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Contentious Conversations, Missing Voices: The Ongoing Debate about Style

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Contentious Conversations, Missing Voices: The Ongoing Debate about Style

Contentious Conversations, Missing Voices: The Ongoing Debate about Style

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

By

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Henderson State University
Bachelor of Arts in English, 2009

August 2013
University of Arkansas

ABSTRACT

As I began to investigate the concept of style in Composition curriculums, I quickly realized two things: style is difficult to define, and student input about style is virtually absent from the previous scholarship on style theory and pedagogy. This project, therefore, does not seek to end the debate about style. It seeks to do exactly the opposite. I want to extend the ongoing conversation about style even further, this time to include student voices. My project seeks to triangulate discussions about style to include voices from scholars, practitioners, and students. Students are too often an afterthought, receiving instruction based on pedagogies that are debated and theorized about in academic journals as they are being implemented in the classroom. But students should have been conversing with us all along, their input and feedback directly informing the ways that we teach. I make the argument that style should be a central concept in Composition curriculums so that students can think critically about the ways they write and subsequently become empowered with the ability to navigate writing and rhetorical situations both inside and outside the academic discourse community. In order to incorporate student voices into the conversations about style, I have chosen case studies as my research method.

This thesis is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

Thesis Director:

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Dr. Elías Domínguez Barajas

_____

Dr. David Jolliffe

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

To Brian, Nana, Bubba, and Brady. You're the best family I could have ever hoped for.

To my students. You are the reason this project exists. Keep doing amazing things.

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Introduction

It's difficult to say exactly when I began thinking about this project. It's much easier, however, to say why. My first semester teaching Composition at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville was exciting and challenging as I was still learning about Composition as a discipline and still trying to develop my philosophy of teaching. I had many discussions with my fellow TAs that semester about our roles as Composition instructors, and although I enjoyed these conversations, I could never quite figure out where I belonged within the English Department and within the larger university system. It wasn't until my second semester of teaching that I decided exactly how I wanted to serve my students. While sitting on a worn wooden bench outside of the Graduate Education building on campus, a good friend and fellow TA expressed to me what she believed to be her role as a Composition instructor. I'll never forget how confidently and emphatically she declared that she was here "to break down ideologies." I paused at her declaration, just long enough and politely enough. Then I responded very simply, "I just want to help my students write better." And so this project began to take shape.

The first two semesters I taught Composition I and II, I struggled with how I could make writing more accessible for my students. During our class discussions and one-on-one conferences, I noticed a theme in their attitudes about writing: writing is hard because I've only been told what not to do. I began to evaluate my pedagogical approaches to teaching writing and realized I had been guilty of the same thing, of providing my students with a list of writing rules they should follow and leaving it at that. I then revisited a discussion my colleagues and I had in Composition Pedagogy, a course new Teaching Assistants must take during their first semester teaching. Dr. Elías Domínguez Barajas had presented us with the introduction to Carmen

Kynard's article "I Want to be African: In Search of a Black Radical Tradition/African-American-Vernacularized Paradigm for "Students' Right to Their Own Language," Critical Literacy, and"Class Politics" and asked us a provocative question: "Would you let your students write this way?" Initially, my answer had been a resounding "no." Kynard had incorporated African-American vernacular into her published scholarly essay, and while I appreciated Kynard's "style," I was adamant that my students could not and should not make the same kinds of stylistic choices. That class discussion never left me, though, and Dr. Domínguez's question continued to echo in my mind each time I lectured, planned lessons, and commented on students' essays. And then one day, it seemed to click. In order to become better writers, my students needed and deserved to know what kinds of stylistic choices were available to them.

I began to investigate the concept of style in Composition curriculums, and I quickly realized two things: style is difficult to define, and student input about style is virtually absent from the previous scholarship on style theory and pedagogy. This project, therefore, does not seek to end the debate about style. It seeks to do exactly the opposite. I want to extend the ongoing conversation about style even further, this time to include student voices. My project seeks to triangulate discussions about style to include voices from scholars, practitioners, and students. Students are too often an afterthought, receiving instruction based on pedagogies that have been debated and theorized about in academic journals as they were being implemented in the classroom. But students should have been conversing with us all along, their input and feedback directly informing the ways that we teach.

In order to incorporate student voices into the conversations about style, I have chosen case studies as my research method. As outlined by Janice Lauer and William Asher in *Composition Research: Empirical Designs*, case studies allow teacher-researchers to conduct

formal, methodical, and inexpensive studies of their students in order to further examine a

hypothesis or driving question. My project seeks to fill in gaps in previous scholarship by

incorporating student voices into the ongoing conversation about the relationship between style

and academic writing, and case studies allowed me to systematically gather feedback (or data)

from individual students. Lauer and Asher point out that case studies are rarely capable of

establishing cause and effect relationships between variables in the data (Lauer and Asher 23).

Case studies will, however, allow me to identify significant "new variables" in the study of style

so that I can go on to posit pedagogical suggestions for teaching style and raise "questions for

further research" (Lauer and Asher 23).

Subject Selection

As my subjects, I have chosen students from two sections of Composition I (ENGL 1013)

which I taught during the 2012 fall semester at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. Students

are placed in Composition I at the U of A based on their ACT English scores. According to the U

of A catalog of studies, students with an ACT score of 19-27 should enroll in Composition I. The

students in my two sections did not score high enough on the ACT to be placed in an Honors

Composition course, which requires an ACT English score of 28-29, but some students did score

below 19, qualifying them for concurrent enrollment in Composition I and a basic English course

(ENGL 0013) taught by another instructor. At the beginning of the semester, 36 students were

enrolled in my sections, but 2 students withdrew, leaving me with a total of 34 students who

completed the course. The students' ages ranged from 17-21, and there were no non-traditional

students. Of these 34 students, 22 were female and 12 were male. All 34 students spoke English

as their first language.

Hypotheses

Because style is rarely taught in secondary and post-secondary academic writing courses, I predict that many of my Composition students will struggle to define style and to critically analyze style in their work and that of others. Corbett notes this same tension between writing students and style in his essay "Teaching Style." Corbett, however, does not conduct empirical research to verify his hypothesis. Data collected for case studies will help flesh-out both Corbett's casual observations and my formal findings.[1]

Data Collection

I designed my 2012 fall syllabus with my study in mind, incorporating course assignments that would also serve as a means for data collection. My students were required to complete four academic essays (summary-critique, explanatory synthesis, argumentative synthesis, and a researched term paper), ten literacy log entries, and a definition of their personal writing style. I designed literacy log prompts as informal writing exercises that encouraged students to critically evaluate academic writing style as well as their own writing style and that of published academic scholars. Literacy log prompts fit into one of three categories: reflection, imitation, and critical evaluation. The definition of personal style assignment was informal and simply asked students to briefly describe their writing styles. Personal interviews were the only data I collected that were not required course assignments.[2] Based on the data I collected from course assignments completed by these 34 students, I chose 10 students to participate in personal interviews with me during the last full week of the semester, December 3-7. The interviews lasted between 10-20 minutes and were conducted in a vacant conference room on campus. I

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[1] For more on students' acquiring academic writing style in order to reach an academic audience, see David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University: A Composition Teacher's Perspective."
[2] Literacy log prompts and case study interview questions can be found in Appendix I and II.

asked each student a set of pre-meditated questions but also asked unscripted follow-up questions when a student's response was particularly interesting or unclear. I recorded each interview with sound recorder software installed on my personal computer. The ten students who participated in personal interviews displayed a particular interest in learning and discussing style. Their previous writing experiences varied, with some students reporting prior exposure to the explicit teaching of style in contrast with some students who reported no prior exposure to the explicit teaching of style. The grade range of the nine students I chose for personal interviews also varied, with three students receiving an "A" for the course, five receiving a "B", and two receiving a "C." Choosing students whose previous exposures to style varied and whose final grades represented three levels of performance ensured that I collected data that was not skewed toward one kind of student writer.

My project is comprised of three chapters. Chapter one is a literature review of prior scholarship on style. In chapter one, I will examine the debate over definitions of style and best pedagogical practices for teaching style. My literature review reveals a crucial gap in existing scholarship on style: student voices. In order to work within a manageable swath of history, my literature review will cover the past thirty years in style scholarship. I will use the scholarship in my literature review as a reference point for my students' use of expressivist, prescriptivist, or hybrid discourse conventions.

The two remaining chapters include four case studies in which I examine the data I collected from four students. Chapters two and three will focus on two students and will be organized thematically. Chapter two will focus on two students, Sam and Norah, who reported differing degrees of comfort with writing and the concept of style. My examination of the data I collected from these two students will focus on four variables: their previous writing

experiences, their familiarity with definitions of style, their comfort with academic discourse conventions, and their ability to negotiate those conventions. Chapter three will focus on two students, Lillian and Ava, who reported differing attitudes about writing but similar attitudes regarding conventions of academic writing. My examination of the data I collected from these two students focuses on two variables: their reflections of their personal writing style and how their style evolved over the course of the semester. I will end my project with a brief conclusion which draws connections based on the variables I identified in the data I collected from the four students featured in the case studies.

As proven by the literature review in chapter one, style as a concept is difficult to define; therefore, I am using my own definition of style to guide my discussion of the data presented in the four case studies. I define style as the global and local choices writers make in terms of organization[3], diction, syntax, tone, and even punctuation so that they may convey a message, attitude, or argument to an intended audience. I realize that this definition of style is not all encompassing and does not reference "voice." I argue that writers achieve a "voice" through the stylistic choices they make. There are certainly other elements of style that could be included in my definition, but the elements I have mentioned came up most frequently in discussions with

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[3] Organization is not typically included in the list of stylistic choices writers can make. I am arguing, however, that organization, especially organization of argument, is culturally constructed and can be a cue for a writer's other stylistic choices. For example, American academic writing values a linear progression of argument, and this is often exhibited in the five-paragraph theme. According to the five paragraph model, writers should include a three point thesis statement at the end of their introduction, expand on their points of argument in three body paragraphs, and conclude, not by offering readers new information, but by restating and summarizing the main points presented in the body paragraphs. If writers choose the five paragraph essay as their model, they will likely make stylistic choices in accordance with the genre's conventions. Other cultures may value an inverted organization of argument, including the main argument at the end of the essay rather than in the introduction. I am including organization in my definition of style because choices in organization often influence stylistic choices like diction and syntax. (i.e. a writer chooses the five paragraph genre, so they will most likely write using formal language and author-evacuated prose or the third person.)

my students. Throughout my project, I also refer frequently to traditional academic writing and to traditional academic discourse conventions. I am using the arguments presented by Patricia Bizzell in her essay "Hybrid Academic Discourses: What, Why, How" to define traditional academic writing and discourse conventions. According to Bizzell, traditional academic discourse conventions call for writers to use "a form of language called 'grapholect'" which is "too elaborate to be spoken" (10). Traditional academic discourse conventions also ask the writer to be objective, argumentative and skeptical, to form precise definitions, and to produce writing that is shaped by genre conventions (10). These genre conventions, as Bizzell notes, often manifest themselves in the "structure" a writer follows and in a writer's use of the "ultra-correct form" of his or her "native language" (10).

I hope my project can accomplish two goals. I want to encourage Composition instructors to reconfigure style as a central concept in writing studies, and I also want student voices to play a larger role in the ways we examine and implement pedagogies and their implicit theories of style. These goals only seem logical for instructors like me who simply wish to help their students become better writers.

Chapter One: Entering the Conversation

To echo Louis Milic, there is a problem with style. And perhaps there isn't a problem with style so much as there is a problem with how to define and teach style in the first-year Composition classroom. Composition instructors are generally offered two formal pedagogical schools for teaching style: current-traditional rhetoric and expressivism. Instructors can teach style as a form of correctness, using grammar calisthenics and prescriptivism. Or they can encourage students to explore a more organic form of writing, emphasizing voice and process. Evidence from scholarship doesn't suggest that either of these approaches by themselves is particularly effective. Current-traditional or prescriptivist approaches to teaching style tend to restrict students to a list of do's and don'ts while expressivist or organic approaches can be bewildering for those students who need concrete models for writing. In order for contemporary Composition instructors to fully engage in and contribute to ongoing debates about style, we must have a clear understanding of the two pedagogical schools that continue to inform our definitions and theories of style. In the following sections, I will provide an historical overview of current-traditional and expressivist pedagogy and subsequently examine and synthesize differing definitions of style that roughly span the past thirty to forty years. As I work through these definitions, I will then attempt to place scholars somewhere along the ever evolving style continuum which ranges from the current-traditional to the expressivist school.

Current-traditional rhetoric dominated Composition instruction and textbooks both before and after the 1960s and 1970s, but after the Vietnam War, many Composition instructors began to question current-traditional methods and thus expressivism was born. In his essay "Process Pedagogy," Lad Tobin notes the tension between pedagogies that defined Composition in the 1980s. As I do, Tobin argues that Composition instructors generally pledge their allegiance to

one of these two camps by either professing that voice and organic approaches to writing produce authentic work or that students and instructors must "resist [the] attack on" the current-traditional model and adhere to "rules, conventions, standards, quality, and rigor" (4). During the 1980s, scholars offered criticisms of both schools, and those criticisms tended to be quite political. Those opposing the current-traditional method argued that it marginalized minority groups within the university by promoting "middle-class values…cultural homogeneity…and gate-keeping" (Burnham 23) while those opposing the expressivist movement accused the school of being anti-theoretical and too self-reflexive (Burnham 29). Examining scholarship by Composition theorists from both schools will further illuminate the ongoing debate surrounding style pedagogy.

The current-traditional model, as defined by James Berlin in his 1982 essay "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," stems from positivist approaches to rhetoric. Berlin attributes current-traditional's popularity to the era's tendency to promote "the positivist position of modern science" (777). According to Berlin, the current-traditional or positivist model asks students to engage in a kind of rhetoric that requires "developing skill in arrangement and style" and therefore produces writing that is tailored to discourse conventions (770). Current-traditional pedagogy promotes a linear way of thinking about rhetoric, and students ultimately achieve success in rhetorical situations when they follow a concrete model of sorts, when they adhere to an agreed upon set of conventions. Berlin makes the relationship between current-traditional rhetoric and expressivism explicit, arguing that expressivist pedagogy developed in response to the current-traditional model (Berlin 771). Expressivism seems to exist, according to Berlin's historical delineation, as current-traditional rhetoric's polar opposite, as a "reaction" to current-traditional rhetoric's rigidity (771). Unlike

current-traditional pedagogy which asks students to adhere to a set of conventions, expressivism "is often disruptive, requiring the abandonment of long held conventions and opinions" (Berlin 771). According to Berlin, expressivism "emphasizes writing as a 'personal' activity, as an expression of one's unique voice" (772). The expressivists argue, among other things, that conventions severely restrict a writer's pursuit of truth and what the writer ultimately produces on paper (Berlin 773).

Maxine Hairston is more critical of the current-traditional model than Berlin, whose main goal is to classify popular pedagogies and trace their historical roots. Hairston's "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing" was published in 1982, the same year as Berlin's "Major Pedagogical Theories." Hairston advocates for a paradigm shift in Composition studies or a move away from current-traditional rhetoric and towards a more process-centered pedagogy. Some of Hairston's salient arguments are political and speak to the inferiority complex that plagued Composition studies in the early 1980s. Because Composition has established itself as a discipline, those arguments are no longer as important as the questions Hairston raises at the end of her essay. Hairston argues that current-traditional rhetoric can most often be defined by its penchant for correctness and "orderliness," its emphasis of product over process, and its mantra that "teaching editing is teaching writing" (78). She asks a simple but poignant question regarding current-traditional methods: "What is the basic flaw in the traditional paradigm for teaching writing? Why doesn't it work?" (82). Hairston's questions eerily echo the ones I have raised thirty years later. I offer up an unoriginal answer to her question: the current-traditional model does not work because its definition of style is too narrow, forcing instructors and students to focus on only part of the composing process or the composed product. Hairston makes several allusions to the current-traditional model's

overemphasis on style, but she never states exactly how current-traditional rhetoric defines style. It's safe to assume, however, that Hairston defines current-traditional rhetoric in the same way that Christopher Burnham does in his essay "Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice." According to Burnham, style in the current-traditional model requires students to produce "academic writing in standard forms and [use] 'correct' grammar" (22). Although Hairston's main focus is on examining current-traditional rhetoric, she briefly turns her attention to expressivism, a pedagogy that she believes may have been responsible for a paradigm shift had it not been for the school's "*ad hoc* measures" to try to reverse the damage done by current-traditional rhetoric (82).

Peter Elbow, one of expressivism's pioneering scholars, laments the effects of current-traditional pedagogy on his own writing in his seminal text *Writing without Teachers*. The current-traditional methods of "care, control, planning, order, steering, trying to get it right, [and] trying to get it good" were so oppressive for Elbow that his attempts to follow these methods eventually "ruined" his time at Oxford and Harvard (xvii). Ultimately, Elbow left the Ivy League to join the minors, founding Franconia College along with four other colleagues. According to Elbow, instructing at Franconia provided him with the opportunity to experiment outside of the current-traditional model, and he subsequently developed pedagogical theories that would ground the expressivist school. Elbow argues that expressivist theory allows students control over their own writing process and written product. Much of expressivist theory diminishes the role of teachers, and Elbow even states that teachers are dependent on their students, but students do not, in fact, need a teacher in order to learn how to write (xviii).

Burnham more formally maps out the expressivist student-teacher dynamic in "Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory. Theory/Practice." Referencing Berlin's "Major

Pedagogical Theories," Burnham explains that within the expressivist school, the writer is placed in the middle of the rhetorical triangle, the place of greatest importance, while the audience, message, and language are secondary (Burnham 19). Countering Elbow's definition of the writing process within current-traditional rhetoric, Burnham explains that expressivist pedagogy requires students to engage in "freewriting, journal keeping, reflective writing, and small group dialogic collaborative response" (19). Unlike current-traditional rhetoric which asks students to adhere to a set of discourse conventions, expressivism is more concerned with a writer's ability to grow aesthetically, cognitively, and morally (Burnham 19).

Out of current-traditional rhetoric and expressivism sprang differing definitions of style, and instructors must familiarize themselves with the most popular definitions before they can create their own theory of style. This sounds like a fairly easy task, but prior research on style proves otherwise. Even after examining theories and definitions of style from scholars like Milic, Virginia Tufte, Francis Christensen, Elizabeth Rankin, and Edward Corbett, a concrete definition is difficult to come by. "Style" is a dubious term, and it's best to acknowledge this before delving into the breadth of scholarship that attempts to define style and posit pedagogical suggestions for teaching it. When it comes to style, sometimes the best definitions are contextual.

Milic begins his brief 1965 article "Theories of Style and Their Implication for the Teaching of Composition" with the declaration that "in the teaching of English, the term *style* comes up far too often" (Milic 66). Milic made these arguments about style in 1965, but they are still applicable to the contemporary Composition classroom. Scholarship on style hasn't waned since Milic published his article. It's quite the opposite, in fact. But I do agree with Milic. The term "style" does surface too often, not in the sense that it is an outdated or worn term, but in the sense that "style" can mean just about anything because Composition scholars and instructors

use the term to refer to just about any aspect of writing. "Style" is sometimes thrown around flippantly, with no regard to definition or theory. For many instructors and students alike, style is simply the way a writers transfers words to a page, the way a piece of writing feels or sounds, the impressions a piece of writing leaves on the reader. While those definitions of style aren't necessarily incorrect, they aren't very nuanced. Milic goes on to offer a clever but damning metaphor, comparing the writing instructor to "an old-fashioned doctor" (Milic 66). According to Milic, writing instructors rarely have a well-defined theory of style and, therefore, they proceed to teach writing like unrefined surgeons, "tinker[ing] with [their] patients' organs, using surgery, bleeding, and drugs haphazardly and without reference to a general theory of health or illness" (Milic 66). Milic argues that writing instructors at the college level often have to rely on what Stephen North would call practitioner knowledge (Milic 66). Theories of style are learned intuitively and passed from instructor to instructor. Unlike North, who discredits many aspects of practitioner knowledge in *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portraits of an Emerging Field*, Milic doesn't condemn practitioner knowledge. He does admit that this kind of knowledge making produces theories that aren't uniform and "have a rather unscientific and disorderly appearance" (Milic 66). So goes definitions and theories of style. Milic also asserts that the writing ideologies students bring with them into first-year Composition courses make it difficult for instructors to fully develop a theory of style. A teacher may espouse a theory of style and attempt to apply its pedagogy in the classroom, but that particular theory and pedagogy may not be responsible for a student's improvement. For Milic, "the obstacles interposed by the teacher" do not hinder a student from learning because "it is in [a student's] nature to learn" (Milic 66).

This view of the student-teacher dynamic would seem to suggest that Milic aligns with expressivist pedagogy, and while Milic does not dismiss the expressivist approach outright, he

does note its weaknesses as he outlines what he calls the "only three real theories of style" (67). Milic's arguments suggest that there is no easy or tangible solution for helping instructors develop theories and pedagogies of style, and instead of pointing to one definition of style as being the most accurate or to one theory of style as being the most effective, Milic outlines three categories of style that each espouse its own definition: ornate form or rhetorical dualism, individualist or psychological monism, and Crocean aesthetic monism (67). Ornate form or rhetorical dualism calls for writers to manipulate style for various purposes and audiences, an approach to writing that is closely related to the convention-governed writing valued by the current-traditional model. Writers using the ornate form or style recognize that "ideas exist wordlessly and can be dressed in a variety of outfits, depending on the need for the occasion" (Milic 67). Individualist or psychological monism is most easily described by the popular phrase "style is the man." Milic suggests that this category of style most likely stems from Plato's and Montaignes's theories about style. Milic brings these theories "wholly up-to-date" by explaining that psychological monism argues that style exists inherently within a writer and that "a writer cannot help writing the way he does" (Milic 67). Milic finally examines Crocean aesthetic monism, a theory of style that "denies the possibility of any separation between content and form" (Milic 67). While Milic includes Crocean aesthetic monism in his three categories of "real" style, abolishing theories of style is at the heart of Crocean aesthetic monism. Because those who espouse Crocean aesthetic monism believe writing occurs organically, discussions of style are "useless and irrelevant" (Milic 67). Of the three categories, this approach most clearly aligns with expressivism. According to Milic, this theory of style is so organic that "there is no style at all, only meaning and intuition" (Milic 67). Crocean aesthetic monism has made style so

subjective that it has left instructors with "nothing to do," so much so they don't even need to argue that style is a dubious term.

Milic goes on to cry crisis over Composition as a field and over the quality of student writing, and for Milic, the lack of clearly defined pedagogies of style is to blame. In order for students to improve their writing, instructors must choose one of the three categories Milic outlines. And according to Milic, simply aligning with a theory of style isn't enough. An instructor "must be prepared to accept –even to hail enthusiastically –its inevitable implications" (Milic 68). Even though Milic acknowledges that there are inevitable flaws surrounding the three categories of style, he does not promote mixing elements of these categories in order to create a more complete or effective theory and pedagogy. This kind of hodgepodge approach to style only creates confusion among students and instructors alike, and Milic points to handbooks published after the 1920s as proof. Milic's most salient argument for choosing one theory of style and one theory only is fairly simple: instructors cannot teach using a pedagogy that does not align with their theory of style.

Milic ends his article with a clear call to action: "return to some form of rhetoric" (126). This obviously places Milic in the rhetorical dualism category which emphasizes form over content and puts him greatly at odds with "the monistic view of style" (126). Rhetorical dualism, according to Milic, benefits first-year writing students because they have not yet had the time or the opportunity to explore rhetoric and develop a "maturing…literary personality" (Milic 126). Milic's final pronouncement leaves him hovering in the middle of the style continuum. He values rhetorical dualism, a close relative of current-traditional rhetoric, in the first-year Composition classroom because it is governed by discourse conventions and can provide models for student writers to follow. He does not, however, completely dismiss Crocean aesthetic

monism, an approach closely aligned with expressivism. Milic suggests that the Crocean approach is valuable, but in due time, when writers have mastered "the basics" and are more ready and equipped to strike out on their own.

While Milic examines three categories of style, Virginia Tufte and Francis Christensen seek to define style in relation to grammar and more specifically, in relation to the sentence. In her introduction to *Grammar as Style*, Tufte argues that there is more than just a relationship between grammar and style. According to Tufte, "grammar and style can be thought of in some way as a single subject" (155). In order for student writers to strengthen their prose, they must use grammar as a form of style rather than simply view grammar as a set of prescriptivist rules. Tuft goes on to define grammar, a term she uses to refer to syntax. Because syntax encompasses many aspects of grammar, it is only through syntax that writers can "know grammar as style" (Tufte 156). In other words, looking at elements of grammar in isolation is not as beneficial to writers as looking at syntax, the way "words are hooked together and made to work as a unit" (Tufte 156).

Tufte attempts to connect her definition of style to the pedagogies and definitions espoused by the ornate and the organic school, but she ultimately concedes that her definition does not neatly fit into either category. For Tufte, as for Milic, the ornate school is closely related to current-traditional rhetoric and the organic espouses most of the major tenets of expressivism. Tufte offers a call to action similar to Milic's when she asserts that critics and writing instructors must recognize the need to align themselves with one side of the debate surrounding style. Unlike Milic, however, Tufte does not suggest that scholars and instructors choose either the ornate or the organic school. Instead, Tufte argues for a theory and definition of style that lies somewhere between these two camps, somewhere a bit more moderate. Tufte goes on to defend

her approach, completely dismissing the ornate school's ability to accept her definition of style as syntax. Tufte's definition of style is not acceptable within the ornate school because ornate theory views grammar as meaning and views style, what Tufte would call syntax, as adornment. Tufte is less dismissive of organic theories and definitions of style because the organic view, unlike the ornate school, affords grammar, at the very least, "a rudimentary role" (Tufte 158). "A more complete marriage of grammar and style" is clearly what Tufte is after, however, so she goes on to refute grammar's place within the organic theory of style. The organic school's theory of style is flawed in that it does not allow room for students to "[try] to write better sentences" nor is the organic theory pragmatic for instructors who are teaching students to write more nuanced sentences (Tufte 159). Like Milic, Tufte acknowledges the value of the organic school but ultimately argues that more concrete goals would better benefit beginning writers.

For Tufte, no current definition of style is very satisfactory. She argues that existing definitions "leave much to be desired" because they are often "subjective, impressionistic, unhelpful, [and] sometimes misleading" (Tufte 156). Tufte goes on to briefly examine the history of prose style categories, citing various popular adjectives like ornate, plain, and stuffy that have been used to define style. According to Tufte, no matter how applicable these adjectives may seem, they pose a serious problem for those searching for a concrete definition of style. Rather than clearly define what style is and even what it is not, these adjectives merely provide "impressions summoned up by the very idea of style" (Tufte 157). Tufte argues that defining style in terms of syntactic choices will cure problems created by definitions that rely on figurative language.

Tufte's definition and theory of style is clearly informed by Christensen's 1963 essay "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence." Both Christensen and Tufte argue that focus on the

sentence will help students move toward a more mature writing style and subsequently lead to a greater appreciation of literary works (Christensen 152). Christensen, like Tufte, believes that the sentence, and specifically the way a sentence is arranged, its syntax, conveys meaning, so Composition instructors should teach the sentence as a way to "*generate* ideas" (147). A mature writing style requires students to create cumulative sentences, to become "sentence acrobats, to dazzle by their syntactic dexterity" (Christensen 152). Christensen's preoccupation with the sentence does not mean that he is primarily concerned with grammatical correctness. In fact, he cautions against teaching style as prescriptivism, saying that only "when the sentences begin to come out right" should instructors and students begin to examine "their grammatical character" (151).

Christensen does not explicitly examine style in terms of current-traditional or expressivist pedagogy, but he does vehemently oppose tenets related to the current-traditional model like emphasis on expository writing and the "limitation to the plain style" (152). Christensen concludes his essay with an anecdote from Croll which Christensen calls a "seven-point scale [that] any teacher of Composition can use" to gauge where they fall on the style continuum. Croll's list lambasts current-traditional tenets, but Christensen does not personally place himself in any particular camp. I am inclined to place Christensen somewhere between current-traditional rhetoric and expressivism. He obviously endorses writing exercises, but they are much more structured than the freewriting advocated by expressivists, and although he does take grammar into consideration, he does not believe teaching grammar as a prescribed set of rules will help students develop a more mature writing style.

In contrast to Milic, who believes the term "style" surfaces too often in Composition studies, Paul Butler and Elizabeth Rankin argue that "style is out of style" in the Composition

classroom (Rankin 239). Butler examines style's disappearance in the Composition classroom in

his introduction to *Style in Rhetoric and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook* and argues that

style now has pejorative connotations due in part to current-traditional rhetoric's emphasis on

sentence-level issues. Thus, a preoccupation with correctness at the sentence-level has created a

hesitance among contemporary Composition instructors to explicitly address style because they

don't want to be labeled as prescriptivists. Expressivism could also be to blame for style's falling

out of favor in Composition curriculum. The expressivist movement made style so subjective

that it now seems impossible to teach. Style isn't rules-based, so it's hard to teach and hard to

evaluate. Style's subjective nature has pushed it further and further down the agenda in

Composition classrooms. Unfortunately, many new Composition instructors (and perhaps

veterans, too) only reserve brief units for teaching style. Better to teach a few elements of style in

one class period than try to handle such a hairy principle all semester long. It seems that the two

disparate schools of current-traditional rhetoric and expressivism have created a dilemma:

instructors fear teaching style, students fear taking writings risks, so style is sequestered to a

corner in the Composition classroom.

Like Butler, Rankin points to the current-traditional rhetoric as being largely responsible

for style's disappearance within Composition pedagogy. Rankin acknowledges the argument

from critics, that "for too long…style dominated our pedagogy" (Rankin 239). She agrees that an

emphasis on style did indeed push other pedagogical issues to the side. But, for Rankin, the field

of Composition has committed another glaring error in allowing style to fall out of pedagogical

favor. Composition scholars and instructors have now managed "an overcorrection of sorts"

(Rankin 239). As per usual for any scholar tackling the dubious concept of style, Rankin

concedes that she will need to spend some time trying to define style. After explaining that she

will begin her definition "with particular linguistic choices…diction, syntax, and tone," Rankin cautions against limiting definitions of style only to these elements. For Rankin, "the definition of [style] itself, if regarded narrowly, may very well be a factor in style's decline" (239).

Rankin does not provide any concrete definition of style before she explores the waning emphasis on style in the Composition classroom. Instead, Rankin moves on to the factors contributing to style's disappearance. Referencing Hairston, Young, Berlin, and Inkster, Rankin discusses what is often referred to as the paradigm shift in Composition studies. The paradigm shift marked a movement away from the current-traditional rhetoric to the New Rhetoric, a school largely inspired by Kenneth Burke and Chaim Perelman. Rankin argues that because style was over-emphasized in the current-traditional model, those espousing New Rhetoric pedagogy hesitate to allow style a prominent place in Composition curriculums. Rankin argues that the tension created by the old and new paradigms are actually unnecessary, but "the politics" of Composition and "the rush to fill the gap in research" on invention has greatly deemphasized style (240). Rankin readily admits that style "has a place within both branches of the New Rhetoric" as defined by Young, but unfortunately, "neither branch of the New Rhetoric, [the vitalist or technical][4], has offered…a sound, complete, and adequate theory of style" (Rankin 240). Rankin identifies another contributing factor to style's decline: the tendency for scholars in both the current-traditional rhetoric and the New Rhetoric to present style in opposition with other aspects of writing. Many critics have pitted style against invention and style against usage, further "damaging style's reputation" (Rankin 241). Berlin offers a similar argument regarding invention and style, saying that within Aristotelian rhetoric, "emphasis on invention leads to the neglect…on arrangement and style" (Berlin 768). Rankin then goes on to examine the debate

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[4] The first branch of the New Rhetoric assumes writers have a kind of innate creativity while the other assumes that writers must be taught some discrete skills.

surrounding the composing process and the effects this debate has had on the teaching of style. Rankin specifically cites the Flower-Hayes model of composing which ranks steps of the writing process in a "hierarchy" (Rankin 242). Flower and Hayes privilege elements of writing like "content, organization, or audience adaptation" over sentence-level elements of writing like word choice, punctuation, and grammar (Rankin 242). While, according to Rankin, this hierarchical structure isn't necessarily incorrect, its rhetoric, the words and phrases used to describe the levels of the composing process, works to further deemphasize the importance of style:

> When "narrow," "local," stylistic decisions occupy a "low-level" position in the "hierarchy," it's hard to see them as very important. Thus, though the Flower-Hayes model is broad and inclusive enough to account for stylistic decisions at all levels and stages in the writing process, the rhetoric of the model –like the rhetoric of competing paradigms –to some extent undermines the significance of style. (Rankin 243)

Rankin concludes her article with her most pressing concern, that Composition scholars have failed and continue to fail at pinning down a thorough definition of style, one that is not so narrow that it limits style to only one aspect of writing or defines style using restricting adjectives like "conventions" or "mechanics" (243). In her examination of Donald Murray and Nancy Sommer's essay "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery," Rankin conducts a rhetorical analysis of the definitions of style presented in the essay. Rankin notes a tendency to describe style using adjectives rooted in the current traditional model, creating what Rankin calls "the effect of guilt by association" (Rankin 243). For Rankin, definitions of style that employ language associated with the current-traditional model reinforce the pejorative connotations of style, and as a result, "very subtly, the pedagogy of style gets devalued" (243).

Naturally, Rankin's final move is to call for "a unified theory of style" (Rankin 244). In summation, Rankin offers three clear "criteria" for a more cohesive theory: "A new theory of

style would offer a broad yet workable definition of style…A new theory of style would take into account the wide range of psychological operations that go into the making of stylistic decisions…A new theory of style would be grounded in sound and consistent philosophical/epistemological assumptions about the nature of language and reality" (Rankin 247). Rankin argues that a theory of style developed using her criteria would create a more well-rounded pedagogy and a broader definition of style and pose questions raised by monistic and dualistic theories of style, providing writing instructors with more thorough and "provocative" questions to tackle. Ultimately, though, Rankin hopes to "[avoid] the negative rhetoric we hear in our discipline" so that "we may be able to bring style back into style" (Rankin 248).

Like Butler and Rankin, Edward Corbett examines the disappearance of style in Composition curriculums in his accessible and aptly named essay "Teaching Style." Corbett's arguments directly speak to many of my earlier points about the teaching of style, that contemporary Composition instructors and students are tasked with accomplishing too much, that style is buried in a flurry of academic essays and research, that teaching and learning style take time and practice, a luxury that Composition curriculums do not generally afford. Corbett laments the loss of style in the Composition classroom, observing that students often do not know what style is and that when they are exposed to style, the concept is usually couched in subjective and impressionistic terms. Style has not always been absent in the teaching of writing, though. Corbett points to Renaissance practices of teaching style and rhetoric, noting that "from the beginning to the end of the school day, [a student] was steeped in words" (Corbett 210). But, according to Corbett, requiring contemporary Composition students to engage in in-depth studies of style, "to recite…to parse…to translate…to paraphrase…to recognize, classify, and define the schemes and tropes in a passage" would likely result in "a general revolt" (Corbett 210). In

addition to a crowded curriculum, Corbett recognizes another obstacle in the teaching of style: a

student's insufficient grasp on grammar. The argument that students cannot engage in nuanced

discussions of style if they can't execute the basic concepts of grammar is a fairly popular one.

Corbett acknowledges the legitimacy of this concern, but ultimately dismisses it by asserting that

"many students can learn their grammar while studying style" (Corbett 211). For Corbett,

exercises in style can actually translate as play in a student's mind, allowing students to "at least

absorb grammar subconsciously" (Corbett 211).

Corbett goes on to posit two objectives for teaching style in the Composition classroom.

Similar to Milic, Corbett urges instructors to take a stance on style before they begin teaching it.

Corbett, however, does not advocate for instructors' aligning themselves with one school or

category of style, but rather asserts that instructors should clearly outline their "main objective

for the course at the outset" (211). When teaching style, instructors should have either or both of

two objectives: "[analyzing] someone else's style or [improving] our own" (Corbett 211).

Corbett emphasizes that instructors do not necessarily need to choose between these two goals.

They very well may find themselves addressing both issues. Regardless of which objective

instructors choose, they should clearly delineate the goals of that objective to students.

Unlike many critics of style, Corbett doesn't attempt to define style. Instead, he offers

pedagogical solutions for teaching style to student writers. The explicit teaching of schemes and

tropes, concepts like anaphora and chiasmus, are a priority for Corbett. For more advanced

writers, Corbett encourages methodical analysis of prose pieces that are preferably between

1,000-1,500 words. Corbett argues that students can benefit from collecting raw statistical data

on the stylistic choices writers make, choices ranging from paragraphing to the kinds of schemes

and tropes the writer uses. Corbett readily admits that beginning writers may not be ready for this

kind of stylistic analysis, but he argues that this should not deter teachers from encouraging students to engage in even "inadequate interpretations" of prose style. How teachers should go about amending these exercises in stylistic analysis for beginning writers, Corbett doesn't say.

Corbett concludes his essay by emphasizing the importance of teaching stylistic analysis, urging instructors to not only attend to "students' analytical skills" but also make their "syntheticical skills…our main concern" (Corbett 216). After suggesting that instructors use a few of his exercises as a springboard for teaching style, Corbett again acknowledges the crowded Composition curriculum. He offers a caveat for the already burdened writing instructor: "…even if your students are not ready to engage in stylistic studies, you can [and should] do so yourself" (Corbett 217).

Current-traditional rhetoric and expressivism both have marked weaknesses and have fallen out of favor in the Composition classroom. Rather than search for a different or more moderate pedagogical method for teaching style, many Composition instructors have abandoned the explicit teaching of style all together. If Composition instructors are to teach students to write effective prose rather than simply tell them or expect them to, we must redeem style in the Composition classroom. Just like every Composition instructor should have a philosophy of teaching, every Composition instructor should also have a philosophy of style. Fostering stylistic awareness in ourselves and in our students will help our students begin to think critically about the ways they write, why they write, and empower them to navigate writing and rhetorical situations both inside and outside of the academic discourse community. We must actively and consistently engage in conversations about style throughout the semester, ask our students to dig into texts about style, and reserve time for our students to play, to familiarize themselves with the elements of style and experiment with how to use them effectively.

Disparate theories and pedagogical approaches have illuminated the complexities of style and, in the process, managed to make style a dubious concept, one that's tough to define and tough to teach. For those in the expressivist camp, style is natural, inherent in the writer, and simply needs to be awakened. For formalists, style is rules. It's style's subjectivity that deters many instructors from teaching it and the prescriptive elements of style that make students reluctant to explore it. First-year composition's purpose within the university is also partly to blame for the waning emphasis on style in first-year writing courses. First-year Composition ideally prepares students to write across the disciplines, so a Composition instructor spends the majority of her time teaching critical thinking skills, research methods, and the conventions of academic discourse with the hope that her students will transfer that knowledge to other fields. Because the focus in first-year Composition is on conducting research and completing several academic essays, there is very little room and very little time for students to explore the elements of style and to actively engage with them.

The magnitude of scholarship and argument on theories and pedagogies of style is staggering, and these four critics certainly do not speak to all there is to ponder and know about that dubious concept we call "style." What Milic, Tufte, Rankin, and Corbett do speak to, however, is the contentious relationship between style and pedagogy. If Composition instructors are ultimately tasked with teaching our students to write better, then surely there must be one pedagogy of style we can all lean on, follow, and amend. As it stands, however, there is not. The two most common pedagogical models, formalism and expressivism, have proven ineffective in many ways. Perhaps the next step for instructors teaching in the post-process classroom is to draw connections between seemingly disparate theories and pedagogies, to do exactly what Milic rails against, to create an amalgamation of sorts. Instructors' attempts to align themselves with

one theory and pedagogy of style over another have likely done just as much to sully style's reputation as formalism's rigidity and expressivism's capriciousness. Our students' views of writing rarely exist in dichotomies, so why should our pedagogies?

One looming gap in the existing scholarship on style is particularly troublesome. Where are our students' opinions about style, about how to define it and how to better learn it? If our pedagogies implicitly suggest that our students can meta-cognitively think about their writing, why couldn't they reflect on style in the same way? And why couldn't we use student responses to theories and pedagogies of style to inform the way we approach style in our classrooms? Making the teaching of style a more collaborative effort, one that considers voices from scholars, instructors, *and* students, seems like the most effective way to reach a slightly more unified consensus on what style is and how it could better be taught.

T.R. Johnson makes strides toward incorporating student voices into the debate on style in his essay "Ancient and Contemporary Compositions That 'Come Alive': Clarity as Pleasure, Sound as Magic" by weaving student feedback into the arguments he makes throughout the essay. Johnson argues that there is a dichotomy in Composition that pits the individual writer against writing conventions, but that instructors can help create a balance between this dichotomy by teaching students to live through stylistic devices.

Johnson readily admits that the pedagogy he "[proposes] is hardly any sort of holy grail," but his collaborative approach is certainly a step in the right direction (Johnson 344). More methodical empirical research needs to be conducted in order for Composition scholars and instructors to gain a truer sense of how our theories and pedagogies of style are directly affecting students and their academic writing. Adding student voices to the ongoing conversation is the

logical next step. After all, hasn't the desire to better our students' writing been the catalyst for the debate on style all along?

I have been unable to find any existing scholarship which uses case studies to examine theories and pedagogies of teaching style within the academic discourse community. This makes my project particularly relevant to the reawakened interest in style within the field of composition. T.R. Johnson's informal incorporation of student feedback has been the closest attempt to include student voices in the ongoing conversation about style that I have found. In "Ancient and Contemporary Compositions that 'Come Alive': Clarity as Pleasure, Sound as Magic," Johnson weaves student feedback into his salient arguments, but he does not present formal case studies of the students he names and includes in his essay. Johnson commendably includes a section in his essay titled "But How Do You Teach This Stuff" that is particularly useful for instructors who wish to explicitly teach style in academic writing courses. In this section, Johnson identifies assignments and exercises for teaching style that have been useful for him. Within the assignment descriptions, Johnson includes student feedback, often incorporating direct quotes from his students. This collaborative approach is encouraging for someone like me who wants to hear more student voices join the conversation. The downfall of Johnson's approach, however, is that it does not provide adequate critical analysis of student feedback. The most in-depth analysis of student feedback that Johnson includes comes after a direct quote from a student named Elizabeth: "I've changed. These [stylistic] devices force me to actually think about what I'm saying, rather than just putting down whatever" (Johnson 358). Johnson goes on to simply posit a cause for Elizabeth's response: "What I think is happening in Elizabeth's case and in the case of many of my students, is that making use of these stylistic devices leads them to write with a greater degree of inward reflection, a heightened interaction with what Sondra Perl

calls 'the felt sense'" (358). The comments from Johnson's students are provocative, but without more systematic data collection, other teacher-researchers will find it difficult to replicate Johnson's approach to collecting this feedback.

In the midst of the battles between prescriptivist and expressivist discourse conventions is something more moderate, something that may help our students more fully understand the academic discourse community and better navigate the writing situations they find themselves in. In her 1999 essay "Hybrid Academic Discourses: What, Why, How," Bizzell notes that until the 1970s, much of academic discourse reflected the social and communicative values of those in positions of power within the university. Bizzell underscores the homogeneity of the university during this time, saying that more than likely, individuals holding the reigns of language and, by extension, power in academia were most likely to be white males. But the demographics of the university have changed and continue to change, and along with these changes in the makeup of race, ethnicity, and gender come changes in the way language is used in the academic discourse community. These arguments are compelling, but what interests me is that Bizzell wrote her essay fifteen years ago, and the conventions of academic discourse have not changed all that much. Bizzell argues for a hybridization of academic discourse, one that asks students to critically evaluate how they use language in academic writing and how that language does or does not challenge traditional discourse conventions. On her list of hybrid discourse traits is the use of personal anecdotes, cultural references, vernacular, and an indirect approach to argument. Interestingly, Bizzell is not an expressivist. She does not give much credence to the idea of the personal writing "voice" nor does she suggest that instructors should encourage students to search for their own "unique, 'authentic voice'" (20). What she does do is encourage instructors

and students to actively engage in discussions of hybrid academic discourses so that they are aware of the stylistic options available to them.

While I strongly agree with Bizzell's advocating for the teaching of hybrid academic discourse, and by extension style, in Composition classrooms, I am concerned about the perceived function of Composition courses within the larger university system. The argument that Composition courses should exist to prepare students to write across the disciplines is idyllic at best and at worst, detrimental to the teaching of style. If students do indeed take Composition courses for the sole purpose of preparing to write in fields other than Composition, then the focus in Composition curriculums is pulled away from studying writing and experimenting with style. Instead, Composition courses become one-dimensional, existing not to teach students to become more familiar with the options they have as writers but to teach students how to write using only traditional conventions of the academic discourse community. This means that students will spend their time learning the conventions of traditional academic writing: how to research and how to argue. Unfortunately, students will not be given the opportunity to truly study writing as a subject, and they may find themselves at a disadvantage when they aren't writing in the academic discourse community. The majority of university students will secure careers outside of the academy, so they should be prepared to write in a variety of rhetorical situations. Making style a central concept in Composition curriculums would better prepare students for the writing situations they will find themselves in after they graduate.

Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle, although indirectly, speak to my concerns about style and the function of Composition courses within the larger university system. Their case study "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as a 'Introduction to Writing Studies,'" which examines two pilot Composition

courses that focus on students' "understanding of writing, rhetoric, and literacy," has been flesh-out into a new textbook published in 2011, *Writing about Writing: A College Reader* (Downs and Wardle 552). Like Bizzell, Downs and Wardle call into question the "existence of a 'universal educated discourse'" (552). Defining academic discourse, according to Downs and Wardle, is just as difficult as defining style, and because no concrete definition of academic discourse exists, Composition instructors "are thus forced to define academic discourse for themselves (usually unconsciously) before they can teach it" (556). If instructors have difficulty defining academic discourse and deciding exactly what kind of academic discourse to teach, then how can we ask students to learn a one-dimensional kind of academic writing in our classes? Again, the explicit teaching of style, the nuanced discussions and exercises on how to say things differently, would help alleviate the stress on instructors to teach *the* academic discourse and by extension allow students to write more confidently and freely. That's not to say that some conventions of the academic discourse community shouldn't be taught. They absolutely should. To echo one of my students, writers need to be able to spell and use grammar correctly, otherwise the meaning or purpose of a text will be lost. Teaching various kinds of style, however, calls into question the argument implicit within pedagogies like current-traditional rhetoric, the argument that in academic writing there is only one proper way to say something, only one kind of language to use.

Downs and Wardle make another poignant observation that supports my argument for the explicit teaching of style. As I stated earlier, because Composition courses are generally believed to prepare students to write across the disciplines, there exists an "assumption that writing instruction easily transfers to other writing situations" (Downs and Wardle 556). Downs and Wardle resist this idea, calling it a "deeply ingrained assumption with little empirical

verification" (556). Rather than teach our students that the traditional writing instruction they receive in Composition will undoubtedly benefit them in other courses and other disciplines, we should provide our students with options in their writing style. Familiarizing our students with definitions of style and encouraging them to evaluate their own style and that of others will do just that, give them options. If Downs and Wardle are correct in their arguments about transfer, and I believe they are, then why should we continue to teach only one kind of writing style? Students should be familiar with their own writing style and that of the academy so they are better prepared to navigate other writing and rhetorical situations outside of the Composition classroom.

Chapter Two: Sam and Norah

Bizzell's argument that the demographics of the university are changing is accurate (11). Over the past three decades, enrollment of women and students from social minority groups has greatly increased, and the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville has proved to be no exception. According to the U of A's Enrollment Services website, 100 nations are represented among the 24, 500 students currently enrolled. Along with these changes in demographics come changes in the way language is used, and according to Bizzell, "traditional academic discourse" is now "sharing the field [of Composition] with new forms of discourse" (11). The changes in written academic discourse conventions, however, are most likely to be noted by those who have already gained entry into the academic discourse community: teaching faculty and researchers. Along with the likelihood of academics' recognizing changing discourse conventions is their likelihood to demonstrate these changes in published scholarly works. Scholars like Carmen Kynard, José Limón, and Victor Villanueva have recently published works in which they incorporate dialect or vernacular or code-switching or code-meshing.[5] Students, on the other hand, are much less likely to take these kinds of risks in their academic writing. After all, they are keenly aware that their writing will be evaluated by their instructor, and taking writing risks may mean sacrificing a high grade. Thus, many students, particularly freshmen and sophomores, still cling to many of the conventions of traditional academic discourse. They craft essays and other written works in accordance with older and often outdated writing rules because they have either been rewarded for this practice or punished for failing to adhere to conventions.

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[5] In her essay "I Want to Be African": In Search of a Black Radical Tradition/African-American-Vernacularized Paradigm for "Students' Right to Their Own Language," Critical Literacy, and"Class Politics"Author(s), Carmen Kynard incorporates African-American vernacular while José Limón, and Victor Villanueva weave both English and Spanish into their sentences in their respective works *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* and *Boostraps: From an Academic of Color*.

In collecting data for my project, I was continually confronted with my students' desires to negotiate the conventions of academic writing style coupled with their fears of breaking the rules. My students' tendency to rely on the rules of writing like "don't split an infinitive" or "don't begin a sentence with a conjunction" illustrates just how important teaching style in the Composition classroom has become. Bizzell advocates for "creat[ing] conditions in which students are encouraged to experiment" with their personal writing style and incorporate that style into their academic writing (17). Students rarely have the opportunity to experiment, though, because style has virtually disappeared from Composition curriculums. Instead of being introduced to stylistic possibilities, students are generally offered a list of do's and don'ts of academic writing and told to write accordingly. There is very little room for them to critically evaluate their own academic writing style and subsequently evaluate many of the traditional conventions that govern academic writing. If, as Bizzell points out, the demographics of the academy have changed, then shouldn't the traditional conventions of the academic discourse community be called into question as well? In the following case studies, I will focus on two students' previous writing experiences, their familiarity with definitions of style, their comfort with academic discourse conventions, and their ability to negotiate those conventions. I will use Bizzell's theories of hybrid academic discourse as a lens to examine the data I collected.

In the following case studies, I present and analyze data I collected from two students in my fall 2012 Composition I course at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. Sam, an eighteen year old African-American male, felt comfortable with his academic writing style which he described as "smooth and formal…with a natural feel to it." Sam's completed course assignments reflected this definition. In his writing, he often displayed characteristics of traditional academic writing: paragraphs of about five to seven sentences each, a clear thesis

statement that includes three main points, formal word choice, and a conclusion that restates the thesis. Sam earned an "A" as his final course grade, which according to Sam, reflected his performance in previous English classes. In his literacy logs, Sam often approved of academic writing style and noted that he would probably continue to adhere to traditional academic discourse conventions.

In contrast to Sam, Norah, a nineteen year old Caucasian female, was openly apprehensive about academic writing throughout the semester. Norah was often anxious about the evaluative aspects of writing essays for class, and knowing her writing would be graded often prevented her from experimenting with various stylistic choices that would require her to break some of the writing rules she had previously been taught. Norah defined her style as "formulaic and straight to the point with very little stylistic elements."

It would be easy to assume that a student earning an "A" in a college-level writing course would be comfortable with executing the requirements of traditional academic writing. I chose Sam and Norah as subjects for this chapter because they brought tension to this idea. Sam and Norah both earned an "A" in my course but expressed differing views regarding academic discourse and traditional academic writing style. While Sam readily embraced prescriptivist approaches to writing, Norah pushed against its conventions throughout the semester. Examining their case studies in conjunction with one another has helped me formulate pedagogical suggestions for teaching style that will benefit two camps of students: those who feel comfortable adhering to traditional academic discourse conventions and those who find them difficult to navigate. In the following sections, I will examine the data I collected from Sam and Norah as well as the relationships between the variables I identified in the data. I identified four variables that guide my synthesis of Sam and Norah's case studies: previous writing experiences,

familiarity with definitions of style, comfort with conventions of academic discourse, and ability and/or desire to negotiate those conventions.

Case Study 1: Sam

I immediately noticed Sam's self-motivation during the first week of the semester. A football player who hopes for a career in physical therapy or nutrition, Sam seemed to be naturally ambitious, not only in his athletic pursuits but in his academic endeavors as well. He was always early to class, took diligent notes during lecture, and although he was fairly quiet during class discussion, Sam provided insightful answers whenever I called on him directly. Sam's tendency to "play by the rules" so to speak, carried over into his academic writing. During individual student-instructor essay conferences when I asked Sam if he was enjoying the process of writing, he grinned, shaking his head no. Sam's relationship with writing seemed ambivalent. He did not particularly like writing, but he understood that if he met the expectations of academic writing, he would be rewarded with a satisfactory grade. In his response to the first literacy log prompt, in which I asked students to provide a candid account of their previous writing experiences, Sam was straightforward in his response. Sam readily recognized the evaluative aspects of his writing experiences in high school saying, "I didn't enjoy the process of writing the paper but I was happy with the final product. Throughout high school and middle school, I've gotten A's and B's on all of my papers so I also see them as a positive experience" (Literacy Log 1). For Sam, these grades indicated he was a strong writer, and they made him confident in his ability to perform well in my class.

While Sam's approach to previous writing assignments produced "good" grades and subsequently confidence in his abilities as a writer, he expressed a desire to experiment with writing style, to challenge himself in the ways he approached academic writing.

> I anticipate that my experience in Comp. I will be a pretty good one. I already know that when we are assigned essays and papers to write, I won't be very happy about doing them but I'll do them anyway. As far as writing is concerned, I hope to learn some new, creative ways to write so that I will enjoy it more. I also hope to learn new types of ways to organize essays because all of the essays that I have written have been organized in the same way. Lastly, I hope to gain a new point of view about writing because I think that would also help me enjoy it more. (Literacy Log 1)

Sam's desire to experiment with his writing style is directly tied to his discontent with writing in general. Sam doesn't particularly like to write because he's been writing the same way for years, and his subsequent comment about organization indicates Sam has been writing within the prescriptivist paradigm. Variation is what Sam is after. Unfortunately, prescriptivist approaches to academic writing leave little room for that.

Sam's description of "good" writing also reflects the conventions prescriptivists tend to uphold. In his list of "good" writing characteristics, Sam included correct grammar, linear organization, and formal language, conventions that prescriptivists tend to associate with desirable writing style. In his evaluation of "good" writing, Sam gave no credence to concepts like the writing voice or authorial intent or authority. Sam also continued to underscore the role grades have played in the ways he examines his writing style. Sam explained that because he had displayed characteristics of "good" writing in his academic essays, he had been rewarded with a high grade.

> There are many characteristics of good writing. I think that good writing should be free of grammatical errors and the purpose of the writing should also be clear. Organization is a characteristic of good writing because it makes it easier to understand. Good writing should be logical because writing that doesn't make sense can't be good. Good academic writing is anything that receives the grade of an A or B. I think that I display all of these characteristics in the writings that I have done throughout high school and over the summer. All of my writings have made sense, are well organized, and easy to understand. They have also received grades of A's or B's. Even though I think that my writings are good, I still think I have a lot of room for improvement. (Literacy Log 2)

Sam's response regarding his previous writing experiences highlights his comfort with prescriptivist approaches. Even though he expressed a desire to use more than one kind of writing style so the process of writing would become more enjoyable, Sam hardly ever broke away from prescriptivist conventions in the four required essays he wrote for my course. The following is an excerpt from the introduction to his summary-critique essay in which he critically evaluates Roger Clegg's controversial article "Why I'm Sick of the Praise for Diversity on Campuses", published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2000.

> Diversity is typically seen as a good thing. In today's society, diversity is praised and welcomed. It is a big deal in American culture, for instance, on college campuses diversity is high on the priority list. Corporate America even considers diversity when hiring new employees. People embrace diversity because they were taught that they should. Clegg's article is controversial because it challenges the belief that diversity shouldn't have a high importance on college campuses. Diversity should be enforced on college campuses but other requirements such as GPA and test scores shouldn't be overlooked. Clegg's argument was effective because of his use of questions, his tone, and the context of the article.

In his introduction, Sam employs several traits of traditional academic discourse as defined by Bizzell. Sam's writes his introduction from an objective third-person point of view. Sam also makes a clear argument about Clegg's article and uses moderate language that isn't too informal. Sam makes note of three specific arguments that he will expand upon in his body paragraphs. This move is typically an indication that a writer plans to construct a five-paragraph essay. Sam's final essay, however, was seven paragraphs, and this was about the only way he deviated from traditional academic writing.

In his response to the fourth literacy log prompt, which asked students to evaluate their writing process and style in essay one, Sam was satisfied with his grade and evaluated his writing style accordingly.

When I turned my paper in, I felt like I performed pretty well and my grade confirmed that I did. I feel like I sounded like myself in essay 1. I probably won't tweak any aspects of my writing style for essay 2. On essay 2, I would like to try and expand my ideas so that I won't have any trouble meeting the length requirements. (Literacy Log 4)

Here, Sam is more concerned about meeting the assignment requirements than he is about tweaking stylistic choices like word choice or syntax. Although Sam listed traditionally prescriptivist stylistic writing conventions in his second literacy log, he briefly acknowledged the expressivist concept of the writing voice in his response to literacy log four. I don't have reason to believe, however, that Sam's evaluation of the way his writing "sounded" has much to do with an evolving definition of style. I am almost certain that Sam's brief commentary on his writing "voice" is in direct response to the explicit question "Do you feel like you 'sound' like yourself?", which I included in the fourth literacy log prompt.

I assigned the fourth literacy log at the end of September, meaning Sam would have been enrolled in my course for just over a month. Throughout the semester, Sam maintained his "original" writing style, but in his final literacy log and during our personal interview during the last week of the semester, he offered some interesting commentary on the way he defines style. Throughout the semester, Sam defined style in accordance with traditional academic writing conventions, but at the end of the semester, he admitted that he did not know how to define writing style before taking my course.

Meg: I was really interested in the last literacy log that you wrote because you said that before class, before this class, that you didn't even really, [pause] you knew what style was, but you didn't know how to define it. Could you talk about that? Could you give me a definition of style, do you think, at this point?

Sam: Um, like, I always knew it was, like, how a person writes or like the voice that they have, but they never told us, like, what goes, what elements go into it.

Sam was still unable to provide a clear definition of style during our end of the semester interview, but our explicit discussions of style in class and his working through literacy log prompts seemed to give Sam a language with which he could evaluate his personal writing style and that of others.

> I don't think that my writing style has changed much from the beginning of the year. It has remained consistent but I do feel like I had more freedom this year to write how I wanted to instead of being told to write in a certain way. I've learned a lot about style this year. First, I learned what type of writer I was and what some of the pros and cons of my style were. I also learned exactly what a writer's style is and what it consisted of. Before this class, I had an idea of what a writer's style was but I wasn't sure of the exact definition of it. Now I know an exact definition of the term and all the elements that create it. (Literacy Log 10)

Comfort with writing within the current traditional paradigm was a continual theme in Sam's literacy logs. In his final log, Sam explained that his writing style had helped him gain access to and ultimately enter the academic discourse community, and he also expressed a desire to adhere to traditional conventions of academic writing, with the exception of very formal language. Formal language, or to use Sam's word, "formality," was the only rule of academic writing that Sam mentioned he might be comfortable negotiating.

> I knew that as college students, we were part of an academic group but I didn't know what to call it until I learned it in this class. I think that I have successfully entered the Academic Discourse Community because I've began to enter some of the conversations that are already taking place. I will probably continue to adhere to all of the conventions of Academic Discourse Community because they all seem important. I feel like a writer's word choice, tone, organization, and persona determines how good a writer can connect with a reader…As a writer, I want to connect with my audience so I will continue to follow the conventions of the Academic Discourse Community. I feel like the rule of formality can be bent in certain situations. I would characterize my style as formal but easy to understand. I think that my writing style is similar to some others who write in the Academic Discourse Community. (Literacy Log 10)

Although Sam's style didn't dramatically change over the course of the semester, he has a better sense of his purpose as a student writer. Sam's awareness of audience will play a large role in the kinds of stylistic choices he makes as a writer, which is key to understanding style as a concept and by extension, writing as a subject. Exploring style as a central writing concept encouraged Sam to think critically about the effects he wanted to have on his audience and which stylistic choices would help him achieve his purposes for writing.

Case Study 2: Norah

Norah was always quick to remind me about her relationship with writing. As an engineering major, Norah enjoyed "math and problem solving," (Literacy Log 3) and on the first day of class, she expressed to me that writing "wasn't really her thing." In contrast to Sam, Norah was hesitant about her ability to perform well in a college-level writing course, even though she felt prepared for college after graduating from North Little Rock School District, which Norah felt "offer[ed] the best education you can receive for those who want it" (Literacy Log 3). Similar to Sam, however, was Norah's penchant for structured models for writing that followed current-traditional conventions. Norah explained in her first literacy log that she "took a lot of IB classes" in high school and that "those courses were based mostly on writing" (Literacy Log 1). Even though Norah had been expected to write frequently in high school, she did not feel comfortable with writing, especially writing for English classes. Because Norah's English teachers created essay assignments that required subjective responses, Norah felt she wasn't exactly sure what her teachers wanted her to write about, and therefore she was unable to meet her teachers' expectations. Norah explained that she responded well to essay assignments that required her to follow a model of sorts, but she struggled with writing that asked her to expand on her ideas.

> I did well in classes like History of the Americas because my teacher had a formula for our essays. It made it easier for me to understand because it reminded me of plugging numbers in. Writing for history was very structured; however in English I never did well. My teacher would constantly tell me to add detail. She said my writing never made sense because I did not thoroughly explain myself. It was frustrating for me because I did not know how to improve. In my mind I thought I had successfully explained my thoughts. I have never really enjoyed writing; therefore, I have only written for academic purposes. I am more of a numbers person, writing has never been fun for me but I do not hate it. (Literacy Log 1)

Norah's attitude toward writing was much like Sam's. Neither Sam or Norah particularly enjoyed writing, but they had to complete writing assignments in high school, assignments that often asked them to utilize prescriptivist approaches. Norah directly speaks to prescriptivist concepts in her response to the first literacy log when she compares writing an essay to "plugging numbers in." Like Sam, writing came easiest for Norah when she simply had to follow the rules. When teachers asked her to complete more subjective assignments, she felt as if she were navigating unfamiliar territory. However, if an instructor set forth rigid requirements, Norah felt at ease.

Like Sam, Norah also expressed a desire to experiment with and subsequently strengthen her writing style. Interestingly, Norah referred to the concept of the writing voice in her first literacy log, although the prompt didn't use this language.

> I do hope to work on my writing. I feel like my writing is boring and maybe if I enjoyed writing I would do it more often. I think I lose my voice and I hope you will help me to improve on that…Hopefully by the end of the semester I will be able to write a well written structured paper with varying sentence structure because when I write I feel like I repeat what I say over and over again. I also hope that by the end of the semester I can write a paper that is easily understood and followed. (Literacy Log 1)

In her response, Norah does not define what she means by "voice," but I assume she is using voice in the expressivist sense, to refer to her right to her own writing. In the beginning of the

semester, Norah was more concerned about improving traditional conventions of academic writing like linear organization. Her response here, however, indicates that she is interested in analyzing and improving syntax, an element of style that we discussed throughout the semester.

Norah primarily focused on the characteristics of "good" literary writing in her response to literacy log two, but many of the features of good literary writing she cited could apply to academic writing as well.

> Good writing for me is writing that catches and holds my attention. When you have to read a novel for four chapters of boring to get the exciting points it irritates me because I know the author had the ability to write the whole novel that way. I think good writing flows well. I think there needs to be [some sort of] structure to writing for me to enjoy it. There needs to be some sort of order. Vocabulary in writing really makes an impact on me. When a writer uses a lot of random big words that I don't know I hate reading their work. If there are context clues to define the words then I enjoy it. Also if the writing has very elementary vocabulary it is not enjoyable for me. I don't feel that I use my own characteristics of a good writer. I think my writing has structure but that's it. When I [am] writing I am not confident in it…I think because I don't write for fun and don't really enjoy it my writing is cut and dry. (Literacy Log 2)

For both Sam and Norah, organization and structure were key. It's also worth noting that Sam and Norah both continue to express dissatisfaction with the process of writing. Sam explicitly expresses a desire to experiment with the choices available to him as a writer, and Norah simply states that she doesn't feel her writing is anything special. While Sam values his direct style, Norah seems to dislike this trait in her own writing. The following excerpt is from Norah's summary-critique essay. In this paragraph, Norah's style is direct and her paragraph closely follows the prescriptivist model.

> Clegg's argument against diversity is ineffective because of his skeptical tone. He uses phrases like "sad truth" and "attempt to achieve" in order to belittle the thought that diversity could be a good thing (B8). Clegg's entire article is negative; this does add emphasis to his points, but does not persuade the reader to agree with him because it is offensive. Clegg's insulting diction makes him out to be quite the racist. For example, he says, "if you're expecting to teach white

students that black students are just as good academically as the white students are, you had better be sure that the black students you admit really are on par with the white students" (B8). The phrases "you had better be sure" and "really are" have a demeaning tone (B8). They exemplify his assumptions that black students are not "on par" academically with the white students (B8). He selectively places rhetorical questions like, "Does anyone really believe that?" and statements like, "Let's be honest" to make the reader question the integrity of diversity (B8). This method is ineffective because it results in a defensive reader. Clegg mocks the thought that the reader could believe diversity to be a positive thing.

Norah's paragraph begins with a clear topic sentence that seeks to make a keen observation about Clegg's arguments. She then directly references the text and provides explications of the quotes she has chosen to support her arguments. Norah is correct in saying that her style is "to the point." There is not static in this essay, no deviation from what she has stated in her topic sentence. Everything from the linear progression of her arguments to the length of her paragraph speaks to the influence of the current-traditional paradigm.

Although she expressed a desire to, Norah didn't try to move away from a direct writing style in any of her required essays. Like Sam, Norah began the semester adhering to traditional academic discourse conventions and continued to do so throughout the semester. Both Norah and Sam cited word choice, structure, and organization as markers of "good" writing, but Norah did not seem to view the grades she received as indicators of good writing. In fact, Norah noted that feedback and evaluation from previous English teachers was not valuable to her because her teachers "were no longer motivated to help" her (Literacy Log 1). Norah felt confident after submitting her first essay, for which she received an "A." In her evaluation of her writing style in essay one, however, Norah did not mention her grade. Instead, she pointed out the revisions she made and the difficulty she had with experimenting with her writing style.

> I felt pretty good about essay one. I spent a long time changing sentences and redoing paragraphs. I think in the end I performed well…One of the problems I have is that I don't know how to express my ideas into words…I think my writing

needs improvement on making it personal. I don't think style is something that can be forced. When people try to intentionally add rhetorical devices and different elements of style I feel that they lose their own voice. I think a writer's style comes naturally to them that's why some can write and some can't…It is hard for me to say I am going to "try out" elements of style because when I intentionally add those elements I feel like I am transforming my writing into what people want to read not what I am saying. I guess I am just confused about how to really make writing your own. (Literacy Log 4)

Norah didn't seem to be particularly comfortable with writing in general, whether it be academic writing or writing that is less convention-driven, but she offered up several definitions of style throughout the semester. At times, Norah was almost expressivist in her definition of style, confident that style was something that existed innately within a writer. She also believed that style largely referred to the more concrete elements of writing like sentence structure, spelling, and grammar, elements that are within a writer's control. During our personal end of the semester interview, Norah repeatedly made a distinction between "voice" and "style." For Norah, "voice" was a nebulous concept, something unique to an individual while "style" was more formulaic.

Meg: Alright, so I want you to start by thinking about the, um, instruction you received in high school. We talked about this a little bit already, but what were some skills, some writing skills, you learned in high school?

Norah: …in high school, we were taught to write towards a test, like, we were aware that when taking standardized tests and stuff you had to be detailed, er, you didn't, you weren't supposed to be detailed. You had to be straight to the point…then in other classes I had, my teachers tried to get us to go away from that, and they would try to get us to add our own style. It was never really voice, though. I've never had a teacher, like, try to get me to bring my voice out in a paper. It was more like structure style, like adding bigger words, or changing sentences around, not

having to do short choppy sentences but making some longer. It was more so structurally different than it was actually formulating your own style.

M: Okay, I see. That makes sense. Um, okay, well you answered my second question: Has a previous instructor talked to you about style? But I guess…

N: Yeah, I mean, like, we weren't taught, people taught us about style, but it wasn't something that, like, it wasn't an individualistic thing, like you know what I'm saying? [muffled] like style as a whole. Like, it was not like you could have your own, you could have your own voice. It was like in order to have good style you would have different sentence lengths and different, you know, range of vocabulary. [muffled]

M: Mhmmm. Do you think those elements, though, um, sort of come together to create a personal voice?

N: Yeah. I mean, like, for me, I wish that I could write how I talk. Like, I wish that I could express myself the way that I think, but I have so many problems with getting what I think on paper.

Here, Norah's idea of style as voice is part of her frustration with writing. If style comes naturally to a writer, and Norah believes it does, then she believes she can't get a good grasp on style because she's not born with it. This might explain Norah's tendency to favor writing assignments that call for clear organization and structure. These are elements of writing that are within her control while elements of style like diction and syntax seem more difficult to master. Although Norah feels as though she writes better when using prescriptivist approaches, she isn't entirely satisfied with the final product because her writing tends to be too direct and to use her word, "formulaic."

While Sam explained that he could not offer up a formal definition of style before taking my course, Norah said she felt she knew what style was before leaving high school. Norah's definition of writing style, however, was fairly broad. Norah said that prior to my class, she had "never thought of [herself] having [her] own style" (Personal Interview) and that style existed primarily as a list of rules that writers follow. For Norah, "style was cut and dry…it wasn't something that could be" unique to the individual writer (Personal Interview).

Unlike Sam who readily acknowledged the value of traditional conventions of academic writing, Norah found academic writing style to be restricting and "boring" (Personal Interview). During our interview, Norah frequently returned to her argument that academic writing style requires writers to use long sentences and "big" words, and in her fifth literacy log, Norah indicted the academic discourse community and its writing conventions saying, "The conventions of formal academic writing are intentionally confusing. People think that by using long sentences full of words that most people do not know they are writing academically" (Literacy Log 5). Norah also admitted in her end of the semester interview that she "[feels] pressured to get a good grade, [feels] pressured into what people want to hear" (Personal Interview). According to Norah, traditional academic writing "[pressures] everybody to fit this mold that they're not" and because of this, Norah felt as if she couldn't produce writing that mirrored traditional academic writing style and subsequently succeed in the academic discourse community.

Chapter Three: Lillian and Ava

Victor Villanueva became a style sleuth after receiving a "36 out of a possible 100 –'for [his] imagination'" on an essay written for English 301 at the University of Washington (70). In *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, Villanueva recalls going to the campus library to research his professor's published writing, hoping to find clues about what kind of style would be deemed acceptable. Practicing what he calls "Professorial Discourse Analysis" was how Villanueva learned "to write for the University" (71). Lillian and Ava are in many ways like Villanueva. While writing in high school, they quickly realized each of their English teachers evaluated writing differently, and in response, Lillian and Ava often wrote to please their teachers, tailoring their essays according to their teachers' comments and feedback. To use Ava's words, "you have to figure out what [teachers] want first, and then you write it like they want it" (Personal Interview). Lillian and Ava reported feeling detached from the writing they produced. They parroted their teachers' arguments and mirrored their style, and when they did write an essay in which they made their own stylistic choices, they were assigned an unsatisfactory grade. Lillian and Ava clearly shared a desire to become better writers. But based on previous academic writing experiences and their personal writing styles, they believed they would never feel comfortable in the academic discourse community.

I chose Lillian and Ava as subjects for the following case studies because, much like Sam and Norah, their stories suggest that grades don't necessarily determine how comfortable a student is with academic writing style or to what degree he or she is willing to experiment with conventions of traditional academic discourse. Lillian and Ava also speak to many of my students' desires to be taught more than one kind of writing style and to subsequently be allowed the freedom to make their own stylistic choices in their academic writing. Unlike Sam and

Norah, Lillian and Ava both made conscious efforts to change something about their writing style in at least one of the four required essays they wrote for my course. It was their willingness to take writing risks that set them apart from other students in my class. While Sam and Norah did not cite much change in their writing styles, Lillian and Ava noted specific changes in the way they approached academic writing and in the stylistic choices they made in their academic essays. In examining the data I collected from Lillian and Ava, I have chosen to focus on two variables: their reflections of their personal writing style and how they believed their style evolved over the course of the semester.

Case Study 3: Lillian

During the first week of class, I remember thinking that Lillian would be either one of two kinds of students: witty but unmotivated or sharp but unsure of her abilities. Thankfully, she proved to be the latter. Lillian was the kind of student I looked forward to talking to. Not only did she usually have insightful comments to offer, but she was funny in a self-deprecating kind of way. I think her honesty and humor were what made me so interested in her writing story. I knew she would be candid in her thoughts and help me better understand academic writing from a student's perspective, and that's exactly what I wanted, to hear clearly from my students.

Lillian's definition of her personal writing style is key to understanding to what degree she felt comfortable in the academic discourse community. Lillian makes no mention of prescriptivist discourse conventions like thesis statements, formal language, or argument in the following definition of her personal writing style. Instead, she uses adjectives to describe her writing that rarely apply to much of published scholarship. Lillian's definition of her personal writing style looks similar to some of the traits Patricia Bizzell assigns to "hybrid academic discourses," specifically humor (16).

> My style can best be described as humorous, casual, and entertaining. In any piece of writing I like to make my audience feel comfortable and at ease. I try to make them laugh as often as possible and I try to keep my subjects easy to relate to. Other ways to describe my style include sarcasm and short and to the point sentences tossed with sentences worthy of descriptive excellence in my sentence structure salad. I also like to try to use fresh phrased and colorful verbs to spice up my writing recipe. Yes, yes I am comparing my writing to recipes and the elements of style to ingredients. You're welcome. (Personal Style Definition)

Not only has Lillian included adjectives to describe her style that are rarely used in connection with academic writing, but she has also hinted, whether intentionally or not, at the central problem with style: its subjectivity. Lillian's comparing style to a recipe of sorts is light-hearted but poignant because definitions of style beg for concrete similes rather than abstract adjectives. As the semester progressed, I noticed that Lillian had defined her writing style accurately. She included humor, anecdotes, and asides in every written assignment she completed for my course, including the four required academic essays. Lillian's purpose for writing was not solely to inform but also to entertain. Her use of detailed description, humor, and asides sets her apart from writers who adhere to traditional academic discourse conventions.

Lillian used a hybrid discourse in the first essay she wrote for my class. This assignment asked Lillian to write a summary-critique of Roger Clegg's controversial article "Why I'm Sick of the Praise for Diversity on Campuses", published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2000. The following excerpt is the introduction of her summary-critique essay:

> Ever since kindergarten I have been trained to think that diversity is what Americans strive for. America is a melting pot. How many times can a kid learn that before age nine? I'll give you a hint: more times than necessary. From as young as age five (perhaps for some even younger) the children of the United States have been programmed into believing that without diversity America would not be the great country it is today. So after all these years with a practically brainwashed mind, I read an article titled "Why I'm sick of the Praise for Diversity on Campuses." I'm sure anyone could imagine my initial reaction and horrified expression. I know I was not alone in my immediate thoughts. However, Roger Clegg, the author, goes about his argument in a slightly different

way than I originally imagined. While I was surprised to find that I agreed with his main point, I still had moments where I felt his argument could have been even stronger. I think readers would be more inclined to agree with Roger Clegg's stance on affirmative action in this article if he had used statistical evidence because he is already successful through his credibility, misleading yet engaging title, writing style and various other rhetorical techniques. (Summary-Critique Essay)

Lillian strays from traditional academic discourse in her opening sentence when she uses first person, acknowledging her presence as a writer. Traditional academic writing is typically author-evacuated, written in third person. Lillian also uses a rhetorical flourish, which traditional academic writing avoids. The length of her sentences are worth noting, too. Lillian peppers her introduction with short, punchy sentences. This variation in sentence length is rather unusual in student essays, probably because the majority of students have been taught that compound sentences are the mark of a mature writer, and a preoccupation with sentence length surfaced frequently in the data I collected from my students.

Foreshadowing the stylistic choices she would make in her first essay, Lillian broke many cardinal "rules" of traditional academic writing in her first literacy log, the first writing assignment she completed for a grade. In the prompt, I asked students to describe their previous writing experiences and what they expected to gain from taking Composition I. Rather than directly answering the prompt in 250-500 words, Lillian chose an indirect approach to answering the questions I posed. Lillian provided a narrative account of the first writing experience she could remember, one that caused writing to become "one of [her] favorite hobbies" (Literacy Log 1). Many of Lillian's classmates remained fairly formal in their literacy logs, even though I stressed that these assignments were simply designed to help them think critically and continually about their writing. I also explained each time I assigned a log that I would grade them based on completion, not on matters of correctness. Lillian was one of the few students

who seemed to use the literacy logs as an opportunity to experiment with stylistic choices. The following is an excerpt from Lillian's first literacy log in which she describes her role in writing an opera produced and performed by the students at her elementary school.

> …When the white light of the single spot light shone down on me I felt at home. I felt powerful and in charge. No one could stop me now. I heard the growling crowd gaining volume and I simply raised my right arm to silence them. They complied without hesitation. I began my speech of many thanks to those whom I could not have done this without. Unfortunately there were several misconceptions including the very thought that I needed help with such a extraordinary piece of art. As I finished my speech, I sent a tsunami of kisses through the air toward the wonderstruck audience. They reveled [in] every moment and shared in my glory. They had just been a part of history. They were the first to experience the most exquisite opera ever written by a fourth grader. (Literacy Log 1)

Lillian used a personal anecdote to ground her response and inverts the standard structure of an academic essay, making her literacy log read more like a memoir than a structured response to a prompt. Not until the last paragraph of her response did Lillian explain how her experience writing an opera applied to my class. Lillian was allowed to choose how she would contribute to the opera. She could sing, design scenery, or help write the opera itself. Considering she hadn't proved to be an especially gifted singer or artist, Lillian chose to write.

> Without my work there wouldn't even be an opera. Though writing wasn't my first choice…I quickly learned to love it and it became one of my favorite hobbies. Now not only do I enjoy writing for fun, but also I have learned to like it when it comes to school work. I anticipate my feelings about writing to stay the same through this course and hopefully it will help to improve my writing skills. (Literacy Log 1)

In contrast to Norah and Sam, Lillian cites writing as an enjoyable process, but her responses in our end of the semester interview were tinged with a kind of anxiety about how her writing style meshes with traditional academic discourse conventions. When I asked Lillian to describe the writing skills she learned in high school, she provided a detailed account of the courses she took

and what her instructors expected in her writing. When describing a course she took in high school called "Modern Problems," Lillian explained that some of her writing style was restricted to traditional academic writing conventions, and had she negotiated those conventions, her grade would have suffered.

Meg: First I want to start by asking you about the writing skills you learned in high school, so if you could just tell me a little bit about that.

Lillian: … we had, um this class called "Modern Problems" which was like a required social studies class for seniors. And, um, so we had to do a research paper, like that was the point of the class. And, uh, we, like you pick a topic, and then you wa-, you had to, like, make a change in the, like, legislature kind of thing. So we did, like, we worked with that, so we, like, did sources and stuff, and we had to do source analysis and all that stuff…But that research paper was, like, they didn't really focus on our writing so much, I guess. I mean, they did, but, um, like, my teacher was really big on like transitions, and so I learned, like, that transitions are important. Then, uh, what else did we focus on? In-text citations. So, like, basically, like, research paper stuff versus, like, stylistic things. Like that was the kind of paper where honestly I felt like if I'd cracked a joke in it, it would have been really inappropriate. Like, I would have gotten, like, a big fat "F" on it.

The language Lillian used in this excerpt from our interview indicated that in this course ("Modern Problems") she was asked to write within the current-traditional paradigm. The course writings required Lillian to produce a research paper, a valued genre in the current-traditional school. Lillian's writing style was also restricted to traditional academic discourse conventions. Harkening back to Bizzel's theories of traditional academic discourse, Lillian was expected to produce a paper that was argumentative, grounded in research, and structured clearly and

linearly. Lillian makes it very clear that had she made stylistic choices outside of traditional

conventions, her grade would have suffered. Lillian also interestingly notes that the focus of the

course was not on studying writing as a subject but rather learning to write according to

traditional academic discourse. This seemed to trouble Lillian who, as demonstrated by her essay

introduction and literacy log, does not always write within the traditional academic paradigm.

This data from Lillian seems to suggest that writing is at least more enjoyable if not easier when

she is free to make stylistic choices of her own.

 Throughout the semester, I encouraged my students to experiment with their writing style

by negotiating with traditional conventions of academic writing. For Lillian, this meant being

able to incorporate humor into her academic essays without the fear of being penalized. Even so,

Lillian expressed a hesitancy to question the conventions of academic writing and subsequently

write in a way that didn't perfectly align with those conventions:

> …It can be difficult for me in academic writing to fully be myself because I want
> to sound professional and poised. Usually I end up sounding kind of stuffy, but
> recently I've been trying harder to make my voice more prevalent. I like to be
> informal and crack jokes in my writing, but that can be a little difficult when I'm
> trying to prove the effectiveness of someone's argument. When it comes to my
> actual writing I think I need to work on the mechanics. I feel like I have some
> good idea, but I can't execute them as well as I'd like to. I like my writing style
> for the most part, I only hope that as I write more my style will become more
> developed and I will be able to work it into my academic work as well. (Literacy
> Log 4)

 Taking my definition of style into account[6], Lillian and I worked on ways that she could

"say" things differently throughout the semester. We often discussed the choices she could make

in her essays in terms of syntax, word choice, and tone. Lillian did need to work on mechanics,

as she mentions above, and she also struggled with choosing accurate words, particularly

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[6] I provide my definition of style in the introduction of my project.

accurate adjectives. In her final literacy log, Lillian explains that the conversations, lectures, and class discussions we had on style helped her work through these issues in her academic writing, and she was even able to provide a nuanced definition of style by the end of the semester.

> …I've learned a lot about style. Granted, this wasn't my first class in which it was taught (does that mean I had an upper hand compared to others? Maybe…) but it was certainly the first class when I was really able to evaluate my own style…I was a little afraid of using my own voice in academic writing. But one I figured out that if it's done the right way it can be wildly effective, I just went with it…If I've learned anything more about style I learned that all of the choices that are made from word choice down to punctuation are all important in the overall effectiveness of what is being written. Style is tone, voice, word choice, punctuation, imagery, anything that makes what your (sic) writing what it is. Style can make or break an essay. (Literacy Log 10)

Here, Lillian acknowledges that while there isn't necessarily one correct set of stylistic choices she should make, there are certain choices that will better help her achieve her purpose. Lillian seems to be taking audience into account here, understanding that her stylistic choices can either help her reach her readers or alienate them. Her commentary in the last log indicates that Lillian has a better understanding of how to navigate various rhetorical situations, whether they are within the academic discourse community or not.

Lillian's passion for writing seemed to sustain her throughout the semester. She often told me that she was enjoying the class and the process of writing itself because she was actively engaged in discussions about style. Interestingly, though, Lillian's excitement about writing didn't necessarily help her feel more at ease in the academic discourse community. Lillian seemed to think her writing style made her a rouge writer, one that may be a member of the academic discourse community but writes somewhere on its margins, on the boundary of informal communication and high brow discourse. Even after earning "A's" on the four

academic essays she wrote in my course, Lillian had this to say about her ability to adhere to traditional academic discourse conventions:

> The academic discourse community is a place where I don't know if I'll ever truly fit in. I suppose with research papers I might stand a chance, but it still seems somewhat of a stretch to me…As for adhering to the conventions in this community, I think overall I will continue to do so in my own way. Even knowing that bending the "rules" of academic writing is a possibility sends a shiver of excitement down my spine. Not that I'm going to go write a research paper and like talk like this like and be all annoying and stuff with all my abbrevs. Okay, I don't even talk like that. Ever. So that definitely will not be happening, but writing in first person and being able to put my own spin on what is commonly known as a bland, boring, stuffy academic paper is something I look forward to. A lot. (Literacy Log 10)

Exploring stylistic choices and how they fit into traditional academic discourse seems to have given Lillian a fresh perspective on academic writing. She feels freer to use humor or sarcasm in her academic writing, something that Sam and Norah don't necessarily say they will do. Also, the apprehension Lillian had about negotiating the conventions of traditional academic discourse was tempered by her enthusiasm regarding her personal writing style and style as a central component of writing studies. In her last literacy log, Lillian stated multiple times that she felt more confident in her ability to define style as a concept and to critically evaluate the effectiveness of her own style. In turn, Lillian felt she had "learned what it is to write well" (Literacy Log 10).

Case Study 4: Ava

To say Ava was one of the most motivated students I have taught would be inaccurate. Ava tended to complete assignments when she felt like the she had the time to spare, and she was very open about the times when she didn't read or prepare for class. Even so, I enjoyed having Ava as a student. Like Lillian, Ava was witty and had an honest sense of humor. She was also very candid with me about her relationship with academic writing: she didn't like it. During the

semester I taught Ava, she was enrolled in my course, which was designed for students who scored 19-27 on the English portion of the ACT. She was also concurrently enrolled in a basic-writing English course designed for students scoring below 19. This course was taught by another instructor. Ava told me on the first day of class that being enrolled in the basic-writing course affected the confidence she had in her ability to be an effective academic writer. Ava explained to me that her struggles with writing had begun in the ninth grade, and now as a college freshman, she had to enroll in not one but *two* English classes. Ava wrote "mainly for academic purposes, but sometimes" she wrote "down some stories [she] thought of" (Literacy Log 1). Regarding her academic writing, Ava reported that she would "either spend weeks on an assignment or two days, but [the] outcome was always the same, a low C" (Literacy Log 1). And in keeping with her previous experiences, Ava earned a "C" in my course. Her grade, however, did not entirely reflect Ava's writing ability. With each essay Ava wrote, her writing improved in clarity and nuance. Ava's final course grade was due in large part to her failure to turn in homework assignments and complete reading quizzes.

I chose Ava as a subject for my last case study not because she was a "model" student, but because her attitude toward traditional academic writing was similar to many of her classmates. Ava wanted to be a better writer, but she wasn't sure how she could make that happen, and she was weary of just being told what not to do. As I stated earlier, Ava's apprehensions about writing began in her Frisco, Texas high school where she had four different teachers who each held different expectations regarding writing. Ava's teachers taught differently and graded differently, so she found herself writing not necessarily to become a better writer but for the purpose of pleasing her teachers. As a result, Ava's writing became progressively weaker with each passing year.

> Every year since ninth grade my writing seemed to get worse and worse. I
> halfway blame my teachers and halfway blame me. As soon as I got use [sic] to
> one teachers [sic] way of us wanting to write the next teacher would have us
> writing a completely different way. So I would be back to square one all over
> again. Majority of my teachers never had the one on one time with me that I
> should have got. Instead I got criticism written on a paper I turned in weeks ago
> that looked like chicken scratch. So I learned to write to just get by, and somehow
> I managed to make that work. (Literacy Log 1)

Here, Ava's frustration with writing is glaringly apparent. Here comment about her instructors'
feedback is especially interesting. While Ava may have read her instructors' feedback as
criticism, it's very likely that her teachers intended their comments to be used as mini style
guides for her future writing and revision processes. I think, however, that Ava's reaction to
instructor feedback may have been the opposite of what her teachers intended. Ava began
viewing instructor comments as rules for writing rather than suggestions for the stylistic choices
she could make, hence her learning "to write to just get by." Ava was teaching herself to
recognize the stylistic cues demonstrated by each of her instructors, and then much like
Villanueva, she tried to write accordingly.

Reflecting on her personal writing style was difficult for Ava because she felt as if she
had never been given the opportunity to think about her own style. In fact, Ava did not complete
a homework assignment which asked her to formulate a definition of her personal writing style.
When I asked Ava why she didn't write her style definition, she told me quite simply, she didn't
know what to say, that she didn't know what her style was really like. From Ava's description of
the skills she learned in high school and the data I collected from our personal interview, it
became apparent to me that several of her teachers took a prescriptivist approach to teaching
writing while one teacher was more of an expressivist, telling students to disregard the "rules" of
writing completely. These differing pedagogical approaches with their implicit stances on style

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ultimately confused Ava as a writer. In our end of the semester interview, Ava explained that the majority of the writing she produced in high school fulfilled requirements set forth by her teacher, and she didn't attempt to make her own stylistic choices for fear of receiving a failing grade. One of her teachers was so directive in her approach to writing that she required students to use specific words in their thesis statements and conclusions:

Meg: Alright, so tell me a little bit about the writing skills you learned in high school.

Ava: Oh, in high school?

M: Yeah.

A: Mmm…high school. I guess it was more like structure, more like…I don't know how to explain it. Like, it was definitely the five paragraph thing. There was an introduction and then the three body paragraphs, like your three points, and your conclusion. And in our thesis and in our conclusion, we had to use these, I forgot the name of it, but it was like –We had to use, like, "society" as a word, "psychological," "historical" –like a group of words…But yeah, we had to use one of those words in your thesis and somewhere in your conclusion. And I was like, "Okay. Sure. Why not?" It was weird…Whatever I was writing about, like, sometimes I couldn't use that word…I was like none of these words connect to this book [*Of Mice and Men*] whatsoever. I was literally just throwing out words wherever I could. It was weird.

Just like Sam, Norah, and Lillian, Ava notes that structure, specifically the five-paragraph theme, was emphasized in her previous English courses. In our interview, Ava briefly mentions structure and organization in the traditional academic essay. The majority of her response focuses on the choices, or lack thereof, she was allowed to make regarding diction. Ava believed that in order to strengthen her writing she needed to focus on word choice. The problem was, Ava's instructor was so prescriptivist in her approach that Ava was required to use a set of words

in her essay, even when they didn't make much sense. Rather than discuss *how* she could experiment with stylistic elements like word choice, Ava was only told *what* her choices were. Ava explained that in each of her high school classes, she was assigned a book to read and subsequently a paper dealing with that book. Ava was practiced in literary analysis and was even asked to evaluate an author's writing style, but she her teachers "never did want [her] to incorporate [her] own" (Personal Interview). During our personal interview, I asked Ava what kinds of writing exercises she felt would better help her evaluate and strengthen her style. Ava said she felt her writing needed the most help at the sentence level:

A: I think wording of sentences, would personally help me a lot. 'Cause I don't –for some reason… Like, I'll write my paper, and I'll go back and read it, and I'll, like, use words, like…I'll use the word "actually…" and by using just that word, it makes a total difference.

Ava's response in our end of the semester interview is interesting when compared to her evaluation of her writing style in the first essay she completed for my course. In evaluating her first essay, Ava was most concerned with what I would consider global stylistic issues. This seems to align with the skills she reported learning in high school, skills dealing with structure, formatting, and organization. Ava also mentioned wanting to improve her syntax so she "could easily put [her] thoughts to paper in a clear an [sic] effective way" (Literacy Log 4). She reported that she began to pay closer attention to syntax after I recommended that she read her essays aloud.

> The topic [for essay one] was easy for me to get interested in and was not to (sic) bad to write about. But my introduction and conclusion were very weak….Another thing I need to improve is making the length requirements. I do not know how to expand on my own ideas of go in depth to write the required amount. Even in high school I struggled with reaching the minimum page length…Also in high school I struggled with "awkward sentences." For the longest time I had no idea what they meant by "awkward" sentences but once I

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started reading my papers out loud I was able to eliminate most weird sentences some of course still slipped through but most where [sic] gone. (Literacy Log 4)

By the end of the semester, Ava was considering style, particularly academic style, in new ways. She had once described academic writing as "dull, boring, and probably confusing" (Personal Interview). However, in her third essay, Ava incorporated slang and "off-hand refutation," both traits of hybrid academic discourse (Bizzell 16). The following is the introduction to Ava's argumentative synthesis essay in which she argues for the legalization of marijuana.

> Marijuana, weed, bud, pot, herb, ganja, Mary Jane: whatever you may call it people all over have their own opinion on it. The opinion that seems to matter the most,however, [sic] is the government's of course. The officials we elected to decide what rules we follow and the consequences when we break them. Since we gave government staff the power to decide how our country will work, we assume we can trust them. In Louisa Degenhardt's article, "The Adverse Effects of Cannabinoids: Implications For Use of Medical Marijuana", she noticed Canadian research behind medical marijuana lacked long-term health hazards and dangers of smoking weed. Harris Gardiner's article, "F.D.A. Dismisses Medical Benefit From Marijuana", saw America's decision to outlaw marijuana deemed just based on a study in 1999. In a section on America's official government website, "Marijuana Resource Center: Frequently Asked Questions and Facts About Marijuana", they seemed to fear people's reaction to legalization of marijuana. Both governments should get solid facts on all the questions about marijuana and support their researchers to get the answer. America and Canada should rethink their decisions with an open mind to find what is best for their citizens. (Argumentative Synthesis Essay)

Ava doesn't open her essay with a complete sentence that grounds the topic of her essay. Instead, she lists some of the street names used for marijuana. Ava gently and a bit sarcastically references the government's role in keeping marijuana illegal rather than directly attacking the opposition. Ava then balances her informal stylistic choice with more traditional academic writing moves. She references scholarly sources and concludes her introduction with a clear

pronouncement. According to Bizzell's arguments, Ava has successfully used a hybrid form of academic discourse, something she was not doing prior to my course.

After experimenting with stylistic choices in her essays, and after considering style as a central component of writing studies, Ava was beginning to enjoy the process of writing in the academic discourse community.

M: Did you learn anything surprising about academic writing this semester?

A: It can be fun.

M: How do you make it fun?

A: Well, I just got a different perspective on it recently. Like, I like drawing, like I'm kind of creative. And so when I was writing and you were talking about doing style, I was kind of looking at it a little more artistically, and I was like, "Okay. I have to write this paper. I can either just, you know, wait until the last minute like I normally do and just get it over with right then, or I can make it a little more fun and it'll take longer. I was like, "I'm just going to do that and have fun while I do this. So, like, I looked at it a little more creatively, and I started using my own words and putting more, I guess, jokes and little comments in it, and it made it more fun for me personally.

For Ava, incorporating humor and what she considered unique word choice into her essays was taking a writing risk. She explained that she would not have taken these stylistic liberties while writing in high school, and she didn't begin to tinker with her writing style in my class until she had to write the third required essay. What seemed like a gamble at the time paid off. Ava reported feeling satisfied with her writing style at the end of the semester because she felt it had become more personal.

A: I had some of my friends read my [essays], and they commented on it. And they were like, "Oh, my god. That sounds like you!" And I was like, "Yes!" That made me so happy.

Ava had begun to feel more familiar with her personal writing style and in turn, she didn't view academic writing as a genre that is shaped by "rules." Instead, she began to feel that there are "guidelines" for the stylistic choices she could make in her essays (Personal Interview). Because Ava had been thinking critically about the concept of style throughout the semester, she was able to define style by the end of my class. Style, according to Ava, can be defined as "who you are as a person, how you talk, and how you put it onto paper," and a writer achieves her style through choices in organization and word choice (Personal Interview).

Conclusion

The variables in the data I collected from Sam, Norah, Lillian and Ava are by no means grounds to make broad or sweeping pedagogical suggestions, but I don't think these students' writing experiences are so unique that their stories couldn't be used to think about the pedagogical implications of teaching style as a central concept in the Composition classroom. I also think it's safe to assume that in any given Composition course, an instructor will teach students like Sam and Norah, students who might earn an "A" but define style and perceive academic writing very differently, or students like Lillian and Ava who both actively experiment with their writing style in academic essays.

One variable I identified in the data I collected from my students was the effects their previous writing experiences have had on their current attitudes toward academic writing. This variable proved to be important to my argument about redeeming style in Composition curriculums because in order to begin teaching style in a Composition course, instructors should have a degree of awareness about their students' previous writing experiences. For better or worse, those experiences will ultimately determine what kind of attitudes and conceptions students have about academic writing style when they enroll in a university Composition course. Instructors could easily gain this insight by assigning a brief in-class writing or take-home essay prompting students to recount their previous writing experiences. I used a sequence of literacy logs to determine what had shaped by students' attitudes toward writing. After reading their responses to the first and third literacy log prompts, I was able to determine that Sam and Norah's previous writing experiences and exposure to the concept of style differed to a degree, and this seemed to affect the way they viewed academic writing while they were taking my course. I learned that Sam and Norah were both pleased with the overall instruction they received

in high school. In his third literacy log, Sam, who attended school in Tulsa, Oklahoma, explained that Booker T. Washington High School "was ranked as one of the top 100 high schools nationally" during his sophomore year (Literacy Log 3). Norah believed she received quality education in high school and that her "teachers at North Little Rock [High School] have made a long lasting impact on how [she] value[s] [her] education" (Literacy Log 3). Although both Sam and Norah valued the overall instruction they received in high school, they were not equally as satisfied with their previous writing experiences. Sam reported very positive experiences with writing, citing his satisfactory grades as proof of his ability as a writer. Norah, on the other hand, reported that she wrote frequently, but her writing experiences were just as frequently marked by frustration.

In addition to gauging students' attitudes about writing, instructors who wish to teach style as a central component of Composition should have an understanding of their students' definitions of style, another variable I identified in the data. Again, collecting students' definitions of style can be managed practically. At the beginning of the semester, I asked my students to complete for homework a definition of their personal writing style, a broad definition of writing style, and a definition of academic writing style. No doubt, just as Sam and Norah's cases studies suggest, students' definitions will differ. This shouldn't be surprising or worrisome, considering the degree of difficulty some of the most venerable Composition scholars have had pinning down a concrete definition of style. Knowing students' definitions of style allowed me to open the door for ongoing conversations about style in the academic discourse community. As I collected data for my project, I found that some students defined style in terms of "voice" while others defined style as a matter of correctness. These differing definitions served as springboards for in-class discussions about style as a matter of choice because they brought tension to the idea

that academic writing must look, feel, or act a certain way. Of course, asking students to define style required me to define style as well, which wasn't easy, but as I mentioned in chapter one, just as Composition instructors have pedagogical philosophies and leanings, they have definitions of style. And very often, definitions of style exist implicitly within the pedagogies instructors espouse. Defining style asks students to critically evaluate conventions of academic writing and asks instructors to take inventory of their pedagogies.

A knowledge of students' comfort with academic discourse conventions and their desire and/or ability to negotiate those conventions was also key for me to effectively teach style as a core concept in my classes. As I combed through the all of the data I had collected at the end of the semester, I identified as a variable my students' desire to improve some aspect of their writing style. Even the students who earned an "A" as a final course grade expressed a desire to further explore one or several elements of style. This variable in the data suggests that the majority of students in my class had benefited from discussions and assignments designed to help them probe the assumptions behind traditional academic discourse conventions. They were no longer just readily or begrudgingly accepting the "rules" of academic writing. Instead, they were beginning to see themselves as members of the academic discourse community, and they were beginning to ask if and how their writing style could evolve.

As Sam expressed in his last literacy log, learning about the academic discourse community itself, what it is and who belongs to it, helped him further his understanding of the concept of style. Sam admitted in our end of the semester interview that he was satisfied with his writing style and didn't plan to change it because he felt like he was now a member of the academic discourse community. Our discussions of style and the academic discourse community,

however, did help Sam learn *how* to critically evaluate his personal writing style and better understand how his style compared to traditional conventions of academic writing:

Meg: …How do you think your writing style has changed since, you know, like the first day you started Comp. I until, you know, right now, the very end?

Sam: I don't think, I don't think it's changed. I just like, I think it [the class] opened my eyes to, like, what things, what things I do to make up my writing style.

The data I collected from Norah's literacy logs and her personal interview helped me better understand the root of her frustrations with academic writing. I don't want to give the impression that completing my course cured Norah of her writing anxieties, but she did give me reason to believe the focus on style in my class helped alleviate pressure to conform to traditional academic writing conventions:

Meg: Okay, um, so two more questions. Do you think your writing style has changed now that you've…Like from the first day of class to now, which is essentially the end…

Norah: I mean, I feel like I definitely, okay…When I write, I don't feel as pressured to fit that [traditional academic writing]. I don't feel as pressured to get the thesaurus out and look up all these big words or all these, you know, synonyms and stuff, so I think that in that sense, yes, my writing has become more like me. But at the same time, like, I still find myself saying things and having stuff in my paper that I'm like, I don't…you know? I can't explain it. I just, when I read it, it doesn't sound like me still. I don't think that it sounds like me. There are parts that I get, but overall, no, so…But I definitely think I've improved, I just don't know…It's definitely not where I want it.

Even though Norah doesn't feel completely satisfied with her academic writing, she is *thinking*, thinking critically and honestly, about her style. And as an instructor, that's wonderful

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news. The same sentiment applies to Sam, who feels comfortable using conventions of academic discourse because, ultimately, the best writers are those who are aware of their stylistic options and who know how and when to take advantage of them.

I found it interesting that Lillian and Ava didn't report hard feelings toward writing in general. Both women enjoyed writing creatively on their own time, but when they were tasked with writing an academic essay, their attitudes toward writing shifted. This proved to be a telling variable in the data I collected from Lillian and Ava. Although Lillian took pleasure in writing academic essays, she was often confronted with the fact that her writing style may not be exactly what her instructor was looking for. Being assigned a grade ultimately made the process of academic writing stressful for Lillian. Ava shared a similar attitude. She has [always] liked to write" fiction because her "stories came from [her] mind so [she] had full control over what [she] was saying" (Literacy Log 1). Freedom to make her own stylistic choices "made [Lillian's] writing more confident because [she] wasn't worried about being graded for the content" (Literacy Log 1). I'm sure if Composition instructors were to tell their students that essays would not be graded, more students would be excited about the process of writing. A grade-free Composition course is, however, highly unlikely to exist, so instructors must recognize students' apprehensions about receiving grades and attempt to temper those fears in some way. I believe, as evidenced by the data I collected from Lillian and Ava, that explicitly teaching style can do just that.

Lillian and Ava had not had an opportunity to evaluate their personal writing styles before enrolling in my class. This seemed especially problematic for Ava. While Lillian had a good idea of how to define her writing style, Ava couldn't produce even a list of adjectives she felt described her style. I think this was due in large part to the varying writing experiences she

had in high school. Each of her teachers had differing expectations about writing so rather than spend time reflecting on how her style could and should evolve, Ava was busy adapting her writing to a new teacher's methods of evaluation. As a result, Ava felt her writing didn't improve. It simply changed. Lillian, on the other hand, was quite confident in her ability to define her personal style. Actually incorporating her style into an academic essay, however, was another matter. Like Ava, Lillian wasn't afforded the opportunity to critically evaluate her personal style, so she wasn't sure how well she was navigating the conventions of academic discourse. Ava knew she wrote a certain way. She just didn't know if that way was acceptable in academic writing, so she erred on the side of caution, always careful to use formal language and tone. Before studying the concept of style, Lillian and Ava seemed to write on the basis of trial and error: if the grade was good the style was good and vice versa.

Both Lillian and Ava reported feeling more confident as writers after completing my course, and they attribute this to the opportunities they had to investigate style. This variable in the data doesn't just provide insight about the benefits of allowing students to examine and experiment with their personal writing styles; it can tell us something important about the way we as instructors present, whether explicitly or implicitly, style in our classrooms. Ava's experiences regarding her teachers' pedagogies and expectations support my argument that Composition instructors need to have a working definition of style that is informed by their pedagogy. Otherwise, students will continue to have experiences similar to Lillian and Ava's. Students will continue from one class to the next unsure of what their instructors think about writing as a subject.

The variables in the data I have presented are provocative, but they do not have the power to ground broad arguments about the teaching of style in Composition as a whole. Instead, the

data I examine in the four case studies serve as a springboard for further empirical research. A longitudinal study of Sam, Norah, Lillian, and Ava would be ideal. Making broad pedagogical suggestions is limited by my project's methodology, but at the very least, the case studies I have conducted can reignite conversations about style's place within Composition curriculums. And I think my most salient claim is supported by the data. If our goal as Composition instructors is to help our students produce better writing, writing they are confident in, writing they are proud of, writing that empowers them, then we should teach our students that they have options. And we can teach them that by using style as the foundation for Composition curriculums.

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Appendix I

Literacy Log Prompts

1. Spend some time reflecting on your previous writing experiences and briefly describe them. Have you written only for academic purposes, or have you attended any kind of writing workshop or simply written for your own enjoyment? How would you characterize these experiences? (i.e. were they positive or negative?) What do you anticipate your experience in Comp. I will be like? As far as writing is concerned, what do you expect to gain from completing Comp. I?
2. What kinds of prose/writing do you enjoy reading? Why do you enjoy reading this kind of writing? What are some characteristics of "good" writing? Do you think you display any of these characteristics in your own writing? Do you think that in order to be a "good" writer, you must also be an avid reader?
3. For your first Literacy Log, I asked you to reflect on your previous writing experiences and explain how those experiences affect the way you feel about writing today. Now, I would like to get to know a little bit about who you are and where you come from. Where were you born and raised? How do you think this affected the kind of education you received? Have other members of your family attended some college or completed a degree, or are you a first generation college student? How has your family's level of education affected how you view college? What do you expect to gain intellectually by seeking a college degree?
4. Now that you have completed your first essay, I would like you to spend some time reflecting on your writing style and ability. Just begin by explaining how you feel about essay 1. Did you have any specific problems, or do you feel like you performed pretty well? Describe areas of growth and specify how you could further strengthen your writing abilities. What can you say about your writing style? Do you feel like you "sound" like yourself? Do you think you might tweak some aspects of your style for essay 2? Are there any of the elements of style we have discussed in class that you might like to "try out?"
5. Now that we have defined the Academic Discourse Community and discussed the conventions its members use in written texts, I would like you to spend some time critically evaluating those conventions. The next three literacy logs, including this one, will require you to read excerpts from published academic writing and analyze the author's style. The first excerpt will demonstrate the conventions of traditional academic writing. The second will incorporate some of those conventions into more "informal" prose, and the third will clearly deviate from standard academic writing.

   In order to evaluate the author's style in each excerpt, you will need to consider the following:

   For this LL, critically evaluate the following excerpts:

   If, for a while, the ruse of desire is calculable for the uses of discipline soon the repetition of guilt, justification, pseudo-scientific theories, superstition, spurious authorities, and classifications can be seen as the desperate effort to normalize *formally* the disturbance of

a discourse of splitting that violates the rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality. –from Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*

Natural history museums, like the American Museum, constitute one decisive means for power to de-privatize and re-publicize, if only ever so slightly, the realms of death by putting dead remains into public service as social tokens of collective life, rereading dead fossils as chronicles of life's everlasting quest for survival, and canonizing now dead individuals as nomological emblems of still living collectives in Nature and History. An anatomo-politics of human and non-human bodies is sustained by accumulating and classifying such necroliths in the museum's observational/expositional performances. –from Timothy L. Luke's "Museum Pieces: Politics and Knowledge at the American Museum of Natural History"

6. Now that we have defined the Academic Discourse Community and discussed the conventions its members use in written texts, I would like you to spend some time critically evaluating those conventions. The next three literacy logs, including this one, will require you to read excerpts from published academic writing and analyze the author's style. The first excerpt will demonstrate the conventions of traditional academic writing. The second will incorporate some of those conventions into more "informal" prose, and the third will clearly deviate from standard academic writing.

In order to evaluate the author's style in each excerpt, you will need to consider elements of style like word choice, syntax, tone, voice, use of dialect, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.

Directions for finding the excerpt for LL6:

Google José Limón *The Devil Dances*
Click on the Google Books link. It should be the very first entry that appears in your Google search results.
Click on the book icon.
Click "The Devil Dances" in the table of contents.
Read pages 168-175

7. Now that we have defined the Academic Discourse Community and discussed the conventions its members use in written texts, I would like you to spend some time critically evaluating those conventions. The next three literacy logs, including this one, will require you to read excerpts from published academic writing and analyze the author's style. The first excerpt will demonstrate the conventions of traditional academic writing. The second will incorporate some of those conventions into more "informal" prose, and the third will clearly deviate from standard academic writing.

In order to evaluate the author's style in each excerpt, you will need to consider the following:

For this LL, critically evaluate the following excerpts:

Introduction to Carmen Kynard's " 'I Want To Be African': In Search of a Black Radical Tradition/African-American-Vernacularized Paradigm for 'Students' Rights to Their Own Language,' Critical Literacy, and 'Class Politics.' " *College English* 69.4 (March 2007): 356-386. Print.

8. Briefly reflect on the writing styles you critically evaluated in LLs 5, 6, & 7. Think about how you characterized the authors' tone, approach to audience, diction, syntax, etc. Now, imitate these authors' writings styles by revising one of your paragraphs from essay 2. Rewrite your paragraph by trying to channel the author's voice and style. Your goal here is not to necessarily make your paragraph better, but to "sound" like the other authors. You should have three different imitations:

    The very formal style of the excerpts in LL 5
    The more moderate style of the excerpts in LL 6
    The least formal (and perhaps experimental style) of the excerpt in LL 7

    After you complete your imitations, briefly explain which style you prefer and why.

9. Throughout the semester, we have been discussing the importance of knowing the audience you are writing for. For this literacy log, you will need to read chapter 24 in *The St. Martin's Handbook* and evaluate the kind of style the chapter suggests you should follow. As you are reading, consider the discussions we've had about audience and stylistic choices. What kind of style do you think *The St. Martin's* promotes in chapter 24? How do you feel about the kind of style *The St. Martin's* promotes? Are there arguments about style in chapter 24 that you agree with? Is there anything you disagree with? Do you think the chapter is helpful? Is there anything regarding stylistic choices that you would add to chapter 24? How does the style prompted in chapter 24 compare the stylistic choices you were expected to make in high school?

10. Congratulations! You've almost completed Comp. I. Throughout the semester, I have asked you to reflect on your previous writing experiences and to think about how your writing style and voice is evolving. For your last LL, explain if and how your style has changed since the beginning of the semester. What have you learned about style? Do you think you have successfully entered the academic discourse community? Are there any conventions of the academic discourse community that you will continue to adhere to? Are there any "rules" of academic writing that you think you can bend? Finally, how would you characterize your writing style? How closely does your style align with others who write in the academic discourse community?

Appendix II

Case Study Interview Questions

1. Think about the writing instruction you received in high school. Do you feel like any of those skills helped you make the transition from writing in high school to writing in college? If so, how?
2. Has a previous instructor taught you things about style? If so, what things do you learn?
3. How would you characterize/describe academic writing? Why would you describe academic writing in this way?
4. What is the most challenging aspect of academic writing? Why?
5. Did you learn anything surprising about academic writing this semester? If so, what?
6. What did you learn about style this semester?
7. Do you think teachers and instructors are looking for a certain kind of writing style in academic essays? If so, how did you reach this realization?
8. Do you feel like you "sound" like yourself in the essays you write? Why or why not?
9. Do you think you can "sound" like yourself in an academic essay and still receive an acceptable grade on the assignment? Why or why not?
10. What are some "rules" of academic writing that you think need to change, and are there any "rules" that should stay the same? Why or why not?
11. Have you ever been told to avoid writing in your home dialect or told not to use "slang?" If so, when and by whom?
12. If so, how did this alter your approach to writing an academic essay?
13. After completing Comp. I, has your writing style changed? If so, in what way(s)?

Appendix III

Research Compliance Protocol Letter

<div align="center">August 28, 2012</div>

MEMORANDUM

TO:	Megan Grizzle Patrick Slattery
FROM:	Ro Windwalker IRB Coordinator
RE:	New Protocol Approval
IRB Protocol #:	12-08-059
Protocol Title:	*Finding the Writing Voice: Helping Composition Students Negotiate the Academic Discourse Community*
Review Type:	☒ EXEMPT ☐ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB
Approved Project Period:	Start Date: 08/28/2012 Expiration Date: 08/27/2013

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval.   Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 40 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes.   All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.