

# Introducing ... Create, Perform, Write: WAC, WID, and the Performing and Visual Arts!

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*What is writing, really?*  
—Kathleen Blake Yancey

*She's got everything she needs  
She's an artist, she don't look back  
She can take the dark out of the nighttime  
And paint the daytime black*  
—Bob Dylan

Across the country, university programs in the performing and visual arts ask undergraduates to cultivate appreciation of—and graduate students to work toward mastery of—their disciplines. Students act, sing, play, dance, draw, paint, and carve in the performing and visual arts while learning about and engaging in the generative creative processes of choreography, composing, and visual design. Performing and visual arts programs also ask students at all levels to write about the artistic domains they inhabit. From undergraduates taking introductory arts courses, to MFA students writing theses and academic journal articles, thousands of students nationwide are creating and performing art—witnessing an array of creative processes, performances and exhibitions—and attempting to write about their experiences (e.g. Oliver, 2010; Wingell, 2008; Barnet, 2014).

But negotiating the nuances of writing about the performing and visual arts is no easy task. For example, in *Writing about Dance* (2010) Wendy Oliver outlines the many questions students writing various types of dance genres must consider, including: questions about movement that consider shape, space, time, tempo, rhythm, weight and gesture; questions about supporting elements like music, costumes and lighting; and other questions that involve the structure and style of the performance including the development of the performance, theme, repetition, and whether the dance was a solo or group performance. Learning to perceive and to write through the lens of the arts requires students to learn (and teachers to coach how) to balance the technical expertise of a composer or choreographer with the poetic facility of a creative writer.

## "The Body's Wisdom": Doing Our Part

Composition and Rhetoric scholars are increasingly doing their part to study and report on connections between creativity, performance, writing, and the visual (e.g. *Kairos*; *Computers and Composition Digital Press*; *ARTiculating: Teaching Writing in a Visual World* 1998/2013; Fishman et al. 2005). Childers, Hobson, and Mullin's collection *ARTiculating* (1998/2013) as well as essays like Kathleen Blake Yancey's "Made Not Only in Words" (2004) have made us consider questions like "What do our references to writing mean? Do they mean print only?" (Yancey, p. 298). The move in the recently updated [WPA Outcomes for First-Year](#)

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[Composition](#) (2014) to disperse what was the fifth category—writing in digital environments—into the other four categories is a promising sign of our field's embracing of more than words in communicative performances. It is a sign that, as an inherently interdisciplinary field, we are realizing what [Fishman et al.](#) (2005) call for in terms of the larger goal of the "importance of performance and writing" in order "to describe in detail the writing that students are doing and to use that information to question and perhaps to reconceive our understanding of the definition, future, and scope of writing in the twenty-first century" (p. 247). And rhetoric has always been a domain concerned with artistic performance in writing, speaking, and visualizing.



*Shannon Narasimhan (far right) dancing with fellow students Rachel Randall (left) and Alice Gosti during a UW performance in 2006 (courtesy of Karen Orders Photography).*

According to Quintilian, art is concerned with theory (understanding), practice (actions) or production. The art of rhetoric, Quintilian claims, though drawing heavily from the other categories, is primarily a practical endeavor (Murphy and Meador, 1995). Persuasion, or "identification" ala Kenneth Burke (1969/1950) and Jerome Bruner (1966), is accomplished by rhetorical *action*.<sup>[1]</sup> For the ancient Greeks, those great teachers of the Romans, the interconnections between the performing arts of drama, music, poetry, and dance were strong and important ones. The *choros* ("chorus") sang and danced the parts of tragedy performed in lyric meters. Increasingly, though, in Greek plays (really more like musicals) the actors began to sing and dance. *Choros*, to the Greeks, was the same word for a "dance" or a "chorus." For the Greek mind, so pivotal to Western thought, words, music, and actions were all intimately connected. Hence, the *khoregos* ("manager") choreographed the theory, action, and production of any given play (*The World of Athens*, 1984, pp.173-74, 300-04).

In "Bodily Pedagogies" (2002), echoing Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) concept of bodily *hexis*, Debra Hawhee posits that ancient Greek students worked toward perfection of communicative manner, or style and grace, through constant imitation, repetition, and practice in certain bodily exercises. Through these exercises, Hawhee writes, students learned that "the body itself becomes *sundromos*, an intensive gathering of forces

(of desire, of vigorous practices, of musical sounds, of corporeal codes), trafficked through and by neurons, muscles, and organs. Entwined with the body in this way, rhetorical training thus exceeds the transmission of 'ideas,' rhetoric the bounds of 'words'" (p. 160). Quintilian (1921/ca. 95) further reports on the importance of the Greek notion of bodily rhythm and control, or *eurythmic*, in the service of delivery (I.X.26). He describes how Socrates, Plato, and the rugged Spartans (and later Cicero) saw the virtue of making the most of the mind-body connection, of marrying the passionate intensity of *sundromos* with the deliberate control of the *eurythmic* to realize excellence in communicative performance (I.XI.16-18). Sondra Perl tries to enact this artistic spirit and form in the following poetic excerpt from *Felt Sense: Writing with the Body* (2004):

The body-mind connection.

Rhythm.

Creativity.

Deep intuitive knowledge.

Before the words come.

Being centered.

Flow.

The body's wisdom before it's articulated in words.

Yet peruse any given writing studies collection—whether WAC, WID, CAC, writing center, or composition—for scholarship on writing in the visual and *especially* the performing arts and you will see/hear/feel a relative dearth. Kathryn Perry's webtext "[The Movement of Composition: Dance and Writing](#)" (2012), suggests both the promise and complexity of learning to communicate with more than words. In her "multimodal attempt to capture and compare both the physical and conceptual movement involved in dance and writing," readers are offered an intriguing reversal of roles as Perry's text foregrounds the visual, aural, and kinesthetic—while the textual plays a more modest supporting role. The performing and visual arts have much to offer writing studies in terms of process, creativity, design, delivery, and habits of mind (and body).

## Let's Dance! Our Partnership

From 2000 to 2008 Steven helped direct writing centers and writing programs at the University of Washington, Seattle (UW). The former director of the Dance Program, Elizabeth (Betsy) Cooper (pictured in action below), is not only a professional dancer, she is also a dance scholar who is very interested in writers' composing and learning processes (see Cooper, 2011; 2013). In 2002 a colleague helped us to connect and while discussing Steven's ideas about writing center theory and practice we became visibly and verbally excited. We quickly decided to establish a satellite center for the program.



*Betsy Cooper (courtesy of Gabriel Biencycki).*

Steven soon realized that in order to establish a connection grounded in mutual respect, he would have to conceptualize a "conversation" rather than a "conversion" model of cross-curricular collaboration. He would have to follow the suggestions of [Muriel Harris](#) (1992/2000, p. 171), [Barbara Walvoord](#) (1992/2000, pp. 15-16), and the words of the UW's own [Joan Graham](#) (1992/2000): "Faculty and graduate students in English can provide valuable writing instruction for students in the disciplines—if they go to the disciplinary contexts where students are working and expect to learn themselves" (pp. 125-6). (These sentiments ring as true today as they did when they were first published over twenty years ago.) Steven talked at length with both Betsy and the director of the 100-level dance classes, Peter Kyle. He asked them for books and journal articles he should read. They were very happy to hear his interest in learning about dance. Peter even joked that Steven should take Dance 101, suggesting that he might learn more about dance that way (practicing) than by reading (theorizing) alone. A week later Steven registered. The next quarter he found himself in a studio sporting ballet slippers and learning the fundamentals of ballet and modern dance. More importantly, as he danced and learned to talk about dance, he also began to appreciate the idea of performance, and to ponder its relationship with writing.



*UW Dance class, June 2013 (courtesy of Tim Summers).*

Since then Steven has continued to be inspired and influenced by everything he's experienced working with performing artists. He has taken it into his writing classrooms in a number of ways, including his experimentation and practice with staged debates.

Originally Published in *Kairos*.

As Steven demonstrates in his multimodal [Kairos webtext](#) (2015), teaching and learning, in so many ways, is a performing and visual art in its own right. An awareness of and willingness to use the idea of teaching and learning as performance can make our students' learning, and our lives as teachers, more successful and fulfilling. It can conscientiously engage and immerse students and teachers in the synergistic enactment and realization of those coveted "habits of mind" and attitude described in the [Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing](#) (2011): curiosity, openness, engagement, persistence, flexibility, creativity, responsibility, and metacognition. Viewing the teaching and learning of writing as performance can allow the interweaving of those habits of mind and attitude more intimately with other course and curricular learning objectives and work and life goals.

## Answering the Call to Create, Perform, Write

In the CFP for this special issue of *Across the Disciplines*, we invited proposals for articles that explore connections between the teaching and learning of writing and the performing and visual arts in the classroom or studio, in writing centers and writing fellows programs, and elsewhere across the disciplines. Proposals for theoretical pieces, practical and experiential narrative essays, and case studies were all welcome. Inspired by previous *ATD* special issue multimodal pieces like "[Not Just Words Any More](#)" (Bridwell-Bowles et al., 2009) and "[Going there](#)" (Zhang et al., 2013), we were delighted to invite a range of texts that responded to the initial questions we posed, including:

- What does it mean to analyze, synthesize, interpret and deliver information in writing in and about the performing and visual arts?
- How have process, creativity and other writing and pedagogical theories and practices affected how students write, and how teachers coach students to write, in and about the performing and visual arts?
- What theories of learning and performance influence the teaching and learning of writing about the performing and visual arts?
- And how has technology influenced the teaching and learning of writing in the performing and visual arts, including multimodal composition and online arenas?

The webtexts included in this collection are intended to perform and enact the very ideas contributors espouse. We've arranged the contributions to build from the more theoretical and literature-review focused pieces, to the more typical case study reporting and analyses, finally to the multimodal hybrid texts.

In our opening act "Creative Thinking for 21st Century Composing Practices: Creativity Pedagogies across Disciplines" Sohui Lee and Russell Carpenter synthesize their extensive review of creativity theory literature from a wide variety of disciplines including composition, engineering, the sciences, the humanities, and education and the social sciences to offer pedagogical possibilities for multimodal composition practice and pedagogy. The authors explain how drawing on multidisciplinary creative concepts like play, design, divergent/convergent thinking, boundary pushing/breaking, and problem solving/finding can "make creativity knowledge sustainable by providing compositionists and writing center practitioners with concepts and tools to articulate the value of creativity strategies beyond the composition classroom." The authors apply these concepts and tools especially to the multimodal composition classroom and writing center.

Loren Marquez furthers theoretically hybrid connections as her "Dramatic Consequences: Integrating Rhetorical Performance across the Disciplines and Curriculum" offers a case study of two students delivering two very different types of performances during their respective presentations. Framing the students' performances in comparative theories from writing and performance studies, and layering in the students' own reflections on their performances, Marquez provides readers with a vivid representation of how a performance can foster identification or division with an audience of peers. When it comes to balancing the performance choices of the speaker and the effects these choices have on a given audience, Marquez shows why "in the turn from the textual age to informational and digital age, performance within multiple genres and spaces becomes even more important."

In "Writing-Intensive Approaches in a Typographic Design Studio Class: Holding Students' Feet to the Fire of Cultural Context" Michael Fowler furthers the showcasing of student work begun by Marquez in offering several colorful examples of student work produced for his ARTS 345: Intermediate Graphic Design course. Illustrating the connections between text and the visual in the graphic arts, Fowler guides readers through some of the complex details involved in scaffolding learning to think like, and to compose in words and images like, a graphic designer. Undergirding Fowler's curriculum is his goal "to guide students toward a more deliberate analytic and self-critical attitude during their concept developments" by helping "them to own those skills, initiated largely through writing practice, that will keep them life-long learners in their quest toward excellence as designers." Fowler describes how his focus on cultural and historical contexts for this course fostered this goal by attempting to move students toward a balance between their own aesthetic intentions and the needs and desires of the audience/viewer/client.

While Marquez and Fowler offer qualitative points of view primarily from students, Anicca Cox, in "Mapping Disciplinary Values and Rhetorical Concerns through Language: Writing Instruction in the Performing and Visual Arts," presents a case study of instructor voices designed to help writing instructors across the disciplines make the most of the overlaps and divergences in meaning-making in the creative and performing arts. Framed in discourse community theory and Barthesian semiotics, Cox details interviews of seven instructors in a variety of visual and performing arts, and from a variety of institutions. Her findings illustrate the interconnected value system of teaching, learning, writing, creating, and producing in the performing and visual arts, how "for these instructors it became important over time to not only offer students access to techniques *for*, and values and practices *of* art making but also to model ways that they can articulate that process to a larger community." Cox offers implications of her findings in terms of making the most of what valuable connections we might draw between writing studies and writing in the performing and visual arts in order to empower all student writers.

Our next four contributors deliver true multimodal showstoppers. Chris Gerben, in "Author in the Arts: Composing and Collaborating in Text, Music, and the Visual Arts," presents a multimodal case study that combines the best of both worlds when it comes to instructor and student participant voices. Gerben takes us on a retrospective trip to an experimental course he participated in as a student in 2001 titled *Turning Points: Collaborations in the Arts*. Framing his case study in theories of authorship and current discussions of multimodal pedagogies, Gerben provides in-depth interviews with the instructor of the course, along with thick descriptions of the complex moving parts that constituted the entire experience. Gerben offers several YouTube videos produced by fellow students in the course so readers/viewers can travel back almost fifteen years to lucidly relive some of the experimental fruits of students' labors-of-love from that memorable course. Gerben ultimately hopes his piece will encourage writing studies audiences to "devote ourselves to interrogating the composing processes and products that can be developed in both traditional and more experimental courses like this one."

In "Trends, Vibes, and Energies: Building on Students' Visual Literacies for Visual Composing" Faith Kurtyka offers a case study centering on two social sorority members' use of social media for stirring interest in potential recruits. Framed in current WAC/WID (especially Susan Delagrange's) theories of visual performance and audience uptake, Kurtyka analyzes the Tumblr and YouTube artifacts the two sorority sisters produced in terms of how they attempt to construct a certain relatable identity for potential members. Kurtyka enriches this analysis with interviews of the sisters. The author ultimately delivers a compelling study that illustrates how "by welcoming various forms of composing, places of compositions, and styles of composers into our classrooms, and by constructing pedagogy on these foundations, we create important continuities between students' everyday lives and the classroom."

Following in fine fashion, Lindsey Allgood and Michael Rifenburg offer a visually stunning multimodal enactment of a teacher-artist's metacognitive creative processes of capturing her students' creative composing processes, framed in current writing studies and performance art scholarship. In "The Woven Body: Embodying Text in Performance Art and the Writing Center" co-author Allgood becomes the centerpiece of this art-text, both as artist and as art educator, as when the authors write: "Through its participatory and unscripted roots, performance art flattens audience and rhetor into a singular performer. Such flattening can be maddening for a rhetor valuing authorial intent. Yet Lindsey's goal as a performer is not to dictate how action will unfold; instead, she seeks to create a space in which action can unfold. The focus for Lindsey is providing the opportunity for performance as text to be delivered and that the performance as text is delivered, not who or how it is delivered."

And in our grand finale, "Writing to Learn and Learning to Perform: Lessons from a Writing Intensive Course in Experimental Theatre Studio," Jim Henry and Tammy Baker hold nothing back in providing readers with a thoroughly vivid and evocative treatment of their subject matters. The authors offer a work that is simultaneously art and science, rigorous case study and stimulating multimodal showcase of creative minds at work. Henry and Baker intertwine the theory and practice of writing studies with performance

studies to frame their naturalistic study of the course Theatre 490: Experimental Theatre Studio. Viewers are treated to unique case-study details that include all course materials; reflective writing performed during, and then again two years after, the study; and several video clips of the instructor's curriculum planning, as well as of the staged performances of students in the course. The authors gift reader/viewers/listeners with a rarely experienced in-depth look into the sights and sounds of truly cross-disciplinary teaching and learning where, when it comes to learning to perform, revision is not just part of the creative process but where "revision is the process."

All in all, contributors offer texts so rich and complex (yet simultaneously so enjoyable to follow) our synopses in no way suffice and readers need to experience these works for themselves. Ladies and gentlemen, please enjoy the shows . . .

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## Notes

[1] For Burke (1969/1950), identification is just as (if not more) important to rhetorical performances as persuasion. He writes of the link between style and identification, "we might well keep in mind that a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications [ . . . ] So, there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification ('consubstantiality') and communication (the nature of rhetoric as 'addressed')" (p. 46). One of the most important, if not the most important, "stylistic identification" roles teachers play for students is that of a model for possible intellectual imitation or emulation. Artists, inventors, educators, coaches, anyone involved or who has ever been involved with people in teaching and learning situations, tacitly know this. Jerome Bruner (1966), heavily influenced by Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey, links attitude to the concept of identification and motivation, specifically in relation to the tutoring/coaching situation. Bruner writes, "The tutor as identification figure became increasingly important in all this, for the tutor provided a new model of coping by showing that problems are both soluble and not dangerous—or, when not soluble, at least not the source of either disaster or punishment" (p. 146). Students need to see their teachers/tutors/coaches do well, to perform adeptly. But students can also benefit from seeing their teachers and tutors and peers misstep now and then, no matter how gracefully (at)tuned we may try to act. Students need to see models of how to act and react, while under sometimes intense pressure, with grace and poise.

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