

English 625, Spring 2013

# Empirical Research in Writing

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class meets:	fridays 11:30 in Heavilon 206

Almost everyone who ponders empirical work in writing studies assumes that study is about **texts**; most will assume empirical studies of rhetoric also are about texts. Yet, when the vaguely labeled “almost everyone” or “most” are asked about what “text” means, its boundaries will vary dramatically. TEXT’s boundaries may include/exclude in varied ways paths to texts, or inquiries about the study of writing, the practice of writing/communication, the development of and/or the teaching of writing, and assessments of writing skills in Composition Studies and allied fields. It also may cover institutions, disciplines, habitats, ecologies, and cultures—technologically supported or not—that are crafted through writing. Because of these amorphous borders for “texts” and their study, empirical work invites inclusion of a wide variety of methods and an ecumenism about both the sorts of evidence accepted/prized and the kinds of knowledge-making enacted. The result is a complex of allegiances and methods that sometimes seems to require a scorecard.

This course helps you respond to a complex of questions engendered by saying, “I think this should be studied empirically,” and I hope in a thoughtful way. The course does not aim to make you an empirical researcher; instead it aims to increase your abilities to *responsibly* read, discuss, critique, empathize with, and profit from the insights of empirical research. Its baseline goal, then, is to be empirical research literacy class that fosters both understanding arguments made through direct observation and/or numbers and also understanding how those arguments might have been fashioned for different (or even better) results.

So, a prime concern of this course is the reading of empirical research. Rhetoric and Composition folk often come to composition studies from literature, and some are known to suffer from math anxiety attacks. Yet, those who are going to administer programs must be able to deal with empirical research because numbers arguments are the arguments that will be most successful with decision makers in a college/university. And, more generally, some types of questions and interests lend themselves most directly to empirical study.

After (contemporaneously with, actually) its baseline goal, the course concerns itself with methodological allegiances and choices of method for the study of written discourse. Why do methodologies matter? Well, the controllers of the rules—for (1) what counts as prime evidence, (2) who rates as an observer, and (3) what procedures are prioritized as preferred in the gathering and analyzing of data—are the “groups” who structurally are “in charge” of a discipline. Further, in the academy, you have trouble demonstrating that you have a discipline without methodologies you articulate, methods you deploy, and evidence you prize. Interestingly, in composition studies the discussions of methodology have taken place almost exclusively inside empirical venues. Thus, this course in its core takes up methodology, focusing more on an empirical take on it. [Note: 626 provides a more philosophical take and 624 a more historiographical take.]

A third course concern is the production of empirically-grounded academic discourse. Through its projects, the course aims to help you produce some materials suitable for public consumption (namely, a group project and poster session) and some for progress toward your degree (namely, a prelim style exam and research proposal).

#### Course Practices

- probe the paradigms, methods, and potential alternative methods of empirical research in composition studies
- practice critical reading of empirical research (gridding the studies in order to read from within paradigmatic frames and across the grain of those frames)
- investigate and share empirical work (extant and needed) on topics relevant to your interests
- practice presenting a study plan in poster session format
- successfully propose an empirical study

#### texts & other readings

Charles B. Teddlie and Abbas Tashakkori. *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Sage, 2008. [you purchase]

We will also read widely from published empirical studies, including excerpts from some book-length studies that are being distributed online. We will use texts such as:

- Judith A Langer and Arthur N Applebee. 1987. *How Writing Shapes Thinking: A Study of Teaching and Learning*  
[http://wac.colostate.edu/books/langer\\_applebee/](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/langer_applebee/)
- Barbara E. Walvoord and Lucille Parkinson McCarthy. 1990. *Thinking and Writing in College: A Naturalistic Study of Students in Four Disciplines*  
<http://wac.colostate.edu/books/thinkingwriting/>
- Bazerman, Charles, and Paradis, James. 1991. *Textual Dynamics of the Professions: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Writing in Professional Communities*. [http://wac.colostate.edu/books/textual\\_dynamics/](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/textual_dynamics/)
- Ito, Mizuko et al. 2009. *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*. <http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/hanging-out-messing-around-and-geeking-out>

- work:**
- You are responsible for reading all material that is assigned. We will have a final exam on assigned reading: it is intended to help you prepare for the Rhetoric prelim. In preparation for that work, you will grid your reading of one study each week and for distribute this grid to the class periodically [With 13 people, it should work out that each person will distribute a grid 4 times during the gridding portion of the semester]. The exam and grids will account for ~ 30% of final grade.
  - You are responsible for contributing to an ongoing project (datadatabase). ~15-20%
  - You are responsible for proposing a research study that would be suitable for dissertation work. ~ 30-35 %
  - You are responsible for poster that presents the plan for research detailed in your project. All posters will be shown at the class poster session, and visitors will vote on awards. ~ 20 %

<b>schedule overview:</b>	week 2--	Frames Offered; Future Researchers Imagined
	weeks 3-5--	Macro Sortings of Empirical Work Small N Approaches or Qualitative Studies Larger N Approaches or Quantitative Studies Combinations or Mixed Methods Approaches
	Weeks 6-10--	Highlighting Methods in order to work on Sub areas Surveys, Interviews, and Cases Ethnographies Experiments and Correlational Studies Meta-analyses and Syntheses
	Week 11--	Exam
		Group Work Day
		Theme-based readings-TBA
	Week 15--	Poster Session
	Exam Week--	Project Due

## Reading for the Next Month

### 1/18: Frames Offered/Contested

- Smagorinski (2008) – The Method Section as Conceptual Epicenter in Constructing Social Science Research Reports [2008Wcissueonmethodology/ologysmagorinski.pdf]
- Bazerman (2008) – Theories of the Middle Range in Historical Studies of Writing Practice [2008Wcissueonmethodology/ologybazerman.pdf]
- Haswell (2005) – NCTE/CCCC’s Recent War on Scholarship [framesoffered/haswell.pdf]
- Huckin (2009) On textual silences, large and small [framesoffered/huckinsilences.pdf]
- Hayes (2012) Modeling and remodeling of writing [framesoffered/hayes2012.pdf]
- Juzwik et al (2005) – Writing into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century [framesoffered/juzwik.pdf]
- Leander/Phillips/Headrick (2010) – The Changing Social Spaces of Learning: Mapping the New Mobilities [framesoffered/leanderRoR2010.pdf]
- CCC multiple reviews of *Academically Adrift* [framesoffered/CCC0633reviews.pdf]

Articles that may interest some of you [not assigned reading]:

- Schwartz-Shea/Yanow (2002) – “Reading” “methods” “texts”: How research methods texts construct political science [futureresearchers/schwartz.pdf]
- Sperling /DiPardo (2008)-- English Education Research and Classroom Practice: New Directions for New Times [framesoffered/sperling.pdf]
- Eisenhart/DeHaan (2005) -- Doctoral Preparation of Scientifically Based Education Researchers [futureresearchers/eisenhart.pdf]
- Capraro/Thompson (2008) -- The Educational Researcher Defined: What Will Future Researchers Be Trained to Do? [futureresearchers/capraro.pdf]
- see also the qual-quant debates in comp [subfolder in framesoffered]
- see also the CCC special issue on methodology [2012cccissueonmethodology]

### 1/25: In the Few We Trust?

- Yin (2003) *Case study research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. chs 1 and 2 [cases/yin.pdf]
- Herndl/Nahrwold (2003) -- Research as Social Practice [cases/herndl.pdf]
- Hull (1999) -- What’s in a Label? [cases/hull.pdf]
- Leki (2003) -- Living through College Literacy [cases/leki.pdf]
- Prior (1994) -- Response, Revision, Disciplinarity: A Microhistory of a Dissertation Prospectus in Sociology [cases/prior.pdf]
- Laquintano (2010) – Sustained authorship: Digital writing, self-publishing, and the ebook [cases/laquintano.pdf]
- Smagorinski/Pettis/Reed (2004) High school students’ compositions of ranch designs [cases/smagorinski]

read and grid one of the following studies. . . try to get each study gridded by at least one person [all are in the cases folder]:

- Angelova/Riazantseva (1999)
- Ashley (2001)
- Bisaillon(2007)
- Fishman/McCarthy (2001)
- Foster (2004)
- Greene (2001)
- Kennedy (1985)
- Lee (2007)
- Winsor (2000)

**2/1: OR is it in the Many we Trust?**

- ch 7 and 8 from Langer and Appleby (at WAC Clearinghouse)  
[http://wac.colostate.edu/books/langer\\_applebee/](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/langer_applebee/)
- Campbell and Stanley chapter describing designs [TBS]
- Saunders/Scialfa (2003) -- The Effects of Pre-Exam Instruction on Students' Performance on an Effective Writing Exam [experimental/saunders.pdf]
- Cohen/White/Cohen (2011) == A Time Use Diary Study of Adult Everyday Writing Behavior [descriptive/cohen.pdf]
- Dryer (2013) – Scaling Writing Ability: A Corpus-driven Inquiry
- Jones (2008) – Patterns of Revision in Online Writing: A Study of Wikipedia's Featured Articles [descriptive/jones.pdf]
- Haswell (1988) – Error and Change in College Student Writing [descriptive/haswell1988.pdf]
- Schmitt et al – Why Partisans See Mass Media as Biased [descriptive/study1.pdf]
- Hilgers et al (1999)—“As You're Writing You Have These Epiphanies” What College Students Say about Writing and Learning in Their Majors [descriptive/hilgers.pdf]

read and grid 1 of the following [in descriptive or experimental folder] . . try to get each study gridded by at least one person:

- Carter/Ferzli/Wiebe (2004)
- Hyland
- Janssen/Murachver (2004)
- Lang et al (2002)
- Lazar
- Leijten (2010)
- Penrose (2003)

**2/8: Mixing Methods. . . as answer OR as an interim attempt at détente**

- Teddlie and Tashakkori, chapters 1, 2 and 5
- Johnson/Onwuegbuzie (2004) Mixed Methods Research: A research paradigm whose time has come [mixed/Johnson]
- Onwuegbuzie et al. (2007). Students' perceptions of characteristics of effective college teachers [mixed/onwuegbuzie.pdf]
- Haswell, et al. (1999). Context and rhetorical reading strategies: Haas and Flower (1988) revisited [mixed/haswell99.pdf]
- McDonald and Hannafin (2003) [mixed/mcdonald.pdf]
- Applebee et al (2003) Discussion based Approaches to Developing Understanding [mixed/applebee03.pdf]
- Can/Walker (2011) A Model for Doctoral Students' Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Written Feedback for Academic Writing [mixed/can.pdf]
- Corrigan (2012) The Implementation of E-Tutoring in Secondary Schools [mixed/corrigan.pdf]
- Note. . . Haven't decided on studies to grid