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# CONCEPT 3
### *Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies*

## 3.0

### WRITING ENACTS AND CREATES IDENTITIES AND IDEOLOGIES
Tony Scott

An ideology is a system of ideas and beliefs that together constitute a comprehensive worldview. We make sense of the world around us *through* the ideologies to which we have been exposed and conditioned. Ideologies are both formed and sustained by a variety of factors, including religions, economic systems, cultural myths, languages, and systems of law and schooling. A common assumption in humanities theory and research is that there is no ideology-free observation or thought. Our conceptions of everything—gender identities and roles, people's proper social statuses, what it means to love, the proper basis for separating what is true from what is false—are inescapably shaped by ideologies. To be immersed in any culture is to learn to see the world through the ideological lenses it validates and makes available to us. Writing is always ideological because discourses and instances of language use do not exist independently from cultures and their ideologies.

Linguist James Paul Gee points out that those who seek to create any education program in reading and writing must ask a question: "What sort of social group do I intend to apprentice the learner into?" (Gee 2008, 48). This seemingly innocent question is actually quite loaded because it starts from the premise that there is no general literacy: literacy is always in some way involved in the negotiation of identities and ideologies in specific social situations. Vocabularies, genres, and language conventions are a part of what creates and distinguishes social groups, and thus learning to write is always ongoing, situational, and involving cultural and ideological immersion. This thinking represents a fundamental shift in how many writing scholars now see literacy education, from a view that is individualistic and focused on the acquisition of discrete, universal skills to one that is situated and focused on social involvement and consequences (see 1.0, "Writing Is a Social and

Rhetorical Activity"). Writers are not separate from their writing and they don't just quickly and seamlessly adapt to new situations. Rather, writers are socialized, changed, through their writing in new environments, and these changes can have deep implications. For instance, when students learns to write convincingly as undergraduate college students in an introductory writing class, they enact that identity based on their reading of the expected and acceptable social norms. So in their writing, they might be inquisitive, deliberative, and given to founding their opinions on careful reasoning and research. In displaying these characteristics in their writing, they enact an identity in response to social expectations for who they are and what they should be doing.

This social view of ideology in writing studies has been influenced by the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1986). Drawing on research on language acquisition in children, Vygotsky described how external speech becomes internalized and then comes to frame how we think, self-identify, and act in the world. As we are immersed in discourses through reading and dialogue with others, we begin to name and understand *through* those discourses, internalizing the ideologies they carry. Indeed, language learning and use is a primary means through which ideologies are conveyed, acquired, and made to seem "natural," without obvious alternatives or need of explanation. As ideological activity, writing is deeply involved in struggles over power, the formation of identities, and the negotiation, perpetuation, and contestation of belief systems. We can see obvious ideological tensions all around us in public political discourse: Do you use *climate change* or *global warming*? Does the United States have an issue with "illegals" or "undocumented immigrants"? Perhaps less obvious but highly consequential examples are embedded in everyday writing. In writing in professional contexts, for instance, writers can gain credibility and persuasive power through showing they understand and share the beliefs and values that are commonplace, and markers of fuller socialization, within their professions. When lawyers write effective briefs, or engineers write technical reports, the genres, conventions, and vocabularies they use reflect the ideologies of their professions and settings.

The research-driven shift toward this cultural, ideological view of writing creates tensions with the structures and practices that continue to prevail in many educational institutions. The first-year writing requirement, for instance, was historically based on the premise that writing is a universal skill set and singular discourse individuals can master if they are determined and taught well. In this view, literacy is an ideologically neutral tool, a stable, transposable set of codes and conventions that can

be acquired and then deployed in virtually any setting. Writing is thus seen as separate from other learning, from ideological differences and struggle, and from the socialization processes that operate in learning environments. Required writing courses and gatekeeping assessments that similarly purport to certify generic literate readiness have been placed at thresholds to higher education based on these assumptions.

The understanding that writing is an ideological, socially involved practice and thus inescapably implicated in identity making has vexed the project of writing education and the institutional structures that facilitate it—like first-year writing and placement tests. In scholarship in rhetoric and composition, much conversation has centered on "academic writing" because educating students to be proficient academic writers continues to be a common goal for postsecondary writing classes. Writing researchers have investigated how institutional projects of teaching academic writing have historically situated students in relation to literacy according to unacknowledged ideological assumptions. When we seek to "apprentice" students into academic writing, what ideological imperatives are being asserted in the ways we choose to conceive of academic writers and writing? Other researchers have positioned writing within sites of complicated ideological exchange and struggle as their research considers writing and writers in relation to diaspora, race, global economics and the consciousnesses, social statuses and embodied histories of writers. This work explores the ways conventions, meanings, power, identities—even notions of the functions and authority of authorship and texts—are culturally produced and socially negotiated.

Among professional educators in writing studies, awareness of writing as ideological enactment has led to efforts to understand and take responsibility for the ideological assumptions and consequences of pedagogical practices.

## 3.1

### WRITING IS LINKED TO IDENTITY
Kevin Roozen

Common perceptions of writing tend to cast it as the act of encoding or inscribing ideas in written form. To view writing in this manner, though, overlooks the roles writing plays in the construction of self. Through writing, writers come to develop and perform identities in relation to the interests, beliefs, and values of the communities they engage with, understanding the possibilities for selfhood available in

those communities (see 3.0, "Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies"). The act of writing, then, is not so much about using a particular set of skills as it is about becoming a particular kind of person, about developing a sense of who we are.

Our identities are the ongoing, continually under-construction product of our participation in a number of engagements, including those from our near and distant pasts and our potential futures. Given that our participation with our multiple communities involves acting with their texts, writing serves as a key means by which we act with and come to understand the subject matter, the kinds of language, the rhetorical moves, the genres, the media and technologies, and the writing processes and practices at play in our various sites of engagement, as well as the beliefs, values, and interests they reflect (see 1.0, "Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity"). Writing, then, functions as a key form of socialization as we learn to become members of academic disciplines (see 3.4, "Disciplinary and Professional Identities Are Constructed through Writing"), professions, religious groups, community organizations, political parties, families, and so on.

Writing also functions as a means of displaying our identities. Through the writing we do, we claim, challenge, perhaps even contest and resist, our alignment with the beliefs, interests, and values of the communities with which we engage. The extent to which we align ourselves with a particular community, for example, can be gauged by the extent to which we are able and willing to use that community's language, make its rhetorical moves, act with its privileged texts, and participate in its writing processes and practices. As we develop identities aligned with the interests and values of the communities in which we participate, we become more comfortable making the rhetorical and generic moves privileged by those communities.

Understanding the identity work inherent in writing is important for many stakeholders. For teachers and learners, it foregrounds the need to approach writing not simply as a means of learning and using a set of skills, but rather as a means of engaging with the possibilities for selfhood available in a given community. It also means recognizing that the difficulties people have with writing are not necessarily due to a lack of intelligence or a diminished level of literacy but rather to whether they can see themselves as participants in a particular community. For administrators, this threshold concept highlights the demand for structuring the curriculum in ways that allow learners to develop a sense of what it means to become a member of an academic discipline and creating models of assessment that address learners' identity work. For

researchers interested in literate activity, it underscores the importance of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches that make visible the construction of self.


### 3.2

### WRITERS' HISTORIES, PROCESSES, AND IDENTITIES VARY
Kathleen Blake Yancey

Although human beings often seem to share histories, engage in similar composing processes, and have identities that are at the core human, each writer is unique: indeed, each writer is a combination of the collective set of different dimensions and traits and features that make us human.

Writers, developing in the contexts of family, schooling, and culture, continue that development as they write in increasingly multiple and varying contexts—of larger personal relationship structures, in workplace sites, in the civic sphere, and in cultural contexts that themselves are always changing. Initially, as children learning language and writing—a process that continues throughout our lives—people write their ways into a "variety of complex, interwoven social systems" (Brown and Duguid 2000, 140). In the process, each writer begins a lifelong process of balancing individual perspectives and processes with the opportunities, demands, constraints, and genres of specific rhetorical situations and contexts of the larger culture. The ways in which individual writers do this, however, are influenced by their individual histories, processes, and identities.

Writers' identities are, in part, a function of the time when they live: their histories, identities, and processes are situated in a given historical context. Millennia ago, before formal schooling provided instruction in composing, writers employed their own composing processes, drawing on caves, composing hieroglyphics for tombstones, and writing petroglyphs on the walls of canyons. Later, as formal schooling developed in various parts of the world, male children in the upper classes were *instructed* in the art of writing, in the west, for example, learning, in part through a rhetoric keyed to the civic sphere, the five canons of rhetoric: invention, memory, arrangement, style, and delivery. In more recent times, as our knowledge about writing has deepened, we have understood that composing processes also vary according to at least three factors—the individual writer, the genre being composed, and the rhetorical situation. This new knowledge has also shaped understandings

about the invention, drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and publishing of composing. Likewise, although composition has been a school subject in the US university for over a century, the development of models of composing in the 1970s and 1980s, based in the practices of writers, changed the teaching of writing: teachers have shifted from teaching writing through analysis of others' texts to teaching writing through engaging students in composing itself.

Equally important, as composing becomes increasingly digitized and people worldwide learn to compose in multiple spaces and with multiple devices without any formal instruction (Yancey 2004), we are reminded that school is merely one historical context; there are many. In addition, because of the multiple affordances of digital technologies, composers routinely work with images, sounds, and video, as well as with words, to make meaning, and in using these materials to make meaning, individual writers are able to express their own identities and histories.

Writers' identities vary as well, in part through individual and collective identity markers such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and physical abilities; in part through individuals' relationships with family and friends; and in part through experiences that both attract and influence identity. Writing itself, especially through genres, also anticipates and, to a certain extent, enforces an identity.

The threshold concept that writers' histories, processes, and identities vary is troublesome because it speaks to the complexity of composing itself and to the complexity of the task of helping students learn to compose. People who want the teaching of writing to be uniform—mapped across grade levels, for instance, with all students inventing in the same way, drafting in the same way, and using the same language—find this threshold concept frustrating, in part because they had hoped a single approach would enfranchise all writers; the failure of such an approach speaks to the differentiation of composing itself given writers' histories and identities. The variation in students' composing processes, like the variation in their histories and identities, thus makes the teaching of writing a complex, sophisticated task. At the same time, it's worth noting the inherently paradoxical nature of writing—that we write as both individuals and as social beings, and that helping writers mature requires helping them write to others while expressing themselves. Put another way, writing is paradoxical because of its provision both for the social and the conventional and for the individual: individuals participating in multiple contexts account for social aspects of writing (see 2.0, "Writing Speaks to Situations through Recognizable Forms," and 4.3, "Learning to Write Effectively Requires Different Kinds of Practice, Time, and Effort"), and at the same time

writing is located in an individual who is necessarily distinct (see 4.1, "Text Is an Object Outside of One's Self that Can Be Improved and Developed," and 5.1, "Writing Is an Expression of Embodied Cognition"). In addition, neither writers nor their contexts are static: both change over time, which introduces yet another source of variation and which also means that variation is the normal situation for composing and composers.

## 3.3

### WRITING IS INFORMED BY PRIOR EXPERIENCE
Andrea A. Lunsford

If no one is an island, as poet John Donne famously argued, then no writing is isolated and alone either. Writing is, first of all, always part of a larger network or conversation; all writing is in some sense a response to other writing or symbolic action. Even when writing is private or meant for the writer alone, it is shaped by the writer's earlier interactions with writing and with other people and with all the writer has read and learned. Such interactions form a network or conversation that comes from knowledge and from all the experience the writer has had. Here's an example that may help to illuminate this claim: for over two decades, I asked people all over the United States to recall their earliest memories of writing. Many described learning to write their own names: that act seems to signal a significant moment in cognitive and emotional development. But others—left-handers, for example—reported something painful associated with writing: being made to sit on their left hands so they had to write right-handed. Many others spoke of being made to write "I will not X" a hundred times in punishment for some mistake; still others remembered being ridiculed or somehow humiliated for something they had or had not written. For many people, it turned out, prior experience with writing had been negative, and this attitude and these feelings went with them throughout their lives so that they dreaded writing or felt inadequate when faced with a writing task. Luckily, such associations or prior experiences can be mitigated or changed, and that often happens as writers become more confident or encounter more positive experiences with writing. But those early experiences can still linger on.

In addition to drawing on memories of writing, writers also draw on personal knowledge and lived experience in creating new texts (see 2.2, "Genres Are Enacted by Writers and Readers"; 2.3, "Writing Is a Way of Enacting Disciplinarity"; and 2.6, "Texts Get Their Meaning

from Other Texts"). Assigned to write an essay, for example, writers summon up the features of an essay they've used in the past or learned about by reading and talking about the essay genre. Likewise, a student writing an argument draws on prior knowledge or experience with producing such a text, including perhaps how to organize an argument for maximum effect. Other writers may draw on something written in the past for a new purpose.

In some instances, prior knowledge and experience are necessary and often helpful; in others they can work against writers. When writers call on strategies they have used before when approaching a new writing task, those strategies may or may not work well in the current situation. In studying college student writers' responses to first-year assignments, for example, Linda Flower found that students tended to rely on a strategy she called "gist and list" (essentially making a point [the gist] and then listing a series of supporting statements) whether that strategy was an effective one or not (Flower et al. 1990). When writers can identify how elements of one writing situation are similar to elements of another, their prior knowledge helps them out in analyzing the current rhetorical situation. But when they simply rely on a strategy or genre or convention out of habit, that prior knowledge may not be helpful at all.

### 3.4

### DISCIPLINARY AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES ARE CONSTRUCTED THROUGH WRITING
Heidi Estrem

While people can negotiate how identities are constructed through writing in a variety of contexts (see 3.1, "Writing Is Linked to Identity"), many first encounter unfamiliar disciplinary (or professional) discourse in college. In most American colleges and universities in the United States, students complete-general education courses (introductory courses designed to introduce students to both ways of thinking and disciplinary perspectives within the university) before continuing on to specialized courses within their chosen disciplines or fields. This increasingly discipline-specific learning process involves both the simple acquisition of new knowledge and an "expansion and transformation of identity, of a learner's 'sense of self'" (Meyer and Land 2006, 11). Writing—as a means of thinking, a form of inquiry and research, and a means for communication within a discipline—plays a critical

role in that identity transformation and expansion. Disciplines have particular ways of asking and investigating questions enacted through and demonstrated in writing; teachers or researchers demonstrate their memberships in disciplines by using writing in ways validated by disciplines. It is thus through writing that disciplines (and writers [see 2.3, "Writing is a Way of Enacting Disciplinarity"]) are both enacted and encountered by writers—first as students, and then as professionals throughout their careers.

Identities are complex expressions and embodiments of who someone is (see 3.1, "Writing Is Linked to Identity"). For many students in college encountering disciplinary writing for the first time, discipline-specific writing threatens their sense of self because these ways of thinking and writing are so distinct from other more familiar reading and writing practices, such as those valued at home or in other communities in which the students are members (see 3.0, "Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies," and 3.5, "Writing Provides a Representation of Ideologies and Identities"). As writers continue to work in the academy and beyond, they negotiate (and challenge) disciplinary identities via writing, finding ways to traverse the differing implicit and explicit writing expectations. The process of learning to manage these tensions contributes to the formation of new identities, for as people progress through their major discipline(s), writing increasingly complex texts in the process, they are also writing themselves into the discipline(s) (see 2.3, "Writing Is a Way of Enacting Disciplinarity"). That process of identity formation is interwoven with learning the writing conventions, practices, habits, and approaches of their discipline.

For many people, the idea that writing is not merely a matter of recording one's research or thoughts, but is in fact a process linked to the development of new, professional identities, is troublesome. Writing can appear to be an act of transcription or representation of processes, not an expression of identity. Many prevalent descriptions of the relationship between writing and research neutralize and generalize disciplinary or professional writing into a last step in the research project, one in which research results are "written up" (see 1.0, "Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity," and 1.1, "Writing Is a Knowledge-Making Activity"). Approaching disciplinary writing as an act of identity and affiliation illuminates how writing in new contexts is not only about learning abstract conventions but also about learning how to *be* within a group with social conventions, norms, and expectations (see 3.0, "Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies").

**3.5**

## WRITING PROVIDES A REPRESENTATION
## OF IDEOLOGIES AND IDENTITIES

Victor Villanueva

Writing provides a means whereby identities are discovered and con-stituted. Yet those are never clear cut. We carry many identities, choos-ing to foreground one (or some) over others depending on the con-text, the audience, and the rhetorical task at hand (see 3.2, "Writers' Histories, Processes, and Identities Vary"). If I am writing to a school board about a new policy, for example, I will likely foreground my identity as a parent. If I am writing about writing, as I am here, I will foreground my identity as a professor of writing and rhetoric. In like manner, we also carry any number of political identities, identities that reflect particular ideological predispositions. We can write as a liberal or a conservative, as a woman recognizing particular power dynamics, as a person of color. Identity politics—the idea that one's self-defined identities drive one's choices as they engage in discussions, actions, and interactions—entails a conscious decision by the individual to enter into what critical theorist Gyatri Spivak (1987) terms a "strategic essen-tialism," a reduction of complex political and economic relations in order to present a political statement.

Identity politics tends toward the construction of a single identity. But we know that identit*ies* are multifaceted. One can be liberal on social issues but a conservative on fiscal issues. None of us is ideologi-cally "pure." Or one can be a gay man of color, wherein sets of differ-ent conflicts and different power relations can occur. Even as there is a great deal of value to identity politics, then, when writing from an overtly political or cultural position there is a risk in identity politics of reducing cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, or class relations to their "natures," especially when writers do this as they imagine their audiences and their identities.

There are limits to what can be anticipated about what readers know, assume, or believe. To write from the position of one who is "color blind," for example, could be read as a denial of complex histories and current hierarchical differences in power and economic relations. To write about a gay relationship in terms of husbands and wives is to maintain conven-tional conceptions of gender roles. In other words, because all writing is inflected by power dynamics shaped by identities and ideologies, writers must become aware of the how those identities and ideologies are repre-sented in their writing.

Compositionist James Berlin (1987) points to a way in which representation can be brought into the writing classroom. In his taxonomies of epistemological assumptions about writing, he provides essentially three conceptions of how writing can be seen to work: as reflective, a mirror of an objective reality; as intentional, conveying what an author intends so that the reader's job is to discern that intention; or as or constructed, so that there is a negotiation within the writer with his or her ways of seeing the world and a negotiation within the reader between his or her own worldviews and the perceived worldviews of the writer. Students (maybe even most nonspecialists) accept the first two assumptions, that writing is transparent and/or that it conveys exactly what a writer meant to say. A "pedagogy of representation" (Giroux 1994) disrupts these two perceptions and asks students to do the critical work of discovering the kinds of cultural, political, and economic assumptions contained within their own writing and within popular culture. Guiding questions would be what's being said? and what's left unsaid? These two simple questions can begin to uncover the power dynamics contained in all writing.

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