

## From the Editors: 2021, in Words

Our editorial introductions so far tried have tried to capture the prevailing personal, professional, and social atmosphere with metaphors and eloquently composed intros. In truth, though, the task has eluded us. Things seem to have moved so rapidly in the last few years that we wonder if the world is rotating faster on its axis. It has also eluded us because these short pages are hardly the place for all the thoughts, feelings, and emotions running tirelessly through our beings. Nevertheless, we find ourselves at the end of another difficult year, yet again compelled to attempt it. On one hand, we're slightly hopeful—we're vaccinated; and also distressed—few, if any, of the issues raised in our previous introductions are resolved, and it seems that the omicron variant awaits. As teachers and researchers, we are interested in how words frame experience, impact learning, build reflective capacity, and promote growth. (Key terms are an important part of our research on transfer and often provide a conceptual foundation—a heuristic, if you will—for how students understand writing situations; so it's a wonder we haven't brought them into our editorials sooner!)

So we found ourselves wondering . . . what words are others using to frame the current moment?

For many, a “word of the year” helps set the tone for an annual moment of reflection. These terms are often chosen by some combination of editorial decision and search frequency, so they provide a kind of rough metric for both the interest in and impact of lexical items each year. How might those annual “word of the year” choices—both in the US and abroad—work as a heuristic for thinking about 2021?

Because this “moment” has lasted for almost two years now, we thought we'd start by looking at the words of year for 2020. Where we've been seems pretty clear: the American Dialect Society chose “Covid” as its word of the year in 2020. Merriam-Webster and Dictionary.com both chose “pandemic,” and Collins Dictionary chose “lockdown.” As a rebuff to what she saw as word-of-the-year negativity, Arianna Huffington, the one-time independent newswoman turned behavioral technology guru, announced that “resilience” was her 2020 word of the year. Oxford UP Languages, for their part, found 2020 so difficult to frame that, instead of a word of the year, they produced an entire language report. Internationally, things looked pretty similar: Macquarie Dictionary in Australia chose both “rona” (as in Corona) and “doomscrolling.” The Australian National Dictionary Centre chose “iso” (as in, self-isolation). The Society for German Language (or Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache) chose “Corona-Pandemie,” which needs little translation. Our favorite international contribution for 2020, however, was from the Danish Language Council (or

Dansk Sprognævn): samfundssinn, which means “putting the concern of society higher than one’s own interests.”

In other words, in 2020 you might have doomscrolled while iso’ing from the rona pandemic, trying to remain resilient out of samfundssinn.

The words for 2021, we hoped, would provide more reason for optimism . . . or at least a reframing of our individual and collective responses to the recent past. The American Dialect Society choice is not yet published, but Merriam-Webster chose “vaccine” and, similarly, Oxford UP Languages chose “vax.” The Collins Dictionary chose “NFT”—an acronym for non-fungible token—which narrowly beat out climate anxiety, double-vaxxed, hybrid working, and pingdemic (as in, when an app notifies you of pandemic-related news), among others. Cambridge Dictionary chose “perseverance” for 2021, explicitly linking that choice to the collective response to the global problems of the year and to the landing of an eponymous NASA Rover on Mars. The hope, Cambridge’s announcement said, was to capture “the undaunted will of people across the world to never give up, despite the many challenges of the last 12 months” (Glennon). Highlighting collective response of another solidaristic kind, Dictionary.com chose “allyship” for 2021. Internationally, the mood shifted a bit as well. In Germany, the choice was “Wellenbrecher”—literally a breakwater, aka the measures necessary to fend off a wave of infections. In Australia, it was “strollout” (as in, a very slow rollout of vaccines) for both the Australian National Dictionary Centre and Macquarie Dictionary. Despite our enjoyment of samfundssinn in 2020, the Danes have yet to announce their choice for 2021.

Because of this small heuristic experiment, we no longer feel so alone in our inability to capture the current moment. Perhaps it’s difficult to capture because it is so . . . dispersed and unequally distributed. Perhaps it’s because we are all experiencing it differently. To test that theory, we asked family, friends, colleagues, and students what their “word of the year” might be: the answers ranged from the wildly optimistic to mournfully tired. The lesson we take from these words of the year and from talking with family, friends, colleagues, and students is of the importance of taking care of our mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

That will be the topic of the next special issue. We’re thrilled to announce that Stacey Cochran and Susan Miller-Cochran will guest edit the next digital, open-access, issue for summer 2022. The title of the issue will be “Teaching Writing to Increase Student and Teacher Well-Being,” and a CFP will be ready for you soon—so keep an eye out!

## At A Glance

This issue's At A Glance is "Teaching, Writing, Gaming" by Richard Colby, Matthew S. S. Johnson, and Rebekah Shultz Colby. This gamified research poster outlines ways of thinking about games and their possible influence and impact on writing classrooms: as sites of writing and learning; as possibilities for teaching strategies; and as a way of thinking about teaching and learning. Most helpfully, this text provides three accompanying sets of key terms and a substantial bibliography for following up on the poster's ideas. It also serves as a nice entrée into the authors' new book, *The Ethics of Playing, Researching, and Teaching Games in the Writing Classroom* (2021).

## Articles

The first article in this issue, "Are We Overlooking (and Underselling) the Writing Capstone Course?" by Timothy Ballingall and Brad Lucas, offers a content analysis of 54 writing capstone syllabi from 44 different institutions while highlighting course descriptions, outcomes, and assigned readings. Their findings suggest that "the writing capstone is, primarily, a qualitatively different course from the rest of the curriculum, neither just another course nor a professional-development after-thought." And yet, they find, capstone courses still sometimes lack necessary articulation: of course goals, of whom they serve and why, and of how and why the culminating experience fits within its local context.

Next we have "'Sometimes I Forget I'm in an Online Class!' Why Place Matters for Meaningful Student Online Writing Experiences" by Felicita Arzu Carmichael, who argues that space and place matter in the online writing classroom and can often lead students to have meaningful writing experiences. Using the work of Eodice et al., Arzu Carmichael asks online writing instructors to utilize space and place as intentional for writing about the self, as prompts for reflection, and as a framework for thinking through the binaries of "natural/material" and "constructed/metaphorical" in online writing instruction.

Drawing from a range of disciplinary perspectives, Carrie Hall's "'How am I Supposed to Watch a Little Piece of Paper?': Literacy and Learning Under Duress" carefully considers the inequitably distributed attentional difficulties that writing students face when attempting to focus on writing in moments of duress, whether from personal trauma or ambient threat. Using students' own writing as a site for negotiating the tensions of paying attention, Hall develops three strategies for making sure that writing curricula are "curricula capacious enough that students can find processes that work for them": understanding attention, finding footholds, and deep attending.

Finally, Kristin Bennett’s “Tracing Ableism’s Rhetorical Circulation through an Analysis of Composition Mission Statements” reports on a systematic study of writing program mission statements, noting where attempts to be both inclusive and standardized lead to language that is, instead, exclusive of meaningful difference. Combining research in disability studies with work in technical and professional communication, Bennett identifies where normative programmatic language reproduces and circulates ableist assumptions and then outlines ways of crippling mission statements. Through three specific rhetorical moves—articulating anti-assimilationist multiplicity, validating students’ embodied knowledge, and advocating for collaborative interdependence—Bennett reconstructs extant missions statements as models for future practice.

### **Course Designs**

Global Society of Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE) Basic OLI Certification is an instructor-facing two-course certification program designed by Amy Cicchino, Kevin DePew, Jason Snart, and Scott Warnock to help online literacy instructors, tutors, and writing program administrators. The goal is to help writing teachers learn foundational principles, theories, and practices of teaching and tutoring writing for online instruction and apply those where they work (or where they may eventually work). Course one focuses on online literacy education while course two focuses on assignment and activity design for online writing instruction, whether for an online writing course, writing center, or writing-enriched course across campus. Helpfully, their reflection outlines the challenges of rolling out such a sequence and suggests how the move to remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic can clarify thinking about “triage” versus “certified” online writing instruction.

The title to Nancy Pine’s “ENGL 1100 Contextualized: Designing a FYW Course for Guided Pathways” nearly says it all: this course design provides a locally contextualized, discipline-specific first year writing course for community college students in business and hospitality programs. The course includes “subject matter and the study of rhetorical situations and texts of interest and relevance to students with majors in the pathway,” all of which are prepared, designed, and implemented according to Pine’s “pedagogy of contextualization” based on transfer, motivation, and program specificity.

### **Where We Are**

We are especially excited about this issue’s Where We Are section, which takes up the topic of Teaching Writing in Global Contexts. Scholars from Australia, the Caribbean, Denmark, Hong Kong, India, Latin America, the Middle East, Singapore, and West Africa accepted the invitation to write to us about the teaching, research, and administration of writing in their specific

contexts. The result is a kaleidoscopic picture of the histories, values, pedagogies, practices, programs, purposes, and goals of writing programs around the globe. Our only regret is that we didn't have more wonderful contributors or more pages to give them!

## Book Reviews

This issue, we have a solid group of individual book reviews—seven to be exact!—and they tackle concepts that are very prevalent in the field right now: literacy in the age of mis/disinformation, strategies for online writing instructors, the anti-racist writing workshop, lived experiences by non-tenured writing faculty, labor-based grading contracts, empowering community college first year composition instructors, and style and composition studies. The writers provide wonderfully rich summaries and critical responses to each of the books in question.

What, we wonder, would be your word of the year for 2021? And what will the 2022 word of the year be?

Kt and MD  
Denver and Boston  
December, 2021

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