

## **21 Genres and How to Write Them**, by Brock Dethier.

Logan: Utah State UP, 2013. 280 pp.

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*21 Genres and How to Write Them* is a textbook that aims to guide composition students in analyzing and adapting their writing to various genres. This work emerges out of process traditions in composition theory but explicitly takes genre as the central focus. Dethier worked with Don Murray at The University of New Hampshire for nineteen years and voices that his work is greatly indebted to Murray's thinking. At the same time, this textbook complicates and advances questions of a writer's process by paying specific attention to genres and genre analysis.

In the introduction, Dethier describes a genre as "a type, form, or category" and explains that "[w]e use familiar genres like 'lab report' and 'personal essay' without thinking about what rules and conventions govern the genre" (3). But while genres work because of rules and conventions, Dethier is also careful to note that the idea of genre is changing. In the past, genres were seen as static, but recent theorists have argued that genres are fluid. When writers stretch the conventions of genres, genres themselves evolve. Dethier also points out that "almost all texts mix genres" (3). For example, because a simple two paragraph letter can contain description, narration, analysis, persuasion, and summary, "[t]he question is not whether you're going to integrate different genres but how you're going to integrate them" (3). This textbook stresses practicing different "moves" a writer can make. Dethier cautions that genres will change, but the moves a writer employs can work across different genres of writing (4).

*21 Genres* is designed as a reference and although Dethier explains that the book includes more genres than a writer may actually use, "the point is to find the best move for your current writing situation and try to remember successful moves for the future" (1). Here he alludes to the current research on genre and transfer, but the text is written in a simple, explanatory fashion with no citations to outside works. This is because the audience is students, and the textbook is designed to be streamlined and straightforward.

This textbook is divided into two parts. Part one is entitled "Genres" and part two is entitled "Moves." Part one presents twenty-one common genres listed in alphabetical order. These genres include abstract, annotated bibliography, application essay, application letter, argument, blog, e-mail, gripe letter, literary analysis, literature review, op-ed essay, personal essay, profile, proposal, reflection, report, response to reading, resume, review, rhetorical analysis, and wiki.

For each genre, Dethier provides a sample. He also outlines and answers questions regarding purpose, audience, content, length, arrangement, pronoun usage, tone, and potential variants. In this regard, part one serves as a useful reference guide. When a writer encounters an unfamiliar genre, this text can help her quickly identify the basic conventions of that genre. To address the wide range of the genres he includes, Dethier describes *21 Genres* as “useful to the individual writer, whether or not the writer is currently in a writing class” (5).

Some of these genres are ones that composition students are very likely to encounter when composing for a college course. Literary analysis and rhetorical analysis, for instance, are primarily academic genres. Other genres in this textbook—such as the application essay, application letter, and resume—may not fit neatly into a first-year composition curriculum. However, these genres are among the most important ones that students will write in terms of obtaining professional opportunities. And by including these genres, this textbook gains viability as a required text for not only first-year composition courses but also for professional and business writing courses. Genres such as blog and email could be written in the context of the university or could be instances of self-sponsored writing. For the email genre, Dethier urges students to analyze the writing situation, understand email as more formal than social media, and be conscious of tone. Because it identifies features of a genre that students compose every day, *21 Genres* has immediate utility.

As evidenced by the attention to blog and email genres, this textbook goes beyond print to consider genres on the web. *21 Genres* directs students to visit Wikipedia and also a technical and professional writing wiki to understand wikis as a genre. For teachers who require wiki writing, *21 Genres* is a useful starting point. Dethier provides a description of the common features of wikis and suggests moves to make in order to contribute. However, teachers will need to guide students in assessing the particular workings of specific wikis. Because different wikis have different rules, teachers may also choose to direct students to the Wikipedia page “List of wikis,” which includes dozens of wikis used by various organizations for a range of purposes.

Part two contains over two hundred moves that are organized in ten chapters. The term “moves” refers to actions such as using a double-entry journal, finding a model, asking “what’s not there?,” using headings and subheadings, and integrating text and visuals. The introduction to part two urges writers to take on a spirit of playfulness and combine moves in new ways (151). The voice of these chapters is instructive, not judgmental, and aims to relate to students. For example, the chapter entitled “Develop” reads, “If you find yourself thinking, ‘I don’t have anything to say,’ or ‘I don’t know what to say,’ you should practice the moves in this chapter” (185). The chapter on “Drafting” is helpful because it explains multiple ways to draft, making visible something

that is quite obvious to writing teachers—different genres necessitate different drafting strategies—but can be crucial information for student writers encountering new genres.

The information provided in the chapters of part two is highly relevant, but unfortunately these moves are a bit difficult to navigate. Moves are labeled with numbers that do not correspond to page numbers. The second part of this guide requires page flipping back to the table of contents each time the reader needs to locate an individual move. Teachers will need to spend some time showing students how to navigate the second part of this textbook.

*21 Genres* will function as a useful reference for college composition students. Part one serves as a clear guide for demystifying common genres that students write. However, composition instructors must keep in mind that students will need to read *many* samples of a particular genre in order to have an understanding of how that genre works (4). This book will pair well with an analysis of multiple models of a given genre. While *21 Genres* details basic conventions of each genre, it works with a highly restricted definition of genre as a form or category (3). As a result, it does not address how and when students can challenge the genres in which they so often write. Instructors may choose to balance this reference book with examples of genres that remix, parody, or redefine what constitutes genre.

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