

AUTHORING CULTURE: THE FOUNDATIONS OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WRITING



The Authoring Culture Collective
Columbia College Chicago

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 **CARLI** | **Illinois SCOERs**
Support for Creation of Open Educational Resources

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Preface

The Creation of this Open Educational Resource (OER)

This textbook and ancillary materials were created as part of the Illinois Support for the Creation of Open Educational Resources (SCOERs) project, facilitated by the [Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois \(CARLI\)](#) and funded by a \$2 million [Open Textbooks Pilot Program grant from the Department of Education](#) and the [Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education](#).^[1]

Illinois SCOERs is a true statewide enterprise fundamentally changing the open educational resources landscape in Illinois by providing a new holistic support model that promotes student success through OER awareness, implementation, growth, and adoption. This project features a collaboration between educational systems in Illinois, the library community, and workforce representatives. Developed OER course materials will be released under a license that permits their free use, reuse, modification, and sharing with others, the library community, and workforce representatives. Developed OER course materials will be released under a license that permits their free use, reuse, modification, and sharing with others.

About this Book

This book and its ancillary materials were made possible through an Illinois SCOERs Subgrant awarded to the **Library and English and Creative Writing Department at Columbia College Chicago**. The materials were created for **Writing and Rhetoric I**, a high-enrollment course for **First-Year undergraduate** students.

Contributors

Contributors to the development of this OER, *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing and ancillaries*, textbook include educators, librarians, and staff from Columbia College Chicago. For a full list of the incredible team that brought this text to life and an overview of how this OER came to be, please read the acknowledgements section.

Illinois SCOERs Project Staff

The Illinois SCOERs Project Staff helped coordinate the management of the Open Textbook Pilot grant that made this OER possible. Topical experts shared their knowledge on open educational resources, incorporating technologies including 3D printing, accessibility, author rights, instructional design, publishing, and participated with the review and proofreading processes.

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Advisory Committee

The Illinois SCOERs Advisory Committee provided input on the subgrant applications, and the materials produced, which contain industry members, librarians, graduate students, and representatives from our project partners:

- Illinois Community College Board

- Illinois Board of Higher Education
- Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
- Illinois Heartland Library System
- Reaching Across Illinois Library System
- Illinois State Library
- Illinois Library Association
- Health Sciences Librarians of Illinois
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services
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Peer Review

The Peer Reviewer process was completed by the following reviewers:

Information about peer reviewers coming in February 2026.

[1] The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, (FIPSE), U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Acknowledgements

This open educational resource began its life as an in-house textbook—*Key Concepts in Writing and Rhetoric*—conceived and written by a committee of writing professors from the English Department at Columbia College Chicago.

Pegeen Reichert Powell led the first group of writers and editors who produced the book’s earliest print form and four subsequent print editions. The original *Key Concepts* production committee included Pegeen Reichert Powell, Jennie Faults, Jennifer Ailles, Kenneth Daley, Matthew McCurrie, Nita Meola, Jonn Salovaara, Hilary Sarat-St. Peter, Ryan Trauman, and Jennifer Loeb. Since then, it has undergone regular updates.

Key Concepts became so successful with teachers and students that another group of writing teachers at Columbia decided to share an updated edition with a much wider audience. Since many members of that first authorial team have moved on to serve other institutions, we assembled a new writing team with one writer from the original team, Hilary Sarat-St. Peter, joined by a new crew of writers, librarians, and media makers. In addition to Hilary, the fifth-wave *Key Concepts* team at Columbia College Chicago, led by Terence Brunk and Brendan Riley, includes Heather Cramond, Karl El Sokhn, Kim Galovich, Ames Hawkins, Deborah Holdstein, Katrina Kemble, Marc Meierkort, Svetlana Mitric, Hillary Ostermiller, Delia Pless, Devon Polderman, Doug Reichert Powell, Austin St. Peter, and Alexis Sarkisian.

A team of librarians, media makers, instructional technologists, accessibility coordinators, and intellectual property specialists joined these experienced writing teachers to give *Key Concepts* new life and wider reach as an Open Educational Resource, funded by a generous grant from the U.S. Department of Education, in conjunction with the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries of Illinois (CARLI). These information science, media, technology, and accessibility specialists include Kim Hale, Elizabeth Davis-Berg, Arlie Sims, Heidi Marshall, Dennis McGuire, Hilary Ostermiller, Lauren Noel, Jen Sauzer, Jeanne Kelly, David Morton, and Katie Kosinski. Alejandro Bottia-Forero and Alex Riseman designed the cover.

This fifth iteration of *Key Concepts* has a new name: *Authoring Culture: The Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*. We derived the new title from a cherished phrase in Columbia College Chicago’s mission statement, which envisions teaching students to “author the culture of their time.” Authoring culture involves a wide range of skills and concepts, which the original *Key Concepts* cultivated effectively. Keeping the modular, concept-based design of the original textbook, the new authorial collective has, where necessary, updated the examples in every chapter. We have also added some chapters, compressed or combined others, added coverage of AI, and created media ancillaries to accompany each concept, expanding the book’s inclusivity by addressing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners with videos and podcasts. We have integrated a number of 3-D printing assignments into the book, to expand the range of textual products students might develop.

Due to copyright issues, we have eliminated the essays collected in earlier versions of the textbook. Writing teachers can select and integrate contemporary essays, articles, social media conversations, and other texts into their courses as appropriate. At Columbia, we offer all instructors digitized course blueprints that they can adopt or adapt, selecting new texts to include annually. Another strength of Columbia’s particular institutional context is the presence in our School of Communication, Culture, and Society of fiction writers, poets, essayists, and memoirists who offer their particular forms of expertise in the teaching of writing to our first-year writing students as well as to our creative writing students. Don DeGrazia, Lisa Fishman, Eric May, Joe Meno, and Tony Trigilio inspired the new chapters on Story and Craft: we look forward to benefiting from their continued leadership as we begin the *Authoring Culture* OER adventure at Columbia this Fall 2024. Special thanks goes to Ames Hawkins for leading the initiative with Brendan Riley to engage all our writing teachers in conversation about how to use this resource in their courses.

The videos and podcasts that accompany this text involved transdisciplinary collaborations across the college. Without the leadership and expertise of our colleague Matthew Cunningham from the Communication Department at Columbia, our podcasts could not have become a reality. Peg Murphy, Chair of Communication, graciously welcomed us to use Communication Department facilities for recording. Without the leadership and expertise of our colleague Jeff Spitz in Cinema and Television Arts, our videos would not have been made. Our video-makers include Jonah Hall, Jonathan Connolly, and Brennan Pozzi. Max Hatlem did our podcast editing. A team of student reviewers—Zora Dunlap and Yulian Leshuk from Columbia College and Cassidy Tillman from Aurora University—enabled us to strengthen the text’s user-friendliness. We offer special thanks to Professor Daniel Hipp and Dean Pegeen Reichert Powell from Aurora for their interest in and support of this project. A team of industry experts and peer reviewers including Dr. Josephine Walwema pushed us to produce our very best work.

Senior administrators serve institutions in innumerable, often invisible ways. Dean Steven Corey, Associate Dean Robin Whatley, Library Director Jo Cates, Associate Provost Nate Bakkum, and Provost Marcella David provided critical institutional support for this project. Christie Dal Corrobo, Leigh Plunkett, and David Weiner provided essential administrative support. Michele Leigh, the senior coordinator at the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries, taught us all to use the OER platform LibreTexts, and guided us through every step of the grant process and textbook build-out. Kim Hale, Columbia's lead librarian on this project, deserves a huge shout-out for inviting us into this textual adventure, propelling us forward whenever our progress slowed. Thanks, Kim.

Together, we are the Authoring Culture Collective.

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Introduction: Authorship and Agency

We are all authors of culture.

When you fill out an application for employment or for an internship or for college, painting a picture of your accomplishments and your potential, you author culture.

When you embrace or revise a family tradition or develop inside jokes with friends or post wry observations to social media, you author culture.

When you work on an assignment for a writing course or any other class, or when you invest yourself in a passion project of your own or in a collaboration with others, or when you voice your perspectives about local or national policy, you contribute to the richness of social life in the various communities you interact with. You build culture.

At times, we might be tempted to think of highly visible people—political leaders, popular musical artists, film celebrities, best-selling writers, protest movement organizers, social media influencers—as the true authors of culture. Certainly, figures like these are in a better position than most of us to promote particular ideas, values, or trends in ways that sway public opinion or perception at a large scale. Their prominence might reflect a complex blend of talent, labor, good fortune, and an ability to navigate systems of privilege and power. But at root, their authoring of culture is no different from ours, and our decisions about culture are crucial to determining who rises into high visibility and how much influence they exert.

Whether we are well-known or not, we all create the culture we live in. All our voices are integral to the ongoing process of generating culture. What you say matters.

Writing with Agency

Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing is a resource for *enriching* your authoring of culture, for extending your ability to communicate with *agency*--a term that derives from the Latin verb *agere*, which translates as “to do” or “to take action.” **Fields** and professions ranging from psychology, economics, and law to theology and philosophy, among others, have developed concepts of agency that differ in detail but share a focus on action, either in service to someone else (consider a talent agent, an insurance agent, or even a secret agent) or, more commonly, on one’s own behalf.

Even within fields, there is frequently debate over how to define “agency” and how it operates. These differences reflect varied perspectives on core questions. Some specialists debate how much our capacity to act comes from us as individuals and how much it is granted by large institutions such as governments or wider social conventions. Others explore the extent to which agency relies upon individuals’ rational decision-making or conscious intention: to what degree can we speak or act with agency if we are not completely certain what our aims are or if our choices result in unintended consequences?

Questions like these shape ideas about agency in writing study as well. Academic Marilyn Cooper suggests that rhetorical agency “is based in individuals’ lived knowledge that their actions are their own,” even though agents “are very often not aware of their intentions...and the choices they make are not free from influence ...” (421). In other words, we make arguments and take action based on our lived experience, sometimes unaware of how our surroundings affect us.

At first glance, this model of agency might seem a little strange. According to Cooper, we do experience the power or authority to speak or act, yet we might not be fully aware of or in control of the meanings of our actions or their effects on the world around us. That lack of full awareness might appear to undercut agency rather than explain it. After all, how much power to speak do we really exhibit when our words are constrained by other forces or when we’re not entirely sure what we’re trying to accomplish?

Taken from another perspective, however, Cooper’s model could foster our sense of agency in situations where we might not otherwise feel we have the capacity to act in our own interests. Her model frees us from having to understand all of our intentions. It allows us to write with agency even when we can see ways that our choices are affected by external circumstances, such as the expectations of the workplace, the conventions of professional practice, or the parameters of a writing assignment for class. Cooper encourages us to experience a measure of authority at moments we might otherwise be inclined to feel powerless. Claiming agency in moments like these can be a liberating and inspiring experience.

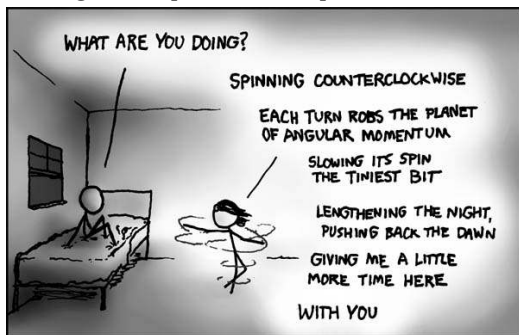
Explorations of agency in other fields also have intriguing implications for considerations of authorship. Jonathan Newton is an economist, but his observations about agency blend productively with Cooper’s comments. Newton calls attention to two factors

that potentially complicate our sense of how agency operates. First, we often act not solely or even primarily as distinct individuals but as part of “collective entities” such as a workplace, a family, a faith community, a friend group, or other social bodies or organizations. These moments are not necessarily times when we knowingly sacrifice personal interests to community priorities. Rather, these are moments when we act out of a shared sense of purpose and significance, moments when we might not even be able to separate individual agency from the agency of the larger group.

Second, Newton contends that we often act as what he calls “intra-human entities” or, less abstractly, as people with various and sometimes competing senses of our own selfhood. If Cooper notes that we are not always certain of our aims, Newton might suggest that our uncertainty reflects the conflict of rival goals and identities contending for voice within our writing selves. His perspective doesn’t automatically resolve those conflicts. However, it might offer us a way to think through our uncertainties, a framework for beginning to identify those conflicting identities and goals. The better we understand ourselves as we speak or write, the better position we’re in to speak and write effectively.

Claiming Agency

Consider how agency operates in this example from the webcomic *xkcd*, by Randall Munroe. The frame, titled “Angular Momentum,” features the characters Cueball, sitting on the bed, and Megan, twirling around the room. In response to Cueball’s puzzled question, Megan explains that she is generating a rotational force to counteract the angular momentum of the earth, slowing the spin of the planet and thereby lengthening the night so she can spend more time with Cueball.



In principle, Megan’s thinking is correct, at least to a degree. The spin of any rotating object, even one as massive as the Earth, is affected by external forces applied to the object. Pressing one’s finger to a spinning desk globe demonstrates this principle in action: depending upon the magnitude of the downward pressure on the globe, it will gradually or almost immediately stop spinning. If one side of that globe faces away from a light source—a lamp across the room or sunlight shining through a window—it will indeed remain in darkness longer or even permanently as the spin of the globe decreases or stops. Its “night” gets longer.

In practice, however, Megan’s efforts to extend the night are futile. The mass of the Earth and its rotational momentum are astronomically greater than that of a desk globe. No matter how vigorously Megan spins, her impact on the Earth’s rotation will be completely negligible. Neither she nor Cueball will experience any lengthening of the night. If her final aim is to have more quality time with Cueball, she would do far better by leaving off spinning and spending that time with Cueball instead. And as Munroe sardonically asks in the title text for the comic (visible by hovering the mouse over the frame on the *xkcd* site), would extending the night even be worth it if all that spinning left Megan feeling too dizzy and nauseous to enjoy her extra time with Cueball?

Yet the impossibility of Megan attaining her stated goal of staving off the dawn does not mean she lacks agency in the comic. Her response to Cueball’s question powerfully expresses her intense wish to be with him, and it reveals her effort to apply her knowledge of physics to address the looming problem of their time together coming to an end with the rising of the sun. She understands enough of the relevant math to be aware that her best efforts will yield only the “tiniest” change in the Earth’s angular momentum, but it seems that, however immeasurably short, any extension of their time together is so valuable to her that she will do whatever it takes to achieve it. Megan’s capacity to shape her physical environment in her desired manner is inconsequential, but her communicative agency is quite impressive.

Arguably, the fruitlessness of her actions intensifies the rhetorical power of her words. **Her speech draws a direct line from her actions to her emotions**, which she conveys both to Cueball and, indirectly yet just as powerfully, to those of us reading the comic. Munroe’s placement of her words in visual space breaks down her logic step-by-step and culminates in “with you” hanging in the

air as Megan's ultimate endpoint. In "Angular Momentum," Munroe displays the curious contradictions identified by Cooper and Newman, foregrounding Megan's communicative agency in a situation in which her actions are so outweighed by external forces as to appear pointless.

Tools for agents like you

Fortunately, you don't need to face down the monumental force of the planet to exercise agency. In fact, you can enact authority in nearly any writing situation. *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing* offers a set of concepts you can draw upon to analyze a wide range of rhetorical situations, whether you are preparing to work on a writing assignment for class, completing a writing task at work, or writing out of personal interest or for social occasions. They are:

• Affordances • Alphabetic Text • Arrangement • Circulation • Craft • Ethos • Field	• Genre • Image • Kairos • Logos • Remix • Story
---	--

Table listing 13 Key Concepts

With these "key concepts" in mind, you can approach your writing tasks as opportunities to expand your agency: in Cooper's terms, to generate an awareness of speaking for yourself in the texts you compose. That self-awareness might take a number of forms. These concepts will help you more fully understand your writing contexts, grasping not only of what others might expect of you but of how you can pursue your own goals and interests. For example, you might reevaluate values and perspectives you hold—not necessarily with the aim of changing them—but with the objective of better understanding how they relate to the issues you address in your text.

You can use the concepts to examine the words or texts generated by other people, perhaps leading you to new insights about them and building positive connections with people who had once seemed distant from your life or even opposed to your own priorities. Some concepts will illuminate historical or cultural frameworks that put your own experience in a new light, discovering connections between your life and the stories or concerns of others that you were not previously attuned to. Other concepts might help you recognize unexpected paths of resistance, opening possibilities for you to alter the world around you in ways that more fully reflect your values. And some concepts might encourage you to experiment with inventive modes of communication that provide compelling ways for you to express your voice. Whatever uses you put them to, these concepts offer lenses through which you can view and participate in the rich variety of ways we write today.

[Right here, right now.](#)

When we highlight the authoring of culture "today," in the twenty-first century specifically, we call attention to recent technological and cultural developments that shape our everyday interactions and define ways we communicate. Most obviously, digital technologies have become more capable, more affordable, and more portable than ever before. Uneven access remains, but today, many more people have ready access to tools for authoring and distributing not merely words but **images**, video, sound, and a compositions that blend multiple media forms than ever before. We are increasingly accustomed to using a range of modes of communication in situations that, not so long ago, were primarily the domain of printed text. What we write, how we write, and why we write all change over time and across different contexts.

One recent change is the emergence of so-called AI services built on large language models, such as ChatGPT and Google Gemini. We consider each of the key concepts in relation to this uncertain new technology. Another relatively recent development is the growing accessibility of 3D printing. While far from a common household technology at this time, 3D printing represents a fascinating new medium for rhetorical expression, one that could blend with written text, images, and other **modes** of

communication in innovative forms of multi-modal text. We provide discussion of 3D printing in relation to several of the concepts included in this resource.

In our coverage of all the key concepts and in our attention to multi-modal writing and to newer technologies, we want to ensure that *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing* prepares you for all the writing you need to do now and in the future, as students, professionals, and engaged citizens. Since it is impossible to know all the many ways writing will continue to evolve as you move forward in your lives, we focus on *how to learn about writing* rather than on particular writing conventions. No matter what kind of writing task you find yourself presented with in the future, we want to prepare you with the strategies, skills, and habits to meet the challenge successfully.

Agency for all

Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing is an open educational resource (OER) designed for use in college-level first-year writing courses, but will also be useful in other college courses that assign writing projects, and in a wide array of other writing situations outside of class. This book will remain valuable for when you want to review or learn more about elements of writing—whether it's for a personal project, or a proposal, a report, or workplace presentation.

Authoring Culture is distributed under a Creative Commons license, so it is freely available for you to use whether or not you are enrolled in a course that has adopted it as a class textbook. You are also free to modify it: you can add your own notes or new examples to the text; you can reword passages so that you understand them more readily; you can remove material you don't find helpful or reorganize chapters in ways that better fit your habits of writing. You can even share *Authoring Culture* with others, in its original form or with your modifications. Just make sure you provide attribution to the original project authors in accordance with the Creative Commons license. Our aim in releasing *Authoring Culture* as an OER is to make it as accessible and useful for you as possible.

Happy writing!

Works Cited

Cooper, Marilyn M. "Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2011, pp. 420–49. *JSTOR*, [Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted](#) [jstor.org].

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Newton, Jonathan. "Agency Equilibrium." *Games*, vol. 10, no. 1, Mar 2019, [Agency Equilibrium](#) [mdpi.com].

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1: Affordances

Affordances refers to the advantages provided by different communication **modes**, technologies, platforms, and media.

Truly, there is no “master” mode of communication, and our audiences are always changing. The experience reading a book imparts differs from the emotional quality of watching a film, and playing a video game provides an unmatched immersive experience. When making rhetorical choices, it is also important to consider constraints—that is, limitations or restrictions on your purpose for writing. In the context of writing and rhetoric, we must carefully consider affordances, constraints, and the accessibility of our writing to different audiences.

History of Affordances

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “affordance” was coined in 1966 by James J. Gibson, a psychologist who specialized in visual perception. The concept has since been used in **fields** related to **design** (object design, user interface, and the like). Donald Norman is credited with bringing it to theories about the design of objects. The 'eared' teacup is a good example of how design can be shaped by attention to affordances: Have you ever noticed that the teacup handle implies how you should use the object? The handle is specifically designed to inform your actions: it is the right size for fingers to go through and it protects you from the heat of your recently steeped drink. But this is not the universal symbol for the teacup.



Figure 1.1: Gaiwan Teacup (Copyright; Ryu Orn via Unsplash)

Consider the Gaiwan teacup (lid-bowl tea) originally designed during the reign of the Ming dynasty in China, the top tea exporting country in the world today. This teacup has no “ears” and its affordances can seem unusual to people who have never used it. A small lid covers the cup to control the flow of tea; this lid also serves to signal waiters if more tea is needed or if the patron is sated.

Affordances are not universal, and we must consider the cultural, religious, physical, and social diversity of our audiences to maximize the effectiveness of our communication and avoid exclusionary rhetorical situations.

Affordances Today

Game designers utilize the concept of affordances because while they create immersive fictional worlds, they must also inform players how to navigate those worlds. Game designers use shape, color, light, movement, sound, and even recognizable gaming tropes to help players understand the fictional world.

Affordances also depend on by the user’s familiarity with the **mode**, **genre**, or form of communication. Seasoned gamers have years of experience that makes things like the controller’s mapping, the possibilities of the video game, and the different cues feel intuitive. When non-gamers play video games, they need training in the interactive language of video games as well as the affordances of the specific game they are playing.



Figure 1.2: Tracer from Overwatch – Blizzcon Anaheim California (Copyright; Andrew De Leon via Unsplash)

Brian Block, a Columbia College Chicago game design graduate, offers insight into the way game designers think about affordances. Block explains how some **design** elements that game designers use repeatedly have become a part of the communicative framework for games, a kind of language. Players know that red barrels usually explode and that doors with shiny handles can be opened. However, every video game is different, and players have varying levels of familiarity with each game. Games therefore usually include a tutorial segment that introduces the mechanics available in the game. Subsequently, every new mechanic that the player unlocks tends to be followed by a small tutorial, creating affordances.

Broadening the Concept

“An affordance is, in essence, an action possibility in the relation between user and object.” (Interaction Design Foundation).

When we think about the properties of objects and the diversity of agents using those objects, we can formulate a more inclusive way to understand affordances. In other words, affordances are only accessible to those who understand and can use them effectively. A simple example of this definition is the following: the affordance of a doorknob is lost on a child who is too short to reach it, even if the child knows what the doorknob does. Your film's profound dialogue will not bring tears to your deaf audience without closed captions or an interpreter, or both. Therefore, it is wise to consider affordances in the context of accessibility, diversity, and inclusion.

Think about it this way: Have you ever invited friends to play card games? Imagine you are all sitting in a circle, and you decide to start playing a new game with everyone. The first thing you must do is give everyone a rundown of the rules. When you explain how the game is played, you give your friends the affordance to play the game. And after the first few mock rounds, the game is ready to go full swing as the newly acquired rules fade into the background. Game designer Brian Block agrees, suggesting that if you don't notice the rules when you're playing the game, then the game designer has done their job well.



Figure 1.3: Dragon and Knight Board Game Pieces (Copyright; Clint Bustrillos via Unsplash)

Just as game designers rely on the affordances to communicate necessary information about a complicated world, so too do we all need to consider affordances as we approach any rhetorical task. Affordances exist in the relationship between the object and the user, the text and the reader, the film and the audience, the game and the player, etc. It is not only our job as writers and rhetoricians to understand the best **mode** of communication, it is also essential for us to identify the most accessible, diverse, and inclusive **modes** when we participate in rhetorical situations.

Affordances and Other Key Concepts

Communicating a message involves affordances and a range of other interrelated principles. The key concepts shared in this book should be seen as a functional whole rather than a collage of unrelated ideas. For instance, think of the affordance of **genre** when you are writing your screenplay: how does a horror film convey ideas about mental health (*We Need to Talk about Kevin*), abortion rights (*Rosemary's Baby*), or other political concerns in a way that a comedy film does not—and vice versa?

Always remember that different platforms have different **circulation** strengths and weaknesses. Think about the strengths and constraints of X (formerly Twitter, a text-based social media), and compare these affordances to Instagram (image/video social media) and you will notice that each application is suited differently for different rhetorical situations. For example, you should plan to release a small statement about your upcoming musical album on X/Twitter while also sharing a short video teaser with your fans on Instagram or TikTok.

For generations, **alphabetic text** had been the dominant **mode** of communication in Western culture. It had been the mode in which the state and the church conducted their (sometimes controversial) affairs (economics, religion, politics). However, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen argue that there may be a weakening of the assumption that alphabetic text is preferable and an increasing reliance on **image** in our culture (16-17). The material affordances of alphabetic texts are changing in response to technological advancement, with traditional forms of writing changing rapidly in a digital culture that accelerates constantly toward greater stimulation and profit.

Smart communicators therefore consider **kairos** along with the affordances available in any rhetorical situation, taking note of how sociological, economical, and historical factors affect the communicative task. What is the most effective medium of communication as you read this? How might image and alphabetic text combine? What are the most useful ways to share your newest creative endeavor today?

Looking Ahead

Some writing and rhetoric classes can be likened to a semester-long intellectual **conversation**. Think of these classes as a journey in which teachers and students explore multiple social, political, and aesthetic issues together. When we consider that classrooms afford dialogue with others, we search for effective, inclusive ways to expand that dialogue. Your writing skills will serve you well in many other classes as you connect different topics and draw other students into dialogue. When we participate in a classroom, we contribute our own skills and share in the strengths offered by our classmates.

The film industry illustrates the affordance of labor division. Film crews include numerous departments: Production, Assistant Director, Camera, Grip, Electric, Hair and Makeup, Costumes and Wardrobe, Catering, Special Effects, Stunts. Within these larger groups, specific crew positions require specialized expertise. Crew members contribute their hard work, time, and expertise to make a film possible. Actors and directors may receive the bulk of the awards at ceremonies, but without the entire crew, no creative vision can come to life. Collaboration allows any creative community to maximize its collective potential.



Figure 1.4: Film Crew Shooting Interview (Copyright; author via source)

Affordances in AI-Assisted Writing

We are not yet at the juncture where AI-assisted writing is an essential skill for the workplace, but that day may arrive soon. With the rise of LLM (Large Language Models) and other AI tools that have the potential both to aid and hinder students' and workers' thinking and writing, it is imperative to study what these machines can offer us: what are their affordances and what are their drawbacks? How do we maximize our creative potential by collaborating with these language models? How do we make sure that we are not foregoing the necessity of creative and critical thinking by allowing the machines to do the work for us?

Remember, abusing an affordance can have detrimental effects on your learning. Writing classes, for example, ask that you produce texts that take into account technical, critical, and socio-political considerations; these thoughts help you grow as a communicator. Machine-produced text can't think those thoughts for you.

Similarly, we don't make art just made because it is beautiful: art catalyzes change and has an impact on the world around us. It's hard to know what images without intention *mean*, but they elude our general understanding of art. Although there is much more to unravel from the Pandora's Box that is AI, it is primarily important to recognize that the use of AI will be communicated differently depending on the class objectives, the instructor's expectations, and the learning outcomes of each class. In other words, before you use AI to assist with your writing, make sure you're following your school's rules.

In an MIT article titled "Advice Concerning the Increase in AI-Assisted Writing," Edward Schiappa and Nick Montfort (professors of rhetoric and digital media, respectively), talk about the relationship between AI, LLMs, and learning objectives: "It may be that the use of a system like ChatGPT is not only acceptable to you but is integrated into the subject, and should be required. One of us taught a course dealing with digital media and writing last semester in which students were assigned to computer-generate a paper using a freely available LLM." Although this article is directed at instructors and offering them advice on building classes that either engage with LLMs or stray away from them, it is essential for you as a student to make the most of each class by understanding the goals and objectives you are meant to achieve at the end of the semester.

For example, classes that are focused on the study of contemporary digital media and other forms of post-modern writing could require you to use LLMs to sharpen your understanding of such tools. Other classes that are writing/communication intensive might demand that you produce the work on your own without leaning on the help of language models. **Always remember that the affordances of an object are dependent on the relationship with the user.** Considering this concept with a machine that is constantly learning creates an even deeper understanding of affordances. Large Language Models and AI chatbots are constantly evolving.

The affordances of such machines will be in constant and tremendous flux. So, remember to inform yourself and to stay up to date, to learn the rules, and to use these machines ethically.

Writing with Affordances

Picture this scenario:

You have been tasked with bringing a project to life. Your client, the Lincoln Square Chamber of Commerce, wants you to advertise and build a buzz for an upcoming music festival in the city. The members of the Chamber see great potential in your unique approach to marketing. They have trusted you with a budget of \$15,000. They are allowing you to hire whomever you want for the advertising team.

Consider these options to start the brainstorming process, and feel free to mix and match more than one option or even add your own. Obviously, you want to keep in mind that you are tied to a budget, so for the sake of this exercise, you are allowed a maximum of three options.

- a. Graphic Designer: Hire a designer to create a flyer for the music festival.
- b. Guerilla Marketing: Hire a team of people who go around the city putting up different flyers on light posts, storefronts, coffee shops, and so forth.
- c. Social Media Marketing: Hire a social media content creator to raise awareness about the music festival on multiple platforms.
- d. Filmmaking Crew: Hire a crew to shoot video content that shows all the activities and vendors that will be available to festival goers.
- e. Radio Advertising: Pay a radio channel to advertise the upcoming music festival.

Write a project proposal for the client, explaining which options you've selected and why. Make sure you explain the reasoning by explaining how the affordances of your choices suit the project. Where applicable, include in your explanation other rhetorical ideas and Key Concepts from the book (Audience, Affordance, Constraint, **Circulation**, **Alphabetic Text**, **Image**, and so forth).

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Affordances

Podcast for [Affordances](#), Chapter one of [Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 13:19.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Anfisa Gladkikh and Sarah Driessen about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Affordances

Video for [Affordances](#), Chapter one of [Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 04:07.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 1, "Affordances" created by Rejon Strong with collaborators Tyler Cruse and Sophia Duron. (Transcript available)

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2: Alphabetic Text

Alphabetic text refers to the letters and words we use when we communicate in writing. This key concept may seem obvious, but that is because it has been the dominant form of communication in Western culture for centuries, and we tend to take it for granted. Alphabetic text is actually more complicated than we might think. First of all, we tend to forget that alphabetic text is a visual **mode**, so we must consider the way it looks. It's also worth noting that our alphabet represents the sounds of our spoken language, which distinguishes it from writing systems that rely on characters that represent ideas and objects (such as Chinese and Japanese).

Alphabetic text is just one resource we have for communicating our ideas. That is, we can communicate with **image**, the sound of our voice, video, animation, or music, among many other modes, and our electronic devices and the internet make it easier than ever before to use these other modes to communicate with a wide audience. Distinguishing among these various resources, and choosing to use one instead of another, becomes one of the many rhetorical choices we make whenever we face a situation when we are trying to communicate with others. Therefore, it's important to study what makes alphabetic text unique and how it relates to all other modes.

History of Alphabetic Text

Although it might be hard to imagine our world without some form of writing, the fact is that writing evolved (or was invented) relatively late in human history. This is worth remembering because while spoken language is acquired so naturally it feels innate, most people have to actively learn how to write and read.



Figure 2.1: Cave drawings in Fele's Cave (Copyright; Phillip Capper via Wikimedia Commons)

Scott McCloud provides a brief history of the evolution of writing systems in “Show and Tell.” McCloud explains that writing likely evolved out of cave drawings and other instances of pictographic writing, and gradually, the **images** became increasingly abstract to evolve into writing systems based on a complex system of characters. Our writing system derived from the Greek alphabet, which developed hundreds of years BCE. It wouldn't begin to be standardized until centuries later, after the invention of moveable type and the printing press in the 15th and 16th centuries CE.

The printing press also gave rise to the **affordances** of the visual nature of alphabetic text. A page of writing used to be an uninterrupted string of letters that relied on the reader, usually reading out loud to other people, to determine where one word or idea ended and the other began. When the printing press made books available to more people, reading became a solitary and silent activity. At the same time, visual conventions were introduced to help people make sense of the alphabetic text on the page. For example, we have capital letters to mark the beginning of a sentence and punctuation that marks the end of the sentence. We also have paragraph breaks that help communicate where subtle shifts in ideas occur.

As alphabetic text became standardized, readers grew accustomed to these visual clues; it is likely that after you learned these conventions, you have taken them for granted as both a writer and reader. In fact, many texts are designed so that you don't really look at the alphabetic text, but rather look through it, straight to the ideas it contains.

However, writers today have many options for working with the visual affordances of alphabetic text. From fonts and sizes to colors to the **arrangement** of chunks of text on a page or screen, we have a lot more choices to make when we use alphabetic text,

which requires us to look at this resource in a new way.

Alphabetic Text Today

Alphabetic text has served as the dominant **mode** for communication in Western culture for centuries, the mode in which people conduct their most important affairs. Think of the religious documents that spell out how one is to worship, the contracts that determine who owes what to whom, the political treatises that establish laws, and educational texts such as this. Because alphabetic text has been so pervasive, we often aren't even aware of how it works.

We all know that writing happens by arranging words into phrases and sentences that convey meaning, but if we pause long enough to consider what's involved in that action, it can be fascinating. Each time we put one word after another after another, we are making choices about which words we use, from the countless words available in our language, and each choice excludes all the other words we could have used instead. There are some principles that govern the order in which we have to arrange the words, but even here, our options are overwhelming. The resources available to us when we are working with alphabetic text are virtually limitless.

Consider the following headlines and the first paragraphs of articles that appeared on August 10 and 11, 2014, about an incident that dominated the news for several months that year:

“Unarmed Black Mo. Teen Shot After Altercation, Police Say.” (*CBS News*, August 10, 2014)

An unarmed 18-year-old black man was shot and killed by police in suburban St. Louis after an altercation that involved two people and an officer, authorities said Sunday while hundreds of protesters demanded answers outside.

“Police Say Mike Brown Was Killed After Struggle for Gun in St. Louis Suburb” (*New York Times*, August 10, 2014)

The fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager Saturday by a police officer in a St. Louis suburb came after a struggle for the officer's gun, police officials said Sunday, in an explanation that met with outrage and skepticism in the largely African-American community (Bosman and Fitzsimmons).

“Riot Erupts Near St. Louis Over Police Shooting of Teen” (*Chicago Tribune*, August 11, 2014)

Rioting and looting erupted in Ferguson, Missouri, late on Sunday as protests over the killing of an unarmed black teenager by a police officer turned violent, law enforcement officials and media reports said.

“St. Louis Police: Black Teen Shot in Altercation with Officers” (*NPR.org*, August 10, 2014)

The chief of the St. Louis County Police says a black teenager fatally shot by officers Saturday was killed during an altercation with authorities (Neuman).

In these excerpts, each news organization attempts to describe an event, but the range of choices in language made by these organizations is significant. Notice the various ways that the victim, Michael Brown, was identified:

- unarmed black Mo. Teen
- unarmed 18-year-old black man
- Mike Brown
- unarmed black teenager
- Teen
- Black Teen
- a black teenager

It is worthwhile to discuss with friends and classmates the implications of referring to Michael Brown as a teen or teenager instead of as a man, for example. Half of these phrases include the detail that he was unarmed, five of them include the detail that he was Black. Why might those differences matter? Most of the news media came to use the name “Michael”; what does the use of “Mike” instead contribute to or change the story?

How we use the resources available to us in alphabetic text to represent the people, places, or things involved in events is extremely significant, as is the way we depict the actions. Again, look at the range of choices made:

- shot

- was shot and killed by police
- was killed
- fatal shooting ... by a police officer

You might discuss the difference between identifying the verb as “shoot” or “kill.” Both, of course, are accurate, but they mean different things. Moreover, in none of these examples, is the active voice used. The active voice would read like this: A police officer shot/killed Michael Brown. Instead, nominalizations or passive voice *are used*, as in this sentence. A nominalization involves writing about an action, typically represented by a verb, and turning it into a noun phrase instead. For example, “fatal shooting” or “the killing” removes the accountability for the action from the event and hides it inside a noun phrase.

The passive voice, as in “was killed” or “shot,” distances the actor (the police officer) from the action itself (killing, shooting) by pushing the actor to the end of the sentence or removing the actor altogether. Notice how the first and third example in the bulleted list above doesn’t name the actor at all, whereas some of them name the shooter/killer in the “by-phrase,” so we have “shot by officers,” for example.

This brief analysis doesn’t even begin to cover the way the authors of these words drew on the resources of alphabetic text to communicate the meaning of this event. Other questions you might discuss with friends and classmates: What words or phrases are missing from these headlines and paragraphs? Why, for example, do none of them identify the race of the police officer? What is the difference between referring to the response by the citizens of Ferguson as a “riot” or a “protest” and what are the implications of the verb “erupts” in the headline from the *Chicago Tribune*? The *New York Times* initially published its story under the headline, “Police Say Mike Brown Was Killed After Struggle for Gun in St. Louis Suburb.” The title was later changed to “Grief and Protests Follow Shooting of a Teenager.” How might this change in title shape your sense of the story being presented by the *Times* or of priorities or details the *Times* draws attention to?

When we talk about the **affordances** of the different modes, it is worth remembering the vast array of resources we have available to us each time we put even a few words together using alphabetic text. It’s no wonder, then, why alphabetic text has been the dominant mode in our culture for centuries. However, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, among others, argue that we are witnessing a period in history in which the prominence of alphabetic text is weakening, and we are increasingly relying on **image** to communicate in our culture (*Reading Images* 23). The extent to which this is true is up for serious debate, but one basic premise of that debate is the fact that writing and the role of writing are constantly changing and always have been.

Change can disturb people. Think of the way people respond to the written conventions used in text messages. A quick Google search (“texting and grammar”) will turn up any number of articles about whether texting and all of the abbreviations, missing capital letters and forms of punctuation, and other short-cuts are negatively affecting the way people write and speak. Do the search yourself and read a few articles. If you look for the words that describe what’s going on, you’ll see that what some people refer to as “evolution” others will refer to as “decline,” and some describe these new conventions as “inventive” or “efficient,” while others refer to them as “lazy” and “ignorant.” Talk with your friends or classmates, and you’ll see that these different arguments circulate even among people of the same generation—it’s not just older people complaining about “kids these days.”

Texting may also provide examples of Kress and van Leeuwen’s argument about our increasing reliance on images in everyday communication. Consider this exchange between a teenage son and his mother. He sends a picture of his friends walking up to a McDonald’s with a map of his current location to let his mom know where he is. She can write “OK, but when are you coming home?” and choose from any number of emojis to communicate her perspective on the situation—does she send the worried face? the angry face? or the “I’m cool, just chillin’ with my sunglasses on” face?

Perhaps what we see in this exchange is an example of a more nuanced argument than Kress and van Leeuwen’s. John A. Bateman argues that “What we instead find all around us is a far richer range of combinations of different ways of making meanings. Visual depictions commonly include words and so the visual and the verbal are evidently working together. When this is done well, what results is something more than either could achieve alone” (11). Note how the map in the exchange between son and mother would mean nothing without the written names of streets and familiar establishments, or how the written words “OK, but when are you coming home?” can mean very different things depending on the emoji the mom chooses.

When you multiply the resources we have available to us when working with alphabetic text alone by the resources we have when we combine it with other modes like image, the capacity we have to communicate with other humans is sometimes overwhelming, but always remarkable in its possibilities, both for communication and for miscommunication.

Alphabetic Text and Other Concepts

If you consider the range of choices available to you as you work with alphabetic text, you have some sense of the options you have for creating your **ethos** using this **mode**. As we demonstrated in the discussion of the Michael Brown headlines and paragraphs, your credibility as an author can be demonstrated—or weakened—depending on which words you choose and in which order you place them. The visual elements of a text can affect your ethos, too. For example, consider the difference between the fonts Comic Sans and Times New Roman, and think about the ethos created by too many exclamation points!!!! Proofreading can also demonstrate your care with alphabetic text, and thus affect your ethos: spelling errors or missing punctuation can negatively affect your credibility.

As the texting example illustrates, though, the rules governing spelling and punctuation depend on **genre**. You might have noticed that the hypothetical mom in that example, who may or may not be a writing teacher, could not bring herself to text “Ok but when r u coming home,” which would have been perfectly acceptable, maybe even preferable, in this particular genre. When conventions that are appropriate in texting appear in other genres like a school essay or job application letter, however, we may accuse authors of being careless with alphabetic text, which also weakens their ethos, their credibility.

The discussion above about the relationship between alphabetic text and **image** indicates that we are not just responsible for these word- and sentence-level decisions, but that we must also consider the visual elements of alphabetic text as well, from choosing font type and size to the use of underlining and bolding to choosing the colors of our alphabetic text. And we must pay careful attention to the **arrangement** of the chunks of alphabetic text on the page or screen and consider how they are positioned in relation to other modes. The questions in the “Writing with Alphabetic Text” section can guide you through some of the choices you need to make.

Alphabetic text allows for a sustained, uninterrupted reading experience. Further, print-based alphabetic text allows audiences to read multiple times at any speed. The reader can also choose to concentrate on chunks of the text, even if those chunks are located on different parts of the page, with only the movement of the eye (rather than alphabetic text scrolling on video or being read aloud). This means that the reader can perform a close reading of the text and easily identify strategies that help to advance the meaning of the text. Readers can examine how individual words (lexicon) and the arrangement of words and phrases (syntax) are used to determine meaning and context. By studying the overall arrangement of the text, readers can also discover how the many parts of the text form a whole. However, readers also cannot ignore how the visual qualities of alphabetic text can enhance or constrain reading. Even simple choices between a particular font (with or without serifs, for instance) or script typeface or indenting or blocking paragraphs can influence the effectiveness of a given text.

As readers of many kinds of texts, it is easy for us to see the varied ways we can engage with alphabetic text, but we also know that alphabetic text can create abstractions, confusion, and perplexity. Sometimes this can be pleasurable, as when we are reading a poem, but it can also be frustrating, for instance, when we are trying to follow an argument or explanation. When we compose using alphabetic text, we need to be attentive to how we are guiding our readers to a shared meaning. How can our choices of typeface, words, phrases, and sentences, as well as arrangement help us sustain and advance the intellectual conversations we share in our courses?

Writing with Alphabetic Text

Although the nature and roles of alphabetic text are constantly changing, it is premature to say that alphabetic text is no longer important. In fact, considering how networked communication potentially enables us to reach a far wider and more diverse audience than ever before, perhaps our written words, and our appropriate and careful use of them, are more important than ever. It is also true, though, that each time we go to communicate with others, we must decide whether alphabetic text is the best choice for a particular rhetorical situation. Then, as you write, and especially after you’ve written and while you revise, ask yourself questions such as these:

- Have I chosen the best words in each instance to represent other people, places, things, events, and my own ideas and arguments?
- Have I ordered the words in such a way that the meaning I’ve created comes close to what I intend?
- Have I taken care with my alphabetic text by learning the conventions expected of me in this situation and editing and proofreading so that I adhere to these conventions as effectively as possible?
- Have I used the visual elements of alphabetic text—fonts, bolding,

- paragraphing, and so on—effectively?
- What **genre** is appropriate or effective for this particular writing project, and how is alphabetic text used (or not used) in this genre? How is its employment effective (or not)?
- What other **modes** can I combine with my alphabetic text here, if appropriate, not just as decoration, but as resources for changing and enhancing my meaning?
- How should I arrange the alphabetic text and other **modes** on the page or screen, so that readers get the experience I hope they will, and so that it is aesthetically pleasing?
- Have I considered important principles of **design**?

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Alphabetic Text

Podcast for [Alphabetic Text, Chapter two of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 11:26.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Ari Martin and Riley Brown about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Alphabetic Text

Video for [Alphabetic Text, Chapter two of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 04:36.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 2, "Alphabetic Text" created by Cassandra Hernandez with collaborator Winter Brooks. (Transcript available)

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"File:Lelepa (Vanuatu) expedition 17, Cave drawings in Fele's Cave, 24 Nov. 2006 - Flickr -

PhillipC.jpg" by Phillip Capper from Wellington, New Zealand is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

[Alphabetic Text Image Greek Alphabet.docx](#)

Αα Ββ Γγ Δδ
Εε Ζζ Ηη Θθ
Ιι Κκ Λλ Μμ
Νν Ξξ Οο Ππ
Ρρ Σς Ττ Υυ
Φφ Χχ Ψψ Ωω

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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3: Arrangement

Arrangement refers to the deliberate placement of pieces of a project in time or in space. We arrange ideas in longer **alphabetic texts** and speeches in a particular order so that they make sense and have the desired effect on our reader or listeners. If you've ever outlined an essay, beginning with introduction and ending with conclusion, and thought about in what order to make your main points, you were considering arrangement. Arrangement in multimodal texts also considers where pieces go in time and space: we place pieces (chunks of alphabetic text, **images**, sounds) deliberately, so they are viewed in the order we want, or so that within a visual frame, their spatial relationship conveys our meaning most clearly.

History of Arrangement

Arrangement is one of the five canons traditionally taught to classical rhetoric students:

- invention (generating ideas),
- arrangement (organization and order),
- style (words and grammar),
- memory (memorization),
- delivery (speaking or writing).

Classical rhetoric pertained to speeches, with arrangement helping orators decide the argument sequence that would make their points most effectively. Most teachers of classical rhetoric agreed, for example, that one should start with an introduction, focusing on establishing one's **ethos**, and end with a conclusion, when one makes a main point to be as memorable as possible, often by evoking the relevant emotions in the audience (**pathos**). The Roman philosopher Cicero added four other sections between the introduction and conclusion:

1. a statement of facts or the background of the issue;
2. a division between ideas;
3. proof or evidence supporting the ideas;
4. refutation, or the countering of other people's ideas.

While different teachers taught different rules for arrangement, the general principle remained the same—that we need to organize our speeches in a certain way so that they are effective in conveying our meaning. Even today, when you first learned the rules for how to write five-paragraph essays or lab reports, you were learning arrangement; when you have produced texts in these **genres**, you have experienced the influence of classical rhetoric. In this context, arrangement is similar to organization.

More recently, arrangement also refers to the visual placement of pieces of a text on a page or a screen, and so this concept also overlaps with **design** and layout. This spatial understanding of arrangement is relatively new for most writers, but word processors and other programs make it increasingly easy for everyone use computers to create texts and manipulate their visual design. (See the chapter on **Image** for more discussion of how visual elements interact with other elements on the page; the **field** of Graphic Design also explores these concepts in considerably more detail.)

Using the same term for both the *organization of ideas in alphabetic text and speech* and the *placement of visual elements on the page* suggests that the practices interrelate profoundly and that both are important for achieving your communication goals.

Arrangement Today

The rules for organizing print and speech are usually very specific to the different **genres** you will produce. In this chapter we will focus on arranging elements visually on a page or screen, which can be relevant to many genres and media.

In *Reading Images*, authors Kress and van Leeuwen write about the “grammar of images,” identifying three different things to think about as we arrange or analyze visual spaces, whether they are single images or multimodal pages:

1. **Information Value**: Consider the elements at the left, right, top, bottom, center, and margin of a space. Items on the left are usually about what we already know as common sense or self-evident, while things on the right are new information or ideas that we should pay closer attention to or may not automatically agree with (*Reading Images* 181).
2. **Salience**: Figure out what is most noticeable in a space. Something might be more noticeable if it's in the foreground, if it's larger, or if it's clearer (201).

3. *Framing*: Some images use lines on the page to divide it up, creating an inside and outside to the image (203).

When elements of a page or **image** are arranged at the top and bottom, we see “what has been placed at the top is presented as the Ideal, and what has been placed at the bottom is put forward as the Real” (186). By *Ideal*, the authors mean general or aspirational ideas, while *Real* conveys facts, details, or examples.



Figure 3.1: Advertisement for The Leslie Shoe House, circa 1915-1935. The Violet Elliott Collection. Public Domain.

For example, in this old ad from the Leslie Shoe House, you’re lured in by the aspirational statement “Regain the Joy of Youthful Feet” at the top of the page, with silhouettes of people walking, one in high heels and one in business loafers. Notice how the ad divides its sales pitch into vertical columns: the slogans under the high heels aim to attract female customers while the slogans under the business loafers target male buyers. The wide slogan “A New Thrill in Foot Happiness” joins the two columns back into one to promote the name of the business and its address. As the reader’s eyes move down the page, they are brought from the ideal space (regaining youthful foot joy) toward the details of that journey, which ends at the “Shoe House of Quality” on Front Street in Belleville, Ontario.

Finally, when the arrangement creates an obvious center and margins in a page or image—which Kress and van Leeuwen say is relatively uncommon in Western cultures (194)—then the elements at the center are most important, and everything around them is dependent or secondary information. We see this arrangement in broadcast media such as 24-hour news channels, with a stock ticker, headlines, and other graphics surrounding the presenters. We also see similar arrangements on Twitch streams, where the focus of the stream is in the middle, and the elements around the edge supplement the central focus.

However, despite how flexible modern authoring tools are, many platforms make it difficult to manipulate arrangement. Most social media sites such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok allow you to upload content in the form of **alphabetic text**, images, videos, music, and links but they give you very little choice in how you arrange that content on your page.

Consider how profile pictures function as an example. We think carefully about what photo to upload for our profile picture. But sometimes we use that space to make a statement of some kind, as in when people use logos or symbols to signal their allegiance to a cause (see **Kairos**). In other words, we take seriously how the profile picture contributes to our readers’ impression of us (see **Ethos**). However, we don’t have any control over the placement of the photo relative to the rest of the content—the photo is usually on the left.

In some respects, this makes sense. Western readers take information on the left to be given or self-evident, and presume new information is on the right. (By contrast, Tik-Tok places your profile picture and other information on the right-hand side of our screen, which may stem from the fact that Chinese is traditionally read from top to bottom, right to left and Tik-Tok was created by a Chinese company. Recently Mandarin has begun to be written from left to right, but perhaps the cultural significance of “right first” still holds sway among Chinese writers.) Our physical appearance, on the left, is a given, but our status update or story, appearing on the right, is new.

The locked-down arrangement of the platform has an ideological effect as well—it homogenizes us. The profile picture functions in a similar way as the picture on our driver’s license, passport, and various ID cards, and its placement relative to the content—to the left—is the same as well. By participating in these systems, we are complicit in the blurring of our legal, social, and personal

selves, and given the financial interests of a site like Instagram, our identity has become monetized. Arrangement in these situations is a form of control, and the more we use them, the more we endorse and reinforce that control.

When working with sound, image, and moving image simultaneously, you need to think about the **affordances** of the different elements and their orientations in both space and time. For example, TikTok creator Elyse Meyers uses a direct style that suits the intimate nature of the platform, but she also makes skilled use of arrangement in crafting her videos. In the example below, she uses a very close shot, placing her face in the upper portion of the screen, taking up most of the image. As she tells her **story**, she uses the “text” and “stickers” features to add visual elements to the image, overlaying them on top of her face. While this might seem counter-intuitive (isn’t her face the most important part?), Meyers grasps a key aspect of the platform—attention economy. The stickers and text provide visual variety that amplify the details of the story, but they also keep the image in motion despite the lack of motion in the content. She also uses different camera angles to offer an aside to the story (which is especially funny since we are the same audience in both parts of the video). Of course, Meyers also makes use of hashtags and subtitles, accommodating different kinds of viewing experiences.

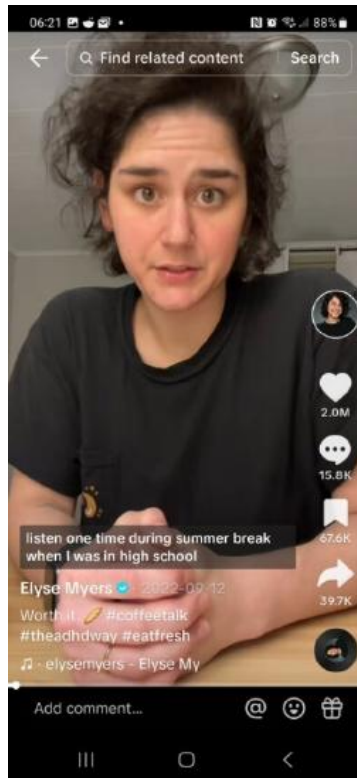


Figure 3.2: Elyse Meyers tells a story. (Copyright; Elyse Meyers, 2022; Used under Fair Use)

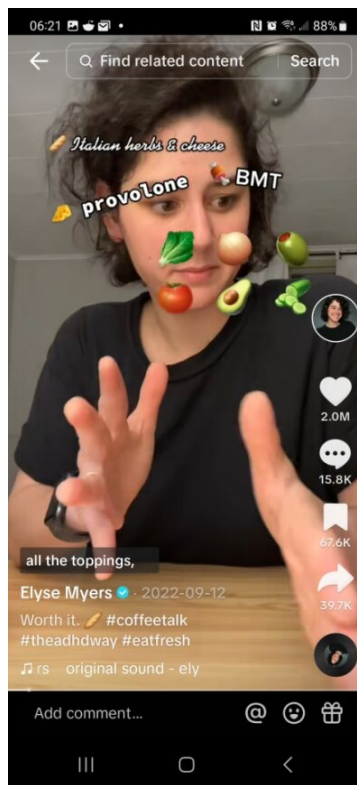


Figure 3.3: Elyse Meyers uses stickers to elaborate her story. (Copyright; Elyse Meyers, 2022; Used under Fair Use)

One of the key assumptions informing this book is that you are going to be working in English, or another language that reads the same way (from left to right, and top to bottom). This text’s presumptions about where important information goes, what order our eyes will use to track information, and what assumptions we’ll make about the importance of elements on the page all stem from the established traditions of English usage.

Many languages, by contrast, read from right to left (as mentioned in the context of TikTok’s arrangement, above). Speakers of Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Hebrew, and other languages will thus have a different set of assumptions about what’s important on the page because they are used to examining pages in a different order. When you work in spaces with other communities, you will need to consider how those communities understand arrangement differently.

For example, in a 2010 study published in *Cognitive Science*, authors Orly Fuhrman and Lera Boroditsky discuss how “spatial layouts created to represent time may differ across cultures.” In a series of tests with English and Hebrew speakers, the authors found that English speakers tended to see things on the left (in a group of images in a row, for example) as “before” **images** on the right. Hebrew speakers tended to see things on the right as happening first. Thus, if you are arranging three images in a line, it’s worth thinking about how your audience might perceive those images, and what choices you can make to ensure that the arrangement conveys what you intend.

As with all aspects of your writing, it’s crucial to take **audience** and **circulation** into account as you consider arrangement. The people who read your text will bring their own assumptions and experiences with them, and careful arrangement can help you communicate effectively with them.

Arrangement also matters a lot when you’re working in a **genre** about which readers have firm expectations. For example, resumes typically have predictable arrangements; there’s an expected order for your details about education, job experiences, and skills. However, different professions arrange their resumes differently and even have different categories of information; it’s important to learn what arrangement your **field** expects. According to a study by the employment firm The Ladders titled “Why Do Recruiters Spend Only 7.4 Seconds on Resumes?,” recruiters look at a resume for an average of 7.4 seconds. At that speed, the visual arrangement of your resume can affect its success. With such a short opportunity to catch your reader’s attention, it’s crucial that you consider audience and circulation in addition to arrangement.

Yet while many genres maintain strict rules for arrangement, many other forms present opportunities for a lot of creativity. **Remixes** in music and other media, for instance, are primarily about arrangement. We take pieces of other people's work, add some of our own, and rearrange them to communicate an entirely new idea. Arrangement also helps us take advantage of the **affordances** that different elements have in different media. Determining where to put the image on the page is in part determined by what the image can do that the other elements can't. Moreover, the **juxtaposition** of different elements will create meaning that the elements alone can't achieve. Again, this is where creativity is important.

Considering arrangement in multimodal compositions also means looking at **alphabetic text** differently. Not only do we need to consider the organization of our ideas within the chunks of alphabetic text, but we also need to think about how to arrange the alphabetic text in relation to the other **modes**, to see the chunks of text as a visual element of our composition (as in the Elyse Meyers example above). We can change the size and shape of the chunks of text to arrange them effectively on the page or screen, and we can place them anywhere we want on the page relative to other modes. This practice, broadly, is referred to as *graphic design*.

Looking Ahead

In our daily communication, we intuitively make many choices about arrangement. For example, you might text a friend that you are leaving to pick them up but will be late because you must stop to get gas (explanation before complication), or in conversation with a friend about the NCAA men's basketball tournament you might observe, "Loyola has advanced to the Sweet Sixteen for only the second time since 1985" (obvious before remarkable).

As you encounter more complex writing situations, arrangement should play a key role in your writing process. You should always bring logic to the way you communicate your ideas; avoid placing elements in composition randomly—whether they are **alphabetic text**, **image**, or sound—it can really hinder communication. One of the greatest pitfalls in communication **design** is not thinking through the arrangement of all relevant **modes**.

For example, many professionals start projects by writing proposals to get funding. While deciding on exactly which persuasive appeals to use depends heavily on **audience**, exploring the range of appeals and their most effective arrangement is an important part of the process. For example, proposals to academic institutions might focus on the long-term benefits of a study and the doors it opens to future research, while proposals to business entities might stress the profitability of the project, and proposals to non-profits might focus on the benefit your endeavor will provide to the organization's constituency. Paying attention to the arrangement of your proposal might give you the crucial advantage as you attempt to persuade your audience.

In academic contexts, argumentative writing (sometimes called *inquiry* or *research* writing) depends heavily on arrangement because complex ideas are hard to convey well. Considering order, layout, reading practices, and the other elements discussed above will help you engage with your audience as you spell out a problem or question, establish its context, explain your thinking, and lay out your conclusion. Careful arrangement is essential to successful academic writing.

Beyond your studies, understanding arrangement benefits you as an author and an audience member. When you encounter a convincing orator (classical rhetoric style) or a snazzy video, you will recognize how the text's arrangement contributes to its effectiveness. Does the appeal to emotion (**pathos**) hide the shoddy logic behind the idea? Does the careful explanation of the facts give you extra confidence in its conclusions? New media forms, emerging daily, challenge us to comprehend new priorities in arrangement.

Arrangement in AI-Assisted Writing

Generative Language Models, like Chat GPT, produce text based on mimicking and extrapolating patterns from their data sets. As such, they aren't particularly innovative or creative, but they are very good at matching formats and producing texts that *sound good*. Since they're very good at mimicking, they can be very good at arrangement.

Give a generative language model a **genre** task, such as *help me write a rejection letter*, and you'll find that they closely match the arrangement expectations of such genres. They recognize what kind of information to produce, and when. Thus, one way to benefit from these tools is through modeling – these tools can help you examine different arrangements of ideas and decide which fits the project you're working on.

Be careful, though, in letting style outweigh substance. Because generative language models can produce texts that seem to fit the rhetorical goals of the prompt, incautious authors might mistake pattern matching for intelligence, and rely too much on clever arrangement to carry the burden of content. Early experiments with generative language models and argumentative writing, for example, find that these systems do not understand honesty or accuracy as key aspects of convincing writing. Generated texts often sound correct, but AI often will create reference texts that do not exist; that is, the learning language model makes up facts.

Using these tools to test arrangement might be useful, but don't rely on them to do your writing for you. Nobody wants to get a letter from an A.I.

In coming years, as people (and businesses) rely on these tools more and more, it will be interesting to see how arrangement grows and changes. When machine-generated text always meets the expected criteria for arrangement, we may find that creative or innovative writing blooms from deviations in these expected patterns. Finding ways to deviate creatively from the norms generated by these systems will make your work effective and help you stand out.

Arrangement in 3D Printing

Arrangement becomes even more important when your composition moves from two dimensions to three. Just as visual elements need careful consideration on a page or a screen, so too must you consider a variety of factors in arranging 3D-printed projects. To start with, there's the practical matter of working within the constraints of the materials your printer uses. Consider how the materials in the printer are applied to the plate and when they need extra support. A portion of your print made too thinly or at the wrong angle might not work well with your printer, so thinking and learning about the limitations of your medium is crucial.

You'll also want to consider how your objects will be engaged by the "reader." What arrangement will they have in the physical space of the text? Will they lead from one to another with physical characteristics such as arrows or connections? How will you guide the eye over your object? Do those characteristics have universally clear meaning to the audiences to whom your objects will circulate?

Think about the physicality of the object—if you're making a building with things inside, for example, are the windows big enough for viewers to look through? How will light get inside? If you're including textures or patterns on the surface of the object, how deeply will the pattern be etched, and will that communicate well to the readers? Arrangement goes hand in hand with **affordance** in 3D printing and will give you the tools you need to push from abstract idea to physical object.

Writing with Arrangement

Arranging written or spoken texts is primarily an issue of **genre**. In multimodal texts, we must consider both the organizing principles for that genre, and the visual (and audio) composition on the page or screen. Ask yourself questions about your own intentions with the piece and use the space and time available as an opportunity to manifest those intentions:

- What are my options and constraints for arrangement within this **genre**, media, or platform? *These openings and limits will help you define the scope of your text and shape your output.*
- What do I want the reader/viewer to pay the most attention to? *You might arrange this item last, chronologically, or to the right, visually. Or you could make it larger or put it in the foreground.*
- What is, for me, the general idea or the overarching concept? *You could put this at the top of the page visually and arrange details and support below it.*
- What happens when I juxtapose these two seemingly disparate ideas or **images**? Does the **juxtaposition** create a new meaning? A dissonance?
- Which **mode**—**alphabetic text**, **image**, sound, 3D object—carries the greatest burden in terms of communicating my message? How can I arrange the project in order to privilege that mode?

Arrangement Activity

In this assignment, you will use visual arrangement to make a one-sheet poster aimed at a specific audience with the intent of pushing them toward action. (This activity works well for both individuals and groups).

STEP 1: Choose a subject. This could be a current issue that you feel strongly about, or it could be a commercial object (like a film), or an informational issue (like a safety concern), or something else your group agrees upon.

STEP 2: **Decide what outcome you want.** What do you want your audience to *do* after they encounter your poster? Also consider who your audience is, where they would encounter your poster, and how they likely relate to your subject already.

STEP 3: **Craft a couple short phrases or sentences** that evoke the ideal for your readers, and additional information that connects the issue to the world. Examine the advertisement for an example. Decide on your call to action and how it will appear.

STEP 4: **Create or find visual elements** to add to the poster. Be sure to consult with your instructor about expectations regarding copyright and those **images**. Consider using Creative Commons or Public Domain images where possible.

STEP 5: **Lay out the poster in three different ways** using a graphic organizing program. If you aren't familiar with many of these, Google Slides or PowerPoint are likely the easiest to access and use. Align each of your three versions with different rhetorical goals.

STEP 6: **Compose a brief discussion of the three different posters you've made**, explaining your intent with each and evaluating whether the posters successfully convey the meaning you intended. As much as possible, discuss how the different arrangements change the meaning of the poster.

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Arrangement

Podcast for [Arrangement](#), Chapter three of *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 12:28.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Vadym Valihun and Lila Kelley about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Arrangement

Video for [Arrangement](#), Chapter three of *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 03:55.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 3, "Arrangement" created by Izabella Valenciana with collaborator Aidan Johnson. (Transcript available)

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Images

Images in "Arrangement"

[fig 1: Advertisement for The Leslie Shoe House, circa 1915-1935. The Violet Elliott Collection. Public Domain. [Leslie Shoe House](#) [www.flickr.com]]

[Fig 2: Screenshots from Elyse Meyer video published on TikTok. 12 September 2022. [Screenshots from Elyse Meyer](#) [www.tiktok.com]]

[Screenshot_20230710_062151_TikTok.jpg](#)

[leslie-shoe-house-ad-Violet-Elliott-collection.jpg](#)

[Screenshot_20230710_062151_TikTok.jpg](#)

[Screenshot_20230710_062158_TikTok.jpg](#)

[Screenshot_20230710_062253_TikTok.jpg](#)

[Screenshot_20230710_062253_TikTok.jpg](#)

[Screenshot_20230710_063142_TikTok.jpg](#)

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4: Circulation

Circulation describes the way a text is moved or shared once it has been created, written or produced. In this context, the meaning of “text” can be as simple as an email or text message, but a text can also be as complex as a Hollywood movie, speech, or graphic novel. Thinking about circulation helps us understand how texts get delivered from authors to receivers, as well as considering where a text might go, who might want to see it, and what readers might do with it. Sometimes circulation is easy to identify and understand, such as when you send a text or post on your preferred social media platform. However, circulation can often be more complicated. Whenever you read, send, post, share, watch, or listen, you are playing your own part in the circulation of texts as either the author or receiver of texts.

History of Circulation

Aristotle suggested that to be an effective writer or speaker, a student must become skilled in five different aspects of communication: invention (generating ideas), **arrangement** (organization and order), style (words and grammar), memory (memorization), and delivery (speaking or writing). Aristotle argued that effective delivery is just as important to communication as the ideas themselves or the language used to convey them.

In ancient Greece, most ideas were communicated orally, through public speeches, debates, or conversations. For Aristotle, the concept of delivery meant giving speeches, participating in debates, or having conversations. Most simply, the concept of delivery has always focused on how an idea is shared from one person to another, between a speaker and audience, or an author and readers. Speech and performance were the dominant **modes** of communication in the ancient world, and so it followed that discussions of delivery focused on the spoken voice and bodily movement. Only with the development of bound and printed texts like books, newspapers, and posters did the ancient concept of delivery evolve to focus more on the written word.

Recording ideas in handwritten texts was one of the first steps in allowing ideas to circulate in new ways. Making copies of texts or manuscripts required scribes to copy by hand one word at a time onto blank pages to create a new manuscript. Because these texts or manuscripts were rare, most manuscripts produced by scribes ended up in the libraries of monasteries or wealthy individuals.

Therefore, one might understand why Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press in 1455 was one of the most important moments in the history of the circulation of the written word. His invention meant that more books could be produced. As a result, books became more plentiful and inexpensive. More people than ever before had access to the world of ideas through the written word.

As the transition from quill to printing press illustrates, available technologies can impact circulation of a text: from how it’s produced, to how it’s consumed, to what its material properties are, and who has access to it.

Circulation Today

This sort of transition, from one communication medium to another, has become increasingly common as new technologies emerge. The invention of recorded sound and radio radically shifted the way we produced and consumed texts. Certain types of texts were no longer limited by space and time. A symphony performed by an orchestra in London could be experienced by a banker in Cleveland months or years after the actual performance. The same can be said of motion picture cinema and broadcast television. Moreover, the development of radio stations, movie studios, and television networks has always been followed by amateur producers who take advantage of consumer technologies like ham radio, photocopiers, video cameras, or cassette tapes. All of these technological developments have produced new types of texts and new media.

Further, as our writing and media technologies have become more powerful, our texts increasingly seem to take on a life of their own. This idea has never been more current than in our contemporary digital culture of websites, social networks, viral videos, and internet memes. There used to be a clear distinction between producing a text and distributing it. Writing a text and publishing a text were two different activities entirely. The same could be said for recording a song and playing it on the radio or making a movie and showing it in a theater. Writing and sending a letter was a process measured in days, not seconds. Making a movie required a production studio, rather than a smartphone.

New technologies continue to emerge at an increasingly faster rate, and the distinction between producing a text and circulating it is slowly disappearing. As a result, writers who have the best understanding of how texts are shared between people, how they circulate within and across social networks, will have the most impact and the biggest presence in the networks most important to them.

Wikipedia is an excellent example of the way that networked and digital technologies have changed the very nature of how certain texts are produced, circulated, and evolved in contemporary culture. For centuries before the internet enabled and democratized the digital publication and distribution of texts, encyclopedias were one of the most important and respected repositories of knowledge and reference information in almost any home or library. An encyclopedia was usually made up of dozens of expensive bound print volumes/books. Usually, each volume was dedicated to a letter of the alphabet. Unless a researcher had access to the encyclopedia's most recent edition, the information contained within its covers was likely not current. Even the most recent edition was likely written months or even years earlier due to the lengthy process of editing and publishing bound books at that time.

These limitations were taken for granted in an age where print-publication dominated the circulation of texts. But there was no alternative. Acquiring a new, yearly volume that was produced every year to update a set of encyclopedias was often a financial impossibility for most families and libraries.



Figure 4.1: Wikipedia Logo (Copyright; Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0)

As new technologies became available, Wikipedia was designed specifically to respond to these exact limitations, including constraints of accessibility, up to date information, and cost, to name a few. Although not a perfect solution to the challenges noted above—there are some who question the veracity of some entries within it—Wikipedia is accessible to any individual with online access, whether that be at home, at school, or at a local library. But accessibility is only one of the elements of circulation that Wikipedia addresses.

Each entry within Wikipedia is constantly evolving. As new knowledge becomes public, as science charges forward, and political events unfold across the globe, Wikipedia is able to accommodate and incorporate those bits of knowledge far more quickly and (we hope) democratically and (we hope) accurately than ever before. Since the advent of user-authored technologies, readers of Wikipedia have been able to participate in its existence as writers and collaborators. They can suggest corrections to inaccuracies or add emerging knowledge to the existing entries, and their suggestions become available almost instantly.

Teams of volunteer editors also monitor pages in their subject areas, enforcing style and attribution guidelines, sometimes controversially. Nonetheless, occasionally errors find their way onto pages for hours, weeks, days, or even longer. This interaction, where the boundaries between reader and writer, producer and consumer begin to blur, has resulted in one of the most comprehensive and highly accurate sources of knowledge ever produced.

A fascinating example of just how powerful the idea of circulation can be is the internet phenomenon of fake news, which—though it existed well before then—came to light during the 2016 presidential election. Because authors can make money based on the number of clicks an article gets, a story that has a high circulation and gets attention can mean more money for an author even if it is fake. Some fake news stories are also intended to sway public opinion about particular issues or people.

In both cases, those that are written just to circulate and those written to influence people's beliefs deliberately contain misinformation. These are hoaxes, not satire; Satire calls attention to itself as untrue, whereas fake news tries to convince readers that it is true.

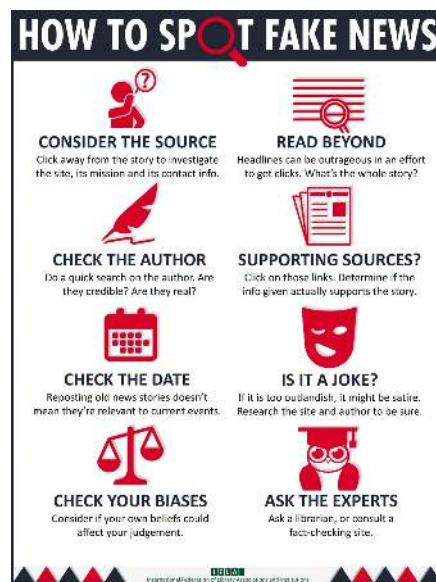


Figure 4.2: How to Spot Fake News graphic (Copyright; IFLA via Wikimedia Commons)

“Successful” fake news authors have mastered the art of circulation: they think about who their readers are and produce easily shareable content, anticipating that their readers will spread the news via social media. One fake news story in late 2016 spread the lie that a pizza parlor in Washington D.C. was the site of a child sex slave ring led by Hillary Clinton. This story motivated a man to show up at the pizza parlor with guns, allegedly to free the children (Kang and Goldman). The power of the written word in the age of the internet is profound due to the increased means of circulating what we write, but the story of the pizza parlor is a reminder that circulation without considerations of **ethos** and ethics can be truly dangerous, too.

Alphabet (parent company of Google) and Meta (parent company of Facebook) have taken some steps to change their algorithms to reduce the visibility of fake news stories, but the danger of being fooled is still present for anyone who spends time on the internet.

Circulation and Other Concepts

It's one thing to think about circulation in terms of viral videos, internet memes, or popular movies and television, but it's just as important (and more practical) to think about circulation in terms of texts being exchanged among a smaller group of people who share a common **field**. For instance, a scholar might write an article for a journal, and that person could reasonably assume that it would only circulate among other scholars interested in that topic. Scholars have a sense of the people who might encounter their texts, so they can make intelligent guesses about their audience's expectations regarding the features of the **genres** they produce: citation styles, referencing the work of previous scholars, or using certain words that might only be familiar to the people among whom the texts circulate.

Certain types of text afford different types of circulation. It's not likely that you'll see a brilliant meeting memo being shared among friends, and you likely know better than to include a link to your favorite cat videos as part of your job application materials. If you want something to be shared among friends, you're more likely to produce an **image** with a caption or a video, maybe even an Instagram post. If you're responding to a request for job application materials, you'll write something meant for one or two specific people, and you won't have to worry about producing a text that could be easily shared outside the company to whom you are applying.

When looking at circulation and **affordances**, it's best to think about these as being dependent on each other. If you want something to circulate to as wide an audience as possible, choose **modes** and genres that best fit your goals. If you want to be well-known or an influencer and respected for being able to do tricks on your bike, you'll likely put together a demo or highlight video and post it to YouTube and other sources so it can be shared among as many people as possible. On the other hand, if you know that you're only going to have access to email or a text message to communicate your idea, you can guess (or hope) that it won't circulate much beyond the people to whom you send it directly.

Sometimes circulation will be limited or determined by the affordances of the materials you have at hand. But at other times, you might have a very specific sense of your target audience, even if it's just one person, and you'll select your materials accordingly.

Looking Ahead

One of the aspects of studying any **conversation** is understanding how it circulates. We know that circulation refers to how texts move from authors to readers and how texts are shared within and across different communities. When we immerse ourselves in an intellectual conversation, our effort to listen carefully reveals the important voices and the ways ideas circulate among participants in the conversation. We find ourselves focusing on the contributors who demand our attention through the insight and clarity of their ideas as well as their ability to access and dominate the networks, platforms, and **genres** where their work circulates.

Think for a moment about the students of Stoneman Douglas High School who successfully punctured the rhetoric of the gun lobby after a shooting at their school in Parkland, Florida. Those students had to survey the many perspectives in the conversation on gun control and then create a message that would move the conversation forward. Their mastery of social media platforms enabled them to create effective messages that spread rapidly and built momentum. As their messages circulated, other young people were able to navigate and invent their own messages, **kairotically** surfing and selecting from all the available media. We write to circulate, but we also write with, from, and because of circulation.

As you enter conversations and contemplate what your contribution will be, consider how the concept of circulation can help you at every stage of your work: when you gather and read sources, when you plan what your contribution will be, and when you imagine how your message will spread.

Circulation in AI-Assisted Writing

AI technologies based on large language models are already shifting the conversation around circulation in at least two broad areas. First and perhaps most obviously, AI shapes content being circulated through existing systems for sharing information, such as popular social media platforms. Various AI language models have been trained to fabricate a wide range of content: written text, certainly, but also software programs, **images**, spoken audio, music, and video. A number of these technologies are designed to assist people in the work of content creation.

For example, in September, 2023, Google announced a suite of AI-powered tools to translate spoken audio into other languages, generate outlines for videos that YouTube creators can make themselves, and produce background videos and images that can be incorporated into YouTube Shorts (Sato). These tools offer clear benefits to users, helping them develop richer content that can reach a wider audience in less time. For those who earn an income from YouTube, the ability to generate more robust videos more quickly can translate directly to economic gain. For more casual or even first-time posters to YouTube, these tools can have a democratizing influence, making the idea of becoming a content creator on the platform seem within reach and encouraging new voices to circulate on the platform.

These benefits do not come without additional challenges. In the same month that Google revealed its AI tools to support content creation, Amazon announced two changes to its policy governing the self-publication of Kindle e-books on its site. First, Amazon added a new requirement that authors notify the company if their e-books contain AI-generated material. The policy focuses on AI-generated content specifically. Authors who rely on AI tools to *assist* in their own development of content do not have to identify their texts as products of AI.

Interestingly, Amazon did not commit to passing this information on to consumers: the company would know which products available in its store contained content created by AI, but purchasers would not (Amazon indicated it might alter its disclosure policy in the future to make this information public) (Italie). A matter of days later, Amazon followed up with a second update to the policy, restricting authors to publishing no more than three new e-book titles per day on the platform (Creamer). As the company explained on its Kindle Direct Publishing forum, Amazon “is actively monitoring the rapid evolution of generative AI and the impact it is having on reading, writing, and publishing” and is “committed to providing the best possible shopping, reading, and publishing experience for our authors and customers” (“Update”).

Taken together, these policy changes suggest a number of ethical, economic, and legal questions. Why is it important for Amazon to know which titles are written by AI models but not for consumers to have the same information? What assumptions about human-generated and AI-generated content frame the claim that knowing the authorship of Kindle books will enable Amazon to provide the best experience for writers and consumers? How do authors, readers, and Amazon factor AI into calculations of value, understood as both “quality” (however one cares to define that concept) and price (a fair and reasonable cost that compensates authors for their labor and Amazon for their services while providing consumers with the content they want)?

Consider some of your own perspectives on these questions:

- If you are a content creator on the Kindle platform or a similar service, or if you envision yourself possibly pursuing these opportunities in the future, how might you feel about earning the same compensation for your labor as someone who used AI to generate competing texts in a matter of seconds?
- As a consumer of content, would you want to know whether the content you purchased was written by people or by an AI? Why or why not?
- Would you believe it appropriate for you to pay the same price for similar products regardless of how they were developed? How much of a product's fair value comes from your perception of how useful the product is, and how might fair value reflect your understanding of the labor it took to generate the product?

These questions stem from the pressures that AI creates on systems of content circulation and in our attitudes and perceptions of how content should circulate based on shifting historical and technological conditions.

If content is the first dimension of circulation affected by large language models, a second area might be the technologies of circulation themselves. AI models have implications for *how* content—regardless of how it was developed—circulates. A September, 2023 article (the prominence of this particular month in this discussion indicates how rapidly developments in AI models are emerging) on the science and technology news site *Ars Technica* highlights ways that AI might improve data compression. We rely upon data compression all the time: phones, streaming services, still **image** and moving video, the Internet, satellite communications, and nearly all of the other information infrastructure we routinely interact with use data compression algorithms to squeeze as much information into as little bandwidth as possible.

The more efficient the compression, the more data can be circulated, at less cost. The *Ars Technica* article explores a recent study that demonstrates the ability of large language models to compress some data types more efficiently (sometimes significantly more so) than commonly-used compression algorithms such as PNG for images and FLAC for audio without any loss in quality (Edwards). AI thus has the potential to streamline the circulation of extremely large data sets, which would in turn lead to reduced data transfer costs and possibly reduced energy use, reducing the environmental footprint for digital data circulation. In time, these changes could alter authors' sense of the resources available to them and of the size, scope, and format of the content they circulate.

Writing with Circulation

With so many texts competing for our attention and our memory, it's important to understand how texts operate in people's everyday lives. Knowing how receivers might encounter a text, or when it might be most appropriate for them to receive it, will often make the difference between being noticed and being passed over. Some things to consider are:

- What sorts of things make a text memorable? Why do I notice or remember certain texts and not others?
- How are texts circulated in my particular **field**? What **genres** circulate most?
- In what sorts of social networks do the people I'm trying to reach participate most? Do people participate more as a consumer, producer, commenter, or sharer in these networks? Do they share things from one network or platform to another? Why?
- What sorts of experiences, good or bad, have I had with the means of publication on the web that focus primarily on **alphabetic text** (Google Docs, blogs, Tumblr, wikis, forums, etc.)? Which ones do I prefer, and which do I think my audience will prefer, and why? What is it about them that attracts me to them?
- What are the **affordances** or constraints of the various methods available to me for circulating my text?
- What **image** have I created for myself? Am I accurate, reliable? Do I understand my intended audience? What have I done to indicate these?

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Circulation

Podcast for [Circulation, Chapter four of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 11:56.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Maria Fernanda Freaner and Ryan White about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Circulation

Video for [Circulation, Chapter four of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 04:09.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 2, "Alphabetic Text" created by Aidan Johnson with collaborator Izabella Valenciana. (Transcript available)

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5: Craft

Craft refers to skill used in creating something or executing a complex task. Just as doctors and designers and engineers require a set of skills in order to apply their craft, so too do creatives like musicians, writers, filmmakers, illustrators, podcasters, fashion designers, and website developers. The greater your level of skill in a **field** or **genre**, the more expertise, imagination, and care you bring to the process.

In terms of writing and rhetoric, craft relates to how we decide what to use from a wide array of **affordances** combined with the **arrangement** we employ for various **modes** (such as **alphabetic text** or **image**) and **genres** to communicate with one another within a **field**, or even across a range of fields. Craft can also help us create a personally curated aesthetic, an original style or voice, and an identifiable **ethos**.

Craft involves painstaking attention to *how* something is created, from the chair you're sitting in to the clothes you're wearing to the words you're reading right now. Craft maximizes the impact of an object, action, or text. Craft is the difference between simply doing something, and doing something *well*. Technically, you may be able to stitch some pieces of cloth together and make a garment, but *crafts-person-ship* moves you beyond simple functionality to the thrill of original and enduring fashion design.

History of Craft

The word craft derives from the Old German word *kraft*, meaning “strength.” This evolved into the Old English *cræft*, meaning “power” or “physical strength.” Later it expanded to include “trade, handicraft, employment requiring special skill or dexterity.”

The concept of craft goes back to Aristotle. In Greek, the word *techne* refers to a “true art, craft, or discipline” and, according to Stephen Halliwell in his book *Aristotle's Poetics*, *techne* was “the standard Greek word both for a practical skill and for the systematic knowledge or experience which underlies it”(44). In the words of Richard Nordquist, Aristotle considered rhetoric to be *techne*, “a skill for communicating effectively,” as well as “a coherent system for analyzing and classifying speeches.” Our modern words “technique” and “technology” derive from *techne*.

Rhetoric is the art of *crafting* effective communication. Style is one of the five canons in Aristotle's definition of classical rhetoric. For Aristotle, the way the argument is made and presented is as important as the content of the argument—it's not just a matter of *what* is said, but *how* it is said. Had Aristotle replaced the word ‘style’ with the word ‘craft,’ his logical framework and argument would have the same structural integrity.

We can learn a great deal about the craft of writing and rhetoric from the craftsmen and craftswomen of the Middle Ages, who formed guilds devoted to the development and promotion of material practices like blacksmithing, shoe-making, baking, carpentry, and hat-making. Tradespeople took tremendous pride in the quality of their products. Excellence in craft contributed to the social identity of the maker,

raising the most skilled makers to social prominence and distinction. Handcrafting goods from clothing to furniture to cathedrals, outstanding medieval tradespeople distinguished themselves through artful attention to detail.

The Industrial Revolution of the 1850s dramatically changed systems of production. As mass production and manufacturing began to displace handcrafting as the primary means of material production, originality and attention to detail threatened to decline. Artistic movements emerged that celebrated the aesthetic qualities of handcrafting. From about 1880-1920, the Arts and Crafts Movement, a trend in fine and decorative arts, flourished in Europe and, later, in the U.S. Designers like William Morris, Louis Tiffany, and Frank Lloyd Wright re-instituted aesthetic values like intricate detail, lyrical beauty, and one-of-a-kind distinctiveness. The Mingei movement emphasized similar aesthetic values in Japan during the 1920s.

In the language arts and communications, an appreciation for craft challenges makers to lavish attention on every detail of a piece of communication. Every word, sentence, image, sound, can be selected and combined with exquisite care and thoughtfulness. Following World War II, as America experienced its post-war economic boom, television and advertising became powerful tools for persuasion and turned into big business. As depicted in the hit television series *Mad Men*, communications professionals began collaborating to craft popular advertising slogans and campaigns that would command the attention of consumers and motivate consumers toward specific products and behaviors. Advertising professionals might spend hours in committee collectively considering each word in a five-word slogan!

Today, with so many platforms available for communication, each with their own **affordances** and audiences, craft is essential to making your voice stand out. Whether you work with words, paint, film, sound, dance, fashion, photography, video games, wood, metal, or textiles, attention to and development of craft helps your message rise above the others in our crowded media landscape, enabling you to engage with the world powerfully, creatively, and distinctively.

Craft Today

Effective communicators in the 21st century embrace a multimodal approach to communication, often using sophisticated mixtures of **alphabetic text**, **image**, and other elements to craft messages, build stories, and convey information and with tremendous complexity across numerous local and global platforms. Indeed, as communicators now rely on more than alphabetic text, dependence upon image to communicate is growing rapidly (Kress and van Leeuwen 23). Images, according to Bateman, enable us to use “a far richer range of combinations of different ways of making meanings” and allow us to create text/image combinations that deliver “something more than either could achieve alone” (11).

Since this act of combining text with images has become standard, our communications get evaluated on a number of levels. As technology increases the **affordances** available to us, the possibilities about what to include, what to leave out, and how the modes work *together* expand our range of considerations in

crafting communications. Crafting effective communication, like crafting a poem or garment, compels us to **arrange** text and image thoughtfully, with maximum attention to detail, to create the intended meaning.

As people use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to find their news and other information—and are more likely to engage in conversation about this information on those platforms—we must craft text/image combinations that command attention and convey meaning skillfully. And it may be even more important to notice how others use these elements to influence and manipulate our thinking and behavior.

The crafting of multimodal communication complements traditional modes of writing and composing with alphabetic text. According to Bouelle, Bouelle, and Jones, “From the 21st-century, multimodal perspective, style can refer to how one incorporates sound, images, or design elements to persuade the audience through **pathos**, **logos**, and **ethos**.” Communication today is often a synthesis of word, image, sound, symbol, orality, gesture, and other modes a communicator finds useful.

Viewing writing from this multimodal perspective, the concept of craft challenges authors to plan each element of a communication with thought and care, attending both to the effects and possible combinations of each element. Such attention to detail enhances the overall message being communicated, and increases the likelihood that the message can be heard in the twenty-first century’s noisy media landscape. Aristotle’s principles of rhetorical ‘style,’ or craft, still enable authors with excellent crafts-person-ship to distinguish themselves.

Broadening the Concept

Practicing the craft of composing should not result in uniformity of style. In fact, when we celebrate the diversity of language that naturally accompanies variations among human communities, we will recognize that excellence takes a variety of forms. The craft of composing produces a wide-ranging variety of expressive and communicative styles. The Executive Committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication issued the following resolution in 1972:

We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language – the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the rights of students to their own language.

An open-minded, compassionate, and inclusive approach to writing and communication naturally embraces craft as a means for accessing and expressing the specific cultural and linguistic forms that represent the various groups and individual students within a diverse student body. Craft aims to

highlight those cultural differences in language and bring them to the forefront of authentic, effective personal communication. Crafting a message that contributes to the “**conversation**” must include consideration of environment and experience as essential to arriving at a personal perspective, or **ethos**, one that moves the “conversation” forward and gives it energy and a demonstration of active thinking. Craft enhances communication by allowing for the full spectrum of human language and expression to be valued and included. Craft gives us tools to use language to the best of our ability, whether in alphabetic text or multimodal communication.

The poet Audre Lorde says, “For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking these truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth” (43). Such growth is best achieved by acknowledging and embracing the linguistic differences between people of different cultures and backgrounds. We use craft to convey the “truth of that language” which is uniquely ours, depending on our communities of origin and personal development

Craft and Other Concepts

Fields as wide-ranging as medicine and furniture design require specialized skills, perfected through practice over a significant period of time. While the primary skills for these fields are not linguistic in nature, effective communication in these fields often requires special language skills. Most fields have their own jargon, industry or field-specific terminology used by specialists. Doctors need to know the terminology for diseases, medical treatment and procedures, instrumentation, and human anatomy. This is true of creatives, as well. For example, the technical aspects of filmmaking have created a language for camera shots, scene blocking, composition, and editing techniques that is necessary for one to know to work in the field.

Like all professional creatives, filmmakers take their craft seriously, especially those working in specific **genres** that rely on tropes, or commonly used structures, themes, devices, character types, or other conventions of the genre. As filmmakers increasingly **remix** familiar images, texts, and arrangements to create new forms and styles, those genres can blur, creating, in effect, new genres of storytelling. The films of the Marvel Universe are a good example. In terms of traditional film genres, these movies cannot be easily categorized; they are parts fantasy, science fiction, thriller, action, western, comedy, and romance all rolled up into one, but their popularity has made them so recognizable that they demand the creation of their own genre: [the superhero film](#). Filmmakers apply craft through their understanding of film history (their **field**) and its **genres**, then use this expertise to **remix** those genre tropes into new and original art.

Looking Ahead

Communication is an ongoing “**conversation**,” one that you will engage with for the rest of your life, and craft plays a central role in how you participate. It allows you to control and shape how you communicate, as well as how you evaluate what is communicated to you. There are many things in life we have no control over, but developing your ability to craft how you communicate allows you to make choices about how you contribute to the “conversation.”

The craft of communicating through writing is still an important skill for contributing to the “conversation,” and in addition to the other key concepts in this book, writing continues to utilize basic elements of **story** such as structure, language, voice/**ethos**, narrative, and so on. These elements of craft are applied in writing whether the **genre** is creative, academic, professional, or commercial. Each of these genres may amplify the need for elements particular to the genre: poetry may emphasize elements like lineation, imagery, sound and rhythm, and form; fiction and creative nonfiction often focus on elements like plot, setting, character, and point of view; commercial writing such as advertising will commonly prioritize craft elements that appeal to **pathos** or **logos** in order to persuade.

Courses that focus on academic or professional writing may focus on elements of craft unique to their **field**. Academic writing frequently uses a **remix** of ideas from other authors, and craft is evident through the resources used and the citations that identify them as well as the development of the author’s own point of view and **ethos** to synthesize those ideas. Professional writing, such as a business report or a grant application, will use **alphabetic text** and **images** (such as graphs) to tell the story of a how a business is performing or why a grant application should be funded. Authors in these fields use craft to manipulate text and image and how those are arranged in order to create new ways of understanding and expand our ongoing “conversation” in new directions, and craft also contributes to the credibility of the author and weight of the contribution made to the “conversation.”

Courses and fields that create content and communicate using multimodal approaches (podcasting, YouTube, social media posts, filmmaking, blogs and relationship websites) use their **affordances** to expand upon how craft might be used. Craft here means not only being skilled in the demands of the technology, but also in understanding how people “read” these messages and crafting a message accordingly using **arrangement**, **modes**, and other key concepts is to be part of society’s “conversation.”

Craft may come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but it continually pushes artists and other creative minds as well as academics and professionals deeper into the inner workings of their fields, opening up possibilities for the discovery of new forms, styles, and levels of meaning. Regardless of your chosen field, craft will play a role in your level of success. Learning and applying the specialized skills required for a field illustrates the importance of craft in terms of not simply doing the job, but doing the job well; not only participating in the “conversation,” but participating in it meaningfully; not simply communicating with your audience, but impacting them. Remember: craft is about *how* you say *what* you say.



Figure 5.1: Woman Building Chair

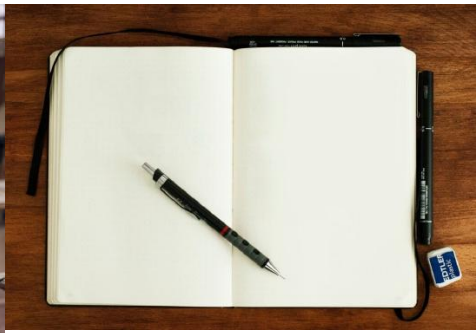


Figure 5.3: Book and Pen



Figure 5.4: Music Studio

Craft in AI-Assisted Writing

For humans, language, in all its forms, lies at the heart of communication. It provides the tools (words) and the rules (grammar and usage) we need to express ideas and concepts, and ourselves. For artificial intelligence (AI), a language model provides the foundation to create and communicate new concepts.

A language model works by scanning a data set: a vast amount of humanly-produced writing fed into the program by the programmers. Then, through programming that allows it to make inferences, the model can generate new content based on the data set. The ELIZA language, developed at MIT in 1966, is one the earliest examples of a language model (Weizenbaum).

A large language model (LLM) is a type of AI algorithm that is used to understand, summarize, generate, and predict new content. In fact, it is a type of *generative* AI, designed specifically to generate new textual content. LLMs are the next generation of language models, using dramatically larger data sets, which enhance the model's capabilities. For LLMs, the data sets typically have at least one billion parameters on which the model is trained. ChatGPT, a commercial AI writer, uses 175 billion parameters, the largest neural network ever.

In terms of writing and rhetoric, AI-assisted writing is another **mode** of communication, literally another language, requiring a high level of skill to best understand and utilize its beneficial qualities. Like any language, AI follows a set of rules that can produce logical and well-reasoned content, but, unlike human language, AI currently lacks the craft to offer the subtlety, nuance, or innovation a seasoned writer or other type of communicator might. Unlike human language, AI is unable to re-imagine itself into something that might produce new sounds and meanings. This means that, at present, the benefits of AI are often limited to or expanded by our ability to craft meaningful prompts.

Imagine you need to compose a cover letter in which you introduce yourself to decision-makers at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago, Illinois. You have seen a call for a paid internship in which you will assist the museum's curators in developing placards to accompany the artworks in a major exhibition of surrealist women. As an art history student interested in curating their own exhibitions someday, you will want to craft a letter that demonstrates your writing skills, highlights an expertise in describing artworks, and impresses an audience that is certain to be highly sensitive to visual communication. Rising above the competition will require you to think carefully about every detail of your letter from the opening sentence to the closing sentence, with attention not just to *what* you say but how you say it and how your letter looks—the font, the paragraph length, the integration of any images you may include. You would be wise to ask yourself questions like these:

- Do I want to sound warmly enthusiastic or professionally reserved?
- What experiences have I had that qualify me to do this work?
- How can I amplify my qualifications and portray them attractively?
- Can I include an image somehow, to make my letter stand out?
- How can I show off my ability to write about art?
- How can I convey my enthusiasm while still sounding professional?
- How can I grab my audience's attention immediately, in the opener?
- How can I close the letter memorably?

These kinds of questions require you to make choices, to choose *how* to present yourself as well as *what* you are presenting. You're considering all the possibilities before selecting those elements that best suit your purpose. Sometimes we compose instinctually, without really thinking about what we're doing. But when we do start thinking intentionally about our choices, we have entered the sphere of craft. We are making specific decisions for conscious reasons to create an effective message or artistic effect.

The more you consider your choices, the more consciously you make decisions, the more expertly you practice the craft of writing. Thinking about the various concepts in this book will help you craft a letter calculated skillfully to showcase your personality and identity as well as your professional abilities. Here are additional questions to think about:

What are the expectations of a professional in my particular **field** or industry?

What does the cover letter **genre** require me to include and how should I sound?

How can I best leverage the effects of **alphabetic text**?

How can effective **arrangement** enable me to distinguish myself to my readers?

What format should I use? What are the conventions of this **genre**?

Should I consider **remixing** material by including the words or images of others in my letter?

Can I integrate **images** somehow?

What sort of **ethos** am I hoping to project through this letter?

How can I show myself prepared to contribute to a **conversation** about surrealist women?

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Craft

Podcast for [Craft, Chapter five of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 14:11.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Meghan Patnode and Sprig Velic about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Craft

Video for [Craft, Chapter five of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 04:17.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 5, "Craft." The author is Alina Yastrebova, with collaborators Sean Munoz and Anthony Miocic. (Transcript available)

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6: Ethos

Ethos refers to who other people think we are, based on what and how we write and speak. One of the ways we can try to persuade people to do or think something is to create a positive ethos. We do this by writing or speaking in such a way that others trust us and think we are good people. Ethos refers to who *other* people think we are, so the way we construct our ethos will depend on who our audience is in each particular rhetorical situation. Different people value different character traits. Think of the contrast between the way you write and speak with friends, and the way you write and speak when applying for a job.

History of Ethos

Ethos is one of the key concepts that comes from ancient Greece, and you will see references to this work elsewhere in this text. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle identified three methods of persuading listeners to think or do something. The first is ethos, about which he says, “it makes much difference in regard to persuasion. . .that the speaker seem to be a certain kind of person” (120). The second approach to persuading listeners according to Aristotle is **pathos**, which is when the speaker or writer arouses emotions such as pity, anger, or fear that will lead the listeners to do or think something. (For further discussion of pathos, see “Additional Key Concepts.”) The third approach is **logos**, which is when we appeal to reason, or the soundness of the argument itself.

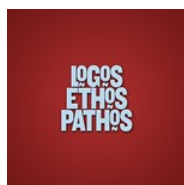


Figure 6.1: Rhetorical 1 of 2 (Copyright; Brett Jordan licensed under CC BY 3.0 via Flickr)

Aristotle’s discussion of ethos in *On Rhetoric* can be a little confusing. Sometimes it seems that he thinks ethos is something we invent in our text; elsewhere in this work, he is clear that ethos refers to one’s moral character, and thus refers to something that exists in the person. Other rhetoricians of the time debated whether ethos was something one could just make up depending on what one is trying to achieve at that moment, or whether it had to come from a deeper sense of justice and wisdom within one’s character. Isocrates, for example, scolded other rhetoricians’ hypocrisy for claiming to be whoever their audience wanted them to be (Isocrates).

One way to understand ethos is that it is both. We must convince our audience that we are trustworthy, that we have their best interests in mind, and that we know what we’re talking about. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this in our writing and speaking is to actually be trustworthy, generous, and knowledgeable.

Ethos Today

Politicians and celebrities rely heavily—in some cases, exclusively—on ethos to persuade people to vote for them or consume their music and movies. And in the era when the star of *Celebrity Apprentice* is also a top politician, it’s interesting and important to pay attention to the ways that celebrities construct their ethos in political spheres.

Consider Chance the Rapper. In March of 2017, Chance met with then-Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner to discuss funding of Chicago Public Schools. While most Black men from the South Side of Chicago would not get through Rauner’s security, Chance relied on his established **ethos** as a Grammy-winning artist to get a meeting with the governor.

However, in interviews after the meeting, we see him crafting his ethos in more subtle ways. Chance claimed “I’m not a politician. I’m here ‘cause I’m a dad, I’m an after-school teacher” (Strauss). Identifying as a dad like this, Chance is trying to complicate his celebrity status and construct an ethos as a concerned Chicago citizen. One author writing about the press conference describes his ethos, contrasting it with that of a politician’s: “...he spoke not with grand oratory but with his typical shy-guy humility” (Kornhaber). There is an element of **pathos** here, too: raising in his audience the protective, tender feelings a man has for his child.

Chance could not persuade Rauner to address the problems with the Illinois budget so that more money would reach Chicago Public Schools. As a result, Chance then donated \$1 million of his own money toward CPS’s arts education. Announcing this donation, he again relied on his ethos as a celebrity to leverage the **circulation** of news about himself. Speaking to reporters from industry magazines, he said, “I want y’all to do your jobs. The international and national publications out there—*Complex*,

Billboard, people that post about me walking down the street and shit—if you guys could give a comprehensive history on how we ended up here” (Kornhaber). Here we see him using language to signal that he’s talking as a rapper again—not a politician or a dad: the “y’all” and “walking down the street *and shit*” and “you guys” all help listeners and readers to see him as a successful artist in this particular moment.

The example of Chance illustrates how speakers and writers can use language to leverage who they are to persuade other people to do things. It also illustrates how one’s **ethos** can shift depending on who your audience is and how important it is to consider how you’re constructing your ethos in different situations. It is useful for Chance to be a dad in one situation, a rapper in another, and a political advocate in a third. There are many in Chicago and beyond who hope he’ll one day decide to work on his ethos as a politician and run for public office.

Ethos and Other Concepts

While classical rhetoricians were mostly concerned with how individual politicians and lawyers persuaded an audience to believe them, today we can use the concept of **ethos** to think about institutions and brands, too. Recall that our short definition of ethos is “who other people think we are, based on what and how we write and speak.” A brand is what customers think of a product, based not just on the product itself, but on what the company says and does in ads and other PR. Creating a successful brand depends, in part, on constructing an ethos that consumers can trust and relate to.

An example from January 2019 illustrates how one brand tried to construct such an ethos with divided results (reflecting a stark division in the country in 2019). Razor company Gillette launched an ad that ran during the Superbowl, converting their traditional tagline “Gillette, the best a man can get” into a question.

To a soaring orchestral soundtrack, the commercial presents scenes of girls being told to smile, women being diminished in the workplace, and boys’ aggression being excused. A gentle voiceover announces “Something finally changed. And there will be no going back. Because why? We believe in the best in men. To say the right thing. To act the right way. Some already are, in ways big and small. But some is not enough. Because the boys watching today (pause) will be the men of tomorrow.”

Gillette seized upon a **kairotic** moment—a national conversation about toxic masculinity in light of a boorish president, the #MeToo movement, increased awareness of bullying, and continued systematic inequality. The commercial was met with praise from many but derision, as well, all having to do with responses to ethos.

If you agree with the progressive social message about changing gender roles and definitions of masculinity, you like and identify with the ad’s ethos. If, however, you identify with a more old-fashioned male ethos, you joined the #BoycottGillette backlash.

X (formerly Twitter) user @akaplan41 summed up this response by saying, “The problem with the ad is its premise is insulting—the premise is that all men are bad somehow and need correcting. It’s actually quite offensive to men. Why are they lecturing us?! Most men are good. I will join the boycott. #gilletteboycott #GilletteAd.” In the advertising world, the commercial is successful either way. Whether you responded positively or negatively to the ethos of the ad, it got attention.

Presumably Gillette was trying to construct an ethos characterized by the energy and momentum of a current social movement. By referencing real social media, such as a video of a dad coaching his little daughter to say “I am strong” into a mirror, they construct credibility via real voices. It is as if Gillette is signaling it is enlightened.

The backlash represented a group clinging to older norms. Gillette risked losing their business to embrace and represent a warmer ethos. It was a gamble involving demographics and the reality that younger generations are exercising more evolved thought as consumers.

The Gillette ad seems to illustrate the point that the best way to convince your audience that you are trustworthy and good is to actually be trustworthy and good. The words and **images** you use to construct a particular ethos should be connected to substantive knowledge and sincere values.

In his book *The Economics of Attention*, rhetoric scholar Richard Lanham argues that we have to think about not just the stuff we produce—our arguments and stories, or a company’s products—but how we might bring positive attention to that stuff. Successful rhetoricians do both in such a way that readers go back and forth between the two. **Alphabetic text** is particularly important in this respect because it involves choices about the stuff, or what you put into words, as well as choices about the surface features such as fonts, colors, and **arrangement** on a page or screen.

attention + stuff = ethos

It might be tempting to just “throw a picture in there” to make a page pretty and bring attention to what you’re saying. However, inventing a positive ethos requires making deliberate decisions about our use of image as well as sound, video, and other **modes**, and thinking carefully about the **affordances** and constraints of each.

Writing in the 21st century requires making these various, complicated decisions not just in each piece we do, but across platforms. If you use social media at all—Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, any of it—your ethos is in constant, possibly eternal, **circulation**. It’s important to be mindful of circulation as you construct your ethos on various sites.

This is especially the case when you are applying for jobs. The ethos you want to create in your career will depend on your **field**, and what the values and principles are that govern that field. Is the field hip and fast-paced or more conservative? Does it value intelligence, playfulness, rigor, creativity? Depending on your answers to these questions, you will have to decide how you fit in, how you will communicate those values, and whether you do so across all the pieces of your online presence. This is ethos: changing not who you are, but how you express who you are, depending on your goals.

Looking Ahead

You can usually remember a good conversation for its ethos—that collective identity that comes out of the spontaneous back-and-forth, the personalities involved, the setting, even things like the music that was playing at the time. Stop and think about memorable conversations that you either observed or participated in. Talking to a friend about important things. Witnessing a meaningful dialogue in class. Bonding with teammates, camp buddies, a mentor. How did it make you feel?

You can look at your academic work as one long **conversation**, at its best, one of those really good ones that you remember for a long, long time. Many of your courses may be designed to create exactly that kind of conversation in a seminar setting, but even courses that rely less on class discussion or more on other forms of delivery can still be seen as a conversation in writing, as students read texts of all kinds and respond to them by writing in a variety of ways, **remixing** them into the unique text of each student’s education.

If we think of an education as something that shapes who you are as it shapes what you know, then we can think of the whole process as one of ethos formation.

Throughout that process you face decisions you must make about ethos in each course you take and each assignment you complete. These decisions might be picky (“Can I use the pronoun ‘I’ in my text?”) or grave (“How forcefully should I make a point about something I believe in?”) or tactical (“Can I get away with being funny?”). In any course you might find it helpful to ask questions about ethos like these: What expectations about what constitutes a positive ethos do you face from your instructor and your peers, and how will you respond? What kind of self-presentation presents your work in the most effective ways? How do you acknowledge the debts your work owes to the work of others? How can you draw on personal connections to the material you are studying to make work with credibility, expertise, integrity?

Ethos in AI-Assisted Writing

Questions like these are especially hard to answer in the context of the recent advent of highly sophisticated Large Language Modelling (LLM) artificial intelligence (AI) programs, which can generate text in response to queries drawing on its vast database of writing and language practices from across the landscape of digital information. Does AI-generated text even have an ethos? Or is it simply the outcome of a sustained series of educated guesses, with no more “self” than a coin toss, ultimately?

The implications for our understanding of writing, and especially of writing done by students, are profound. In the case of students, there is a particular ethical burden, that part of the ethos of students (successful ones, anyway) is that they are expected to uphold standards of academic honesty, which means using no unacknowledged aid on work you claim as your own.

Are students who use AI on writing assignments plagiarists? Or are they early adopters, adapting their writing to new technologies, just as students are supposed to do? Perhaps as our use of the AI interface becomes more sophisticated, we will be able to issue prompts and queries of great complexity or subtlety that will allow sophisticated AI users to evolve new tactics for constructing authorial identities in the text.

Writing with Ethos

As is the case for many of the key concepts in this book, ethos is common sense: we tend to do things instinctively that we think will persuade people to like us or to do or think the things we want them to. However, writing in an online, networked environment multiplies the number of decisions we have to make, so it's important that we don't always rely on instinct. Not only does technology increase the resources (words, **image**, sound, video, color, and so on) available to us as we communicate, but the Internet makes our ethos far more public than it used to be. Therefore, it's worthwhile to consider questions such as the following:

- Who am I trying to persuade with this piece of communication, and what do they value? Do I share those values, and if so, how do I demonstrate that I share those values?
- Do I know what I'm talking about? Do I actually care about my readers? Am I being honest? And if I answer "no" to any of these questions, how should I proceed and what are my goals?
- Do all the elements of this piece of communication—font, images and other **modes**, **arrangement**, and so on—work together to contribute to the positive ethos I am trying to create?
- How important is careful editing and proofreading for creating a positive ethos with this particular audience? How do issues such as word choice, spelling, punctuation, and format affect my ethos in this text?
- Is my ethos in this piece of communication consistent with the other texts I've produced that are **circulating** online, for example, my social media profiles and updates, my website, my portfolio?

Ethos Activity

Can acts of intentional misrepresentation create an ultimately positive ethos? This paradoxical question lies at the heart of the work of the Yes Men, an activist organization that engages in infiltration and impersonation of corporate representatives to carry out what they term "identity correction." Search the internet for "Yes Men" and "identity correction" and you'll find multimedia essays and interviews in which Yes Men Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonnano (both assumed names, an important part of their ethos-making) in which they explain why and how they use what they call "operations" and their targets call "hoaxes" to bring out the truth. "By catching powerful entities off guard," they write, "you can momentarily expose them to public scrutiny. This way, everyone sees how they work and can figure out how to control them. We call this *identity correction*."

You can see their theory in practice by watching one of the films they have made to document their work. The 2010 film *The Yes Men Fix the World* is available license-free on archive.org. At about 28 minutes in, it shows how Bichlbaum successfully appeared before millions of viewers on the BBC World Service's radio and television coverage of the 20th anniversary of the 1984 Bhopal, India, chemical disaster—the world's worst industrial accident, which killed thousands and has produced ongoing health problems throughout the region. Posing as a Dow Chemical spokesperson named Jude Finisterra, Bichlbaum claimed the Dow Chemical corporation, owners of Union Carbide, who ran the Bhopal plant, took full responsibility for the accident for the first time. Jude Finisterra detailed plans to liquidate Union Carbide to pay reparations to the people of Bhopal.

As you watch, notice ways that Bichlbaum systematically constructs his ethos as Dow spokesman Finisterra. Pay special attention to the way written texts help him convincingly portray himself as a corporate spokesperson. How and why does his ethos as Finisterra work to convince his audience that what he says is true? Is good?

The Dow impersonation was quickly noticed and responded to by Dow, whose actual spokespeople denounced the operation as an act of deception. The theory of Identity Correction expects and anticipates the development, urging its practitioners to "capitalize on the target's reaction." As you watch the documentary's narrative of these developments, take a moment to notice how the language and presentation of Dow's swift and complete denials of responsibility for Bhopal construct the corporation's ethos, especially by way of contrast to the version of the corporate ethos offered by Jude Finisterra. Who offers a more compelling or appealing ethos for Dow? What larger impressions or inferences could viewers draw between the fictional idea of Dow the Yes Men offered, and the actual Dow corporation that denounced them? Could or should Dow's public comments have put forward a different ethos?

Once the deception is exposed, the Yes Men are summoned back to the BBC to discuss the prank. In an angry interview, a BBC anchor asserts that "the real tragedy of the day" is that the people of Bhopal were given a brief period of false hope." What do you think of that allegation? Is the Yes Men's project in ethos construction ultimately unethical? As you watch Bichlbaum respond to the media attention the deception's exposure causes, pay careful attention to the way Bichlbaum's ethos is distinct from Finisterra's. How does he adjust the way he appears in the text for this new rhetorical situation?

This segment concludes with the Yes Men interviewing health care workers in Bhopal and asking if they had felt injured by their prank. Here we see the Yes Men building ethos at yet another level: as the makers and narrators of the documentary film accounts of their projects. How does this final sequence affect the way you see them and their work? And ask yourself, does “identity correction” work? Did Dow, momentarily caught off guard, reveal anything that makes you see their larger corporate ethos in a different way? Finally, reflect on the complexities of how ethos works at multiple levels and in multiple ways through this project. What can you learn from their experience that could help you more effectively **craft** an ethos for a specific rhetorical situation?

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Ethos

Podcast for [Ethos, Chapter six of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 12:37.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Cristian Montero and Avery Petersen about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Ethos

Video for Ethos, [Chapter six of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 04:25.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 6, "Ethos" created by Anthony Miocic with collaborators Sean Munoz and Alina Yastrebova. (Transcriptfour-weeke)

Suggested Assignment:

A four-week, adaptable classroom assignment for use with topics discussed within [chapter 6, Ethos](#), in *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 5 pages.

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7: Field

A **field** is a group of people, the texts they write, and the things they do to generate and **circulate** knowledge related to a particular idea or question. The concept of field reminds us that, especially in our public or professional lives, we almost always write and read in the context of other people, previous texts, and particular goals, and success typically requires familiarity with the way our field works. Learning how people in a chosen field communicate with each other is one of the purposes of attending college.

A field is not static. Even an expert in a particular field is never done learning: as new texts and practices emerge, and as people move in and out of a field, the nature of that field necessarily changes. Moreover, many fields overlap with each other, especially as people and texts and ideas move between and among fields. Networked communication today may increase the speed at which a field evolves, may facilitate access among fields, and may also blur the line between expert and amateur.

History of Fields

Even the most rudimentary texts can inaugurate a new field of study. Consider the Neolithic Revolution (900-700 BCE), when humans began cultivating plants and animals for food. This was a complex endeavor that required farmers to remember and convey large quantities of information. So Neolithic farmers invented pictograms (simple writing) that they used to count and measure their products. Then, something astounding happened: as farmers reread and analyzed their own records, they began to see larger patterns of success and failure. During droughts, some crops failed; in rainy seasons, certain plants thrived.

When farmers realized that their records held the key to deeper intellectual and practical knowledge, the field of agriculture was born. Likewise, to identify important texts in our own field, we can begin by considering the simplest records all around us: the notes, logs, and instructions we use to track our own progress and plan our work.

But it would be difficult to make sense of all the ephemeral records without shared methods for systematic inquiry. By 300 BCE, agriculture had spawned so many fields of study that it would have been impossible for one person to become an expert in them all: botany, medicine, astronomy and meteorology, just to name a few. How could these fields coordinate their efforts to turn information into knowledge?

Aristotle devoted his life to answering this question. Famously, Aristotle developed a taxonomy (classification system) that outlined how the fields fit together. But he also introduced a system of logic that allowed experts to reason from particular cases to universal principles, thus formally linking together practical and academic knowledge.

Of course, it would be very difficult to study hundreds of years' worth of texts on one's own. In the Medieval to Modern periods, the first institutions of higher education appeared to guide novices through the process of acquiring expertise. These early institutions prepared students for three main fields: medicine, theology, and law. Because early universities had no meeting place or campus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the early university was made of texts. These texts included written texts described above, plus a new type of multimodal text we know as the *lecture* in which experts in a field discoursed with other experts and students. These lectures included plenty of back-and-forth interaction.

No matter what field we belong to, we can identify the higher education requirements necessary to become an expert—and the interactive texts (like lectures) that guide and facilitate our reading.

Fields Today

Digital technology has transformed texts, the ways texts **circulate**, and therefore the ways members of a field communicate with each other. The field of music recording and production is an interesting example. In 2019 we interviewed two Columbia College Chicago musicians in order to get a sense of how people become members of contemporary fields, in this case music. Rocco Sabatino of punk band Bad Jokes and Dj Buschauer of “radioactive rock” band The Radiomen talked about their art, from composition, to recording, to distribution, to touring. Because the field has been transformed by digital technology, from accessible home equipment for writing and recording to circulation systems like Bandcamp, local music production isn't as different from “the big leagues” as it used to be.

Sabatino and Buschauer shared an understanding of a Chicago scene supported technologically by social media collectives, such as a DIY Chicago Facebook group and the ChiVibe online community. They each discussed the value of live performing, where you share energy with audiences and peers. But a lot of their field work occurred electronically in the contemporary music field, where

bands distribute songs, information, and promotion online instead of via the demo tapes and press kits of old (Sabatino; Buschauer).

So how does it begin? In the creative world of Bad Jokes, Sabatino and bandmates compose and record using the **affordances** of software and simple apps: “We all file share. We use Google Drive, Dropbox, and save ideas to phones, forwarding demos to each other.” Buschauer, too, discusses The Radiomen members recording lyrics and riffs on the voice memo app to send to each other: “You can create everything in one track from different rooms in different places,” adds Sabatino. Further, “You can have GarageBand going on your MacBook and have FaceTime open in another tab and be talking to the singer who’s giving you notes on what to do.” You don’t need to be in the same place to make a record.

When the time comes to circulate and market the songs, different online platforms come into play. While Spotify and iTunes are the go-to for audiences accessing new music, musicians often take advantage of a middleman. Sabatino also discussed the affordances of DistroKid, which is so helpful to local bands. He distinguished its affordances from those of Bandcamp: “We had this record, *Too Fat to Skate*, in Bandcamp, but no one really uses it unless you’re in music. The real thing that matters is how people can wake up in the morning and turn on Spotify to find Bad Jokes. DistroKid is simple—you send them artwork, songs, credits, legal stuff. We pay about \$30 a year and they circulate it to Spotify and everything. They do it all at once. And they track your earnings.” The affordances of technology in this field include creating new markets that aid circulation and free up artistic time for musicians.

Sabatino and Buschauer were both well-versed in the current language of the field at that time. The nature and success of streaming, the common platforms and technologies, the money—all are factors that shape the field and thus their understanding of how to make work that circulates there. One can tell that local musicians have to become as smart about management and marketing as production and performing, all activities that involve different forms of writing.

Some readers will be familiar with all of this, but to some it might shed light on specific technologies and methods that characterize the field of music around 2019, when these interviews were conducted. And we know music and marketing will change and evolve in the future; one thing participation in a field demands is staying abreast of the latest developments in professional practice.

Learning about the professional practices of their field has increased these musicians’ passion for their work. Sabatino stopped the interview to express concern for how we’d fit all he had to say into only one chapter: “There’s so much to talk about. You’re going to be hard pressed to narrow it down.” Buschauer also volunteered unsolicited follow-up interviews, knowing how extensive and expansive a conversation about the field of music would be. For all of their expertise in the field, Sabatino and Buschauer care most about the music itself and its effect on their audience.

Fields and Other Concepts

The concept of field can help us think about the difference between success and failure in one’s own profession, but the concept of field also helps us think about and evaluate the expertise of professionals in others’ fields. This assessment of others’ credentials is especially important when we rely on these other professionals for our own professional (and other forms of) well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, threw a powerful spotlight on the importance in our culture of the credentials of the field of medicine. The medical profession has a long tradition of rigorous higher education; one cannot enter the field without years of study. This education includes reading and spoken interaction to ensure that professionals correctly apply knowledge from texts to the practical problems of human illness.

Now, a new generation of patients enjoys unprecedented access to medical texts online. These texts include expert texts from PubMed, articles on WebMD written for laypeople, and patients’ experiences represented on online forums. Even before the pandemic unleashed a tsunami of medical discussion, from publications in scientific journals on the latest progress in vaccine research to dangerous misinformation **circulated** by scammers, most of us encountered this information through the common practice of Googling our symptoms.

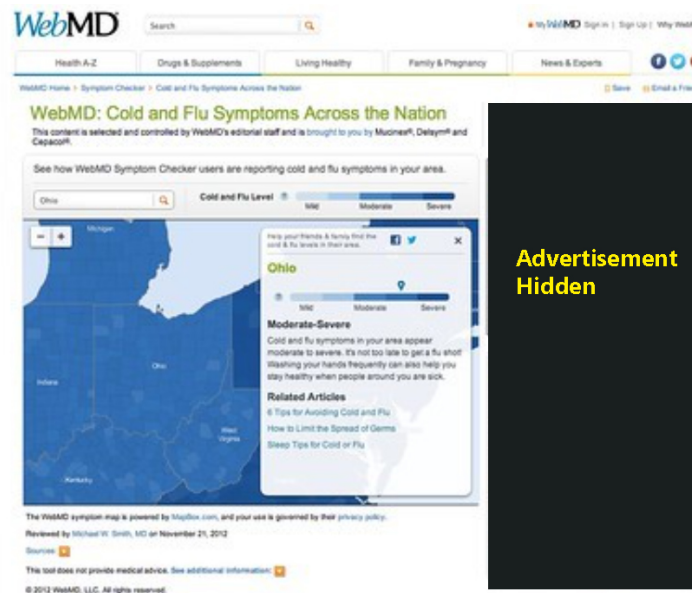


Figure 7.1: "WebMD Publishes Flu Risk Map with MapBox" by Mapbox is licensed under CC BY 2.0. Source: Flickr

However, there were also more troubling phenomena. Television celebrity Jenny McCarthy, for example, drew public attention decrying the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine, which she believes caused her son's autism. Many concerned parents as a result rethought their own positions on childhood vaccination and its effects on child development, with potentially dangerous results.

As early as 1998, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that spurious online information posed problems for doctors and patients (Jadad and Gagliardi 611-614). Patients have legitimate concerns about being able to understand discussions about their own health and health care, pointing to a need for the medical field to adopt some different rhetorical strategies for dealing with patients who bring their own reading and research to the exam room. But can public challenges to medical credentials, to the profession's definition of its field, even harm our health?

Many would argue the pandemic produced devastating problems that emerged from the superficially harmless phenomenon of ordinary people discussing the work of a field of experts. Because of the widespread circulation online of unscientific individual opinions, patients are refusing life-saving medical aid such as vaccines. The digital revolution has shaken the core of the field of medicine, requiring doctors to reconsider how medical texts circulate and impact the spoken text of the doctor-patient relationship.

Fortunately, we can return to the key concept of field to evaluate the mélange of information we find online. Because we know fields are made of texts, we can begin with a commonsense assumption: texts within a field are probably more credible than texts outside it. To determine whether and to what extent a digital text situates itself within an established field of study, we need to ask three questions:

- Did the author draw on other texts in the field?
- Did the author use the field's research methods?
- Did the author complete higher education in the field?

The concept of field not only helps us evaluate others' texts, but it can also offer a powerful tool for motivating our own writing. Consider the way most high school students are taught to write. At the beginning of their first writing class in college, new college students feel most comfortable expressing personal opinions on topics like abortion and veganism. Then, when we are asked to write a college-level term paper for history or biology class, we suddenly face a type of writers' block known as the blank screen problem. The first time we must write a paper on a topic we have no opinion about (cellular mitosis, for example), and it feels impossible to move forward, we stare at the blank computer screen; a blinking cursor stares back.

But the concept of field reassures us that we are not writing alone in a void. Thousands of scholars have produced texts on our subject, and we can stand on the shoulders of these giants to compose our own text: the term paper. In other words, we can solve

the blank screen problem by writing with the field. We can do this by using the concept of **kairos** (seizing the opportune moment) to discover new motivations for writing—motivations that arise from an entire field of study instead of just our opinion.

How can the concepts of field and kairos solve the blank screen problem? Imagine a college student, Sharon, who is writing her first term paper for a 2014 American history class. Right now, Sharon is staring at the blank screen in a panic; she has no paper topic or plan for writing. Remembering the concept of kairos, she decides to seize the opportune moment to write about something timely. Several films and videos have recently debuted depicting Black history during the antebellum period preceding the Civil War: *Django Unchained*, *12 Years A Slave* and *The Story of Catcher Freeman*, to name a few. Sharon knows these depictions are controversial, so she decides to seize the opportune moment (kairos) to research antebellum Black history.

At this point, Sharon has identified a topic but she has not developed her unique angle. A general paper on antebellum Black history would be uninteresting to historians, who have read much about this topic and may have even served as consultants on movies such as *Django*. To satisfy the history field's exacting standards of kairos, Sharon must contribute a fresh insight to the conversation.

While researching *credible* sources on her topic, Sharon eventually notices that something is missing. There is much scholarship about nuclear family relationships in antebellum Black America, but little on extended family ties including grandparents and grandchildren (scholars refer to this as a “research gap” or “gap in the knowledge”). From her own experience, Sharon knows that these ties are critical to transmitting the family's history to a new generation. Sharon decides to fill this important research gap by writing her paper about family ties between grandparents and grandchildren in antebellum Black America. What began as a blank page now represents a unique contribution to the field of history, albeit from an undergraduate's perspective. After careful research, Sharon is ready to write.

Looking Ahead

Field is a concept that shapes your education, since your faculty and courses are organized by departments that share academic, creative, and professional fields. Courses offered by these departments not only convey information about the subject matter, but they also teach students how to participate in professional discourses, to adopt the perspectives, methods, and standards of the instructor's field. The assumption that coursework confers expertise, and that expertise confers credibility, is a core value of academic fields.

When we study one field over a period of many years, we undergo the process of transitioning from novices to experts. This transition is a gradual one. In fact, as we gain expertise, we feel as though we are taking steps backward. For example, our confidence in our own knowledge often *decreases* as we gain expertise. This phenomenon is known as the *Dunning-Kruger effect* (Kruger and Dunning 1121–34), and it helps explain why people with limited information leap to confident conclusions. Let's return to our example of the medical profession to take a closer look.

Imagine a college student with a bad sore throat. As his illness progresses, he will likely Google his symptoms. When the student visits the campus health clinic the next day, he is convinced that he has strep throat based on information that he found on the Internet. However, the physician remains uncertain about what is causing the student's illness and orders several tests. The college student and the doctor in this scenario demonstrate the Dunning-Kruger effect. A novice (college student) is quite confident in his knowledge, but the expert doctor's years of study and practice have taught her that symptoms can be deceiving; many of the severe sore throats that she has treated have turned out to be caused by viruses.

If becoming an expert makes us *less* confident in our own knowledge, then how do we know that we are learning? As we gain expertise in our chosen field, we begin to notice aspects of our field that we may not have noticed when we were novices. These subtle shifts in perspective do not mean that we have become experts, but they are signs that knowledge is maturing into expertise. Not only can we recognize and celebrate these signs of progress, we can also cultivate these shifts in perspective through study and practice.

The first sign that we are developing expertise is that we begin to see our field as an assemblage of **conversations**, including unanswered questions, debates, discussions, and disagreements. When the physician treats a sore throat, she thinks of many debates with her colleagues (carried out through published research and in-person conversation) regarding when to suspect strep throat and whether to prescribe antibiotics.

Second, we notice patterns in the way that the conversations in our field unfold. Certain key terms and texts (important books, articles, and other sources) keep coming up over and over. Listen to doctors talk to each other about treating patients with sore

throats, and you are likely to hear about *viruses* and *bacteria*, the twin problems of *overprescribing* and *antibiotic resistance*, and the challenge of meeting *patient* expectations. See, for example, Butler et al., “Understanding the Culture of Prescribing: Qualitative Study of General Practitioners’ and Patients’ Perceptions of Antibiotics for Sore Throats” (637-42). These key terms provide threads of continuity as conversations about treating sore throats ebb and flow within the field of medicine.

Once we understand the key terms and texts that constitute the conversations in our field, we can begin contributing to those conversations. Conversations in a field are never settled once and for all, and new and novel contributions have the potential to shake up even the most timeworn conversations. For example, as recently as 2018, one medical study found that an anti-inflammatory spray can provide meaningful, lasting relief for viral sore throats (de Looze et al. 79-83). This study contributes to an ongoing debate about sore throats and the overprescription of antibiotics by identifying a non-antibiotic drug that doctors *can* prescribe to meet patients’ expectations for pain relief.

As you pursue your own career goals, try to pay attention to the conversations around you: What key terms come up? What texts are considered authoritative? What open-ended questions seem left unanswered? By noticing the conversations that emerge, merge, and diverge around you, you will be able to build upon others’ insights, and contribute your own insights to the conversation.

Fields in AI-Assisted Writing

As we have noted with all the examples in this chapter, fields are in constant states of change, reacting to, adapting to, and sometimes even causing widespread cultural change. As we saw with the effects of the new degree of access to medical information online and non-professional’s skepticism of the field of medicine, the impact of digital technology, especially, on the practice of writing can be multifaceted, ambiguous, or ambivalent.

Such is the case with artificial intelligence (AI), where we are only beginning to witness and experience the effects it might have on writing, culture, and representation. The field of artificial intelligence has recently introduced changes to the practice of writing that pose significant challenges to the way fields have historically operated. Writers have traditionally established credibility in fields by learning, even internalizing, a field’s distinctive writing practices, from its core concepts to its central theories and debates, to its technical vocabulary, to its methods of using and acknowledging source material, to the relative prestige of its different venues for **circulation**.

The advent of recent developments in artificial intelligence that allow web applications like ChatGPT not only to use existing information to invent new texts but also to make texts automatically conform to the writing practices of specific fields means practices like conforming to a certain source citation style, like MLA Style in the humanities or Chicago Style in the social sciences, no longer warrants the author’s awareness of the field’s larger context. Since that entire process can now be automated with a new degree of effectiveness, since artificial intelligence can “learn” in seconds the rhetoric, vocabulary, and style of entire **genres** and fields in seconds, the kind of intellectual work that used to be considered the cost of entry into a field has shifted, if not decreased, in value.

In the field of law, for example, the ability to do the arduous work of researching and reviewing every example of case law relevant to a particular issue or argument, the ability to cite legal precedent for one’s opinions, has long been considered a cornerstone of legal expertise. Learning to do and to remember this research is a foundation of legal education, especially in the first years of law school. Artificial intelligence now has the capability to find this information and factor into its generation of text, leaving many lawyers wondering how their expertise will retain its value in the future. But there are serious risks if one depends on ChatGPT for these forms of expertise.

Indeed, the jury is still out on that question (pun intended). In May of 2023, lawyer Steven Schwartz, arguing a personal injury case in New York’s Southern District court, presented a brief to the judge that he was soon compelled to admit had been composed by ChatGPT (Bohannon). The judge, Kevin Castel, said he immediately recognized that much of the case law cited in the brief was *entirely fictional* (Maruf). What Schwartz did not know is that ChatGPT does not simply cite existing examples, but invents new ones that sound relevant and plausible, that conform to the discourse and the standards of the field of legal writing even though they are made up. That mistake cost Schwartz \$5,000 and a formal sanction from the court, and notoriety in the international news that will likely have significant impact on his standing in his field (Mangan). There are similar examples from the sciences, where credible-sounding research cited in a paper was, in fact, made up by ChatGPT and did not exist—at all.

Perhaps researchers will be able to refine artificial intelligence so that it can restrict itself to existing cases and produce more credible briefs. Perhaps attorneys will learn to craft more sophisticated AI queries to produce preliminary drafts they will then refine. Perhaps courts will attempt to develop sophisticated AI detection tools to better police the boundaries of their field. Perhaps fields will de-emphasize rituals of inclusion or exclusion like citation styles or the memorization of huge amounts of core information and re-emphasize that critical knowledge of a field's core information is the ultimate determiner of one's validity in a specific field.

A combination of some or all of these possibilities, plus many other unanticipated changes, is entirely likely, but fields, having adapted to every technological change since the birth of agriculture, are likely to find ways to adapt and endure. But perhaps it's best to gain one's expertise and credibility in what we might call more traditional ways.

Fields in 3D Printing

Fields are one example of our culture's systems of division and classification. Technological advances (like AI) can destabilize an individual field's understanding of itself, but it can also call into question systems of categorization themselves. 3D printing, a phenomenon like AI that is becoming more widespread and more integrated into the operation of daily life than most of us understand, may be one such disruptive technology. The familiar cultural and economic ecosystem of manufacturing, for example, tends to treat **design**, production, and distribution as separate phases of a larger integrated process. 3D printing, however, allows the designer access to and control over the production process in ways that do not conform to long-standing assumptions about the roles of individuals, fields, and whole sectors of society are divided.

How will our understanding of fields change in a culture and society in which the route from imaginative thought to written expression to production of material objects as a result is different than it has been before, crossing the boundaries of fields and of types of fields—our old distinction between white-collar fields that focus on ideas and blue-collar fields that focus on things—in new and different ways?

Writing within a Field

Writing within a field is not an all-or-nothing process. As we progress through higher education, we gradually begin to write less from our individual perspective and more from the perspective of our chosen field of study. Writers at any level can take advantage of the **affordances** that fields offer to writers: a well-defined set of topics to write about, a wealth of expert texts on the topic, and clues to interesting new topics to explore (i.e., the “research gap” described above). We can begin to write in a field by asking ourselves questions like these:

- What's the official name of my field? Or: What field is this class about?
- What are the boundaries of my field?
- What are the central texts that make up my field?
- What current world events or problems involve this field?
- What's missing when I explore scholarly sources in this field? What research would I like to see that is not there?
- What **genres** do experts use to **circulate** ideas within this field?
- What rules do these **genres** have for writing with **alphabetic text** and **images** and
- arranging ideas? Am I required to follow these rules when writing for this course?
- When I have learned to write with my **field**, what new ideas of my own do I hope to **circulate**?

To return to the blank screen problem, consider this: Most first-year college students can expect to spend some time feeling mocked by a blinking cursor. As we encounter different fields of study and interact with the texts that constitute them, our ideas begin to push the cursor along—transforming the once-blank screen into a sphere of interest, inquiry and action.

As noted above, the COVID-19 crisis starkly revealed the ways in which a field can be an active part of public discourse, as public health professionals aced the challenge of circulating critically important but often highly field-specific information to the public in an atmosphere of skepticism, debate, and malicious dis- and mis-information. Public health communication from the pandemic provides complicated examples of how the same information can be presented in multiple ways by and for divergent fields.

In July of 2020, the premier scientific journal *Nature* published an article titled “ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 Vaccine Prevents SARS-CoV-2 Pneumonia in Rhesus Macaques,” announcing major successes in the testing of AstraZeneca's experimental COVID-19 vaccines on primates (van Doremalen, Neeltje et al.). Similar information, with discussion of its implications for the larger vaccine

development process, was announced by the US government's National Institutes for Health in an August 2020 press release for science journalists ("Phase 3 Clinical Testing"); journalists reported the news in an August 31, 2020 CNN report (Kane); the same vaccine development process was subsequently tweeted about by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, promoting the British origins of Astra Zeneca and much of the laboratory research (@BorisJohnson).

Comparing and contrasting the use of alphabetic text, the affordances of images and other media in the texts, the different ways **ethos** is constructed for different readerships, the specific ways sources are used and acknowledged, can help us see how awareness of field prompts attention to multiple critical decisions about writing, broadly conceived. Writers can then gather examples of different kinds of texts about their own topics to help them understand the different fields that are stakeholders to the cultural conversations they want to participate in and the writerly decisions that must be made to best reach those fields. In every case, writers should ask these key questions about field: "To whom am I writing," "what is the best, credible evidence I can find to support my points," and "what do I expect my audience to do with this information?"

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Field

Podcast for [Field, Chapter seven of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 14:32.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Lila Kelley and Vadym Valihun about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Field

Video for [Field, Chapter seven of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 04:41.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 7, "Field" created by Taryn Yahn with collaborator MacKenzie Oberlin. (Transcript available)

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8: Genre

Genre refers to the form a communication takes. Etymologically, the word is related to “gender” and “genus,” both of which are significant classification systems. Genre serves as a mechanism to help us recognize language as part of a distinct group or kind, and each genre possesses its own unique structure and differs in terms of how, when, and why it is employed—a love letter, for example, is a different genre than a quarterly stock report, which is a different genre than a tweet.

The definition of genre you are probably most familiar with—a group of expectations in a particular kind of story—is a subset of this older idea from rhetoric. While the first part of the chapter focuses on the more traditional idea of genre as a way to understand text forms like letters, essays, podcasts, and legal briefs, we will also address the more common use of the term to classify stories like Westerns or Romance tales later in the chapter.

Every genre takes a different form, serving specific purposes and fulfilling particular objectives in the world. Because genre stems from our understanding of how language becomes meaningful in social contexts, writers often use the idea of genre to talk about how oral, written, and multimodal texts function in society. Norman Fairclough argues that “a genre implies not only a particular text type, but also particular processes of producing, distributing, and consuming texts” (126). When we produce the same kind of text over and over to do the same thing over and over, these kinds of texts emerge as genres with recognizable features that readers come to expect.

History of Genre

In classical rhetoric, the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle focused on three genres, distinguished by their audiences and their occasions:

- *Deliberative rhetoric* was used to persuade audiences to do something and typically happened in political settings; it focused on future events.
- *Judicial rhetoric* happened in courts of law and was used to determine whether or not someone was justly accused; it concerned past events.
- *Epideictic rhetoric* occurred during ceremonies like funerals, and it was used to praise or blame someone.

Distinguishing among these genres was important for Aristotle as he taught students how to produce the kinds of texts their audiences would recognize and admire. But genre studies has persisted throughout intellectual history, especially when new genres emerge and challenge scholars’ sense of order.

The works of two important contemporary scholars of genre in rhetoric, John Swales and Carolyn Miller, illustrate how widely divergent theories of genre can be. Swales is concerned with analyzing genres by describing them—identifying key textual characteristics of various genres—because these descriptions can easily turn into rules that help students master the genres that circulate in higher education.

Miller, on the other hand, argues for a view of genre “as a specific, and important, constituent of society, a major aspect of its communicative structure, one of the structures of power that institutions wield” (71). Miller is less concerned with teaching students how to reproduce already established genres and more concerned with understanding how genres function in society.

There are genre scholars in a variety of **fields**—film studies, literary studies, musicology—and the theories of genre are numerous. The concept persists as an important object of study because it helps us to better appreciate the works we create and to better understand ourselves as creators.

Genre Today

Studying genres today often involves exploring the specific features that texts in that category share. Often, these features emerge when people have to produce similar texts over and over.

Consider, for example, the journalistic genre of “the obituary.” Try to list the features of the genre called “the obituary,” a public text written to notify the community that someone has died. Some obituary features include: the date (and occasionally the cause) of death; the date and place of birth; a positive account of schools attended, careers, and other accomplishments; a brief list of people that the deceased was “preceded in death by” and those who survive the deceased; and the details about funeral

arrangements and memorial services. Very often, this text is accompanied by a photograph of the deceased when he or she was young and/or healthy.

Knowing the features that readers expect in a particular genre make it easier to write. So, when a loved one dies and you are asked to write the obituary, you don't have to make up from scratch what to include in it, as it is a common genre with its own set of conventions.

One obituary that **circulated** on social media illustrates just how predictable this particular genre is. Walter George Bruhl, Jr. wrote his own obituary because he was familiar with the features of the genre, and because he knew his readers would be familiar with them as well, he was able to make it one of the sweetest, funniest obituaries you'll read. For example, he writes, "Walt was preceded in death by his tonsils and adenoids in 1936, a spinal disc in 1974, a large piece of his thyroid gland in 1988, and his prostate on March 27th 2000."

And where we expect the positive discussion of his schooling, we read "He drifted through the Philadelphia Public School System from 1937 through 1951, graduating, to his mother's great relief, from John Bartram High School in June of 1951." About the details of the service, he wrote, "There will be no viewing since his wife refuses to honor his request to have him standing in the corner of the room with a glass of Jack Daniels in his hand so that he would appear natural to visitors." Because he knew this genre so well, he was able to write it in a way that depends on readers' expectations of the genre, only to subvert those expectations with humor.

Perhaps what is most interesting about the concept of genre in the digital age is how genres change when they move from print into networked, digital environments. For example, most obituaries now appear online, as part of the page of a funeral home's website. These obituaries will still include many of the features described above, but they borrow from other online texts, too: there might be a "Guestbook" where people leave comments for the family, along with links to articles about handling grief or funeral home etiquette.

And the story of the life of the deceased **juxtaposed** with ads for cell phone plans can be somewhat jarring in this context. Catherine Schryer aptly describes genre as "stabilized-for-now," highlighting the paradoxical nature of its role in communication (200). While genres offer stability—obituaries, for instance, in publications such as the *New York Times* are usually detailed and follow typical conventions—they are not immune to change.



Figure 8.2: Obituary by Walter George Bruhl, Jr. (Copyright; xxsamb10xx via Imgur)

Some genres have not changed much, even though we often **circulate** them electronically rather than on paper. A grocery list is still a list of items written as a reminder of what is needed while out shopping. Whether this list appears on a scrap of paper or in a notes app on the phone, its general features and function haven't changed. On the other hand, reviews (of restaurants, movies, music) have changed to the extent that they are written by everyone now, instead of solely by professional writers. Now, they are collected (for good or ill, as one must discern the legitimate reviews from fake ones) on sites like Rotten Tomatoes or Yelp, instead of being circulated in print newspapers or magazines.

The email is an evolved form of the paper memo that was circulated in offices: we can recognize the features of the To, From, Date, and Subject lines that existed in that earlier genre. When sent from co-worker to co-worker and copied to others, we see the function of the paper memo, and we talk about our email "inbox," a remnant of the actual box on desktops that held the paper documents. However, in some ways, an email is no longer a recognizable relative of the memo. We might use emails to communicate with friends or relatives (that was never the case with work memos); we can distribute emails to greater numbers of people (than would have been practical with the print memo) instantaneously. Further, some people use a far more casual, conversational tone in email than they ever would have in traditional memos. Other genres are completely new. Tweets, for example, don't seem to have a parallel in terms of form, function, and circulation methods in the world of print.

Instagram is worth considering as a genre story. It can be regarded as a hybrid genre or perhaps multi-genre. At its inception, Instagram was simply an image-sharing platform. This storytelling genre offered users a way to document their experience via photographs. However, an Instagram account has evolved not only in terms of its **affordances**, to add video and to **remix** longer "stories," but in its power to brand individuals.

The profession of modeling now uses Instagram "follower counts" as criteria for opportunity and success. (That is, you are marketed to clients by your agency according to how many followers you have.) The professional role of "influencer" has emerged, as Instagram's genre has shifted. It has become a portfolio representing a person's or organization's value as a commodity. Your picture represents your "work" (which appears to be an entirely new definition of work).

Consider the now infamous story of the 2017 Fyre Festival. Organizers used Instagram to sell tickets to an elite destination music festival, advertising its opulence with doctored images and big promises, despite having no expertise or plan to organize the

advertised event. (See the notorious video promoting the festival, available online.) When festival goers showed up, they found tents and meager meals where they expected vacation homes and feasts. For Fyre Festival organizers, the genre Instagram represented was the perfect projection of their product—real pictures depicting a fake experience. As followers made the Instagram posts go viral, this genre of media seemed to lend credibility to an incredible fantasy. It fit the genre of the elite music festival and thus *seemed* legitimate.

On the flipside, Instagram, as genre, can successfully promote positive messaging, too, in the form of popular hashtags related to animal rescue or cancer awareness, similar to other types of posts on Facebook, for instance. Instagram might now be the place you would post a love letter to your paramour, for example.

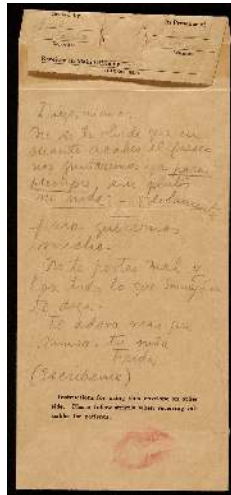


Figure 8.1: Love letter from Frida Kahlo to Diego Rivera, 1940. (Copyright; Frida Kahlo via Smithsonian, Archives of American Art)

Do image sharing apps (Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook) share enough features for us to recognize them as a discrete category of genre? The concept of genre has to be flexible as we witness tech-remix evolution. As authors, readers, and makers, we must notice emerging genres and use them intelligently as we navigate the complex communication landscape.

Genre and Other Concepts

Apart from widely used forms of genre, we can also think about hybrid genres and subgenres, many of which have been historically marginalized or overlooked. Embracing these lesser-known genres not only expands the scope of creative expression but also amplifies diverse voices and perspectives, invites fresh interpretations, and encourages writers to embrace other types of richness and multiplicity within human experience.

A hybrid genre is a form of **remix** wherein an author combines two or more established genres to create something new. By combining multiple genres in one text, authors can challenge audience expectations and create innovative forms of expression. Graphic novels, for example, were long disregarded in literary circles because they combined fictional narratives with comic strip art, leading some critics to conclude that the stories presented in graphic novels couldn't be serious or complex—which, if you've had the pleasure of reading titles like Art Spiegelman's *Maus* or Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, couldn't be further from the truth.

Today, digital platforms have created new genres and opportunities for hybridization, such as interactive fiction, hypertext literature, and video game storytelling. Embracing these new hybrid genres enables authors to experiment with interactive narratives and engage readers in innovative ways.

Subgenres, on the other hand, are spinoffs of larger genres, each with its own specific form and use. A literary subgenre that has recently gained attention in national discourse is "cli-fi," a genre of speculative science fiction that focuses on climate change and its environmental impact. This excerpt from the jacket description for Omar El Akkad's bestselling 2017 cli-fi novel *American War* gives us a sense of what cli-fi is all about: "Sarat Chestnut, born in Louisiana, is only six when the Second American Civil War breaks out in 2074. But even she knows that oil is outlawed, that Louisiana is half underwater, and that unmanned drones fill the sky."

Dan Bloom, a fiction writer and freelance journalist, claims to have coined the term “cli-fi” in 2007 to market his book *Polar City Red*, which sold only 271 copies when it was released (Glass). Instead of feeling angry when news outlets began using his term to describe *other* works of science fiction that dealt with similar themes, Bloom is reportedly happy to see cli-fi gaining wider recognition. By calling certain works of literature “climate fiction,” we begin to make a previously unknown subgenre legible to others, thus increasing the visibility of its authors and their stories.



Figure 8.3: Shopping list. (Copyright; Torbjørn Helgesen via Unsplash)

Further, by recognizing genres that have been historically marginalized or overlooked, we can amplify diverse voices and perspectives. Broadening our concept of genre creates opportunities for writers to express themselves and for readers to engage with a wider range of texts, which gives the writers of those texts greater visibility and potentially challenges dominant cultural narratives. In addition to an author’s command of traditional genre forms, this newer approach can promote a more inclusive and diverse writing environment, where a multiplicity of voices and perspectives are valued and celebrated.

Genre plays a significant role in the **arrangement** of a communication by providing a framework and expectations for how information should be organized and presented, and different **fields** each have their own established genres that reflect specific values, expectations, and communicative practices. As you see elsewhere in this text, the rhetorical appeals of **ethos**, **logos**, and **pathos** are also key elements related to genre, as each genre entails its own conventions for appealing to an audience’s sense of what’s trustworthy, logical, or emotionally stirring.

Apart from its role in creating hybrid forms, remix can be also used to transform texts of one genre into another; erasure poetry, for example, involves selectively erasing portions of an existing text, creating a poem from what remains. In her poem “R E D,” trans author Chase Beegrun erases sections from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* to craft a story exploring themes of violence, feminist anger, gender, and what it means to be a “monster.” Additionally, writers must consider the **affordances** of a particular genre to utilize its capabilities, such as a poem’s ability to convey emotion, or an academic research essay’s ability to provide logical arguments and evidence.

Looking Ahead

As you progress beyond your first college writing course, the concept of genre will continue to be relevant in many future endeavors. In more advanced writing courses, you may be asked to explore specific genres within your chosen discipline, for instance, such as technical writing, academic writing, or creative writing. Understanding the conventions and expectations of these genres will enable you to navigate and contribute effectively to their respective **fields** of study and will help you understand how best to create a **remix** of traditional genres.

Looking ahead, writing courses may also offer specialized genre-focused electives that will allow you to delve more deeply into specific genres or explore emerging ones. These courses could explore genres such as graphic novels, interactive storytelling, digital media, or multimedia composition. By engaging with these genres, writers can expand their understanding of genre and develop the skills needed to effectively communicate in diverse contexts.

Courses outside of an English or writing department will also no doubt incorporate genre as a means of communication and expression; every field has its own genre expectations and preferred forms. Understanding genre conventions in any discipline will enable you to communicate effectively and engage with the broader academic, public, and professional communities.

Genre in AI-Assisted Writing

LLM (Large Language Model) or AI-assisted writing tools can provide valuable support for writers engaging with genre. These tools can offer suggestions and feedback on genre-specific conventions, helping writers refine their texts to meet the expectations of a particular genre. However, writers should keep in mind that while these tools can assist with genre-specific conventions, they can't replace your own judgment and creativity. You'll need to engage in a thoughtful and reflective process of incorporating AI-generated suggestions while maintaining your own voice, originality, and style.

The use of LLM or AI tools may also lead to the creation of new genres—in fact, LLMs like Chat GPT have already changed the genre of “chatbot conversation” significantly, doing away with the canned repetition of chatbots of the early 2000s like SmarterChild. As LLMs and AI tools continue to develop, so too will the genres they are capable of assisting humans to create.

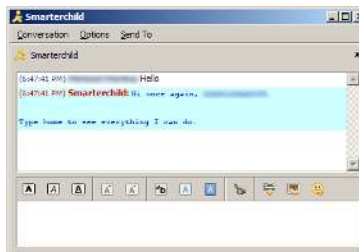


Figure 8.1: Smarterchild Chat. (Copyright; TheFirstM via English Wikipedia)

Genre in 3D Printing

While genre may initially seem unrelated to 3D printing, the rhetorical aspects of this technology highlight the role of genre in guiding the creation of three-dimensional objects. Just as genres inform written texts, so do they also influence the **design** and production of objects in the three-dimensional space. Understanding the intended purpose and context of a 3D-printed object helps designers make informed decisions about its form, function, and aesthetics.

In the context of 3D printing, genres can be seen as design templates or blueprints that inform the creation of objects. Different genres of objects, such as architectural models, medical devices, or artistic sculptures, have their own conventions, requirements, and intended uses. By understanding these genre-specific considerations, designers can create objects that effectively communicate their intended purposes and engage with users.

3D printing allows for the exploration of new possibilities and the creation of hybrid objects that blend elements from different genres. Designers can combine functional and artistic aspects, experiment with unconventional materials, and challenge traditional genre boundaries. This opens up opportunities for innovative and creative expression in the realm of three-dimensional design.

Writing with Genre

By asking yourself some key questions when working with genre, you can navigate its conventions, tailor your communication, and engage with your audience more effectively:

- What is the purpose of my writing? Consider the overarching objective of your writing and how genre can support and align with that purpose. Selecting an appropriate genre that matches your intended purpose is crucial.
- Who is my audience? Identify your intended readership or audience and consider their expectations. Understanding your audience's genre expectations can help you tailor your writing to better resonate with them—it can also help you decide when, and how, to subvert those expectations and surprise your readers with something new.
- What are the conventions and characteristics of the genre I'm working in? Familiarize yourself well with the defining elements, structure, style, and language associated with the genre you intend to use. Read, watch, and study examples of established and emerging works within the genre to grasp its conventions.
- Should I modify or adapt this genre to better suit my purpose? Take some time to assess whether the genre conventions you've identified align with your specific writing goals or if certain modifications or adaptations are necessary. Explore how you can

creatively blend or tweak genre conventions to serve your unique needs while still maintaining audience expectations.

- Are there any ethical considerations related to the genre I'm using? Consider issues like cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, or potential harm that may arise when utilizing certain genres. Strive for responsible and respectful engagement with genre.
- How can I effectively blend or combine multiple genres? Explore the potential of blending or combining genres to achieve your desired communicative effect. Assess how different genres can complement or enrich each other, and experiment with hybrid forms that push the boundaries of genre conventions.
- How is the genre I'm working in changing, and how should I adapt? Recognize that genres are not static; they evolve over time. Commit to ongoing learning and stay updated on emerging genres, shifts in genre conventions, and changing audience expectations. Embrace the need for continuous adaptation and improvement in working with genre.

Genre Activity

In small groups, identify two genres of communication that exist somewhere in the world. Try to focus less on broad categories of genre like “fiction” or “painting” in favor of more specific, tangible examples (e.g., “love letter,” “tweet”). This activity also works best if you choose genres that are distinctly different from one another in terms of audience, form, and purpose (for example, “1980s rock ballad” and “quarterly stock report” instead of “tweet” and “reply to a tweet.”)

Then, use the prompts below to outline the qualities of each of the two genres your group has selected.

Genres Comparison:

Genre 1:

- Primary audience:
- Purpose:
- Conventions/ formal elements:

Genre 2:

- Primary audience:
- Purpose:
- Conventions/ formal elements:

For example, you could compare a 1980s rock ballad with a quarterly stock report thus...

Genre 1: 1980's rock ballad

- Primary audience: fans of the band
- Purpose: rocking out (powerful emotional expression re: love, loss)
- Conventions/ formal elements:
 - generally gloomy subject matter (think Cinderella's “Don't Know What You Got Till It's Gone”)
 - slow tempo (think slow dance pace)
 - lots of power cords
 - cathartic expression of pain/anger/grief
 - delivered to stadiums of cheering fans by glamorous people with enormous hairdos

Genre 2: Quarterly stock report

- Primary audience: investors
- Purpose: tell investors about a company's earnings over a fiscal quarter
- Conventions/ formal elements:
 - stiff, formal tone
 - common elements include an executive summary, goals and objectives, challenges or ongoing strategic initiatives
 - delivered at board meetings by CFOs to investors in publicly-traded companies
 - might come with a PowerPoint

Mash Up the two genres

Next, combine the **purpose** and **audience** of genre 1 with the **conventions and formal elements** of genre 2. In the example above, that would mean we're looking at a 1980s Rock ballad written using the formal elements of a quarterly stock report.

With your group, **write a 100-200 word example** of this new mashup genre you've created. This is an opportunity to be funny, creative, and odd—in fact, it's kind of the point. Have fun adapting the tone and style from one genre into the unfamiliar territory of another.

Post-activity questions:

Did your genre mashup “work”? Do you think it could be used as it is, or would it need to be altered in some way to achieve its intended purpose?

Do you feel comfortable making any statements about genre based on your experience in this activity? Did this activity make you think about anything new, surprising, or challenging that you hadn't considered before? How so? How not?

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Genre

Podcast for [Genre](#), Chapter eight of *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 10:32.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Petey Holman-Herbert and Charles Metcalf about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Genre

Video for [Genre](#), Chapter eight of *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 05:39.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 8 created by Sofia Duron with collaborators Tyler Cruse and Rejon Strong. (Transcript available)

Suggested Assignment:

A four-week, adaptable classroom assignment for use with topics discussed within [chapter 8, Genre](#), in *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 5 pages.

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9: Image

Image refers to a visual representation of someone or something in material or mediated form. We readily recognize images in the form of paintings and photographs, or in three-dimensional forms like statues and sculptures, or as visual displays on screens and monitors. The word “image” also refers to immaterial functions of mind and consciousness. We visualize things to ourselves in our thoughts, dreams, and memories. These mental images are much more difficult for us to share but no less real (or are they?). Images also come to us in the form of words. Verbal images are pictures in our minds that result from the descriptive powers of language, whether written or spoken. In another sense, even printed words are images, particular marks on a page to which we can pay visual attention.

History of Image

The word “image” is complex and tricky because it refers to the visible and the invisible, the physical and the mental, the material and the spiritual. We can trace the word’s ambiguity to its earliest usages in ancient Hebrew—where it conveyed both a material and immaterial presence, a concrete object in the physical world and a spiritual essence or ideal. Indeed, early Jewish commentators insist that the original authentic meaning of the Hebrew *tselem*—like the Greek *eikon* and the Latin *imago* (ancient words that we translate as “image”)—is not “picture,” but rather spiritual “likeness,” as in Genesis 1:26, “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” (Mitchell, 31- 36). There can be no possibility of mistaking man for a picture of God, so goes the predominant interpretive strain of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but rather, man possesses certain spiritual attributes that derive from and reflect God’s glory. But even in the Hebrew Scriptures, image (*tselem*) is an equivocal term, because it also refers to idols, those false material objects that the Lord commands Moses and the children of Israel to destroy when they cross from Jordan into the land of Caanan (*Holy Bible*, Numbers 33:51-52).

Of course, as material forms in space and time, images enter human history long before words. Many thousands of years ago, the substances of plants and animals, even the blood of human beings, were used to make pictures, representation by visual signs—marks, scratches, shapes, lines, colors—depicting human perception, aspiration, fear, hunger, and so on. We really know very little about the genesis of the earliest cave paintings. The art historian E.H. Gombrich suggests that perhaps it was the recognition of resemblances that prompted the first cave drawings, some rock or boulder suggesting a specific animal or object, which were then worked through artistic means into an even greater likeness. Resemblance—or similarity or verisimilitude, or mimesis—stands as the starting point for entering discussions on the concept of image.

Whatever the origins, ancient cultures developed increasingly complex symbolic systems of pictorial signs that eventually evolved into writing. Scholars tell us that the first proto-writing was pictorial, comprised of ideograms—symbols that represented the thing that they attempted to express. Sumerians used a system of image-writing we now call cuneiform, in which the pictograms changed to represent sounds, much as we use combinations of letters today. We can find other predecessors to modern writing in Egypt’s hieroglyphs and in the script of the Tuareg people in northwestern Africa: TIFINAGH.

Writing that is largely independent of these pictorial elements—logographic writing—does not appear until sometime in the middle of the second (or maybe third) millennium BCE. One such example is the “Complaint tablet to Ea-nāsir,” written in the 18th century BCE. Note that “largely independent” indicates that no language is or was either completely ideographic or logographic--language does not evolve in a straight line. For a modern example, consider the role of emojis in contemporary non-formal writing, for instance, or the way that image and text blend in MMS/SMS texting and messaging threads.

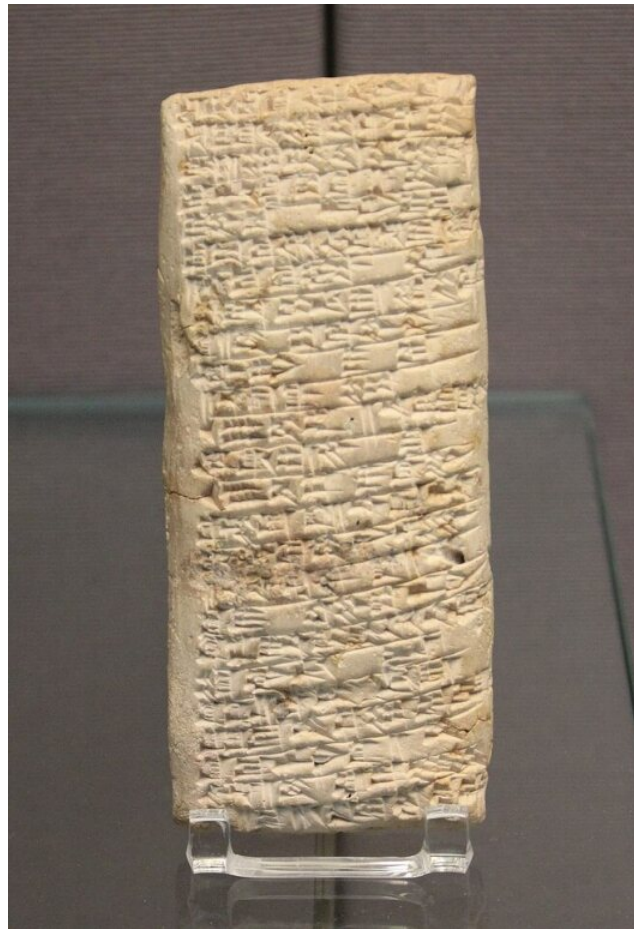


Figure 9.1: Complaint Tablet to Ea-Nasir. (Copyright; zunkir via Wikipedia Commons)

Image Today

If the word “image” is paradoxical (for example in the Hebrew Scriptures examples discussed above), images are just as ambiguous and equivocal when we’re referring to visual objects. Think of how strange an ability it is to recognize a material image as image: we see it, we name it, and at the same time we know that it’s not really there!

In an ancient Greek legend, birds flew to peck the grapes from the picture by the famous painter, Zeuxis, because they were not seeing an image of grapes but rather the grapes themselves. Human beings, too, are capable of being fooled by the illusory tricks and powerful magic of images. The legend goes on to describe how Zeuxis’s rival, the painter, Parrhasius, tried to pull back the curtain from the same painting, only then to realize the curtain was itself a part of the picture. “What is that?” someone asks, looking at the still life of grapes and a curtain. “That is an image,” we reply. “You mean that canvas full of colors and lines? Or do you mean those grapes and that curtain?” (Mitchell 17).

Few have explored this paradox of the image, its relationship to presence and absence, as provocatively as the Belgian surrealist painter Rene Magritte. This is especially the case in his two pipe paintings, “*La trahison des images*” [*“The Treachery of Images”*] (1929), and the much later “*Les Deux Mystères*” [*“The Two Mysteries”*]([opens in new window](#)) (1966). The first is a simple image of a pipe, and underneath it the sentence, “Ceci n’est pas une pipe.” [This is not a pipe.] Fair enough. We know that’s not a pipe; it’s a picture of a pipe.

A similar example appears in the first panel of comic artist (and ex-NASA scientist) Randall Monroe’s xkcd comic “[804: Pumpkin Carving](#)” ([Pumpkin carving](#) [xkcd.com]), where their beret-wearing artist carved a pumpkin into a pumpkin, invoking Magritte’s self-referential doubling.

However, pictures rarely announce their own status as representations. In everyday conversation, if asked to identify Magritte's painting we are very likely to say indeed, "The one with the pipe." In a very straightforward yet provocative way, Magritte's image explores the confusion between pictures and things. This confusion accounts for so much of the power that images possess.

The second painting ("Les Deux Mystères") radically extends the ambiguities of the first. Like the earlier painting, it too is an image about images. But it is far more difficult to describe what is represented here. To help get us started, let's look at a brief passage from a famous essay on the painting by the French philosopher, Michel Foucault. "There are two pipes," he begins simply.

Or rather must we not say, two drawings of the same pipe? Or yet a pipe and the drawing of that pipe, ... Or two drawings, one representing a pipe and the other not, ... Or yet again, a drawing representing not a pipe at all but another drawing, itself representing a pipe so well that I must ask myself: To what does the sentence written in the painting relate? ... perhaps the sentence refers ... to the disproportionate, floating, ideal pipe--simple notion or fantasy of a pipe. Then we should have to read, "Do not look overhead for a true pipe. That is a pipe dream. It is the drawing within the painting, firmly and rigorously outlined, that must be accepted as a manifest truth. (16-17)

As Foucault's analysis demonstrates, the serious contemplation of images can lead to a sort of vertigo. If we really think about how images work, there is a feeling of endlessly spinning about, which many modern theorists and commentators have identified as the predominant characteristic of contemporary life. The overwhelming abundance of cultural images has made it increasingly difficult for us to distinguish between image and reality.

Today, images are everywhere. So much so, we might say, that in the 21st century the **affordances** of image are overdetermined. They are so pervasive in our everyday life that we tend to think of and through them as a matter of course without necessarily understanding both their power and their limitations. We make constant use of images to help us achieve all sorts of goals, desires, and rhetorical ends: to access and understand the past, both our own and the larger cultural societal groups of which we are a part; to elicit desire and get people to buy goods and commodities; to express feelings and identity; to distract and enthrall; above all, to record and to provide evidence—"yes, sir, you did indeed go through the red light; here are the pictures to prove it."

"A society becomes 'modern' when one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images," writes Susan Sontag in her 1987 book, *On Photography*, and throughout the second half of the twentieth century, cultural theorists have consistently described our modern age in visual terms. They refer to it as the society of the spectacle, the society of simulations, the age of surveillance, and so on. The intimate relation between the modern and the visual goes at least as far back as the nineteenth century, an era that produced an explosion of visual technologies, culminating in the invention of the camera.

From its very beginnings, photography was wildly popular, producing images of "reality" of a kind never seen before. It allowed this availability of the visual on an increasingly vast scale, a democratization of the ability to produce images, for private as well as public use. Of course, today, with the advent of social media and myriad cloud-sharing applications as well as cameras on our phones, the ability to produce, **circulate**, and consume images are activities most of us take for granted and perform with great facility in astonishingly large numbers. Most importantly, we are able more easily than ever before to alter images and change their original intention—or simply take them out of context.

Magritte's seemingly straightforward statement, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," painted nearly 100 years ago, seems ever more significant. Sophisticated photo-editing software, such as Photoshop, can help alert us to the artifice of the image: framed, focused, retouched. But images, digital and otherwise, mediate so much of our experience that we may still find it difficult to see beyond them. The more we understand how images work, the better we can use them to our advantage, and guard against those that would use them to take advantage of us.

The mass production of images in culture and society is central to the production of cultural ideas around representation. Because the presence of images are overdetermined, the repetitive ideas, themes, tropes, and motifs that they generate *en masse* can take on either a sense of cacophony (a feeling of non-patterned, dissonant randomness) or a sense of normative invisibility (a feeling of normalcy that comes from ubiquitous, semi-unified ways that certain ideas, persons, places, cultures, and genders have been/are

represented). Both feelings about the presence of images are true: the world is overpacked with both incredibly random and remarkably consistent arrays of images that bombard the senses without mercy. This duality is possible because certain dominant ideas, themes, tropes, and motifs obtain a higher signal-to-noise ratio than others, emerging as a pattern within the cacophony, repeated with greater frequency and strength than the rest. Sometimes, these dominant visual representations are stereotypical representations or harmful tropes that require active pushback from those that encounter them.

Broadening the Concept

Let's briefly explore two visual tropes from comics and graphic narrative, a medium that attempts to represent the entirety of sensory experience visually. Two of the more common negative visual tropes in comics that readers (and creators) often encounter are "Women-in-Refrigerators" and the "Electric Black Guy."

Fridging

The first of these, colloquially referred to as *fridging*, was coined by writer Gail Simone in the late 1990s. The term itself references a specific infamous, gruesome comic book image in which Green Lantern returns home to find that his nemesis dismembered his girlfriend and stuffed her mutilated corpse in the refrigerator (*Green Lantern*, Vol. 3, Iss. 54, 1994). More broadly, the term refers to instances in which women in superhero comics have been victimized, traumatized, mutilated, and/or murdered either as a means of providing (generally visual) shock value or as a way of providing weight to another male character's narrative arc.

This visual trope reduces women's bodies to mere prop or object whose suffering contributes to the experience of visual pleasure that comes from consuming a visual aesthetic object (a comic, a film, a photograph, a painting, etc.). Yes, male characters are also victimized, traumatized, mutilated, and/or murdered in superhero comics. However, as noted above, some images occur with greater frequency than others, comprising a dominant cultural pattern of representation.

Even at the current moment that this section is being written, a quarter-century after Simone coined the concept, with the comics industry aware of the negative impacts of the trope on women's experience (and readership), *fridging* is still relatively commonplace in superhero comics and other forms of speculative fiction. The fan favorite Muslim-American character Ms. Marvel, created by G. Willow Wilson, was fridged in May of 2023 in Spider-Man comics as the sorrowful dramatic climax of another male character's narrative arc—only to be revived not two months later.

Electric Black Guy

Speaking of shock value, the second negative visual trope is the oddly common tendency of Black characters in speculative (especially superhero) fiction to have electrokinetic powers, the ability to generate and shoot lightning. This trope, referred to more broadly as the "Electric Black Guy" started in the mid-1970s and persists to this day. Black characters such as Black Lightning, Storm, Static, Ultimate Spider-Man (Miles Morales), Thunder Fall, Coldcast, Black Vulcan, Jackson Hyde, Black Hammer, Shango the Thunderer, and Volt (among others) all have their powers connected either partially or fully to lightning or electricity.

On its face, this trope seems far less problematic than a visual trope like the aforementioned Women-in-Refrigerators. It certainly is less problematic. However, it comes with its own sets of entanglements and difficulties. Charles Pulliam-Moore, in his essay "Why Do So Many Black Superheroes Have Electricity Powers?" hypothesizes that it's an extension of a tendency to connect Black characters with nature:

Personally, the thing that's always stuck with me about most black heroes with nature-based power sets is the very thin line writers and artists have to walk to make sure the character isn't being depicted as a "savage." The idea that black people are inherently closer to nature is one of the larger undertones to the problematic magical negro trope that many characters are often hamstrung by....The Black Electricity Trope reads like a distant cousin to the Magical Negro, in that they're both established formulations of a character whose most defining qualities are a preternatural understanding and command of natural force. (para. 11-12)

Pulliam-Moore emphasizes that “it’s not difficult to understand what makes electrokinesis popular with creators. For one thing, it can make for some of the most visually arresting art you can imagine” (para. 6). However, as with the magical negro trope, the “Electric Black Guy” is another permutation of an existing stereotype that connects blackness to the natural world, a stereotype that has had long standing damaging effects on Black cultural representation and influence.

Yes, there are plenty of black characters that have powers that are not electrokinetic. There are also characters of diverse racial backgrounds that have electrokinetic powers. As noted in the paragraphs above, the problem of harmful visual representational tropes is their frequency—and with that frequency broader cultural association.

Image and Other Concepts

The relation between image and word, or between the arts of painting and poetry, has long been a central and much contested issue in discussions of art and philosophy. While there is a long tradition of identifying resemblances between the two arts, the relation between visual and verbal signs becomes increasingly understood in terms of a contest or rivalry. The expression “A picture is worth a thousand words” is a commonplace example, an assertion of the power of images and their ability to express things that words cannot.

On the other hand, many commentators have come down on the side of “tell, not show.” **Alphabetic text**, they say, is more powerful than images for a picture needs words to indicate its **story**. Otherwise, it is but a frozen narrative illustrating any number of possibilities. Sontag, for instance, in her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, points out that in the Balkan wars of the 1990s, the same photographs of children killed in the shelling of a village were passed around in both Serb and Croat propaganda briefings—only their captions were altered. Words, she argues, are more powerful than pictures in mobilizing opposition to war, for pictures are mute, without context, utterly susceptible to appropriation.

Of course, the real question is not which sign, visual or verbal, is better in any absolute sense, but rather, what are the peculiar **affordances**, in any given situation, of using images or words or some combination of the two. Typically, we regard images and painting as best suited to represent the visible world, words and poetry the invisible world of thoughts and ideas. We associate images with space and immediacy; pictures are static and represent the “here and now.” We associate words with time and development; narratives are in motion and represent the “beyond” and “beneath.” That is not to say that images cannot represent time and action, that words cannot represent space and stasis. But it may not come as easily to them.

Looking Ahead

Images are welcome components of the texts we compose in our writing classes. Few authors opt to represent their **conversations** in **alphabetic text** only. The **affordances** of **remix** are too great to dismiss the chance to incorporate pictures with text.

Let’s imagine a written conversation project about the #MeToo movement. Including a panoramic image of the iconic 2017 Women’s March could serve as a powerful preface to a remixed timeline of events. A strong image can do the work of setting the scene before a text-based discussion.

In the early 20th century, photographer Walker Evans and writer James Agee collaborated on a text that documented the lives of struggling tenant cotton farmers. The book, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, represents the devastating effects of The Great Depression in America. Look up Evans’ iconic images and notice how they tell a **story**. Agee writes the following in the beginning of the book:

If I could do it, I’d do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement. Booksellers would consider it quite a novelty; critics would murmur, yes, but is it art; and I could trust a majority of you to use it as you would a parlor game. A piece of the body torn out by the roots might be more to the point. As it is, though, I’ll do what little I can in writing. (13)

Representing a rich conversation in your writing project is about choice-making. Image is always an important option as you create a memorable sensory experience for your readers. Positive **ethos** can come from your choice to compose verbal or material images.

Image in AI-Assisted Writing

As we write this chapter, generative AI appears poised to transform our relationship to the arts and global economy in ways that we cannot yet anticipate. This is true in multiple domains and **fields** extending from journalism to copy editing, from coding to data analysis, from photography to graphic design. Generative image-based AI tools such as Midjourney, DALL-E 2, Stable Diffusion, Bing Image Creator, and Dream, among others, allow users to rapidly generate multiple permutations of images based on simple, plain text prompts until a user finds an image that satisfies their need. If you ever should need, for example, an image of a “Soaring Bald Eagle with U.S. flag cape carrying a piece of bacon,” generative AI can provide near-instantaneous pictorial outcomes.

These outcomes, at the current moment, still are subject to gaps in machine learning. Image-based AI can fail to construct images in ways that display sometimes terrifying, sometimes hilarious, flaws: A frog with too many eyes; a hand with too many fingers; a hand with fingers that each themselves have their own hands; or a swan with a saxophonic neck. Borders and boundaries between objects and environments dissolve rhizomatically or collapse under the weight of user expectations.

However, because of the speed of image-based AI generation, a user can simply rapidly re-generate a prompt over and over and over until they find an image that satisfies their needs and largely hides the failures of the photo AI engine. There is a long-standing idea known as the “Infinite Monkey Theorem”—most people have heard it articulated as follows: “Infinite monkeys typing on infinite keyboards could eventually write the works of Shakespeare.” With image-based generative AI, it is as if one simply can produce the output of the aforementioned monkeys—or in this case monkeys indexed to Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso, Ansel Adams, Annie Leibovitz, Cindy Sherman, etc.—without requiring typing time in passing.

But what does this mean about the nature of images itself? As noted in the history section, any discussion on the nature of images necessarily begins with the idea of resemblance, or similarity, or verisimilitude, or mimesis. Put another way, the discussion begins with the simple axiom that an image of a thing resembles the thing that it stands in for as proxy.

However, at the same time as image-based generative AI improves its models and algorithms towards the goal of perfect approximation or photorealistic images, our expectations of the capabilities of images extend towards the hyperreal – more real than real itself – and towards the simulacra. Jean Baudrillard, in his central text *Simulacrum & Simulation*, describes the transition of images from following representational logics to simulacral logics as such:

So it is with simulation, insofar as it opposed to representation. Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent...Conversely, simulation starts from...the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference. (p. 170)

What does photorealism even mean when a “photo” is neither captured photons nor more than the loosest approximation of human intention? What does it mean for our uses of images that they can be so often satisfied by a partially-randomized, partially-machine-patterned pictorial output with no index or connection to an actual place, person, space, object, animal, or time? These are only a few questions related to the relationship of images and value that generative AI challenges to address at our current moment.

Writing with Image

To conclude, more often than not, we encounter words, images, and other **modes** (sound, video, etc.) together. Television, cinema, websites, illustrated books, comic books, photographs with captions, museum objects, magazines, and labels—the visual and the verbal are involved in many different kinds of relationships. The interesting question is to determine, in each specific instance, the impact that one has on the other, and to decide for ourselves how we can best bring them together to suit our own purposes. You might ask yourself questions like these to determine when and how to use images:

- Have I chosen the best images in each instance to represent other people, places, things, events, and my own ideas and arguments?

- How are images used or not used in this **genre**?
- How should I arrange the images and other **modes** on the page or screen, so that readers get the experience I hope they will, and so that it is aesthetically pleasing?
- Have I considered issues surrounding intellectual property and copyright? Is my manipulation of images deceptive?

Image Activity

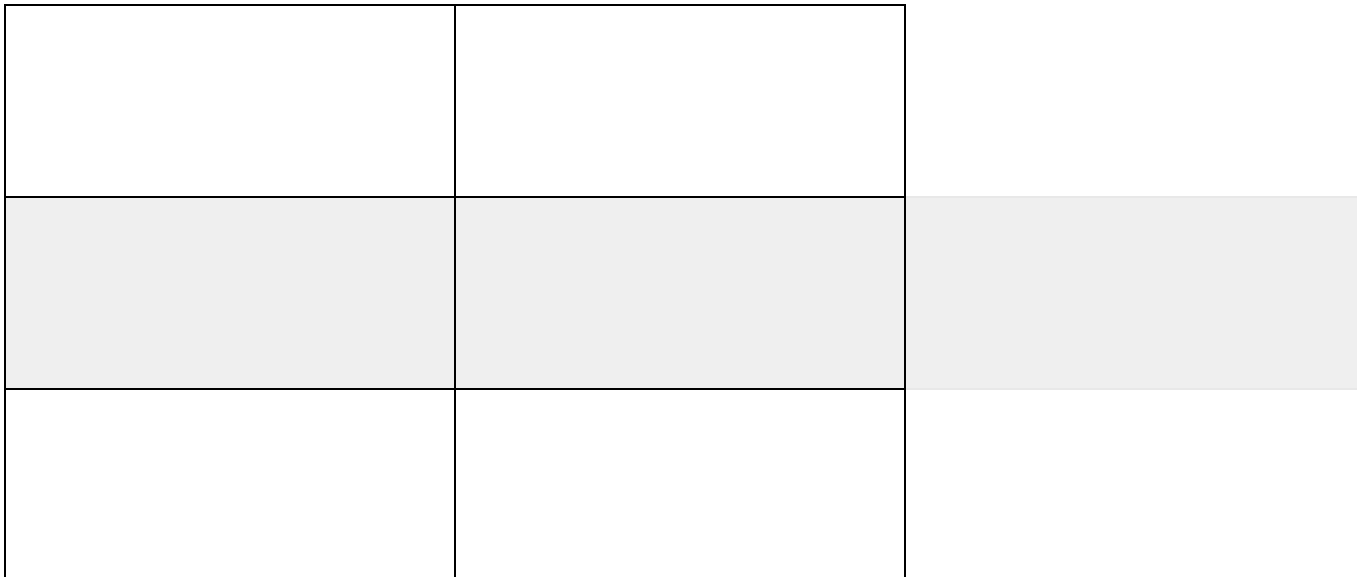
Using the 9 storyboard panels, compose a love **story** in either image only or image + text.

Once finished, translate that illustrated story into spoken words. Working with a partner, use your storyboard as notes to tell the story out loud.

Next, partners should write each other's stories without referring to the pictures.

Finally, look at your partner's storyboard and adjust your written version of her story to reflect the content and **ethos** of the pictures.

Exchange written stories and discuss the **affordances** and effectiveness of each version. Which are most effective? Why?



Description: 3x3 grid of blank squares to storyboard with.

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Image

Podcast for [Image](#), Chapter nine of *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 12:02.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Fernanda Freaner and Ryan White about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Image

Video for [Image](#), Chapter nine of *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 07:52.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 9, "Image" created by Tyler Cruse with collaborators Rejon Strong and Sofia Duron. (Transcript available)

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Tablet to Ea-nāṣir. 1750BCE. *The British Museum*. [British Museum collection object\(opens in new window\)](#) [britishmuseum.org]. Licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\(opens in new window\)](#).

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10: Kairos

Kairos refers to a qualitative sense of time, an intangible sense of opportunity. In ancient Greek, *kairos* simply means “time,” but it doesn’t mean the same thing we understand by time. For ancient Greeks, there were two different understandings of time. The first, *chronos*, is similar to what we mean by time: quantitative, linear time (it’s where we get the word “chronological”). The second word for “time” in ancient Greek is *kairos*. A moment is *kairotic* when something happens that couldn’t happen at any other time or place. As writers, we might recognize a *kairotic* moment and seize the opportunity to put our ideas out there, or we might try to create a *kairotic* moment by generating a sense of urgency and significance in our audience about an issue or topic.

History of Kairos

Kairos was a minor god for the Greeks, the god of opportunity, and the youngest son of Zeus. He is often depicted as having wings on his feet to represent fleeting time, but his most distinguishing physical characteristic is a long piece of hair on his forehead that represents the need to grab opportunity as he is racing toward you. If you let him get by, you’ve lost your chance, because typically he’s depicted with his head shaved. Kairos as a theoretical concept was central to classical Greek rhetoric, philosophy, and education. In ancient Greece, it carried a variety of meanings, including among others, “symmetry,” “propriety,” “decorum,” and “wise moderation” (Sipiora 1).

For Plato and Aristotle, *kairos* was paramount. Both philosophers gave their students many rules and principles about writing and performing different kinds of texts. However, rhetoricians knew that, especially when you were speaking in front of a live audience as were most ancient Greeks, no matter how carefully you followed all the rules, you also had to pay close attention to the particular circumstances of that moment: What exactly you were trying to accomplish, what people were talking about that day, the general mood of the audience, and anything else that might affect listeners’ attitudes toward the speaker’s topic and argument. Considering all those other forces that would affect speech is considering *kairos*.

Jewish and Christian communities borrowed the Greek concept of *kairos* to talk about the ways that God intervened at opportune moments (*kairos*) in human history (*chronos*) (Smith 54). The English phrase “a time to” in the oft-quoted passage in Ecclesiastes —“For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die”—is to some a translation of *kairos*. Catholics in particular use the term to refer to a specific type of retreat where participants are on “God’s time.” This usage is similar to the notions of “presence” or being “in the moment” that you might be familiar with from Buddhist and other traditions.

Kairos Today

Athletes already understand what *kairos* means, even if they don’t use the word. You might think of **kairos** as timing your move just right to achieve the results you want—throwing the pass at just the right time, stealing a base, making the final sprint, putting up a block just when the opponent shoots. A quarterback doesn’t just count seconds when preparing to pass (that’s time as **chronos**); they also think about this particular defense’s tactics and whether the receiver is where they need to be, about how the weather affects play in this stadium, and about how they feel that day and how the game has gone so far. When all these circumstances line up, the quarterback seizes the opportunity to score. That’s **kairos**.

Writing in the 21st century requires that we all think more carefully about *kairos*. Consider, for example, the writing we do via social media. Tweets and status updates are typically about events happening in the moment, and a writer with a sense of **kairos** is more likely to be “liked” or be re-tweeted, because that person has hit on something that responds successfully to what others are thinking and doing at the time.

We might think of [Google trends](https://www.google.com/trends) or a TikTok “For You” page as an up-to-the-minute snapshot of topics that are particularly *kairotic*. Even news sites determine the placement of their articles by the number of clicks: Editors move the articles with the most clicks to the top of the page because advertisers and media companies make money in the presence of **kairos**.

In fact, many of the best current examples of **kairos** come from marketing. A company like Apple, for example, times—in the sense of **kairos**, not **chronos**—the release of their newest models or products to maximize profit, and they do a lot of work to create a *kairotic* moment by building up anticipation among customers before the release.

Carolyn Miller explains *kairos* this way: “The challenge is to invent, within a set of unfolding and unprecedented circumstances, an action (rhetorical or otherwise) that will be understood as uniquely meaningful within those circumstances” (xiii). The authors and

editors of *Teen Vogue* faced this challenge around the time of Donald Trump's election in 2016: many people were surprised to notice that *Teen Vogue* started publishing overtly political and feminist articles. The surprise stems from the seeming disconnect between their **ethos** as a frothy girls' magazine and these serious journalistic efforts. However, through the lens of *kairos*, it makes perfect sense. One commentator said, "The genius of the current iteration of *Teen Vogue* is that it's caught on to its current readers' enthusiasm for topical issues in a timely enough fashion to actually engage them" (qtd. in Gilbert). "Timely" here is referring to the sense of time we mean when we talk about *kairos*.

One of *Teen Vogue*'s editors confirms the analysis that the publication was paying attention to *kairos*. He says, "Obviously, the election has provided unique circumstances and a real need for someone to dissect the news for young people. Since we are, in particular, a brand that speaks directly to millions of young women, we have a responsibility to do right by them and view the news through that very specific lens." (qtd. in Gilbert).

We can see Miller's definition of *kairos* here: the publication recognized "unfolding and unprecedented circumstances" in the election of a president deemed, by many, misogynistic; by writing to their audience of young women, they took a rhetorical action that has been "understood as uniquely meaningful within those circumstances."

Another example of *kairos* might be the surge in organizing that was seen in the summer of 2023, which some called the Summer of Labor. While union membership has declined since rates were first recorded in the 1980s, it seems that everyone was talking about labor-related issues in 2023. The Writers Guild of America and Screen Actors Guild, along with the United Auto Workers, are some of the largest unions on strike as of this writing.

While groups like actors and writers may seem privileged, their concerns such as just-in-time scheduling and being replaced by AI have resonated with many people. These strikes have created an opening for new unions to form in coffee shops, Amazon warehouses, or other lower-wage jobs where the workers don't have the visibility of favorite TV stars. These writers and actors use the advantage of **circulation** to create *kairos* for their fellow workers.

Broadening the Concept

The notion of *kairos* has become even more slippery with the explosion of social media platforms and the speed at which we can share information. Often, the germ of a news story will **circulate** on TikTok long before facts have been verified by a traditional journalistic source. In some ways, this has been a positive. The democratization of information allows marginalized voices a platform for viewpoints that have traditionally been undervalued. However, the amplification that these platforms provide is not always positive, and it often proves to be misleading—or out-and-out false.

Indeed, sometimes (if not often) social media gets it wrong. In 2014, *The Daily Dot* reported that Anonymous doxed (released the private information about) a police officer accused of shooting Black teenager Michael Brown (Price). Or at least that's what the intention was. When it was pointed out that the publication had doxed the wrong person, the damage had already been done. The person who was doxed was not even a police officer and wasn't involved in the shooting at all, but his information continued to circulate. You likely have other examples of a "news story" that turned out to be false or a rumor. Once a pile-on starts, it's difficult to stop the wave of vitriol.

Similarly, repressive groups can also be mobilized through these platforms just as easily as people working for social justice. Where once White supremacist groups had to "out" themselves to gather and cause chaos, they are now able to create moments by connecting social media, and then carrying those *kairotic* opportunities into the offline world.

Kairos and Other Concepts

Kairos is about timing our communication—whether it's in words or some other media—so that we can accomplish our goals. We need the concept of *kairos* because we can't just time our communication's influence by looking at a clock. Rather, we must time it by thinking about all the other circumstances that will affect what happens to our ideas once we put them out there. As the examples above indicate, we not only have to be ready, but we also must be aware of how we intend our ideas to **circulate**, how our ideas might get **remixed** (or distorted), and the **affordances** and constraints of various media and technology.

There isn't a set of "10 easy steps" to circulate our ideas in whatever **field** we're trying to reach. It should be obvious why this is the case: What people are talking about, their mood, even their physical location are all constantly changing. In some respects, this

makes kairos challenging to learn. But we need to think in terms of what is possible *right now*. What can we do right now that will take advantage of everything we know about our particular field?

Part of the answer will lie in the **genres** we choose to use, the way we construct our **ethos**, how we **arrange** our text. Part of the answer will lie in circulation methods—is X, Instagram, TikTok, or just standing on the street corner the best way to circulate our ideas? And part of the answer will lie in pure chance. Still, it's important to remember that kairos isn't the same as chance; kairos is recognizing when it's best to take a chance and making your own luck by taking that opportunity.

Looking Ahead

Kairos, as we know, is the combination of finding the “right” moment to speak and the “right” way to speak. However, Eric Charles White expands this definition, adding that “the word has roots in both weavings (suggesting the creation of an opening) and archery (denoting the seizing of, and striking forcefully through an opening).” When George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police in 2020, his dying words “I Can’t Breathe” were seen on t-shirts, social media accounts, and protest signs across the country.

Although groups like Black Lives Matter existed prior to Floyd’s death, the brutality of this death and the kairotic moment created by the pandemic lockdown turned the eyes of more Americans to a problem that these groups had been trying to solve for years. Since then, ideas like restorative justice and defunding the police no longer sound as “out-there” as they might have to citizens just five years ago.

In classes that invite students to use research and secondary sources, students often use the concept of kairos when they consider what **conversation** they will study. If students decided to study the conversation around the topic of immigration reform, for example, they would find many timely sources to offer varying perspectives on the conversation. They would also find a variety of opportunities and venues to make a meaningful contribution to that conversation.

Often, however, students use their own experiences and engagement with culture to select a conversation that has not captured the attention of the larger culture so that they can create opportunities for kairos. If a student decided to study women in the DIY music scene, they might search for sources for initiating a conversation around how to promote equality and fairness and create the best music. The student might then create a space for kairos where many people view and comment on their writing by considering the **affordances** of different **modes** of online **circulation**.

However we employ the concept of kairos in future writing, it will ensure that our work meaningfully responds to the conversations we value.

Kairos in AI-Assisted Writing

Many writers are afraid of AI-assisted writing because they believe it can do their job faster than they can and thus could theoretically seize a kairotic moment more quickly. Yet as we noted above, being first doesn't guarantee accuracy or accountability. AI is still in its infancy, and as it scrapes the web for answers, it doesn't know the difference between a carefully researched argument and a screed written by someone's racist uncle. It will pick the answer it sees most often.

A writer or researcher will amend what they think if new facts are revealed, but AI only knows what it has been “trained” on, so if its training data is old it may not have the up-to-date facts on trending topics. It also may not have gathered information from older or more obscure texts that get fewer clicks, or from texts that pre-date digital archives. Nuance is not AI's specialty—nor is accountability. As you have read elsewhere in this text, AI often fabricates what it presents as facts.

Again, this technology is in its infancy, and we can't know what it is capable of. Currently there are some rules around citation, but those rules are changing every day. At the time of publishing, the driver of kairos is still the human inputting the prompt into the AI; human publishers are still responsible for making sure that the speech they produce is accurate and doesn't cause harm.

Kairos in 3D Printing

While we've focused primarily on writing and other **modes** of communication, kairos can apply to the production of physical objects as well. Earlier, we mentioned the several strikes that began or continued through 2023's Summer of Labor. A complaint of many workers is the idea of on-demand or just-in-time scheduling. That is, instead of having a set weekly schedule around which they can plan other jobs or things like doctors' appointments and classes, many workers find that businesses adjust schedules based on consumer demand, and therefore they often expect workers to be able to make last-minute changes to their respective schedules.

When it comes to the production of objects, the market has had to adapt to a similar variable schedule. During the pandemic, we saw some of the effects of this: stores that ordered based on demand frequently ran out of staple items or were unable to cope with surges in customer interest in items like children's bikes, puzzles, or baking supplies. Customers used to Amazon and DoorDash have also increased the need for production flexibility as they expect delivery in increasingly time-limited windows.

3D-printing is one of the many technologies that can help meet this demand for a flexible, fast production schedule.

Writing with Kairos

Think again about the quarterback getting ready to pass: a good quarterback knows how to seize the opportunity to score when all the circumstances are just right, and a better quarterback can create some of those circumstances by dodging a tackle or making a last-minute play change. Even the best quarterback cannot control all the circumstances that matter: The speed of opponents, the weather, how well the receivers slept the night before, the noise of the crowd, and so on.

The same is true of writers: much of what matters when we write in the 21st century is beyond our control. The concept of “spreadability,” which Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green discuss in the introduction to their book *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, is about how much an audience's decisions about whether to share content matters. Authors can try to create content that is spreadable and put that content in places where others will find it, but the audience's decisions—like much of **kairos**—is ultimately beyond their control. Nevertheless, when we write, we can be attuned to the relevant circumstances by asking a series of questions:

- What are the historical circumstances, both locally and more broadly, that have given rise to this issue? How does my topic respond to these circumstances?
- What are other people saying about my topic right now? Why do people care about this right now?
- Where are people talking about this topic (on X [formerly Twitter], in mainstream media, in informal conversations, in academic journals)?
- When people talk about this issue, what else are they talking about? What are the most current examples or points of debate? And what aren't they saying?
- What **genres** and media are best suited to the **circulation** methods that will most likely generate the attention I want?

Kairos Activity

Option 1: Gather a few weird memes. Use sites like “Know Your Meme” to help discuss “Why This? Why Now?”

Option 2: Use the For You page of TikTok accounts or Google Trends to determine the “it” story of the day. (For those who may not view TikTok or Google Trends, pair up with students who do.) Discuss how to “stitch” new content to the existing trending content and **remix** it into something new. What's the best way to **circulate** that content? If there's time, create and circulate the actual content. What strategies have been most effective here, and why?

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Kairos

Podcast for [Kairos](#), [Chapter ten of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 12:02.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Meghan Patnode and Sprig Velic about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

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11: Logos

Whenever we walk by a poster or flier or we simply watch a commercial that pops up on TV, we may notice statistics from research studies and other facts about the specific product advertised. All the numbers, facts, and data that you have noticed in the advertisement are to persuade us, the consumers, to buy the product or do something. This method of persuasion is defined as **Logos**, and it refers to logic and reason when presenting an argument.

We can also speak of *Logos* in a broader sense beyond statistics, facts, and data to refer to the message that is presented to the audience in a logical and well-structured manner. In Greek, the word logos means “what is said”: word, sentence, argument, reason, speech. Bennetch et al. (65) explain logos as objective, intellectual, and calm, suggesting that authors must use careful structure, logic and evidence to persuade the audience. Additionally, the audience can be persuaded by providing fact-checked information and strong, non-biased explanations to support the author’s arguments.

History of Logos

Logos was first identified and explained by an ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle. He argued in *On Rhetoric* that the rules governing the ideal rhetoric in one-on-one communication do not apply when speaking or writing for a wide audience with different tastes (and who may lack patience) (Aristotle 33-36). Therefore, he said it is necessary to apply several methods of persuasion to appeal to the audience and convince them. These arguments, according to Aristotle, must have a firm basis in the truth and verifiable facts.

Therefore, Aristotle defined three methods of persuading listeners to think or do something. As you have read, **ethos** is perhaps the most important method of persuasion as it refers to the trustworthiness of the author or speaker. The second, **pathos**, is an appeal to and consideration of the emotions of the audience. The third method is logos. Aristotle defined this concept as an appeal to reason and an appeal to the soundness of the argument itself. It is based on inductive and deductive reasoning and presented as communicating facts (Aristotle 38-39).

Ancient rhetoricians argued that the job of the rhetor was to look for methods of persuasion within the language itself. These methods of persuasion can take several shapes, such as the syllogism or enthymeme, and they can involve various forms of reasoning. Other strategies we traditionally associate with logos include cause and-effect and either/or reasoning, analogies, examples, elaborations, coherent thought, comparisons, deductive and inductive reasoning, and anecdotes, in addition to the deployment of facts or statistics that support the speaker or writer’s position.

Logos Today

Although written in the 3rd quarter of the 4th century BCE, Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* presents persuasion methods that are as influential and relevant nowadays as they were many centuries ago in the ancient Greece. As a result, we may notice logos being used in a wide range of everyday situations like trying to convince a friend to go on a trip with you, asking a professor to extend an assignment deadline, entreating a family member to change his opinion on a political matter, asking a boss to endorse an idea, or persuading a consumer to buy your product.

Not only can logos be used to try to persuade someone to do something, but it also can be used to persuade an audience to consider circumstances differently or to come around to a new way of thinking. Providing sound arguments substantiated with facts will solidify the chances of achieving one of these goals. We use or notice logos on a daily basis in our lives. The most available examples can be seen on everyday media, both online and in print.

Commercials are everywhere around us—on TV, on smart devices, or in print form. Advertisers use logos in commercials to “prove” that their product or service really works, substantiating that idea with consumer or scientific research to add to the trustworthiness of the message. Therefore, you will most likely notice a specific number or percentage of users that have used the advertised product before and prove the product really works (e.g., 90 % of customers were satisfied with the product).

Advertisers will also invoke logos as the highlight of benefits and key facts about the product usually presented by a trustworthy person as seen in the example below. In this case, Australian radio personality Jack Davey leverages his trustworthiness to market hair product to his audiences.



Figure 11.1: 1954 advertisement for Brylcreem from 6 September 1954 edition of Melbourne, Australia newspaper *The Age*. (Public Domain; Matthew Paul Argall via Flickr)

Since today almost anyone can be a content creator and share information very quickly, being a consumer passively receiving the message, without critical analysis, can be detrimental. Therefore, now more than ever critical thinking and analytical skills are essential.

Analyzing and dissecting the content or arguments will help us discover the *why and how* of the message we are exposed to. An analytical approach to the content will lead us to rational decisions so that we can carefully respond to or challenge content. For instance, we might scrutinize whether Jack Davey's endorsement of Brylcreem was offered because he's a hair expert, or perhaps because he's popular.

Consequently, we will be able to decide whether the advertisers' arguments were effective enough to buy the product or whether these arguments could even make us change our minds about an opinion we previously held. Effective decision making requires the consumers to not just view the content, but to actively participate in analyzing and questioning the soundness of the arguments that are used to present information.

Broadening the Concept

The accuracy of the information presented to us is essential; however, much of what we read and see can be distorted or false. With the ready access and convenience of different social media networks, information spreads quickly and reaches a large audience worldwide. Distorted or false information can confuse an audience with negative results.

With logos in mind, it is crucial as both readers and writers, we must be thoughtful, critical thinkers and consider verifiable facts published by the experts in their respective **fields** rather than a social media post that was distributed by someone who does not have enough knowledge on the topic, especially if it is regarding new phenomenon. If more people had relied on the scientific facts during the pandemic in 2020, the U.S. would have found more clarity and guidance on the ways to protect its citizens' health; instead havoc and confusion spread as many believed inaccurate information **circulated** by social media posts.

Researching the topic to discover verified facts and relying on the previous research and accurate data, a writer's arguments will be substantiated, and thus more valid in the eyes of the readers. Relying merely on an argument without specific facts and evidence-based data will not bear much weight when a judge needs to decide whose argument wins or if a consumer needs to decide about purchasing a product.

Therefore, before either writing or verbally presenting your argument, it is essential that you do your research and back up your claims by verifiable facts that are proven by the experts in their fields who have published articles in academic journals or industry-specific magazines.

Logos and Other Concepts

As noted earlier and as part of the triad, logos represents facts and data, **pathos** represents emotions, and **ethos** represents credibility of the source or the author. Usually, these three concepts are interconnected and presented as a rhetorical equilateral triangle indicating that all three methods should be balanced in a text.

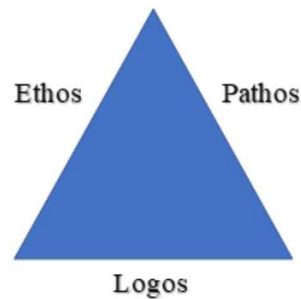


Figure 11.1: Rhetoric triad: Ethos, Pathos, Logo. (Copyright: Authoring Cultures group, cc-by 4.0.)

For example, a balanced application of these three appeals is used in commercials, such as the [Old Navy commercial](#) that features Julia Louis Dreyfus (“Old Navy”). We see a famous actress whom we love and trust (ethos) dropping her son off to school. The humorous dialogue among Dreyfus, her son, and the children throughout the commercial makes us laugh. We also see smiling faces of children and upbeat music to set the tone (pathos). Additionally, the school children at the end of the commercial tell her the clothes cost \$8 and \$4 (logos).

Although the balance of these three methods is ideal, more often we are likely to see only two concepts used together in a text. The persuasion method that is most often used with logos is ethos because the well-presented facts and data can establish a trustworthy source of information. Let us look at the images of the toothpaste commercial.

- In the first and last image, we see a person wearing a white coat in a dental office, and we assume she is a dentist. Therefore, we believe she is experienced enough to recommend what we should use for our dental hygiene (ethos).
- Next, the same dental expert presents facts (logos) about the effectiveness of the product (“2x stronger protection, strong enamel”). This ad purports to give us expert advice and information on how the product will benefit the consumers.
- As such, the commercial establishes trustworthiness with the audience and fosters a greater likelihood of the product being purchased.

In the digital era, it is important to consider how accurate information and facts are **circulated** online. With print media, it was not so easy for one person to convey a message to a large audience, but now with access to an internet connection and with only one click, it seems that everybody can be an author and share a message.

But what are the messages being shared? What is the truth, and how do we know the truth that is being shared is accurate? The answers to these questions are not simple. Everybody who shares a post on social media believes their information is accurate and wants others to see their “truth.” However, there have been many instances of “fake news” circulated during the presidential campaign in 2016 and during the global pandemic--you may remember some yourself.

For example, we all remember when people were sharing their opinion against COVID-19 vaccines on social media. At that time, anti-vaccination online groups were becoming more vocal about their concerns with the vaccines. These groups, although small in membership, were more strongly advocating against the vaccines and at the same time trying to convince others to avoid the inoculations that could, we know, prevent Covid-19. As reported by a *Nature* article, these anti-vaccination online groups contributed to the hesitancy of people who had been undecided about taking the vaccine (Johnson).

According to Ullah et al. (94), social media and false information that was circulated frightened people. Many who were not experts in public health fields continuously shared their opinions and inaccurate information. However, their followers believed their views on the vaccines were right and began spreading the posts further. These posts were circulated many times worldwide, causing much of a confusion and rage against the scientists who were trying to prove that the vaccines were the only solution to the ongoing crisis. Not just advising against getting vaccinated, some influencers offered their solutions to the COVID-19 crises as well as the medicines that were not recommended by doctors. These “solutions” had often fatal outcomes.

A news release from KFF reports that nearly eight out of ten people believed “myths” that were circulated on social media (Palosky). Some of those myths included beliefs that the government was exaggerating the numbers reported of COVID deaths; that vaccines cause many side effects, such as infertility and autism; and that vaccines contain a microchip that can change one’s DNA.

Our experience with the pandemic should have taught us to be cautious not only when sharing information online, but to also be critical of the information we read from others. Moreover, circulating information that is not verified and substantiated by science, especially by people who do not have expertise in the relevant **fields**, can be dangerous and detrimental to the people receiving the message. As Johnson and his team concluded, “distrust in scientific expertise is dangerous” (230).

Looking Ahead

Often, we are asked to conduct research or immerse ourselves in **conversations** about many important topics. In this process, it is important to first examine existing facts and evidence that are presented to us and later present accurate information to our audience. Only accurate information will be considered a valuable and valid contribution to the conversation or the current research base.

One of the first steps in the process involves investigating what other authors have already contributed on the same topic. In this process it is essential to have logos in mind, since a large number of resources are available, and we need to be able to decide which information is accurate. During your search, you will find various sources ranging from academic articles to podcasts and other multimedia. Depending on the topic, and in most circumstances, some sources will appear more reliable than others.

For example, *Wikipedia.com* is a generalist website to which everybody can add information and as such cannot be counted as a most rigorous, accurate, and valid source. On the other hand, as publishing an academic article in a scholarly journal or industry-specific magazine is a rigorous process verified by experts, we customarily trust the source and accuracy of information that we find, and we feel confident to further present the findings to others.

After having been immersed into research on a particular topic, you as a credible writer can feel confident enough to present your own ideas and findings and with that contribute to the conversation. You as a researcher build on the existing knowledge based on the topic, possibly encouraging others to pursue the topic further.

Writing with Logos

Recall a time when you tried to convince someone to do something. It can be a friend, family member, colleague, or boss. What were the ways you tried to do this? Usually, different techniques would work better with one target audience than the other. For example, with your friends and family members you will use less formal information to get what you want, but with your professors or boss, you will probably need not only correct information, but perhaps figures, charts, and statistics to convince them that your idea will work. When authoring a persuasive essay or a speech, remember to consider logos and the following questions:

- Are the arguments well-structured and presented in a logical order?
- Are the arguments strong and well-supported?
- Have I considered data and scientific facts related to the topic, where relevant?
- Is the information I use to support arguments correct and come from experts in their respective **fields** or from other credible sources?
- Do your arguments already include **ethos** and appropriate use of **pathos**? How can logos strengthen your argument in addition to these two concepts?

Logos Activity

As you have been reading about logos and how it is used to persuade an audience, it is now your turn to identify this concept and reflect on how the authors are using it to convey a message and have a credible impact on a wide audience.

Find three different commercials that you have noticed lately either on social media or TV and try to answer the following questions:

- Can you identify logos in these three commercials?
- How is logos used to convince you into buying a product or a service advertised? (Statis

- How different or same were the ways in which logos was depicted in these three commercials? Which one do you consider to be the most effective? Why?

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Logos

Podcast for [Logos](#), Chapter eleven of *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 12:52.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Cristian Montero and Avery Petersen about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Logos

Video for [Logos](#), Chapter eleven of *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 03:48.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 11, "Logos" created by Sean Munoz with collaborators Alina Yastrebova and Sofia Duron. (Transcript available)

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12: Remix

If you hear the following lyrics: “Hi, my name is, what? My name is, who? My name is...Slim Shady,” you might think of the Eminem song *My Name Is*. Or you might think, “Who even listens to Eminem anymore?” But you probably don’t know the origin of the song’s famous beat. The internationally recognized melody was sampled from British singer, songwriter, and poet Labi Siffre’s funky tune *I Got The....* Siffre’s original song was written in 1975, and Eminem’s remixed hit was released in 1999, twenty-four years later.

So, what is a remix and how does it transcend time? A **remix** is the manipulation and re-arrangement of original materials, **modes**, and **genres** into something new. Remix is an active process, and it requires artists to be immersed in the **affordances** of their respective medium as well as the existing historical, socio-political, cultural, and technological materials of their time. As Victor Wooten once said, “To be a good musician you have to be a good listener.”



Figure 12.1: Assorted source codes. (Copyright; Ali Shah Lakhani via Unsplash)

History of Remix

The earliest tales we told were passed orally from the speaker to their audience, and each new speaker told a different version of the story, speaking with a different cadence, and considering their audiences as they spoke. While remix had already been an ongoing form, the advent of writing allowed these tales to be recorded using **alphabetic text**.

With each new telling (or now, *writing*), new elements and details were altered. The stories changed historical contexts, their audiences changed, and their **affordances** changed. So, they too adapted, and the ethical concerns of such technological developments grew more and more important. Remix, which has alliances with musical recording and sampling, stresses how the newly shaped work can also involve the blending of two different pieces to create an alternate third piece.

There are many types and sub-groups of remix: imitation, alteration, offshoot, parody, revision, mash-up, spin-off, and more.

Remix Terms:

- Citation: quotes or paraphrases other texts in the new text
- Imitation: sticks as close to the original as possible
- Parody: stresses the comical and humorous aspects of the new text
- Alteration, Revision: revises the original to stress particular aspects, or changes only some parts of the text
- Offshoot, Spin-off: focuses on a selected element of the original and builds a new story from that
- Mash-up, Hybridization: joins together more than one text or mode
- Appropriation: forcefully takes over another's ideas or work; raises ethical issues around authorship or ownership of materials
- Adaptation: revises the original to make it work for a new purpose or setting or time period

Each of these terms stresses a particular dimension of the remix process and the nature of the connection between the original source and the remixed product. These terms apply to using established artistic pieces and strategies to create new works.

Remix Today

Remixes range from sampling a song to completely overhauling a film script. A very common method of musical remix on social media involves editing small clips to a beat; the musician subsequently creates a rhythm from an otherwise arrhythmic visual medium. To remix other works, you must interact with and pay attention to other artists and how they have contributed their own adaptations. Remixing should involve a careful look at the **genres**, forms, texts, **images**, videos, songs, and stories, recombining and repurposing components of an original source.

Remixing applies to genres and forms other than music, of course. After you've considered the most important aspects of the element you wish to remix, study the **affordances** of the new medium you want to use and identify ways to translate ideas from one medium to another. How does a screenplay translate to a TV show? How does a music video become a short, ten second promotional reel? How does anime spring forth from a manga's original comic-book style?

Remixers must also consider how faithful to be to the original material. A remix can stray away from the source, but it must usually keep the original work recognizable, even as the new author adds their own touch.

We can see an example of triumph and failure in the recent Disney live-action remakes of their hit animated films. These films have proved popular with audiences. Leslie Felperin explains that success in her *Hollywood Reporter* review of the live-action adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, "This remake of the company's 1991 animated hit tracks closely to the earlier version's plot and story beats, includes revamps of all the old songs and arrives just in time to exploit generational nostalgia—to lure viewers who loved the last version as kids and are just becoming parents themselves."

In terms of box office success, these Disney "remixed" films are performing well. As of 2023, *The Lion King* (2019) is the #9 highest grossing movie of all-time at the global box office, generating \$1.66 billion ("The Lion King"). Thus, the success of a remix depends on the metric: Are you looking for audience and fanbase satisfaction or profit? Raking in huge profits for a remix is an exciting reason to revive an old classic, but it is also helpful to consider how the remix can contribute to an ever-evolving socio-cultural landscape.

But financial success doesn't necessarily indicate artistic triumph. Alison Foreman, in her IndieWire article "Disney's Unending Live-Action Adaptations Ranked, from *Pinocchio* to *Mulan* to *The Little Mermaid*" suggests these films are artistically vacuous. "By and large, Disney remakes are exhausting regurgitations that tend to undermine the joy of Disney's most historically significant films." Perhaps these remixes are too close. If they don't offer enough new material, they end up making both the original and the remake tiresome.

Consider the example new material in *Beauty and the Beast*. The change was made to LeFou, played by actor Josh Gad. In the original animated film, LeFou, Gaston's side kick, had such enthusiastic support for him that some viewers interpreted it as infatuation or love. Disney's animated film never elaborated on the sidekick's sexuality; he was repeatedly treated like a sack of potatoes by his love interest.

In crafting the remake, the company picked up on fans' intrigue about LeFou's sexual orientation and attempted to create a **kairotic moment** by claiming that LeFou has an "exclusively gay moment" in the new film. In an interview with *The Independent*, actor Josh Gad gives a lengthy statement about this issue:

"We didn't go far enough to warrant accolades, we didn't go far enough to say, 'Look how brave we are.' My regret in what happened is that it became 'Disney's first explicitly gay moment' and it was never intended to be that. It was never intended to be a moment that we should laud ourselves for, because frankly, I don't think we did justice to what a real gay character in a Disney film should be" (Pollard).

All we got from this live-action retelling was a "blink and you'll miss it" on-screen waltz between LeFou and another man. And that is why actor Josh Gad spoke out five years later to inform readers about the company's questionable agenda.

Whether you choose to remix your own IP (intellectual property) or other people's original material, always remember that remix is a chance to expand and modernize artistic pieces, but you must do so carefully and thoughtfully. It is important to be immersed in the *zeitgeist* of your culture to produce an effective adaptation of various tales, even if they are really old.

Remix and Other Concepts

Remixing is central to the creative process, whether you are creating a piece using **alphabetic text, images**, or any other **mode**. We remix when we draft and revise our own written work to emphasize our personality and **ethos**. We remix when we alter a rough draft and recreate it to suit different modes and **genres**. We remix to maximize the **circulation** potential of our art and reach new **fields**. We remix when, in aiming to make an original contribution to a particular scholarly field, we locate and integrate the ideas of others in with our own observations (citing appropriately, of course!).

When we remix our work for new audiences, we may have to change our language and style, include more images, sound, video, think about different **arrangements** and **juxtapositions** of content on the page or screen, and so forth. Adaptation and remix involve knowing how texts circulate and spread via media and culture. Remix also requires us to learn about our audiences and imagine what they would expect from an effective re-envisioning of an original piece.

A remix that focuses on genre is quite common in music. Music samples are a great way to transpose compositions from one period to another and from one genre to another. Revivals of classic pieces offer us a chance to contribute to a **kairotic** conversation. When we remix, we participate in a long history of adaptation, we create new spaces for cultural politics, and we can give voice to individuals and issues that have been ignored or silenced by the mainstream media. As genres become increasingly hybridized, remix becomes the norm.

The digital omnipresence of our art has allowed everyone to reproduce, re-imagine, and re-create each other's work; and with the conundrum of robotic sentience looming large, we are now questioning the very notion of originality. Remix existed before the Internet, indeed, since the beginning of rhetoric itself, and the concept will continue to be a creative (if not financial) goldmine. It's up to us to recognize the most effective ways to mine it.

When we engage in a sustained, ongoing **conversation** about a big idea or question, as we are asked to do in writing and other classes, we inevitably employ remix. In our research, we draw from past and contemporary voices that have weighed in on the conversation, and we synthesize these voices with our own evolving perspectives. We are part of a perennial conversation in the humanities: Who are we? How do we live? What do we value? This conversation began long before we arrived, and it will continue long after we leave, for it is a conversation of cosmic proportion.

One of the most obvious and important ways that a researcher participates in remix is through citation. We locate texts that expand our conversations and excerpt them in our work assigning credit to the original source. We adapt texts, films, and tales by recontextualizing them into new conversations, and sometimes into new modes of communication. Certainly, we can also spot examples of minor remix where creators tell the same story by slapping on a fresh coat of paint to maximize profit.

Two of the most common ways we encounter remixes -- in citations and in memes (or other kinds of social media circulation) -- challenge us to consider the "other side" of remix as well. As we think about the way our text might **circulate**, we should consider how the text we are making might, itself, be remixed. When you work on a post that might become viral, you should take into account how others might make new use of it. Scholars Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss call this movement "rhetorical velocity." Considering how the text might move through culture once we've released it is next level stuff, but it's important to think about.

Remix, Ownership, and Culture

There are a variety of ways in which remix can move beyond the usual give and take of creative expression, and into something less ethical. As digital tools make remix ever-easier to do, it's important that you consider carefully your relationship to the texts you're remixing. Three ideas to consider as you approach remix projects are Appropriation, Intellectual Honesty, and Copyright.

Appropriation can be simply understood as taking something that doesn't belong to you, claiming it as yours and using it.

Appropriation involves a series of missteps: locating something that does not belong to us, removing it from its intended context, and claiming it as our own. It is a hostile takeover of someone else's work or creative expression; it's a colonization, if you will. Appropriation is perhaps the worst rendering of privilege. It is the assumption that we can take whatever we want from someone else without consideration or consequence. A common sub-set of appropriation is *cultural* appropriation: the act of assuming someone else's cultural markers, without deference to the cultures and traditions those markers may symbolize.

For example, in the United States, many sports teams from local communities up to professional teams have appropriated imagery from Native American tribes to use as mascots. This appropriation was usually done without permission or much consideration for the people being depicted, and almost never with attention to the specifics of the indigenous groups being colonized. Thankfully, recent public conversations about cultural appropriation seem to be having some effect. Many teams, including the NFL team the Washington Commanders, have retired their old mascots.

Intellectual Honesty is the idea that when we remix someone else's work, we're obligated to give them credit. In rhetoric, failing to acknowledge the source of ideas you've borrowed is *plagiarism*. When we draw from others' work, and when we remix that work into something new, it is important that we do so ethically. The conversation among sources, from which you're drawing your evidence and context, depends on a shared tradition of mutual acknowledgement.

When you borrow ideas from other writers (creators, musicians, artists), you are laying the foundation for your own ideas. Acknowledging where they come from enhances your **ethos**, as it demonstrates that you understand your **field**. Failing to do so risks making you look arrogant (for representing other peoples' ideas as your own) or dishonest. By contrast, when you remix conscientiously and acknowledge your sources, you demonstrate an ability to respectfully contemplate other voices and integrate them into your own perspectives.

Copyright and Intellectual Property are ideas that put into formal, legal language the notion that we own our creative expression. These laws represent the legal challenge of making room for two competing ideas: 1) that a healthy society benefits from the free exchange of ideas, and 2) that creative people need to be able to make a living from things they create. And the way to make money from things they create is by selling copies.

As we learned above, remix has always been part of human culture. But before mass-produced texts, *ownership of creative works* was not (at least, not in the way we understand it now). If you heard a story, you could tell that story to your friend without ethical concern. But when authors get paid for the work they produce, copying that work and cutting out the author becomes ethically tricky.

Things get even more complex when we introduce digital tools, which allow us to quickly and easily copy, cut up, and manipulate those texts. Some see remix as an art form fully distinct from their source texts, and envision the new texts as new objects. If new novels draw on storytelling tropes from the past or new symphonic pieces borrow from themes crafted decades or centuries ago, we can see how remixes continue that artistic tradition in a new medium.

At the same time, some owners of today's source texts see remix as theft--the direct appropriation of creative work leading to unauthorized profit.

Here's a simple rule of thumb for remix: *Give Credit Where It's Due*.

Take pains to be conscious of the broader context of the work we are drawing from, which may include the social or cultural impact of the original work or may represent the lifetime of scholarship and lived experience of the writer/artist. Pay close attention to the norms for your **field** and for the expected **circulation** of your text. Remix is complicated right now, so it's important to think about how you approach it.

Next time you consider remix, think of the translator whose job is to bridge cultures with the power of language. The translator is always careful to show a mastery of language in translation while also remaining transparent and hidden behind the original piece and its intended meaning.

Remix in AI-Assisted Writing

A system that always errs on the side of avoiding transgression is hamstringing itself from ever achieving human-level creativity, which is often grounded in a rejection of tropes and norms. (Ippolito et al.)



Figure 12.2: A man in a room with a record player. (Copyright; Chill Lover Radio via Unsplash)

AI-assisted writing has reached new heights with recent experiments turning to professional writers and expert creatives for inspiration. The article *Creative Writing with an AI-Powered Writing Assistant: Perspectives from Professional Writers* clearly states that the machine is still lacking the capacity for subversive creativity, which is probably the most valuable kind of creativity. This eighteen-page article relates a study conducted with writers of diverse ethnicities and backgrounds who belonged to various creative writing **fields**: novelists, short story writers, poets, educators, comedians, and game designers (Ippolito et al.).

The participants were tasked with writing a story that spanned 1,000-1,500 words in length. They were left to use the AI writing assistant without any prior explanation of the **affordances** of the model. In this study, the AI chatbot was Wordcraft and each creative person had a different workflow. Some used Wordcraft as a research assistant, others took to considering the bot as a writing partner, while others created prompts that would push the software to rewrite sentences in more interesting ways. The relationship between the writer and the AI-powered assistant is primarily governed by the concept of **remix**.

For example, the writer gives the machine a prompt, and then the machine transforms the prompt into a sentence. Since AI creativity remains in its infancy many, if not all, of the sentences are then re-written by the author. But there was one consensus about AI-assisted writing: It can be a useful brainstorming tool. In fact, the article states: “Participants found suggestions from Wordcraft to be helpful for worldbuilding and detail generation even when they did not end up incorporating the exact wording of the suggestions into their stories. For example, ET used the chatbot interface to home in on the appearance of the Worm-Mothers, the god-like entities in their story. Wordcraft suggested details such as the Worm-Mothers swallowing birds whole.” (Ippolito et al.)

The process of brainstorming involves an infinitely repeating process of remixing, polishing, and re-arranging ideas that will be included in the final draft of a story. Accordingly, we need to consider the importance of not offloading the creative process onto the machine and foregoing the need to come up with ideas ourselves. Instead, we encourage you to look at AI-assisted writing as a gateway to a productive writing process and a fun back-and-forth remix between humans and machines—one that must be cited if it is consulted, as with any other source.

Remix Activity

This chapter discusses the ubiquity and prevalence of remixes as well as their different uses, formats, and presentations. Review the arguments made throughout the text before diving into this chapter’s activity: **Remixing your favorite artworks**.

When you remix pieces you love, consider how you are absorbing the original material, synthesizing them and allowing them to grow through the process of remix.

Here are a few ideas for remixes, but feel free to expand beyond these suggestions. Find your own methods and reasons for remixing if that feels right to you. Write an essay that documents how you came up with your remix and the process of creating it:

- Remix a film you love by re-writing it under a completely different **Genre**. For example: Write a synopsis/logline imagining *Mulan* as a horror film instead of a children’s animated drama.

- Create a spin-off based on your favorite fictional character. For example: How about an entire show dedicated to the life of Uncle Iroh from *Avatar: The Last Airbender*?
- Sample a recording of an old song you think is interesting and create a new song out of that sample. For example: Sample Billie Holiday's music and use the scratchy vinyl and old-timey quality for a lo-fi beat.
- Remix a story to adapt its political concerns to modern socio-cultural issues. For example: Write a version of *The Notebook* that strays away from the quintessential tropes of the heteronormative love story.

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Remix

Podcast for [Remix, Chapter twelve of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 11:04.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Petey Holman-Herbert and Charles Metcalf about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Remix

Video for [Remix, Chapter twelve of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 04:30.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 12, "Remix" created by MacKenzie Oberlin with collaborator Taryn Yahn. (Transcript available)

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13: Story

Story refers to the fundamental structuring principle underlying a narrative account or visual representation of events, ideas, or experience. Although the word “story” is often associated with fiction, writers and other types of content creators use other forms of storytelling in everything they do. In literature, history, marketing, advertising, politics, science, social science, news reporting, cultural commentary, and the arts, story organizes human experience, thought, knowledge, and communication in every field and sphere of human endeavor.

Whenever you entertain friends with an account of your latest adventure or explain during an argument why you hold certain positions, you are using story. When you write an essay about a novel, you tell a story about a story. When you explain why a historical event occurred, you tell a story about the past. When we try to understand animal behavior or anatomy, we tell stories about evolution and natural selection. We even understand human life and *self* in terms of *story*: biographies and autobiographies often start with birth, narrate events chronologically, and end with death or a person’s posthumous legacy. Psychotherapy involves the telling of self-defining story to a clinician trained to hear and help interpret the story.

Stories often have a beginning, middle, and end, but story forms also vary across cultures, and they can take a variety of shapes. Not all stories unfold in linear form chronologically, and storytellers frequently disrupt familiar story structures on purpose, to achieve desired rhetorical effects.

History of Story

The world’s oldest surviving human stories are visual representations of hunting, battle, worship, and birth. Cave drawings in France, Spain, Indonesia, Australia, Borneo, Russia, Romania, and other places that date back at least 30,000 years depict visual stories such as these with their imagery of humans and animals. Imagery was later used for storytelling in pictographs, one of the world’s earliest writing systems, which used drawings to represent symbols and sounds. Storytelling through **image** is still prevalent today in the huge variety of media now available, whether used exclusively or in combination with other **modes** of communication.

As humans developed the ability to communicate with one another through language, the oral tradition joined visual representation as a mode of storytelling. It has been theorized that stories have been a fundamental part of human communication since the development of language, which led to oral traditions that could pass stories through word of mouth from one generation to another. Oral storytelling often used gestures prominently to heighten and emphasize different points throughout a story, and, as it developed, oral storytelling came to take many forms, including epic poems, songs, rhymes, chants, and more. Sometimes the storytelling was complemented with music or dance to further connect with the audience for the story.

Again, oral storytelling is a tradition that crosses cultures. The Griots of Africa are celebrated and respected for their important roles as storytellers and poets who also, through their storytelling, served as historians and genealogists. Native Americans, from the Seminole to the Inuit, used oral storytelling to impart lessons, such as the Choctaw animal fables, or to pass along creation myths or nature stories that honor life. The Skald (Norway and Iceland), Kathaker and Dastango (India), Ashik (Turkey, Iran, Armenia, and other places), and Asian storytellers from China, Korea, Japan, and other areas occupy similar roles of cultural importance. The oral tradition of storytelling encompassed a broad range of story types, including myths, histories, fables, legends, stories of worship, morality tales, proverbs, instructions, and more, whether the story was told by one person, several, or in performance like theater or puppetry.

Evidence of written symbols dates back about 9,000 years, with stories transcribed on paper, stone, or clay in a transition from pictures to text. Early stories from the oral tradition, like *The Iliad*, *The Tale of Gilgamesh*, and the fables of Aesop, are among the oldest oral stories to be written down. As more populations became literate, printing was introduced to share stories more broadly. Milestones in printing include a mechanism developed by Chinese monks that set ink to paper using wooden blocks, followed in the 15th century by the invention of the moveable-type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg. The variety of different types of stories continued through these advancements.

With such a long and rich history of storytelling, audiences can identify tropes, which are commonly used structures, themes, devices, character types, or other conventions, for thinking about story and narrative. Tropes help audiences engage with a story, even if they don’t consciously realize they are following a pattern. Just as importantly, they allow those who are writing or telling a story to find an organizing construct for it.

One example of an inherited storytelling structure is *Freytag's Pyramid*. Developed by German novelist, critic, and lecturer Gustav Freytag in the 19th century, and expanding upon earlier story analyses in Aristotle's *Poetics* and "Ars Poetica" by Horace, the pyramid is a basic storytelling structure that progresses through an introduction or exposition, a rise in action, the climax, falling action, and a resolution (originally described as "catastrophe," but now largely understood as a conclusion or denouement) (Freytag and MacEwan 106-07).

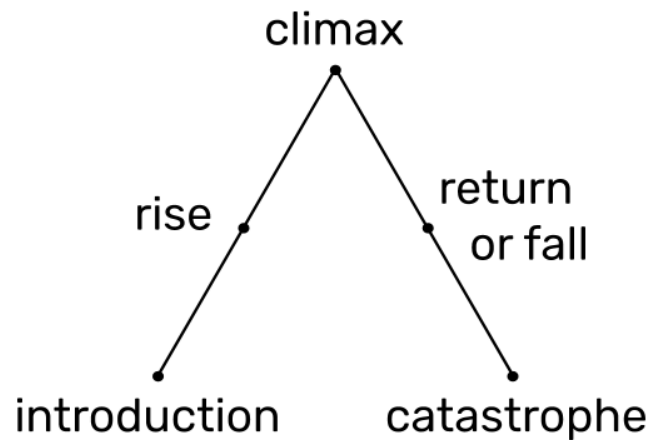


Figure 13.1: Freytag's Pyramid. (Copyright; Sinjora Foster via Wikimedia Commons)

Other examples of the organizational principles of a story include *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*, developed by Georges Polti in 1895, and the reference book *Masterplots* (Magill & Kohler). Understanding common storytelling structures and tropes helps people tell stories, whether they are looking to emulate what they have heard or read or to subvert common forms.

The technology of the last 200 years has continued to influence the use and enjoyment of stories as well as the audience a story can reach. In addition to pictures, oral telling, print, and other traditional forms of storytelling such as music and dance, storytelling media now also includes photography, cinema, radio, television, news reporting (the story of how something happened), and advertising (the story of why one should buy something), as well as interactive media (video games), mobile apps, and social media. This diversity of forms allows storytellers, be they an individual or an organization, the opportunity to tell a story to a wider audience than ever before.

Through all these changes, the draw of storytelling has remained largely the same. Whether fiction or nonfiction, we have and continue to use stories to organize and understand the world we occupy together, to share information, to teach, to praise, to influence, to worship, to entertain, and to develop empathy with others.

Story Today

Culture-makers of all kinds recognize that stories structure communication in every human enterprise:

- Marketing professionals work to help entrepreneurs and corporations "tell the story" of their brand.
- Web designers work to help companies "tell their story" visually.
- Savvy professionals curate their online profiles meticulously to "control the narrative" available about them on the internet.
- Medical schools now include training for physicians in the art of storytelling both because physicians listen to patient stories in order to make diagnoses and they must communicate information to patients effectively.
- Even in our private lives, social media companies encourage us to share Instagram and TikTok stories because story elicits engagement and conveys a sense of meaning and coherence.

Story is not only a structure of communication, however. Story structures thought and culture as well.

The French theorist Francois Lyotard describes knowledge and culture as a succession of "master narratives" (xix). A "master narrative" is a big explanatory idea like *class struggle drives history* (Karl Marx) or *unconscious drives propel human behavior* (Sigmund Freud) or *people misbehave because original sin destroyed the perfect world God created* (St. Augustine and the Catholic

Church). Lyotard describes late twentieth century culture in Europe and the United States as a time characterized by the questioning of master narratives.

We could also describe the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century in terms of important new narratives being developed: *gender is performance rather than essence* (Judith Butler); *racism structures the American legal system* (Kimberle Crenshaw); *decolonization requires national sovereignty and the return of land to Native Americans* (Elizabeth Cook-Lynn).

Stories structure culture even when people are not aware that story is operating. A story dominating white American middle-class culture in the 1950s was summarized in the title of a popular television show: *Father Knows Best*. Many of the most significant advances in culture occur when a thinker manages to identify a story that structures culture without a majority of people in the culture recognizing it. David Mura's book *The Stories Whiteness Tells Itself: Racial Myths and Our American Narratives* identifies the story patterns that together construct American white supremacy. Because story is critical to politics and national identity, political figures fight over how history gets narrated.

In 2019, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones and *The New York Times Magazine* launched the "1619 Project," a collaborative initiative developed to explore the role of enslavement in American history. Through a series of articles and essays, Hannah-Jones and her collaborators are building what Hannah-Jones calls "A New Origin Story," by which she means a new story about the origin of the United States. The United States did not originate in 1776 with the creation of the constitution, the 1619 Project suggests: the United States began in 1619, with the arrival of the first Africans in North America. Of course, Native Americans and Native Studies scholars would start the origin story of the United States earlier than 1619.

Every story gets told from a particular perspective, whether that story is pure fiction or an attempt to organize a collection of events, facts, or information. Since the launch of the project, Hannah-Jones and her collaborators have expanded their means of storytelling to a multimodal approach, including photo essays, a multi-episode podcast, a children's picture book, and, eventually, a Hulu documentary series. The power of this story has led to attempts to ban the 1619 Project from public school education in a number of states because it changes a dominant, accepted narrative (Schwartz).



Figure 13.2: Nikole Hannah Jones. (Copyright; Alice Vergueiro/Abraji via Openverse)

Cultivating awareness of narrative gives us power. When we can identify the stories that structure our communities, our cultures, our worldviews, and our very selves, we strengthen our powers of analysis and expression. Regardless of what you are composing, what form your composition will take, and in what **field** you are communicating, your powers of communication will benefit from getting clear about your own perspective, and about the story you want to tell.

Broadening the Concept

The uses of story are broad. Beyond entertainment, story can be used to document, explain, or advocate.

If you're in the movie-making industry (or angling to get into it), you know that movies start with a storyboard—a series of panels that lay out the components of a story from start to finish. The storyboard establishes a pattern of development from beginning to middle to end and makes sure that the story stays on track. Other storytelling ventures might use the term *storyline* to describe the

plot or sequence of events, like a roadmap for the story. Stories change and develop as people tell them, in which case, a creator would change the storyline to reflect unexpected developments in the creative process.

Even documentary makers think of themselves as storytellers. Jeff Spitz, a documentary filmmaker, began a film entitled *The Return of Navajo Boy* by telling a story about the effects of uranium mining on the Navajo peoples who live near and work in the uranium mine. The story about uranium mining was intertwined with a story about how tourism and Hollywood cinema portray Navajo people.

Halfway through the making of the documentary, a newspaper story about the filmmaking project caught the attention of a man who had been removed from his family as a child by Christian missionaries and placed for adoption by a Christian family. The man, named John Wayne by the movie star when that star visited the boy's Monument Valley village during the filming of *The Searchers*, had been searching for his biological family without success. When he read the newspaper story that featured his relatives, he realized that they were his family, and contacted the filmmakers. Spitz's film then became a story about the reunification of a family.

Stories change and develop in the telling. Being open to this process and following it where it leads can help you develop rich, compelling storylines.

Science also uses narrative. Near Eastern oral storytellers used to make observations about the natural world by telling poetic stories based on what they observed. According to the Hebrew creation story narrated in Genesis, "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep..." The pre-Socratic philosopher Thales asserted that the world began with an element, rather than a divine being; Thales and his fellow pre-Socratic philosophers imagined that the world began with a substance they called *arche*, an "original substance."

After the emergence of the scientific method during the eighteenth century, scientists in Europe and the United States began using experimentation, mathematics, and the systematic collection of data to make and test observations about the natural world, but they continued to use narrative as a strategy for explaining their findings. Currently, most educated people in the United States and Europe would say that the universe began with a Big Bang that dispersed all matter and triggered an expansion that continues.

Scientific knowledge changes as researchers gather data and produce narratives that interpret that data and describe phenomena with ever-increasing precision.

Story can also be used to advocate. For its [Cuentos: Stories of Immigrants series](#) (opens in new window), The National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago interviewed immigrants of different nationalities so that they could tell their stories in their own voices. The project aimed to help viewers better understand why people immigrate and what that experience is like, as well as highlighting the role of art in bridging cross-cultural dialogue. In videos that open with music and text, immigrants tell their own stories to the camera, some in English and some in Spanish with English subtitles.

Story and Other Concepts

The kind of story you tell will depend on the **field** and **genre** in which you're working. If you're producing fiction, you might tell a story about an orphan who overcomes enormous difficulties and rises to a position of prominence in their world, like Moses, Cinderella, or Harry Potter.

If you're reading a short story in a literature class and your professor asks you to write an essay, produce a podcast, or create a video in which you share an insight about the short story, then you'll be telling a story about a story. In the field of commentary about literature, the genre expectations include an expectation that you will share an observation or insight about the short story, and then refer by direct quotation to specific parts of the short story that gave rise to your thoughts. You will also be expected to use Modern Language Association format to provide bibliographic information about the short story under consideration, and about any sources you use in working with the short story.

For example: A reader experiencing Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" might tell a story about their reading experience this way [Alert! Spoiler ahead!]: *When I read "The Yellow Wallpaper" I understood the woman's hallucinations about the wallpaper to be a picture of how she felt reduced and diminished by her "medical" treatment and her gender role.* That would be the story of how the reader understood "The Yellow Wallpaper." The reader would then develop that story by talking about moments in Gilman's story that led to this insight.

In the field of photography, genre expectations would require you to share an observation or insight about the photograph under discussion, and then refer to specific details in the photograph that support the story you are telling *about* the photograph.

A writer discussing the photo below, entitled “Jubilee Singers,” might tell a story about the photograph this way: *With their formal attire, consummate composure, and serene faces, posed artfully in a symmetrical composition arranged in a university space, the photograph celebrates Black artistic accomplishment and religious authority while establishing Fisk University as a significant contributor to American cultural life.* The writer would then develop that storyline into an analysis of the photo by discussing details about the fashions, furniture, background, and genders of the persons portrayed.



Figure 13.1: Jubilee Singers, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. (Copyright; James Wallace Black via American Missionary Association)

Depending on the length of the assignment, the writer might offer information about historically Black colleges and universities, and/or the mission of the Fisk Jubilee singers. If the writing prompt called for research, a piece about this photograph might also offer information about the Black middle class, patriarchal family structures, gender identities, or the performance of class status through clothing, deportment, hairstyle, and educational achievement.

Understanding the genre expectations of the field in which you’re writing enables you to produce strong writing. Story provides a backbone for the details that build your discussion.

Looking Ahead

Academically, socially, and professionally, story is a concept that can help you to think about, understand, frame, and accomplish virtually any task or goal that involves communication. We have been exposed to so many examples of stories in our lives that the very concept of story feels innate, inseparable from who we are; indeed, one might argue that every day is another page in the story of this world and our role in it, individually, socially, and commercially. Ultimately, however, we control the stories we tell—how we tell them and what they are telling—which demonstrates the power of story as an organizing construct.

Understanding story as a writing concept will serve you in future courses, ones that focus on writing and, often, ones that don’t. Consider the earlier example of the photograph “The Bronzeville Middle Class.”

- In a photography class, the questions suggested can lead to identification of the story that the photograph is telling, and possibly the story of the social constructs that led to the taking of the photograph and its importance.
- If the assignment for the photograph is more technical in nature, then the story to be told, including research, may be the advancement of film development and the camera up to the point when the photo was taken, and how those elements allowed for the final **image** to be created.
- If the assignment is more focused on the photograph’s importance in the history of photography, then the photo itself will be one part of the story, with photos taken before and after possibly completing the beginning, middle, and end arc of the larger historical story.

If you take a course that requires research, you might use narrative inquiry as a research method. Narrative inquiry is a form of research that employs some combination of stories, surveys, journals, field observations, focus groups, letters, photos and other

artifacts, or, often, interviews, for analysis and understanding. It has been used in ethnography, sociology, psychology, cognitive science, linguistics, and other **fields** focused on transferring knowledge and experience.

For instance, in the field of psychology, Sigmund Freud used narrative case studies from his patients to develop his theories for psychoanalysis. In ethnography, the study of individual cultures, research conducted through narrative inquiry can allow participants' voices and stories to be heard as they are, potentially opening deeper understanding, unique points of view, and the exposure of historically significant information that may not have been recorded elsewhere. Narrative inquiry can also help give voice to marginalized communities to share their stories.

In a creative writing workshop focused on fiction, you can expect the concept of story will play a central role, as you would be writing one or more of these stories throughout the semester as a part of the workshop. How will you identify the story that you want to tell?

- You might begin by imagining characters, those who are similar to you or those who are your complete opposite. What do they want, or what challenges do they face?
- Or you might begin with places you know—family places, community places, workplaces, and others—that hold stories you can observe or imagine. How do you see those characters and those places in your mind? What are the characters' habits, or how do things usually go in this place?
- What's different about this time, the instance that will be this story, and what is the reaction to this change?

Questions like these already begin to follow common story structures that have been articulated over time, such as Freytag's Pyramid. Indeed, some of these questions are not that different than what may have led to the stories told in the cave drawings in France. Once you have these basic building blocks, you can begin to consider what it is about the emerging story that speaks to you, that you feel must be included. Then the story starts to become *your* story, and the workshop teaches you **craft** so that you have the tools you need to tell it.

Beyond this basic utility, stories, the ones we consume and the ones we create alone or collaboratively, allow us to expand our understanding of the world and the others with whom we share it. Story offers us a means to connect with and better understand others, those with whom we may disagree as well as people who share our views, making clear similarities that may not have been apparent and opening avenues to build empathy with others.

We are in a period where voices that have been traditionally marginalized are gaining more opportunity to share their stories through publishing, cinema, television, theatre, art galleries, cultural commentary, and other applications of the arts and humanities, which furthers the value of story. Story shapes who we are and how we relate to one another, and this is why story allows us to author the culture of our time.

Story in AI-Assisted Writing

When we think of writing as the development of thought and when we use story to structure it, chatbots can be helpful or harmful. While these tools are relatively blunt right now, they're becoming more effective every day. Human writers will find that bots can generate correct sentences but may be unable to produce compelling insights or a distinctive, engaging voice. Chatbots cannot produce story on their own. Human writers have to prompt chatbots to generate sentences as the human writer decides on a starting point and moves in a particular direction. At best, AI provides human writers with an opportunity for a collaboration in which the human retains control over the ideas, shape, and direction of the writing.

In his article "My A.I. Writing Robot," *New Yorker* writer Kyle Chayka reports on his investigation of the helpfulness and harmfulness of AI writing assistance. After several chatbot providers programmed a bot to imitate his writing, Chayka examined the results and found that while the bot could imitate his style, it also produced sentences that barely made sense, or produced science fiction when asked to produce nonfiction. Chayka concludes, "Putting a verb after a subject or padding out a sentence with adjectives is a task that machines can accomplish, because such grammatical probabilities can be calculated. Insight isn't as easy to automate, because it's something that deepens with time, through the process of getting words down on the page."

Most writers already make use of AI-assisted writing in the form of spellcheck and/or grammar checkers. Chatbots and AI may well also provide value as "brainstorming" tools for stories or essays, and even in helping to create early drafts. Thus far, however, it seems that to develop deeper insight and meaningful connection with an audience, those things that make storytelling fundamental to any sort of communication, AI does not have the life experience to do this independent of humans.

Writing with Story

Story is an excellent tool for discovering what you want to say. Whether you are writing or recording autobiographical material, creating an ad campaign, writing about literature, a movie, or a painting, communicating results from a scientific experiment, or building your online profile, it is rare to have the most compelling angle of the story from first conception. But you can start to find it by asking, *What story do I want to tell? What's the main storyline here?* and then develop the story from there.

In any medium, you can imagine yourself telling a story about whatever it is you wish to explore. Later in the composition process, you can use your main storyline to guide your decisions about what to include or add and what to reduce or leave out. Trust your sense of the story as you include elements that you think will enhance your main storyline in ways that are interesting to you.

Consider your audience as you begin to more firmly identify the story you want to tell. For example, if you want your online profile to tell prospective employers a story about you as a powerful professional, you might decide to leave out your Spring Break pictures and post only photos of you in professional spaces.

As you practice using the concept of story to help you think about and organize what you need to say to meet the needs of your audience, you will likely find that it can be valuable to you in virtually any situation that involves communication. Term papers, social media posts, sales pitches, political speeches, grant writing, gathering community support, connecting with a stranger, dispute resolution, salary negotiation, a job interview, even just impressing a date—all of these are situations where the concept of story can strengthen your ability to communicate effectively.

Ask yourself questions to discover what you want to say:

- What stories do you tell yourself about yourself? What stories do other people tell about you? What storyline would you want in the minds of potential future employers?
- Whose stories fascinate you—what public figures or people in your private life have amazing stories that hold meaning for you?
- What cultural narratives interest you? How might you want to change the story we collectively tell about gender, race, class, or nation?
- What stories occupy the people in your **field**? Which of those stories would you like to retell or participate in building? What stories are not yet being told?

Story Activity

View Episode 1 from Nikole Hannah-Jones's *1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, in which the project's creators re-imagine the story of the United States. Think of another “origin story” that might need an overhaul. Identify a story that you'd like to see reinvented. This could be a story you have been taught, read, watched, listened to, participated in as part of a game, or even be the story of something you experienced that you wished had gone another way. In determining what origin story you will choose, consider the following questions to help you decide:

- How is the history of your **field** presently narrated? How might you retell that story?
- How do people in your family tell the history of your family? How might someone else tell it? How would you prefer that your family's story (or your story) be told?
- How is the history of a certain technological innovation being told? How else might the history of that invention be narrated?

Once you've selected the story you want to retell, summarize the storyline as it's presently being told in five sentences, and then tell your new story in five sentences. If the story compels you, develop it further. If you prefer **image** to text, try doing this work visually with a storyboard tool like [Storyboard That](#)(opens in new window).

Choose a story from your life, but when you tell it with text, image, or oral telling, substitute yourself with a character who is an opposite of you. The character could be an opposite from in as many or as few ways as you choose. How does the story change?

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Story

Podcast for [Story](#), Chapter thirteen of *Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing*, 13:46.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing, and Karl chats with students Ari Martin and Riley Brown about their take on the idea. (Transcript available)

The Authoring Culture Video: Story

Video for [Story](#), Chapter thirteen of [Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 04:54.

Student-created video offering insight into Authoring Culture, Chapter 13, "Story" created by Winter Brooks with collaborator Cassie Hernandez. (Transcript available)

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14: Additional Key Concepts

In this chapter, we offer four additional key concepts you may find useful. As with all of our key concepts, they are not meant to be learned in isolation, but to be practiced and applied in relation to all of the others.

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition is the positioning of items next to each other to create a particular effect or meaning, one that is different than either item could accomplish alone. At the same time, each item individually takes on new meanings. Juxtaposition can be used on elements within a single mode (words or phrases juxtaposed in a sentence) or different modes next to each other (somber music playing over a seemingly happy scene in a video).

One way to understand the power of juxtaposition is when it fails. (The internet loves juxtaposition failures—try a Google image search for “juxtaposition fail.”) A juxtaposition failure might be a bright “Back to School Supplies!” sign next to a rack of condoms, or a billboard advertising a gun show right above a billboard advertising caskets. You might also discover unintentional juxtaposition in your social media feeds, when one person you follow posts a trivial comment (“I love Spaghettios!”), and the next person to appear in the feed posts news of a personal tragedy (“News from the hospital isn’t good. Dad may not make it through the night.”)

In fact, the pop-up advertisement, a bane of early Internet use that still haunts us today, was invented after an advertiser on a website was upset to find that their products were sometimes randomly appearing in juxtaposition with sex ads (Zuckerman).

These examples of unintentional juxtaposition illustrate how powerfully juxtaposition works. The store running a back-to-school sale is typically appealing to parents purchasing supplies for their (young, innocent) children who are looking forward to a year of art projects and math tests. Next to a rack of condoms, though, school becomes a place for hook-ups, and children are not young and innocent, and they are not looking forward to art projects. Likewise, thinking of condoms as “supplies” brings connotations to sex that typically do not exist. Juxtaposition changes the meaning of each item—the words on the sign and the rack of condoms—and together they create a humorous effect that neither would have alone.

As you approach the **arrangement** of a piece you’re working on, you can deliberately juxtapose items for humorous or dramatic effect. An **image** could take on new meanings next to something you’ve written, and together the **alphabetic text** and image could have an effect that neither would alone. Juxtaposing two adjectives in a surprising way could enrich a narrative.

You might also play around with the ways that different types of music create different emotional effects (pathos) when juxtaposed with images in a video you’ve created. You might also use juxtaposition while you’re drafting a piece, as a way to generate ideas. For example, if you were assigned to write an essay about Chicago, you might make a list of the best things about the city next to a list of the worst things about the city. The juxtaposition of those lists could yield interesting connections and help you come up with ideas that one list alone could not.

Modes

Modes are the material resources we have available to us as we make decisions about how best to communicate with other people. We discuss two modes in this textbook at length: **alphabetic text** and **image**. Additional modes include moving image, spoken word, music, gesture, and 3D objects. We think of these as material resources, because each mode is made up of stuff that exists in the material world—ink or pixels in the shape of letters in the case of alphabetic text, for example, or sound waves in the case of music, or our bodies in the case of gestures.

The **affordances** and constraints of these different material properties should be considered when choosing which is the best mode for a specific purpose. A fairly straightforward example is when you are communicating with an audience that may include deaf people. Using a mode that relies on sound waves will be far less effective than a mode that relies on visual stimuli. Of course, if your audience might also include blind people, it would be good to use both modes to make your text as accessible as possible.

Likewise, we might consider what Gunther Kress refers to as different modes’ specific orientations to the world: some modes are temporally oriented, some are spatially oriented, and some are a combination (154). For example, sound is temporally oriented; it happens in time. We hear one sound after another and meaning depends on the order in which we hear the sounds; therefore, the

producer of the sound is primarily responsible for the organization of the meaning. (Think of the significance of the order of words in speech or notes in music.)

Alphabetic text is a “border category” in terms of temporal or spatial orientation (81). Alphabetic text is written on the page or screen so that it moves from left to right and it occurs in lines, so in these respects it uses spatial logics for meaning to occur. However, writing also shares with speech the fact that we need to put our words and phrases in a particular order for them to make sense.

How a mode works also depends on the social context. Modes mean different things at different points in history. We might argue that the mode of image shifting right now. For example, in literature we have associated pictures with children’s fiction; images in a book have often meant something like “this story is for young people.” However, graphic novels have recently achieved recognition as a way of dealing with serious and adult themes in both fiction and non-fiction, and the cultural ideas about images in books is shifting. Modes can also mean different things in different cultures. If you’ve traveled outside the U.S., you may have learned that what we accomplish with swear words, some other cultures accomplish with gesture.

Though we sometimes intuitively choose the mode that will work best for a given communicative task, thinking about the affordances and constraints of different modes in this way will help us make the best choices. Moreover, while each mode brings its own affordances and constraints in different rhetorical situations, even more complicated and exciting is the potential for multimodality.

Multimodality simply refers to communication that includes more than one mode. This textbook includes images and alphabetic text, and so is multimodal, for example. The potential in digital, networked texts for productive combinations of modes is limitless. When a website can include words, images, videos, music, audio files of speech, and so on, and when we have available to us a limitless number of texts to draw on and **remix** in our own work, authors must consider what each mode contributes and how the modes can best be arranged to work together.

Pathos

Pathos is an appeal to emotion. (The Greek word *páthos* is the root of several English words suggesting feelings or sorrow or compassion, such as “sympathy” and “empathy.”)

In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle identified three methods of persuading listeners to think or do something: ethos, pathos, and logos. **Ethos**, which has its own chapter in this textbook, indicates that the author uses their own character to persuade an audience. **Logos**, which also has its own chapter, appeals to the soundness of the argument itself. Pathos involves the writer’s attempt to make the audience feel a certain way so that they do or believe what the writer wants them to. In any communicative situation, we might use all three.

An organization that is trying to raise money for people in need might focus on pathos in persuading people to donate. Through words and **images**, they could try to make their audience feel sad for the people in need, or they might try to make the audience feel guilty about ignoring the individuals’ situation, or they could arouse a sense of patriotism: “We’re a nation that helps each other!” The different emotions may be more or less effective in achieving the goal, depending on the audience.

As you approach a situation in which you are called on to produce and **circulate** a text, consider what types of emotion are appropriate in this situation. But even as you consider how to use pathos, keep in mind that some audiences might resent or dismiss a text that seems to be trying to manipulate their emotions, or one that seems to be trying to cover up a lack of substance with excessive or inappropriate emotions. (On the other hand, sometimes audiences are swayed by pathos alone.)

Likewise, as you approach a text as its audience, pay attention to how it affects your emotions. Savvy advertisers and politicians often foreground emotion over reason, pathos over logos. You might study a range of ads and try to articulate what emotions they inspire: is it desire to be a certain type of person? Fear that without a product, you will be unpopular or unhealthy? Humor and happiness that the product promises? Or look at the campaign slogans of candidates running for president and figure out which of them rely on ethos, which rely on logos, and which rely on pathos, or how they blend the three.

There is simply no tried and true method for determining how pathos works in every situation. Especially in networked, digital texts, we have available to us a wide range of resources—from sad images to happy music to bittersweet metaphors—that can help us evoke a variety of emotions in our readers. The **affordances** of different modes may lend themselves to evoking different emotions in a particular rhetorical situation.

Design

Design is the deliberate and thoughtful **arrangement** of elements to achieve a specific purpose or desired outcome. It encompasses the careful selection and use of various components such as typography, layout, color, imagery, and structure, to create visually pleasing works that communicate effectively. Understanding design principles empowers writers to communicate their ideas effectively by influencing how information is presented, perceived, and understood.

It's a common misconception that design is just about making things “look pretty.” Good design makes use of the **affordances** of specific elements and can influence how an audience interacts with and perceives a text.

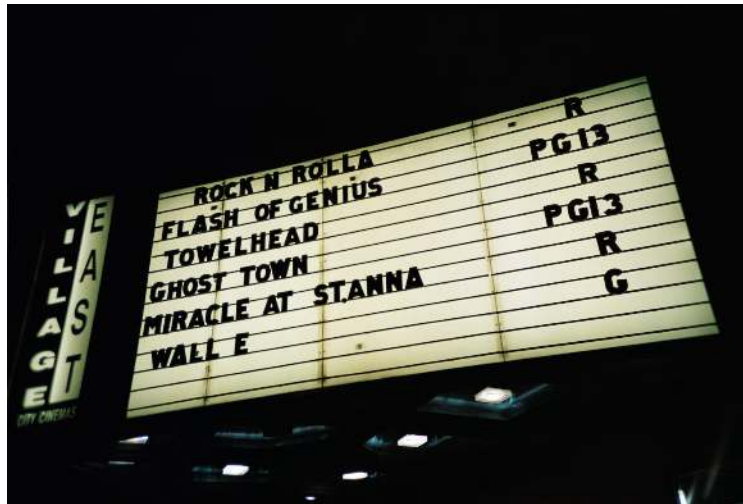


Figure 14.1: Marquee. (Copyright; Gemma Evans via Unsplash)

The history of design can be traced back to the earliest forms of human expression. From the cave paintings of prehistoric times to the intricate manuscripts of the Middle Ages, design has played a pivotal role in visual communication. The Industrial Revolution and subsequent advancements in printing technologies brought about a significant shift in design, enabling mass communication through typographic innovation and the standardization of certain alphabetic design principles (see “**Alphabetic Text**”).

Textual design elements such as typography, spacing, and layout contribute to the visual appeal and readability of written works. Carefully selecting rhetorically appropriate fonts, organizing content with clear headings and subheadings, and using adequate line spacing ensures that texts are visually inviting and easy to comprehend. For example, trying to make a text feel important, you should stick to a font that conveys seriousness (Times New Roman is a classic) as opposed to whimsy (Comic Sans is the butt of many jokes in this regard).

Design principles can also aid in organizing and structuring texts more effectively—by using appropriate visual cues, writers create a logical flow and guide readers through their content with purpose.

It's important to remember, however, that design has to be considered in the context of the **genre** of the communication. Some genres and their audience have very strict design expectations—for example, an academic audience may expect a writer to use an academic citation style such as MLA or APA format, which dictates everything from font size, spacing, the placement of page numbers, headings and subheadings, and more. Even a seemingly minor deviation from audience expectations in this genre hurts a writer's **ethos** and results in a less effective piece.

Although writers should always carefully reflect on genre conventions and audience expectations, most rhetorical situations offer at least some opportunities to develop one's own design style. When considering design in writing and rhetoric, you may want to think about the following:

Arrangement



Readers of English and other western languages read texts left to right, and top to bottom. Arrange your text deliberately to control what readers see in what order.

Font

Some fonts are serif fonts. Others are sans-serif. Many carry rhetorical weight or convey meaning by themselves. In any writing context, it's important to choose a font that doesn't distract readers from what you're saying.

Size

Consider size as a tool to create **spatial emphasis**.

Bold/underlined/italic

Changing your text by making it **bold**, underlined or *italicized* directs readers to interpret what you're saying in a particular tone. These sorts of emphasis can also convey meaning, as when the title of a publication is *Italicized*.

Contrast

Poor contrast between text and background color is harder to read, especially for those with visual impairments, as in the image below.

A lack of contrast between text and background is harder to read, especially for those with visual impairments.

Understanding design principles empowers writers to create visually engaging, coherent, and impactful works. By integrating design elements such as the ones above, you can enhance the effectiveness of your message, engage your audience more effectively, and foster deeper connections with them.

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Additional Key Concepts

Podcast for [Story, Chapter fourteen of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 10:06.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore four more key concepts in writing. (Transcript available)

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15: The Conversation Metaphor



Figure 15.1: Discussion at the Continental Arms, 1861. (Copyright; Frederick Willing Billing via Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. MacKenzie Gordon)

The process of conducting and sharing research is like a conversation—someone shares an idea, others react to it, and someone else can take the idea further. Kenneth Burke, an influential 20th-century literary theorist, used this conversation metaphor to illustrate what scholars do:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (Burke, 110-111)

From *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1974)

We have probably all had a similar experience of joining a party or gathering, either in person or online. We encounter a group of knowledgeable people engaged in vibrant conversation that includes multiple perspectives. We listen in for a while, thinking through and evaluating the various points of view and positions represented in the conversation, and then decide how we can add to the conversation. If we jump into a conversation without listening first, our contribution is much less likely to be meaningful.

The same is true of doing and sharing research—for our own work to make sense, we must first explore the existing scholarly conversations around the topic. Exploring scholarly conversations includes understanding what the researcher's perspective is and what makes them an expert on the topic.

A conversation, research-related or otherwise, can be based in **alphabetic text**, in **images**, or across multiple other media. Contributions to scholarly conversation do not have to be in the form of a research paper—they can happen in online communities, guided discussions, conference posters, video presentations, and more.

Understanding and “listening” to existing conversations enables us to make meaningful contributions so that new research and writing can carry the conversation forward. New insights and discoveries occur over time as a result of varied perspectives and

interpretations coming into contact with one another through conversation. For some topics, it is possible to establish answers through this process, but many questions do not have a single recognized answer. When researching, it is important to seek out many perspectives, not just those that are already familiar. These perspectives might be in an expert's own discipline or profession, but there might be additional relevant perspectives in other **fields** as well.

The overall context of the conversation provides valuable additional insight—it is important to critically evaluate others' contributions by questioning what the researcher is responding to, noting which citations are used, and recognizing where the conversation is taking place (e.g., journal article, book chapter, interview, blog post, social media).

This context also affects how information is shared, evaluated, and understood. For example, a reported news piece is published quickly to report on current events. A scholarly article about the same event would be written and published much later, after it has gone through a process of peer review, where other experts on the topic have evaluated and assessed the content. Both types of information are valuable, but they serve different purposes and will likely reach different people.

While new scholars and experts at all levels can take part in the conversation, established power and authority structures may influence their ability to participate and can privilege certain voices and information. Historically, this has often meant that people in positions of privilege have had access to more resources and that their voices have often been louder in scholarly conversations. As new researchers, developing familiarity with the sources of evidence, methods, and **modes** of discourse in different fields will assist your voices to enter the ongoing conversation and to offer fresh perspectives.

One responsibility of participating in scholarly and research conversations is giving attribution to relevant previous research and ideas. Citing sources accurately makes it possible for the chain of conversation to move forward and provides a foundation for future participants. Scholars realize that these conversations are ongoing and will continue long after they make their own contribution. Other scholars will follow them into the conversation and may in turn cite that contribution in their own research.

Introducing the Conversation Metaphor

1. Take a few minutes to complete these prompts. Today ...

I'm feeling curious about _____

I'm feeling passionate about _____

I'm feeling angry about _____

I'm feeling frightened about _____

2. Pick two of the feelings you identified in #1 and write a sentence for each that explains why you selected it.

3. Pick one of the sentences you wrote in #2 that you think you could write about for 4-5 minutes. Describe the emotion (sensory detail, physical sensations) and the experience(s) that prompted this feeling.

4. Find a partner and spend a few minutes sharing. You could exchange your papers or simply discuss what you wrote.

5. After you've shared with a partner, as a class try to list all the qualities of a good conversation. How do we know we're in a good conversation with someone? Next, try to list all the things that prevent or constrain a good conversation. How do you know when you're in a bad/painful conversation?

Parlor Activity

As discussed in this chapter, we are working on understanding academic writing as a conversation, embracing the metaphor of "the parlor." When you write in an academic setting for an audience of college-level thinkers, it should be like entering a parlor where thoughtful people are engaging socially. This writing assignment asks you to envision what your parlor would be like if it were a real place.

- Take some time to analyze who is in your parlor and what it looks and sounds like. Consider the physical environment. Consider the objects and media around you.
- Look at your bookmarked websites and social media accounts to consider who you talk to and share information with the most. What ideas and values do you have in common with the people with whom you share ideas? How are you similar? How are you different?

- What does your podcast or Netflix playlist say about your interests?
- In what way does this parlor environment represent your identity?

Write a one-page narrative imagining your parlor: Who's there and how do you know these people, artifacts, and subjects? What subjects will you likely discuss? What do the people have in common—what values do you share?

Student Example, Parlor Activity: “Coffee for Few,” Jey Woyner, Columbia College Chicago student

I envision a small but quaint space. The lights aren't too bright, nothing is too loud, and the atmosphere is similar to that of a local town cafe (yes, coffee will always be available). I welcome you to my parlor! Actually, it isn't much of a parlor. It's more like a tiny apartment room. Anybody is welcome to come over, if they express the interest for it. Anybody under the condition that they are considerate towards others and respect others' opinions. To put it simply, no jerks allowed. M

ost of the time, however, it's only a few close friends that come here. Some of these friends I've known for years, some of them less. The worth of our relationships does not depend on how long I may have known them for, but on the connections we've established through deep conversations. Conversations about ourselves, life struggles, creative passions, and more. There are two distinct things that connect all of us—we are all creatives in some way and we all fall into the LGBT+ community. Despite where our differences may lie, our discussions revolving around these topics are always done with care and open minds.

We usually end up offering each other our support and insights. It isn't always as serious as it seems here, however. We could be talking sincerely one moment, and completely foolish the next. We've all got Twitter on our phones, and some video game consoles are set up. A discussion on gender equality, for instance, can quickly turn into a chat about the latest update for Nintendo's Super Smash Bros. Ultimate. We can catch all the latest news on it from our phones and have a casual talk about it while we play some rounds.

We aren't too picky here in my parlor. As long as no one feels uncomfortable and we're all having fun, we don't mind who joins us. We'd love to hear new thoughts from someone else. Though, it would be nice to have a bigger space if a party decides to come over!

Reaction Videos as Conversation

Spend 5 minutes watching TikToks, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, or other short-form videos on social media.

Please count the number of videos you watch, then answer the following questions about your viewing experience.

For each video, note whether it is

- An “Original” Video: It is not a “reaction” to another video, it is not a “recreation” of another video, it does not copy an idea or footage from someone else.
- A “Reaction” Video: The poster is reacting to another person's video.
- A “Recreation” Video: The poster is recreating the idea or actions of another person's original video.

Questions:

- Of the “reaction” and “recreation” videos you saw, was there a way for you to identify the original poster's video or username?
- What do you think about the ease/difficulty of locating the original poster's username or video in a “reaction” or “recreation” video?
- What do you think is good etiquette for using and reusing other people's video content?
- How is this short-form video use of other's ideas and videos different from how researchers respond to one another?
- How is it similar? Think about the different ways academics interact with each other via writings.

The Authoring Culture Podcast: Conversation Metaphor

Podcast for [Conversation Metaphor, Chapter fifteen of Authoring Culture: Foundations of Twenty-First Century Writing](#), 11:52.

Columbia College Chicago faculty members Brendan Riley and Karl El Sokhn explore a key concept in writing. (Transcript available)

Works Cited

Billing, Frederick Willing. *Discussion at the Continental Arms*. 1861. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. MacKenzie Gordon. Smithsonian Open Access Collection. [Discussion at the Continental Arms](#) [si.edu].

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THE FOUNDATIONS OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WRITING



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