

# Chapter 17: Research Remix: Soundwriting Studies of the English Language

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## 8. Kate Vriesema's Discourse Ethnography: Wattpad as a Discourse Community

Kate Vriesema enters the world of an online creative writing community to think about how language serves as a medium through which strangers become writing group partners.

### Transcript

*[sound of a small bell ringing, blended quickly with coffee machines buzzing and general chatter]*

**Woman:** What can I get for you?

**Angela:** Can I have an Almond Joy hot chocolate?

*[Coffeeshop ambience continues under the following narration.]*

**Kate Vriesema:** Coffee shops are a common place for writers to go and get some work done. Maybe it's because they need a change in scenery. Maybe they like the smell of coffee . . . or more likely, maybe they just don't want to feel so alone. Writing is a very solitary endeavor and sometimes it can get kind of lonely being lost in a world inside your imagination. That's where support networks come into play. In writing, support networks are a group of people who you can turn to and share your writing with. These are the people who are going to read your writing and look for plot holes, grammatical errors—but most importantly, they're there to provide encouragement. However, what if you don't have those kind of people in your life? What if you don't know how to reach out and find those people? Or, what if you're just too scared to share your writing with people you know? If you answered any of those what-if questions with "Yes, that's me!", then you've come to the right place because I have the answer for you, and the answer is a website called Wattpad.

*[Mac power-on sound]*

Wattpad is a safe place to share your stories and to receive feedback on them. It's about a collaboration between writers who are just looking to become better at their craft. And it has sort of like a discover-and-be-discovered kind of dynamic. In other words, Wattpad gives budding writers a chance to discover other writers' stories while having their own be discovered at the same time, which, I think, is exactly what makes Wattpad so unique. You have strangers from all over the world, from the U.S. to Europe to the Philippines to Japan, on this site, and they're all using Wattpad to bond over language, specifically the language to tell stories.

But Wattpad is a lot more than just posting chapters. It's about commenting on those chapters and voting for them. It's about making new friends and relationships within the various clubs because on Wattpad, there's a club for pretty much everything. You have your Improve Your Writing club where you can go with any questions you have and receive writing advice in return. You have clubs for almost every genre of writing you can imagine, like Teen Fiction, Romance, Sci-Fi, Mystery, Fanfiction, and then you have a club called the Café where you can go to talk about anything you want. You can talk

about your favorite TV shows, any problems you're having off-screen, whatever you want. And it's that kind of language that makes Wattpad one giant support network.

*[sound of typing on keyboard plays briefly, stopping before narration continues]*

I observed two different discussion threads found in the clubs on Wattpad. They are both from the Improve Your Writing Club because I think they highlight the purpose behind Wattpad. You can tell immediately from the names of both that they're designed to provide relief from the woes of writing, like writer's block and lack of inspiration. Writers everywhere experience these problems and to be able to go to these clubs and find tricks and strategies that other people have found to be successful in overcoming these problems is critical.

Another great feature of the Wattpad clubs is that you can use them to post snippets or excerpts of your writing before you post them as a whole on your profile. The majority of Wattpad members are willing to read them and tell you if everything makes sense grammatically, organizationally. And this will also help solve the problem of lack of inspiration because a positive comment or positive feedback from another member on this site is usually all the incentive I need to keep pushing forward.

*[sound of typing on keyboard plays briefly, stopping before narration continues]*

In addition to observing two discussion threads on Wattpad, I also interviewed via FaceTime a Wattpad member that has been on this site for a few years now, and she was able to give insight into this whole Wattpad-as-a-support-group dynamic. I first asked her the reason why she decided to join Wattpad in the first place.

**Micah:** I am a shy person and for some reason it was easier to me to share my stories online than to share them with the people that I knew in real life. *[laughs]* That was the way for me to get out there and build my confidence as a writer.

**Kate:** Part of the reason that Wattpad feels like such a big support network is because of the dynamic that occurs between the veterans and the newcomers on the site. The level of interaction that takes place between veterans and newcomers varies. Obviously, you're gonna have some veterans that are gonna be really responsive, answering messages, answering questions and then you're gonna have some that don't really answer anything at all.

**Micah:** I really do know that I appreciate the authors that will respond to every comment. Like I know a couple authors that even though they're veterans with like over a hundred thousand followers, that they'll still like respond to newcomers that post things on their wall and that's like really nice for me to see that.

**Kate:** Plus, the more a newcomer interacts on the site and gets involved on the site, like leaving comments, voting, the more success they're gonna find on Wattpad, and the more readers they're eventually going to attract and maybe one day they'll be able to earn the veteran status on Wattpad. Ultimately, having veteran status on Wattpad or being a famous Wattpadder is just one view of success on the Wattpad website. Some people view success as having a certain amount of reads or a certain amount of votes or a certain amount of comments, but success can also be viewed as just interacting within the support network that is Wattpad, which can then lead to getting the reads, the votes, and the comments. What makes Wattpad stand out from the rest of writing communities is just how personal it is, especially considering that the members of the site range in age, gender, and geographic location.

**Micah:** There is a lot of like reader and author interaction, like as stories gain readership. You get the chance to like talk to people and they can ask questions and get to know you more than they would like if you were publishing like a book. It's just a lot more personal. I feel like on Wattpad, like you get that chance to build that readership like on a lot more personal level.

**Kate:** And that's what Wattpad is really all about: just finding your voice in the midst of sharing it with others. So if this sounds like the kind of support network you want or if you just really want to meet some cool people from all over the world, then Wattpad is the perfect site for you.

**Woman:** Here you go. You're very welcome. I hope you enjoy!

*[same small bell from the beginning rings again]*