

Literacy Link

Spring 2015

SVSU
the **Literacy Link**
February 1992 Vol. I, No. 1

Featured in this issue:
WRITING AT SVSU

From the Editors:
The purpose of the *Literacy Link* is to share with faculty across the university information and ideas about the teaching of reading, writing, and thinking. We believe that all teachers at the university are teachers of literacy; therefore, we hope you will find this newsletter informative. This first issue is devoted exclusively to writing; however, the next two issues (due out in March and mid-April) will include articles on reading and thinking as well. We welcome any and all suggestions and submissions.

- INSIDE**
- 1 Grading Papers
 - 2 Writing Center Plagiarism
 - 3 Perceptions of Student Writing
- Writing Across the Curriculum

Handling the Paper Load

One of the major problems of writing across the curriculum continues to be the amount of time required to grade papers, especially for large class sections. While I know of no perfect solution to this problem, I have heard discussions of one approach which seems to me to combine practicality for the instructor with a high level of value for the student.

In this method, instructors in non-Composition classes do not attempt to "correct" all errors in a paper or to provide comprehensive commentary on the student's writing performance. Instead, they look for the most typical writing problems in a particular student's papers and prescribe specific kinds of improvement. Although a student may have a variety of writing

problems which occur repeatedly in the student's papers, commenting on these problems and asking the student to work on specific kinds of improvement.

This approach seems to me to have several virtues. For one, neither the instructor nor the student is overwhelmed. Even if there are a lot of diverse problems, the instructor can focus on eliciting specific new writing behaviors and give fairly specific suggestions, rather than spending time marking every error and struggling with how to "fix" every awkward or incorrect sentence.

General comments about the full range of problems may be appropriate, especially in the first paper, but the student can be required to concentrate on one or

dealing with them one or two at a time, and will begin to develop a sense of mastery. If significant improvement is evident, the papers are being read and the instructor can later give a second, less critical improvement.

This permits the papers for each student to be read and for improvement areas to be identified. It also allows the instructor to search for trying to suggest improvements to every one. This requires faith in the process of writing. However, we are unlikely to solve writing problems singly. This approach allows us to handle short-term production

Beats Broke Through the Norms— But Where Are They in Textbooks?

Eric Patterson
When should I begin? I have never been the typical student—well, I was once, but those days had been left far in the past when I first got my education career at Saginaw Valley. I had to have fun—that did not mean I was not studying. Some of the writing I did in the past, for me to get a hold of—I began studying the parts and philosophies that influenced my childhood heroes. Now, most kids utilize sports games or historical figures—for me it was music. I am not talking about the wasted down pop stars you see on the radio and that later allowed me to take an even stronger interest in music. I am talking about the music that we learned and loved in the 1960s and 1970s. That's the music that I am talking about.

teracy link

Winter 2013

CONTENTS

Literacy Link	2
Writing spaces for	3
Editors' Desktops	11
Winter 2007	



Semicolon

Here is the American essayist Lewis Thomas on the semicolon: "The semicolon tells you that there is still some question about the preceding full sentence; something needs to be added [...]. The period [or full stop] tells you that that is that; if you didn't get all the meaning you wanted or expected, anyway you got all the writer intended to parcel out and now you have to move along. But with the semicolon there is more to come; read on; it will get clearer."

(The Medusa and the Snail, 1979) as cited in Eats, Shoots, and Leaves by Lynne Truss.

Contributors

- Emily J. Beard-Bohn
- Geoffrey Carter
- Ruth Copp
- Jesse Donahue
- Laura Eidam
- Brigitte Farley-Leppek
- Phillip Hanson
- Deborah Huntley
- Joe Jaksa
- Brad D. E. Jarvis
- Jason Kahler
- I-Hsuan Lai
- Mike Mosher
- Lifang Qui
- Jieying Shi
- Gary Thompson

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From the Editors' Desk



Dr. Emily J. Beard-Bohn
Assistant Professor of English



Dr. Jason Kahler
Instructor of English



Brigitte Farley-Leppek
PTW Major, Intern

This is a historic edition of *Literacy Link*.

This issue's theme, "Short Takes," allows us to feature more voices at one time than ever before. We are excited and grateful that so many people from the campus community took the time to share with us the importance of reading and writing in their lives. Our contributors are students, members of the faculty, and folks from administration. It's a wonderful mix of modes and methods, and highlights the power that literacy has in our work and our lives writ large.

We hope you enjoy the stories they tell.

But this *Literacy Link* is historic for another reason, as well, because it's the final issue that will appear in this format. Perhaps in the future, *Link* will make some sort of a reappearance, but for now, consider what you're holding a collector's item.

We have been fortunate for the support of the Provost's office during our tenure as editors, and for the many people whose words were included in these pages. It's been wonderful working with the student editors and designers. We'll miss the privilege of interacting with all the contributors.

The mission of the *Literacy Link*, we've been told, will continue in other places. The university isn't abandoning its support for reading and writing across campus.

Enjoy the voices on display here, and be on the look-out for voices in new places in the future. Thanks to everyone who was a part of *Literacy Link* across its lifespan. We're pleased to see it going out on a high note.

— E & J

SHORT TAKES

ON READING AND WRITING

Jesse Donahue

Professor and Chair of Political Science

Many people believe that if one can read at a middle school level then one can read anything. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are dramatic differences in reading comprehension that either help or limit students' college experiences and their potential for admission to graduate programs. The only way to increase comprehension of more sophisticated academic texts is to assign them. We need to move our humanities and social sciences courses away from textbooks and toward scholarly monographs, articles, and novels that force students to expand their vocabularies and thereby increase their reading comprehension.

Joe Jaksa

Associate Professor of Criminal Justice

In the field of criminal justice, we write—EVERYTHING! In fact, there are times when we spend more time writing reports than physically protecting lives and property. The ability to write in a competent and professional manner is a cornerstone for success in criminal justice. Those who do not take the time to master the skill of composition will have a difficult tenure in this field. For those who want to “protect and serve,” they must be able to accurately and articulately document events and activities. Writing is a skill that will always pay dividends for every C. J. professional.

Gary Thompson

Professor and Chair of English

Writing often takes the form of a printed conversation I have with myself. While I admire the accounts of Wallace Stevens composing poems like “Le Monocle de Mon Oncle” in his head while walking to work at Hartford Insurance, I need to have something external to create a trace which I can come back to.

In that way my thoughts are out there, and the things which are out there are inside of my thoughts, and the boundary between myself and the rest of reality is made more permeable and more manageable.

Jieying Shi

Graduate Student in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language at the joint program between SVSU and Ming Chuan University

Reading is absorbing and I am the sponge. Writing is all about reflection and delivering ideas about what I read. Reading is satisfying because exploring new ideas fulfills my brain and updates the information. It makes me delight to write since I can express my ideas freely and exchange them with others.

Deborah Huntley

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Students think it is the chemistry and math that are difficult when, in fact, the problem is often the reading.

These kids are not bad readers; I suspect they read non-technical texts very fluently. They just haven't mastered the skill of reading dense, rigorously precise scientific writing. When I help them parse the information and extract key points, they know how to take the next step.

I use *How to Read a Book* by Adler and VanDoren to help students develop their analytical reading skills. They pay hundreds of dollars for those books—they should be able to use them.

Laura Eidam

Instructor of English



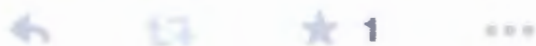
Laura @eidam1 · 10h

@svsu #literacylink If, as Robert Louis Stevenson claims, fiction is a “web at once sensuous and logical, an elegant and pregnant texture,”



Laura @eidam1 · 10h

then reading is my way of tracing the web, and writing my way of connecting with other readers to understand fiction’s texture. #shorttakes



Laura @eidam1 · 10h

Stevenson, Robert Louis. “Essays in the Art of Writing.” London: Chatto, 1905. Project Gutenberg. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.



Geoffrey Carter

Assistant Professor of English

One of my big writing breakthroughs was the realization of just how much has been written about the difficulty of writing. In fact, Dennis Upper once published a blank page in the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis* as “proof” of his own “unsuccessful self-treatment of writer’s block.” The discovery that this blank page was actually published gave my writing (and my reading about writing) a different focus. As Giorgio Agamben tells us in *Potentialities*, more important than the commonplace term “*Tabula Rasa*” (blank slate) is “*Rasura Tabulae*” (a blank slate’s thin layer of wax)—*Writing’s Own Potential*.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Potentialities*. Stanford University Press, 2000.

Upper, Dennis. “The Unsuccessful Self-Treatment of a Case of ‘Writer’s Block’.” *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. 1974 Fall; 7(3): 497.





I-Hsuan Lai

Graduate Student in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language at the joint program between SVSU and Ming Chuan University

Reading makes my horizons broader. I can absorb different knowledge by reading books, magazines, and any kinds of information that have been written down. These publications can come from any country all over the world. You can learn a lot of new or special stuff from them. After the busy working days, I like to read a book that I am interested in; it makes me relax. Reading is really an important part of my life. I'm happy that I *can* read and also *enjoy* reading.

Brigitte Farley-Leppek

Student in Professional and Technical Writing

Magazines are a source of inspiration. An article on corporate funding for political campaigns spawns an idea for a research paper, a science article suggests an interesting profession and background for a fiction character, the page layout teaches me design. The limited format makes me pay attention to things I might not otherwise.

Newsweek was first. It trained a young me to read in-depth reporting, news analysis, essays, and letters to the editor (beginning-level public discourse). A magazine is there, in the spots where I relax, artfully reminding me to read further. In electronic spaces, something else is always just a click away. I hope others continue to see the value of print publications.

Emily J. Beard-Bohn

Assistant Professor of English

My freshman year of college, I registered as a Physical Therapy major, only to change my major to Psychology my sophomore year. Taking classes in a science-driven field, I found myself surrounded more by statistics and experimental equations than writing. When I struggled with an average "C" in my Experimental Psychology class, my advisor delicately informed me that Psychology probably wasn't my path. So, I was back to, "What now?" Looking back on the classes I enjoyed in high school, I remembered I always enjoyed English class and reading and writing. I switched my major again – this time to Literature. A few years after I graduated, I ran into one of my high school English teachers, Mrs. Kontos. She asked me what I had been doing since I was her student. "English," I said. "Oh yes," she said, "I always knew you'd be."

Jason Kahler

Instructor of English

I remember sitting at a usual family dinner one evening when I was about sixteen and breaking the news to my parents that I wasn't going to be an engineer, after all.

I was going to be a writer. Of stories, of poems, of plays and comic books, of whatever. Mom nearly cried.

"It's ok," I said. "I'll be a teacher, too."

That was an avocation the people at church would understand, so all was well and Dad resumed eating his roast beef.

Being a writer—of anything, any time, anywhere—is an endeavor of bravery, a declaration of vulnerability. We wonder how people will respond to our words and our ideas.

Writing teaches us to be brave. It teaches us to take risks.

I'm glad I found it. I would have made a terrible engineer.

Lifang Qui

Graduate Student in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language at the joint program between SVSU and Ming Chuan University

Reading is a cup of tea for my busy life. Reading opens a window in my inner house. When I begin reading, my window lets the fresh air blow in and lets me see the beautiful life in the view. Reading is a journey. Writing is a pathway. The pen is my garden tool; I enjoy planting the flowers and plants. Writing is the way I express myself, the way I reflect, the way I explore the world. Reading and writing are twins of mine; I'll keep them for life.

Phillip Hanson

Assistant Professor of Art

Just a Minute

I conduct mandatory one minute office hour appointments for each of my students at the beginning of the semester. The purpose of these meetings is to welcome them, to introduce the concept of office hours, and to mitigate any trepidation they may have in seeking my assistance in the future. I send them on their way with their choice of a pencil or chocolate after giving them my one minute spiel.

Brad D. E. Jarvis

Associate Professor of History

I have Asperger's. I don't hide that fact, but neither do I admit it readily in conversation. Most people would probably never know, but live with me as my wife and kids do, and it becomes apparent. One effect it has had on me is that writing, particularly creative writing, can be quite difficult. Even simple tasks can take a significant amount of effort, and I've had to train myself to accept imperfect prose. In some ways, these difficulties have been a blessing for me as an instructor. Good writing is a product of passion, patience ... and hard work.

Mike Mosher

Professor of Art/Communication & Digital Media

Mom read me Little Golden Books until I could. Toys outgrown, I got books for Christmas.

Guys who wrote and drew our Ditto-published high school comics ended up English professors and professional writers publishing science fiction.

Took two cartons of books to college. Freshman week asked the English Chair, a New Yorker essayist, "Should I major in art or writing?"

"Choose art; you can write about your art."

Wife and I have a house full of books. When TV broadcasts went digital in 2009, we didn't replace our 1990 television, now used only for DVDs. Get more reading done but never enough.

Ruth Copp

Lecturer of English

Donald Graves spoke to an audience in Midland a number of years ago demonstrating how to nudge students in their writing process.

My timeline of reading nudges:

From my parents: Reading to us in a book-filled home.

From my mother's parents: Suggesting I might like *Stuart Little*, etc.

From my K-12 librarian: Suggesting I might like *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*.

From my father, at 93, still nudging his four children: Most recently - Barbara Kingsolver's *The Lacuna*.

My sons: Nudged and now nudging back.

My students: Responding to nudges such as *Montana 1948*.

Nudge, nudge. Wink, wink; reading turns out to be a wonderful adventure.



Literacy Link is a campus publication that began in the winter of 1992 with the support of Dr. Robert Yien and the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. In the first issue of *Literacy Link*, founding editors Sally Cannon and Jenny Senft focused on three key areas of literacy: writing, reading, and thinking. Over the years, individuals from departments across campus have added to the conversation.

literacy link
Winter 2014

SU SAGINAW VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

Contents

From the Editors' Desk

My Transatlantic Path: An experience with revisiting transcendentalism and the cultivation of an authorial voice

Reflections on Writing

Mapping the Terrain

From the Editors' Desk

A colleague asked me a few years ago how we liked being the Literacy Link. "It is a great job," he said. We turned and smiled. "Yes, but we're not enjoying it if you find it. And we believe talking and reading about it is worthwhile work."

Most of the articles in this issue are classroom moments that we've collected over the years. It is our hope that you will find it a worthwhile publication in a few weeks and staff in writing.

Contents

- 1 From the Editors' Desk
- 2 I'm a Good Reader: I can Have Problems with Comprehension
- 3 Spanning Genres into One: Why Study Creative Writing at SVSU?
- 4 Brain Change: The Power of Intentional Teaching
- 5 Building Literacy Links beyond SVSU
- 6 Book Review

Winter 2014

the SVSU Literacy LINK
January 2008 Volume 7, Number 1

Seats Broke Through the Norms—Where Are They in Textbooks?

February 1992

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INSIDE

- Grading Papers
- Writing Center
- Plagiarism
- Perceptions of Student Writing
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