

## Section 4. The Ethics and Values of Writing

Writing and the teaching of writing are deeply value-laden and ethical activities. Writing communicates and establishes relationships among people—directly in the written communications, less directly in forms of social organization writing makes possible, and indirectly in how writers represent others and their work. Further, teaching writing puts us as teachers in ethical and value relations with our students and societies they are entering.

One fundamental ethical issue is who gets to share in the power of writing. Historically access to the basics of writing and its more advanced competencies has been inequitably distributed. This inequity of access has reinforced other inequalities of our societies. Since writing gives voice to individuals and groups within the expanding domains of literate practice, if individuals or groups of people are not given opportunities to develop as writers, they are silenced. Their needs, perspectives, and even presence are left invisible in the documentary world that forms ruling relations. As well, they do not have the opportunity or means to elaborate critical views or contest other perspectives that dominate the textual world. It is up to us as educators to ensure the powerful tools of writing are made available to all. Otherwise, those tools are left only in the hands of the already powerful to reproduce the inequities of society.

The first chapter in this section, “Equity Means Having Full Voice in the Conversation,” identifies writing teachers’ commitment to teaching writing to provide voice to students so they can become full citizens in a literate way of life, representing their own interests, concerns, knowledge, and identities in literate forums. Even if students gain access to higher education, if they do not have the academic and social supports to develop as writers, they may remain at the margins of professional communities and suffer the penalties of never truly belonging. This chapter, originally presented to South American educators, reviews some of the evidence-based practices and programs supporting writing in higher education.

The following chapter, “Schooling for Life, All Lives: Opportunity, Dilemma, Challenge, Critical Thought,” pursues writing teachers’ pedagogical obligations in developing students’ critical participation in literate ways of life. Educational systems historically have depended on critical analyses of the social, economic, and governance needs for literacy, but these analyses have been controlled by and served the interests of powerful groups that have directed education. The teaching of writing, however, has increasingly brought power into the hands of educators and now those being educated. Critical writing in particular brings the tools of critical thought and deliberation about education and educational systems to students.

Once people have the means to enter into consequential discussions transacted in writing, writers face the ethical and value-laden issues of how they engage

with the writing of others; how they draw on and represent their words, facts, and ideas; how they position their words vis-à-vis the words of others; and what they contribute to the discussion or growth of knowledge and organized social activity. The third chapter in this section considers our obligations as writers to live up to and exceed the expectations to contribute to our communal life through the genres we write in at the same time as we recognize the prior writers who brought us to this point. “Paying the Rent: Linguaging Particularity and Novelty,” raises the complicated question of how we identify our responsibilities to draw on and participate in shared prior writings while fulfilling our obligations for novel contributions—that is, the value-added work we need to carry out within each kind of writing.

This section’s fourth chapter, “Reproduction, Critique, Expression, and Cooperation: The Writer’s Dance in an Intertextual World,” pursues the paths by which writers develop the skills of locating their writing voices within intertextual worlds and how schooling at different levels can support that development. Only by learning to understand and respect the contributions of others can one effectively speak to their words, contribute to knowledge and communal life, and assert one’s needs. Schooling can help guide students and provide strength within the intertextual world they are born into and that will evolve through their contributions.

The final chapter of this section “The Ethical Poetry of Academic Writing” specifically considers the ethical roles and obligations of academic writers. Scholarly and scientific writing has particular ethical obligations to those we as researchers study, to the world we represent, to the people whose work we rely on and who rely on our work, to the social systems that support knowledge production, and to the society which relies on the knowledge we produce. We also have ethical obligations to ourselves as scholars. At heart, knowledge production is a deeply ethical and value-laden endeavor.