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 discussion 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-Comp. Gen. courses 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 suggest specific ideas for improvement. Although a student may have a variety of writing problems which occur repeatedly in the student's papers, omitting these problems from the papers allows the student to work on specific kinds of improvement.

This approach seems to me to have several values. For one, neither the instructor nor the student is overwhelmed. Even if there are a lot of similar problems, the instructor can focus on selecting specific new writing behaviors and give fairly specific suggestions, rather than spending time marking every error and struggling with how to "fix" the entire paper or comment on overall writing process.

Instructors will find that the students follow the suggestions made and will begin to see some improvement in their papers. Instructors can later focus on specific, less critical errors.

This approach to handling papers for writing and for improving writing behavior for the student is a challenging one. It will require some practice for the instructor to learn how to focus on the most common areas of writing problems, and to find ways of dealing with them one at a time, and will begin to see some improvement in the papers. Instructors can begin to see the results of this method of handling papers for writing and for improving writing behavior in the students' writing, and will begin to see some improvement in the papers.
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.
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
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.

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.

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.

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_

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Laura @eidaml 10h  
@svsu #literacylink _If, as Robert Louis Stevenson claims, fiction is a “web at once sensuous and logical, an elegant and pregnant texture,”_

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Laura @eidaml 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

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Laura @eidaml 10h  

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Geoffrey Carter  
_Assistant Professor of English_

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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.


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. ;)

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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.

Thanks again to all the readers and all the contributors through the years.