

## From the Editors: A Critical Encomium to Pasts, Presents, and Futures

2022 is the 50th anniversary of *Composition Studies*—the field’s oldest independent, peer-reviewed journal. To celebrate this milestone, we have invited contributions from a number of previous and current editors, authors, and board members from *CS*’s history. Specifically, we invited them to revisit the journal’s past—whether their own contributions or those of others—in the spirit of a critical encomium. In invoking this phrase, we hoped to draw on the genre’s ancient roots—to draw forth praise for the journal (it is our birthday, after all!)—but also to welcome criticism, honest examination, and exhortations for improvement. We’re very excited about how our 35 contributors interpreted this task, and we’re excited to use this editorial introduction to join them in reflecting upon the previous half-century in order to understand the present moment of the journal and the future of our field.

### The Past: Views of a Future to Come

We’ve heard it said that everything old is new again, an apt idiom for this issue of *Composition Studies*. As we perused the archives to see where it all began (at Texas Christian University! on typewriters!), we noticed how much carries forth from decades past.

\*\*\*

Matt: In the very first article of issue 1.1, reprinted in full at the end of this introduction, Richard Larson writes about the changes in the content of composition, including the inclusion of public texts and student writing as content.

Kara: Well, we took this and ran with it, huh? Certainly using student texts to teach with and making public writing part of our courses, assignments, and sometimes even assessments, has become more popular. And the way conversations about the content of composition have taken center stage in recent years. Even the content of non-first year composition courses in a variety of curricular locations for writing classes. And we now have the writing major, the writing minor, MA and PhDs in rhetoric and composition—all of which are locations for thinking about writing-as-content.

Matt: Funny you should mention that. He also writes about a wide variety of approaches to course content, from theme courses, to speaking and writing, to those focusing on the “personal life,” and on the identities of students. This certainly hasn’t gone away! It is a bit more complicated than we have time for here, but these approaches have been generative of so many disciplinary conversations and debates over the last 50 years.

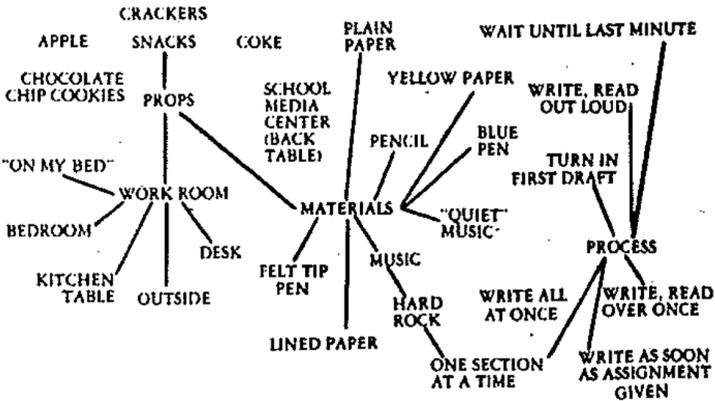
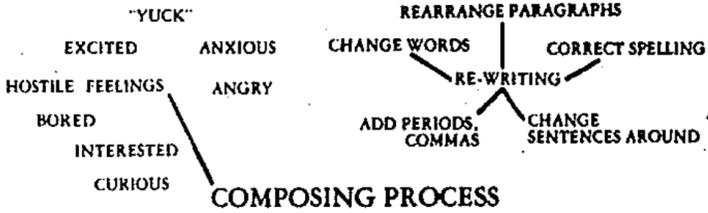
Kara: So, did you see the part about “multiplying abundance” of offerings for what we might call “Freshman English” and what we might do to make some changes? Among those changes, he suggests: new, cheaper, and more usable textbooks. And we’ve definitely got plenty to choose from! Textbook production, cost, and availability is a constant concern for teachers. We’ve got more and more open-source textbooks— and open-access teacher resources—offering viable solutions. But! He also writes about how language itself “helps one to know and to organize one’s knowledge.”

Matt: Ha! Reflection, meta-cognition, key terms, transfer, threshold concepts— it’s like the seedlings of all of that are right there. Much of the work in our journals in the intervening five decades has further explored how language and knowledge within first year writing can (or should?) be taught and explored.

And not just language. Get this—Larson also writes about how a “multiplication of forms” that includes “all modes of communication, print, non-print verbal, and non-verbal” as the hallmark of humanistic study. This is almost a full 25 years before the New London Group and multiliteracies!

Kara: Exactly! Multimodality. Widely used and explored in many first year writing courses, writing across the curriculum programs, and writing center contexts. He even incorporates it into his piece. Look at this diagram—he focuses on studying students’ “processes of thought and ways to increase the power of thinking” and—

FIGURE 1



Matt: The writing process!

Kara: Right?! One of our most transformative and enduring disciplinary concepts. And now we understand the power (and limits!) of it and its importance to students thinking critically about their own writing.

Matt: Not to mention the way the diagram anticipates attention to materiality (snacks, the kitchen table!), the affective turn (“yuck”!), and work in spatial rhetorics (there’s the kitchen table from the extracurriculum!). He’s got a bit about the goals of composition in there, too: “helping students achieve genuine rhetorical effectiveness in their writing”—which he specifically juxtaposes to the enforcement of correctness norms—and “helping human beings to make the most of themselves” as individuals, citizens, and inhabitants of a shared world.

Kara: Rhetorical effectiveness and making-meaning for oneself and others might be the most common course goal out there. And there’s a lot to love and appreciate about this last statement: “helping human beings to

make the most of themselves” as individuals, citizens,  
and inhabitants of a shared world. It’s something most  
of us still strive for today.

\*\*\*

Everything old really is new again! Fifty years ago, Larson’s piece prefigured a lot of what we’d be researching, arguing about, and implementing in the writing classroom. On the one hand, it reads as if we’ve come full circle, writing about similar things over and over. On the other hand, those issues, questions, and concerns have been so generative—for revising, reinventing, re-mixing, transforming. Half a century later, this stuff really has staying power. Writing, and the teaching of it, transcends time. Why?

To consider the “why” question, we wonder about what issues have staying power in composition studies. And, if we just consider some of what was written about in the first pages of *Composition Studies*, these issues emerge clearly:

- Arguments about the content of composition
- Teaching writing across institutional contexts (especially two-year colleges)
- Articulating disciplinarity while valuing variety, reflection, and metacognition
- Understanding multimodality and changes that come with modalities
- Writing across the curriculum and the vertical curriculum
- Advocating for students, especially their rights to their own languages

Naming these issues helps us look at current movements and toward possibilities of what our future might be. And while there are parts of our past that—like most (maybe all?) histories—have things we wish could be undone, we remain hopeful about building a new way forward.

\*\*\*

## Events & Fun Facts in the History of CS

Among the many events in the pages of *CS*, we’ve selected a few we thought readers might enjoy (with issue numbers in parentheses):

- Announcement of the revival of the Rhetoric Society of America (1.1)

*Freshman English News* is published three times a year at Texas Christian University. Subscription price for one year is \$2.00. All news items, articles, books for review, and queries should be sent to the editor.

Editor ..... Gary Tate  
Texas Christian Univ.

- Announcement of the beginning of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* (3.2)
- Announcement of first forum on Freshman English at MLA (4.2)
- First Special Issue: A Forum on Doctoral Pedagogy (23.2)
- First international author contribution: Thomas from Soong Sil University, we think! (25.2)
- First issue typeset on a computer: spring 2003 (31.1)
- Special Issue: Composition in the Small College (32.2)
- First “Polylog” on Writing Center Directors and Writing Program Administrators (34.2)
- Special Issue: Growing Pains - The Writing Major in Rhetoric and Composition (35.1)
- Special Issue: Wo/men’s Ways of Making it in Writing Studies (39.1)
- Special Issue: Comics, Multimodality, and Composition (43.1)
- Special Issue: Composition’s Global Turn (44.1)
- Special Issue: Corequisite Writing Courses: Equity and Access (48.2)
- Special Issue: Diversity is Not Justice: Working Towards Radical Transformation and Racial Equity in the Discipline (49.2)

\*\*\*

## The Present: Reconsidering a Past

CS has long been conscious of and responsive to issues of equality, equity, and linguistic justice—even as we have sought to correct our mistakes, right past wrongs, and do better. In staging a critical encomium, this issue continues that tradition.

For instance, the At A Glance pieces (Eyman; Jacobs & Dolmage; Milu et al.) in this issue resulted from invitations to authors of some of our most-cited publications. We asked authors to to revisit their previous work and create visual representations of those pieces. These texts make that previous work comprehensible in news ways and also push at the limitations of their previous publications.

In lieu of articles for the issue, we invited a selection of previous CS authors to reflect on either their own contribution to the journal or on the work of others. What resulted is a fantastic array of interpretations of that invitation: some folks revisited specific pieces, ideas, or eras (Anson; Dobrin; Lorimer Leonard; Martinez; Rule), while others created specific encomia of individualized praise (Hidalgo;

### CORRECTION

In the Winter issue, Richard Welna, English Editor for Scott, Foresman was quoted (p. 2. col. 1) as saying “Textbooks seem to be in a decline.” What Mr. Welna said was “Textbookese seems to be in a decline.” He still believes in textbooks! Our apologies.

Medina). Some took historical approaches to the tasks that were by turns personal, scholarly, and fun (Bawarshi & Reiff; Martinez; Phelps), and yet others cast new understandings of the past as possible future (Elbow; Enoch & Walston; Perryman-Clark). Finally, several contributors read the past through the lens of current thinking on race and ethnicity (Chairez et al.; Rosas & Glenn), thereby offering critiques for improvement and possible ways forward.

Similarly, we invited previous journal Editors and current Advisory Board members to contribute to a *Where We Are* focused on the question: “What’s next for (publishing in) rhetoric & composition?” The resulting texts include deep microhistorical accounts (Clary-Lemon; Micciche), specific visions of futures contiguous with the journal’s past (Leverenz; Mayberry), and critical accounts oriented to progressive futures (Carter-Tod; LaVecchia).

We also invited current and previous Book Reviewer Editors to review any book of their choosing. We think the results are a lot of fun: postprocess postmortem, autoethnography in writing studies, and a revisitation of the archives make for a tripartite exploration of major turns in the field’s previous two decades (Gaillet; Siegel Finer; Tham). This issue doesn’t contain any course designs, though fret not: those will continue again in the next issue!

Although not everyone we invited was inclined or able to take us up on the invitation, we’re very grateful to the 35 contributors who were able to make it work during a very busy and difficult time.

At this particular present moment, the *CS* staff is also changing, so we want to thank the folks who are rotating off of our editorial staff. We’re incredibly grateful to the following people, each of whom has been with us the past year and has helped immensely with editing the journal, growing our social presence, and leading *FEN Blog*’s incredibly successful first year!

- *FEN Blog* Editors: Lauren Fusilier and Megan von Bergen
- Social Media Editor: Nitya Pandey
- Content Editors: Alex McAdams and Clare Sully-Stendahl
- Editorial Assistant: Anna Aldrich

We are incredibly grateful for your hardwork and dedication to the journal and wish you well in the next leg of your journey.

### **The Future: Where Do We Go Next?**

Thankfully, the future of *CS* is also in its people, and we are thrilled to welcome a some new editors onto the team:

- *FEN Blog* Editors: Ben Hojem (Univ of Cincinnati) and Jada Pat-chagondla (UCLA)
- Social Media Editor: Mikala Jones (Young Harris College)

- Content Editors: Cydney Alexis (Kansas State Univ), Jaclyn Fiscus-Cannady (Florida State Univ), Rhiannon Scharnhorst (Univ of Cincinnati), and Roberto Sebastian Leon (Univ of Maryland)

They join our fabulous returning team members: Megan Busch, Mike Haen, Callie Kostelich, Emma Kostopoulos, Annmarie Steffes, and Jason Chew Kit Tham. One thing is clear: wherever we go next, it will be together.

Another question is how we get to where we are going. In our summer 2021 editorial introduction, we mentioned that we've been building a Heuristic Guide for Anti-Racist Editorial Practices. It's been reviewed by our Advisory Board and our editorial team, both of which have offered helpful feedback and revision suggestions. We piloted an initial version in the Community Guidelines and Review Guidelines documents for *FEN Blog*—we're proud to have this part of the journal, run by graduate student editors, lead the way forward. The updated document, which will guide future editorial practices at the journal, is now live on our website. We will ask future authors and reviewers to review it and join us in using it as a set of guiding principles.

**The editor reserves the right to edit essays so that their usage conforms with the *Guidelines for Non-sexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications*.**

Trying to predict the future—disciplinary, educational, and otherwise—is a risky endeavor, as the past two years have shown very clearly. Nonetheless, at this moment we wonder: what does the future hold for *Composition Studies*?

We see a number of vibrant areas of inquiry in the discipline, and we look forward to publishing more work of the kind that has made the last 50 years so productive. At the same time, there are transformational changes in the world of linguistic technologies (as Chris Anson's contribution to this issue makes clear), in education, politics, climate, and other domains of life that, we think, deserve more of our attention.

So, as we look forward, we want to encourage authors to send us their research articles. Publishing research is something we were committed to when we began our collaborative editorship of the journal, and it's something we want as a continued focus. Though the discipline has moved a bit away from research in recent years, it's something we've continued to believe in. And we don't mean a specific call for a narrow conception of empirical work (though we certainly welcome empirical work!). This vision is one where research offers writers and teachers of writing systematic, ethical accounts of what happens within and outside the walls of our classrooms and results in robust construc-

tions of knowledge that presents us viable ways to improve practice. Research can help us be/come better researchers, teachers, administrators, mentors, and citizens because it helps us form dialogical, reciprocal relationships between inquiry, praxis, understanding, and knowledge. As researchers and teachers of writing, we have the opportunity to offer students—and each other—something incredibly meaningful: knowledge that results in powerful meaning-making practices, a voice with which to share them, and ways of making and remaking the world with it.

Those are some of the reasons why, 50 years later, we believe the researching and teaching writing has such staying power.

Kt and MD  
Denver and Boston  
May 2022