

From High School to College: Developing Writing Skills in the Disciplines

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ALL COLLEGE TEACHERS across the curriculum face a challenge when helping first-year students develop college-level writing skills. The gap between high school and college writing can complicate interactions between students, who often believe that their high school English teachers (particularly in college-prep courses) have given them all the tools they need for success in writing at college, and college teachers, who have only a vague idea of what this high school writing instruction looks like. It would be useful for all college teachers to know what their incoming students know and understand about writing in order to fix this disconnect. A review of research on the transition from high school to college writing reveals a set of six key terms or concepts (genre/format, sources, argument, process, audience, and voice) that are commonly used in both high school and college writing classes. Knowing how teachers and students have used these terms in high school can help college teachers connect with their students in such a way as to build on the writing skills they bring with them. Teachers in every discipline, either purposefully or indirectly, teach their students what it means to write in college and can benefit from an examination of, in particular, three of these concepts: genre/format, argument, and authority/voice. Using these three to talk with their students about the discourse community of their discipline, college teachers across the disciplines can offer students a greater sense of building upon the writing they did in high school.

Tiane Donahue's 2007 article in *The Writing Instructor* says, "College faculty seem to know little about what high school teachers are asking students to do and why, and less about what high school students bring with them to the college writing classroom." The lack of knowledge suggested by Donahue's article becomes almost prohibitive when college instructors discuss the difficulty of teaching students who seem overwhelmed by and unprepared for the writing and reading tasks assigned to them. This frustration has spawned at least two collections of essays in the past six years: *What is College-Level Writing? Vols. 1 and 2*. These two volumes and a flurry of scholarly activity on the relationship between high school and college writing in

just the last two years—Addison and McGee (2010); Applebee and Langer (2009 and 2011); Sullivan, Tinberg and Blau (2010); Hansen and Farris (2010); Taczak and Thelin (2009); Tinberg and Nadeau (June 2011)—have all brought to our attention the “space between” high school and college writing. Some of this conversation has been about the lack of writing in secondary schools; some has been about the increasing popularity of dual-enrollment programs. These are fruitful discussions that will have significant impact at the programmatic level in teaching writing at the secondary and post-secondary level as well as in preparing writing teachers. What I seek to do in this synthesis of the research is to pull out certain threads of discussion that might help college teachers who use WAC/WID methodologies better assist students in making the transition to college-level writing. I’ll begin by briefly discussing what recent research shows to be the limitations of high school writing practices, touching on the so-called “deficits” of incoming freshmen. The bulk of the essay will then describe how the body of research into the transition between high school and college writing reveals three key terms/concepts relevant to transitioning into writing across the curriculum. The essay ends with a call to resist the widespread belief that writing is a set of low-level skills that can be learned once and be “out of the way.”

Constraints in High School English

In reviewing the literature (which includes more than eighty articles, books, and dissertations over the last sixty years), there seems to be a clear consensus among writing teachers and researchers—in comments quantitative, qualitative, and purely anecdotal—that students entering college are not fully prepared to do the kinds of writing tasks required of them at college. Recent data from Sharlene Kihara, Steve Graham, and Leanne Hawken, in a 2009 article in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, shows that “Collectively, almost one half of the [secondary] teachers across the three disciplines [language arts, sciences, and social studies] (47%) did not assign at least one . . . multiparagraph activity at least monthly. On a weekly basis, 80% of teachers did not assign at least one of these activities. When such activities were assigned, teachers were most likely to ask students to write a five-paragraph theme or a persuasive essay” (143). They also indicated that “a sizable proportion of the participating teachers seldom assigned activities that clearly involved writing multiple paragraphs. Almost one third of language arts and social studies teachers did not assign such an activity monthly” (151).

Additionally, Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer’s most recent report of their research into writing instruction in middle and high schools (2011) shows that even though students in middle and high school are writing more than they did thirty years ago, only 12.3% of the time in English classes “was devoted to writing of at least a paragraph length” and “only 19% [of the 8542 assignments they analyzed]

represented extended writing of a paragraph or more; the rest consisted of fill in the blank and short answer exercises, and copying of information directly from teacher's presentation—types of activities that are best described as writing without composing" (15). High school teachers, they say, report that only 41.1% of the total grade for English would be based on writing of at least a paragraph length: "writing on average matters less than multiple choice or short answer questions in assessing performance in English" (18).

The results of several other large-scale empirical studies, all of which offer a similar picture, are delineated in a 2010 *College Composition and Communication* article by Joann Addison and Sharon McGee. The body of research says again and again that even though secondary English teachers are clearly more engaged in process-oriented writing instruction, students still do not write enough in high school, that they do not write for specific audiences and purposes, that they do not write in multiple genres, that they are bound by formulas and rules, and that they primarily write responses to literature. The Common Core State Standards for K-12 Language Arts instruction, developed by the National Governors Association for Best Practices and now adopted by 45 states, may change things, as the standards call for more writing in all classes and in response to more nonfiction texts. We may see that as students write more in all disciplines and on more nonfiction texts that they are coming to college with a more sophisticated approach to understanding how writers make choices and decisions based on rhetorical contexts.

At present, however, the research in the field confirms our experiential understanding that students will experience writing very differently in college than they did in high school and explores how these differences complicate the transition from writing in high school to writing in college. Susan Fanetti, Kathy Bushrow and David DeWeese categorize the differences this way: "High school education is designed to be standardized and quantifiable. College education is designed to be theoretical" (77-78). They assert, "High school students learn to follow a specific set of rules; college students learn that there are no rules—or, better, that the rules change daily" (78). While this delineation is somewhat oversimplified, given the nature of some testing and assessment protocols related to college writing, it does reflect a general shift in thinking about composition that will challenge students when they enter college.

It would be difficult for those of us who teach and have always taught at the college level to truly understand the power and influence of the external pressures that lead secondary teachers away from using writing more often as a tool for either instruction or assessment. The best-intentioned, most rhetorically-driven secondary teachers see themselves time and again brought up short in their ambitions by schooling systems (local, regional, and national) that are constantly shifting and recalculating the ways they measure student success. These shifts are driven by

political, economic, and social forces that truly overwhelm the individual teacher in her classroom. Applebee and Langer report that teachers feel obligated to prepare students for high-stakes testing situations, and that those tests are having “a very direct and limiting effect on classroom emphases” (18); they note that “55.1% of English teachers reported frequent practices in timed, on-demand writing” (19), concluding that, “Given the constraints imposed by high-stakes tests, writing as a way to study, learn, and go beyond—as a way to construct knowledge or generate new networks of understandings—is rare” (26). This is, again, not to say that innovation and evidence-based writing instruction never happen, but when they do, it is sometimes against incredible odds.

Key Concepts/Terms for Understanding the Transition

A college teacher can expect, given the data reported, that her students will have had far less experience in and exposure to the kinds of writing practices she will want to incorporate in her classes. Where does the WAC/WID-focused teacher begin to bridge the gap between what her students know/can do and what she will ask them to do? The key to helping new students make the transition to writing in the disciplines may be a small set of terms or concepts that teachers on both sides of the transition use, terms that often have different implications, meanings or associated practices in each of the cultures. If first-year college instructors in every discipline can understand how these terms or concepts are used in high school writing/English classes, we can offer definitions, explanations, and activities to our students that will build that bridge.

Genre/format, argument, and authority/voice—the terms analyzed in this essay—come directly from reading the available research on the transition to college writing. These concepts emerged repeatedly in discussions of what students do in high school writing, what they do in college writing, what teachers emphasize at each level, and what skills writers need to succeed in writing at the college level. Certainly we see the terms coming up in discussions of writing at each level, but how they are used—their definition, practice, and reinforcement—illustrates the differences in culture that lead researchers to characterize high school as standardized and college as theoretical (see reference above to Fannetti, Bushrow, and DeWeese).

This characterization, unfortunately, seems to cast both high school and college as homogenous and monolithic cultures—a tendency well debunked by Victoria Cobb in her 2002 dissertation, “From Where They Sit: Stories of Students Making the Transition from High School Writing to College Writing.” Cobb rejects the term *culture* for describing high school as creating a false sense of homogeneity, preferring to analyze the discourse communities (or “Discourses”) students experience in high school and college (2-4). Cobb’s critique of the tendency to see high school

as a homogenous culture can also be applied to discussions of college or “college-level writing.” Most research and scholarship about the transition from high school to college writing assumes that first-year college students will be entering writing classrooms that share some similarities of approach, pedagogy, theoretical underpinning, or purpose when this is in fact inaccurate and optimistic. If our secondary colleagues are constrained by external forces that demand they teach and evaluate in certain ways, our post-secondary colleagues in English (or the department that oversees first-year writing requirements) sometimes suffer from having absolutely no constraints on what and how they teach in first-year writing classes. So, Fanetti, Bushrow, and DeWeese may be describing a golden ideal of college-level writing. But in the general view, teachers at the college level teach writing in the context of a specific disciplinary approach to knowledge-making and communicating within a specific discourse community. The difference in how these two educational environments tend to use these three terms/concepts seems connected to how writing practices in college are more likely to grow out of a larger concern for rhetorical awareness and the kinds of discipline and community-based writing skills writers will need as professionals and college graduates rather than as future college students. The higher-education concern with genres, arguments, and voice comes from an understanding of the disciplinary demands of writing—the community demands of writing—whereas the way the terms are used in high school seem stripped of that community-driven context, that understanding of these terms as rhetorical.

The three terms this article will explore are a subset of the useful terms readers can glean from the literature; these three will offer the WAC/WID teacher in particular a way to use terms their students will have heard in high school (English, mostly) as a means of introducing the discipline-specific discourse practices and values they teach. These three terms reveal certain long-held beliefs about the nature and purpose of academic writing and its grounding in critical thinking and community-based reasoning; they are common language we share for talking about how writers first learn and then join any discourse community.

Genre/Format

Easily the most discussed “problem” that first-year college writers face is their lack of understanding of genre/format. Many articles and books argue that student writers are constrained by their limited understanding of how content affects format, and their consequent reliance on a limited range of formats and genres for writing. Kathleen Blake Yancey reports on research conducted at the University of Washington and the University of Tennessee that confirms that “students brought a limited genre knowledge into college with them and didn’t use that knowledge when writing” (304).

The research by Kiuahara, Graham, and Hawken offers some specific ideas about the genres incoming college writers will have practiced:

The most common writing activities used by teachers were short answer responses to homework, responses to material read, completing worksheets, and summary of materials read. . . . The next most common writing activities were journal entries and lists. . . . This was followed by writing step-by-step instructions and five-paragraph essays. (140)

Their research shows us that entering college freshmen will likely have had some experience with five-paragraph essays, reading responses, and journals; about half will have had some experience with research papers; very few will have ever been assigned to write e-mails, memos, and business letters.

David Smit identifies this limited understanding of genre conventions as the most serious difference between high school and college writing and as a serious flaw in writing instruction at all levels. He asserts, “a great deal, if not most, of what passes for writing instruction at the secondary and college levels in this country is rule-ridden and formulaic and unrelated to writing as it is actually done by people who write” (73). He believes that a lack of attention to the social contexts of writing leads to an ignorance of genre and that “writing teachers [are] providing little useful information about how various genres are actually written; I see a great deal of instruction in how to write using rules, formats, and formulas and little practice in actually writing” (73). Smit’s observations confirm the experiences of most of us who teach or use any kind of writing in college.

At this point, it would be useful to talk about the difference between the rules and formulas so denigrated by Smit (and others) and genre conventions. Why are “rules” bad and “conventions” good? The answer lies in teaching students that writing is always a response to particular rhetorical situations and within discourse communities. Scholars like Smit see “rules” as de-contextualized directives for writing judged as good or bad based on criteria not shared or created by a group of language users; the judgments are often arbitrary or idiosyncratic, or even contradictory. Rules or formulas are usually de-contextualized or contextualized only in solipsistic school settings: “we write like this in high school because you’ll be expected to write like this in college.” The resulting texts often represent school-bound genres that bear little resemblance to authentic texts read or written outside of the classroom. In contrast, genre conventions are always social, the results of ongoing negotiations of groups of readers and writers who share a common set of values and uses for discourse; as such, the conventions are obeyed because of a desire to reach a real audience and/or participate in a conversation about something of interest to the community.

Christine Farris's essay "Minding the Gap" offers some explanation for the limited instruction in genre in both high school and college. She says that although high school and college teachers are both interested in "developing students' critical understanding," more high school teachers than ever feel the pressure to teach "accessible formats for writing-on-demand" (273). Peter Kittle and Rochelle Ramay agree, saying that one particular genre of academic writing—"the formal-register essay"—has monopolized writing in secondary school: "The emphasis on accountability in the No Child Left Behind Act has resulted in an increased prominence of standardized written forms in the public school sphere—a prominence that does not lend itself to effective college writing. Formulaic writing . . . ends up becoming the de facto genre for academic expression in too many educational settings" (100-101). Teachers, then, are not sacrificing genre flexibility in their writers so much as they are responding to the demands of "stakeholders" who use de-contextualized formulas for writing in order to measure something other than rhetorical fluency.

The specific recipient of this criticism is the five-paragraph theme. Indeed, college composition instructors in particular can expect that most of their students will know and like the five-paragraph essay format. The research by Kiuahara, Graham, and Hawken showed that 83% of Language Arts teachers have students write five-paragraph themes with the frequency of once-a-quarter to daily. Only 7% said they never have students write five-paragraph themes. Joseph Jones's survey of high school students reinforces this frequency; when 300 seniors at a fairly elite high school in Tuscon, Arizona, were asked, Which types of writing have been most emphasized in your high school courses over the past two years? the most common responses, in order, were "the five paragraph essay" and "research reports."

Reliance on this formula serves high school writing instruction in at least one important capacity—test preparation—but it is also most likely true that some secondary English teachers have a limited understanding of how to teach other formats/genres. Peter Kittle, in describing his experiences as a high school English teacher, admits that he propagated the myth of the five-paragraph essay. "While I readily enough taught this form of writing, I honestly cannot say I looked forward to reading the student work with any relish. But I told my students, as well as myself, that this writing form would serve them well in college" (137). He says that although he believes that correctness and form are both important, that is not why he taught the five-paragraph theme; he taught it out of expedience and an ignorance of what else to teach: "The fact was that I had only vague ideas about what was expected of students when they had to perform at college level, and even less-firm ideas of how to teach students to reach that level" (138). Kittle is probably not in the minority; secondary teachers in general have historically received very little training in teaching writing. Robert Tremmel claims, "It is not uncommon for prospective and beginning

teachers—despite their best intentions and the best intentions of their professors—to go through an entire field experience sequence without ever becoming fully involved in the teaching of writing and without ever thinking of themselves as writing teachers” (9). Without direct training in writing instruction, beginning secondary teachers have little background for resisting or working around the external pressures surrounding writing practices.

This lack of training in writing pedagogy may be seen often in college-level instruction as well, both in English departments and in other disciplines, where only certain members of the department are invested in using writing as a way of teaching and using the idea of discourse community as a tool for knowing a discipline. But even amongst those teachers who have not been trained in writing instruction or do not address it specifically in their classes, there is usually an expectation that students will have a more sophisticated understanding of the various genres used in academia than just the five-paragraph theme. In many cases, the teacher expects that students already have a sense of what it means to write in/for their discipline and/or they expect that students will know how to adapt the formulaic writing of high school to the more specifically situated writing of their course.

For a multitude of reasons, college students probably leave high school with a very limited understanding of genre and how it is a part of rhetorically situated writing, preferring instead to rely on formulas designed to teach habits of mind more than actually serve audiences. As these writers enter new discipline-specific discourse communities, college teachers should develop in students (and in themselves) the habit of considering form/genre as entirely dependent on the rhetorical situation and the capacity to think about their writing in the context of the discipline. College teachers, then, should be prepared to explain to the writers in their discipline that formats must be determined by writers, and a class discussion of the uses and limitations of the five-paragraph formula might even help students see both what they can take from it and how they can begin to let it go.

Argument

We move now from the range of possible textual modes contained within the idea of genre/format to the overarching purpose of most texts in any academic discipline: argument. Even in its most detached manifestation, argument—the presentation and support of a position or perspective—has long been seen as the cornerstone of academic writing and is a skill usually heavily emphasized by college teachers. The 2009 NSSE data suggests 80% of college freshmen indicated that most or all of their writing assignments required them to “argue a position using evidence and reasoning” (Addison and McGee 154). While some composition scholars would argue that analysis is the more important skill to teach, as a precursor to argument, *analysis* is

not a term used extensively in secondary education, except in connection with the analysis of imaginative or creative literature. Therefore, the term that truly overlaps from high school to college writing is not analysis, but argument.

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein-Graff go so far as to contend that argument is a “rhetorical fundamental” that can bridge the gap between high school and college writing. They define argument in Burkean terms as “the art of entering a conversation, of summarizing the views of others in order to set up one’s own views” and contend that “it is central to every academic department and discipline, from history to microbiology, where practitioners are required to state their views not in isolation, but as a response to what others in the field are saying” (W410).

This definition of argument is, I think, well accepted at the college level. Michael Bernard-Donals describes the process of argument as:

widening the intellectual context in which arguments are made, and that means giving writers an opportunity to explore not just the “opinions” and “facts” of the case, but also where “opinion” and “fact” bleed into one another depending on which party in the argument you’re listening to. Making an argument means not just laying out what you know about an issue (going to the library, mining your own experience), but also finding out what your interlocutor knows and figuring out what common ground you share, what assumptions bind you together, and how opinion and received facts are shaped (and not just “found”). (Alsup and Bernard-Donals 120)

In his description of what argument is at the college level, he also describes how entering students have probably experienced argument in high school: as stating with certainty what you believe to be true, backed up by what you have found. Research by Ron Lunsford, John Kiser, and Deborah Coxwell-Teague confirms this difference in the concept of argument; the authors say that they

have long noted that the kinds of argumentative writing taught in high school AP courses differs from the argument taught in many college writing courses . . . the argument essays on the AP exam have been consistently of the thesis and support variety. That is, students may be asked to write about argumentative topics by examining the arguments on both sides of that argument or by proposing a compromise for competing sides of an argument. However, they are not asked to stake a position on a controversial topic and then defend that position for an audience that takes the opposing viewpoint. As a result, they do not have to deal with counterarguments to the position that those on the other side of the issue would take. (95-96)

The idea that the sophistication and subtlety of students' skills with argument will increase in college seems to make teachers less uncomfortable than they are with the developmental nature of other writing skills/concepts. There is much less debate or lamenting about students' abilities related to argument; we seem to have no problem accepting that there is a level of argumentation that will be best taught at college and that good high school writers will have a limited understanding of how to create sophisticated arguments. Students may still be confused by the use of "argument" to describe two different modes of writing, so it is still quite helpful for the WAC/WID teacher to know what expectations secondary writing teachers have when they teach argument.

In building on these expectations, college teachers can talk to students about what argument looks like in their discipline, demonstrating how writers in that discourse community use sources; how they find and use evidence; what constitutes good evidence; how they acknowledge and refute counter-arguments; what tones and styles are appropriate in argumentation; and, on a larger scale, what issues, ideas, and events are worth writing about in the discipline. The practice of argument, then, becomes an understanding of the nature and history of the discipline, an understanding of how knowledge is made within that discourse community.

Voice/Authority

When thinking about writing argumentatively in intellectual or academic discourse communities, we often assume and fail to discuss the importance of the writer's perception of her own role in the text she is writing. This idea of her role—her position, her relationship to her audience and her topic—is often encompassed in pre-college writing instruction in the term "voice." In college-level writing, particularly in the disciplines, we call upon writers to write with authority, with a certain attitude toward both the topic and the reader, and with a certain disciplinary style. Our entering students may not understand us when we talk about persona, authority, or role, but they have, in some sense, been introduced to these ideas in the term "voice," which, in secondary writing, may have been most closely associated with word choice and use of vivid detail.

Stephen Acker and Kay Halasek, in the *Journal of General Education*, comment on this shift in understanding; they interviewed writing teachers at both high school and college and found some disagreement about the nature and role of voice:

In short, high school teachers typically encouraged students to create voice in personal essays (e.g., personal narratives or opinion pieces) but discouraged them from using that same 'voice' in more academic pieces (e.g., research papers). The distinction was not one generally made by college

teachers, who encouraged students to create voice in all of their academic writing. (9)

The difficulty in making this transition is probably directly related to the difference in the genres emphasized at each level, and the fact that the concept of “voice” most often taught at the pre-college level is drawn from the 6+1 Traits writing program, which describes voice from an almost entirely narrative and expressivist perspective, using measures of success such as “The writing sounds like you” or “Vivid descriptions make it seem like there’s a real person behind the text” (PK-16).

Wendy Strachan describes the difference in voice/authority as related to a shifting understanding of how to use critical thinking and the students’ own judgment and “a difference in perception of the relationship of students to their subject matter and, perhaps, in perceptions of learning and knowing” (143). One major cultural difference between high school writing and college writing is the notion of stance and relation of the writer to subject matter. Once students get to college, they will have to begin seeing “voice” as a sense of expertise in relation to their material and audience.

Kristen Dombek and Scott Herndon, in *Critical Passages: Teaching the Transition to College Composition*, note how this shift in understanding leads students to avoid using questions in their writing: “They may believe that academic thinking necessitates authority, and that asking too many questions destroys authority” (13). They insist that we need to help new students understand that questions do not undermine authority, to help them see that academic writing is “problem-motivated, rather than thesis-motivated” (19). We begin, they suggest, by helping students read good texts as “records of struggle” (19).

Edward White’s “College-Level Writing and the Liberal Arts Tradition” offers similar advice: “College papers exist because writing is a student’s chief means of learning, and college-level writing is usually designed to move students out of their comfort zone into new ways of thinking about complex matters” (298). Encouraging students to take risks with their writing is one of the perennial challenges first-year composition teachers face, but perhaps a greater understanding of how students perceive their role within the text, their “voice,” will help both composition teachers and teachers of first-year students in all disciplines develop strategies for encouraging their development of an authoritative, problem-focused writing persona.

Conclusion

These three concepts—genre/format, argument, and authority/voice—identify specific elements of writing that incoming college students may have heard discussed in their high school classes and that they may have some understanding of. However, their high school understanding of these terms does not prepare them for how these

concepts will be used in college-level writing, and may, in fact, hinder their ability to adapt to discipline-specific writing tasks. Frustrated WAC/WID practitioners may find that they cannot rely on students bringing writing skills and knowledge with them from high school because the students' understanding of these terms—the secondary teachers' definitions of these terms—are not sophisticated enough to allow a quick and easy transition into disciplinary discourses. The three elements of genre, argument, and voice all connect to a central shift away from “thinking like a student” toward thinking as a member of a discourse community. They are three parts of what is done when a given situation is rhetorically analyzed in order to determine what is right, what is best, and what elements of the audience need to be accounted for while writing. Genre conventions are strictly but subtly constructed by members of discourse communities; they are enforced by what is published and what is not, what is deemed successful and what is not, what is taught to newer members of the discourse community and what is not. The nature of both argument and voice are factors in these genre conventions, threads in the web of understanding the forces of appropriate discourse. A larger focus on genre conventions would encompass both argument and voice as writers learn how to relate to the other members of the discourse communities they enter. The key may be to begin, in all classes at college, to talk to students openly about disciplines as discourse communities and to emphasize the ways members of the discourse community talk to one another—how they make decisions about what is valued as evidence, style, organization, etc.

College writing teachers must acknowledge that students have been taught some of these elements as mere requirements of school writing—merely “what you're supposed to do” as a student writer. Teachers must build on students' previous practice as writers by helping them contextualize all of these choices as social—as choices grounded in a deep understanding of the conventions of a variety of academic and professional discourses. The skill of understanding how to join those communities—or even how to apprentice in them for one semester—has to come both from reading and analyzing texts within discourse communities and practicing writing those texts (or academic versions of those texts) which mimic the conventions and roles professional members of discourse communities adopt. To step back from the surface of any text to the “deep structure” of its place in the conversation of the discourse community requires some understanding of the community's purposes, history, place in society, scope and focus, mission, the past and present members, their goals, and the subtle shifts in emphasis that reveal the discourse community as a socially-constructed entity. In these ways, we can help each student break away from “thinking like a student” and begin “thinking like a writer.”

Because teaching students how to join a professional and/or scholarly discourse community is complex and often exhausting, some college teachers choose not to do

it and instead continue to teach a sort of hodge-podge generic academic discourse as is taught in high school, simply with more sophisticated expectations about depth of analysis and development of support. It takes members of any discourse community a long time to understand the “felt sense” of writing in that community, and we could argue that the knowledge is gained more than taught, but it is best gained by reading, discussing, and writing within that field, and being coached and responded to by more experienced members.

The complexity of this learning also makes it important for teachers at every level to adopt and teach a developmental approach to learning to write. Many voices in the research surrounding the transition from high school to college writing urge teachers who teach writing or use writing-to-learn methodologies to step back and adopt the attitude that writing is a skill that develops, not a one-time “problem” that can be learned and “taken care of” like riding a bicycle. Leann Carroll’s *Rehearsing New Roles* is built on this premise, and she notes that current composition theorists “challenge the notion of a stable, unified ‘writing ability’ that can easily be measured by looking at isolated texts” (2). David Jolliffe agrees, recommending that all literacy advocates look skeptically at two propositions: “first, the notion that literacy is literacy is literacy, no matter what the context; and, second, the idea that once you’ve ‘got’ literacy, then you’ve ‘got’ it for life” (x).

Carroll urges us to change our thinking about how students learn to write, arguing that, “A developmental perspective also challenges the beliefs that students ought to know ‘how to write’ before they get to college” (26)—they cannot know “how to write” because there is no one way to do it, and writing ability continues to develop as writers encounter new discourse communities, audiences, and disciplines. If teachers can help their students become more aware of some of these salient features of discourses—of how questions about genre, argument, and voice are really questions about markers of belonging in particular discourse communities—students can learn disciplinary ways of writing. Understanding the ways these terms/concepts were used at the secondary level opens up ways for the WAC/WID teacher to build upon those foundations as they guide students toward a more rhetorical understanding of text and more community-situated discourses.

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