

Listening Language and Student Interaction in Online Writing Spaces

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Patricia Bawol and Max Henry Anton. As one left, the other entered.

## Abstract

This dissertation responds to the concerns rhetoric and composition teachers have with student interaction in online writing spaces. Specifically, the study conducted here is part of a recent conversation regarding the way students listen in online environments. This dissertation explores listening from a rhetorical perspective. Current frameworks for online interaction center largely on reducing three types of conflict: flaming, lurking, and low/non-participation. As a response to the challenge of how to proceed in light of these online conflicts, this dissertation offers “listening language” as one solution. Drawing upon the works of Wayne Booth, Sharon Crowley, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and Krista Ratcliffe, I argue that listening language becomes an approach to online interaction that students and teachers may use in three distinct online spaces: asynchronous discussion forums, virtual peer reviews, and a final narrative analysis assignment that is uploaded to a graded drop box. Listening approaches like the one I develop have the potential to transform the way individuals interact with each other from a position of mastery and argumentative superiority to one of mutual exploration and exchange. This dissertation is guided by the following research questions: Does exposure to pedagogy based on listening language a) change students’ attitudes about the relationship between listening and writing and b) their online discourses? Are there differences between the online discourses of students who have been exposed to a pedagogy based on listening language and those who have not? If so, how can those differences be characterized? Taken

together, these questions help researchers interesting in listening and online writing instruction understand some of the ways listening happens in online spaces.

To assess the impact of a pedagogy based on the principles of listening language, I use a mixed methodology for data collection and analysis. This study was conducted on two sections of first-year writing at a large, mid-western research university during the Spring 2013 semester. I created a sequential design that begins with a quasi-experiment data collection process followed by rhetorical analysis of student texts generated through the duration of the study. This study also uses statistical analysis of an original pretest/posttest survey results that are a part of the quasi-experimental research design. Sentence-level and whole-paper rhetorical analysis were also conducted on student-written texts collected during this study.

The findings suggest that listening language does impact student attitudes toward listening. Though there are differences between the written texts of students in treatment and control groups, neither group makes use of listening language's entrance and exit moves. This study also finds that hedging and qualifying are the most frequent ways students acknowledge troubles others may have with listening to their ideas. Moreover, students acknowledge troubles with listening most frequently during peer reviews rather than in discussion forums or the narrative analysis assignment.

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# Chapter One: Asynchronous Discussion Forums and Interaction in Online Spaces

This dissertation is a study of how first-year writing students interact in asynchronous, online discussions. An online discussion forum is a common feature of course management systems (WebCT, Moodle, Blackboard, etc.) that allow instructors or teaching assistants to create a written or video prompt for classroom participants to respond. These discussions are threaded, meaning that those with access to the course site can view a series of posts, one after the other, who each person responded to, and when they responded. Prior to reading or writing a response, participants can view which topics on the thread have received the most attention and/or when the last post was added. Students can respond to initial prompt or to another classmate's response. Online discussions can continue in this way for as long as community members or teachers would like. This chapter explores the scholarship of online discussions as a form of student interaction.

This study is focused on discussion forums for a number of important reasons. First, online discussion forums are a common area of exploration in educational research (Pamler, Hoyt, & Bray, 2008). Empirically driven journals (*Internet and Higher Education*, *British Journal of Education*, *Computers and Writing*, etc.) have and continue to use discussion forums as rich sites of analysis. Second, since computers first entered the writing classroom, it is common to read about the increasing administrative and colleague pressure for more and more online education (Grant-Davie & Cook, 2005;

Clark, 2010). Third, the work of asynchronous discussions, more frequently than not, happens through writing (Harrington, Rickly, & Day, 2000; Warnock, 2010). Fourth, asynchronous discussions constitute a significant mode of public interaction. Early edited collections (Handa, 1990; Selfe & Hilligoss, 1994) reflect rhetoric and composition's eagerness to understand the relationship between democratic involvement and technology. Major publications (*The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *Salon.com*, etc.) and news aggregate and content creation sites (*The Huffington Post* or *YouTube*) make use of asynchronous comments. *The Current*, a local Minneapolis radio station recently (2013) teamed up with Citizens League for a community discussion titled "Policy and a Pint: Uncivil Discourse: Comment Sections in the Digital Age" that explored the relationship between journalism and online comment sections that follow features, reviews, and op-eds. Social networking sites like Facebook and micro blogging tools like Twitter also function as a common form of asynchronous communication. In short, discussion forums are everywhere and critical attention to them is necessary.

The inclusion of asynchronous discussion forums in online writing courses has been a part of rhetoric and composition since the inclusion of computers in the classroom (Faigley, 1996; Harrington, Rickly, & Day, 2000). Often the inclusion of new educational technologies comes with increasing levels of teacher anxiety (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Warnock, 2010; Ko & Rosen, 2010). Starting with the familiar, smaller steps of creating a threaded discussion helps ease this transition. It is helpful because teachers are often responsible for creating discussion prompts for their face-to-face interactions. Asynchronous, online discussions replicate this common pedagogical practice. With

minimal training and time, teachers new to online systems and teaching can very often quickly set up a basic discussion forum. Though much like face-to-face discussions, online interaction forums excite writing teachers because unlike their verbal/oral counterparts in face-to-face environments, online discussions are most often conducted through writing.

### **Understanding the Interaction Imperative in Online Research**

Undergirding much of the scholarship in online discussions is what I am calling the “interaction imperative.” The interaction imperative is the assumption that students and/or student writing must or should be visible to teachers and community members. Dennen & Wieland (2007) suggest that peer interaction “can be motivating and contribute to a sense of social presence and community” (p. 284). The focus on interaction shouldn’t be entirely surprising given that the prevailing educational philosophy, social construction, makes its way to online education. *College Composition and Communication’s* “State-of-the-Art in Online Writing Instruction” (2011) found that those who teach in online spaces will often migrate social constructionist philosophies and a process approach to writing instruction to their online teaching. The “State-of-the-Art in Online Writing Instruction” represents an important moment of clarity and deserves careful attention here because the report’s findings confirm empirically what rhetoric and composition has known to be the case through anecdotal accounts (p. 13).

The *College Composition and Communication* report, a national survey of 2-year and 4-year college and university instructors across the United States of America with online teaching experience, is the most current assessment of the field’s understanding of

online writing instruction. This report describes generalized trends in the approaches to online writing instruction as well as self-reported descriptions of teacher and student experiences with online education. Several key findings of the report help animate and justify my study. First, survey respondents indicated that “the online setting required more reading and written communication on their parts, which increased the time required for course interaction” (p. 8). What is interesting to note is that it is the transfer of these teacherly activities *into writing* that was most cumbersome, not the fact that teachers did not want to engage students in these ways (p. 8). The increase in workload from face-to-face to online and hybrid settings seems, then, to be a contributing factor to teachers’ willingness to continue teaching in these settings. Second, when asked about their understanding of student experiences with online writing, respondents “indicated that online class discussions, while interesting, are inefficient and take longer because of typing the remarks and its typically asynchronous nature” (p. 10). Instructors reported that “early semester community-building activities” and communicating a desire for flexibility were frequent approaches to help mitigate students’ frustrations. Third, of the three most widely reported aspects respondents liked *least* about online writing instruction was a “lack of interaction among students and [teachers]” (p. 12). These initial findings regarding the state-of-the-art in online writing instruction set the tone and justification for the study that makes up this dissertation. Specifically, the concern over the lack of student interaction in these spaces justifies focusing scholarly attention on the ways students interact. This study closely examines a way rhetoric and composition teachers might shape student interaction in online discussions.

Establishing a classroom community requires interaction among its members. Dawson (2006) confirms that the “frequency of communicative interactions undertaken by the student body positively impacts the development of the social community experienced among the cohort” (p. 16). That is to say that interaction among students in online spaces contributes to a sense of community. Moreover, situated meaning is key to interaction that leads to community formation (Vanderwell and Zachariah 2005).

Though interaction is understood as a positive indication of community formation, interaction in these environments is not a guarantee. In fact, robust and meaningful interaction among community participants often proves difficult to accomplish. There are numerous reasons for the lack of interaction in online spaces. In the next section, I outline three barriers to online interaction that face online communities.

### **Conflict and Interaction in Online Spaces**

In this dissertation, I understand conflict to be more akin to a barrier than clash. Framing conflict as barrier to community interaction does two important things for this study. First, conflict as barrier reframes the concept as something to work through rather than something to seek out and embrace. Second, conflict understood this way turns our attention to community response rather than individual remediation. Moreover, the two definitions of conflict described here are not mutually exclusive; it is possible for both definitions to operate together. With respect to interaction in online discussions, there is a general agreement that three conflicts are pervasive: flaming, lurking, and low/non-

participation. I now turn my attention to shaping my understanding of these conflicts and articulating how they function as barriers to classroom interactions.

### **Flaming and Oppositional Resistance**

“...The electronic equivalent to a prolonged tongue-lashing.”

--A.P. Rovai, “Building and Sustaining Community in Asynchronous Learning Networks”

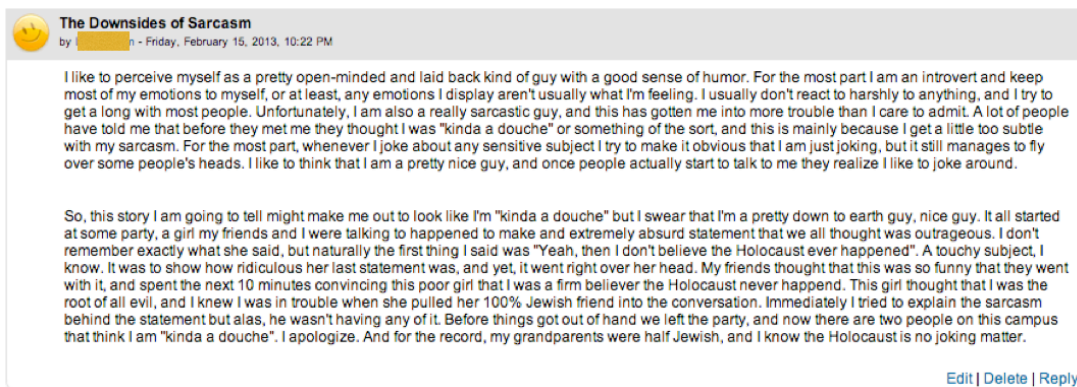
Flaming and insult is one form of conflict that challenges interaction and online community. Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur (2010) affirm a common conception that flaming tends to be more common in online spaces than in face-to-face environments. Thus, it is worth devoting some attention to this phenomenon as a conflict in online interaction. Pinning an operational definition of flaming has been difficult and ranges from definitions like the epigraph to this section to Shea’s (1994) assertion that flaming is what “people do when they express a strongly held opinion without holding back any emotion” (p. 43). Indeed, emotions have been a significant part of flaming literature and play a crucial role in identifying flames. Currently, two indicators are used to identify flames: a heightened state of the flamer and the negative emotional response of those who are (in)directly burned by the flame. A common approach to flaming treats it as a universally recognizable form of interaction that can be decontextualized and understood universally as such. This understanding of flaming has contributed to the need for “netiquette,” or online social codes that follow particular sets of behaviors (i.e., we shouldn’t shout in online spaces by writing in ALL CAPS).

Another perspective on flames has been to focus attention on those who flame. Weinstock (2004) suggests that it is important to help students understand the damage flaming does to one's ethos. He writes, "the flame as a form of revenge for real or imagined injury may give one a momentary sense of satisfaction, but it does so often at the expense of the author's reputation and future designs" (p. 379). The perspective of flames as ethos damaging is echoed in Lenard's (2005) suggestion that electronic communication in the classroom requires a careful construction of ethos that can be damaged by flaming.

The decontextualized approach to flames and the focus on *individuals* who flame is not without criticism. An arguably more nuanced version of flames as context-bound exists. Such context-bound notions of flaming suggest that what is insulting or troubling in one community does not transfer easily to another (Thompson, 1996; McKee, 2002; Oleksiak, 2012). Liew (2010) asserts that the "amorphous structures of CMC have exceeded—and will continue to exceed—any legalistic framework of punitive strictures on proper online conduct" (p. 310). Though focused on the structures that shape interaction, Liew's assertion reads to me as an acknowledgment of the futility of ridding online communities of flammers and flaming. What is needed is more attention to community responses to flames. Listening language, the concept I develop further in the next chapter, is one approach to developing community responses to those moments when communities should not and cannot ignore disruptions.

The specter of flaming carries a lot of weight because flames' impacts often derail lesson plans, dislodge a community's affective ties, and disrupt a sense of decorum. Such

challenges require responses, and communities and teachers should prepare for their possibilities. However, the case is that often tensions among community members become more pronounced as conversations evolve and the contrast among individual positions becomes more apparent. *Figure 1* shows an original post from a student who was writing about a time when his perception of himself clashed with another's perception of him. The discussion regarding whether sarcasm is appropriate during conversations about the Holocaust *could* result in a “flame war” among participating students. The sexist undertones of the post and his cavalier treatment of a sensitive subject could be interpreted as incendiary language that warrants (rightly or wrongly) a negative response from others. I'll turn to the responses to this student's post momentarily because what has actually happened in the brief discussions is indicative of another type of conflict that makes sustained online discussions difficult.



*Figure 1: Initial Post on “The Downsides of Sarcasm”*

### Lurking and the “Invisible Student”

“To participate in the act of lurking is to observe a setting but not contribute in any noticeable way.”

--Vanessa Paz Dennen, "Pedagogical Lurking"

Course management systems have given instructors unprecedented surveillance abilities. With Moodle, the CMS used in this study, teachers are able to see dates and times of student posts, when they last accessed what post, and how many times students click on the various links within the system. The implications of this type of surveillance are well beyond the scope of this dissertation and are an important area of scholarship. It is worth mentioning because such activities have allowed educational researchers to identify and classify a new type of student: the lurker. Lurkers exist on the periphery of the most dynamic types of interaction that occurs in online spaces. Lurking, the description of a behavior, is a form of passively-active education whereby a student uses online resources for their own development. Palmer, Holt & Bray (2008) describe lurking as an "optional engagement with online discussion forums" (p. 849) where students read rather than write to forum posts.

The politics of naming is apparent in lurker research. Some suggest that the term "lurker" is derogatory (Wise et al. 2012; Dennen 2008). Others advocate for terms like "invisible learner" (Beaudoin, 2002) in order to shift our attention away from the assumption of visibility in classroom research. Often the shift away from "lurker" as a term carries important challenges to the assumptions that lurking is even a problem. Beaudoin (2002) finds that lurkers learn content knowledge and complete classroom objectives. Such insights pose significant challenges to the interaction imperative undergirding social constructionist philosophies. It is important to highlight that for

Beaudoin, what is *learned* is course content. If course content is based in the principles of participatory democracy and critical pedagogy, however, the atomistic behaviors of those who lurk in online communities should be challenged.

Less challenging critiques of lurking scholarship suggest that far from a negative behavior, lurking is simple “part of regular online class participation” (Dennen, 2008, p. 1631). Wise et al. (2013) take an approach to lurking that is similar to Dennen. In their study, Wise et al. argue that treating lurking as a way to categorize those who “produce” and those who “consume” tests “segregates the complementary actions of making and accessing message across different categories of being” and ignores “how contributions interact with prior contributions” (p. 325). Studies like these encourage us to reconsider the negative connotations of those who are not producing textual interactions in online discussions. I am sympathetic to scholarship that calls into question what could be understood as derogatory or language that marginalizes or pathologizes students. Studies that explore *why* lurkers lurk (Preece et al. 2004) keep the focus on individuals much like flaming research often does. However, in studies like Dennen and Wise et al., lurking is synonymous with *reading*. Such understandings of lurking lead logically to the conclusion that students who lurk are participating in classroom content. However, a more nuanced version of interaction, one where community interaction and response is at the center of our teaching and student learning, requires participation through textual production. It does not require this at the expense of individual learning or reading, but in addition to it. In blunter terms, when learning is the focus of our lurking scholarship, we are left needing to contend with the implications that suggest interaction and participation

in community development is unnecessary at best and that the specific lurker's participation is not needed.

### **Low and Non-Participation in Online Discussions**

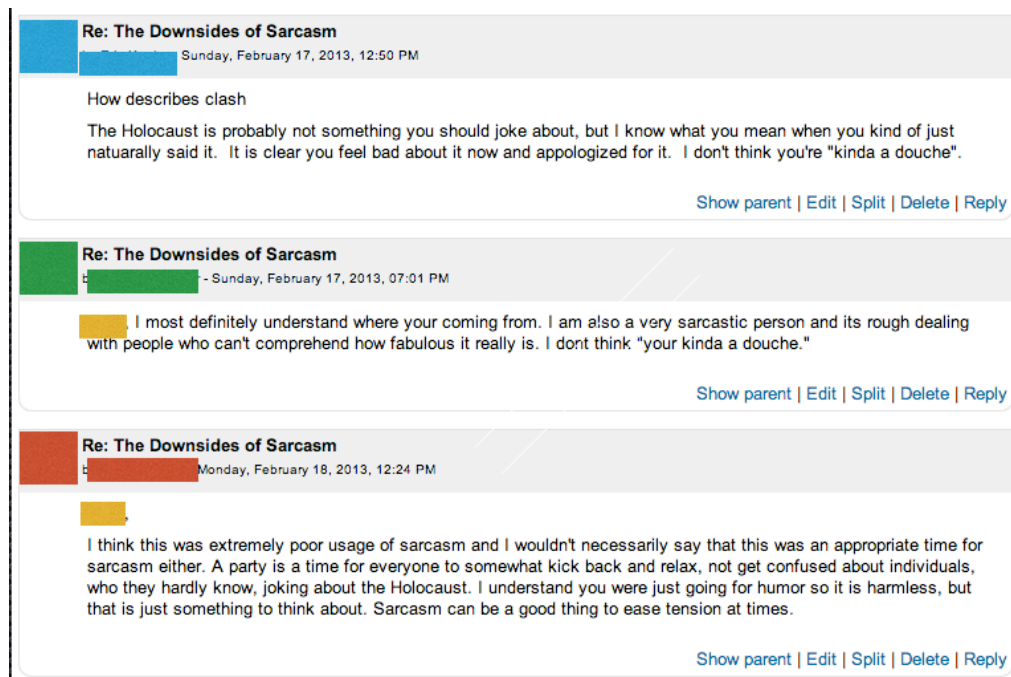
A final form of conflict that makes interaction in online discussions more difficult is low levels of participation or students who simply do not show up to the course for significant periods of time. Like the previous conflicts, low and non-participation represents particular challenges to those who value interaction in online spaces. Low and non-participation is similar to lurking. However, where those who lurk in online discussions spaces are participating by accessing course materials, those with low or non-participation do not access course content at key points during the community's lifespan.

There is another aspect to this conflict beyond a student simply not accessing or showing up to the spaces where communities interact. In asynchronous discussion forums discussions often die. Hewitt (2009) identified seven distinct factors that contribute to the death of a discussion in asynchronous spaces that are worth naming here:

1. Individuals have nothing further to say on the topic
2. Conversation becomes too confrontational or threatening
3. Participants lose interest
4. Multiple threads compete for students' attention
5. The thread is a "clunker" or does not appear to be robust enough for interaction to continue.
6. Discussion moves off topic
7. The moderator interferes (pp. 573-574)

Participants' loss of interest seems to be corroborated by a recent study in *College Composition and Communication's* "State-of-the-Art in Online Writing Instruction" (2011). The nation-wide survey of writing program administrators found that students will often become weary of the time and energy it takes to carefully read community members' posts *and* teacher comments (p. 10).

*Figure 2* reveals more reasons that might contribute to forum discussion death. What is shown in *Figure 2* is the entire exchange between students regarding what is appropriate during discussions of the Holocaust. They are the direct responses to the post illustrated in *Figure 1*. The three responses can hardly be understood as robust interaction among participants. The first response to the original post by "Blue" responds in affirming ways saying that she understands what "Yellow," the original poster, is trying to say. "Green" goes one step further in affirming "Yellow's" ideas. His amplification of affirmation does not create the type of response that warrants attention. Finally, "Red's" response challenges Yellow's ideas and goes against the affirming trend of what Blue and Green have started (though Red does suggest that sarcasm can be a good thing for easing tensions). What this exchange reveals is that students are not focused on how to respond to each other. It is not possible to see students moving off topic, nor can this discussion be considered a "clunker." Rather another reasonable explanation is that students were not sure how to carry on a conversation that is worth developing. Several students returned to this very post at a later time to work through the ideas each member presented. For now, it is important to note that for a variety of reasons, discussion ended without a clear sense of why.



*Figure 2: Illustration of the Death of a Discussion Thread*

I suggest that turning critical and systematic attention to listening language is a rich way to begin exploring community interaction in online discussions. Doing so may provide resources for rhetoric and composition professionals who are looking for ways to build community responses to the conflicts that I have described here. Before turning my attention to my approach to listening in online spaces more fully in the next chapter, I do want to acknowledge that research on listening in online environments is already underway. I turn my attention briefly to work that is already being done in order to distinguish the work presented here from what is already in circulation.

### Listening Goes Online

Rhetoric and composition scholars who devote attention to online writing have shared a concern with listening. That is to say, listening is not an entirely new concept in

this scholarship. In this section, I focus on two distinct approaches to listening: one treats listening indirectly and the other treats listening as a primary research interest. Though such research is important and influential to this study, I suggest that the work of this study is substantively distinct from the ones I carried out for my study.

Heidi McKee (2002) represents an early study on the moments where communication in an online discussion forum breaks down. Similar to the interests guiding this study, McKee's focus is placed on those moments where "discussion do get heated, and participants seem less interested in *listening* [emphasis added] to and engaging with the ideas of others and more interested in winning and defining their individual arguments" (p. 412). McKee's study examined the five most frequent contributors to the Intercollegiate E-Democracy Project in order to explore the reasons for or elements contributing to these failures. What makes her study relevant to my own is her concern with the way individuals discussed race in an asynchronous, online discussion forum. Her study is one where cross-cultural communication (the way White students and Black students communicate about race) and online discussion forums come together. McKee's study suggests that students who appeared to be flaming did not consider their words and posts as such. Rather, two of the respondents she interviewed understood their work as pedagogical in nature. That is, the African American male students who were believed to be flaming expressed the intention that they were "trying to reach the White participants, not just to educate them about the real effects of racism, but in hopes of improving social institutions now and in the future" (p. 419). The complex dynamic between sender and receiver in online, asynchronous discussions

contributes to the difficulty in identifying incendiary behaviors. McKee found that the students she interviewed did not consider the “effects of differing cultural positions,” which often contributed to a contrast in understanding (p. 427). McKee’s conclusion gestures at how teachers might deal with such things. My study takes up the important task of thinking through how community members might attend to the “effects of differing cultural positions” and offers “listening language” as one approach. This study and the one described in McKee’s work share a concern with the way students attend to the messages of others. Whereas McKee relies on a textual analysis of a discussion, the study I offer is a sustained exploration of the way “listening language” impacts the way students interact in online discussions.

A few studies that explore how listening functions in online spaces exist: each of them has been conducted under the leadership of Alyssa Wise (2012, 2013). Without detailing each of these studies, I would like to distinguish between how Wise et al. operationalize listening in online spaces and the idea that animates my own study. In “A Survey of Factors Contributing to Learners’ ‘Listening’ Behaviors in Asynchronous Online Discussions,” Wise, Marbouti, Hsiao, and Hausknecht (2012) define listening behavior as the “factors contributing to learners’ interactions with online discussion forums in the process leading up to their contributions. These online listening behaviors are an important part of the knowledge construction process that influences learners’ awareness of each other’s ideas; thus, promoting such interaction is a critical first step to supportive collaborative knowledge building in online discussions” (p. 447). The key move here is to define listening as the way students attend to posts made by others.

Several assumptions undergird their approach to online listening behaviors. First, it is significant to point to the fact that they classify listening as a behavior. This places listening in the realm of interpersonal communication rather than a rhetorical framework. Second, listening is distinct from composing (p. 326). One can be either listening or posting though listening is often “exhibited by the *same individuals* who speak in an online space” (p. 326). Finally, in this study, Wise et al. treat listening as a productive behavior. They examined participants’ click stream data. Such an approach to data collection is limited because as Wise et al. write, “while we assume that students are attending to the discussion elements they view, we cannot confirm what a student is actually doing at each moment. At times they may be daydreaming or engaging in off-task behaviors in other browser windows” (p. 340). And this is an important limitation to not only their data collection but also the use of communication models of listening. Such models are limited because they cannot tell us of the internal workings of the particular listener. A rhetorical approach to listening would suggest that listening takes place not simply in the presence of click streams but in the content of the posts. Finally, in their studies, listening is replaced with reading and speaking is replaced with writing. There is limited exploration of these differences and what it means to treat listening as a substitute for reading.

Wise et al. (2012, 2013) operate under a different understanding of listening than the one that animates this study. Broadly speaking, theirs is an interpersonal communication approach that is aligned more closely with communication studies rather than the rhetorical approach within the field of rhetoric and composition studies that

guides this dissertation. Their important work attempts to categorize listening behaviors that describe what students are doing in online, asynchronous discussion forums. The work of this dissertation is to assess the impact that a pedagogy based on listening language has on the way students interact with each other in online, asynchronous discussion forums. The approaches require different methods and theoretical justifications.

Wise et al. suggest that the “notion of online listening provides a unifying metaphor for thinking coherently about the different kinds of decisions and actions that learners take in relations to other’s posts and how they are important to the process of learning in an online discussion” (p. 325). When and how students receive online comments is important to Wise et al.’s understanding of listening. They suggest that in “online discussions students have active control over which comments they attend to, as well as when and for how long they do” (p. 326). That students have control over posting is debatable given that Wise et al. do not feel it necessary to explore power relationships in the classroom dynamics in their studies. However, simply having control over when and for how long a student attends to a post tells us little, if anything, about *how* the student is receiving these posts or if the student is interacting in meaningful ways with the post. As such, though there is much to learn from their descriptive study of listening behaviors, a rhetorical study such as the one undertaken in this dissertation can reveal students’ texts as they relate to one another.

## Purpose of this Study

This dissertation contributes to the emerging body of scholarship that explores what it means to listen online. My study focuses on the relationship between listening and writing and how listening as an act of negotiating meaning helps students invent new ways of interacting and contributing to online discussions. Thus, the broad question guiding my research can be expressed as follows: *How does listening work in online discussion spaces?*

More specifically, the following research questions guide this dissertation study.

- Does exposure to pedagogy based on listening language a) change students' attitudes about the relationship between listening and writing and b) their online discourses?
- Are there differences between the online discourses of students who have been exposed to a pedagogy based on listening language and those who have not? If so, how can those differences be characterized?

## Chapter Overview

In Chapter One, I articulated the current research on student interaction in online discussion spaces and the barriers to interaction that are most frequently cited in the literature. I have identified these barriers as forms of conflict in order to keep the focus on the sociality of these barriers. Rather than treated as isolated or individualized problems, flaming, lurking, and low/non-participation are community concerns that require community response. I ended this chapter with a call to explore what role listening may play in preventing and/or responding to these barriers in online discussions

and argued for a rhetorical approach to these concerns rather than an analytically-drive approach.

Chapter Two outlines the role listening has played in rhetoric and composition since the 1970s. I argue that the 1970s marks an early and recognizable point in the field's uptake of listening with the introduction of the work of Carl Rogers. I then trace the transformation of listening in rhetoric and composition to Peter Elbow and Wayne Booth's early work and track the differences between "Rogerian listening" and the way listening is understood in Elbow's believing and doubting games. Finding both perspectives lacking, in part, because they treat listening rhetorically, I turn to Krista Ratcliffe's notion of rhetorical listening. Ratcliffe's framing of rhetorical listening as a supplement to the limitations she finds with Burke's notion of identification treat listening as a central, rhetorical concept. Though Ratcliffe's notion of listening is useful, I argue that an expanded notion of listening, what I call "listening language," broadens listening's reach when it comes to community interaction in online discussions.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used to test the impact a pedagogy based in listening language has on first-year writing students who have enrolled in a traditional face-to-face class with online components to it. The chapter details the mixed methods approach to the study design. I used a quasi-experimental design, and the method of rhetorical analysis used to analyze student-written texts—discussion forums, virtual peer review, and a final narrative assignment uploaded to a digital dropbox.

Chapters Four and Five provides an in-depth analysis of pretest/post-test measures and the rhetorical analysis of students' written texts. I provide an analysis of three

asynchronous discussion forums, a virtual peer review session of a final narrative analysis, and also the final narrative analysis itself. I use a sentence level analysis in order to assess when and where students use listening language in their responses to each other. To assess the relationships between the elements of listening language in a single assignment, I use a whole-paper analysis (Holmes, 1997).

Finally, Chapter Six provides a summary of the research conducted for this study and looks beyond this dissertation to future applications and implications. In this chapter, I describe the limitations of the current study and suggest ways of improving upon the study for future publication. I include suggestions that teachers might use to help students develop their relationship and skills with listening language and create a broad framework for listening language in an advanced writing class. I finish the dissertation by offering suggestions for adapting discussion forums and virtual peer review sessions based on the findings presented in Chapters Four and Five that would help students develop a deeper understanding of listening language and interaction in online discussion spaces.

## Chapter Two: Toward A Listening Language

In the previous chapter I discussed the current concerns facing writing studies scholar-teachers when it comes to interaction in online discussions. I argued for the necessity of conflict in the critical writing classroom and outlined three types of conflicts that online writing instructors are facing. Collectively, I labeled these problems “conflict” because each problem revealed tensions among participants in online spaces. And though each of these conflicts has a face-to-face counterpart, I argued that special attention to interaction among students in online spaces is particularly important. It is important for writing studies because currently online interaction takes place through written discourses. That is, though sound, color, moving images, and other non-alphanumeric modes are possible, students and teacher will most likely use written texts to interact with each other.

In this chapter, I draw upon rhetorical scholarship to build a framework for understanding how listening might play an active role in developing community interaction in online spaces. The key focus here is to articulate the way students in online spaces negotiate meaning. The importance of this work is based in our field’s desire to focus on reception and the need for scholar-teachers to think differently about the way we theorize and teach in online spaces. In her still powerful and useful College Composition and Communication Chair’s Address, Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996) asks, “how do we demonstrate that we honor and respect the person talking and what that person is saying, or what the person might say if we valued someone other than ourselves having a turn to

speak” (“When the First” p. 38)? I read in Royster’s call a desire to focus our scholarly and pedagogical attention on the ways in which students and scholars attend to the discourses of others.

More specifically, we must develop what it means to listen in online writing environments. In early 2011, the College Composition and Communication Convention’s Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction (OWI) published the preliminary results from a survey of writing instructors from a variety of postsecondary institutions across the United States. One key finding states that “theory and practice specific to OWI has yet to be fully developed and engaged in postsecondary online settings across the United States” (7). As the pressure to move to online spaces increases, we must heed the committee’s call for thinking through what it means to foster an engaged classroom community in online writing spaces. Additionally, Clark (2010) suggests that the role of the composition classroom should be to “immerse students in analyzing digital media, in exploring the world beyond the classroom, in crafting digital personae, and in creating new and emerging definitions of civic literacy” (p. 28). This chapter takes up Clark’s notion of the digital imperative by focusing on online interactions in first-year writing classrooms. This chapter argues that listening language is an appropriate response to the needs mentioned in the 4Cs Report and by Clark. In what follows, I draw on rhetoric and writing studies scholarship to build an approach to reception that can be deployed in online discussion spaces.

But first a note on “listening” as a term for online writing and interaction is warranted. As will become apparent throughout this chapter, what I mean by “listening”

is more than interaction in a verbal exchange (i.e., you speak and through physiological and/or cultural processes I listen). Rather, listening is an approach to communication that brings reception from the background to equal footing with the production of texts.

Schweickart (2008) suggests that “emphasizing listening rather than reading as the model for the receptive mode of communicative action has the advantage of foregrounding the intersubjectivity that is obscured by the model of a reader reading a text: One *hears* the *voice* of another person, while one might only *see* black marks on paper or ideas and positions one might agree or disagree with” (p. 16). In other words, a project that foregrounds listening must treat listening as something more than what one does while one waits for the opportunity to speak. Listening is the term used to make sense of the rhetoricity of reception. Further, Daniel Gross (2007) suggests in “The Art of Listening: A Course in the Humanities” that listening deserves a position in rhetorical studies. Gross states, “dismissed as a passive behavior that comes naturally, listening is, in fact, a complex and *learned* [emphasis added] activity that can be perfected” (p. 72). Gross is careful to acknowledge the different traditions that lay claim to the study of listening. As Gross writes, “listening from a rhetorical perspective is neither hearing in the scientific sense, nor should it be understood first as a material condition in the mode of social history or cultural studies” (p. 78). Gross suggests that biological accounts of audition cannot account for the fact that individuals can learn to listen better. Historical and cultural studies approaches do not have the capacity, according to Gross, to understand the function of language in ways that the rhetorical tradition does. By placing listening within the rhetorical tradition, Gross does not imply that we should ignore listening’s

cultural, historical, or biological aspects. I find Schweickart's distinctions between reading and listening and Gross's positioning of listening as a rhetorical concept compelling. This study continues in the work of describing and advancing the rhetorical dimensions of listening.

As mentioned earlier, one way to respond to conflicts in online student interaction would be to focus on listening and interrogate what it means to listen online. This chapter examines previous theories and practices of listening in rhetoric and composition that can contribute to what I am calling "listening language" in online forums. Listening language, as I show, is an approach to listening as a rhetorical act. That is, listening language is concerned with suasive discourses and the relationships between audiences and rhetors. More specifically, listening language is an approach to critical social rhetorics. It allows those concerned with writing to assess the way emergent, contingent, or sustained online community members interact. Listening language is one way for everyone, as Ratcliffe encourages, "to expand our repertoire of listening skills" (p. 21). Though Ratcliffe encourages rhetorical theorists to expand what it means to listen, the field does have a rich history of bringing listening into writing spaces. Specifically, in this chapter, I examine Young, Becker, and Pike (1970) and Hairston's (1974, 1976, 1982) uptake of the work of Carl Rogers. I then turn my attention to Wayne Booth's (1974) work in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*. I then explore Peter Elbow's (1973/1998, 2005, 2008a, 2008b) believing and doubting games. These scholars represent attempts to bring listening into the writing classroom. Understanding the limitations of these previous attempts to bring listening into the writing classroom can help shed light on the ways that

listening language functions and why it is a useful addition to work on listening as a rhetorical act. I rely on Burke's notion of identification as a conceptual transition between previous notions of listening and rhetorical approaches. In order to flesh out what I mean by listening language, I draw upon more recent scholarship of Wayne Booth (2004), Krista Ratcliffe (2005), and Sharon Crowley (2006).

### **Listening as Threat Reduction: Rhetoric and Composition Meets Carl Rogers**

Rogierian rhetoric is adaption of the principles of psycho-therapist Carl Rogers. In his therapeutic approach, Rogers maintained that a client's sense of threat was a significant impediment to healing. If a client feels threatened by the therapist, then communication between the two cannot take place. With this insight, Rogers developed techniques that were designed to help his clients feel safe and understood. Rogers' concept of "positive unconditional regard" is the standard by which therapists should approach clients. The key takeaway from the concept of positive unconditional regard is to resist casting judgment on a client who struggles with the problems that client brings into the therapeutic exchange. As these ideas gained attention, Rogers not only developed client-centered therapy but expanded this to student-centered teaching and beyond dyadic communication in the form of "encounter groups."

The transplanting of Rogers's client-centered therapy into the realm of rhetoric and composition in the 1970s marked one attempt to bring the concerns of others into the writing situation. Rogierian writing had, at its core, the genuine acceptance and integration of others into the writing process. This approach conflicted with the rationalist, logical positivist approach to writing instruction typical of the "current

traditionalist” methods.<sup>1</sup> Rogerian writing transformed the agonistic notion of conflict into one where rhetors demonstrate the worth of those who disagree with them. Thus, Rogerian writing is a necessary and early inclusion into the brief history or story of the way rhetoric and composition has decided to bring listening into the writing classroom. Rogerian writing is an early attempt to show how listening can provide solutions to conflict. Hairston (1982) puts the matter directly when she states that her exposure to Rogerian concepts helped her to “realize that Rogers’ communication theories apply as well to the *teaching* of writing as they do the process of writing itself” (p. 51). Though Rogerian writing has largely gone out of fashion in rhetoric and composition studies, it is important to look to Rogerian writing because the focus was deliberately placed upon how readers might attend to the writing of others and on the basis of this method of attention create new ways of responding.<sup>2</sup> I suggest that Rogerian listening in the context of online community formation is a problematic approach to online listening. However, with respect to identity, Rogerian listening and writing takes great pains to respect the worth of individuals and to live in a state of realness.

Rogerian listening approaches carry the explicit goal of threat reduction.

Therefore, it is important to work through the process of threat reduction as it relates to the challenges of online community formation and the barriers to that. In

“Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation,” Carl Rogers (1952) suggests a

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<sup>1</sup> I am thinking specifically here of Crowley’s (1998) *Composition in the University* and Berlin’s (1987) *Rhetoric and Reality*.

<sup>2</sup> Rogerian argument, however, is most directly and consistently displayed in the field’s argument textbooks. A. Abby Knoblauch’s (2011) recent criticism of argument in composition textbooks suggests that Rogerian argument is alive and well in these texts.

“little” experiment that highlights the difficulty and necessity of an empathic approach to others. His advice is that during an argument “each person can speak up for himself only *after* he has first restated the ideas and feelings of the previous speaker accurately, and to that speaker’s satisfaction” (qtd. in *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* 1970, p. 286). What is important about this insistence is that an individual’s response exists only if an assertion comes prior to it. To be a listening subject begins with being aware of the existence of others. Such awareness may seem obvious to the point of not needing to be mentioned, but it is no small insight into social interaction to insist that others come prior to our responses to them. What Rogers provides in this model is a gesture toward being with others. Rogers also sees in this little experiment a way to test and check if listening is taking place. If a person is listening, that person should be able to situate that person’s responses to what another has actually said. Such checks for understanding and accuracy reflect a Rogerian approach to listening. Confident in his approach, Rogers suggests that sounding back leaves us in a position where we “will find the emotion going out of the discussion, the differences being reduced, and those differences which remain being of a rational and understandable sort” (p. 286).

Herein one of the limits of a Rogerian approach. The subsuming of difference into similarities and the valuing of those ideas that are intelligible through the precepts of rationality brackets out affective forms of communication that are important to shaping understanding and maintaining a listening approach to others. In this approach, elevated emotion is understood as a threat to communication. Listening approaches relying on a Rogerian method are designed to reduce emotional peaks and valleys so that interlocutors

might proceed on the same grounds. Rogers and his advocates, to whom I turn my attention shortly, do not insist on cold rationality that is void of emotion; that would be an unfair reduction of this listening approach. Rather, in order to reduce threat and increase understanding, Rogers suggests a rational basis that is intelligible (immediately or eventually) to the participants within a conversation. The hope is that in moments of “real communication,” a reasonable solution would be reached eventually.

For Rogers, listening itself poses a threat to interaction among interlocutors. The risk is so great for Rogers that when change was a possibility he suggests that the “great majority of us could not *listen*; we would find ourselves compelled to *evaluate*, because listening would seem too dangerous” (p. 287). The element of danger in listening leads Rogers to suggest that the courageous listen or that to truly listen requires a strength of character to face the possibility that we ourselves might change during or after an interaction with others. Rogers asserts that “we may say that though heightened emotions make it much more difficult to understand *with* an opponent, our experience makes it clear that a neutral understanding, catalyst type of leader or therapist can overcome this obstacle in a small group” (p. 287). For those who cite Rogers’s work, this strength of character is a given. It is a precept in Rogerian listening that comes prior to the exchange. As Jim Corder (1985) suggests, the therapeutic context is established prior to the exchange in Rogerian listening. The client enters the relationship with a sense that a therapist has power and is ready to provide services. The same holds true for Rogerian “encounter groups” that work beyond a dyadic, clinical setting. It may appear the same is also the case in educational contexts, a claim that Rogers makes later in his career when

his workshops and ideas take hold during the 1970s and 1980s. However, educational spaces where context-knowledgeable instructors exist cannot be and are not the same as the therapeutic setting and particularly the writing classroom.

Rogers's techniques and the listening approach to others that he has developed are first and foremost an oral form of communication. That is, Rogerian approaches take place through the face-to-face discussions between a client and the client's therapist or through the physical and verbal interactions of those in encounter groups. Though his 1951 lecture expresses the need to move beyond small groups and test the listening approach in larger, more dispersed groups, the thrust of his approach remains verbal. This poses a unique series of challenges when rhetoric and composition tries to make use of Rogerian listening as an approach to writing.

Rhetoric and composition zeroed in on Rogers's concepts of threat reduction as they worked to transfer the therapeutic and verbal approaches to Rogers's listening approach to the writing classroom. Young, Becker, and Pike (1970)—largely credited with introducing Rogers's ideas to rhetoric and composition in *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*—summarize the Rogerian perspective thusly:

From the Rogerian point of view, man has free will, but his ability to consider alternative positions is limited if he feels threatened. The primary goal of this rhetorical strategy is to reduce the reader's sense of threat so that he is *able* to consider alternatives to his own beliefs. The goal is thus not to work one's will on others but to establish and maintain communication *as an end in itself* (p. 8).

Two things are worth noting about their summary. First, conflict is understood as a threat to the stability of a person's self image. The result is that the focus of Rogerian argument centers on emotion and audience. Though Young, Becker, and Pike are not the only ones to include emotion in a framework for argumentation, their suggestion to consider the feelings of others provides an alternative to a calculating rationality as the only tool for interpersonal interaction. Audience is a crucial concept in rhetoric and composition and it is maintained in Rogerian writing schemes: writers must write in ways that reveal an understanding of the values and concerns of others. Second, Rogerian argument is an *a priori* method.

From these guidelines, Young, Becker, and Pike provide the following sequential steps that are imperative when transforming Rogerian listening into Rogerian writing:

1. An introduction to the problem and a demonstration that the opponent's position is understood.
2. A statement of the contexts in which the opponent's position may be valid.
3. A statement of the writer's position, including the context in which it is valid.
4. A statement of how the opponent's position would benefit if he were to adopt elements of the writer's position. If the writer can show that the positions complement each other, that each supplies what the other lacks, so much the better (p. 283).

In her uptake of Rogerian writing, Maxine Hairston provides a similar procedure for translating listening into writing in the face-to-face classroom. In "Carl Rogers's Alternative to Traditional Rhetoric," Hairston (1976) describes five writing moves that

demonstrate Rogerian argument. Rhetoric and composition teachers would want to take up Rogerian argument particularly when moments of tension or increased hostility are present or approaching. Her framework includes the following steps:

1. Give a brief, *objective* statement of the issue under discussion.
2. Summarize in impartial language what you perceive the case for the opposition to be; the summary should demonstrate that you understand their interests and concerns and should avoid any hint of hostility.
3. Make an objective statement of your side of the issue, listing your concerns and interests but avoiding loaded language or any hint of moral superiority.
4. Outline what common ground or mutual concern you and the other person or group seem to share; if you see irreconcilable interests, specify what they are.
5. Outline the solution you propose, pointing out what both sides may gain from it (pp. 375-6).

In both Young, Becker, and Pike and Hairston's uptake of Rogers, empathic listening<sup>3</sup> is intelligible when writing within the confines of a particular series of steps. A key difference is that in Hairston's desire to maintain communication when emotional tensions have caused breakdowns, she would explicitly (whereas Young, Becker, and Pike do so implicitly) throw the emotional baby out with the bathwater. Thus, in Hairston's uptake, one of the most useful aspects of Rogerian argument—its introduction

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<sup>3</sup> Andrea Lunsford and Adam Rosenblatt (2011) discuss empathic listening in their essay "Down a Road and into an Awful Silence': Graphic Listening in Joe Sacco's Comics Journalism" and ultimately distinguish their work from Carl Rogers's notions of empathic listening.

of emotional concerns into arguments—is removed in favor of “calm discussion” (“Alternative” p. 373).

Further, listening in Hairston and Young, Becker, and Pike’s method is unidirectional. That is, writers are in the position to entreat readers to change. It is not a self-reflexive process. In the process of articulating the position of others there is not a space to demonstrate how writers necessarily change or under what circumstances writers will be open to change.

In “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” Corder (1985) notes that the context in which Rogers developed his notions of client-centered therapy was the psychoanalyst’s office. The power relationship is already established by such a context: the client seeks the therapist’s input on how the client might change. When the client no longer desires change or the therapist proclaims the client healed or unwilling to participate in the client’s healing, the interaction between the two ends. In order to change the client, the therapist must be open to understanding the client’s concerns and receiving those concerns from a position of understanding. As Young, Becker, and Pike note, “understanding requires considering the beliefs and perspectives of the reader in the context of his [*sic*] attitudes, values, and past experience” (p. 275). And so the attempt to understand is undermined by the contexts of a need-based relationship that is established prior to the therapist/client or student/teacher or student/student/teacher exchange.

Rogierian writing assumes a persuasion that contradicts the nonjudgmental approach of Rogerian listening. It does so while at the same time upholding the assumption that it is the other that should change. Without a clearly defined process for

how to demonstrate the writer's transformation, Rogerian writing functions contrary to any possible social dimension to Rogerian listening. In "Feminist Responses to Rogerian Argument," Phyllis Lassner (1990) suggests that in "Rogerian argument the writer's stance looks nondirective and active because it states the opposition's position, but in fact guides the reader to accept the writer's arguments as fair and empathetic" (p. 222). Contrary to what Young, Becker, and Pike and Hairston would assert, Rogerian writing manipulates readers to agree with writers through an implicit *ad hominem* attack that says, "agree with me because I am empathetic and my opponent is not."

Diane Mader (1990) notes that such an attitude toward readers is consistent with Aristotelian rhetoric but not the listening goals of Carl Rogers (p. 318). Julie Kearney (2009) further suggests that "Rogers had never considered his psychotherapeutic strategies as a form of argument" (p. 167). For Kearney, the very notion of a Rogerian argument of the kind advocated by Young, Becker, Pike and Hairston requires a leap from the notions of nonjudgmental empathic listening to agonistic argumentation that is not supported by the works of Carl Rogers.

Without critiquing Young, Becker, and Pike's methods, Kenneth Jurkiewicz (1975) argues that the Rogerian approach helps rhetoric and composition think through the tricky question of how to anticipate a reader's needs. Jurkiewicz argues that the "writing process therefore becomes in one sense a shared endeavor between writer and reader, not a tactical exercise in planned rhetorical stratagems" (p. 176). This notion of cooperation and the focus on what individuals have in common transforms Rogerian principles into a "heuristic" (p. 176). Though Jurkiewicz is an early attempt to get

rhetoric and composition to think about Rogerian heuristics, his idea has been largely ignored in favor of working through Rogerian writing as a method.

Responses to critiques such as Mader's and Lassner's imply that Young, Becker and Pike and Hairston's method suggests that the writer who manipulates has not actually listened with positive unconditional regard and has thus not listened at all. Such responses enact what I call Rogerian hope. Specifically, Rogerian hope occurs when the process of transformation that listening has been designed to achieve occurs outside of the text. That is to say reading Rogerian texts leaves no indication that either writers or readers have "positive unconditional regard" or that they have demonstrated listening with understanding. A Rogerian text demonstrates only that a method has been followed. There is no demonstration of transformation in the text and thus, Rogerian advocates have only hope that training in Rogerian listening has worked as a transformative writing strategy. What should give writing teachers pause when operating with such hope is that simply articulating potential audiences' response and values is not sufficient. Whereas Rogerian writing assumes that writers are open to how the presence of others might change, there is no interrogation of what this openness looks like or how *writers* might achieve it. Furthermore, when audience is mediated through digital technologies, geography, or time, there is no way for rhetoric and composition instructors or student writers to check their perceptions.

Paul Bator's (1980) articulation of the foundational assumptions of Rogers's concepts reveals the uncontested and animating principles of Rogerian hope. In "Aristotelian and Rogerian Rhetoric, Bator asserts that the "basic assumption of Carl

Rogers is that through discovery of each other's views, we are all encouraged to revise our image of the world" (431). That the presentation of differing view points invites changes in writers and readers brings about transformation goes without exploration. Individuals must already accept the transformative power of listening or else the process falls apart. Put differently, Rogerian writing requires participants to buy into the transformative potential of the process prior to enacting the process. As Julie Kearney (2009) notes in "Rogerian Principles and the Writing Classroom," "even the staunchest supporters of using Rogerian principles for writing admit to the difficulties and restrictions involved in using his techniques" and acknowledges that Hairston and Teich (two vocal supporters of Rogerian writing) suggest that Rogerian concepts work best with students with a sufficient understanding of rhetoric (p. 178).

Rogerian writing as a method of argument rests uncomfortably with rhetoric and composition's focus on persuasion. As Kearney (2009) notes, "Rogers had never considered his psychotherapeutic strategies as a form of argument" (p. 167). Doug Brent (1991) places an even finer point on the distinction between persuasive writing and the therapeutic context when he asserts that "there is a fundamental difference between pro-con reasoning drawn from a forensic model and pro-con reasoning drawn from a therapeutic model. The goal of forensic debate, from the point of view of the advocate, is always to win" (p. 462).

It is clear that the persuasive force of those who advocate Rogerian writing is based on forensic rhetoric. Hairston (1982) states that "if we really want to *influence* our audience, we have to care more about communicating with them than showing the error

of their ways” (p. 50). Statements like these present a double bind. In writing arguments, the focus is on persuasion, whereby individuals listen in order to bring others over to the writer’s position. Such moves are reminiscent of Aristotle’s approach to rhetoric. Argument carries with it the fundamental requirement of evaluating the positions of others. Such evaluations are contrary to Rogers’s pleas for interaction that is non-judgmental and non-evaluative. They are contrary because, from a Rogerian perspective, judgment and evaluation *increase* a person’s sense of threat. In no uncertain terms, Rogers would invite us to develop ways of demonstrating the transformative nature of non-judgmental, non-evaluative writing practices. Young, Becker, and Pike and Hairston’s methods make no such moves.

Unconditional positive regard, a key aspect to Rogerian therapeutic practices and an element to which rhetoric and composition professionals are attached, ultimately became a synonym for neutrality. Speaking of the responses women writers had to Rogerian writing in her class, Lassner (1990) notes that dispassionate writing advocated by Rogerian compositionists asks writers to deny aspects of themselves. Lassner’s insights suggest the following question: What right do we have to ask people to listen to those narratives that cause affective trauma? The other focus of Rogerian listening as taken up by rhetoric and composition scholars leaves no room for such a question.

I share the concerns of Lassner and those who find in Rogerian writing practices the loopholes for exploitation and manipulation. It is a manifestation of shifting contexts without considering the consequences of this shift. To be clear, my concern is not with Rogers. Moreover, I happen to agree with Hairston (1982) when she suggests that

Rogers's listening methods are applicable to classroom teaching strategies. I use them in my teaching and when I lead discussion groups at symposia or conferences. I agree with Mader when she suggests that Rogerian listening works best within a verbal, dyadic context. But the verbal, dyadic contexts are very different from writing contexts. Brent (1991) suggests as much when he asserts that overcoming the monologic nature of texts is the "most difficult challenge" facing Rogerian argument (p. 464).

The reduction of threat opens individuals to imaginative possibilities. Articulating alternatives signals openness to difference and is the material means by which interlocutors recognize that communication has occurred. A crucial concern in rhetoric and composition's uptake of Rogers's work is *how* openness leads to transformation. The uptake of Rogerian listening in rhetoric and composition has the added negative consequence of bracketing difference in multiple ways. First, different approaches to conflict are removed. Rogers's theories of empathic listening were never suggested as a method. Rogers knew that a codified and repeatable method to listening cut off listening at its knees. Speaking of the uptake of his concepts of client-centered therapy, Rogers (1980) asserts that the "whole approach came, in a few years, to be known as a technique" (p. 139) and a caricature that suggests the therapist "repeat the last words the client has said" (p. 139). The focus on technique or method has left the concept of empathic listening from a Rogerian perspective in a state of mockery.

Rogerian writing, moreover, does not work well in online contexts. To date, there is no empirical or theoretical exploration of Rogerian writing in online spaces. Though there are many reasons for this (for example, Rogerian writing is widely out of fashion,

as the criticisms outlined above have proven too great for its advocates to overcome), I think at least one practical reason is that the method of Rogerian writing necessitates an articulation of another person's position. In online discussion forums, this position is solidified in the form of a posted response within a thread. There is no reason to sound back or repeat what has come before because it is there for everyone to review. A key element of interaction, sounding back, is rendered moot.

Hairston and Young, Becker, and Pike are concerned with demonstrating how individuals have listened to others. However, theirs is a system based on a shaky premise of Rogerian listening. Moreover, theirs does not provide an indication of transformation or change that results from listening. Put differently, if one is to listen rhetorically, one would need to be in the position to demonstrate what it is about *that person's* text that changes the way they were thinking about a subject or position. In short, in addition to the other critiques of Rogerian writing practices that I have outlined above, Rogerian writing projects leave no space for demonstrations of change and transformation. Listening as an act of composition must always maintain this demonstration if it is to also significantly transform the ways in which communities interact with each other.

Finally, it should not go without remark that listening in the Rogerian scheme is not rhetorical. Schweickart (2008) writes

Listening is something more than the “yes, I hear what you’re saying” response people like me too often produce in situations where we are supposedly committed to the project of dialogic understanding. While this Rogerian reflex helps to validate a speaker’s existence, it is not an example of rhetorical listening.

It does not allow the listener to own her reactions to the speaker's words; it does not obligate the listener to take responsibility for those reactions; nor does it force an examination of how those reactions are inextricably connected to the way she hears—and therefore sees—that speaker (p. 17).

Scholars who focus on listening as a rhetorical act are thus left needing new approaches to listening that function similarly to Schweickart's implicit suggestion. What is needed is a rhetorical approach to listening. The early work of Wayne Booth (1974) is a rhetorical approach to interaction. I now turn my attention to his concept of the "rhetoric of assent." Booth frames the rhetoric of assent as a response to skepticism and dogmatism that gripped social interaction during the late 1960s. Given the social rhetorical thrust of Booth's work, it is an important place to explore listening's potential.

### **Listening as Conflict Mediation: The Need for a Rhetoric of Assent**

*Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (1974) is one place to begin the study of cross-cultural exchange and listening as a means for understanding it. Though Booth does not confront listening directly, his inquiry into modernist dogmas does provide insight into the nature and limits of the modernist notion of persuasion as a means for obtaining the assent of others. In his attempt to work through these issues, Booth focuses on the way individuals animate and justify their positions and the attending *reasons* they provide to each other and to themselves. Though written nearly 40 years ago, Booth's insight that "our problem is partly the ancient one of not knowing when to be skeptical and when not to be, when to say no and when to say yes" and his amplification of the problem with the inclusion of his observation that we have "lost faith" (p. 7) in our ability

to see beyond impasses ring true today. Booth's work is an important place to begin because it represents a way of reading a deeply divisive moment in the history of the United States that is multifaceted. His reading of the student protests at the University of Chicago as a moment where deep entrenchment of values and attitudes toward others resulted in rhetorical impasses that kept opposition from staying engaged. And though it is possible to look further back into the history of the United States for examples of deep cultural divisions, Booth's heuristic for understanding these tensions is an important moment in 20<sup>th</sup> century United States rhetorical scholarship.

Though hardly the first, Booth's focus on the way individuals reason through points of disagreement is central to understanding impasses in rhetorical exchanges. Like our own contemporary moment, it wasn't a lack of argument that was happening, it was an inability to understand *how* others were arguing that contributed to cultural tensions in the United States. As such, the goal is not to create "better" means of argumentation. Rather, our focus should be on creating better means of understanding and executing reception. We need better ways to attend to the assertions and discourses of others. In turbulent times individuals argue with each other consistently and make frequent attempts to persuade each other. However, they do so often from a position that does not account for differing and contradictory lines of justification and logic. In Booth's words, "every effort to change a mind will appear differently depending on our view of what does the changing, what is changed, how it relates to the whole nature of things, whether or in what sense the change is tested or justified in basic principles, and the purpose of the change" (p. 22). How individuals understand the context surrounding a thing, the nature

of the thing itself, and, importantly the methods used for developing our understandings comprise the foundations of modernist dogmas.

Ultimately, what Booth believes to be the crux of the issue of modernism is a too rigid means of changing the minds of others. We either externalize the knowable world through rationality to the detriment of our selves or we value only what is experienced and known through the self to the detriment of a particular kind of rationality. Ironically, the terms of engagement are decided upon without input from those we wish to persuade. The result is a talking at each other rather than talking with each other. Moreover, the very need to approach conflict with the intention of changing another person's position (i.e., through the prior position of skepticism or dogmatic vigor) requires reconceptualization.

The modern dogmas, as enacted through the view of scientism or irrationalism, both share a commitment to doubt as guiding epistemology and move through persuasion with this basic idea in common. The trouble with doubt is that its means for invention do not account for the other side of the modernist binary between rationality and affect. Booth's suggestion is to operate under the assumption that all those who have a stake in a social issue focus on the insight of shared experience. He returns to the idea of shared assumptions in his brief essay "Blind Skepticism versus a Rhetoric of Assent" (2005). In this reflection on the concept of assent, Booth again maintains that there are things that all people can agree upon and that those commonalities are the basis of building a rhetoric of assent. The assumption of shared experience is at the heart of Booth's rhetoric

of assent. In order to be successful, interlocutors must already assent to the transformative power of shared experience.

It is difficult to keep track of Booth's notion of sameness within his theory of systematic assent. He seems to be advocating a classical notion of persuasion when he asserts that

it is assumed that reasonable men of differing interest, experience, and vocabulary will disagree about some questions to which reason, nevertheless, must apply. Consequently, they not only can but must, by virtue of their common problems, search for meeting places where they can stand together and explore their differences about the choices life presents. (p. 111)

Here Booth would ask us to explore the common experiences shared by all as a starting point for interaction. And while Booth acknowledges difference, it is subsumed by commonality. This subsuming is more apparent when Booth articulates that we may know about ourselves after we remove modernist dogma's grip on the rhetorical. Booth (1974) writes that "we know that what we are doing at this moment—discoursing together, trying to *understand* [emphasis added] each other—is done in some form by every man and woman in all cultures in all ages" (p. 112). He also suggests that sometimes in the sharing of information "we *understand* each other" (p. 113). Booth's reliance upon understanding seems to condense the rhetorical into a substance that all people share. As a result, Booth's rhetoric of assent does not do a sufficient job of articulating the role difference has in exchanges. Rhetoricians want to maintain

difference, in part, because difference animates engagement in ways that commonality cannot. The rhetoric of assent fails on the level of difference because it insists on a prior understanding of communality before we engage with one another. It is an irony of Booth's critique of modernism's *a priori* values are enacted through his rhetoric of assent. In other words, we have to agree to agree prior to confronting each other's differences.

And yet, other concerns exist with the rhetoric of assent that warrant further attention. Willard (1990) puts the problem bluntly when he writes, "Of course not all differences are solvable" (p. 141). For Willard dogmatism and skepticism, the positions Booth's rhetoric of assent is designed to eradicate, are not the only forces that produce differences between community members. In the same collection as Willard's essay appears, Rowland (1990) suggests that Booth's solution to the troubles of skepticism and dogmatism are theoretically problematic. For Rowland, Booth's use of creating a rhetorical community that works toward assent is tautological. It is the solution to the problem that is created by the very presence of a rhetorical community.

I understand Booth's contribution to the study of cross-boundary discourse and rhetorical listening as follows: Interlocutors must be in a position to pay closer attention to the reasons for why others should assent to their claims. Interlocutors must also pay close attention to the understanding of who the "we" is in any rhetorical exchange. It is important to take time with Booth's argument, not because I believe that the rhetoric of assent is a pervasive and widely accepted approach to the mobilization of sameness when engaging with others. Booth's work presents a moment when we can see the limitations

of persuasion that focuses on asserting claims and providing reasons. Far from rejecting reason and assertion, Booth's work asks us to consider different points of origin for engagement.

### **Listening Becomes Apolitical: The Believing and Doubting Games**

Before assessing Peter Elbow's approach to listening in rhetoric and composition, it is important to weigh in on the expressivist/social constructionist debate. Such an exploration is necessary not because I intend to resolve it or rehash the values of the 1980s and 90s. Rather, the prominence of these debates in rhetoric and composition and Elbow's place within these debates demands acknowledgment. The expressionist/social construction debates do have influence on how rhetoric and compositionists might understand and approach Elbow's notion of listening. As such, a brief overview of this moment in the field is useful.

James Berlin has perhaps been the most influential critic of Elbow's work. In "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Classroom" (1988) and in his important history *Rhetoric and Reality* (1987), Berlin lumps Elbow within a subjectivist category of writing instruction which insists upon inner truth as a reality. Berlin insists that expressivist rhetoric cannot extend to a *socio-political project* that resists dominant cultural and economic forces that maintain and create systems of oppression. He writes, "[expressivist] rhetoric can be used to reinforce the entrepreneurial virtues capitalism most values: individualism, private initiative, the confidence for risk taking, the right to be contentious with authority (especially the state)" (p. 487). Berlin's insights lead many to think that Elbow's work rejects the social in favor of the individual. Such readings are

encouraged through Elbow's own language choices throughout books like *Writing Without Teachers* (1974/1998). Here Elbow makes frequent claims similar to "Govern *your* [emphasis added] behavior according to the principle that whatever makes [writing] happen is right for *you* [emphasis added] and whatever gets in the way is wrong" (p. 67). Social constructionists would interrogate what Elbow takes as self-evident: the structural, cultural, political economic forces that influence what "gets in the way" of students composing processes.

It is in this background tension between social constructionists and "expressivists" that Elbow came to defend and nuance the believing and doubting games. In his introduction to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow (1998) states that he was "trying to show the power of a disciplined and methodological use of believing, *listening*, [emphasis added] affirming, entering in, attending to one's experiences and trying to share one's experiences with others" (p. xxi). Experience is a unique way to validate or build claims and has been discussed elsewhere in important ways. For now, however, I want to suggest that experience works meaningfully when communities are open to it as text that carries transformative potential. Elbow's method of believing contrasted with what he saw as a dominance of methodical doubt and criticism in writing classrooms. He expresses the distinction between the doubting and believing games thusly, "where the doubting game tests an idea by helping us see its weakness and shortcomings, the believing game tests an idea by helping us see the strengths of competing ideas" (p. xxiii). The connection to interaction is most apparent when Elbow writes, "without others, the believing game is crippled" (p. xxv). It's the

dialectical relationship between the doubting and believing games that help writers approach truths about the way meaning is made. In the face of someone's doubting of our positions, before or even if we begin to challenge them, believing would require the total acceptance of that person's position.

However, rather than replace doubting with believing, Elbow conceptualizes the two games as a dialectical method for getting at truth (p. 169). Donald Jones (2002) makes a similar point in "John Dewey and Peter Elbow" when he suggests that the "alternating forces of believing and doubting can propel a writer from the felt difficulty to problem definition and from hypothesis to experimentation" (p. 270) and thus to a form of pragmatist truth. To make believing a possibility, Elbow suggests students put themselves "into the skin of people with other perceptions; make metaphorical transformations of assertions to help you enter into them" (p. 170). Of all his concepts, these games rely on student writers listening to each other. Simply put, one plays the doubting game when one *denies* the truth of an assertion and one plays the believing game when one *accepts* the truth of an assertion. Parsing out how Elbow understands listening in these games points rhetoric and compositionists to yet another approach to listening in the writing classroom.

Elbow's methodological approach to the believing game rests on the assumption that listening need not be interrogated as a critical concept. In other words, listening is treated as an automatic response to the discourses of others. In the presence of these discourses individuals can either doubt or believe what has been *said*. I place a particular emphasis on "said" here because as Elbow conceptualizes it, the games are played within

the context of a classroom where students are sharing texts with each other. In this setup, the believing and doubting games are seen as revision strategies that function as only a part of the process of rhetorical invention. Addressing players in these games, Elbow writes, “you must put your own responses out on the table, you must offer up your own reactions as pure data—not defend or justify or even discuss them—just reveal them and let the other person *use* them for his own private purpose” (p. 140). Such assertions are similar to the coercive force of those who rely on Rogerian hope in that the persuasive thrust is akin to telling students that they will want to play the believing game because it reveals strength of character.<sup>4</sup> Joseph Harris (1997) would critique Elbow’s approach for failing to hold students “answerable to each other as intellectuals” (p. 31). Elbow would mention Harris’s critique frequently, citing it during “Coming to See Myself as a Vernacular Intellectual (2008a); “The Believing Game—Methodological Believing” (2008b); and in “Bringing the Rhetoric of Assent and the Believing Game Together” (2005). That Elbow saw the need to make Harris’s criticism a reoccurring moment in his development of the believing game suggests just how powerful Harris’ insight is. I suggest that Harris’s critique sticks so well because of the way Elbow treats listening as automatic. The important aspect about Elbow’s games is that listening itself is not interrogated. Players of the games listen and make honest efforts to try to believe what they are trying to say even if it is reprehensible.

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<sup>4</sup> The coercive ethos argument implicit in Rogerian writing and the believing games is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I am developing this point as an aspect of “Rogerian hope” in rhetoric and composition studies as part of a article-length manuscript.

Harris's point also sticks because of contrasting assumptions about the social in the expressivist/social constructionists debates. Elbow's use of the social contrasts markedly with Harris's and Berlin's. In saying so, I do not mean to suggest that Harris and Berlin specifically or the social constructionists in general share a similar concept. I only mean to suggest that the difference between what Elbow means by the social is stronger than these social constructionist thinkers. Perhaps the distinction could be understood more clearly by focusing on what the social is *used for* in interactions among individuals. In Elbow's conceptions, the social moves individuals to spaces for writing and testing the individual's beliefs. It is a tool for personal development wherein the social becomes a way of connecting of atomized individuals who make use of others in meaningful ways. The social constructionist view, on the other hand, makes use of the social as a resource for community development and construction of shared knowledge. Put differently, there is simply a different starting and end point to the social in these theories.

Another insightful critique is that the very dialectic nature of doubting and believing too easily is taken up as a binary reduction. Kathleen Blake Yancey (1998) affirms the importance of believing and doubting but acknowledges that such approaches reify binaries that students already bring into the writing occasion (p. 33). Her approach is to expand doubting and believing with predicting and agree/disagree. Though Yancey writes within the narrow parameters of reflection, it is important to note the limits to the believing game that others have noticed.

Elbow's games are troubling in part because of similar concerns that previous scholars have with Rogerian writing techniques. M. Elizabeth Sargent states an obvious limitation with the believing game when she writes that "no list of good reasons (cf. Booth)—no matter how full, how long, or how good—is ever *sufficient* to force someone across a logical gap into a new intellectual framework" (p. 107). In addition to making the explicit connection between Elbow's games and Booth's rhetoric of assent, she faults Elbow's believing game as too limited with respect to social dimensions of persuasion. In short, Elbow does not account for the very real connections that individuals have to their beliefs. Further, asking others to pretend to believe others gets us into similar problems that Lassner points out are problematic with Rogerian writing. The doubting and believing games, as epistemological "games," open spaces to treat affective responses as marginal.

If Booth's rhetoric of assent and Elbow's games appear similar in scope and attention, it's because they are. In the second edition of *Writing Without Teachers* (1998), Elbow acknowledges his debt to not only Booth but the formative influence of Carl Rogers. In his introduction, Elbow writes "I probably got as many seeds of the believing game from Rogers as from Polanyi. And from Rogers I learned to think of it as a *disciplined process* rather than just a sweet, soft, and fuzzy matter" (p. xxix emphasis original). Specifically, Elbow cites the "sound back" approach to communication as influential to his development of the believing game. As for Booth, Elbow states that Booth's is a "seminal and important study of doubting and believing... but so far from challenging my argument, he moves in exactly the same direction" (p. xxvii) and

acknowledges the distinction between his work as epistemological and Booth's as rhetorical. Additionally, Elbow (2005) describes several points of agreement between Booth's and his own works:

1. Both are interested in challenging dogmatism and skepticism
2. Rhetoric theory should focus on both changing the minds of others and how to change our own minds
3. Assent/belief is foregrounded in their models of rhetoric
4. Though valuable, skepticism has its limits

The key difference, Elbow acknowledges, is that his "believing and doubting games are pictures of what to do *before* deciding" (p. 392). As such, Elbow's practices of doubting and believing are difficult foundations on which to build cross-cultural communication.

The concern I have for both the Booth and Elbow approaches is that they assume that listening is automatic. As an important aspect of listening to perceived meaning in texts, it rightly belongs, though not exclusively, to the rhetorical tradition. With respect to Elbow and Booth's approaches, rather than provide an exploration of how to listen, their fatal flaw lies in the sub-field of rhetoric that concerns itself with listening as an automatic response to persuasive tactics.

I have taken strides to show the extent to which listening has been backgrounded in rhetoric and composition scholarship. The question then becomes how might we begin to develop rhetorical approaches that allow theorists and teachers alike to foreground listening. Foregrounding listening is important because it allows us to place critical focus on the way individuals in online discussion attend to the messages of others in these

spaces. In order to do this, I turn attention to Kenneth Burke and his development of identification. I place my focus on Burkean identification because as Michelle Ballif (2013) writes in her introduction to the published conference proceedings of Rhetoric Society of America's 14<sup>th</sup> biannual conference, under Burke's theory of identification, "rhetoric initiates and forges connections... [it] invents and coheres social relations" (p. 1). Understanding the way these connections are made, I maintain, contributes to how participants in online discussion spaces might respond to and understand the messages they receive in these spaces. As such, identification as a means of cross-cultural interaction and community formation can be a useful place to begin understanding how individuals might interact in online discussion spaces.

### **Burkean Identification and Community**

Kenneth Burke's contribution to the field of rhetoric is multifaceted, but the relevant contributions of Burke's thinking for the issues related to this dissertation center on rhetorical construction of community formation and how language use contributes to community formation. Burke is particularly useful as a way into community because his theories expand rhetoric beyond the classical tradition of persuasion to include focused attention to the ways language in all its forms connects or divides individuals from each other. In *Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke (1950/1962) suggests that persuasion "ranges from the bluntest quest of advantage" to a "pure" display or form that has no motive outside itself whereas identification casts a wide net and purpose (p. xiv). Both persuasion and the expansive notion of identification are attempts to understand the transformation of individuals and communities. Treating identification as a process of transformation aids

in our ability to understand the way communities cohere and the language choices that might prevent individuals from cohering with each other. In short, identification starts the process of thinking through cross-cultural interaction. Not every community coheres the same way. Community formation is important for a study on listening because attention to how communities form and what coheres members to each other can help individuals think through approaches to cross-cultural interaction. Foss, Foss, and Trapp (2002) suggest Burke broadened the “notion of rhetoric so that it is a change in attitude or action through identification” (p. 192). Furthermore, as Pounds (1987) suggests, transformation “is simply a way of talking about the effect of the text on the reader. Transformation does its work through *identification*” (p. 48). Burke’s focus on identification brings him to two insights that are dramatically different from ancient conceptualizations of rhetoric. First, Burke removes intentionality from rhetorical design. The consequence is that individuals can never *not* be rhetorical. However, texts (broadly defined in Burke’s theory to include oral and written discourses as well as literary and nonliterary ones) carry with them symbols with which others identify. The process of identification brings individuals closer together as individuals who share substances. With respect to substance as an important concept in Burke’s theory of rhetoric, Burke suggests that substance is not only the shared stuff between individuals. He also puns on the notion of sub-stance and, therefore, treats the turn as a scenic concept that allows him to expand his notion of identification from essentialist concepts to shared spaces. The point is that with an expansive notion of substance, individuals have more available

means for identifying with each other and then greater opportunities for persuading each other.

For Burke, identification is just as likely as its dialectic counterpart: division. The ambiguity of not fully understanding where identification begins and where division ends is what Burke calls a characteristic invitation to rhetoric. This process of identification, for Burke, happens consciously or not but always prior to an individual being persuaded. However, as Ratcliffe (2005) argues, “because Burke’s place of identification posits conjoined substance (i.e., the metaphoric place of common ground), it demands commonalities” (p. 58). In other words, though Burke acknowledges the presence of division, his framework foregrounds identification and thus commonalities while backgrounding division and differences in the process.<sup>5</sup> With this in mind, I turn my attention to the scholarly resources available for drawing a form of community interaction and cohesion that resist Burke’s tendency to marginalize division and difference. In short, Burke’s theory of identification falls into a similar danger zone that Booth’s rhetoric of assent does. What appears to be a concern with difference ends up favoring similarities to too great an extent.

### **Theorizing Listening Language**

Listening language is my contribution to the field of rhetoric and composition. It is an approach to cross-cultural interaction and can help those who interact in online discussions negotiate meanings in ways that prevent or mitigate the three common

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<sup>5</sup> Contra Ratcliffe, Davis (2008) and Borrowman and Kmetz (2011) challenge the marginalization of division in Burke’s theory of identification.

conflicts that prevent robust online interaction—flaming, lurking, and low/non-participation. I choose the phrase “listening language” as a descriptor for these negotiations and interactions because the act of listening is made intelligible through the words that online community members choose. Broadly speaking, listening language is an expansive type of interaction that pays attention not just to what happens when individuals need to interact, but also to the ways in which individuals enter and leave online discussions. By focusing on the entrance, middle, and exit strategies of a discussion, listening language functions as an expansive approach to interaction in online discussions. Listening language is a form of interaction where understanding the impacts of the cultural knowledges and values of others is a priority.

### **The Opening Call: Setting the Listening Occasion**

Though there are an infinite number of ways individuals may choose to engage each other, I turn to Wayne Booth’s (2004) *Rhetoric of RHETORIC* to explore the possibilities for developing an opening call to develop a listening interaction. In *Rhetoric of RHETORIC*, Booth explores three avenues for judging the interactions of others. Critics can judge an exchange as either “win rhetoric,” “bargain rhetoric,” or “listening rhetoric.” The presence of a “win” or “bargain” rhetoric suggests that interlocutors do not always follow a listening path. Such a path would be recognizable when participants in a rhetorical exchange are demonstrating a deliberate attempt to “genuinely understand” (p. 46) the other’s position. For example, if I engage you with the understanding to win at all costs, what Booth would call “win-rhetoric A,” then I need to be persuaded that engaging with you through the precepts of a listening rhetoric is necessary. The existence of

alternatives, in other words, requires a careful articulation of how individuals should *enter* discursive exchanges.

What is of the utmost importance in Booth's insight in *Rhetoric of RHETORIC* is his suggestion that interlocutors also provide reasons for why others should continue to listen to what it is we have to say. That the audience is present and willing to engage with individuals should never be assumed. Nevertheless, it is clear that Booth's approach cannot sustain itself in light of the multiplicity of factors influencing individual identities. Booth's successful heuristic for understanding if listening is present in an exchange is also its greatest limitation. Booth does not provide a means for how individuals might engage in "listening rhetoric A," only that it would be a positive step. It's this step that should be made explicit during moments of conflict wherein students communicating across cultural boundaries are struggling to work through tensions. Booth is not after the specific forms of interaction. As such, he falls short of describing what a listening interaction looks like. For that, we must turn to the theory of rhetorical listening advanced by Krista Ratcliffe. Hers is an important and necessary place to begin describing what a listening exchange looks like because Ratcliffe provides a means for *how* to listen rhetorically as a way to invent methods of interaction that rely on commonalities and differences.

### **The Listening Exchange: How to Listen**

Though Booth's listening rhetoric encourages individuals to resist assumptions that auditors are always listening to us, his thoughts on what it means to judge rhetoric do not take us far enough into the rhetorical exchange. Accounting for these limitations is

what brings my attention to Krista Ratcliffe's work in *Rhetorical Listening: Gender, Identification, and Whiteness*. In Ratcliffe's (2005) work, these negotiations take place within face-to-face classroom environments and within academic conversations. Listening language, as I suggest later in this chapter, is an especially useful approach to cross-cultural interaction in online discussion spaces as well. Ratcliffe insists that rhetorical listening "may precede *conscious* identifications" (p. 19). In other words, before we can identify with a particular person and thus be persuaded by her, we must develop a prior stance of openness. The "may" is consistent with Ratcliffe's basic definition of rhetorical listening as a trope for interpretative invention and Ratcliffe's thinking more generally in that she maintains throughout that individuals are free to either engage in the practices of rhetorical listening or not. Ratcliffe, furthermore, respects the fact that in some cases (as in the case of unproductive resistance), listening may not be possible. I return to the moments of impossibility in the next section; for now it is important to understand that the act of listening encourages individuals to pay attention to the "exiled excess" (p. 20) and its relationship to the individual self and the cultural context in which said individual exists.

In her theory of rhetorical listening, Ratcliffe assumes that individuals are not just attending to persuasive claims of others, but also the "rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well" (p. 28). Those who listen are not tuning their ears to the persuasive forces of an argument in order to situate themselves within a position either for or against. Rather, they are paying attention to the ways in which arguments also carry signs of "(un)conscious presences, absences, [and] unknowns" (p. 29). Like jazz,

rhetorical listening is an exploration of not only the sounds played but also what is missing. Rhetorical listening assumes that there is intention behind what is included and what is excluded from texts. However, when listening, interlocutors should listen with intent rather than for intent. Ratcliffe cautions against seeking out a reductive motive in the words and actions of another. Rather, we should listen with the intention of hearing what she calls “troubled identifications” or the moments where identification is challenged or reliant upon problematic assumptions (p. 46). As identification is central to the concept of cross-boundary exchanges, I now turn my attention to how Ratcliffe’s contribution to identification makes her theories of rhetorical listening important for understanding community engagement.

Those interested in rhetorical listening from a Ratcliffian perspective should also be concerned with understanding the need for a trio of identification, disidentification, and non-identification. Ratcliffe understands identification largely from a Burkean perspective that suggests that interlocutors share a similar substance, that their commonalities are prior to identification, which itself is prior to persuasion or the transcending of division. However, with respect to understanding the role of troubled identifications, Burke’s notion is limited. Ratcliffe suggests that Burke’s theory is unable to

adequately address the coercive force of common ground that often haunts cross-cultural communication, nor does it adequately address how to identify and negotiate troubled identifications; moreover, it does not address how to identify

and negotiate *conscious* identifications functioning as ethical and political choices. (p. 48)

That is to say, in his overemphasizing consubstantiality as part of identification, Burke marginalizes the role difference plays in rhetorical negotiations between people.

The consequence of Burke's being unable to deal with the limitations of common ground is that though his theory of transformation based on identification is a useful rhetorical concept, Burke's theories of identification alone cannot be a site for rhetorical listening. It cannot be such a site for Ratcliffe because rhetorical listening must attend to both commonalities and differences.

Ratcliffe supplements Burke with what she calls postmodern theories that display commonality as a troubled concept. As Ratcliffe understands it, postmodern theories champion the "figurative function of discourse, not substance" when considering identification (p. 52). As such, the very notion of commonality is displaced because it is impossible to share the same languages (cf. the works of Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard etc.). Relying on Diana Fuss's (1995) theory of disidentification, Ratcliffe (2005) suggests that it is an important concept, but one that, like Burke's theory of identification, cannot rest as the sole way to understand the way individuals interact with each other. Simply put, because of the indeterminacy of language, our identifications with others can never be fully complete.<sup>6</sup> There is, therefore, always a series of disidentifications that prevent us from achieving total identification. Because of the contradictions and gaps and spaces

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<sup>6</sup> Just because identifications can never be fully complete does not lead to the conclusion that it is impossible to engage in social unity based on common outrage. There is such a thing as large-scale injustice that moves groups of people to enact change in the world.

within language, our embodied agencies come to fruition through the ongoing process of identifying with another but yet realizing the moments where that identification will always be incomplete, or where disidentifications become apparent.

The distinctions between Burke and Fuss's theories lead Ratcliffe to conclude that rhetorical listening makes use of the dialectic between identification and disidentification and creates awareness of "power plays that are ideologically (un)fair and to the resulting troubled identifications" that structure people's lives (p. 66). Ultimately, the goal is not to rid ourselves of these troubled identifications. Both halves of the binary must be maintained for it to truly be a dialectical relationship. Therefore, rhetorical listening's goal is to acknowledge the points where identification and disidentification exist. Ratcliffe suggests, therefore, that we understand a third term, "non-identification," as a way to maintain the distinctions.

In Ratcliffe's conceptualization of non-identification, individuals listen for "that-which-can-not-be-seen, even if it cannot yet be heard" (p. 73). Put differently, non-identification is the space between the moments where identification and disidentification exist. It is the ever-present possibility for "asserting our agency to engage cross-cultural rhetorical exchanges across both commonalities *and* differences" (p. 73) that animates rhetorical listening's transformative potential. It should be clear by now that rhetorical listening supports the notion that a personal agency exists. It does this, however, by attending to the very discursive, cultural, and temporal forces that shape and develop perceptions. There is an understanding of agency but with the important distinction that

agency and the ways individuals negotiate their own agency and the agency of others can change from engagement with others.

Given that what we know about identity and identification is enacted and intelligible through language, it is important to understand Ratcliffe's thinking on language. First, language as Ratcliffe understands it is based in tropes. Second, from these tropes, or better, given the existence of these tropes, particular ways of knowing and communicating result from the distinctions among the ways individuals come to understand these tropes. Ratcliffe labels the way we reason through a trope "cultural logic." To illustrate these points Ratcliffe uses the tropes of gender and race. For her, these tropes mean different things to different communities, and, as such, it is possible to begin the process of recognizing "troubled identifications" by articulating how the logics of race or gender are understood. As Ratcliffe understands it, "*gender* is a trope that signifies socially constructed 'common sense' attitudes and actions associated with men and women" (p. 9). Therefore, when engaging in discussions about gender, individuals can look for the reasons animating the trope to find moments of identification, disidentification, and non-identifications. The same can be understood with race.

Ratcliffe's concept of rhetorical listening is not without its critics. For example, as Terese Guinsatao Monberg (2008) suggests, the question of who we should listen to will plague advocates of rhetorical listening in two ways. First, because dominant discourses are consistently being heard by those whose identifications are with non-dominant identities, it makes sense then, as Ratcliffe (2005) suggests, that those with identifications in the majority identities will have a more difficult time listening to others. However,

implicit in this is the requirement that non-dominant identifications be “audibly or visibly present so that others might listen to their speeches/texts alongside speeches/texts or instances of whiteness” (Monberg 2008 p. 86). The result is that without an encouraging open attempt to set a listening context, rhetorical listening places too strong a burden on individuals with non-dominant identifications to speak *for* those with dominant identifications.

Alone, rhetorical listening is a difficult place to build a materialist, political project. In her addition to the edited collection *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts*, Joyce Irene Middleton (2011) brings rhetorical listening and classroom practices into notions of civic participation and action. Middleton’s linking of rhetorical listening with democratic participation is one way to respond to what some have called listening’s “attitude problem” or the idea that there is no materialist political project to be constructed on the basis of rhetorical listening.

Finally, Ratcliffe is justified in highlighting the limits of rhetorical listening. She suggests, “if the context is not one of genuine conversation, then refusing to listen may be appropriate” (p. 37). In statements like these, it is clear that rhetorical listening is something that happens when individuals *agree* to engage each other or when an individual agrees or is in the presence of mind to listen to herself. I want to turn my attention next to the importance of listening out of an interaction where one person feels, believes, or thinks interaction is no longer helpful or necessary. Such attention is necessary for several reasons. First, Ratcliffe’s work rightly points out that sometimes listening fails. There are times when individuals conducting cross-cultural

communication are unsuccessful at communication. Ratcliffe's focus is largely placed on how listening might work as a mode of cross-cultural exchange, not how to theorize these failures or what individuals and communities might do in light of these failures. Listening language takes up the need to articulate a process of disengagement and thus functions to expand the rhetorical dimensions of listening on the back end of interaction. Paying closer attention to articulating how to disengage from a failed listening occasion is part of a community response that can shape future community interactions.

### **Articulating the Need for Disengagement: Describing The Limits of Listening**

In *Toward a Civil Discourse* (2006), Crowley describes and justifies the notion of ideologic and its importance in rhetorical theory. Ideologic is rightly placed within the realm of important concepts when dealing with listening because it provides a means for understanding the limits to interaction. Understanding the limits of the exchanges between interlocutors takes into the account the affective dimensions of failure and allows one possible way to understand the collapse of exchanges. Not having a means for understanding why listening has failed can encourage a cynical or skeptical approach to listening as a rhetorical act in some students. Furthermore, when online discussions die, not having a sophisticated understanding of what individuals participating in the discussion have done makes it easier for those individuals to ignore their own contributions to the discussion breakdown. Thus, rather than suggest, as Booth (1974) or Elbow (1973/1998) do, that skepticism or dogmatism has prevented the types of interactions that they critique, I suggest that not having a language to deal with the failures of interaction leaves open the possibility for a return to skepticism or

dogmaticism. Though rhetoric and composition instructors are justified in focusing on the successes of the rhetorical exchange where both parties walk away having valued the experience and become different, teachers of rhetoric and composition would do well to pay some part of our attention to how we could make productive use of the failures in our rhetorical exchange.

As we have seen in Ratcliffe's (2005) discussions of identification and difference, the importance of her use of "may" cannot be overstated. There is no method or theory of communication that can guarantee change *will* take place. There is no way to know for sure whether or not the discourse we've given to others has resulted in a genuine transformation. I do not want to suggest that individuals can develop persuasive strategies for overcoming the refusal to engage or the troubled identifications that come from disidentifying in ways that negatively shape the ways in which individuals are understood. However, we need a way to understand these refusals and resistances to cross-cultural exchanges. Understanding them can open new spaces for exploration and create declarations of hope for a possible return to the interaction at a later point.

Ratcliffe's articulation of pedagogical listening is one way to understand those who are resistant to cross-cultural exchanges. Moreover, it is not difficult to articulate a public pedagogy for her listening strategies. Nevertheless, by framing pedagogical listening within the classroom contexts, Ratcliffe might be limiting the site of pedagogical listening. In other words, though I agree that some interlocutors refuse to listen and engage in dialogue or do so in ways that are unfair, we need a way to

understand this unwillingness that does not pathologize individuals or advance new(ly) troubled identifications.

Whereas Ratcliffe suggests that cultural logic is a way to understand a world that has limitations on cross-cultural exchanges, Crowley's (2006) argues, "in the worst case, rhetorically speaking, some believers cannot be persuaded to entertain dissenting arguments at all" (p. 77). As such, an individual's ability to become persuaded understood prior to how "densely their belief systems are" (p. 78). Ideologic, therefore, is a way to understand the intensity and scope of a given network of thinking. However, if the focus that I have been developing for individuals is to develop ways of advancing reception of texts, it is important to listen for the intensity of the values that individuals hold onto. In other words, it is not just that they are or are not resistant as listening pedagogically suggests, but that there are degrees of resistance as well as responses to difference that should be acknowledged in cross-boundary discourses. As Crowley suggests, the aim for interlocutors engaging in cross-cultural exchange, as a result, is that we must not "ignore the values held by those whose beliefs" we want to change (p. 200). Whereas she describes ways of responding to others, I want to focus on the importance of three of them with respect to listening. First, Crowley suggests that a "rhetor who wants to alter beliefs has to arouse an affective response—to get attention" (p. 199). Additionally, she suggests that "rhetors cannot afford to ignore the values held by those whose beliefs they wish to change" (p. 200) and that those who attempt to change ideas should provide superior values or provide articulations of the contingency of the values. Finally, she suggests that individuals work on "disarticulating" one set of values from the

dense networked system of values that audiences hold onto (p. 201). And though attention to pedagogical listening and ideologic still might not soften or break down resistance, I believe the double approach might increase the likelihood of doing so. Naming the ideological resistances that individuals see during the exchange is a necessary condition for disengagement.

It is important to review Booth, Ratcliffe, and Crowley's works because together they present a rich theoretical foundation on which I build the notion of listening language. This contribution to rhetorical theory and practice applies to online interactions. It applies to online spaces because as, McKee (2002) shows, such spaces are not free from the cultural forces that shape the way individuals interact. As Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman (2000) suggest in *Race in Cyberspace*, "race matters in cyberspace precisely because all of us who spend time online are already shaped by the ways in which race matters offline, and we can't help but bring our own knowledge, experiences, and values with us when we log on" (pp. 4-5). The same can be said of any other identity and the identifications that make such identities intelligible and meaningful for ourselves and others. Ratcliffe's work suggests that the same is true for our listening practices. The cross-cultural exchanges of a face-to-face environment do and can apply to online interactions. My study brings listening language as an expansive form of cross-cultural interaction into online writing spaces.

### **Alternative Forms of Disengagement**

Ideologic is not the only approach for disengaging from a situation where listening has reached its limits. Here I want to articulate two possible alternatives:

refusals and silencing. In Schilb's aptly named *Rhetorical Refusals: Defying Audiences' Expectations* (2007), compositionists are challenged to make sense of the rhetoric of non-engagement. Here, Schilb suggests that some refusals are deeply rhetorical practices that communicate intention to audiences. Such rhetoric works along the ideas of disassociation and defying expectations as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1950) describe in *The New Rhetoric*. With respect to listening, it might be the case that an individual's lack of engagement with the ideas and concepts of another is a willful form of non-participation or an attempt to delegitimize another. Those who create rhetorical refusals as Schilb frames it would have to disassociate ideas following the setup in *The New Rhetoric*, a complex process that would be difficult to parse for many people let alone first-year writing students—the participants of this study. Schilb's work might be a way to develop a more sophisticated understanding of non-participation in sites for online interaction. However, similar to previous critiques of Rogerian writing, engaging rhetorical refusals seems to work best with those who already have a developed understanding of rhetorical theory.

A sophisticated understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of silence and silencing offers another alternative for disengagement. In *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, Glenn (2004) suggests that silencing functions as a rhetorical power play that is gendered and invites rhetoric and composition to explore the meanings behind the silences or what is unheard. In the online writing classroom where the conflict of low or non-participation and lurking occurs, exploring the silence of others might be one inroad to changing the way participants interact. Thus, recognizing the presence of silence could

allow individuals engaged in rhetorical listening to foster an awareness that the ways in which they are interacting have excluded or silenced others. In the heat of productive interactions that rhetorical listening is designed to foster, perhaps breaking the interaction to account for those whose silences are speaking might be another way to think through purposeful disengagement.

Glenn's work allow rhetorical listening scholars to think through the possibility that perhaps lurking might not be an individual problem, but actually an intentional or unintentional silencing that has encouraged participant non-involvement. This might be the case as when McKee (2002) found that the metaphors that white students used in their online discussion forums comparing slavery to car ownership and opening the unintended consequences of comparing people to objects was in fact a silencing move that the white students were unaware of. Though others thought it was "flaming," perhaps those who refused to engage the comparison might have thought such a move was an attempt to silence the conversation. So, listening to the ways we silence each other is a part of developing modes of cross-cultural communication.

### **Listening Language: A Definition and Justification**

With the previous exploration of listening in rhetoric and composition, I propose the concept of listening language as an important addition to our thinking about the way individuals interact in online discussion spaces. Broadly speaking, listening language is an expansive type of interaction that pays attention not just to what happens when individuals need to interact, but also to the ways in which individuals enter and leave online discussions. Listening language is part of rhetoric and composition and writing

studies to the extent to which it provides resources for students to negotiate meaning in online spaces. Moreover, listening language can function as a powerful means to overcome the barriers (flaming, lurking, and low/non-participation) unique to online interaction I discussed previously in Chapter One. The three components of listening language are as follows:

1. Individuals enacting listening language persuade each other to listen rather than assume that they will.
2. Individuals who rely on listening language as a mode of cross-cultural interaction in online discussions will pay attention to the moments where those involved in an exchange either identify or disidentify with a particular concept.
3. Individuals who engage in listening language acknowledge and account for the degree to which others have difficulties with listening, either by helping to provide language options to overcome barriers to listening or by identifying and appropriately confronting troubling ideologic.

In what follows I develop each of these ideas and illustrate what rhetoric and composition teachers and researchers might expect students to do when these ideas take on central concern in the writing classroom.

### **Entering the Listening Exchange**

Individuals enacting listening language persuade others to listen rather than assuming that they will. Because an individual's cultural positioning is unknown and because our reasons for interacting with others are varied, it becomes important to set the

interactive occasion as a listening one. As Booth (2004) suggests, the presence of “win rhetoric” and “bargain rhetoric” reveal two alternatives to what he calls “listening rhetoric.” Clarifying that the occasion for interacting can and should be a listening one, one where interlocutors are genuinely trying to understand each other, can help clarify and set expectations.

This aspect of listening language can take on a variety of forms that are both directly and indirectly stated. For example, a student who writes, “Please listen to me as I attempt to work through this idea” is making a direct pleas for others to engage his or her writing in a particular way. A student writing, “You should listen to what I have to say because I think it will help us move forward on this issue,” might express a different form of a direct attempt to persuade others to listen. Indirect attempts to shape the occasion as a listening occasion are revealed in student writing when a writer attempts to shape how the respondent should engage their work. For example, students in virtual peer review sessions will share their work with a statement similar to the following: “I know this is pretty rough, but please be kind” or “Be brutal because I need lots of help!” Statements like these attempt to impact the way an author’s text is received and set the occasion.

### **The Actual Listening Exchange**

Individuals who rely on listening language as a mode of cross-cultural interaction in online discussions will pay attention to the moments where those involved in an exchange either identify or disidentify with a particular concept. As McKee (2002) suggests, people often come to online discussions without a clear sense of the cultural frameworks others bring into the situation. The focus on identification and the ways

tropes are made meaningful is one way for those taking part in an online discussion to focus their responses and assertions. This aspect of listening language is designed to get students to engage in cross-cultural communication directly but to do so in ways that avoid treating a particular identifications as determinant.<sup>7</sup> Rather, listening language relies on Ratcliffe's notions of cultural logics not only of race and gender, but those cultural logics relating to a broad range of other identity tropes—sexual orientation, class, nationality, ability, age, etc.—and the way they are made meaningful for other groups.

In online discussions, announcing tropes relating to identity and exploring how writers make this trope meaningful in their posts and responses to each other may be expressed directly as when a student writes that, for example, the individual grew up poor or that a student is Chicano. A student who attempts to negotiate what such identity marks means is attempting to explore the logics behind that identity. During these moments students might write things like “What you are saying about White people sounds like you are relying on multiculturalism” or “Isn't that color blind thinking as we have discussed it in class?” The larger point is that this aspect of listening language, which does draw from Ratcliffe's initial framework of tropes and their attendant cultural logics as she articulates them in *Rhetorical Listening* helps students develop assertions and response to each other so that they can begin to understand the cultural perspectives others are bringing to online discussions.

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<sup>7</sup> This idea is similar to Ratcliffe's (2005) notion of listening metonymically whereby individuals resist the tendency to reduce others solely to their identifications rather than see them as contingent and dynamic.

## Exiting the Listening Exchange

Individuals who engage in listening language acknowledge and account for the degree to which others have difficulties with listening, either by helping to provide language options to overcome barriers to listening or by identifying and appropriately confronting troubling ideologic. As Hewitt (2009) describes it, discussions often die. And though listening language is an attempt to sustain interaction in online discussion spaces, an important fact is that sometimes discussions cannot or do not continue. The broad goal of listening language is to help those interacting in online discussion spaces make their positions and understandings of what is being discussed explicit. Similar care should be given to those moments when discussion has come to an impasse. Rather than let discussion end, it becomes increasingly important in online spaces for students to be able to articulate why a discussion should end or what is contributing to the discussion's resolution or end. As such an important element to listening language is to articulate impasses. Specifically, listening language encourages discussants to articulate why they think a conversation has come to an impasse. The ideal articulation of an impasse would be to focus on the extent to which someone's values have interfered with their abilities to carry on a discussion. Such assertions work both ways; they can be directed at others or the self. Articulating an impasse in others' discussions might take the form of a student saying "I do not get the sense that you are open to challenges to the color blind logics that I think you've relied on in this discussion. Let's take a break for a while and come back." Articulating an impasse in the author's own discussion might have students saying "I am really trying to understand why multiculturalism is troubling to you, but I need more time

to think through this.” Statements like these provide a sense of closure without assuming that those participating in the discussion are through with the conversation. More importantly, though not always the case, leaving the possibility for further interaction can help participants stay open to further interaction. Focusing on the values or thoughts that keep participants in an online discussion from being open to new ideas is an important and challenging aspect to listening language, but given the ambiguities that are a consistent part of online discussions in terms of how people interact, it is a challenge worth undertaking.

It should be clear by now that listening language is interested in the way interaction can happen in online spaces. The goal is to develop with students modes of interaction that resist the tendencies for flaming, lurking, or minimal to no participation. This study is concerned with the interaction at the entrance, actual, and exit points of interaction and as such, analysis of student texts will focus on these points of contact between students in online spaces.

In this chapter, I argued that listening has been a peripheral presence in rhetoric and composition studies since the 1970s uptake of the work of Carl Rogers. I have also suggested that both Wayne Booth’s (1974) rhetoric of assent and Peter Elbow’s (1998) believing and doubting games are insufficient places to explore listening in rhetoric and composition given that listening is treated as a secondary or peripheral concern in their works as well. My attempt to explore listening as a central concept in rhetoric and composition brought me to the work of Kenneth Burke (1950/62) initially and to Booth (2004), Ratcliffe (2005), and Crowley (2006) specifically in order to develop what I call

listening language. Listening language, I argued expands the scope of listening to include both the front and back ends of cross-cultural exchanges and is particularly useful for interaction in online discussions.

In the following chapter I operationalize listening language in order to study the impacts of a pedagogy based on listening language in student interactions in online discussions. Chapter Three, therefore, is a detailing of this operationalizing and a justification of my empirical study.

## Chapter Three: Mixed Methods Study of Two First-year Writing

### Courses

#### Introduction

This study examines the potential impacts of a pedagogy based on listening language in a face-to-face, first-year writing course that requires students to interact in online discussions.<sup>8</sup> More specifically, this study examines student attitudes about listening, and examines online discussion interactions for evidence of listening language characteristics, which are repeated here:

1. Individuals enacting listening language persuade each other to listen rather than assume that they will.
2. Individuals who rely on listening language as a mode of cross-cultural interaction in online discussions will pay attention to the moments where those involved in an exchange either identify or disidentify with a particular concept.
3. Individuals who engage in listening language acknowledge and account for the degree to which others have difficulties with listening, either by helping to provide language options to overcome barriers to listening or by identifying and appropriately confronting troubling ideologic.

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<sup>8</sup> IRB Approval on November 20, 2012 (reference number: 1211E23847)

This study draws inspiration from *Transitions: Teaching Writing in Computer-Supported and Traditional Classrooms*, a year-long, empirical research study of traditional and computer-supported classrooms. In this study, Palmquist et al. (1998) focused their attention on the students and teachers within two first-year writing classrooms. One classroom was a traditional face-to-face classroom environment; the other used computers through the semester. Palmquist et al. specifically examined how teachers and student dealt with the transition from a face-to-face environment to one mediated, in part, by computers. In *Transitions*, Palmquist et al. focused on the ways technologies help first-year writing teachers meet curricular goals. As such, the study's focus was not on access or what Stuart Selber (2004) would call "functional literacy." Rather, the focus was pedagogical. Their focus on the ways students interacted with each other and their instructors during the study is, in large part, a precedent for studying student interactions. Whereas the *Transitions* study focused on the role technology played in student interactions and how students interacted when computer technology was present in the classroom, this dissertation studies the way students interact in online discussion spaces.

Because the *Transitions* study was an important example/precedent for my study, it is important to discuss it more completely here. In order to understand the ways in which computer-supported classrooms influenced writing practices and first-year writing pedagogies, Palmquist et al. examined four first-year writing teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. These teachers had previous teaching experience and were recognized as expert teachers. Each teacher taught two sections of introductory college

composition: one in a face-to-face, traditional setting and the other in a computer-supported classroom. There were a total of 173 students participating in the study. These students self-selected into the traditional or computer-supported classrooms. The computer-supported classroom had one computer for each student. These computers were also networked to each other. This network allowed students to message each other during the class. The study took place in the 1993-1994 academic year. As Palmquist et al. describe it, the learning objectives for introductory college composition were as follows:

- “To introduce students to college composition by completing five major papers over the course of the semester.
- To follow a process-oriented approach to writing, and
- To focus on both personal and academic writing” (p. 20).

In both traditional and the computer-supported classrooms, the teachers used the same texts but were allowed to explore various uses and strategies for using these texts in the different classrooms.

The *Transitions* study made use of survey and quasi-experimental methods as part of Palmquist et al.’s data collection process. The survey they developed for the study used Likert-scale questions to assess students’ attitudes (whether they agreed or disagreed) about writing, about computers, and about specific classroom practices at the beginning and end of each semester. The survey results were analyzed statistically. Similar questions were grouped together under one measure. They also interviewed 36 of the 173 participating students. Teachers were interviewed at three points during the

semester as well. Students were asked to create weekly reports on the interactions they had with students and their teachers. Finally, Palmquist et al. asked participating teachers to keep daily logs for the duration of the study.

For their analysis of this data, Palmquist et al. used statistical analysis of quantitative data and a “holistic/interpretative analysis of the classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, student texts, and teacher logs” (p. 28). Their analysis led them to the following conclusions. First, the findings of their study suggest that students not only write more in computer-supported classrooms, but they also talk about writing tasks as they are happening in these spaces. They also found that the computer-supported classroom was a work site rather than a discussion site or a space for conversation. As they put it, the traditional classroom was a place where “writing was discussed,” whereas the networked, computer-supported classroom was a place where “writing was done” (p. 40). Finally, they report that students in the computer-supported classroom had more contact/interaction with the instructor.

The *Transitions* study is an appropriate early study from which to draw inspiration for a number of reasons. The *Transitions* study and this dissertation focus on student interaction and attitudes. Like this dissertation, the *Transitions* study also relies on quasi-experimental and survey designs for data collection, although this dissertation also makes use of qualitative methods and, thus, is more appropriately framed as a mixed methods design.

Though I draw inspiration from the work of Palmquist et al., the research questions and methods of this dissertation are not extensions of the *Transitions* study.

The research described and reported in this dissertation responds to needs and concerns that are different from the *Transitions* study in a number of important ways. First, this dissertation is not interested in the anxieties students face regarding technologies in the classroom except to the extent that those anxieties reveal themselves in the rhetorical and discursive interactions located in online spaces. Similarly, face-to-face discussions prior to my study's launch helped reduce teacher anxiety about working with online discussion forums. That is, when the cooperating instructors expressed concern about implementation of the treatment or common unit, we worked together to reduce those stressors by working through functional approaches to technology and creating spaces where teachers could discuss concerns with implementation via Skype or face-to-face meetings before the start of the study.

Second, the *Transitions* study is more robust in its data collection process. A dissertation project cannot compete with the scope and breadth of a year-long, book-length project headed by a team of researchers. Whereas the *Transitions* study makes gestures based on larger data sets and in-depth interviews with participating teachers, this study is more specific in scope and reach. For example, in my study I focus on two sections of first-year writing that had 24 students each. This dissertation does not make use of qualitative interviews with teachers or students. Rather than focus on a general notion of student interaction, this dissertation focuses on the impact of a new pedagogy.

Third, the *Transitions* study focuses primarily on the effects of computer-supported writing classrooms on writing instruction. Though this dissertation is also interested in writing instruction and its impacts on students, this dissertation does not

share a concern with the effects of computers on this process. More than 20 years have passed since the *Transitions* study and the use of computers in writing instruction is commonplace. In other words, the *Transitions* study itself existed at a transitional moment where computers were taking hold in higher education. The work of this dissertation is a first step in transitioning to a listening approach to online writing and student interaction. Such work carries the assumption that computer use is less anxiety-producing than it was 20 years ago.

Finally, the *Transitions* study explores computer-supported writing instruction's impact on the writing process. Though this dissertation acknowledges that a process orientation of writing instruction is appropriate and the prevailing paradigm of writing instruction, process is not a focus here. This dissertation makes no claims to understand what online listening might tell us about the writing process (pre-writing, writing, revisions, etc.). What this dissertation does do is provide insight into how exposure to a pedagogy based in listening language impacts students' online discourses. My study is, therefore, an empirical approach to critical writing pedagogy and student interaction in online writing spaces.

This study is driven by a desire to explore what listening looks like in online writing spaces. Broadly speaking, this study is concerned with the following question: How does listening work in online discussion spaces? Two secondary questions help sharpen the focus of this study:

- Does exposure to pedagogy based on listening language a) change students' attitudes about the relationship between listening and writing and b) their online discourses?
- Are there differences between the online discourses of students who have been exposed to a pedagogy based on listening language and those who have not? If so, how can those differences be characterized?

I hypothesize the following:

1. Students in the treatment group will show an increase in positive attitude toward listening than those in the control group.
2. Students in the treatment group will open online discussions with attempts to persuade others to listen more frequently than those in the control group.
3. Students in the treatment group will describe their identifications and engage in an exploration of cultural logics more frequently than those in the control group.
4. Students in the treatment group will articulate barriers to listening in online discussion spaces more frequently than those in the control group by using more frequently the following moves:
  - a. Attempting to change the nature of the conversation to a more productive one;
  - b. Describing the types of resistances they or others have to particular positions within the conversation; and
  - c. Articulating the need to end a conversation

## Mixed Methods Approach

The questions and hypotheses guiding this study are both explanatory and exploratory; as such, a mixed methods approach is necessary. Mixed methods work best when researchers need to explore relationships between variables and seek a deeper descriptive understanding of the topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Given the novelty of listening language and the fact that such a pedagogy has not yet been tested in rhetoric and composition, it is appropriate to treat this as both an exploration of listening language and an explanation of the pedagogy as one that may or may not lead to demonstrable changes in student writing and interaction. I acknowledge from the beginning that listening language represents one of many possible approaches to listening online and that researchers would do well to continue to research and theorize listening in online writing spaces further. That having been said, I approach these questions largely deductively from the previously articulated theoretical perspective that I discussed in Chapter Two. For theorists with critical orientations toward research, deductive approaches are limited specifically in that the design used in this study does not engage students directly about their experiences with the pedagogy and how they responded to instructional units. For now, I use this space to acknowledge these concerns but to show how the mixed methods design can be a useful approach to creating knowledge about classroom teaching and theory.

A mixed methods approach to empirical research assumes that the limitations of quantitative research can be mitigated through the inclusion of qualitative design elements and vice versa. This study affirms this philosophical foundation and uses the

space that follows to describe how I mixed both quantitative and qualitative methods and in what ways such an approach is more robust than a singular approach.

This study makes use of a “nested approach” (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Such an approach is used by researchers that have different, though related research questions driving their studies. As my questions largely center on quantitative concerns relating to the impact of listening language on student interactions, I follow a sequential design that begins with a quasi-experiment data collection process followed by rhetorical analysis of the student texts gathered throughout the duration of the study. Not only is such an approach to mixed methods common (Creswell, Fetters, & Plano Clark, 2005), but it is also useful when experiments or quasi-experiments are part of the research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The embedded design is most useful when researchers attempt to confirm quantitative findings with qualitative support (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This study also makes use of statistical analysis of pretest/posttest survey results that are a part of a quasi-experimental research design. Though the design is sequentially ordered, both quantitative and qualitative analyses are weighted equally. That is, the quantitative and qualitative procedures of analysis are given the same level of importance.

Before moving to the specific methods for data collection and analysis, I suggest that studies like this dissertation are part of a larger trend in writing studies research for empirically driven research. Webb (2006) suggests that at least in the pages of *Computers and Composition*, there is an overrepresentation of theoretical arguments and case study articles. There is thus a need to move beyond anecdotal understandings of these

approaches in order to focus on three key areas of research. As Webb suggests, longitudinal studies of students “across semesters and instructors” might prove valuable. She suggests the field would benefit from studies that collect varied data and explore “cognitive gains, attitudinal perceptions, and retention rates” (p. 473). Finally, Webb suggests that theoretical and case study approaches have left the field with a dearth of data collection measures and effective data assessment strategies. For Webb, a mixed methods approach (or a blend of theoretically and empirically derived results as opposed to the mixing of quantitative and qualitative methods) “opens up new areas for us to research as well as expanding the kinds of answers and results we can achieve” (p. 473). She suggests a mixed methods approach, not at the expense of theoretical or case-based approaches to research, but rather in order that we even out the playing field and provide more attention than we currently do to mixed methods. I share these concerns and this call to action here.

## **Participants**

This study was conducted with two sections of students enrolled in WRIT 1301: University Writing at a large, midwestern research university. The research was conducted during the spring 2013 semester. This first-year writing course is required for those students who do not test out of first-year writing or who are not eligible for WRIT 1201 or WRIT 1401. The majority of the sections in this course are taught by graduate instructors from the Writing Studies, English, American Studies, and Cultural Studies departments. Professional and Administrative staff frequently teach this course as well. This study focuses on first-year writing for a variety of reasons. First, studying first-year

writing is a frequent practice in writing studies research. In a recent study, Patricia Webb Boyd (2008) conducted a research study of first-year composition students' perceptions of their online and hybrid learning. The most recent studies of online listening behaviors (Wise et al., 2012) focus on *first-year* business writing classes.

### Cooperating Teachers

The teachers volunteering for this study were not randomized. Rather, they were chosen based on a call for participation. See **Appendix A** for the complete call for participation. Teachers were also asked to keep logs (see **Appendix B** for prompts for logs and the logs teachers kept). Additionally, the decision to identify a treatment instructor was based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. The treatment teacher had critical familiarity with Krista Ratcliffe's *Rhetorical Listening* (2005)
2. The treatment teacher was willing to meet with me for two "pre-unit" discussions during the month of November, 2012.

The cooperating teachers had different approaches and experiences with the teaching of first-year writing. The treatment teacher, Richard,<sup>9</sup> is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition with a focus on critical whiteness studies. He had taught first-year writing at the institution three years prior to this study. The control teacher, Carol, on the other hand, is currently pursuing her MFA in creative writing. At the time of this study, she had not taught first-year writing previously.

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<sup>9</sup> All names of participants within this study are pseudonyms.

Over the course of two meetings, Richard and I met to discuss his understanding of *Rhetorical Listening*. We also discussed approaches to listening language and how the reading provided for the students might relate to the elements of listening language described in Chapter Two. Prior to the treatment unit, it was clear that Richard understood that his role in developing the listening inventory with students would be to fill in gaps and clarify confusions using his expertise with the texts students would be reading. Though the listening inventory seems to focus on the actual engagement, classroom discussions on “Judging Rhetoric,” a chapter in *The Rhetoric of RHETORIC* (2004), centered on how Booth’s texts helped students enter a listening interaction.

### Cooperating Students

Students enrolled in one of two sections of WRIT 1301 were part of this study. According to the university’s course description, WRIT 1301

Fulfills the first-year writing requirement. It involves critical reading, writing, and thinking as students practice some of the types of writing they may expect in their college career such as summaries, essays, academic arguments, bibliographies, and papers built on research. The course helps students develop, at a minimum, an approach to writing that relies on clear statement of a thesis and support of that thesis with appropriate sources and documentation. Time is spent discussing rhetorical elements of writing such as audience, purpose, and argumentative structure. Students also practice steps in the writing process such as invention, research, organization of ideas, paper drafting, revision, and editing. Students

report, synthesize, and draw conclusion regarding the significance of what they read. Students become aware of the rhetorical choices available to them and learn to make appropriate choices. Some sections may be taught in computer classroom. Some sections are offered online. Some sections may include a service-learning component. (University Catalogue)

The sample for this study comprised all students in these sections who did not opt out of the study (n=48). The instructors of record for the sections responded to a call for volunteers to participate in a research study regarding listening and students' online discourses. An email was sent to all instructors scheduled to teach WRIT 1301 during the spring semester.

I began the data collection process with what Campbell and Stanley (1963) call the “non-equivalent control group” design.<sup>10</sup> This design has distinct advantages over, for example, the “one-group pre-test/post-test” design where the researcher is not able to compare changes resulting from treatment with a control group. Though not randomized, the two classrooms in this study are distinct and natural groups; thus, key threats to internal validity are reduced because researchers who maintain naturalistic settings within the treatment and control groups have “no reason to suspect differential recruitment related to” treatment (Campbell and Stanley, p. 50). That is, students within naturalistic settings are equally likely to appear in either course. This data collection method requires

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<sup>10</sup> Though more than 40 years old, Campbell and Stanley's text still represent a standard in experimental and quasi-experimental design. Their text is cited frequently as *the way* to understand such designs. See especially Gerring (2012); Green, Camilli, & Elmore (2006); and Duke & Mallette (2004).

a pretest, a period of treatment, and then post-treatment testing to see if the treatment impacted participants.

For the pretest/posttest measurement, I created a 35-item survey to assess student attitude regarding listening. The study of students' attitudes has been a common research focus in writing studies research (Charney et al., 1995; Marback, 2001; Palmquist & Young, 1992; Schwartz, 1975). The survey also explored the prevalence of students' experiences with the uses of "identity markers" in disagreements. As suggested by Fowler (2009) and Dillman (2000), the survey was piloted with a sample population similar to the ones participating in the actual quasi-experiment. The IRB-approved pilot study took place during the Fall 2012 semester on a section of WRIT 1301 students.<sup>11</sup> Shortly after the results of the survey were compiled, a focus group with the participants revealed the need to change the measurement tool in minor ways. These changes included adding "Hindu" to the list of religious affiliations and changing both gender and sexual orientation to allow participants to check more than one category or write in their own category.

This survey was developed and used for the first time during this study. The objectives were based on aspects of listening language described in Chapter Two. As such, the goal of this survey was to assess student attitudes toward listening and the prevalence with which they encountered identity markers during moments of disagreement in the previous month. The focus on attitude was to assess students' openness to listening in cross-cultural interaction in the first place. The focus on

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<sup>11</sup> IRB Approval on August 8, 2012 (reference number: 1208E18244)

prevalence was intended to ascertain whether or not students were used to dealing with identity markers. The assumption of those objectives pertaining to prevalence and attitude suggest that if students are not interested in or experienced with issues of identity, they will be less willing to participate in cross-cultural exchanges where identity issues played a central or meaningful role. During the summer of 2012, I developed this survey based on the following objectives that were derived from both my research questions and hypotheses:

1. This survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the extent to which they must persuade each other to listen;
2. This survey will assess the prevalence with which students and those they know self-identify or identify others with a particular identity marker;
3. This survey will assess the attitudes students have about the use of identity markers in disagreements;
4. This survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the arguments that are not able to be resolved;
5. This survey will assess the prevalence with which students are willing and able to identify “troubled identifications”; and
6. This survey will assess demographic information of respondents.

Of the 35 questions, 31 were original. Questions 15-17 and 20 were modified from Palmquist et al.’s (1998) *Transitions* study. In their study, they developed a survey that assess students’ attitudes about *writing*. I modified these questions to focus on listening. Thus, “I avoid writing” becomes “I avoid listening.” “Anyone with at least average

intelligence can learn to be a good writer” becomes “Anyone with at least average intelligence can learn to be a good listener.” “I am no good at writing” becomes “I am no good at listening.” And finally, “I enjoy writing” becomes “I enjoy listening.” The complete survey with cover letter (as suggested by Fowler, 2009) and consent form can be found in **Appendix C**. See **Table 1** for a breakdown of which questions matched which objectives.

**Table 1:** Survey objectives

<b>Survey Objective</b>	<b>Questions</b>
This survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the extent to which they must persuade each other to listen.	1-4 and 15-20
This survey will assess the prevalence with which students and those they know self-identify or identify others with a particular identity marker.	21-23
This survey will assess the attitudes students have about the use of identity markers in disagreements.	5-9
This survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the arguments that are not able to be resolved.	10-14
This survey will assess the prevalence with which students are willing and able to identify “troubled identifications.”	24-28
This survey will assess demographic information of respondents.	29-35

As the majority of the questions on this survey focused on participants' attitudes toward listening, each attitudinal question was marked as either showing a positive attitude toward listening or a negative attitude toward listening. Twenty Likert-scale questions were used to assess students' attitudes toward listening. An attitudinal scale (20-100) was developed. For example, question 1 reads as follows:

1. It is important for me to invite others to listen.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

If a respondent "strongly agreed" with this, that answer was scored as a 5. An answer of "Agree" was scored as a 4 and so on down to a score of 1.

A number of the questions were inverted. For example, question 3 asks the following:

3. There is no need to ask others to listen.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

Respondents with a positive attitude toward listening should "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" with this statement. Those questions with inverse positive responses were

accounted for and in these cases a “Strongly Disagree” was given a value of 5 and a “Strongly Agree” was given a 1. These items are reverse-scored to ensure that the highest positive attitudes was given a 5 and the least positive attitude was given a 1. Therefore, the possible range for the attitudinal index was 20-100. The higher the score, the more positive the attitude.

The composite attitudinal score was based on the 10 attitudinal questions and provided a range from 20-100 where 20 is the most negative attitude toward listening and 100 is the most positive attitude toward listening possible. The composite attitudinal score for each respondent was plotted on a chart that shows changes between Time 1 and Time 2. Though I show the result here, interpretation and analysis of the results are described in detail in the next chapter.

The pretest survey was distributed on January 27, 2013 to all 48 student participants. They were given one week to complete the pretest and were reminded electronically and by their instructors throughout the week to complete the survey. This same procedure was repeated again during the posttest phase on March 3, 2013. **Table 2** shows the response rate for pretest and posttests. Four \$50.00 Visa gift cards were given randomly to those who completed both pretest and posttest surveys as an incentive for survey completion.

**Table 2:** Responses and Response Rates for Survey Completion

	Control Group	Response Rate T1	Treatment Group	Response Rate T2
Pretest	13	54%	10	42%

Posttest	12	50%	8	33%
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### Common Unit of Instruction

Rather than focus on one specific assignment, I developed with participating teachers<sup>12</sup> a complete unit of instruction based on the relationship between writing and narrative. During the fall 2012 semester, I met with both participating teachers to develop the common unit of instruction they would use in their classrooms. We decided at what point the unit would be delivered and how the assignments within the unit might be addressed. As the primary investigator, I felt that it was important to include the teachers shaping the common unit for several reasons. First, the common unit had to fit in with their goals for the remainder of the semester. Second, working with the teachers collaboratively was a way to ensure fidelity to the agreed upon units of instruction. In other words, teachers were less likely to reject the unit mid-study if they were a part of the unit's creation and development. Three criteria guided our discussions of the common unit:

1. There must be an online discussion forum where students are required to post;
2. There must be an online, virtual peer review of a draft of the final unit assignment; and
3. The final unit assignment has to engage with different perspectives.

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<sup>12</sup> After the completion of the common unit, one of the participating teachers left the study. Thus, though the common unit was collaboratively written, the control teacher did not have input into how the common unit was constructed. To this teacher's great credit, she executed the common unit faithfully and with enthusiasm.

Once the common unit was developed, the treatment and control teachers were instructed not to communicate with each other or their colleagues about what was happening in their classes until after the common unit was complete. At the completion of the common unit and after the final submission of the Teacher's Logs, the two teachers were welcome to exchange information if they wished. See **Appendix D** for complete common unit.

The common unit was developed with the elements of listening language in mind. Students would first explore how they understood themselves. The second forum invited students to explore influences that helped shape them. During these first two forums, students were in the process of exploring identity and the ways others impact them. For the final discussion forum, students were asked to explore a moment when another person's perception of them clashed with their perception of themselves. The approach to this third forum was to help students articulate moments of tension regarding their identities. The final assignment was designed to help students think broadly about the way identity functions in the classroom community. Specifically, students were invited to use posts from the first three forum assignments to answer one of the following sets of questions:

- What common themes have you noticed in the way narratives were developed or responded to by members of our class? What might these themes say about our classroom community?

- What tensions, if any, can you identify throughout the posts? How might you explain these tensions? What do these tensions say about our classroom community at this point in the semester?
- What worked well or did not work well in the way classroom members related to each other through the forum discussions? What might this say about the way members in our community relate to each other at this point in our semester?

The second and third sets of questions specifically ask students to explore tensions among community members and successes/failures in the way students interacted with each other. These are the types of interaction that listening language encourages. Students who have been exposed to the elements of listening language, then, should respond differently to these sets of questions.

In order to ensure fidelity to the agreed upon lesson plans, I visited the teachers at agreed upon points during the common unit. I visited the treatment teacher on February 13, 2013, and on February 15, 2013 I visited the control teacher. During these visits, I took observational notes regarding how members of the classroom interacted with each other. A second fidelity check was to have teachers keep daily, informal logs about what they covered that day as well as their experiences and reactions to the students during the units (see **Appendix B** for teacher logs).

### Treatment Plan

Prior to the common unit, the cooperating instructor and I developed a treatment plan that we believed worked as a first unit of instruction for his semester and for my study. The treatment plan asked students to read Wayne Booth's (2004) "Judging

Rhetoric” found in his *The Rhetoric of RHETORIC*. Students then read Joyce Irene Middleton’s (2011) “Finding Democracy in Our Argument Culture.” These texts were chosen specifically because Middleton references both Booth and Ratcliffe’s work on the importance of listening. Given the cooperating teacher’s background and familiarity with Ratcliffe’s *Rhetorical Listening*, he was encouraged to fill in gaps in student knowledge with his own understanding of her work so that students would walk away from Middleton’s piece confident in Booth, Middleton, and Ratcliffe’s ideas.

After engaging in these texts, students and the cooperating teacher developed a listening inventory (see **Appendix E** for the listening inventory that was developed). This inventory was then used as a heuristic to assess the extent to which members of an existing online discussion forum were listening to each other. For a breakdown of how this inventory was used, see **Appendix B** and the entry for February 13, 2013.

After using the listening inventory to understand a previously established online community regarding a text that was created for that community, the students of the treatment group were encouraged to return to this inventory to help them through the activities of the common unit.

### **Pilot Study on Discussion Forum Types**

The specific writing prompts within the common unit were developed as a result of a research project and pilot-study conducted during the summer of 2011.<sup>13</sup> This pilot study explored what I called “forum types” and the relationship between these types and the responses students gave.

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<sup>13</sup> IRB Approval on February 4, 2011 (reference number: 1102E95575)

One primary and two secondary research questions guided this pilot study.

- With respect to online forum participation, how might writing instructors develop rhetorical listening behaviors with our students?
  - What features of rhetorical listening emerge in instructor and student dialogue?
  - In what ways do students seek out continued conversations with each other in online discussion forums?

I developed a data reduction scheme that allowed me to narrow the data from the 20 classroom forums down to five. Each forum was an active forum where students could choose the number of times they responded to each other. Some forums required at least one response to another student. The types of exchanges occurring in these forums were student-to-student, student-to-teacher, and teacher-to-students. I ruled out the use of random sampling because of the nature of my research question. In order to narrow the data set I took note of the various functions of forums. I use the term “forum function” to describe the unique tasks that a forum required students and teacher to execute. In the five forums represented in this pilot study, the following functions were present. The forums functioned to 1- introduce themselves to the class; 2- discuss non-course content related interests; 3- continue a face-to-face conversation online; 4- fulfill a classroom learning objective; and 5- evaluate an online peer review session.

By focusing on the forum function and its corresponding tasks, this pilot study assumed that listening behavior could be understood through writing. These five functions were not the only ways that forums could be understood. However, the

functionality of forums should not be treated as a minor issue when considering rhetorical listening. By isolating, to the extent that it is possible, various tasks, I was able to begin understanding how the function of a particular forum contributed positively or negatively to successful listening behaviors in these online forums.

### *Demographics and Raw Data*

In this required university writing hybrid course there were a total of 22 students: seven identified as female and 15 as male. The following tables present the various data collected through Moodle Reports and compiled in a way that provides insight into the research questions guiding this study. Table 3 shows the breakdowns of posts added in the five forums in terms of gender and number of posts. This information includes the instructor’s contributions as well. Table 4 shows the number of views related to the number of posts and provides the posts as a percentage of views. Table 5 isolates student activity of the past seven months in terms of number of posts added to the forum.

**Table 3:** Gender Breakdown of Added Posts by Forum

Forum Name	Total Posts	Number of Posts by Males	Number of Posts by Females	Percent of Males	Percent of Females
Introduction	114	90	24	79	21
Social Issues (woot!)	14	12	2	86	14
Music Post	23	18	5	78	22
“Five Faces”	72	52	20	72	28
Online Peer Review	22	15	7	68	32

**Table 4:** Number of Views Next to Number of Posts

Forum Name	Number of Views	Number of Posts	Posts as Percentage of Views
Introduction	2550	114	4.5
Social Issues (woot!)	359	14	3.9
Music Post	473	23	4.9
“Five Faces”	3180	72	2.3
Online Peer Review	354	22	6.2

**Table 5:** Student Posts in Past 7 Months<sup>14</sup>

Forum Name	Number of Students who Posted	Students who Posted More than Once	Number of males and Females who Posted More than Once
Introduction	4	2	0/2
Social Issues (woot!)	6	1	1/0
Music Post	7	3	2/1
“Five Faces”	22	21	14/7
Online Peer Review	18	3	2/1

### *Categories of Response*

I chose a deductive coding method based on the theory of rhetorical listening as developed by Krista Ratcliffe. However, rather than use her exact categories (e.g., listening metonymically, eavesdropping, and listening pedagogically), I focused on how

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<sup>14</sup> Some of the data goes back beyond the 7-month period allowed by Moodle Reports. That is why the numbers in Table 5 might not make sense next to the numbers in Table 3. In other words, the instructor did not post 110 times to the Introduction forum as might be suggested by placing Tables 3 and 5 side by side.

students' language choices revealed that they were listening to the forms of resistance, cultural logics, and silences that are always, according to Ratcliffe's theory of rhetorical listening, part of rhetorical exchange. These categories are provisional and are not intended to be exhaustive.

### Reduction

Reduction—a move to close down a conversation via an attempt to directly answer a question or a prompt. The class decided to continue a face-to-face discussion regarding race in an online forum. In this forum one student wrote, "If you believe [in the cultural logic of multiculturalism], then you understand why everyone reacted to Stan's dad when he described 'a group of people who annoy you' as ... well... you know, and the whole episode is a funny way of teaching a lesson about accepting everyone as the same [.]” The student reduces the entire “take away” from the episode by attributing agency to a general understanding of multiculturalism.

### Acknowledgment

Acknowledgment—a move to situate responses as a response to another. A student created a hypothetical situation as part of his question. When responding to this student, a classmate began with “Even in the hypothetical society that was posed...,” which functions to acknowledge the structure of the argument on the terms of the one who posed the structure.

It is interesting that in the same step, the student's response to his peer's question also came with a depersonalization as indicated by the passive phrase “that was posed.” Further research into passive voice as it relates to acknowledgment would provide insight

into whether this student was simulating what he thought was an appropriate “academic voice” or if something else was apparent.

Additionally, acknowledgment can take the form of direct address when one student writes, “To start out [student’s name] is correct that Young believes marginalization is possibly the most dangerous form of oppression.” In moves like this, students acknowledge the presence of another’s ideas.

### Acceptance

Acceptance—a move that signals an acceptance of the terms used by another. A student writes “In Young’s Five Face of Oppression she does not use any personal stories but instead backs up her assumptions with vague examples” as lead-in to his question. In her response to his question another student writes, “Instead she uses vague examples when discussing oppression.” The respondent has accepted the questioner’s terms. Regardless of the accuracy of the terms, there was an acceptance of a position as part of creating a response to another.

### Generous Reading

Generous Reading—a move that acknowledges the alternative possibilities of responding to a question, but does so in a way that gets at the heart of what is really being asked. When a student asserted that women’s brains may be better suited to handle emotional work than men, his peer responded, “For the purpose of this writing it will be assumed that [last name] is correct about the aforementioned evidence, as the question arose from this assumption.” Rather than respond to the essentializing notion that women’s brains are different from men’s and, therefore, better able to nurture others, the

student responded to a different concern that can be supported with texts that both students had access to. The point of generosity comes not from accepting essentialist notions of gender, but in temporarily granting validity to a position to focus on the things that are shared between interlocutors.

The pilot study was limited in a number of ways that this dissertation seeks to correct. First, the pilot was conducted in a classroom that I taught. As the respondents' primary instructor I could shape the ways that students understood rhetorical listening and its chief components. Moreover, I did not have the type of rigorous quantitative framework for data collection as I do in this dissertation. Such a framework as the one described in this chapter guards against idiosyncratic readings of data and can be tested against hypotheses. Second, the focus of the pilot study centered on categories of response as it relates to the elements of rhetorical listening. Thus, the analysis was too closely aligned with Ratcliffe's theory of rhetorical listening. As I suggested in my exploration and development of listening language, a more robust approach to online listening is to have students focus on the beginning and ending moments of a listening occasion as well as to the manner of interaction.

### **Method of Rhetorical Analysis**

I use students' sentence-level texts to describe how they interact in online writing spaces. In other words, I look for sentences that map onto any of the conceptual categories that make up listening language (see Table 6 for coding scheme). The table below is separated into four sections—Move, Category, Student Example, and Code. The Move corresponds to the three moves that comprise a listening exchange. That is,

students will enter an interaction in specific ways, they will interact in specific ways, and they will exit an interaction in specific ways. The Category column describes in more detail one of the three moves. The category is a more specific description of what it means to enact a particular move of listening language. The student examples within the table are actual statements written by students in this study. Finally, each sentence that a student wrote in online discussion forums, virtual peer review, and the narrative analysis was coded 1-6. These numbers correspond to the category of the same row.

**Table 6:** Coding Scheme for Rhetorical Analysis of Student Texts

<b>Move</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Student Example</b>	<b>Code</b>
Entrance	Persuades others to listen	Please be mean to my paper!!!  Please help me take a look on my essay if I go on the right direction.	1
Actual	Announces an identification	I am extremely interested in art and music and have started promoting for Skyway  I have a passionate soul; it drives me to take risks of helping others and even me.  For that matter, I would not be the person I am today if it weren't for gymnastics.	2
	Asserts disidentification	It shocked me when you say you blame it on society.  Someone whose life clearly hadn't been as fortunate as mine.  I'm not an expert, and if you feel like leaving anything the way it is, don't doubt yourself.	3

	Troubles an identification	Some people were not treated nicely because they didn't have enough money for their health insurance.  I like it a lot, but you might want to explain more why everyone always talk about their positive influence and why they choose their parents as the most influence people on their life.	4
	Acknowledges troubles with listening		5
Exit	Provides options for overcoming barriers to listening	No student example	6a
	Identifies troubling ideologics	No student example	6b
	Attempts to remove troubling ideologic	No student example	6c
Other	No code	My Rough Draft is attached.  What is it like?  The isles of the grocery store were among my favorite stages.  She stared down, and nodded at me to close the door myself.	7

The very first student example on the table is from a student who writes to a peer reviewer "Please be mean to my paper!!!" This is an attempt to shape how the reviewer

should enter the review context. Essentially, when a student in peer review asks his or her peer to be mean, they are attempting to shape the approach rather than to make an evaluative statement about the quality of the paper. A opening interaction based on an attempt of the author to shape how the reviewer enters the review process *is* an entrance move in this study.

Another broad move is what happens during the actual interaction. Listening language is an attempt to have students interact with each other by attending to the ways students identify or disidentify with each other and/or the central ideas explored in the paper or interaction. This general move is broken down into three categories: announces identification, asserts disidentification, and troubles an identification. These categories are the way the actual interaction among students gets done. The illustrations in the table are helpful for understanding how these categories work. For example, a student who writes, “For that matter, I would not be the person I am today if it weren’t for gymnastics,” has aligned himself as a gymnast; he is identified with that role.

Identifications work differently than disidentifications. When a student writes, “It shocked me when you said you blamed it on society” that student asserts a disidentification. The statement functions to separate the student from the person who shocked him. Of course, a disidentification could be considered a *type* of identification. As Burke (1969) tells us, “identification is compensatory to division” (p. 22). However, framing statements like these as disidentification focuses analysis on the relationality of the statement. A student has expressed distance from another student. The statement acts in a specific way that is categorically different than statements of identification.

Another category of actual interaction is based on troubling identifications. These are statements students make that attempt to disrupt the alignment of the identification or disidentification. The following statement would be coded as an attempt to trouble identifications: “Some people were not treated nicely because they didn’t have enough money for their health insurance.” In one way the statement is about the treatment of those who do not have enough for healthcare on a rhetorical level; the student is challenging a value system that suggests a different treatment of people based on economic capability.

The final form of actual interaction within this study occurs when students acknowledge the troubles that others might have with their statements. Statements such as “Sorry this sounds a little bit different and harsh” or “Feel free to not use some of my ideas if you do not like them” suggests that some aspect of that person’s text might be taken in ways that are not shared.

Exit moves are an important aspect of listening language because they externalize disengagement whereas typical approaches in online spaces do not. The concerns with simply not responding is that when a writer does not articulate why she is leaving an exchange, those who are privy to the interaction might not have a clear sense of why she left the discussion.

Doing a close reading of these texts at the sentence level allowed me to also think through how these moves impact the way students interact and if there is a notable difference between those who have prior knowledge of listening language and those who

do not. Reading and re-reading the students' texts helped refine the way I saw these texts and what students were doing within them.

### Whole Paper Analysis

For this analysis, I draw upon Holmes's (1997) "Genre Analysis, and the Social Sciences," but with several differences in mind. First, and perhaps most important, I do not claim, as Holmes does, to do a genre analysis here. Second, Holmes focuses his attention on research articles generally and the discussion sections specifically. The purpose of Holmes's analysis was to describe the discursive features of the discussion sections of published research papers in the social sciences. The focus on genre generally and discursive structures specifically allows Holmes to focus on what is being communicated to readers in the discussion sections. Like Holmes, I work deductively, exploring the presence of the elements of listening language within the six sample papers (for complete and coded sample paper set see Appendix F) collected during the course of the study. Whereas I use listening language as a basis for analysis, Holmes relies on Hopkins and Dudley-Evans' (1988) description of the moves most common to discussion sections. Both Holmes and I code the various elements or moves of our respective analytical lenses with numbers and present a series of sentences within paragraphs in a sequences of numbers, what I refer to as "code strings," that allow for a quick visualization of the types of moves sentences are making as well as what moves the surrounding sentences are making. Unlike Holmes, my claims made through this analysis are not about genre; rather, they are about the way the papers have been written and whether or not students are engaging with the concepts of listening language. My

assumption is that samples from the control group will have little demonstration of the elements of listening language, whereas those from the treatment group will reveal greater attention to these writing moves. The paper-analysis also allows me to explore relationships between elements of listening language. For example, do students move from identification to disidentification, or are there intermediate statements between these elements of listening language?

In this chapter, I have outlined the approach to exploring the impacts of listening language on first-year writing students' online discussions. I have described a mixed methods approach to this study and how the study functions to test the impact of a pedagogy based on the elements of listening language that I described in Chapter Two. In the next chapter, I describe the findings of this study, paying attention to both the sentence-level and paper-level analyses that occurred.

## Chapter 4: Quantitative Assessment and Results

In the previous chapters, I described the concept of “listening language,” its origins and theoretical justifications. I also outlined the methodology and methods used for data collection and analysis. Recall that listening language functioned as the basis for a pedagogy for online interaction in a single section of WRIT 1301: University Writing. The student-produced texts from those students are compared with a single section of WRIT 1301: University Writing. The focus of this chapter is to describe and discuss the results from this analysis.

As this study was designed with a quasi-experimental, mixed methods approach, this chapter will proceed by first describing the quantitative results of the pretest/posttest survey measurements. Though the quantitative results revealed no statistically significant differences between students in the treatment and control groups, I show that there is a suggestion for further inquiry.

As a guide for this chapter, I return to the research questions and hypotheses posed in Chapter Three: How does listening work in online discussion spaces? Two secondary questions help sharpen the focus of this study:

- Does exposure to pedagogy based on listening language a) change students’ attitudes about the relationship between listening and writing and b) their online discourses?

- Are there differences between the online discourses of students who have been exposed to a pedagogy based on listening language and those who have not? If so, how can those differences be characterized?

These are descriptive questions, and the results presented in this chapter will be descriptive in nature. Furthermore, given that two groups of students are being compared in this study, I hypothesize the following:

1. Students in the treatment group will show an increase in positive attitude toward listening than those in the control group.
2. Students in the treatment group will open online discussions with attempts to persuade others to listen more frequently than those in the control group.
3. Students in the treatment group will describe their identifications and engage in an exploration of cultural logics more frequently than those in the control group.
4. Students in the treatment group will articulate barriers to listening in online discussion spaces more frequently than those in the control group by using more frequently the following moves:
  - a. Attempting to change the nature of the conversation to a more productive one;
  - b. Describing the types of resistances they or others have to particular positions within the conversation; and
  - c. Articulating the need to end a conversation

The goal of the survey was to assess students' attitudes toward listening and ascertain the prevalence of identity markers in moments of disagreement in the past

month. Given that attitude and prevalence are measured on different scales, these results will be analyzed separately. The results described in this section should be qualified.

First, the naturalistic setting of the study is a real strength in educational research while at the same time a limitation given that controlling for all variables is not possible.

Naturalistic settings allow researchers to explore subjects in environments where they would normally interact. The alternative is a laboratory setting, where variables that could impact performance are more strictly controlled. As is clearly the case, students and teachers often do not interact the same way when placed in one of these two settings.

As this study attempts to explore student interaction in online spaces, a more naturalistic setting is appropriate. Second, the sample of students completing the second survey was smaller than anticipated (see Table 7). As a result, statistical analysis of the kind that would lead to high confidence in the results is impossible. Thus, most of the results from the quantitative analysis are *descriptive*, which allows researchers to describe *what* has happened and gesture at why students might have interacted in the ways described.

Before turning my attention to the results of the survey, I want to focus on the validity and reliability of the survey instrument.

**Table 7:** Responses and Response Rates for Survey Completion

	Control Group	Response Rate T1	Treatment Group	Response Rate T2
Pretest	13	54%	10	42%
Posttest	12	50%	8	33%

## Survey Assessment

This survey instrument was first used and created for this study. Thus, prior to exploring the results of the survey, it is important to spend time on the validity and reliability of the survey itself. Simply put, validity is a measure of how well an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Litwin, 2003). In terms of this survey, the goal was to measure students' attitudes toward listening. Validity measurements assess the extent to which this survey measures student attitudes as opposed to, for example, their *interests* or *experiences* with listening. Face, content, and criterion validity measures were used to assess the survey's validity. Reliability, on the other hand, measures the ability of the instrument to reproduce similar results. Cronbach's alpha and test/re-test reliability measures were used to assess the survey's reliability.

### Validity of Survey

With respect to the validity of the survey, each question was developed along one of the seven objectives (see Table 8) and then piloted on a sample population to determine question intelligibility. The 35 questions of the survey assessed students' attitudes and the prevalence of identity markers in moments of disagreement within the previous month. Prior to the pilot study, the survey was reviewed by Andrew Snell and Alicia Hofelich Mohr, Research Project Designer with the College of Liberal Arts Research Support Services. Providing the survey to external reviewers like Snell and Hofelich Mohr was a face validity check. Snell and Hofelich Mohr were unfamiliar with the subject of the study at the time they were asked to review the instrument. Though

informal in its execution, checking the face validity of the survey did result in some useful changes. For example, during our initial meetings, Snell suggested that I replace the word “argument” with “disagreement” given that the respondents might have a negative reaction to the word “argument.” Dr. Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch and I reviewed the survey instrument together against a series of objectives. Though not trained in listening language, reviewing the instrument with Breuch functioned as a forum of content validity as she does have subject knowledge of computers in the classroom. At separate times, Breuch and I and Snell and I reviewed questions alongside the objectives (see Table 8) that the survey was intended to assess. We determined that the questions were aligned with the objectives that guided the survey construction. An informal check for criterion validity, or the extent to which this survey matched with other surveys in the profession relating to attitude, included adapting questions from the *Transitions* study to the survey included in my study.

The pilot study, conducted the semester before the study in this dissertation also ensured that the survey was internally valid. The informal focus group on a section of students in WRIT 1301 understood each question and only minor revisions were made as a result of the pilot study.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 8:** Survey Objectives

Survey Objective	Questions
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<sup>15</sup> The inclusion of “Hindu” as a demographic category and the ability to check multiple gender and sexual orientation classifications were two of the changes made as a result of the pilot study.

This survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the extent to which they must persuade each other to listen.	1-4 and 15-20
This survey will assess the prevalence with which students and those they know self-identify or identify others with a particular identity marker.	21-23
This survey will assess the attitudes students have about the use of identity markers in disagreements.	5-9
This survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the arguments that are not able to be resolved.	10-14
This survey will assess the prevalence with which students are willing and able to identify “troubled identifications.”	24-28
This survey will assess demographic information of respondents.	29-35

### Reliability of Survey

Reliability tests of a survey instrument are conducted to ensure that the instrument is repeatable under similar conditions. That is to say, if the survey were given to similar groups of respondents, the results would be consistent. The reliability tests conducted for this instrument were to check for internal consistency and for test/retest reliability. Specifically, Cronbach’s alpha was conducted for each objective that focused on attitudes. In the section that follows, I state the Cronbach’s alpha of each objective and provide a discussion of what that says about the instrument itself.

### *Internal Consistency for Attitudinal Objectives (1, 3, and 4)*

The survey developed for this dissertation is new, and given that the objectives for the survey were known prior to analysis, we conducted a Cronbach's alpha rather than a factor analysis. Such analysis measured the internal consistency of the survey. Similar to the *Transitions* study, each objective was assessed for internal reliability. For objective one (this survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the extent to which they must persuade each other to listen), Cronbach's alpha = .75. The survey is, thus, internally consistent for this objective given that an alpha above .7 indicates an internally reliable instrument. While an alpha of .75 seems low, the smaller sample size of the survey makes it appear smaller than if the sample size were larger. For objective three (this survey will assess the attitudes students have about the use of identity markers in disagreements), Cronbach's alpha = .66 and for objective four (this survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the arguments that are not able to be resolved), Cronbach's alpha = .76.

Of the questions related to objective one (this survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the extent to which they must persuade each other to listen), only question 3 was negatively correlated to the objective. There are a number of reasons why this negative correlation occurred. One of the more likely explanations for the negative correlation was that there is an order effect influencing respondents. Questions two and three on the survey appeared in the following ways to respondents:

2. People should want to listen to what I have to say.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—  
Strongly Disagree

3. There is no need to ask others to listen.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—  
Strongly Disagree

There are two possible explanations for this unexpected response. First, order effect could have influenced those with a positive attitude in ways that were different from the primary researcher's rationale. In other words, the sequences encouraged an unexpected rationale similar to the following: If people should want to listen to what I have to say, then why would I need to ask them to? If respondents strongly agreed to question two, it is consistent with a positive attitude toward listening to suggest that there is no need to ask. This rationale leads to the second reason why question three was negatively correlated. It is possible that, for respondents, the question was difficult to parse as a statement of attitude. A key takeaway from this negative correlation is to review the survey for subsequent studies.

#### ***Internal Consistency for Prevalence Objectives (2 and 5)***

The questions for these objectives were less internally consistent than those that make up the attitudinal questions. I group them together because these are questions and

objectives relating specifically to prevalence. Both objectives two (this survey will assess the prevalence with which students and those they know self-identify or identify others with a particular identity marker) and five (this survey will assess the prevalence with which students are willing and able to identify “troubled identifications”) had Cronbach’s alphas below .75. For objective two, the Cronbach’s alpha = .49. There are a number of reasons for this result. First, this objective had three questions total. The questions on prevalence were also binary in nature and left less room for nuance when determining the reliability of the questions with respect to the objective’s outcomes. Finally, as with much of the analysis of this survey data, there were relatively few respondents. More respondents could suggest different alphas. What is clear is that the questions related to objective two were less internally consistent in that respondents are not responding in consistent ways between questions designed for this objective.

For objective five, Cronbach’s alpha = .69. Though below .75, the internal reliability of this set of questions to assess the objective is higher than that for objective two. Reasons for this could be that the questions themselves were better designed for the objective and that there were more questions for this objective than for objective two. Revision of the survey with respect to creating more internally consistent questions for objective 2 should take into account the number of questions and the number of respondents.

### ***Test / Re-test Reliability Measures***

Test / re-test reliability was determined using Pearson’s product-moment correlation. Overall the test / re-test reliability was high with 10 questions having

significant positive correlation where  $p = .006$  and  $r(10) > .58$ . This means that control group respondents who took the survey during time 1 can be reasonably expected to produce the same results during time 2.

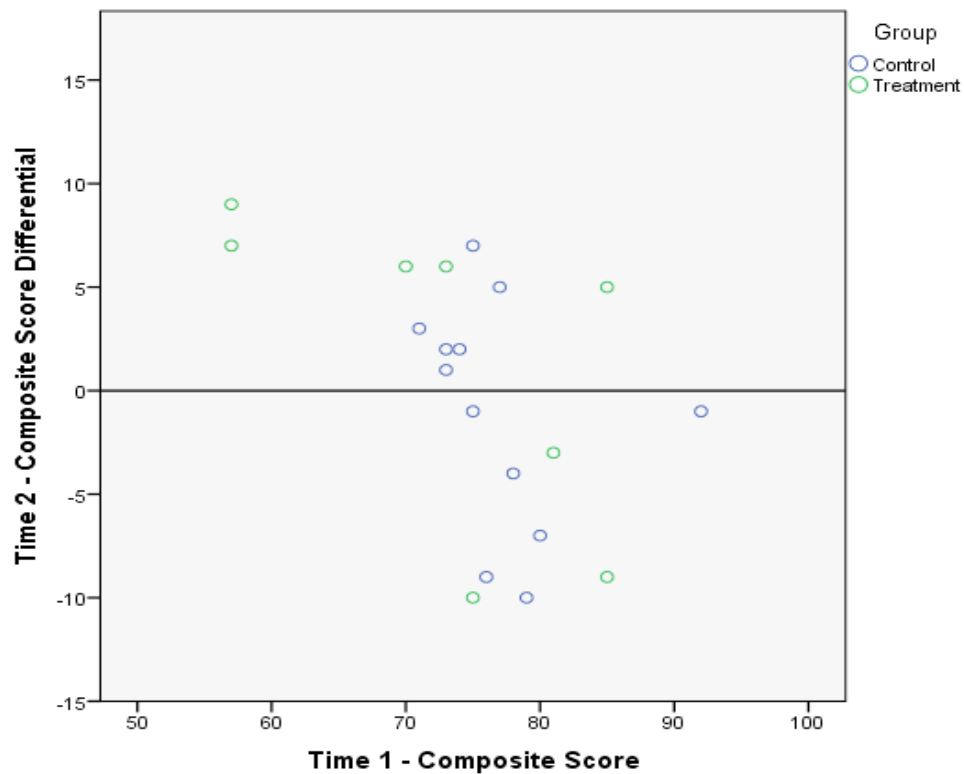
## Survey Results

Previously, I hypothesized the following:

1. Students in the treatment group will show an increase in positive attitude toward listening than those in the control group.

As the graphs below indicate, students in the treatment group *who completed time 1 and time 2 surveys* did show more of an increase in positive attitude toward listening than students in the control group. This assertion is based on the composite attitudinal score shown on graph 1. Before discussion of what the results mean, a few words on how to read them is in order (see Graph 1). Along the x-axis for the attitudinal scores is a range of 20-100. This number represents a student's attitudinal score with 20 being the lowest attitude toward listening for this study and 100 being the highest possible attitude toward listening. Locating any point along the x-axis will indicate a student's time 1 attitudinal score. The y-axis indicates a change in attitude, if any, between time 1 and time 2. Thus, if a student is located at the point marked 80 on the x-axis and -10 on the y-axis, the results indicate that the student showed a decrease in positive attitude by 10 points between time 1 and time 2.

### **Graph 1:** Composite Attitudinal Score Differential



An “attitudinal score” for each student was developed in order to assess any changes in attitude between times 1 and 2. Such a score was calculated by rating each attitude question on a scale of 1-5. Such a scale provided an attitudinal scale ranging from 20-100 with 20 being the most negative possible attitude toward listening and 100 being the most positive score a respondent could have on this survey. Some of the questions were inversely scored. Question 3, for example, reads as follows:

3. There is no need to ask others to listen.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

Respondents with the most positive attitude toward listening can be expected to “strongly disagree” with this statement. Thus, 5 points were added to their attitudinal score. In a similar fashion, question 2 reads as follows:

2. People should want to listen to what I have to say.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—  
Strongly Disagree

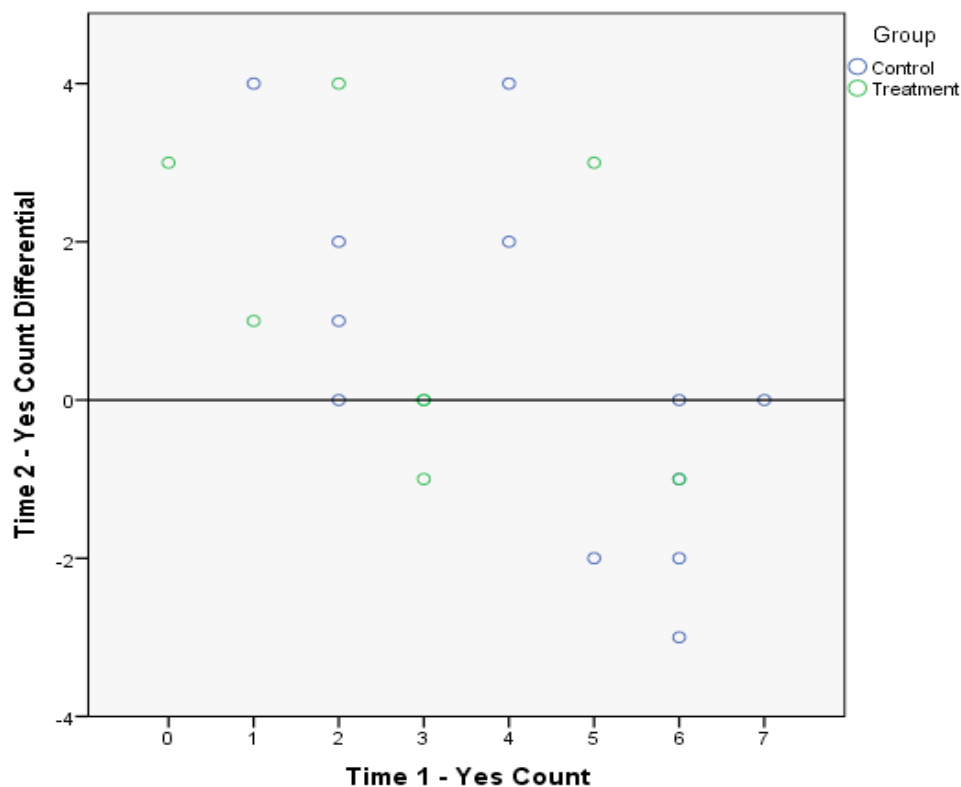
Respondents with the most positive attitude toward listening can be expected to “strongly agree” with this statement. Thus, 5 points were added to their attitudinal score. Composite Score was generated by adding the 20 scale item numeric responses. Each scale item was converted to the following synthetic scale of Positive = 5 through Negative = 1 based on an a priori assessment of each statement's directionality. This allowed for the calculation of a composite score of the 20-item measure for analysis purposes. The max composite score possible is 100 (5 x 20) and the min is 20 (1 X 20). The original scale displayed to participants was Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5.

There were fewer prevalence questions. Such questions were answered using a binary “yes/no” response. There were a total of eight questions relating to the prevalence of identity markers used during moments of disagreements in the past month. The survey compiled the eight prevalence items. Respondents who answered “yes” to all eight questions were understood to have a higher prevalence of the use of identity markers in

moments of disagreement in the previous month than those who responded “yes” to fewer of the questions. The survey thus provided an indication of the familiarity students had with identifications (either because they used identity markers or because they heard others use them in conversations they had in the previous month).

The graphs representing the results on the prevalence scores work much the same way (see Graph 2). There were eight items that assessed the prevalence of identity markers that students had experienced in the past month. The x-axis represents the prevalence of these identity markers whereas the y-axis notes the change in score between time 1 and time 2. Thus, if a student’s time 1 score here was 5 on the x-axis and a -2 on the y-axis, that means that during this study, identity markers were *less* prevalent in that student’s life during the past month.

**Graph 2:** Composite Prevalence Measure Differential

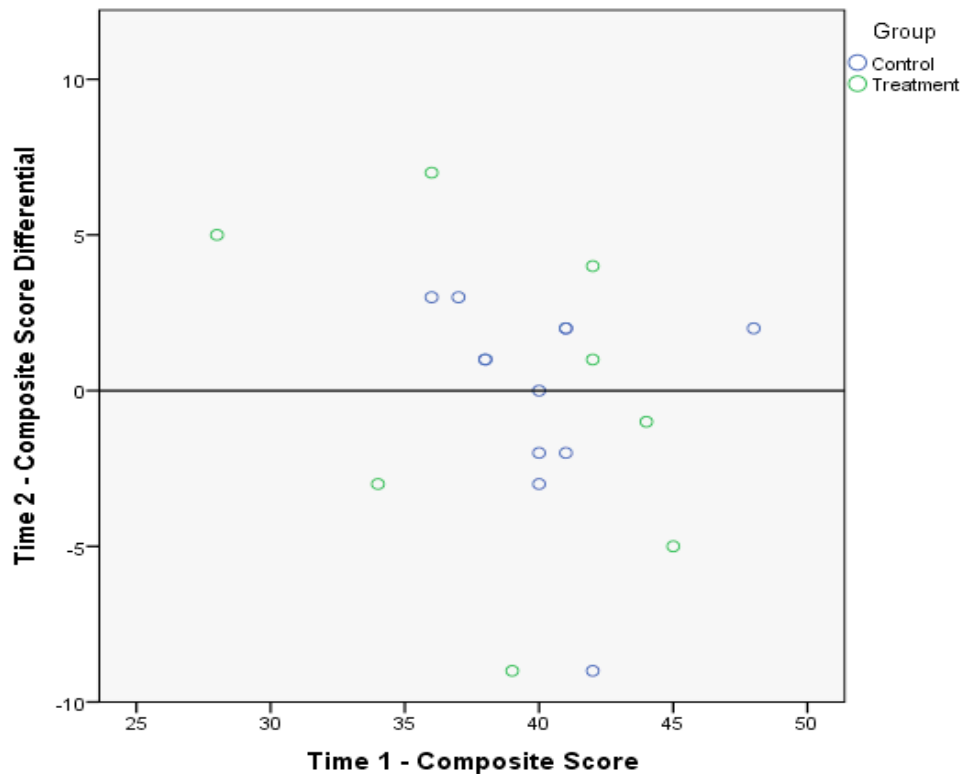


### Attitude Objectives Results

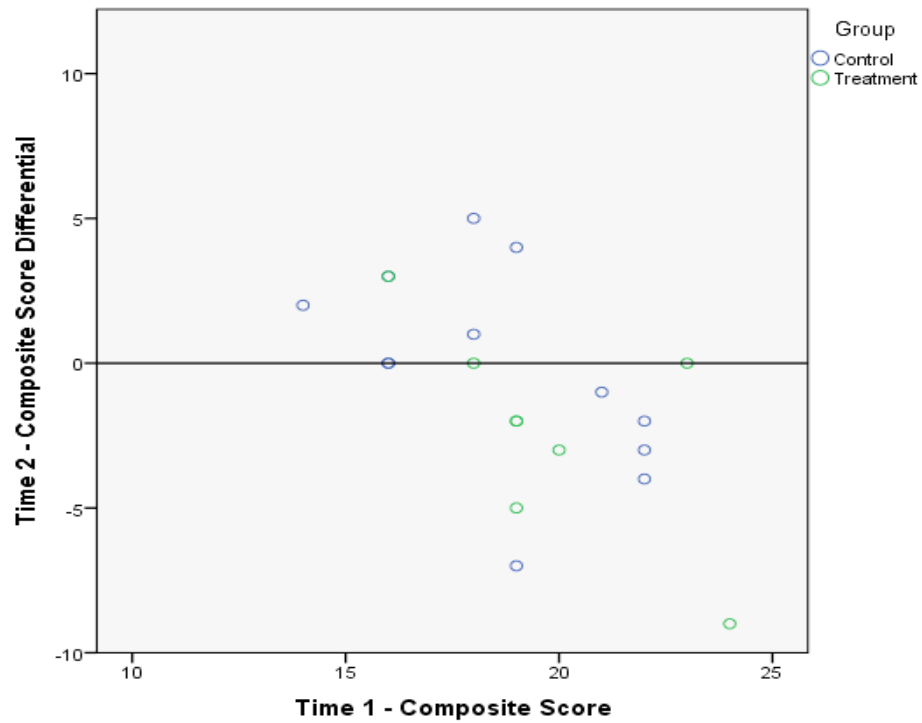
The graphs that follow reveal the results of the survey for each objective. It is clear from these results that there are not statistically significant patterns emerging. There could be several reasons for this. First, the treatment could have no impact on students' attitudes toward listening. However, qualitative analysis suggests that there are noticeable differences between the two groups (a point I turn to later in the chapter). What is more likely and might be a second reason for the lack of statistically significant findings on the survey is that there were very low response rates. The low response rate is curious given 1) that the survey was delivered online and to students' university email accounts with automated reminders for completion; 2) cooperating teachers provided frequent reminders for students to complete the survey; and 3) four \$50.00 Visa gift cards

were available for those who completed both surveys. Short of using class time for students to complete pen and paper surveys, it is not clear what else could have been done to increase survey response rates. The time of survey distribution was early in the semester which might have impacted students' willingness to complete the survey. When the survey was distributed is something to consider in further iterations of this study. As of this study, it was important to distribute the survey as soon as possible, however given that the study was a single, early unit activity rather than a semester-long study of student interaction. What follows is a graphic display of the results that were collected.

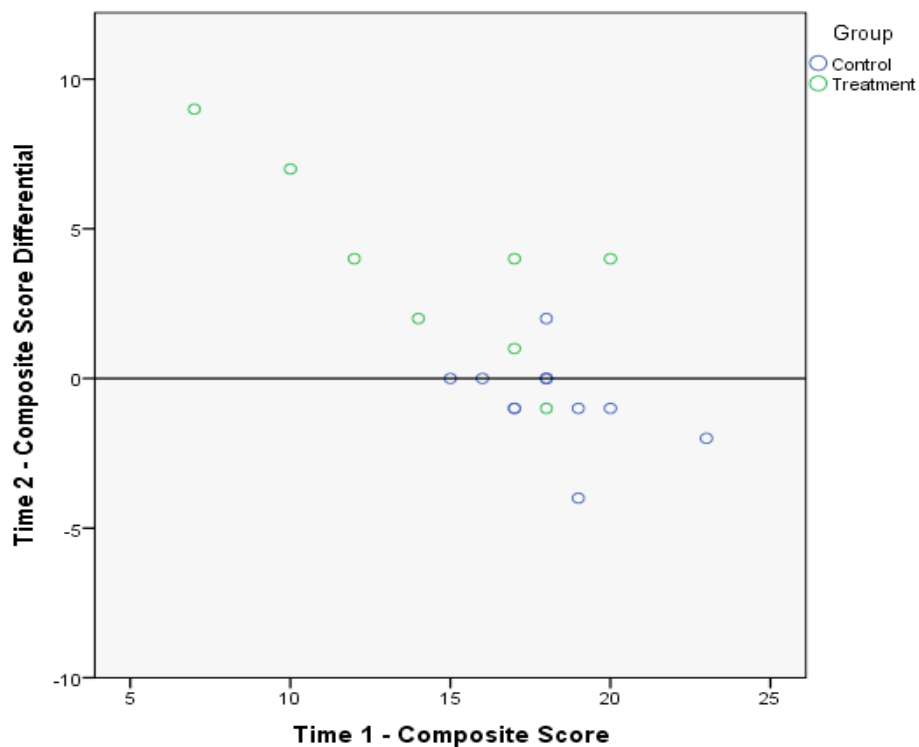
**Graph 3:** Objective 1: This survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the extent to which they must persuade each other to listen.



**Graph 4:** Objective 3: This survey will assess the attitudes students have about the use of identity markers in disagreements.



**Graph 5:** Objective 4: This survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the arguments that are not able to be resolved.



### Attitudinal Objectives Results

When looking at the composite attitudinal score, it is clear that *more* students in the treatment group increased their positive attitudes toward listening than those in the control group. That students in the control group *decreased* in positive attitude is also interesting. The question then becomes, what is it about either the common unit or the treatment that could have impacted these results? One explanation is that students in the treatment group had a clear and unambiguous understanding of what listening meant. The listening inventory could have helped students focus their attention on a single, collective definition that they worked on developing. There were no such activities present in the control group. As such, students' decrease in positive attitudes toward listening could be the result of a discomfort with the relationship between reading, writing, and listening.

Students might also have been less clear on what listening means. What is clear is that more exploration and research into the teaching of listening language as it impacts students' attitudes toward listening is necessary. Further studies should proceed with this in mind.

Graph 5 indicates some interesting, though inconclusive, results that suggest further study. That the treatment students seem to be aligning themselves in particular patterns called for closer analysis of objective four (this survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the arguments that are not able to be resolved). Graph 5 suggests an impact of the treatment on those students who received it. As such, further analysis was conducted to find out if this was the case. ANOVA testing assesses the relationship between variables. Such a test reveals if there are differences in the “mean effect of time” or time related to increasing and decreasing of scores. For objectives one, two, and three, there were no statistically significant results to report. This is very likely because there response rates were so low. However, with objective four—survey will assess student attitudes about arguments not able to be resolved—there were statistically significant results from a means perspective. At the level of interaction, the groups differed in relationship with time. Between T1 and T2 the groups' scores increased or decreased differently with respect to objective 4 (Graph 5). Between subjects test revealed that the groups are not different if you collapse across time.

Time one is a very significant predictor of time two. When you control for T1 score, the group respondents are in predicts how they will do for time 2. This is only the case with objective four. For this  $p = .013$  with a beta value ( $b = .0451$ ), which suggests

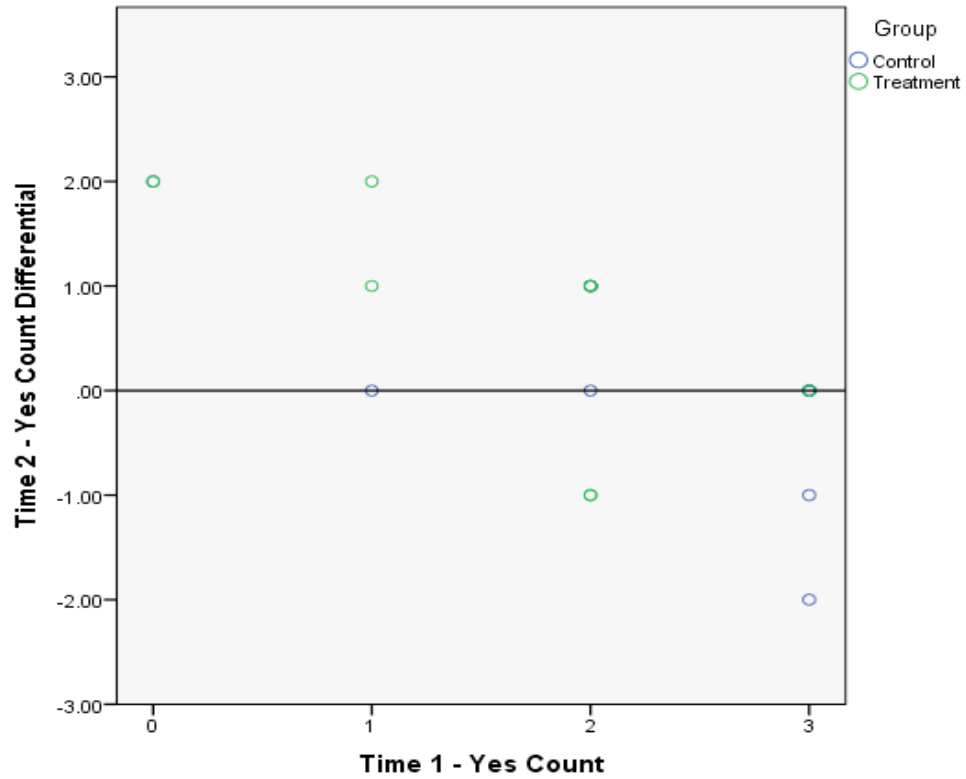
that respondents exposed to a treatment will score half a point higher than composite score for objective four. Though half a point seems small, it is a significantly reliable result. This finding leaves us with the question of why the treatment specifically is better at objective four than the other objectives.

### **Prevalence Objectives Results**

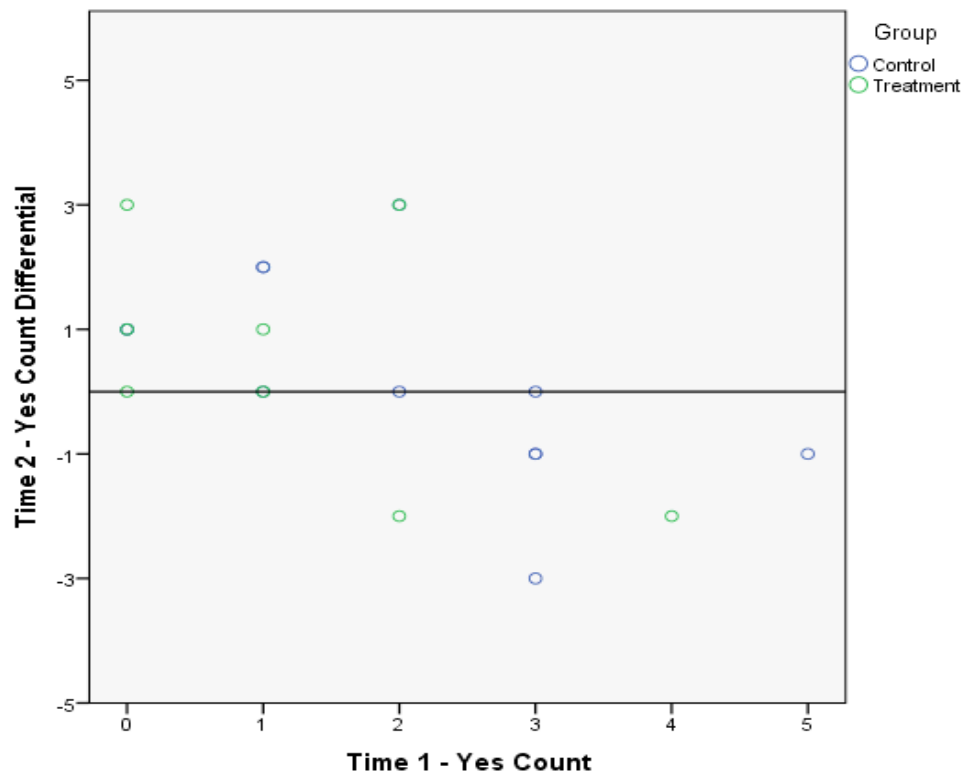
Graphs 6 and 7 reveal the results of the prevalence of identity markers in students' disagreements during the past month. The assumption operating under the need to assess the prevalence of identity markers is that the more exposure students have with identity markers during moments of disagreement, the more comfortable they might be with interacting across differences. Though more research is needed on this point, it is clear that students in the treatment group who took both time 1 and time 2 surveys increased the prevalence of identity markers in moments of disagreement. This is indicated through the greater number of students from the treatment group falling in the top half of the graphs below.

Further study would explore these findings in a number of ways. First, comparing the prevalence scores to the demographic information collected as part of the time 1 survey could shed light on the relationship between prevalence of identity markers in moments of disagreement and the demographic diversity of a particular classroom. Second, consistent classroom observations throughout the semester (i.e., taking field notes during each class meeting) can help researchers get a better picture of how instructors do or do not encourage conversations about identity markers.

**Graph 6:** Objective 2: This survey will assess the prevalence with which students and those they know self-identify or identify others with a particular identity marker.



**Graph 7:** Objective 5: This survey will assess the prevalence with which students are willing and able to identify “troubled identifications.”



The hypothesis I articulated in Chapter Three suggests that listening language *does* influence students' positive attitudes toward listening when we explore the composite scores of the attitudinal scale. However, individual analysis of the various objectives relating to this variable do not allow for conclusive and statistically significant assertions regarding this result. Further studies might secure greater student participation and allow more thorough study of time 1 and time 2.

With respect to prevalence scores we can ask, "Has the treatment affected these scores, and how can we tell?" Using McNemar's test, we can ask if there is a likelihood of switching a "yes" answer from time 1 to time 2. This probability ratio is descriptive

rather than predictive. The results from McNemar's suggest that over time, respondents are likely to switch from a "no" to a "yes." However, it is unclear if exposure to listening language is the result of this switch.

In this chapter, I found that when taken as a composite, there is evidence to suggest that the treatment group showed an increase in positive attitudes toward listening after being exposed to a pedagogy based on listening language. Though the findings are encouraging, they must be asserted carefully given the very low response rates to the pretest and posttest measures. There is something specifically about the relationship between listening language and its impacts on students' attitudes toward disagreements that have come to an impasse. Though there is no statistically significant result from closer analysis to this objective, further study of the relationship between listening language and students' attitudes toward impasses in moments of disagreement is justified. Finally, the survey results suggest that students in the treatment group had an increased prevalence of identity markers during the course of this study. There are many possible explanations of this and, again, further study might help clarify what it is about listening language that makes this the case. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the qualitative results that come from rhetorical analysis of students' written texts in online discussion forums, virtual peer review, and a whole paper, narrative analysis.

## Chapter 5: Qualitative Results

The types of analyses conducted here are designed to get at how listening language is or is not used by students—in online discussion forums, online peer review sessions, and whole papers—against a control group of students who have not been exposed to listening language. Broadly speaking, listening language is an expansive type of interaction that pays attention not just to what happens when individuals need to interact, but also to the ways in which individuals enter and leave online discussions. Listening language is part of rhetoric and composition and writing studies in that it provides resources for students to negotiate meaning in online spaces. Moreover, listening language can function as a powerful means to overcome the barriers (flaming, lurking, and low/non-participation) unique to online interaction I discussed in Chapter One. Listening language could be useful because it is designed to help students interact with understanding about how identification plays out in online spaces. Indeed, listening language is designed to help students figure out the role identification plays in these interactions. Shifting student attention to the ways individuals interact in online spaces from argumentation and persuasion is a major objective when teaching listening language. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the three components of listening language are as follows:

1. Individuals enacting listening language persuade each other to listen rather than assume that they will.

2. Individuals who rely on listening language as a mode of cross-cultural interaction in online discussions will pay attention to the moments where those involved in an exchange either identify or disidentify with a particular concept.
3. Individuals who engage in listening language acknowledge and account for the degree to which others have difficulties with listening, either by helping to provide language options to overcome barriers to listening or by identifying and appropriately confronting troubling ideologic.

More specifically, Table 9 shows the specific coding scheme I used to code each sentence as well as its relationship to the three major elements of listening language described above.

**Table 9:** Coding Scheme for Rhetorical Analysis of Student Texts

Move	Category	Student Example	Code
Entrance	Persuades others to listen	Please be mean to my paper!!!  Please help me take a look on my essay if I go on the right direction.	1
Actual	Announces an identification	I am extremely interested in art and music and have started promoting for Skyway  I have a passionate soul; it drives me to take risks of helping others and even me.  For that matter, I would not be the person I am today if it weren't for gymnastics.	2
	Asserts disidentification	It shocked me when you say you blame it on society.  Someone whose life clearly hadn't been as	3

		<p>fortunate as mine.</p> <p>I'm not an expert, and if you feel like leaving anything the way it is, don't doubt yourself.</p>	
	Troubles an identification	<p>Some people were not treated nicely because they didn't have enough money for their health insurance.</p> <p>I like it a lot, but you might want to explain more why everyone always talk about their positive influence and why they choose their parents as the most influence people on their life.</p>	4
	Acknowledges troubles with listening		5
Exit	Provides options for overcoming barriers to listening	No student example	6a
	Identifies troubling ideologic	No student example	6b
	Attempts to remove troubling ideologic	No student example	6c
Other	No code	<p>My Rough Draft is attached.</p> <p>What is it like?</p> <p>The isles of the grocery store were among my favorite stages.</p> <p>She stared down, and nodded at me to</p>	7

		close the door myself.	
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My analysis of the student written texts centers on the types of statements that signal one of the five moves that comprise the elements of listening language. The analysis of forum discussions gets at the types of interactions *between* students whereas the paper-level analysis is designed to see how students use or do not use elements of listening language in their analysis of a descriptive narrative. For a review of the common unit and the types of tasks students were asked to complete for each part of the unit, please refer to Appendix D.

With respect to the hypothesis stated at the onset of this chapter, students in the treatment group used elements of listening language more frequently than those in the control group. They made more moves toward identification and disidentification (elements of actual interaction). Students in both groups used entrance moves to a lesser extent than identification and disidentification moves. Neither group of students made use of exiting moves of listening language. That is, no student confronted the ideologic of another classmate nor did students end conversations by articulating barriers to listening that might have been present. However, analysis does reveal that students' uses of qualifiers may function as a way to articulate potential troubles with listening.

### **Online Discussion Forums**

Online discussion forums are a significant location for student interaction. Yet, as I have discussed in Chapter One, this location is not without challenges. Conflicts that I have outlined previously (flaming, lurking, and low/non-participation) are most likely to

show up in these spaces given that the dynamic interaction among students in these spaces appears more fluid than in a virtual peer review or the development of a narrative analysis assignment. In what follows, I present frequency counts and forum exchanges from both the treatment and control groups in order to describe the way students are or are not using listening language and what that might mean for listening language as a pedagogical approach/theory of teaching writing in online spaces and for this study.

I hypothesized that treatment group students would use *more* elements of listening language than control group students. Moreover, a reasonable expectation was that students would write more identification statements in the forum discussing themselves, more disidentification statements in the forum discussing influences on them, and more statements that trouble identifications in the forum discussing clashes of perception. By and large these expectations were present in the frequency charts for each discussion. Though the presence of listening language appears differently from forum to forum and between treatment and control groups, listening language did not play a role in increasing student interaction in online discussions. Ultimately, students did not pay attention to or did not feel it was necessary to continue exchanges beyond one or two passes.

#### **Forum One: Narrative of the Self**

The prompt for the first discussion forum reads as follows:

Central Question: Reflect on a moment where you had a tense time interacting with someone that is different than you. How did you work through or fail to work through a moment of tension between you and someone who is different from you?

There are no word limits in this post, but I am thinking that your responses might be between 200-300 words. Treat that range as a suggestion more than a rule.

After you are done posting your answer to the question above, take some time to respond to 2 different community members. Use the following questions as a way to guide your response: What do you think the post's originator was trying to do here? What assumptions seem to be underneath the author's post? How do you make sense of what the person was trying to do in this post?

If someone responds to your work, you are required to respond to that person's comments.

As I show, the elements of listening language appear in both the treatment and control groups. Where and how these elements are taken up, however, appears differently between the two groups. I find that when writing about the self in online discussion forums, students in the treatment forums tended to trouble the ideas of each other whereas students in the control group tended to trouble identifications present within their own stories and defer to each other with affirmative statements. Comparing troubling statements of two students—Jim from the treatment group and Dan from the control group—can help to illustrate this point.

**Jim (2/13/13 at 3:18pm):** I wish that you would have shared an actual story about you and your brothers instead of how you two were competitive (4).

**Dan (2/17/13 at 5:55pm):** Looking back, I don't think I stopped because my body was tired (4). I certainly could have kept going, but my mind quit on me—it told me I could not when I could (4).

The illustrations trouble: Jim troubles his colleague Terry's story, and Dan reflects on his own previous understanding of what was possible. These distinctions suggest that it is not the existence of troubling that brings about potential response but rather the location of the troubling move, as well as the focus of what is being troubled that has the greatest potential for interaction.

Table 10 shows the frequency of specific elements of listening language that are used throughout the "writing yourself" discussion forum for each group. The focus on the way treatment and control groups used listening language more is complicated by the fact that each group uses different elements of listening language more than the other. For example, students in the treatment group more frequently announced identifications than those in the control group. However, students in the control group troubled identifications nearly twice as frequently as a group then those in the treatment group. That is, they wrote statements that challenged the identifications or disidentifications present in the forums. As Table 10 shows, the control students wrote nearly two and a half times as many uncoded statements in the "Writing Yourself" discussion forum. What might be contributing to these differences between the two groups and what this might say about

interaction as it relates to the conflicts described in Chapter One will be the focus of this section.

Table 10: Frequency Counts of Listening Language in “Writing Yourself” Discussion Forum

<b>Listening Language Item</b>	<b>Treatment Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Persuades others to listen	0	1
Announces Identification	422	271
Announces Disidentification	48	79
Troubles an Identification	23	68
Articulates Troubles with Listening	0	0
No Code	125	301
Multi-code	17	44
Total Lines	635	744

Exploring the frequency of the elements of listening language during this discussion forum reveals that students in the treatment group collectively used identification statements almost twice as frequently as those in the control group (422 to 268). Though students in the control group collectively wrote 100 more lines than those in the treatment group, those in the control group had nearly 2.5 times as many uncoded statements as those in the treatment group. If troubling or disidentifying creates a

potential for opening up conversation, it would be expected that students in the control group would have had lengthier discussions or more exploration of ideas given that control group students wrote 79 statements of disidentification to the treatment group's 48 and they troubled identifications nearly twice as much. Rather than trouble others' identifications, however, students in the control group most frequently troubled identifications within their own stories about themselves rather than troubling each other's narratives as was often the case in the treatment group. Thus, one major insight into the function of listening language in use is that the existence of troubling does not alone prompt interactions that remedy the conflict of low/non-participation. Troubling within a narrative does not lead to more interactions. Take Terry's troubling of Jim, the illustration I presented above. The following is Jim's complete response to Terry:

**Jim (2/13/13 at 9:36pm):** Terry, (7) I appreciate the feedback and I agree with you that it would have been productive to include a little story about us as younger kids (2). Basket [*sic*] is truly a passion of ours (2)!

While Jim's responses seems to resolve Terry's concerns, it is the very notion of resolution without further negotiation or interrogation that listening language is trying to prevent. That Terry did feel the need to or did concern himself with Jim's response to his original concern is not knowable. What is clear is that Terry did not respond to Jim's affirmation of Terry's feedback. Ultimately, though there were distinctions like the one I have illustrated between treatment and control groups, interactions in these groups did not produce exchanges that moved beyond a low/non-participation rate threshold.

The dialogue that follows shows the types of assertions/posts that typically

occured during this discussion forum. Contrary to what might be expected from students who have explored the elements of listening language, Bill<sup>16</sup> does not begin by persuading others to listen to his assertions. Rather, he begins this discussion with a series of identification statements regarding where he is from, his experience with music and art promotion and what it is to be a professional gamer working for Machinima, Inc.<sup>17</sup>

**Bill (2/10/13 at 3:45pm):** My name is Bill and I am from [city], [state] but decided to attend college in Minneapolis because I wanted to be a part of an interesting school in a city where there were many opportunities and things to do (2).<sup>18</sup> In the past I have played baseball, soccer, football and basketball, but during my freshman and sophomore years of high school I played video games professionally and worked for Machinima Inc. making me some great long term connections and some extra money so I didn't need to work at a fast food restaurant (2,3). I am extremely interested in art and music and have started promoting for Skyway Theatre in Minneapolis and Actual Records in Philadelphia (2). In addition to promoting for these venues and promotion teams, I have extended my reach to promoting festivals such as Summer Camp Music Festival, Electric Daisy Carnival, Infrasound Festival and Electric Forest (2). Education-wise I have yet to decide my major or field of choice, but feel as if I

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<sup>16</sup> All names are pseudonyms and the original spelling, grammar, and mechanics of all posts has been maintained.

<sup>17</sup> [Machinima](#) is "the dominant video entertainment network for young males around the world" that produces video content and tools that community members may use across a wide array of platforms.

<sup>18</sup> (#) denotes the corresponding code to a particular element of listening language. For a full breakdown of the codes see Table 9.

will lean towards business or graphic design because of my interest and experience (2). After a few years (either after sophomore year or after college in general) I plan to move to California and see where life takes me (2). Even though I moved over twenty hours away from home I feel as if I have adjusted very easily; I enjoy meeting and speaking with new people and feel comfortable in nearly any setting so being far away from home isn't a huge deal even though I miss my family and friends (2). I tend to become extremely devoted to a task once I begin it and often quit once I get bored and then move on to the next thing which is why I wouldn't want to choose my major or career path at this point in my life (2). In conclusion, I hope to better myself constantly as a person by being open to anything, and to stay on track with my health and grades (2).

His classmates respond with the following statements:

**Frank (2/10/13 at 9:25pm):** How was it being a professional video game player, working for Machinima Inc., and going to high school at the same time (7). I feel like that would be a very large work load for a person to take (4).

**Bill (2/11/13 at 4:13pm):** I was a pretty hardcore gamer and didn't care much about school for Freshman year, simply went to school, played over 5 hours a day (including making videos) and did stuff on the weekends so school took the damage (2).

**Jim (2/12/13 at 1:01am):** That's pretty interesting you get to actually live the part of being a professional gamer (2). There are so many kids as you grow up that say they would prefer to do that as a living but I've never actually heard of someone that actually is (3). Do you still enjoy gaming the same after doing it so often (7)?

**Hyo (2/12/13 at 12:33pm):** Profession gamers sound fantastic, Bill (2). How much did you play games a day (7)? I just cannot imagine how much effort you put in (3). Awesome (7).

**Chen (2/13/13 at 10:42pm):** What interests me most is your life style (7). You have so many experiences (7). Professional video game player is no doubt the most interesting one (4). You have played many sports and you are deciding to move to California (7). You are interested in arts so you go to lots of music festivals (7). Needless to say, you are a dreamer and achiever (7). I can never do what you do (3). I hope you enjoy whatever you are doing because it seems you are always goal-oriented though I cannot understand the logic of these goals (4). Maybe I should have less "why" but more "how" in life (4). Haha... (7)

This is the extent of the interaction between Bill and Frank, though there are opportunities for both of them to develop a conversation about being a professional gamer and the tensions with school. That Bill only responded to Frank (who did not reply to Bill's response) suggests that students either did not take seriously or did not integrate the request to respond to anyone who responds to a post. Such interaction was encouraged in the form of the initial writing prompt and Frank's troubling of what it is

like to balance professional life with school. Thus, while initial uses of listening language appear in the discussion forums here, there was not much evidence of students maintaining interaction.

Jim's response to Bill also provides ample opportunity for someone who is familiar with listening language to respond in ways that open up the discussion for critical exploration of the tensions Frank and Jim have articulated implicitly. Bill does not reply to this or the other two students who also wrote on his discussion forum.

What is clear is that Bill's colleagues provide enough information for him to respond should he accept the assignment's activities and listening language as a viable form of interaction in online spaces. Put differently, beyond just answering questions and ending there, listening language encourages students to pay attention to the moments where identifications are troubled and respond to those moments. Thus, rather than respond directly to the question, an alternative option given the discussions on listening language would have had the students interacting over the course of several exchanges all the while focusing on the tensions that have been named by Frank and Jim.

Hyo and Chen respond to Bill's original post but they are not part of previous insights made by Frank or Jim, both of whom posted earlier than Hyo and Chen. Though it is clear that Hyo and Chen are responding to Bill, it is less the case that they are taking into consideration the other existing voices within the conversation.

Whereas students in the treatment group sometimes engaged each other through questions that were quickly answered or through insights that were not taken up by the original poster, students in the control group often engaged each other through what

might be described as polite encouragement or praise. The following exchange between Deshi and Holly is representative of the types of interaction between students in this forum.

**Deshi (2/17/13 at 1:03pm):** Please read (1)

Whenever my family gets together for a celebration or a reunion, we often talk about our past (2). The older folks, not so much, but us younger member of the family usually get into a long conversation about our days (3,2). We often reminisce, my siblings and nephew, about the days when we lived in the North Saint Paul projects called “Mount Airy Homes” (2). We share our memories of how our lives were (2). But the one that I often remember hearing is of when my nephews and I got in trouble and was punished by my older brother (2). This was the memory he had that he always talked about (3). My two nephews, Allen and Scott, and I were allowed to go and play outside (7). My brother, Peter, was in charge of us (7). For some reason, all of my other siblings and my parents were not home (7). He gave us time to be outside and run around and have fun (7). We knew wherever we were because we knew the terrain of the territory (7). We had played hard that night, but for some reason, I did not want to give up the fact that the fun had to stop (2,4). It can easily be said that my nephews shared the same feelings (2). The sky began to turn dark blue and we still played, not thinking of the consequences (7). My brother called us in, but we were rebels (4). We did not answer (7). He was now, forced to find all three of us in the dimming light of day (7). What seemed like fun to us three was only more work for him (2,4). The

longer he looked, the angrier he became (3). He finally catches us all and was now forced to handle our consequences (4). When we were brought into the house, we already knew what was going to happen (2). Although we were just children, we knew that we were in the wrong (2). We must face our consequences (2). But the way we faced them was scary just thinking about it (2). We were all thrown into the basement (7). The dark abyss was held inside the last door of the house (7). Our punishment was to sit in there for at least ten minutes; thinking about what we had did wrong (7). We all knew what we did (2). Now, we just had to do the time for the crime (2). This was a memorable moment because this is the story that is always told by my nephew (7). It is also significant because this would probably be one of the first times I actually got in trouble (2). After that day, I learned two things (7). Listen to my brother when he wants to be listened (2). And two, never disobey the law (2). I've lived with this motto and by following this motto; I have never had to face any consequences (2).

**Holly (2/17/13 at 2:26pm):** I really liked your use of imagery in this piece (7). Your words were very descriptive, and it made me feel as if I was there with you (2). Despite the fact that you were just a child, it is amazing that you learned such an important life lesson from this experience (3, 4). It shows that you are the type of person that really reflects on your actions in order to learn from your mistakes which is an admirable quality (4)!

**Deshi (2/20/13 at 8:58pm):** Thank you for reading my story (7). Think everyone learns from their mistakes when they are made (7).

What is worth mentioning here is that Deshi's post consisted of 36 lines which prompted Holly's four lines of response. This last statement about the type of character that Deshi's story reveals is coded as a type of troubling. I classify this as troubling in part because the statement is evaluative in nature. It is not necessarily a given or unarguable reading of Deshi's story. Deshi's response is an affirmation of the insights he describes in his original post that Holly mentions in her response to him. Though the prompts for this discussion asked students to respond to each other whenever someone responds to a post, the discussion ended here. The way in which the discussion ends is different than what is typical in the treatment group, however. Holly describes the *way* Deshi wrote his story and then reflects on his character as Holly believes is reflected in the story. Deshi's response is to affirm the platitude both of them share. There is no attempt on either student's part to push at these insights.

The student excerpts highlighted above represent typical interactions within the two groups that comprise this study. In this discussion forum, students in the control group often responded to the way the narrative was written and what that narrative revealed about the author's character. Students in the control group took a different approach. These students asked questions of the author based on his or her narratives. Sometimes these questions were answered and other times they were not. Typically, those who asked questions of the authors first were the ones who received a response.

The treatment and control groups both showed evidence of multiple posters responding only to the primary authors original post rather than to the other voices in the discussions. This last insight was the case for all three discussion forums.

### **Forum Two: Narrative of Influence**

The prompt for this discussion forum reads as follows:

Central Question: How would you describe yourself to others? To what extent does the writing you do reflect who you are as a person? How and to what extent does the writing you do reflect who you are as a person?

There are no word limits in this post, but I am thinking that your responses might be between 200-300 words. Treat that range as a suggestion more than a rule.

After you are done posting your answer to the question above, take some time to respond to 2 different community members. Use the following questions as a way to guide your response: What do you think the post's originator was trying to do here? What assumptions seem to be underneath the author's post?

If someone responds to your work, you are required to respond to that person's comments.

Table 11 shows the frequency of specific elements of listening language that appear through this discussion forum for each group. Unlike the "writing yourself"

discussion, students in the treatment group for this discussion made more statements of disidentification.

Table 11: Frequency Counts of Listening Language in “Writing Influences” Discussion Forum

<b>Listening Language Item</b>	<b>Treatment Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Persuades others to listen	0	0
Announces Identification	135	40
Announces Disidentification	102	31
Troubles an Identification	68	54
Articulates Troubles w/ Listening	0	3
No Code	341	566
Multi-code	6	4
Total Lines	652	695

The following exchange occurs after Duyen’s (a student in the treatment group) post about her grandmother’s influence on her. I select this exchange because it is representative of a longer exchange between an author and those who comment on the original posts. I begin this illustration by presenting Duyen’s original post in-full.

**Duyen (2/15/13 at 11:40am):** Not pretty (6).

Not famous (6).

Always gentle (6).

That is my grandma (6).

Thirteen years of living with my grandma in Vietnam taught me how to live with a positive attitude and pursue a good education (3). My grandma was born during the war time (3).

So, it was hard for her to have an opportunity to go to school (3). In the morning, when other children in the village went to school, my grandma had to spend time working in the rice field for a living. Even though she could not go to school, she still had a desire to learn how to read and write (3). At night, she learned how to read through the kids who could go to school (3).

She used to give candy to them, so they would teach her how to read (3). Hard life at that time forced her to leave her dream of going to school (3). That is the reason why she always encourages me to get a good education, so I can have more opportunities (6).

Being good at school is an important thing, but having a positive attitude is just as important, which is a lesson that my grandma taught me when I was young. She taught me those ethic lessons through the events that I approached in real life (6).

Once time, my grandma and I went together to the farm market (6). When we passed through the cake store, I wanted her to buy me a cake, and she did (6).

Then, we saw a homeless man that was walking toward us with miserable eyes, looking like he was hungry (6). At that time, I was too naive to know how to sympathize with other people (6). At that age, I always thought that everyone in

town had same life as me (2). My grandma asked me to give the cake to the man, saying that he needed it more than me (6). My grandma explained that the man was alone and did not have a place to live like I did (6). That is the first time that I learned how to share my things with other people who have more difficult life than I do (6). My grandma taught me that there are a lot of people who are in poverty and need my help (6).

My grandma was the first teacher that taught me how to do things in an ethical way (6). In addition, she was a person that gave me the most motivation to achieve in education (6). Because of her, I know the importance of a good education (6). With good education, I can succeed in life and have a better chance to help other people who are not as lucky as I am (4).

Maybe not pretty (6).

Maybe not famous (6).

My grandma taught me that a meaningful life is a life that starts with a gentle heart (6).

**Kim (2/15/13 at 3:56pm):** I really enjoyed reading this, Duyen (7). It's great that you've had such a strong and meaningful relationship with your grandma (7). I think a lot of people our age don't take interest in their grandparents, when there are so many important things we can learn from them (4).

**Duyen (2/20/13 at 10:56am):** Thank you for taking your times to comment on my topic (7). I learned a lot of things from my grandma and I am thankful for it (7).

**Mike (2/15/13 at 9:36pm):** Wow I like your post a lot (7). There are not too many people out there can do what you are doing to your grandma (7). It is very important that you have a relationship with the elderly (7)!

**Duyen (2/20/13 at 10:57am):** Thank you for taking your time to comment on my topic (7). I really appreciated it (7).

Another exchange reveals a similar set of responses within this discussion forum. This time Xiang writes about her negative relationship with her father as an influencing force. Below are Xiang's original post responses to her narrative as her reply in return:

**Xiang (2/16/13 at 6:24pm):** I did not like my father, even secretly despised him when I was in middle school (3). He seldom had his personal opinions and just fellow my mother (3). Every time we drove outside for dinner, he was like a robot who was waiting for order (3). He was more like a servant but not a husband in my eyes (3). What is more, when my mother was not satisfied with what he did and cried to him, he was always continue doing his things or simply walked away without any words (3). He was such a quiet man and busy with his business every day, facing to his computer, meeting different people, and dealing with tons of

things (3). I could never imagine what his life would be without his business (7). Thus, I never thought that he would take the money out of his business and invested it in real estate (7). At that time, Chinese people did not have a clear concept of real estate (2). Almost every one lived in a small unit in the apartments (7). My father found that with the development of rural area, there would be an increasing number of people coming to cities (7). Further more, booming private shops would further stimulate the growth of real estate (7). Thus, father took out seventy percent of money and invest it in real estate (7). “Do you imagine that if your intuition was wrong and what to do next” (7)? My mother was crazy about his decision at first (3). “Well,” my father smiled, ”I earned these money from others (7). If my feeling was wrong, we could just regard it that they were back to the original” (7).

I ever thought that a man or woman should be force enough every time, but my father totally changed my perception of the world (4). He is an ordinary and easy going person in daily life, but enterprising in his work (3). He gives me the best definition of “still water run deep” (7).

**Bill (2/18/13 at 6:29pm):** This is incredibly different than all the other responses and it is crazy to me how different everyone’s parents are (3).

**Frank (2/18/13 at 9:05pm):** It is really neat that you wrote something like this (7). You wrote that you don't really like your father, but I get the sense that you have a lot of respect for him (3). Would this be true (7)?

**Xiang (2/18/13 at 11:26pm):** Thank you ~ I can't tell whether or not I like my father (4). I play and talk with my mother more in daily life (7). But to say the truth, if I have something I do not dare tell my mother, I will discuss it with my dad (4). \*^(^o^)\* (7).

The disidentification moves that Bill and Frank make with respect to Xiang's post are different. This difference might be a contributing factor when Xiang considers responding. In Bill's case, the disidentification is a general observation about how Xiang's *post* is different than the others. He then collapses the difference with a general descriptor of everyone's parents being so different. Frank, through his use of second person, responds directly to Xiang and offers an interpretation of Xiang's relationship with her father that is not directly expressed within Xiang's original post. Frank's direct question posed to Xiang also seems to be a factor in getting Xiang to respond to him. I resist stating that directly questioning colleges in discussion forums is a valid way to help increase response rates among students in discussion forums, but there are cases where students directly question each other without receiving responses from their peers. As such, direct questions alone do not seem sufficient for increasing interaction among

students in discussion forums. Nor, would it seem, is simply asserting an insight as Bill has done here.

Given that Bill, Frank, and Xiang have each been exposed to listening language, it is possible to expect that this conversation would have continued to explore the relationships between children and adults. However, the exchanges between these students ends here. As such, the only insight gathered is not that listening language increases the number of interactive moments between students but only that elements of listening language are being used by students. Listening language does provide a framework through which to read these interactions and perhaps a way back into a conversation. As such, teachers might be in a position to ask students to return to their exchanges to either 1) assess the exchanges through the frame of listening language or 2) extend their exchanges with listening language in mind.

The following exchange from the control group represents one of the longest exchanges of any forum discussion as well as one where Stephanie (the original poster) makes sure to comment on everyone's responses. The exchanges here represent a typical way in which students in the control group responded to each other—they politely affirmed the assertions of the original author. An appropriate summary of Stephanie's story is that her father rejected her requests with the statement "Life's not fair."

**Stephanie (2/20/13 at 6:11pm):** The person or people that have influenced me the most on how I perceive the world are definitely my family (7). My parents have had a big role in determining my views but also my brothers (7). My parents have always taught me that I can do anything I want to if I work hard and I should

never settle for something because that would limit what I am capable of (4). I think back though and always remember looking up to my older brothers (4). From them and their experiences I have learned so many things and they have helped shape the person I am today (7). A story that sticks out to me and how I perceive the world and the obstacles and opportunities that come along with it is something my dad has always said, "Life's not fair," which is a pretty simple statement for such a complex meaning (7). The story that I am thinking of is sort of a story within a story (7). So when I was younger I really wanted to get a puppy (7).

We already had one dog already but I wanted another one so bad (7). I looked up all of this information and made a schedule on when I would take care of it etc. (7). I asked my parents repeatedly and they said no every time (7). I asked them why and my dad replied usually with a grin because "Life's not fair" (7). Then one night we were sitting in the living room and he started to tell me a story of when my brothers were younger (7). Anyway the summary of that story is when my brother was about ten years old he swore while my family was visiting a friend's home (7). My parents heard and they were furious, naturally (4). So they went downstairs and got my brothers and left and went home (7). My dad then began to sort of scold my brothers (7). One of my brothers asked my dad but you swear sometimes so why can't I (7)?

My dad said because "Life's not fair" sometimes (7). As my dad told me this story it all began to make sense (7). Even though I really wanted a puppy and

technically there wasn't anything stopping me from getting one I couldn't get one because "Life's not fair" (7). Now I see that my parents were trying to teach me a lesson and that lesson now has applied to many things in my life (7).

Even though the lesson seems in a way negative it had a positive influence on me because I view that if something happens and it doesn't go my way then I say "Life's not fair" and I move on (5).

Instead of dwelling on the negative and on the past it helps me move to maybe the other opportunities I could have that I might otherwise not have gotten (7). So basically what I am trying to say is "Life's Not Fair" and that's okay with me (7).

**Natalie (2/20/13 at 9:01pm):** I really like that you brought attention to the whole “life’s not fair” line that I am pretty sure all parents use at one point or another (7). You took it a lot better than me, though (3). You understood that it was for the best while I just always saw my parents as selfish and withhold intentionally (3). And I can relate to the dog part (2)! My sisters and I always wanted one so bad and my dad always said he was allergic (7). Then he met his wife and she had a dog, and now we have two (7). Life’s just really not fair sometimes (7). [smile emoji] (7).

**Stephanie (2/20/13 at 9:10pm):** Haha it really isn't (7). Especially when we are kids, we don't quite understand what are parents are trying to do (7). I'm glad you finally got to have dogs too (7)! They are the best (7). [thumbs up emoji] 7

**Nick (2/21/13 at 12:33am):** I love how three little words [life's not fair] have had such an impact on your world view (7). Life isn't fair and the fact that you've come to accept that it really great (7).

**Stephanie (2/21/12 at 1:05am):** Well thanks (7)! I just tried to turn what some may see as three negative words into something positive (7)!

**Dillon (2/21/13 at 7:46pm):** When I was in middle school my 2 young siblings and I wanted to have a dog so badly (7). We did the same thing you did, we made a care schedule and promised to do all the work (7). For years my parents said no for the exact same reason "Life's not fair" (7). It's good that you took it so well (2). We definitely didn't (3).

**Stephanie (2/22/13 at 12:34am):** I feel like all parents say no to a puppy for a while (7). It sucks when you are younger (7)! Also I think it's cool in a way our parents both said "Life's not fair" for a reason why to say no (2).

**Winston (2/22/13 at 1:13pm):** I admire how you were able to understand and get over why you were not able to get a puppy (7). I probably would not have been able to do it (3).

**Stephanie (2/24/13 at 9:04pm):** Thanks (7)! I am happy that I was able to learn from this experience as well because it has really helped me in other experiences (7)!

Students' tacit agreement with Stephanie's original value statement—life's not fair—does not produce further insight or development. Rather, each student with the exception of Natalie responds to Stephanie with a confirming story or assertion of the validity of her assertion. Natalie, on the other hand, has an alternative understanding of this platitude that does not receive further investigation by the students. In fact, though the discussion appears to be a multi-vocal exchange, it is, in actuality, a series of atomized back and forths between Stephanie and each student. Students with a sophisticated understanding of listening language might have noticed the difference in understanding between Natalie and Stephanie with respect to the idea that life is not fair. Where as Natalie sees the value as part of “selfish and withholding” parents, Stephanie understands it to be a life lesson that motivates her to work harder. That this distinction happens early in the exchanges suggests that other participants in the conversation might have taken up these differences. As the conversation played out, however, the students

did not speak with each other in this forum and thus missed the chance to explore the differences here.

There was similar lack of uptake in the treatment group's discussion of their influences.

**Mike (2/12/13 at 8:35pm):** My mom is definitely a person that has most influenced how I perceived the world (7). I was luckily born in a wonderful family (2). Let's be honest (5)! I was a prince when I was at home with my parents in Vietnam (2). I didn't have to do anything in the house (2). Everything was taken care of by either my mom or my aunt (3). Everything was really easy in my eyes at that time (2). I lived in that fabulous life for 15 years (2). I know it's hard to imagine this (4). I didn't even know how to use a knife when I was 15 (2). Everything completely changed when I turned 16 (7). I got scholarship for a year at the public school in Chicago (2). My parents agreed for me to study abroad (3). They were absolutely worried about how I could survive in a different country (3). I didn't know how horrible a real life is (2). I used to think everything was simple (2). That was really wrong (4). When I first came here, I was totally shocked (3). I had to handle everything by myself (2). My parents were not there to take care of me (7). I was so depressed because it was not easy to deal with everything by my side (2). At that moment, my mom called me and she told me that she knew this day would come (7). She told me that it was time for me to see the real life (3). She told me that life is not a red carpet that I could easily walk through it (3). Life is a picture with various colors and characters in it (7). It took

me a while to understand what my mom said (2). Even though she was there, she still called me everyday to see how everything was (7). She lifted me up when I failed and encouraged me when I hesitated to do something (3). She helped me a little bit everyday until one day I can confidently decide everything by myself (2). Living by myself has been such a wonderful journey (7). I have grown up so much (2). My mom helped me understand how to behave and how to survive in the real world (3). It is really important because she won't be by my side all the time (4). That day will come eventually, the day that I have to live in my own life (4). I think my mom has played a major role in my life (7).

**Jim (2/13/13 at 10:33pm):** I agree with you in the impact that a mother can have on their child (2). My mother had a similar impact on me as I grew up (2). Although it is very different for you now that you are on your own (3). I still live very close to my mother so it is harder for me to understand your situation (4).

**Mike (2/15/13 at 9:34pm):** Thanks for commenting on my post!!! (7)

**Kim (2/15/13 at 4:00pm):** I'm very impressed with you coming here and learning to live on your own at 16 (4)! Even this year, coming to college not far from my home, it was definitely an adjustment (4). It must be difficult not seeing your mother, who was clearly a major influence on your life (4). I'm curious, how often do you get to see her (7)?

**Mike (2/15/13 at 9:34pm):** I went back to Vietnam twice and I will go back this Christmas!! (7) I can't wait!!! (7)

I reference Mike and the exchanges after his original post in the “Writing Influences” forum to show that opportunities to respond to the identifications or troubling identifications of others did present themselves in both groups. Both groups often left these moments unexplored and instead responded with statements that politely affirmed what was being said or showed that they acknowledged the presence of other ideas.

### **Forum Three: Narrative of Perception**

The prompt for this discussion forum reads as follows:

Central Question: What influences how and what you write? How might we explore the influences working on us when we write?

There are no word limits in this post, but I am thinking that your responses might be between 200-300 words. Treat that range as a suggestion more than a rule.

After you are done posting your answer to the question above, take some time to respond to 2 different community members. Use the following questions as a way to guide your response: What do you think the post’s originator was trying to do here? What assumptions seem to be underneath the author’s post?

If someone responds to your work, you are required to respond to that person’s comments.

For this forum that focused more directly on the way difference plays out in an exchange, it was expected that students in the treatment group would trouble either their own or another person’s identifications. Troubling identifications is a way of creating a productive tension or resolution in the face of tensions. Table 12 shows the frequencies of the elements of listening language between the two groups.

Table 12: Frequency Counts of Listening Language in “Writing Perception” Discussion Forum

<b>Listening Language Item</b>	<b>Treatment Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Persuades others to listen	0	1
Announces Identification	116	44
Announces Disidentification	31	27
Troubles an Identification	73	122
Articulates Troubles w/ Listening	8	4
No Code	293	299
Multi-code	3	3
Total Lines	524	499

The students in the treatment group typically deferred to each other without conflict or clash. The same can be said of the control group. However, one instance out of the several interactions in the third discussion forum was challenged. The following

exchange shows a direct clash of ideas and perceptions among students in the treatment group and thus has potential for a number of different interactions.

**Kevin (2/15/13 at 10:22pm):** I like to perceive myself as a pretty open-minded and laid back kind of guy with a good sense of humor (2). For the most part I am an introvert and keep most of my emotions to myself, or at least, any emotions I display aren't usually what I'm feeling (2). I usually don't react to harshly to anything, and I try to get a long with most people (2). Unfortunately, I am also a really sarcastic guy, and this has gotten me into more trouble than I care to admit (2). A lot of people have told me that before they met me they thought I was "kinda a douche" or something of the sort, and this is mainly because I get a little too subtle with my sarcasm (3). For the most part, whenever I joke about any sensitive subject I try to make it obvious that I am just joking, but it still manages to fly over some people's heads (4). I like to think that I am a pretty nice guy, and once people actually start to talk to me they realize I like to joke around (2). So, this story I am going to tell might make me out to look like I'm "kinda a douche" but I swear that I'm a pretty down to earth guy, nice guy (5). It all started at some party, a girl my friends and I were talking to happened to make an extremely absurd statement that we all thought was outrageous (3). I don't remember exactly what she said, but naturally the first thing I said was "Yeah, then I don't believe the Holocaust ever happened" (7). A touchy subject, I know (5). It was to show how ridiculous her last statement was, and yet, it went right over her head (4). My

friends thought that this was so funny that they went with it, and spent the next 10 minutes convincing this poor girl that I was a firm believer the Holocaust never happened (7). This girl thought that I was the root of all evil, and I knew I was in trouble when she pulled her 100% Jewish friend into the conversation (3).

Immediately I tried to explain the sarcasm behind the statement but alas, he wasn't having any of it (4). Before things got out of hand we left the party, and now there are two people on this campus that think I am "kinda a douche" (4). I apologize (7). And for the record, my grandparents were half Jewish, and I know the Holocaust is no joking matter (5).

**Sally (2/17/13 at 12:50pm):** How describes clash (7) The Holocaust is problemby not something you should joke about, but I know what you mean when you kind of just naturally said it (4). It is clear you feel bad about it now and appologized for it (7). I don't think you're "kinda a douche" (2).

**Stephen (2/17/13 at 7:01pm):** Kevin, I most definitely understand where your coming from (2). I am also a very sarcastic person and its rough dealing with people who can't comprehend how fabulous it really is (2). I don't think "your kinda a douche" (2).

**Jim (2/18/13 at 12: 26pm):** Kevin, (7) I think this was extremely poor use of sarcasm and I wouldn't necessarily say that this was an appropriate time for

sarcasm either (4). A party is a time for everyone to somewhat kick back and relax, not get confused about individuals, who they hardly know, joking about the Holocaust (4). I understand you were just going for humor so it is harmless, but that is just something to think about (2, 4). Sarcasm can be a good think to ease tension at times (7).

This exchange represents a unique moment where two students' perspectives clashed. Jim has clearly taken a contrary stance to Kevin's use of sarcasm. However, neither Kevin, Sally, nor Stephen respond to Jim's critiques of Kevin's use of sarcasm. Jim's response to Kevin centers on the *use* of sarcasm rather than the ways Kevin attempts to frame himself against the perception that some might think he is "kinda a douche." Kevin's indication of his grandparents as "half Jewish" and his statement that the "Holocaust is no joking matter" conflict with the plot of the story. It could be expected that students who are attempting to interact with listening language in mind would pick up on these ideas and respond to them in the discussion. Kevin and Jim present a clear clash of ideas, but rather than engage the distinction through flaming or a back and forth exchange, the idea is dropped. Several students picked up on this post in their narrative analysis assignment as a key moment, but during the forum phase of the unit, the tension was dropped. That the treatment students were encouraged to speak to each other across differences and in ways that were articulated in the listening inventory suggests that the ways in which students integrated the ideas of the listening inventory were minimal at best.

Whereas clash was apparent in some of the treatment discussions on differing perceptions, affirmation and acceptance were often the case during similar discussion in the control group.

**Winston (2/25/13 at 2:16am):** “When I first saw you I was so scared.” (7) It is sad to say that I have heard those words countless times (7). I am usually referred to as the big scary black guy until people get to know me and then all of a sudden I am known as nice (4). Even though I may be known as nice it is not hard to sense the big scary black guy expectations (4). I remember one day my friend had lost her phone the previous night and she wanted to get a group of people together to go get it from the house she was at (7). I was obviously busy but the group kept on pushing me to go because I could intimidate people (4). I do not even like to talk in class, what frightening thing could I act out to some random guy (4). But they knew that (7). They knew that I would be the last person to be assertive, yet they still thought it would be to their advantage to have me there as that big scary black guy (3). The person who found the phone eventually contacted my friend and gave her phone back (7). I think I was happier about not having to go than I was about her getting the phone back though (7). We read something in class that had two significant parts that really related to me (7). I forgot who wrote them but they were both from the same essay (7). The first was about a large man who looked like he could be a football player who almost cried because of the looks and judgment he felt he was getting from the author (7). The second was a group of black kids who yelled something like, “you don’t have to be afraid of us.” (7) I

have not almost cried, and I do not yell at random people, but I know exactly how they felt (2). I do not try to give anyone a reason to be afraid of me but I have come to a point where I have accepted that people will judge me that way (4). I guess I can hope that one day I will not be viewed as that big scary black guy (7).

**Mitch (2/25/14 at 1:20pm):** I can sympathize with this story because i have a few black friends who are always viewed as a thug by people who meet them only once (2). Thank you for having the courage to say something about this racial stereotype (7).

**Dillon (2/25/13 at 7:55pm):** “Big scary black guy is a really shitty stereotype (4). A friend of mine from high school had the exact same thing happen to him (7). He rarely spoke, but is definitely the nicest guy i’ve ever met (7)! Although I am not a big and am practically albino, I can relate to this post (3, 2). I have had a few people tell me that they thought I was a scary guy (3). Like you, I am definitely not a scary person at all (4)!

Mitch and Dillon’s responses to Winston’s post are interesting in the way they use their identifications to express sympathy with Winston. Mitch articulates his sympathy directly while using the experiences of his black friends to justify the connection he feels with Winston. Dillon, on the other hand, begins his response by calling the “big scary black guy” stereotype “shitty.” His troubling of the identification placed on Winston

focuses his response on a social issue (racial stereotypes) before moving on to the personal ways Dillon has had to deal with this stereotype as a white man.

### **Assessing the Use of Online Discussion Forums**

What, then, about asynchronous discussion forums as a pedagogical approach to online interaction? I am resistant to make the claim that asynchronous discussion forums should be removed as a pedagogical practice. Largely, such practices get students writing, and as the College Composition and Communication Committee's (2011) report on best practices for online writing instruction finds, students do find value in these discussion forums. This study suggests at least two reasons beyond the 4C's findings that should encourage us to keep asynchronous discussion forums. First, they can function as preparatory writing exercises. The common unit asked students to return to discussion forums as data used in the final narrative analysis. Such activities cannot be undertaken without forums. In this way, discussion forums become rich sources of data for students to build credible claims about the way communities use writing. From this internal, classroom exercise, students in first-year writing classes can use their own discussion forums as introductions to empirical research methods.

Second, this study suggests that listening language is a skill that students and teachers can develop. Discussion forums can function as sites for developing this form of interaction. However, listening language as a writing practice will not develop on its own. It is clear that the deliberate shaping of discussion forums beyond general commands to "respond to those who respond to you" are necessary. Helping student focus their responses from general statements of affirmation and support would go a long way in

fleshing out the ways in which these discussions are useful for classroom learning outcomes. Further study is needed, however, with respect to how forums can best be shaped to serve these needs. In Chapter Five, I gesture at how rhetoric and composition teachers might be able to develop listening language practices in first-year and upper-level writing courses.

Third, that students' responses looked different from forum to forum is an important finding. It is not just that they were asked to do different things, but that what they were asked to do resulted in different uses of listening language, that is important for how listening language might function in forum discussions and interaction. If we want students to focus on troubling identifications and challenging assumptions, it will be helpful for writing teachers to prompt students to write about moments of perception. In the following section, I turn my attention to assessing the interactions among students in a virtual peer review setting. I find that virtual peer review provides a different opportunity for students to interact and, given the task-specific goals of peer review, changes the way this interaction appears.

### **Results of Virtual Peer Review**

The tasks for virtual peer review for students in both groups was written as follows:

Before reviewing your peer's work, please familiarize yourself with Breuch's "Peer Review Tutorial" (see Appendix G).

Please post your complete draft to this forum by (insert date students should post their drafts). To post your draft, please click “Add New Discussion Topic” and then upload your assignment. Make sure your subject is “NAME’s draft of Narrative Analysis” and don’t forget to leave a note for your reviewer regarding what you would like help with specifically.

Once you and your peer have posted your drafts, please read the draft, and use the “track changes” feature of MS Word to insert comments, questions, and suggestions throughout the draft. At the end of the draft, write a response no less than 300 words in which you summarize things you have noticed about the draft.

When you have finished your “track changes” comments and your 300-word response, save your document by adding your initials to the file name and post it as an attachment to the message the student author posted in the Peer Review forum.

As with the discussion forum sections, I show the frequency counts (Table 13) of the elements of listening language for each group’s virtual peer review sessions.

Following a reading of this chart, I turn my attention to representative moments in peer review from each group. By highlighting particular moments within virtual peer reviews, I hope to describe the way students interact when engaging in review tasks. Before I move on to the results of this section, one thing warrants attention. There are four locations where writing took place in virtual peer reviews: discussion forums, Tracked

Changes within the text under review, embedded comments, and end notes to authors. I only considered text written in the discussion forums, embedded comments, and end notes to authors for this analysis. Tracked Changes features, when used by students, were almost entirely focused on grammar and mechanics or those moments where edits to the text were necessary. This use of Track Changes is in keeping with the peer review tutorial document provided to the students (see Appendix G).

**Table 13:** Frequency Counts of Elements of Listening Language in Virtual Peer Review

<b>Listening Language Item</b>	<b>Treatment Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Persuades others to listen	14	28
Announces Identification	15	13
Announces Disidentification	16	0
Troubles an Identification	14	9
Articulates Troubles with Listening	35	17
No Code	475	1,1038
Multi-code	0	0
Total Lines	563	1,104 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Students in the treatment group reviewed one other paper whereas students in the control group each reviewed two papers. This explains the 2:1 total line ratio.

Analysis of Table 12 suggests that exposure to listening language did not change the way students interacted with each other when conducting virtual peer reviews. Had listening language been an impacting variable on student interactions during virtual peer

review, it would be expected that students would have used elements of listening language than they did. I would like to offer several reasons why this might be the case. First, it does appear to be the case that students in the treatment group use the elements of listening language found in Table 12 more frequently than those in the control group. With respect to articulating the troubles that others may have with listening, students in the treatment group used this element of listening language 6% of the time whereas control group students used it 1.5% of the time. This finding justifies further exploration of why this might be the case.

Though it may appear that there is something about the context of virtual peer review that prompted students to persuade each other to listen more than happened during online discussion forums, I suggest that these differences might be explained with the fact that students were asked to focus their peer's attention to areas with which the authors needed help. The peer review description explicitly reminded students to "leave a note for [their reviewers] regarding what you would like help with specifically." As such, providing a guiding framework for how reviewers should engage their drafts cannot be attributed to exposure to listening language, though this is a move that those familiar with listening language might be expected to execute.

Another explanation for the lack of distinction between the treatment and control groups can be found in the complex cognitive tasks students in the treatment group were asked to do. In addition to assessing and evaluating a peer's writing as it relates to what the reviewer understood the assignment to be, reviewers in the treatment group were also asked to refer back to and use the concepts created in the listening inventory. Processing

both the complexities of peer review *and* the listening inventory in a short time frame might have encouraged students to default to assessing their peer's work rather than trying to interact with the work in the new ways that the listening inventory suggests.

Though the impact of listening language on student interactions in virtual peer reviews during this study cannot be ascertained, I would like to spend some time on how the context of virtual peer review might influence listening language. In both groups, but nearly four times as frequently in the treatment group, students used qualifying and hedging language while interacting with peers. Such hedges and qualifications rarely showed up during the online discussion forums. Before I show a virtual peer review exchange that highlights students articulating troubles others might have with their ideas, I want to provide a typical interaction in virtual peer reviews during this study. In this case, Jillian is reviewing Sally's draft.

**Jillian (Embedded Comments):** Try to keep it to either we or you as opposed to mixing both (7). Be a little more consistent with your tenses Try and make a better transition to this paragraph (7). Re-word this sentence, it's a little long and confusing (7). Expand on this idea a little (7). Break up the sentence a little more so it isn't a run on (7). \*In the beginning of their replies (7). Maybe end with a different sentence that concludes the whole essay more as a whole (7).

**Jillian (End Comments):** Overall I think you did a good job with this essay. I like all of the things that you talked about and how you took what you saw and made sense of it as much as you could. I like your introduction with how it's a

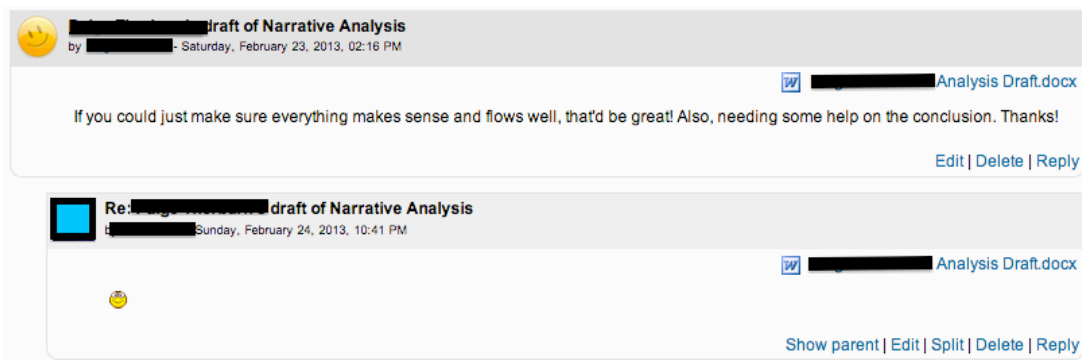
little broader and how you talked about the class more as a whole, then you went more into depth with various examples. I would say however, to try and work on some of your transitions to the next paragraph and try and mention what you are going to talk about in the next paragraph instead of completely changing the topic. Also, I would try and work on some of your sentence structures. Some of the sentences are a little long and confusing with your wording. So try and re arrange some of those. When speaking about the class I would recommend to try and be consistent with how you refer to them as. In some cases you refer to them as “you” and sometimes you say “we” and sometimes “them”. Try and be consistent with one word. Lastly, I like what you talked about in your conclusion, but maybe try and extend it out a little more and touch a little more on why you were comfortable with the forum and how comfortable you think your classmates were with it.

Good paper though, I enjoyed reading it!

Each sentence in Jillian’s review of Sally is “no code.” Though it might be the case that Jillian’s comments contribute to the successful revision of Sally’s paper, Jillian’s comments are critiques and commands. It appears that as if Jillian has ignored the suggestions on the virtual peer review handout to provide comments with reasons. Rather than create spaces for potential exchange, Jillian’s comments function to hinder further discussion about how Sally’s writing functions rhetorically. I suggest that when students execute the element of listening language that acknowledges troubles with listening, they are in a better position to create spaces of negotiation.

The following is a complete exchange between Kim and Sally from the treatment group that includes an articulation of a moment that might challenge an author's ability to listen to the reviewer's comments. The text within the parentheses indicates the location. *Figure 3* is a visual display of the peer review *forum* exchanges between Kim (author) and Sally (reviewer).

*Figure 3: Peer Review Forum*



**Kim (Forum Notes):** If you could just make sure everything makes sense and flows well, that'd be great! (1) Also, needing some help on the conclusion (7). Thanks! (7)

**Sally (Forum Notes):** [smile emoji] (7)

**Kim (In-text End Notes):** (7) Thanks for editing, Sally (7)! It's a pretty rough draft so feel free to do whatever you need... and if you have any ideas for a conclusion, I'm kind stuck (1, 2). That's always the hardest part hahah [smile emoji] (7).

**Sally (Embedded Comments):** The concept of writing or a greater understanding of the concept of the forums (7)? Would you like to have the opportunity to do this with the people in your life (7)? Or other people in general have the opportunity to do this (7). This is just a little unclear to me (3). This word to me sounds better but I am not sure which one is grammatically correct (7). I'm not sure about this word, but I wanted to avoid using home twice in a sentence (7). I really like this word you chose (7)! J(7) This section is a little confusing to me, I'm not 100% sure what you are trying to say (3).

**Sally (End Comments):** Need more of a conclusion here... ?? (7) –I think that you have great ideas just some parts were a little hard to understand (7). I tried to make it make more sense and I hope it makes sense to you (7). I really like all of your ideas and how you set it up (7)! I think you chose really great quotes and examples from the forum (7). You didn't use too much or too little just enough to prove a point (7). I am not the best writer, but I attempted to fix what I could and make comments when I was confused (5). Feel free to not use some of my ideas if you do not like them (5). It will defiantly not hurt my feelings (5). It is your paper so do what you this sounds best for you (5). I tried to switch up the words when I noticed you used them a few times in the same paragraph (7). Also I don't like to use and but at the beginning of sentences so I also tried to remove them but if you like them there it is okay with me (7)!! J (7) It's no big deal it's just me (5). Overall your writing was very good (7)! I don't know what you were talking

about when you said you couldn't write (3)! You have so many great ideas and I thought you put them together well (7). I'll just say it once again, you can defiantly get rid of anything you don't agree with (5)! I'm not the best writer or very good at making my own writing sound great (3)!

See you Wednesday (7)!

--Sally (7)

While one reading of these moments is that Sally is experiencing anxiety about being able to assess Kim's work, I'd suggest that listening language provides another reading of this moment. If virtual peer review can function as a way to negotiate meaning, then what appears to be moments of anxiety could just as easily be understood as moments where Sally is leaving interpretation of meaning open. This could be a moment in Sally's exchange with Kim that suggests further interaction if we treat (virtual) peer review as more than a one-stop exchange between students. If we treat this text as worthy of analysis and as a reflection of two writers attempting to negotiate meaning, it might be possible to have Sally and Kim focus on *why* Sally felt the need to hedge when she did and why she did. I expand upon how listening language as a concept might ask us to review peer review in ways that move from students critiquing each other to students exploring how to shape peer review so that both author and reviewer can interact with each other as they negotiate meaning.

The readings of Jillian and Sally's virtual peer review highlight differences in the ways that these two students interact with their peer. I suggest that listening language provides an opportunity for different interpretations regarding the way students interact

with each other during peer review. Listening language also suggests a reading of how students persuade each other to listen during virtual peer reviews.

Unlike the other writing activities, students in both groups made moves to shape how others will receive their texts. I code such moves as an attempt to persuade others to listen to authors in particular ways. For example, in her note to her peer reviewer, Tina, a student in the treatment group, wrote “I would like your honest opinion. BE BRUTAL PLEASE! it only helps hope you guys like it [smile emoji].” Each of these statements is a move that attempts to frame how reviewers should experience the text. Of course, what Tina means by “BRUTAL” or how she understands an “honest opinion” is left unexplored. At this point in the unit, it would have been perfectly reasonable for students who accepted listening language as a legitimate form of interaction to inquire about the meaning of “BRUTAL” and “honest opinion.” However, her reviewers did not explore these ideas further.

Other examples of students attempting to shape how reviews receive their work focused on central concerns that students had about their own work. For example, Kim provided the following note to her peer reviewers: “If you could just make sure everything makes sense and flows well, that’d be great!” Julie made a similar move when she wrote, “I have a lot of write yet, but anything you notice, please make a note of it.” These statements are both coded as an attempt to shape the way reviewers *enter* the review process and thus part of an entrance strategy for interaction. The extent to which their reviewers took up their suggestions is an important area for further analysis and

should be a part of an expansive peer review process that asks students to review virtual peer review before subsequent peer review sessions.

The data shows that the relatively high number of statements where students are attempting to shape the way reviewers read their work (1 code) suggests that there was an ambiguity about how interaction might take place during virtual peer review. This ambiguity exists despite having clear directives for how to approach the review process. Though students were given clear directives, the frequency with which students felt the need to shape how others received their work suggests an ambiguity in the interaction among author and reviewer. It is also the case that though many students did attempt to direct how reviewers read their work, there were instances of authors who did not provide such guidance to their reviewers. Such approaches were often short and direct as when Terry writes, “Draft for Mike to review!”

That the treatment did not seem to impact the frequency with which students in the treatment group used listening language in their interactions during virtual peer review, I have attempted to show how listening language invites different understandings of these interactions. Such understandings set up different executions for virtual peer review than the typical one-shot exchange of ideas. In Chapter Six, I turn my attention to how virtual peer review can be shaped to help students understand the complex process of meaning negotiation and how the elements of listening language may aid in that interaction. Now, I turn my attention to the results of the paper-level analysis of a sample of students’ narrative analysis assignments.

## **Results of Narrative Analysis**

Students were instructed to do the following for the narrative analysis assignment: Using the texts we've created in forums 1-3, we will write a 4-5 page analysis of a moment or moments in the way our class has used narratives and responses to interact with each other (for full description see **Appendix D**).

Recall that the analysis undertaken here is based upon Holmes's (1997) work on the discursive features of discussion sections within published, social science research articles. This section presents the results of a whole paper analysis of six sample papers: three from the treatment and control groups. It is not my intention to generalize beyond the findings gathered from these sample papers. However, it is useful to provide an analysis of how students may or may not integrate listening language within extended writing tasks. It should be noted from the start that these papers no longer had students interacting with each other directly as they were during the online discussion forums and virtual peer review sessions. Instead, they are interacting with the ideas that have been written in previous interactions in order to make assertions about the classroom community. Alternatively, students might have envisioned these papers being written for a captive audience of the teachers, a fact that could have influenced the way they entered the conversations. In any case, this section of my analysis is designed to describe what, if any, relationship there is between the elements of listening language in a single, revised paper. This analysis explores the following questions:

1. Are there differences between sampled papers from the treatment and control groups with respect to the presence of listening language?
2. If differences are present, how can these differences be described?

3. If there are not differences between groups, what are possible reasons for this?

Unlike the analysis for the discussion forums and virtual peer reviews, the analysis undertaken with the narrative analysis assignment is designed to search for patterns within sections of a short assignment. Appendix H has the complete narrative analysis assignment description, but the point of the assignment was for students to return to the three online discussion forums and make arguments about the way the classroom community used narrative. They were to draw connections and points of distinction among classroom community members and draw conclusions based on these insights. Many students from the treatment group picked up on the use of family and culture as dominant influences on them and their colleagues. Several from this group also wrote about the differences between native English speakers and their non-native English speaking colleagues. In the control group, many students turned their attention to critiques of the activities that comprised the common unit and the distinctions between face-to-face interaction and interacting in online discussion forums.

Recall that listening language has three primary moves (entrance, actual, and exit) and six categories that correspond to each of these moves. Students attempting to use listening language in these papers would begin their papers with a justification or a framing for how the reader might experience the ensuing argument. These students would pay attention to the identifications, disidentifications, troubled identifications, and moments that would be difficult to maintain a listening posture. We could also expect authors to confront intellectual impasses by possibly describing the ideologies animating

these impasses. Table 14 shows the relationship between the primary moves, the sentence types, and the numerical code.

**Table 14:** Listening Language: Moves, Categories, and Numerical Codes

<b>Move</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Code</b>
Entrance	Persuades others to listen	1
Actual	Announces an identification	2
	Asserts disidentification	3
	Troubles an identification	4
	Acknowledges troubles with listening	5
Exit	Provides options for overcoming barriers to listening	6a
	Identifies troubling ideologies	6b
	Attempts to remove troubling ideologic	6c
Other	No code	7

Table 15 below shows the coding strings of three randomly chosen papers from the treatment group. Code strings are helpful, visual data points to show how students move into and out of the various elements of listening language, if and when listening language is present. For example, code string motifs—smaller patterns within a given code string and across sampled papers—provide insight into the relations between the elements of listening language. If a code string motif of 2-4 or 7-5 frequently appears, then what this tells researchers is that students tend to trouble identifications following an assertion of an identification or that students tend to acknowledge the trouble others might have with listening following statements that receive a “no code” designation. The concept of the code string motif is an original contribution to analysis. However, no code

string motifs were present to justify deep exploration of this analytical perspective. This may be due to the small sample size. The code strings are further grouped by paragraph.

**Table 15:** Code Strings of Treatment Group’s Narrative Analysis

<b>Paper</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Coding String</b>
<b>Bill</b>	“Topic #1 Final Draft”	I7-7-7-7-7-4-2 “2”-“2” 3-7-7-7-7-7 7-7-2/3-3-4-3-2 “7”-“7” 7-4-7-“3”-“7” 7-3-3/2-5-4-7 C7-7-4-7-“2”-7-2-2-7-7-7-7
<b>Stephen</b>	“Influential Themes: Family and Culture”	I7-7-7-7 7-7-2-7-7-7-7-7-7  “2”-“3”-“3”-“2”-“7” * 7-7-7-7-7  “7”-“7”-“5”/“2”-7-7-7-5/7-7 7-2-7-3-7-4-7-7-7-7-7 “7”-“7”-7-4-7 4-2-2-7-7-7-7-7 C7-7-7
<b>Bao</b>	“Narrative Analysis”	I7-7 7-3-3-7-2-3/2-7-4-7-2 7-7-7-7 7-7-7-7-7 7-2-5 7-7-4-4-4 3-2-4-4 7-2-7-5-7-7-4 7-7-5-7-4 7-7-7 7-7-7 7-7-7-7-7-7-7 C7-4-“7”-“7”-7

I = Introductory paragraph; | = paragraph break; “#” = quoted statement; C = Concluding paragraph; \* = paragraph presents coding challenges that are explained below.

The coding strings largely support what might be expected of students who received early and brief exposure to listening language as a practice of interaction. That is, the code strings demonstrate that students did not feel the need to persuade others to listen to what they were writing. The introductory paragraphs of the papers sampled showed some evidence of articulating identifications and evidence of troubling identifications. Frequency counts of the presence of listening language at the sentence

level showed that treatment papers collectively included 50 statements that can be coded as listening language whereas control papers showed 25 statements. These elements appeared throughout the entire set of papers for each group. To make more sense of code strings and their usefulness, I draw upon Stephen's introductory paragraph. Table 14 suggests that Stephen's introduction paragraph in his narrative analysis consisted of four statements that were not based in the elements of listening language.

**Stephen's Introduction:** While trying to find a common theme within the forums, the one that kept popping into my mind was the theme of family and culture (7). In everyone's post about influences, all but one mentioned the presence of a family member as being an influence albeit good or bad (7). I thought the theme of family was a little too broad so I delved deeper into the subject matter (7). I looked at what the influences were made on the majority of people as well as the role that culture played in the forums (7).

By looking at the code strings of Stephen's introductory paragraph (7-7-7-7) it becomes clearer that the entrance move of setting a listening context by persuading readers to engage in a genuine attempt to understand the coming ideas is absent. When we compare Stephen's code string to the sample papers from Bill and Bao, the other papers sampled from the treatment group, it is clear that there is no code string patterned between these papers.

I do not mean to suggest that listening language suggests or requires uniformity of expression of ideas. That is, there is no ideal, as of this study, code string or series of code motifs that would lead analysts to proclaim "Ah, *this* is how it should be done!"

Rather, code strings and motifs as an analytical lens are useful for drawing comparisons between texts. That no code string patterns or meaningful code motifs emerged from the analysis in this study does not mean that we cannot draw meaningful results from looking at entire papers. The process of looking for patterns resulted in useful findings about students’ uses of listening language in this assignment.

**Analysis of Control Group’s Narrative Analysis**

Generally speaking, these sample papers did not use elements of listening language throughout their analyses. In what follows I focus on those moments where elements of listening language did appear and those moments where it seems as if students in these papers did write a statement that could be coded as an element of listening language but upon closer inspection was given a “no code” designation.

The paper analysis for the sample papers of the control group is noticeably distinct from those sample papers in the treatment group (see Table 16). Examining the code strings shows that students did not use listening language nearly as much as treatment students.

**Table 16:** Code Strings of Control Group’s Narrative Analysis

<b>Paper</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Coding String</b>
<b>Henry</b>	“Narrative Analysis”	I7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7 7-7-7-7-7 7-7-2-7-7-7-7-7 2-2-7 7-7-7-2-7-5 2-7-7 7-7-7 7-2-2-2-2-5-2 7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7 7-7-7-7-7 7-7-7-7 2-5-7-7 7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7 C7-7-7
<b>Dillon</b>	“Online Generation”	I7-7-7-2-5 2-7-2-4 7-7-7-7-7 2-4-7-7-2 7-7-7 7-7-



focusing on developing or engaging the identifications he has made with Stephanie. The paragraph following this one reads as follows:

It happened to me was when we were skiing in Sweden (7). One day my dad decides that it would be a good idea to try one of the toughest slopes at the mountain, he decided to do this even though it was closed off due to high avalanche risk (7). He is a pretty experienced skier so he handled it pretty well (7). Now I was around 17 years old and I have been skiing for most of my life so I thought that if he could do it then I could as well (2). I decided that I didn't want to try the same slope he did, but I did try a slope that was similar and closed off as well (7). So now you are expecting this huge wipeout, but no, I made it down without to much of a hassle (7). I remember telling my dad that I had taken one of the slopes that was off limits and he got pretty upset with me (7). I told him I had seen him do it (7)! He then told me don't do what I do, do as I say (7).

Henry has used a narrative to *illustrate* that he has experienced the same idea as Stephanie, but the connection between Henry and Stephanie is done through a lengthy (for a 3-5 page paper) description that leads up to an implied "Lifes not fair" conclusion. Put differently, Henry suggests that he is relating to the ideas Stephanie writes about and then illustrates an experience he had with his father that comes close to what he understands Stephanie's point to be.

### ***Dillon and the Limited Use of Identification and Disidentification***

In the control group, the focus on creating a narrative rather than analyzing the way the classroom participants told stories seemed to be a key focus. The following passage from Dillon's narrative analysis illustrates the issue.

The first short narrative I wrote was an embarrassing story about how I used to burn my hands on grills as a young boy (7). I forced myself to raise my hand and volunteer my story to the class (7). When I was called on I could feel my face quickly warming (7). I knew if I raised my hand I would be called on because very few students actually volunteer (7). So why did I start freaking out (7)? I remember thinking to myself; "What the hell are you doing" (7)? I only volunteered my story because I knew I needed to participate more (7). Now I am going to embarrass myself in front of the whole entire class for a couple of participation points (7). As I began to read my story I felt more and more relaxed as I drew closer to the end (7). I started out of my comfort zone, but I was getting slightly more comfortable as the story progressed (7). Near the end of my short story was the part of my narrative that was intended to be funny (7). Nothing is more awkward than telling a bad joke or a boring story (7). I was so relieved to hear laughter (7)! In the end I was glad that I decided to read my narrative out loud (7). I forced myself out of my comfort zone and it turned out to be a positive interaction between me and the class, and the fact that I could make everyone laugh greatly boosted my confidence in my writing ability (7).

What is interesting about this is that though Dillon is writing in the first person, he is not describing this as announcing identifications. The *plot* of the story rather than the

character, logics, or identifications within it is the central concern here. This opens up analysis in surprising ways. Can the structure of student writing mask or make it difficult for writers to announce identifications in ways that open themselves for troubling or in ways that others would disidentify with them? How might another student trouble the facts presented by Dillon's narrative? It would seem that the narrative structure of this piece would encourage responses that center on the rightness or wrongness of the events or use of narrative elements, not necessarily the identifications animating the story. To be fair, attention to listening language is designed to have students do just what I am saying this narrative makes difficult. That is, students who read Dillon's narrative should be able to comment on the way Dillon's narrative is possible or made meaningful based on Dillon's identifications or disidentifications. As a final unit assignment, however, it is not possible to get other students' reactions.

### *Dan and the Shared Notion of Troubling*

In one of the sample papers from the control group, there was evidence that a student began to trouble the ways students listened to each other in surprising ways.

Dan's paper is illustrative of this point. He writes,

The discussions get more interesting when peer review is introduced (7). In workshops, students were forced to critique their classmates' work in person, and not just talk about a story as they were accustomed to on the Moodle forums (7). This was hard (7). Initially, there was the familiar dead silence when the first round of critiques came - everyone was reading, so that was natural (7). Within a few minutes, the room was uncharacteristically filled with chatter and voices (7).

Why was it hard (7)? To put it simply, students didn't know how to give acceptable feedback and improvements (7). The entertaining narratives seemed well-written and polished (7). Why would they want to change the story, or the way it was told (7)? The workaround to this was to not discuss improvements, but to instead compliment the piece and share interesting writing techniques they noticed (7). This surprised the writers being critiqued (7). They felt the anticipation and surprise similar to a student rushing late to an early morning class, only to learn that it was canceled (7). All that worry for nothing (7)! It was only after rounds of compliments that actual suggestions were made, and even then they were modest (7). "This may be personal preference, but..", "This is something that's probably very nitpicky..", and so on (7). This was not unintentional - it was simply too hard to correct and improve a story that was not their own (7).

This passage points to the difficulty of not knowing how to interact with peers about their writing. As noted in Dan's narrative analysis, the externalizing and description of the class activities during the common unit were described and then assessed. When student writing focused on what actually happened in the class rather than telling a story, it seemed as if they were more inclined to write in ways that looked like some of the elements of listening language. It is clear the Dan's attempts to figure out why particular aspects of the unit failed or were unsatisfying given that the unit lasted as long as it did. Though the critique of the peer review and discussion forums was sharp, Dan did not use other elements of listening language other than to acknowledge some of

the troubles students might have with listening to each other. This is really about critiquing the activity and not about how the identifications of those involved limited the interactions. Such critiques run contrary to the stated goals of listening language, which ask students to interact through a stance of openness when interacting across and with differences.

It is curious that Dan depersonalizes the writing and writes about “the students.” This makes it difficult to know whether or not Dan includes himself within this description or not. Thus, understanding if such statements are identifications or disidentifications has proved difficult. It is likely that the student would include him/herself within the group, but since that information cannot be confirmed, it remains inconclusive.

Ultimately, Dan’s narrative analysis is a critique that is not based on issues of identification; and, thus, it does not make use of the ideas or concepts of listening language, though moves that appear to be similar to elements of listening language do appear in Dan’s critiques of the activities of the common unit.

### **Analysis of Treatment Group’s Narrative Analysis**

The most striking distinction between the treatment group and the narrative group was how the students and teachers approached the content of this assignment. Though the directions for the final narrative analysis were the same in both groups, the sample papers presented here developed thesis statements that explored the ways community members interacted with each other. Each of the papers attempted to describe common themes and

how particular evidence from the discussion forums supported their understanding of these themes.

One potential exploration of this would be to check the way the student authors used the posts of their classmates to help support their cases. However, listening language offers another perspective for analysis. Rather than looking at the way each student builds an argument, we can look to the extent to which a particular element of listening language played a role in the development of the idea.

### *Stephen and the Force of Certainty*

The overarching theme that presents itself in Stephen's paper is the force with which he makes his claims. The second paragraph of his narrative analysis has the following code string: 7-7-2-7-7-7-7-7-7. He writes in that paragraph

While looking through all of the student's Moodle posts, the vast majority included these two themes (7). They might have been about a sibling, parent, or in some cases even a grandparent, but overall, they spoke of positive lessons learned from their family members (7). *I am also guilty of this,*<sup>19</sup> as to I wrote about my parents and brother (2). *I think that when it came to posting their respective personal narratives, everyone had to ask and answer the same question (7). What do I feel comfortable exposing to a group of random people in my Wednesday night freshman writing course (7)? I'm certain that when people asked themselves this, they all came back with the same response; give the people what they want to hear (7).* I believe that when people asked themselves this, they all came back

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<sup>19</sup> Italics are added.

with the same response; give the people what they want to hear (7). I believe that even if a person had a family member that had an extremely negative response and was clearly their biggest influence, they wouldn't have posted it (7). That is why I am convinced that the vast majority of posts revolve around the classic parent son/daughter billboard relationship (7). The only one that went against the current was Xiang (7). She had the guts, that others didn't, to tell the viewers in 1301 who was her biggest influence and how it had negatively impacted her (7).

While Stephen has successfully set up a central idea to explore (the two themes common in the Moodle posts), the italicized sections of this paragraph represent an unsupported certainty and cynicism about his fellow classmates. His is presenting contrast between classmates and Xiang, but these moves do not function as statements of disidentification. This text focuses on what Stephen believes is the affective thrust animating his classmate's contributions to the forum discussions. This starkness is carried out in his reading of Xiang's post where she reveals that she hates her father. Referring to Xiang, Stephen writes,

What she depicted was significant and really showed how she didn't have a filter for what she wanted the class to hear (7). I also found it astonishing the way she ended her Moodle post with her slightly changed mindset on the man. Also, that she left it up to the reader to decipher if she had gained respect for her father (7). I think it is the social norm to tell people the positive and push down the negative. So in this instance I gained a lot of respect for Xiang for coming out telling us about the person that influenced her the most! Another theme I found while

looking at these forums is that culture plays a fairly large role when citing your influences. What she depicted was significant and really showed how she didn't have a filter for what she wanted the class to hear (7). I also found it astonishing the way she ended her Moodle post with her slightly changed mindset on the man. Also, that she left it up to the reader to decipher if she had gained respect for her father (7). I think it is the social norm to tell people the positive and push down the negative. So in this instance I gained a lot of respect for Xiang for coming out telling us about the person that influenced her the most! Another theme I found while looking at these forums is that culture plays a fairly large role when citing your influences.

This text presents difficult coding challenges and as a result would be difficult when reading the text with listening language as an analytical lens. Given that Stephen's organizing concepts are family and culture, one response might be to encourage Stephen to reflect on what is astonishing about Xiang's story as it relates to the trope of families. Stephen suggests that Xiang has his respect, but personal development and the affective connections between students take writing instruction only so far. What might help Stephen as a writer working through the presence of such different ways of relating to families is to ask him to interact with the various cultural logics relating to the trope of family both domestically and internationally. Thus, these early and seemingly self-interested activities might lead students to larger research question opportunities.

### *Bao and the Location of Tensions*

Bao's narrative analysis stands apart from Bill and Stephen's because his analysis focuses on the differences between international students and native speakers within the classroom community. His paper uses illustrations and statements from colleagues who have self-identified with either of those two identities to draw out the differences between these two groups. As such, it should not be surprising to see Bao's paper have more identification and disidentification moves throughout. Bao also troubles the identifications throughout his paper. His second paragraph has the following code string: 7-3-3-2-3-7-4-7-2. This string represents a greater use of disidentification moves than the other papers sampled from the treatment group. Bao writes,

One of the common themes that I recognized the most quickly was the similarities in-between the international students' posts and the native speakers' posts on Who I am forum (7). From reading, it is evident that international students' narratives structure primarily with the topic of moving to a complete new environment and how the processes of settling in have altered their identity compared to the past (3). For example, Duyen talked about how lazy and indolent past-identity began changing after moving to U.S (3). She realized that miracles occur under the name of effort and now sees herself as a hardworking person with goals to achieve (7). Samantha became more of a global person from moving and traveling so many times and managed to erase the ethnic barriers and leave aside prejudice, and same goes for Xiang (2). Mike specifically mentions that he has been living in the U.S for three years and said "These three years have changed me from a 17-year-old boy to who I am right now (2/3). I have learned various

things for myself during these three years (7). Sometimes, when I looked back to the past three years, I was really surprised how I could manage all of this” (4) His narrative clearly tells that he became an entirely different person after living in the United States for three years (7). This common theme of discovering the new self-identity is within the international students’ narratives and I, as an international student also have strong feeling of identification as well (2).

Bao has, to this point in his analysis, not identified as an international student and thus it is unclear in this text whether he groups himself within Xiang and Mike or if he is identifying with them as international students. Late in this paper Bao writes a paragraph with the following code string: 3-2-4-4. Such a string suggests that a well crafted disidentification can lead students to trouble particular identifications. He writes,

One of the narratives that I most disagreed upon was Sichen in the influence forum (3). He stated “Honestly speaking, there is no particular person who has most influence me” (2). I’m not sure of Sichen detailed background but to my belief there must be at least one person in the world that had a negligible influence on him, whether that influence would be good or bad (4). It could be just that he was indirectly influenced and he just simply doesn’t notices the impact because it’s really hard to know who had an indirect influence unless you confront with that person and observe the thought-processing similarities or action similarities (4).

Announcing a clear and unambiguous contrast between himself and Sichen, Bao is then able to position himself differently and then trouble Sichen’s insistence that he has

no influences. These moments of disidentification often function to stop the exchange between individuals. Asking Bao to share his description of the situation with Sichen could help foster a different understanding of what Sichen meant by this and provide Sichen with another opportunity to communicate his meaning in light of such a strong reaction from Bao. Listening language, in other words, encourages a consent return and exchange of texts in order to keep interaction among participants open. Such interaction is difficult to conceptualize and enact through the writing of a longer paper assignment, it seems.

### *Bill and the Need to Trouble Reader's Understandings*

In previous sections I have described qualifying or hedging statements as a form of acknowledging a person's possible difficulty with hearing a particular statement. Of the papers sampled here, Bill had the most frequent use of this move, and I would like to focus in on these moments in his narrative analysis to show the consequences of these moves and situate this in the larger notion of listening language. Moreover, Bill's paper is worth reading in full given that when not hedging or qualifying his statements about various colleagues or cultures, he articulates an understanding of the intentions behind the online discussion forums and why they might be important to the class.

The following passage in Bill's narrative analysis has the following code string: 7-3-5-3-4-3-4-5-5-4-7. This indicates that there a fairly large number of disidentification moves, moves to trouble identifications, and frequent attempts to acknowledge troubles others might have with listening. I focus specifically on Bill's acknowledging the troubles readers may have with his statements. Bill writes,

[Xiang's] statements concerning [her dad's] passion for investing money and in business in general show obvious resentment which she makes extremely apparent (7). I feel one major difference between here and China in the family aspect is ideally in America families' show each other love and push their children to achieve but love them no matter what (3). In China (in my opinion) the children are pushed too hard having unconventional childhood's filled with requirements and expectations that are expected to be met by their overachieving parents (5). While this will make them excellent job candidates and functioning members of society, I believe for an individual to be personable and relatable they would need to be shown more compassion growing up and spend time with their parents for fun rather than work (3/2). This is why I believe that China is also far superior to us technologically and intelligence-wise, but I would rather have the choice of remaining a child as long as possible and enjoying myself rather than constantly comparing to thousands of other super intelligent and talented individuals with the goal to become rich and impress their parents or superiors (3/2). I am definitely generalizing far too much, but this idea does apply to a fair amount of people based on my prior experiences (5). Maybe the tension is the judgmental glances that others would offer when hearing that you hate your parents because it is out of the norm, but I fully respect Xiang's opinion (4). The way we related to each other was extremely similar which makes it very interesting when someone has a different opinion, but I enjoy when there is a difference in the group which will help in discussions throughout the semester (7).

Several things are noteworthy here about how Bill describes the relationship between what this student is thinking and Xiang's experience. There are identification and disidentification moves and an attempt to make sense of these differences. However, such an attempt brings closure rather than exploration or openness. That phrases like "(in my opinion)" and "I am definitely generalizing" suggest that the student is aware of how difficult it might be for some to read what this student is writing. Such acknowledgment functions as a justification for generalization rather than a means for cross-cultural communication. Such acknowledgments often follow identifications or disidentifications that could surely be troubled. What this student's post suggests is the need to pay close attention to *how* we might acknowledge troubles with listening in ways that move the texts or ideas within them in ways that don't reify stereotypes or collapse into similarities or differences. Bill's moves are curious given that later in the paper he acknowledges that the discussion forums "allowed classmates to open up and explore each other's lives bringing us closer together whether we wanted to or not!" While Bill has taken steps to work through his perception of the differences between children who grow up in China versus those who grow up in the United States of America, his writing of these differences does the opposite of what he understands the forums to do.

Second, within Bill's narrative analysis are general statements about who students are and what is typical of their behavior. In his introduction Bill writes, "The normal format [for writing about yourself] is as follows:

Hello, my name is Bill and I am from (Here), I like to do (this) and I came to the University of Minnesota because (generic reason) (7). This is the best way to get a condensed sense of someone's background, but it is not very useful when learning about them as an individual (7). This theme if it were apparent throughout everyone in the classes' forum posts would indicate that our class is not very willing to open up to strangers and express ourselves (7).

Responding to this type of writing with listening language in mind would take the form of encouraging Bill to reflect on his generic description of how students' interaction in forums focused on writing about who they are.

### **Concluding Thoughts on Analysis**

That students focused on the function of narratives and a critique of the common unit activities suggests that listening language is not students' default writing practice. As such, listening language must be taught and learned. This study was one way to begin exploring how listening language can be taught to first-year writing students and the potential impact this pedagogy would have on the way students interact in online spaces. There were several key findings from the whole paper analysis conducted during this study. First, listening language is more apparent in online discussion forums and virtual peer reviews than in whole papers. This is not an entirely surprising finding given that interaction between students is more abstract and less concrete. That is, students interact directly with each other in forum discussion and virtual peer reviews and with each other's ideas in a single paper assignment. Who students envision as their primary reader/audience for these papers might also play into their willingness or perceived need

to articulate entrance moves in their introductions. Second, narrative descriptions are not the same as listening language. Narrative descriptions place the focus on genre rather than the ways individuals are interacting. Third, teachers can have an impactful influence when helping students work through assignment descriptions. Put differently, though students may be given the *exact* same assignment, how this assignment is taught *by the teacher* does influence what students write about in these assignments. Richard, the treatment teacher, knew about listening language and was encouraged to teach that pedagogy. Without such knowledge, Carol, the control teacher, relied on what she knew would help students through the prompt.

## Chapter 6: Implications and Further Considerations

This study explored student interactions in online writing spaces and the impact of a pedagogy based on listening language. In the first chapter I described common conflicts occurring in online spaces and suggested that listening language is one way to prevent or mitigate these conflicts. Chapter Two situated the concept of listening language within rhetoric and composition and described its basic tenets. Chapter Three articulated a mixed methods approach for testing the degree to which a pedagogy based on listening language impacted the way students interact with each other in online discussion forums, a virtual peer review, and a narrative analysis assignment. The results presented in Chapter Four suggested that the ability to shape student interaction in online spaces cannot be fully determined. In Chapter Five, I described the qualitative analysis of students' written texts in online discussion forums, virtual peer review, and a narrative analysis assignment. In this chapter, I return to some of the key issues through this dissertation and discuss the limitations and implications of this study.

### Responding to the Research Questions and Hypotheses

I reproduce the primary and secondary research questions and the hypotheses that guided this study. This time, I provide answers to the questions based on the findings of this study.

**PQ1:** How does listening work in online discussion spaces?

The answer to this primary research question is apparent in the answers to the secondary questions and the hypotheses articulated below.

**SQ1:** Does exposure to pedagogy based on listening language a) change students attitudes about the relationship between listening and writing and b) their online discourses?

The results from this study suggest that exposure to pedagogy based on listening language can change students' attitudes about listening, but given the low response rate from the survey used to answer this question, such an assertion can only be made hesitantly. Rather, the inconclusive results of the survey suggest areas needing refinement and possibilities for further study. There was some evidence from the sample papers in the paper analysis that suggest students did enjoy interacting with each other in the online spaces of the discussion forums. However, the small sample size makes such assertions tentative at best. Sample papers from the control group directly critiqued the discussion forums. This negative view of online interaction suggests further areas of exploration regarding the extent to which listening language directly impacts attitudes toward online discourses.

**SQ2:** Are there differences between the online discourses of students who have been exposed to a pedagogy based on listening language and those who have not? If so, how can those differences be characterized?

This study suggests that there are differences between the online discourse of students who have been exposed to pedagogy and those who have not. These differences

are most clearly revealed in the frequency charts that show the number of times a particular element of listening language has been used in treatment and control groups.

**H1:** Students in the treatment group will show an increase in positive attitudes toward listening than those in the control group.

As the survey findings suggest, when treated as a composite, students in the treatment group did show an increase in positive attitude toward listening than those in the control group. Moreover, when the composite score is used, students in the treatment group ended up experiencing a greater prevalence of identity markers during the course of the study. However, looking at individual objective outcomes that guided the survey suggests that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

**H2:** Students in the treatment group will open online discussions with attempts to persuade others to listen more frequently than those in the control group.

Based on the frequency counts of the three online discussion forums and the virtual peer reviews, it is clear that students in both groups did not attempt to open conversations with an attempt to persuade each other to listen.

**H3:** Students in the treatment group will describe their identifications and engage in an exploration of cultural logics more frequently than those in the control group.

This study suggests that students in the treatment group *do* describe their identifications more frequently than those in the control group. However, it is not entirely clear from this study whether that is because of the treatment or because of the differences in the way the common unit was approached by the cooperating teachers.

The whole paper analysis suggests that students in the treatment group do engage in the cultural logics of each other more frequently than do those in the control group. This assertion is based on the fact that there were more attempts to trouble the identifications of their peers in their final narrative analysis assignments.

**H4:** Students in the treatment group will articulate barriers to listening in online discussion spaces more frequently than those in the control group by using more frequently the following moves:

- Attempting to change the nature of the conversation to a more productive one;
- Describing the types of resistance they or others have to particular positions within the conversation; and
- Articulating the need to end a conversation.

Though students in the treatment group did articulate possible barriers to listening through their uses of qualifiers and hedges, there was no evidence of students exiting discussions in the ways that this hypothesis suggests. New studies centered on helping students to develop exit strategies like the ones suggested in this hypothesis are needed.

### **Additional Findings**

There are three additional findings that are important to discuss at this time. First, online discussion forums have a discontinuous time frame with one-stop shop discussion that make them seem like inauthentic spaces of interaction. Writing instructors should keep this in mind when assessing and developing student interaction in these spaces.

Second, the field should resist tendencies to equate quantity with quality when it comes to interaction among students in online discussion forums. The number of

exchanges between students and the length of responses should no longer be a concern. What makes more sense is to focus on developing students' abilities to recognize and use listening language as it occurs in these interactions. Thus, if a student recognizes a colleague who is not in a position to maintain a productive discussion, that student should be in a position to articulate that without the need for seven or eight more forum exchanges. Teachers should be able to recognize that exit move as a succinct and sophisticated rhetorical strategy regardless of how lengthy the exit appears. That listening language appears in each of the types of writing assessed in this study—online discussion forums, virtual peer review, and narrative analyses—is encouraging and points to specific instances where teachers can develop student capacity and understanding with listening language. The results and suggestions for teacher responses articulated in the previous chapter are some ways to begin developing listening language with students.

Finally, rhetoric and composition teachers have to pay very close attention to the discussion prompts they provide students. Both the results of the pilot student I have articulated in Chapter Three and the results of this study support this finding. If we want students to interact in ways that look and feel more like community, then we will have to resist creating prompts that treat online spaces as dialogues between teacher and student. If teachers create discussion prompts that ask students to summarize a text, they should not expect robust interaction among students. Instead, they should expect students to write appropriate summaries that demonstrate their understanding of the text *to the teacher*. If teachers want students to negotiate the meaning of a text with each other, then they will have to develop discussion forum prompts that focus on student interaction.

## Possibilities for Rhetorical Theory

This study owes a great deal to the theoretical work of Kenneth Burke and Krista Ratcliffe. In this space, I would like to gesture at what I believe listening language is a pedagogical practice and theoretical lens does for those scholars who continue to explore and work theories of identification and listening as a rhetorical act.

The *how* of listening is central to this study and listening language as one way to resist what I referred to as “Rogerian hope.” In Chapter Two, I define Rogerian hope as a belief that listening is located in the conditions that set up interaction rather than through the texts that writers write. In other words, listening becomes more closely akin to reading and teaching rather than to the act of writing itself. Listening language textualizes listening; it is listening expressed through writing. As such, it is one way to treat listening as a necessary and important area of scholarship that rhetoric and composition studies.

I believe that listening language, by asking students and teachers to pay attention to the ways in which they enter and exit interactions, expands the purview of rhetorical listening. These entrance and exit moments, I believe, are especially important in online spaces. I continue to understand the exit as an important practice that has implications for public pedagogy and the shaping of online discourse *over time*. Put another way, silence seems too ambiguous a response to moments of clash in online spaces. Demonstrating or articulating the ideological barriers interlocutors have in online spaces can hail third or fourth or fifth party observers to step in to help clarify, smooth over, or expand upon the impasse. In surprising ways, therefore, the exit framing could function as an entrance invitation for others to join in the threaded conversation. Further research possibilities

suggest that listening language specifically and the scholarship on listening as a rhetorical act might be enhanced by theories of invitational rhetoric developed by Foss and Griffin (1995).<sup>20</sup>

The whole paper analysis presents challenges to listening language generally and the notion of exit and exit specifically. A series of questions for further consideration and analysis arise out of insights of such analysis. Is listening language *best* expressed in online spaces where interaction is live and fully realized? Does this make listening language simply a preparatory writing activity? How might listening language's entrance strategies be developed and justified as an alternative or enhancement to the genres that typically make up first-year writing's major assignments (the research argument, the expository essay, etc.)? It very well could be the case that such questions set a lifetime of scholarly activity.

### Limitations of Current Study

I want to suggest the limitations that this study has on the development of listening language as a pedagogical practice and framework for online education. There are five areas that limit the findings of this study: location of the unit within the regular semester, lack of qualitative interview data, absence of intercoder rating, limitations of the unit of analysis, and the naturalistic setting of the study. Both individually and collectively, these limitations are not fatal to the study presented in this dissertation.

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<sup>20</sup> Professor Cheryl Glenn suggested similar ideas during her formal response to my College Composition and Communication conference paper in 2014.

Rather, they suggest areas of concern that should be addressed in further iterations of this research.

The findings from Chapter Four suggest that students do use elements of listening language in their discussion forums and in their peer reviews. However, the speed at which the treatment was developed and the rapidity of the common unit did not allow students or cooperating teachers to develop a rich sense of why and how listening language can be used in online interactions *as an alternative* to argumentative mastery and critique. This study would benefit from infusing more time into the treatment development. I suggest ways of slowing down and focusing on the treatment later in this chapter. Timing may also play a part in the low response rate for the surveys. That students in both groups had to complete the survey during week 2 of the semester may have contributed to low response rate. That students are usually inundated with emails from professors, friends, and the university during the first few weeks of the semester may partly explain why students did not complete the first time survey.

Second, particularly in the case of conflict among students within the discussion forums, it would be helpful to interview participants regarding how they understood their use of listening language. These interview responses could be used to strengthen the accuracy of what these interactions among students might have meant *to the students*. Interviewing cooperating teachers over the course of both the treatment and common units would help clarify how they understood the units. Closely connected with the need for interviewing is the importance of sitting in on face-to-face classroom discussions that occurred during the treatment and common units. Creating ethnographic field notes and

then sharing them with cooperating teachers and/or checking these notes against the teachers' activity logs would help clarify how the units of instruction were introduced and framed for students. Though teacher logs were collected for this study, they were not used in systematic ways beyond checking whether or not they followed the schedule of the treatment or common units.

Third, further studies must include coder training and inter-coder rating checks. Training coders and conducting inter-coder rating would benefit the project in a number of ways. First, it would help refine the coding scheme. Recall that most statements or images created by students in this study were labeled "no code." Another benefit for inter-coder rating is to check against researcher bias in the application of the scheme. Having a second or third check on the data when and where applicable could increase confidence in the interpretation of the results.

The sentence-level and paper-level analyses conducted in this study yielded useful results for a study that is as new as this one. That having been said, there were limitations with this unit of analysis. Though many of the statements within the data set were coded 1-7, there were a significant number of multi-coded statements to justify using the T-unit as the unit of analysis. Another approach to the unit of analysis could be to move beyond the sentence level and toward individual forum posts as a unit of analysis given that a series of sentences seemed to be needed to help students make particular moves.

The goal of this study was to examine listening language in a naturalistic setting. There are concerns and limitations with conducting research in a naturalistic setting. Chief among these concerns is the influence of the teacher. The treatment teacher was a

trained rhetoric and composition professional interested in social justice and anti-racist pedagogical practices. His theoretical and graduate school studies centered on theories of whiteness and institutional racism in higher education. The control teacher, in somewhat of a marked contrast, was an English literature/creative writing graduate student who taught first-year writing from a cultural studies, creative writing perspective. This might explain the control student's focus on structure, voice, and figurative elements of the forum activities.

I present these limitations not as flaws in the study presented here, but as suggestions and explorations to improve upon the work begun in this dissertation. The mixed methods approach that combines quasi-experimental data collection and rhetorical analysis still makes sense when assessing the impact of a pedagogy on a group of students.

### **Implications of Findings on the Discipline of Writing Studies**

In his final narrative analysis, Zach wrote the following, “At the end of class I was left sitting there thinking to myself Moodle sucks.” That critiques of the interface like Zach's appeared throughout students' narratives suggests that further study is needed on the relationship between listening language and the interface. Such research is supported by Selfe & Selfe's (1994) “The Politics of the Interface” that asks rhetoric and composition professionals to explore the political dimensions of technology and its impact on student learning. Such a project is also suggested by existing research on the impact location has on listening. Gross's (2007) findings that 18<sup>th</sup> century religious texts often “coached” congregants in the ways of listening to sermons is one such study that

indirectly connects location with listening as a rhetorical act. Studies attending to this relationship could expand the field's understanding of *how* students learn to listen. One such question to hint at further study might be for researchers of hybrid courses to explore the relationship between the face-to-face and online interactions among classroom participants.

Given the low response rate on the surveys, demographic data was not useful. However, several students within both groups directly announced their Vietnamese, Chinese, or African American identifications in their forums. This opens up a unique research possibility to explore how those with different ethnic or cultural backgrounds understand listening language. If writing and speaking are part of a large notion of literacy instruction, listening, as part of language arts, also impacts how meaning is negotiated across national or cultural identifications.

As the previous chapter indicated, the inconclusive results of the survey regarding Objective 4 (This survey will assess the attitudes students have regarding the arguments that are not able to be resolved) suggest one place for further study. Determining the impact of listening language on student attitudes regarding discussions that are not able to be resolved is a question worth exploring.

Lurking, social presence, and listening language is another area for further study. The notion of lurking is rich and contentious. As of this study, I am not sure if lurking is entirely demeaning. That the scholarship on lurking that treats it as such has not situated itself in the work of critical feminist pedagogues leaves me to suggest that there are rich opportunities to frame this discussion in new ways. That the textual production or

visibility imperative (Beaudouin, 2002) is a thing makes lurking a contentious concept. However, I think situating the lack of interaction within a larger political economic context of student disengagement would ask us to rethink the notion of invisibility. In any event, there is scholarship in the work on this issue of lurking, and this dissertation is one place of origin on this note.

### **Applications for Online Discussion Forums**

Until this point, I have not spoken directly of the entrance, actual, and exit moves that comprise listening language. Rather, my focus has been almost entirely on the six elements that make up these larger moves. Here I want to suggest how the idea of entrance, actual, and exit moves can help rhetoric and composition teachers in the development of student interaction in online writing spaces.

To a high degree, students in this study did not feel the need to attend to the way they entered conversations in online discussion forums. There are a number of possible explanations for this. First, students could have understood the discussion prompt as setting the criteria for interaction rather than treating it as a move that they were responsible for making. Second, students could have understood entrance moves as the responsibility of the first poster rather than something they needed to also be responsible for doing. It is unclear what students' understandings of entrance moves were, and further studies should attempt to get at this understanding.

With respect to actual interaction, those moments where students *are* responding to each other, it is clear from in this study that the focus should be on development. That identification, disidentification, and troubling of identifications occur in both groups

suggests that students can make use of this way of interacting. Teachers should keep this insight in mind when developing online forum discussions and play to students' prior knowledges in this regard.

Finally, listening language provides a practice of exiting interactions that have come to an impasse or are no longer productive. In this study students in neither the treatment group nor the control felt the need to articulate their disengagement with each other. It very well could be the case that students believed not posting a reply was a valid form of exiting a conversation. That is to say not replying indicated disengagement. That might have been the case; however, there was no indication of much clash throughout the online discussion forums. In the discussion regarding the appropriateness of sarcasm when discussing the Holocaust, students did not interact with each other past their general assertions of understanding or thinking that what Kevin did was not okay. If classrooms have even one moment like this, it might be possible for teachers to use this as a “teachable moment” that could demonstrate the need for more attention to exit moves.

### **Applications for Revision of Virtual Peer Review**

As virtual peer review is a significant form of online interaction between students, this practice seems like a rich space to have students develop listening language. As suggested in this study, most students are reviewing in very traditional ways. That is, these students are responding to grammar, clarity, confusions, and whether or not the draft is conforming to the assignment dictates. Though there is nothing wrong with that approach, I argue that such moves in review sessions are re-enforcing the traditional notion of mastery while also helping students to aid each other in stronger, more efficient

forms of written communication. If writing instructors take up the call for *different* modes of interaction that are distinct from reviews based in mastery, then the way writing teachers teach virtual peer review is going to have to change. What then are some ways to help students review each other's writing that allow them to develop their understanding and execution of listening language?

One of the strategies that could shift the purpose and focus of virtual peer review to a sense of mutual exploration and exchange is helping students to engage more directly with those moments where they were attempting to trouble others' openness. The most common element of listening language in virtual peer review sessions came in the form of hedging and qualifying suggestions. Though one possible read of these hedges or qualifications is that students do not feel confident with their abilities to provide meaningful and useful feedback, I suggest we look into these writing moments as a possibility for exchange where the reviewer's convictions suggest a place for further dialogue. So, at the moment when a student writes, "I know you already know this, but I just wanted to put a virtual reminder that everything I commented on is not necessarily wrong," as in the case of one reviewer in this study, listening language would ask us to stop here to interrogate why a student felt the need to comment when it would appear that they were writing information that wasn't necessary. Such moments reflect what might be described as an externalized affect. This reviewer comment suggests an uncertainty. These moments of externalized affect can be transformed into moments where classroom communities can ask why the statement seemed necessary in the moment and interrogate if such statements actually are necessary.

Often peer review sessions are not treated as a multi-phased interaction among students. The normal process of peer review, virtual or otherwise, follows a typical path: draft, review, revise, submit to teacher for marking. A peer review, virtual or otherwise, that brings in concepts of listening language may require several passes: not just another round of review, but a rich exchange where author and reviewer home in on those moments where the author attempts to help the reviewer to begin review with an attempt to understand what she was attempting to do in the paper and where the reviewer articulates difficulties with listening in ways that help everyone understand how writing is a complex process of communication.

### **Applications for First-Year Writing**

I am convinced that directing students to discussion forums they have already engaged is a useful activity. In order for this to work, I suggest that discussion forums have to have what might be called strong connections to other activities. A strong connection to other activities includes providing a convincing reason for students to return to previous discussion forums *and* ensuring that students understand why they will have to return to previous discussions. A strong connection between forums and writing activities will also make clear that the data created in the forum is part of understanding a central course concept *in use*. For the common unit, both of these ideas were highlighted. The narrative analysis assignment included the requirement for students to return to previous discussion forums. The assignment also asked students to focus on narratives *in use*. The narrative analysis assignment for both treatment and control groups read as

follows:

Using the texts we've created in forums 2.1-2.3, we will write a 4-5 page analysis of a moment or moments in **the way our class has used narratives and responses to interact with each other**. To help you think through this assignment, consider the following questions.

- What common themes have you noticed in the way narratives were developed or responded to by members of our class? **What might these themes say about our classroom community?**
- What tensions, if any, can you identify throughout the posts? How might you explain these tensions? **What do these tensions say about our classroom community at this point in the semester?**
- What worked well or did not work well in the way classroom members related to each other through the forum discussions? **What might this say about the way members in our community relate to each other at this point in our semester?**

This provides students with the opportunity to assess the types of interactions their classroom community has created. Treating students' own textual communities as objects worthy of analysis can help foster a critical sense of what is happening and make older forums have new importance. However, when examining the discussion forum prompts, it was not entirely clear that the prompts were to be used for the narrative analysis

assignment. Moreover, it was not entirely clear how frequently or in what ways cooperating teachers reminded students of this fact. Nevertheless, creating better prompts that establish strong connections between forums and other assignments is one way to infuse purpose into discussion activities. Further study is necessary to assess whether this impacts the frequency or prevalence of conflict in these spaces.

Students in the treatment group used a discussion thread from a YouTube video to make sense of how some online communities interact. Sustained attention to online discussions might help students become more adept at noticing the types of interactions among participants in these discussions. Developing the listening inventories and framing this inventory as a theoretical lens through which students can see, assess, and/or make sense of the way online communities can interact can help develop students' familiarity with listening language and their confidence with the concepts that make up listening language. Integrating a longer period of time where first-year writing students can explore existing discussion threads in order to assess how elements of the listening inventory they created play out in these discussions would help students understand the difference between typical discussion forum conversation and listening language as part of online discussions. As time is an important variable, creating an entire unit wherein students are assessing actual online interactions might help foster a stronger connection to the listening inventory.

A group reading activity might also create purposeful interaction among students in an online space. For example, cutting and pasting a short article to Google Drive and then inviting students to embed comments within that text and also respond to the

comments of others could open spaces wherein students respond to reading strategies and points of confusions about texts. A representative text could be Peggy McIntosh's 1980 essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." This or similar essays that introduce challenging concepts about whiteness or gender can help students reflect on the ways they are responding to texts. By asking students to respond emotionally and intellectually to new information, teachers and students create new texts that are available for response. The practice of making responses apparent for others so that we can begin investigating the *reasons* or *logics* that are animating these responses is key. The framework of listening language helps shape these interactions in ways that attempt to get at these reasons and the consequences of one form of reasoning over the other.

Helping students develop an inquisitive sense of questioning not just of the primary text under analysis but of each other can be another opportunity for interaction in online discussion spaces. For example, rather than critique the rightness or wrongness of a comment in relation to a text under discussion, listening language encourages an exploratory stance. Thus, in activities like the group reading activity I describe above, the real focus is to encourage students not to critique accuracy at first, but to invite students to attempt to understand the responses others have to the text under analysis. Teacher prompts for student interaction that can help foster such exploration might take the form of any of the following:

- Please write directly to your peers during this assignment:
  - For any comment you do not agree with, please attempt to describe what you understand your peer to be doing with this comment.

- What confusions, if any, do you have between your understanding of the text and the comment your peer has made? What do you think caused this confusion for you?
- Pick three comments that your peers have written in response to McIntosh's essay. What rationale do you think your peer is relying upon when making this comment?
- Please make sure to treat your responses to your peers as a conversation. This entails you taking an exploratory stance rather than a definitive stance.

The three suggestions for enriching the development of listening language in student interaction in online discussion forums are in need of further study. Creating strong connections between discussion forums and unit assignments that integrate a persuasive need to return to previous discussion could be a useful way to make discussion forums more than one-stop posts. Building more time into a course to analyze existing, public discussions might also increase students' understanding of listening language as a useful and unique alternative to agonistic interaction. Finally, developing group reading activities beyond discussion forums that function to get students' reactions to texts in writing could help students explore the mutual understanding that listening language is intended to foster rather than simply strive for accuracy of interpretation of a text.

### **Applications for Upper-Division Writing**

Though this study used first-year writing as a site for inquiry and analysis, it would be a mistake to think that the practice and theory of listening language is only for

the first-year writing classroom. I suggest that many of the suggestions that are applicable for first-year writing can and should be brought into a course like this. However, I would like to gesture at some applications for listening language in an upper-division course that might be titled Theory and Practice of Writing. The goal here is not to provide a fully realized syllabus; rather, the intention here is to suggest how rhetoric and composition instructors can help foster a deep engagement with listening language as a theory and then turn students out to practical applications beyond the classroom.

It should be clear that listening language is designed to change the way individual interact in online writing spaces from a position of dominance or mastery to one of mutual exchange. With this in mind, the first section of this course might best help students become familiar with rhetoric and composition's critiques of argument and the discourses and theories of persuasion as violence. An alternative would be to explore the history of listening in a similar way that I have done in Chapter Two. Both approaches provide a rich exploration into the field of rhetoric and composition while helping to justify listening language as an important and new concept for students.

With a rich understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of listening language, teachers might then guide their undergraduates toward empirical research practices that help them explore the way a particular online community's listening practices play out in these spaces. Teachers might introduce methods of rhetorical analysis or archival research practices for students to help shape the way they approach these communities. Introducing autoethnographic research practices might help students explore their experiences with attempting to execute listening language in their own online

communities. Keeping the scale of this project manageable and exploratory can help students keep a handle on the complexities of empirical research practices. Of course, teachers should think carefully about ethical research practices and make such conversations a part of such a course.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This dissertation presented the first study on the impact of listening language and student interaction in online writing spaces. This is the first part of a larger research agenda that looks at the ways in which listening as a rhetorical act can shape student writing. In Chapter One I described the concerns and conflicts facing rhetoric and composition professional interested in teaching online. I concluded this chapter with the suggestion that greater attention to listening as a rhetorical act has the potential to resolve these conflicts. Chapter Two explored the field's relationship with listening from the 1970s to the present. I found that previous uses of listening relied on what I called "Rogerian hope," the belief that listening happens automatically and needs not be taught. From there I turned to Krista Ratcliffe's concept of rhetorical listening as a way to think through how listening might be taught in online spaces specifically. I developed an original concept of listening language for this dissertation. In Chapter Three I devised an empirical research study based on mixed methods to assess the impact a pedagogy has on student interaction in online spaces. Chapter Four explored the results of the quantitative results of this study. Chapter Five described the qualitative results. This final chapter has explored the future possibilities of listening language. Such studies imply future research

possibilities that I hope to explore as a fully participating member of the academy and a rhetoric and composition scholar for years to come.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Call for Instructor Participation

To: Spring 2013 WRIT 1301 Instructors  
From: Timothy Oleksiak  
RE: Participation in Dissertation Research Project

WRIT 1301 Instructors,

I am writing to solicit participants in a dissertation research opportunity. My dissertation research focuses on a pedagogy based on what I am calling “listening language” and students’ online discourses. I need 2 instructors who are scheduled to teach WRIT 1301 and are willing to open their classrooms up for this research opportunity. I am currently seeking instructors interested in the relationship between writing and social justice (broadly defined) who are willing to commit to the following during the Spring 2013 semester:

- Teach WRIT 1301 in a face-to-face format;
- Submit an updated CV and Statement of Teaching Philosophy by January 1, 2013;
- Be willing to keep a daily, informal Teacher’s Log for the duration of collaboratively written “common unit” and/or “treatment unit”

Those interested should email me with questions or concerns. If you are interested, please respond by November 1, 2012 at the latest.

Be well,  
Timothy Oleksiak

## Appendix B: Prompts for Teacher’s Log<sup>21</sup>

*Reminders for teacher’s log—You don’t need to answer every question separately, but do try to cover the content as completely as you can.*

Date:

What did you focus on today in class?

What kinds of questions came up in class today?

How did students respond to these types of questions?

What went well in class today? What didn’t?

What, if anything, frustrated you about the way class went today? Can you explain what seemed to be the cause? How will you try to resolve this frustration? (in future logs, please indicate how successful you’ve been.)

If nothing frustrating happened in class today, discuss why you think things went smoothly.

### Control Teacher Log

Feb. 11

I opened class with a discussion about stories. I posed the following question for an in-class writing exercise: *Re-tell a story that has resonated with you. Then, meditate on why this story has had an impact on you.* From there, I asked students to share some of their exercises. I posed some questions for discussion: Why do stories stay with us? What makes a story good? What makes a story bad? Why are stories important? Participation was satisfactory.

Feb. 13

We discussed the first section of the reading today. Discussion was rather unsatisfactory. I asked students to come in with a question about the reading, and even as they read their questions, no one volunteered to answer. I had to call on students. I ended class by having students write an in-class exercise: *Write a story that is commonly told in your family.* Students then volunteered to read their stories, and we discussed why these stories are consistently repeated in their families. Discussion improved somewhat, with more voluntary participation.

Feb. 15

We discussed the next section of the reading today, with similar results. I should start doing small group discussions. No one wants to participate with large-group; they stay silent and seem to be afraid of saying something “wrong.” We ended class with two *Moth* episodes, which were a big hit. I could tell students were attentive and listening. We discussed what made the episodes good afterwards for a few minutes.

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<sup>21</sup> Adapted from Palmquist, Kiefer, Hartvigsen, and Goodlew (1998).

Feb. 18

We discussed peer editing today. I went over the handbook for peer review (which I also posted online and asked them to read). I wrote key points on the board from the handbook and I posed questions to the class about the purpose of these peer review rules. We spent a lot of time discussing the difference between negative and constructive feedback, and I emphasized that constructive is valuable and helpful while negative causes self-esteem to suffer. We also practiced phrasing critiques in a constructive way. I wrote negative feedback on the board and called on students asking them to rephrase them into constructive. I wrote key phrases on the board from the handbook. This discussion was interactive and helpful. We ended by having one student share a personal essay from the first unit, which fed well into this unit.

Feb. 20

Students posted their first Moodle story today, as well as commented on two others. We came into class and I asked the class as a group about their experiences writing this story. What were the challenges? What came easily? I also asked them how they went about commenting on other stories. I had noticed that many students were responding to stories by saying “I can relate to this...” so I asked them why relating to a story made it more appealing and important. The general consensus was that stories reach more people when they are more universally appealing. I then asked what mattered more in making a story relatable: the story itself or the way it is told/written? Thankfully, the class responded that the way it is written is more important.

Feb. 22

We finished the reading for today, as well as posted our second story. We had a larger discussion about stories in culture. I opened large-group discussion by asking students to think of cultural stories. We came up with: Abraham Lincoln, Thanksgiving, and 9/11. Then, I asked them to think of stories that are relevant in their communities and to share one. They did, and many of them related their community-based stories to the larger cultural examples. I tried to relate this class to the one about family stories by asking them if they felt their family stories related any cultural values. A few people responded with excellent connections. Students were actively engaged in listening, even if they were slow to respond to my questions.

Feb. 25

Students posted their third Moodle story today. We spent the class sharing some of our second stories out loud and discussing, as a class, what was good in the writing. I did an exercise called “recall,” which works well with shorter pieces. After a student finished reading, the class had to repeat words or phrases that stood out to them. The writer had to jot these down, and these served as indicators for what was good and unique in their writing. We again discussed the challenges of writing this post, as well as commenting. Students expressed a preference to commenting in class than through Moodle.

Feb. 27

We spent the class discussing writing strategies for the Narrative Analysis. Students were confused and scared of the assignment; they felt it was very vague. I reassured students that they should not over-worry about doing the assignment “wrong,” and I did give them a list of criteria so they would feel like they had something to hold onto, so to speak. The list included: 1) strong diction 2) strong and varied syntax 3) unique voice 4) in-depth analysis. I told students the most difficult part of the essay was coming up with a structure, but if they chose 2-3 examples of classroom interaction and got into an in-depth analysis with those, they would likely achieve a cohesive structure for their essay.

March 1

I asked students to bring in four copies of a Moodle story that they thought displayed their best writing. Students got into groups of four and exchanged their stories. I wrote questions on the board, which included 1) What details stand out in this story 2) Describe the voice in the story 2) Choose one word or sentence that you believe could benefit from editing. Students then peer-reviewed their stories. Discussion was quite successful. I floated from group to group and it seemed like everyone was engaged in providing valuable feedback.

March 4

By this date students had to post and peer-review their drafts of their narrative analysis. Everyone participated, and comments were substantial and intended to help.

### Treatment Teacher Log

1/23

After taking attendance, I had the students explore the following phrase: YOU ARE NOW IN WRIT:1301 UNIVERSITY WRITING. We tried to tease out the multiple meanings of each word, and then see how each word is related to/affects other words. So “UNIVERSITY” makes us think of particular types of “WRITING” and so forth. We reviewed the syllabus. Timothy discussed his research participation opportunity. I discussed how we are going to practice listening during this first unit, as we explore the common-sense understanding of schools. We took a short break. Then I began our writing activity. The task was to write one page about a moment during your writerly education. The whole class first brainstormed ideas together. Then students did some free writing silently. They then shared their ideas with their tablemates. Finally, students wrote a more formal copy of their “story” to turn in. Before turning it in, some students shared their stories with the whole class.

\*

1/30

Began with a discussion of students’ short writing activity from last week. I discussed common and different themes I read in their writing (writing as tied to self-esteem and pride; desires to become better writers; writing as not-easy labor; etc.). I reminded students of the survey and possibility of winning \$50 and the value of participating in ongoing research. Went over first essay assignment (discussed forums and the ultimate

goal of interpreting interaction in the forums); Conducted whole-class discussion of first three chapters of Neil Postman's *The End of Education* (what does Postman mean by "gods"; what are the "gods" he lists?; what are their relation to one another?; what does he think these gods ultimately fail?). Transitioned to group work: each group had to discuss the questions in greater depth by identifying and discussing passages from the book that implicitly and explicitly answer the questions; then each group had to compose a paragraph that answers the questions, which they read to the whole class. As a class, we discussed similarities and differences between each group's paragraphs. We took a break. Then we discussed how writing fits into the various "gods" of education. Finally, we ended with a writing activity: each student had to write a page (to be turned in to me) that either extended a conversation we were having in class OR explored the "gods" (or absence of gods) that have motivated their education and writing.

2/6

I took attendance by asking everyone to say their name and one thing that confused them during the week. Then I discussed the writing they did last time. The writing was about motivations for writing/schooling. There were many interesting responses. Some attached writing to self-esteem and parental/sibling approval. Some attached it to bigger successes. Some made me rethink the economic god as something more than money; as something that people do in order to do other things (freedom, security, inclusion, participation in society, etc.). Then we discussed how to understand sentences that don't make sense: 1) first, look at the context, 2) find a sentence that makes sense to you, 3) go back and reread the passage. Then we went into Middleton. We discussed what we know about the terms "listening" and "rhetoric." Then each group discussed the term thesis and discussed/wrote about what Middleton's thesis and sub-points are. Each group shared with the whole class. We developed a good sense of what listening is. Then I introduced the three terms in the listening inventory and set the group's up to come up with their own terms. Finally, the groups shared their ideas.

2/13

At the students' request, we started class watching some "Harlem Shakes" videos on YouTube. We talked about them in terms of conventions. The videos are clearly absurd and crazy, but they each follow certain conventions -- they also play with these conventions a little bit. The students discussed how these videos are somewhat symptomatic of our culture (appropriation, here one day/gone the next sort of thing), and I talked about how they relate to writing, namely the appropriation and reinvention of academic writing conventions. Then we reviewed the essay 1 prompt, the forums, and our listening inventory. Then we listened to and read the Dead Prez song "They Schools." As a group, we discussed the "main point." And then students individually wrote about moments of (dis)/(non) identification. What were they? What did you think? Etc. They spent some time writing alone about their process of identification, and then shared with their small groups. In the discussion, each group member pointed to their moments of non/dis/identification and talked about their reasons and ideas behind the identification. After all group members shared, each group came up with a list of similarities and

differences within the group. Then we discussed the song as a whole class. BREAK. Then we watched the YouTube video about schooling (with the Black British dude) and, in small groups, discussed the listening or nonlistening that was going on in the comment's section.

2/20

We spent a lot of time discussing the forums as a whole class. Some of the questions: what was the most difficult question to answer, why? what were some similarities and differences (in terms of theme and style) in each forum and across all the forums? Last week, I had asked students to come today with a short analysis of one forum interaction. In small groups the students shared their short analysis and considered ways of expanding/revising it for their essay. After the groups were done, we went around as a whole class and each person shared an insight into the forums. We spend some time discussing the post about sarcasm, and how sarcasm requires a pre-existing community (or social bonds) into to actually function as sarcasm. Towards the end of the evening I reviewed the virtual peer review instructions and made sure students knew where to post their drafts.

## Appendix C: Consent Form, Cover Letter to Respondents, and Complete Survey

### Consent Form

#### Survey Participation Consent Form

You are invited to be in a research study on the ways students interact with each other in online environments. More specifically, this study examines student language choices with respect to discussions about difference in the writing classroom. You were selected as a possible participant because you are registered in section 013 or 069 of WRIT 1301. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. To participate in this study you must be at least **18 years old** and registered in section 013 or 069 of WRIT 1301 during the Spring 2013 semester.

This study is being conducted by Timothy Oleksiak, Department of Writing Studies (The University of Minnesota, Twin Cities). Professor Lee-Ann Breuch, Department of Writing Studies, is the faculty advisor for this study.

#### **Procedures:**

Those enrolled in sections 013 and 069 of WRIT 1301 in the Spring 2013 semester will be sent an online survey on January 28, 2013. By taking the survey you also grant permission to the primary investigators to access the online writing you do during the duration of the study. On March 25, 2013 you will be given another online survey to take to be completed within 1 week's time. The study will end on March 31, 2013.

Either completing the survey or clicking ahead to the survey implies that you consent to participate.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no risks and no direct benefit to participation associated with this study.

Your participation in this study will develop a growing body of knowledge regarding the way students communicate with each other in online spaces.

#### **Compensation:**

Should you consent and complete both surveys, your name will be entered into a drawing for 1 of 4 \$50 gift cards.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or your instructor. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is: Timothy Oleksiak. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions, **you are encouraged** to contact me at [Oleks008@umn.edu](mailto:Oleks008@umn.edu) or see me in my office in 316 Nolte Center. You may also contact Lee-Ann Breuch, the faculty advisor, at [Lkbreuch@umn.edu](mailto:Lkbreuch@umn.edu) or in her office (205 Nolte Center). She may be reached by phone at 612-624-6727.

## Cover Letter to Respondents

### Cover Letter

Dear Respondent,

As part of my dissertation for my doctorate in Writing Studies at the University of Minnesota, I am conducting a survey on listening language in online interactions amongst students. I am interested in finding out your *attitudes* toward listening and the *prevalence* of listening in your interactions with others. This survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. All the information you provide is confidential.

In a number of the questions that follow you will be asked a variety of questions about your *attitudes* toward listening. For these questions, please respond by circling a number on the 5-point scale provided where 1 is strongly agree and 5 is strongly disagree.

The other types of questions found in this survey gather information on the *prevalence* of listening with respect to difference. For these questions difference is understood as individuals who identify differently than you do. For example, if you identify as a middle-class Latina, those who identify as working class and white will be different from you with respect to race and class. Those who identify as homosexual and male will be different from those who identify as straight and female with respect to sexual orientation and gender. Someone who identifies as Christian will be different from someone who identifies as Muslim with respect to religious affiliation. Race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation are all ways in which individuals identify themselves. Collectively, race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation are known as “identity markers.” Identity markers can help researchers understand many things about how individuals interact with each other.

When attitudes about listening and prevalence of listening with respect to difference are combined, the results of this survey will help researchers understand how listening takes place in classroom interactions and the role listening has in classroom interactions.

Research findings should be complete *after* August 1, 2013. If you would like a summary of the research findings, or if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me after August 1, 2013 at the following email address: [Oleks008@umn.edu](mailto:Oleks008@umn.edu).

Thank you,  
Timothy Oleksiak, Primary Investigatory

### Complete Survey

**Directions:** Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree.

1. It is important for me to invite others to listen.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

2. People should want to listen to what I have to say.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

3. There is no need to ask others to listen.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

4. I get frustrated when I feel like others are not listening to me.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

5. People should not mention race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and class during discussions.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

6. It is helpful for everyone involved in a disagreement to explain how his or her identity has shaped each person's position.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

7. When someone mentions his or her race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or class in a disagreement, I become uncomfortable.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

8. If individuals within a disagreement would just not mention race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or class while talking, we would reach conclusions to disagreements faster.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

9. It is necessary to articulate why race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and/or class should be a part of disagreements.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

10. “Agree to disagree” is the best way to end a disagreement that seems to be going nowhere.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

11. It is necessary to provide a possible explanation for why a disagreement has not come to a resolution.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

12. It is necessary to explain why I no longer want to participate in a disagreement.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

13. There is value in attempting to overcome an impasse in disagreements.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

14. It is important to explain why I think others may be having trouble participating in a disagreement.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

**15. I avoid listening to others.**<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Those items in bold have been adapted from Palmquist et al. (1998).

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

16. I am no good at listening to others.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

17. Listening to others is an enjoyable experience.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

18. I can help others listen better to what I have to say.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

19. Listening to others has value

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

20. Anyone with at least average intelligence can learn to be a good listener.

1—Strongly Agree 2—Agree 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree 4—Disagree 5—Strongly Disagree

**Directions:** The following questions ask if you or those around you use “identity markers” (or statements that reveal a person’s race, gender, class, religious affiliation or sexual orientation) in conversations. Please check whether you or those around you have done the following in the past month.

21. In the past month, I have mentioned my ethnicity, class, religious background, sexual orientation or gender during a disagreement.

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

22. In the past month, I have heard friends, family, or classmates mention their ethnicity, class, religious background, sexual orientation, or gender during a disagreement.

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

23. In the past month, I have encountered comments that I believe were racist, sexist, homophobic/heteronormative, classist, or anti-religious.

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

24. In the past month, I have confronted people who have used racist, sexist, homophobic/heteronormative, classist, or anti-religious.

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

25. In the past month, I have explained to others why a comment was racist, sexist, homophobic/heteronormative, classist, or anti-religious.

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

26. In the past month, someone has labeled what I have said as racist, sexist, homophobic/heteronormative, classist, or anti-religious.

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

27. In the past month, someone has explained to me why a comment I have said was racist, sexist, homophobic/heteronormative, classist, or anti-religious.

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

28. In the past month, I have thought carefully about how my language choices impact others.

- Yes
- No

Not Applicable

**Directions:** The following questions are about your demographic characteristics. Please check the box that best describes you.

29. College Status

- First-Year Student  
 Sophomore  
 Junior  
 Senior

30. Are you are an official “non-traditional” student?

- Yes  
 No

31. What gender are you most comfortable identifying with (please check all that apply)?

- Male  
 Female  
 Transgender  
 Other (please explain: \_\_\_\_\_)

32. How would you describe your sexual orientation?

- Straight/heterosexual  
 Gay or Lesbian/homosexual  
 Bi/Bisexual  
 Queer  
 Questioning  
 Prefer Not to Answer

33. What racial category / ethnicity are you most comfortable identifying with (check all that apply)

- African America/Caribbean  
 Native American (please indicate tribe: \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Asian (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Hispanic/Latino/Latina  
 Caucasian/White (non-Hispanic/Latino)  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

34. How would you describe you or your family’s current economic background?

- Working Poor  
 Working Class  
 Middle Class  
 Upper-middle Class  
 Upper Class

35. What religious affiliation best describes you?

- Catholic
- Protestant
- Non-denominational Christian
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Buddhist/Taoist
- No Religious Affiliation/Spiritual

## Appendix D: Common Unit

### General Unit Description and Requirements

#### UNIT ONE: WRITING IDENTIFICATION HISTORIES

**Description:** In this unit we will be writing and exploring narratives. Through a series of forum discussions, peer reviews, and a final analysis project, we will come to understand the way narrative functions rhetorically.

**Readings:** For this unit, we will read sections from the following texts:

- Hall, Bradford. “How Can We Learn about Our Own and Others’ Cultures?” *Among Cultures: The Challenge of Communication*. Belmont, CA: Thomason Wadsworth. 73-84. Print.
- Forum Posts from our classmates

**Minor Assignments:**

- We will complete three forum discussions on our class’s Moodle site.
- We will also virtually peer review each others’ works.

**Final Unit Assignment:**

Using the texts we’ve created in forums 2.1-2.3, we will write a 4-5 page analysis of a moment or moments in the way our class has used narratives and responses to interact with each other. To help you think through this assignment, consider the following questions.

- What common themes have you noticed in the way narratives were developed or responded to by members of our class? What might these themes say about our classroom community?
- What tensions, if any, can you identify throughout the posts? How might you explain these tensions? What do these tensions say about our classroom community at this point in the semester?
- What worked well or did not work well in the way classroom members related to each other through the forum discussions? What might this say about the way members in our community relate to each other at this point in our semester?

**Formatting Guidelines:**

Please write your 1500 word analysis according to the most current MLA style guidelines. This means that your paper (both the draft and the final version) should be double spaced, in 12 point font, Times New Roman, with 1 inch margins all around. Please make sure to include the proper MLA style heading and title on your papers as well.

## Prompts for the Online Discussion Forums

### *Forum One: Writing Yourself*

Primary Task: Write a brief story that shows who you are.

There are no word limits in this post; however, your responses should hover around 300-400 words. Treat that range as a suggestion more than a rule. After you are done positing your answer to the question above, take some time to respond to 2 different community members. Use the following question as a way to guide your response:

What is your impression of the way this story represents the author?  
If someone responds to your work, you are required to respond to that person's comments.

### *Forum Two: Writing Influences*

Primary Task: Write a brief story about a person or people who has/have most influenced how you perceive the world.

There are no word limits in this post; however, your responses should hover around 300-400 words. Treat that range as a suggestion more than a rule. After you are done positing your answer to the question above, take some time to respond to 2 different community members. Use the following question as a way to guide your response:

What is your impression of the way this story represents the author, the author's influence, and/or the relationship between them?  
If someone responds to your work, you are required to respond to that person's comments.

### *Forum Three: Writing Perceptions*

Primary Task: Write a brief story about a time when your perception of your identity (how you see yourself) clashed with someone else's perception (how someone else viewed/interpreted you).

There are no word limits in this post; however, your responses should hover around 300-400 words. Treat that range as a suggestion more than a rule. After you are done positing your answer to the question above, take some time to respond to 2 different community members. Use the following question as a way to guide your response:

What is your impression about the way this story describes or frames the clash?  
If someone responds to your work, you are required to respond to that person's comments.

## Appendix E: Pre-Unit Treatment Plan

### Directions for Students

#### Objective

Create a listening inventory based on common readings, forum analysis, and shared experiences.

#### Readings

Joyce Irene Middleton's "Finding Democracy in Our Argument Culture"

Wayne C. Booth's "Judging Rhetoric" from *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*

"Sulibreaks" "Why I Hate School But Love Education" YouTube clip

#### Prompt

As we discuss the readings we have done so far, let's come up with a listening inventory that we may use as a lens through which to read online discussion forums. The inventory should emerge out of our own experiences and from the class readings we've engaged so far.

On the board make a list of the strategies for listening to texts. Make sure to organize the items according to themes discussed in Middleton and Booth's work.

When the inventory is complete the class should analyze the conversational thread found after Sulibreaks' "Why I Hate School But Love Education."

With this initial listening inventory, let's turn our attention to Sulibreak's "Why I Hate School But Love Education" and the following discussion just below the video and write for a few minutes on the following question:

#### **To what extent has listening taken place in this conversational thread?**

In your answers, please make sure to use specific support from both our class's listening inventory and the conversational thread after the video.

## OUR LISTENING INVENTORY

**Cultural Logic:** A cultural logic can be thought of as having two parts: 1) a collection of assumptions and 2) a system of reasoning. When we create ideas and arguments, we all use assumptions and we all connect these assumptions in different ways. A “cultural logic” refers to both the assumptions/reasons and the forms of connections. In order to understand the “cultural logic” behind a person’s or a group’s argument, we might begin listing the reasons that they give for their conclusion. Then we could look for what is left out: what assumptions does the argument rely on? It might be helpful to think of Neil Postman’s “gods” as cultural logics: the cultural logic of consumerism, of technology, etc.

**Identification / Dis-identification / Non-Identification:** These three terms help us become self-conscious of how we are responding to an argument or a particular cultural logic. As we listen to a text or a writer or a speaker, we might experience moments when we feel good about what the person is saying, or we might feel like we totally agree with their argument. These are moments of identification. Moments of disidentification can be considered the opposite. Sometimes we’ll be repulsed or enraged by an argument. If we feel nothing or simply don’t care about an argument, we are probably experiencing a moment of non-identification. If we keep track of how we experience all of these moments as we listen to a text, we can reflect on why we feel as we do. We can do try to understand how our responses to texts shape our understanding of them. We can then try to listen again.

**Listening with (or for) Intent:** If you are trying to understand the cultural logic behind an argument and you are keeping track of how you’re identifying with a text, then you are probably listening *with* intent. This means that you are actively engaged in trying to understand the argument at hand as well as your responses to the argument. This is different from listening with the goal of simply proving the text wrong or finding errors. Those might be important tasks. But I suggest that we do them after listening with intent.

**Feedback:** Some kind of response to show engagement: it could be either verbal or nonverbal

**Self-Interpretation:** It’s important to listen to everything someone says, but also to use your own logic to believe or not believe what they say. You should use your own opinion and views to build off of. In the process, you can notice the difference between points of view and become conscious of the limits of your own point of view as well as the views of the other person or text.

**Personal Connection:** Craving a personal connection will deepen the relationship between listener and speaker or text. Listening is a way to show interest in others. Conversation will get deeper when you actually are interested in what the other is saying.

**Mindset:** Preparing yourself to be open to a speaker's or text's point of view. Becoming conscious of your own negative emotions, grudges, and prior opinions. Considering how these might affect your listening and interpretation.

**Analyzing:** Listen with an active mind. Know clearly what the main topic is, so you can catch the key ideas or main points. Be considerate and conscious of what points you are not paying attention to, and what points you are judging to be the main points. Afterwards, you can rephrase the ideas in your own words and ask for confirmation from the speaker or text.

**Body Awareness:** How can you be conscious of and adjust your body in order to promote active listening (i.e., listening with intent). This can be valuable for reading texts as well as listening to live speakers.

## Appendix F: Sample Narrative Analysis Papers with Coding

### Bao's Narrative Analysis

#### "Narrative Analysis"

Narratives are stories that tell the listeners about a specific event that occurred, yet rather than listing the facts; they are composed of the speaker's own tastes and colors of how he/she perceived the event, thus, every narrative has somewhat different messages to convey (7). I had a great opportunity reading through variety of narratives posted by the members in the class, and had a chance to look at how they perceive the world in their eyes and was intrigued to find out the similarities within the narratives and some tensions that arose as well due to different point of view on many narratives (7).

One of the common themes that I recognized the most quickly was the similarities in-between the international students' posts and the native speakers' posts on Who I am forum (7). From reading, it is evident that international students' narratives structure primarily with the topic of moving to a complete new environment and how the processes of settling in have altered their identity compared to the past (3). For example, Duyen talked about how lazy and indolent past-identity began changing after moving to U.S (3). She realized that miracles occur under the name of effort and now sees herself as a hardworking person with goals to achieve (7). Samantha became more of a global person from moving and traveling so many times and managed to erase the ethnic barriers and leave aside prejudice, and same goes for Xiang (2). Mike specifically mentions that he has been living in the U.S for three years and said "These three years have changed me from a 17-year-old boy to who I am right now (2/3). I have learned various things for myself during these three years (7). Sometimes, when I looked back to the past three

years, I was really surprised how I could manage all of this” (4) His narrative clearly tells that he became an entirely different person after living in the United States for three years (7). This common theme of discovering the new self-identity is within the international students’ narratives and I, as an international student also have strong feeling of identification as well (2).

Within the native speakers’ posts about the self-identity, the main key points which the narratives are organized around include stories about family members and hobbies/interests that shaped them the most (7). This theme extends beyond the boundary of “Who am I?” forum and actually works as the common theme throughout the whole forums (7). Those who helped to build up writer’s identity in the first forum indirectly had a major impact or influence on him/her, and that influence allowed the writer to form individual and unique perception (7). Generally, the factors that contributed to formation of identity in the first forum tend to appear also in the influences and perception forums (7).

Taking for instance; Sally’s narratives are great examples illustrating the point that person who helped to build the writer’s identity affects both influence and perception (7). In the Who I am forum, she briefly introduces herself and mentions about her mom, who has most caring personality and Sally mentions that just like her mother; she is very interested in helping others (7). This characteristic allowed her to choose and prepare a career in Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of a hospital (7). In the influence forum, Sally mentions her mom and describes her as the most influential person to her life (7). This influence led Sally to form a perception of always helping caring and loving other people

and writes that she found it surprising and conflicting when sometimes others just wanted to handle things alone according to her perception narrative (7).

Another common theme that appeared throughout the forum was that almost majority of people chose to write about their families or hobbies, and it is really interesting to see how the same concept applies to each person differently (7). I think we subconsciously, without realizing, choose or remember family members and activities that seem close to us as examples in these forums (2). Although these can be seem as cliché (Of course, there are also interesting and unique activities as well) these are the factors that everyone have sense of empathy on (5).

Common themes were not apparent throughout and in many cases conflicting ideas and opinions occurred. There were in turn, lots of interplaying of opposing ideas found between the narrative writers and the commenters/readers (7). To be honest, tensions within these forums are unavoidable because everyone writes narratives on his/her own color, due to the difference in background and culture (4). Therefore the way how the reader will receive and perceive those narratives will differ from the writer's intent and feelings (4). I could disagree upon even the most agreeable narrative thought by the others because maybe, I never did or experience what that narrative had to say and not all the people think the same (4).

One of the narratives that I most disagreed upon was Sichen in the influence forum (3). He stated "Honestly speaking, there is no particular person who has most influence me" (2). I'm not sure of Sichen detailed background but to my belief there must be at least one person in the world that had a negligible influence on him, whether that

influence would be good or bad (4). It could be just that he was indirectly influenced and he just simply doesn't notice the impact because it's really hard to know who had an indirect influence unless you confront with that person and observe the thought-processing similarities or action similarities (4).

There was also a somewhat opinion difference in the comment on Sichen's post as well (7). I agree with Bill's comment saying "While there may be no person that has the "most" influence to you, I am sure that someone in your life has changed your view of the world multiple times (2). Generally someone close to you" (7). From reading upon Sichen previous narrative on Who I am forum, he lived in Ukraine, and I'm probably guessing that his close family member made upon the decision for him to move there, and this had a great influence on Sichen (5). In Ukraine, even though his personality diminished and became somewhat introverted in the beginning, this new environment motivated him to challenge himself to the limits (7). Now he has a perception on not giving up on things no matter how hard the situations are (7). Although he may not think of this as an influence I think it certainly contributed to his personality and how he perceives world and tasks given to him (4).

Another tension that I noticed was the narrative called downside of sarcasm written by Kevin (7). Although I didn't leave behind any comments to the post, I really thought that the sarcasm that he used was just not fit for the situation (7). Just to point things out, I love sarcasm (5). My friends and I use them to ease tension and break the ice with a slight and inoffensive sarcasm towards someone who is not related to us, or to friends I have known for a long time who knows that I am using sarcasm and can take

that as a good laugh (7). Yet, there are some sensitive topics that everyone knows about and tries to be cautious about mentioning them because they can be understood as maybe a harsh stereotype or a racist comment if those are used as sarcasm (4).

Majority of the comments found on Kevin's narrative seems to show dissatisfaction towards Kevin's action and also tell that our class community is well aware of the gravity of situation when sarcasm is used in an inappropriate situation (7). Jim mentioned "I think this was extremely poor usage of sarcasm and I wouldn't necessarily say that this was an appropriate time for sarcasm either" (7) And Sally mentioned "The Holocaust is probably not something you should joke about" (7).

From reading all the narratives from the forum, one of the things that went well would be that we all had a benefit to communicate our style of thoughts and the personal background and see the difference and similarities in life that non-native speakers and native speakers led (7). There were some personal narratives such as, Xiang's which talked about her father and Sichen's narrative about a fight between different ethnic person due to the history, to general lifestyle stories (7). Our class' native and non-native student ratio balances out so that the classroom atmosphere is diverse and it's good to have classmates with different experience, and lifestyle who think outside of the box when they give opinions (7).

However, in my honest opinion, there were lots of factors that didn't go well (7). One of which is, our way of telling the story change as we speak and write (7). As we speak to someone face to face and improvise what we are going to say without any preparation, we tend to either lack or full of personal emotions (7). Personally, I tend to

be full of more emotion as I speak than as I write (7). When I write, I go over what I wrote several times and erase unnecessarily remarks that others think would represent me due to that special or eccentric type of words I often use (7). Others might work an opposite; they might be a better writer than a speaker (7). So not everyone might have fully had a chance to introduce and show their characters and perception to the classmates (7).

Another factor that might have not worked well in these forums is that we tend to prejudge people from looking at limited amounts of writing (7). The image we get and characterization we subconsciously do in our head occurred during these forum readings because not everyone was familiar with others (4). As Samantha said in her narrative, “A perception of someone is something that depends on both the person who is being analyzed and the person who is viewing. (7) ...it is judged not only by the nature of the person being looked at, but also by the situation and the prejudice the viewer has on the person of consideration (7). In my own consideration, it takes more than a whole life to completely understand and finalize the perception of someone” (7). Although I don’t necessarily agree on her last statement saying we need more than a whole life to completely understand someone, I do agree that true perception and acknowledgement of one another takes a while and needs more than a three narratives (7).

## Stephen's Narrative Analysis

### Influential Themes: Family and Culture

While trying to find a common theme within the forums, the one that kept popping into my mind was the theme of family and culture (7). In everyone's post about influences, all but one mentioned the presence of a family member as being an influence albeit good or bad (7). I thought the theme of family was a little too broad so I delved deeper into the subject matter (7). I looked at what the influences were made on the majority of people as well as the role that culture played in the forums (7).

While looking through all of the student's Moodle posts, the vast majority included these two themes (7). They might have been about a sibling, parent, or in some cases even a grandparent, but overall, they spoke of positive lessons learned from their family members (7). I am also guilty of this, as to I wrote about my parents and brother (2). I think that when it came to posting their respective personal narratives, everyone had to ask and answer the same question (7). What do I feel comfortable exposing to a group of random people in my Wednesday night freshman writing course (7)? I'm certain that when people asked themselves this, they all came back with the same response; give the people what they want to hear (7). I believe that when people asked themselves this, they all came back with the same response; give the people what they want to hear (7). I believe that even if a person had a family member that had an extremely negative response and was clearly their biggest influence, they wouldn't have posted it (7). That is why I am convinced that the vast majority of posts revolve around the classic parent son/daughter billboard relationship (7). The only one that went against the current was

Xiang (7). She had the guts, that others didn't, to tell the viewers in 1301 who was her biggest influence and how it had negatively impacted her (7).

“I did not like my father, even secretly despised him when I was in middle school (2). He seldom had his personal opinions and just follow my mother (3). Every time we drove outside for dinner, he was like a robot who was waiting for order (3). He was more like a servant but not a husband in my eyes (2). What is more, when my mother was not satisfied with what he did and cried to him, he was always continue doing his things or simply walked away without any words” (7)

What she depicted was significant and really showed how she didn't have a filter for what she wanted the class to hear (7). I also found it astonishing the way she ended her Moodle post with her slightly changed mindset on the man. Also, that she left it up to the reader to decipher if she had gained respect for her father (7). I think it is the social norm to tell people the positive and push down the negative. So in this instance I gained a lot of respect for Xiang for coming out telling us about the person that influenced her the most! Another theme I found while looking at these forums is that culture plays a fairly large role when citing your influences.<sup>23</sup>

Something that I found to be interesting as I was analyzing the forums was the difference in responses to the Moodle posts (7). Because everyone had to respond to a couple of the posts, I assumed from the beginning that the responses would be lackluster in effort (4). As I was reading through the posts I found that while the majority of them were just what I expected, some people had put real thought and effort into thinking out

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<sup>23</sup> Statements without codes are difficult to determine in this analysis and are discussed in chapter four.

their responses (7). For example, a few people responded to the forums with actual thought provoking follow up questions as well as feedback to the article (7). Bao's response to Hyo's post about her parents exemplifies the definition of a thought out response (7).

“It sounds like your parents had a great deal of impact on you and it's really good to see that your parents trust and place a firm faith on you (7). Especially when your parents said "It's your choice" when you asked about studying abroad (7). I'm not being stereotypical here, but usual Asian parents, including my parents tend to choose and almost dictate over their son/daughter's path, but it's really nice to see that your parents trust and leave the judgment on you” (5/2). His response not only shows Hyo that he read and really understood her post, but that he also cares enough to compare it with his own families values (7). I also found it interesting that the majority of the great follow up questions or responses were often responding to the posts that were just okay (7). When someone put in the effort into a really creative post, I feel like no one felt like they had a good enough response to follow up the great piece of writing a few individuals had done on the forums (7). I can't speak for others, but when I read a really creative post I felt pressured to respond with a well thought out creative answer (5/7). On the other hand, when I read someone's who I could easily relate to without the need for excess examination, I didn't feel like there was any pressure. I could respond with something simple and get my point across (7).

The most interesting point I took when reading the forums was what an individual's family members actually taught them and how they did it (7). Before I

started reading all of the forums, I would have guessed that most people would be writing about how their parents or siblings taught them valuable skills that they would use in life (2). However, after reading through the majority of the entries, as well as talking about the subject matter during class, I had come to a conclusion (7). Not only were people not learning skills of a trade to use in the workforce, but they also were being a lot more self-reliant when it came to their own skills (3). Instead of their parents teaching them how to ride a bike or shoot hoops, they were learning it either through peers or themselves (7). How the majority of people had been influenced was through a totally different approach and manner than the one that I had originally assumed would have (4). Almost all of my classmates had written about learning non-tangible traits (7). They were learning things such as modesty, honor, and kindness instead of riding a bike or working on a car (7). I am guilty about writing various non-tangible things I have learned over the years from my parents (7). In my own writing I write about how my father has taught me lessons of virtue and life that will stay with me as I take on adulthood (7). From my mother I learned the valuable lesson of accepting and being at peace with oneself (7). Ninety percent of what I learned from my major influences happened to be non-tangible (7). Jillian eloquently wrote about how her family and more specifically her mother affected who she is as a person (7).

“She has taught me to be good to people no matter what they have done or haven't done (7). This makes me see the world with a really open mind and to not be so quick to judge people” (7) This post about Jillian's mother shows how she learned many non-tangible traits that molded her to be who she is today (7). Are kids born in the twenty-first

century just more self-sufficient than their parents (4)? I may not have the answer, but through reading through the Moodle posts, I feel that I have a better grasp of why this is happening (7).

I believe that if you would have asked this same prompt to kids even twenty to thirty years ago the responses would have been vastly different (4). With the introduction of the home computer in the early nineties and the rapid growth of technology, kids are swiftly becoming more and more self-competent (2). They rely a lot less on their parents for guidance and more on the internet for information (2). The ever growing existence of technology has switched the lessons parents teach their children from how to use tools to ways to become a better person (7). As children get less social interaction they look more and more at their parents for guidance (7). I believe that through our generations' use of technology, we aren't getting the social interactions or skills that our parents and grandparents received throughout adolescence (7). Therefore, we now rely heavily on our parents to learn and mold our social skills (7). That is why I believe most of the class posted about learning non-tangible skills (7).

Through analyzing the forums, I realized that the main theme was family (7). While delving deeper, I found that there were not only similarities, but also patterns in the forums (7). When looking at the difference in responses, societies effect on the students post, how culture affected the posts, as well as how todays' society is more self-reliant than ever, I feel that I have a much deeper grasp on not only the forums, but my classmates as well (7).

## Bill's Narrative Analysis

### Topic # 1 Final Draft

Common themes are apparent throughout the forum posts, but the most similarities fell into the first forum “Who Am I” (7)? Rather than reflecting on a past event that showcased you as a person, most people (including myself) addressed the question in the autobiographical sense; a very simplistic introduction as you would in a classroom setting to a bunch of new people you have never seen before (7). The normal format is as follows: Hello, my name is Bill and I am from (Here), I like to do (this) and I came to the University of Minnesota because (generic reason) (7). This is the best way to get a condensed sense of someone’s background, but it is not very useful when learning about them as an individual (7). This theme if it were apparent throughout everyone in the classes’ forum posts would indicate that our class is not very willing to open up to strangers and express ourselves (7). Personally, I am very willing to speak with anyone, but when I post online I generally come off as condescending and arrogant while in person I would rather have the person I am speaking with judge me based on our conversation or body language (4). Inho discussed how his constant moving has changed his hobbies, lifestyle and interests rapidly and molded him into the person he is today (2). “Relationship builds upon common ground, interests and personality, but as I’m moving to different cities, trying to fit in to different groups, my personality and interest slightly morph, losing the bondage I built with firends I got to know from previous cities (2). This caused me to stay within my “safe-zone”, and thus I became an introvert person” (2)

While I did not reply to his forum post I did read through it and was very interested in the differences; until I moved to Minneapolis I had lived in the same house

in the same town for my entire life and would never dream about joining the Army at this point in time, which is interesting because since he is from South Korea it is not a choice but a civil duty (3). The “Writing Yourself” forum caused absolutely no conflicts between students because it is simply a “Who Am I?” format where controversial thoughts and opinions would rarely occur when discussing a topic such as this (7). This forum was an extremely important one to start off with because it allowed everyone in the class who otherwise would have no idea who they are attending school with to know a little bit about the other classmate’s backgrounds, hobbies and lifestyles (7). Everyone feeling comfortable enough with their surroundings will allow them to open up and express themselves and be comfortable. The only tension that may have occurred during the first forum is if some people are concerned what the other members of the class think about them; the first forum seemed to be more of a warm up exercise than anything else so individuals don’t feel threatened in class when they want to discuss how they feel about a possibly controversial or touchy topic (7). I believe that this forum linked everyone a little closer to one another because now these people in our class are individuals with valid thoughts and opinions rather than complete strangers (7).

When discussing of someone who influenced you, I often think of someone who had influenced me positively sometime during my life; most of my classmates have the same thought it would seem because the forum generally consisted of teachers, parents and upstanding community members (7). This makes sense that parents are a common theme because in my life my parents have always been there to support me in the positive and negative stages of my life and are always filled with wise advice and love for me (7).

They taught me what is right and wrong and how to act; even if this changes over time due to outside influences I try and keep my morals half as upstanding as my parents who I look up to the utmost respect and admiration (2/3). Both of my parents came from different backgrounds which allow me to be well rounded and take in their different views easily and choose which I agree with most (3). My absolute and complete love for my parents makes it difficult for me to believe that anyone else could possibly dislike theirs, which I know is completely unrealistic (4). That's why I found Xiang's post on the person who changed her perception greatly (her father) to be very hard for me to read and take in (3). My view of my parents is much closer to Sally's who sums it up very well with her statement regarding her mother which I feel is very similar to my own and others' views of their parents and I believe that that thought is close to universal in our class based on the responses and posts of my classmates (2).

"It is clear to me that my mom most influenced how I view the world. Ever since I was an infant my mom was always by my side, caring for me" (7)

This is what amazed me about Xiang's post which caught me completely off guard (7). When I read "I did not like my father, even secretly despised him when I was in middle school.", I had a sinking feeling in my chest and was hoping that the story was going to turn around and become positive, but sadly it only continued negatively (4). When reading, even though I did not recognize the name I had a feeling it was a certain girl in our class based on her responses and attitude towards most class discussions, and I was right (7).

“I could never imagine what his life would be without his business (3). Thus, I never thought that he would take the money out of his business and invested it in real estate” (7).

Her statements concerning his passion for investing money and in business in general show obvious resentment which she makes extremely apparent (7). I feel one major difference between here and China in the family aspect is ideally in America families' show each other love and push their children to achieve but love them no matter what (3). In China (in my opinion) the children are pushed too hard having unconventional childhood's filled with requirements and expectations that are expected to be met by their overachieving parents (5). While this will make them excellent job candidates and functioning members of society, I believe for an individual to be personable and relatable they would need to be shown more compassion growing up and spend time with their parents for fun rather than work (3/2). This is why I believe that China is also far superior to us technologically and intelligence-wise, but I would rather have the choice of remaining a child as long as possible and enjoying myself rather than constantly comparing to thousands of other super intelligent and talented individuals with the goal to become rich and impress their parents or superiors (3/2). I am definitely generalizing far too much, but this idea does apply to a fair amount of people based on my prior experiences (5). Maybe the tension is the judgmental glances that others would offer when hearing that you hate your parents because it is out of the norm, but I fully respect Xiang's opinion (4). The way we related to each other was extremely similar which makes it very interesting when someone has a different opinion, but I enjoy when

there is a difference in the group which will help in discussions throughout the semester (7).

When asked to describe what we think others think about ourselves is an odd question to ask because it would make more sense to ask others what they think about us (7). A common thought between men was that others may perceive them as cocky or arrogant while women feel that others think that they are quiet because they are not as outgoing as the ideal person (7). How you view yourself often will determine how others see you, if you speak with authority, dress well and remain respectful then the rest will all come together (4). Tina did not explain what she thought others would perceive her as at first glance or anything of that nature, but rather how she views herself and how hard she is on herself (7). “I think that I always see the worst in myself because I am use to constantly wanting to be better” (2) is a very pessimistic view, but an understandable one based on her first topic (Who Am I?), she was always compared to her seemingly perfect older sister (7). Being the oldest sibling I never had to deal with this issue and rather did whatever I chose and only compared myself to what I thought I should be achieving at the moment (2). When I want to achieve something enough I work at it until I obtain it and if I am not that passionate about it I let it fade away and not worry about it rather than dwelling on it (2). It is much more important to be concerned with what you think of yourself rather than what others think of you as (7). This forum allowed us to take a step back out of our own views (perfect or not) of ourselves and step into another individual’s shoes and guess how they would see us (7). Very interesting thought which may have allowed my classmates and I to come to realizations; the only tensions that I noticed

were trying not to sound overly modest and judging yourself rather than others which I feel everyone did fairly well (7). These three exercises allowed classmates to open up and explore each other's lives bringing us closer together whether we wanted to or not (7). It allowed us to see another person's world and hopefully come together closely over the course of the semester and have some really deep and meaningful discussions that hopefully change some people's views on various subjects with proper input (7). The forums and topics are a great way to bring everyone just a little closer to one another throughout the remaining semester (7).

## Henry's Narrative Analysis

### Narrative Analysis

In class we discussed a number of different narratives, as well as different narrative types (7). I like the interaction we had about the vietnamese folk story that did not match the story that he had heard (7). Last year I took a class called Scandanivian Fairytale Literature and in the class we discussed a lot of narratives (7). We discussed how they had evolved over time (7). That there were different versions of the same story told, depending on where in the country you lived (7). The story didn't necessarily have to be limited to one country, but could be many different countries (7). This was seen a lot in class when the same story could be found in all in all the Scandanivian countries, but in different versions (7). It was also interesting to see how these stories would evolve over time (7). Sometimes they would start off very basic and then evolve into more complicated stories (7). It was interesting to see that when we discussed the Vietnamese folk story, that Brent had heard of the story, but the version he had heard was different (7). This is probably an example of how the story could change from region to region (7).

I think that folktales are all very interesting, because they almost always have a deeper meaning behind them (7). That there is almost always a lesson to be learned at the end of the story (7). Usually the stories for me would end with a warning to not do something (7). This was described in the handout on narratives (7). Bradford 'J' Hall argued that narratives always teach us something in varying degree (7).

I believe that folk tales is usually something we can always relate too, because when we were younger we would read them or have them read to us (7). My parents

would often read some to me, but usually if someone read folk stories to me it was my grandparents (7). All my grandparents were from different places in Sweden and we would always get different ones depending on who read the story to us (7). I always enjoyed the tale called “Tre bockarna bruse”. I remember I would always appreciate having the stories read to me (7). That these stories were always the best if they were read to me (7). It would always make them more authentic, more life like (7). It would also allow me to use my own imagination, for example if I were to see pictures then my imagination would evolve around the pictures, but with them just reading the stories to me it would I could use my own imagination (7).

Another interaction we had in class that I felt really relatable was Stephanie’s story about how her dad says that “Lifes not fair” (2). I especially felt connection to the part were her brother said that even he swore, so why couldn't we (2)? This is something I would always ask my dad, you did it so why can't we (2)?

It happened to me was when we were skiing in Sweden (7). One day my dad decides that it would be a good idea to try one of the toughest slopes at the mountain, he decided to do this eventhough it was closed off due to high avalanche risk (7). He is a pretty experienced skier so he handled it pretty well (7). Now I was around 17 years old and I have been skiing for most of my life so I thought that if he could do it then I could as well (2). I decided that I didn't want to try the same slope he did, but I did try a slope that was similar and closed off as well (7). So now you are expecting this huge wipeout, but no, I made it down with out to much of a hassle (7). I remember telling my dad that I

had taken one of the slopes that was off limits and he got pretty upset with me (7). I told him I had seen him do it (7)! He then told me don't do what I do, do as I say (7).

This also brought me back to the days when I used to swim with my friends back home in my old club team (7). When we had practice we would always get different sets to do and sometimes someone would get something that was harder than what the rest would be doing (7). There would always be complaining and we would always tell the person that life is not always fair (7).

From reading her post, it brought back so many memories (7). It was interesting to see how such a short narrative, but very straight forward narrative could bring back so many memories and thoughts (7). How they get you thinking about how you have had similar experiences, with the same words, but sometimes meaning something totally different (7).

Another narrative that caught my attention was "The 24 hour flight" by Greg (7). I think that it drew my attention, because it is an experience I have gone through so many times (7). I don't know how many times I have flown, but having lived in five countries and traveled to over 30 countries, I can say that it is a lot (7). I have flown so many times that today when I go through the security check point This story is one that I feel that I can really relate too (7). Now that I think back to it, it is something that brings up so many memories (7). I have probably experienced everything (7).

I remember the time when SARS hit South East Asia and it was probably a month after 9/11, we flew to Australia and the plane was empty (7)! It was just my family, so we pretty much had one flight attendant each (7). We each took up a row of seats, so we

could lie down when it came time to sleep (7). This was probably one of my better memories from flying (7). I also remember once when I was checking in and they told me the flight was full (7). I wasn't too happy about this, because this probably meant I would miss my connection (7). But, before I had time to start complaining they told me they had bumped me up to business class instead (7). Also one of the better memories I have had (7).

Then there are the not so good memories (7). For example when you have an 11 hour day flight between Stockholm and Bangkok (7). Where half the plane seemed to be screaming babies and the other half seemed to be drunk (7). When I hated plane rides, they were the worst ever (7). This was because, everytime we would land I needed a paper bag (7).

Today, I don't find flying very interesting, it is actually quite boring (7). Except for the times when you fly over a city or something that is really cool to see from the skies (7). I remember seeing Angkor Wat from the sky which was pretty impressive (7). There are few things that can be as beautiful as seeing something from up in the air (7).

The conclusions I can draw from Greg's and Stephanie's stories is that they brought similar memories that I have had (7). I read some of the other narratives that my peers had posted and I would always seem to be attracted to the ones that I felt some connection too (7). I could probably say this for almost all stories that I read (7). Whether the story is set in a place that I have been too or whether I have experienced something similar (7). I found the stories that I couldn't find a relationship with, very interesting as well (7). This was because, I had never experienced something similar so the thoughts

and emotions would be new for me (7). I was also interesting to hear about something new (7). I also found out from when I was writing the part on folk tales and my grandparents reading them to me, that I always appreciated having stories read to me instead having to read them (7). The same was when we listened to the stories on the computer it felt more authentic when you have someone read the story, instead of having to read it yourself (7).

I felt that doing the peer review in class was a lot better then doing it online (7). It was a lot easier to give feedback to the writer (7). It felt like when I was writing my comments on moodle they would always end up being comments on how I liked the post, but with the in-class feedback you really had to look for things that you agreed with and sometimes even disagreed with (7).

## Dan's Narrative Analysis

### Common Ground

In this class, students quickly learned that the traditional “lecture-style” format did not fit (7). All sections in this course are denoted as “discussions”, but the meaning did not become clear until the instructor took steps to promote these “discussions” (7). It started with the rearrangement of the desks into a large circle (7). It was reinforced by the constant and expected discussion questions posed every day (7). It was encouraged by assigning supplementary tasks with readings (7). “What were parts of the reading that stood out to you” (7)? “What did you notice about the structure or tone” (7)? Discussion was founded, reinforced, and encouraged (7). Yet, it didn’t work (7).

The semester started with journal entries (7). The students wrote on a variety of assigned topics, varying from abstract creative pieces to personal stories (7). Initially, when asked to share, very few jumped at the opportunity to share their work (7). More often than not, the room filled with silence when volunteers were asked to share (7). When the instructor decided to keep things moving along by randomly picking a student, nobody wanted to be picked (7). However, when the prompt was based on a personal story, more people were willing to share (7). These stories were often humorous, or at least entertaining (7). Still, the journal entries for non-personal stories were scarce (7). It seems that sharing non-personal stories was an unfavorable thing, and the discussions for various personal essays confirm that (7).

During a typical class discussion, one could feel the palpable silence as students sat in their desks, acknowledging the questions but not providing answers (7). Everyone

constantly scans their eyes at their fellow peers in hopes that someone would answer, but to no avail (7). The silence would be broken by one brave person, with one comment, yet they would receive no responses (7). Overall, the resulting “discussion” would be akin to an engine failing to start - sputtering, discontinuous, and always failing to gain traction (7).

Those discussions resided within the first unit in the class, which focused on personal essays (7). Yet when the focus shifted to narratives, the room broke out in discussion, at least on a relative scale (7). Is it because the students had time to figure out how these discussions work (7)? Unlikely, seeing as the first unit lasted almost a month (7). It's more likely that the newer topic was more engaging (7). The new topic, narratives, or stories, offered more natural discussions, unlike personal essays (7).

Why the appeal in narratives (7)? Since narratives are essentially stories with a viewpoint, it is more likely that people will share them, since people inherently like talking about themselves (7). Generally, people like to talk about things that they know about (7). What or who do they know the best (7)? For most, the answer is simply “myself” (7) They have personally experienced interesting stories, events, and ideas, and they subconsciously think of ways to tell them to their peers (7). It's then extremely easy to share these personal stories and experiences, since they are the expert in the subject (7). These storytellers also know that their audience is interested in their story, even if they cannot relate (7).

The results of this are shown in the online Moodle forum discussions (7). Each student was required to post a narrative (7). Some students found the narratives easy,

since all they had to do was just submit a personal story they were willing to share (7). The key observation comes from the responses (7). Each student needed to respond to at least two other submissions (7). Typically, each student only responded to two other posts; there was no incentive to respond to more (7). All of the responses looked the same (7). They included some form of compliment to the narrative, as well as a personal relation (7). It was easier to respond to relatable narratives, as opposed to unrelatable ones (7). Sure, it may have been more interesting to read unrelatable narratives, but there was no communication or acknowledgement to the writer that their stories were read - one downfall of an online forum (7).

The discussions get more interesting when peer review is introduced (7). In workshops, students were forced to critique their classmates' work in person, and not just talk about a story as they were accustomed to on the Moodle forums (7). This was hard (7). Initially, there was the familiar dead silence when the first round of critiques came - everyone was reading, so that was natural (7). Within a few minutes, the room was uncharacteristically filled with chatter and voices (7). Why was it hard (7)? To put it simply, students didn't know how to give acceptable feedback and improvements (7). The entertaining narratives seemed well-written and polished (7). Why would they want to change the story, or the way it was told (7)? The workaround to this was to not discuss improvements, but to instead compliment the piece and share interesting writing techniques they noticed (7). This surprised the writers being critiqued (7). They felt the anticipation and surprise similar to a student rushing late to an early morning class, only to learn that it was canceled (7). All that worry for nothing (7)! It was only after rounds

of compliments that actual suggestions were made, and even then they were modest (7). “This may be personal preference, but..”, “This is something that’s probably very nitpicky..”, and so on (7). This was not unintentional - it was simply too hard to correct and improve a story that was not their own (7).

When asked what was more preferable between the online discussions and the in-person workshops, most responded the in-person workshops (7). Perhaps the online discussions felt “forced” and unhelpful (7). After all, the feedback was mostly praise and related stories (7). With the workshops, the writers received immediate feedback (7). Sure, it was hard to give criticism, but the nature of face-to-face interaction forced those (few) criticisms to be nice and modest (7).

Additionally, the smaller group size may have contributed to livelier chatter (7). The chance of two or more students having the same thought is much higher in a larger group (7). That may have driven away students from responding, since they didn’t want to state a seemingly obvious point (7). In a smaller group, points could be repeated without much worry, since there was usually something added on that would make the response unique (7). The smaller size also motivated responses by making the responder feel more secure (7). In smaller groups, the audience was three people, not twenty-three (7).

So what was wrong with the first unit’s discussions (7)? Frankly, the fear of repeating a fellow student’s thoughts is the most likely reason (7). The discussion questions all pertained to one reading that everyone read, so the topic itself was not unique (7). The personal essays did not have many relatable components to the students,

which only made the situation worse (7). The students can be classified, albeit in a blunt way, as homogeneous (2). They grew up in the same timeframe, with the same technology, and are experiencing similar peer culture (2). This is another reason why the narratives were interesting - they were stories from the same group of people (7). The personal essays from different time periods and drastically different cultures were not as interesting to read (7).

All in all, peer narratives made for more interesting discussions than seemingly random essays (7). It's not a very surprising result - people are more inclined to talk about things that relate to them (2). It's a trait of confirmation bias, where people are more absorbent to ideas that they agree with (2). The students preferred the in-person workshops to the online Moodle forum discussions, since the compliments seemed more "real" and the conversations were less awkward (7). Discussion results when the awkward barriers are gone (7). The easiest way for this to happen is to find similarities, and relate (7).

## Dillon's Narrative Analysis

### Online Generation

When I thought about the narratives that I have written in this class, I realized that I am very honest and have shared things that I really have never shared before (7). Why (7)? What about this class has made me feel like I should share (7)? I have never been an overly outgoing person (2). It's not that I am too shy; I just do not like to talk about myself very much (5/2). Even around my family I do not speak often. I have always been known as "a man of few words" (7). Also, I do not participate often in class discussions because I never really feel like I have anything worthwhile to share with the class (2). So why have I shared these personal details about my life with these people I have only known for a month (4)?

Posting my writing on Moodle has made sharing personal details much easier (7). Posting online takes the initial pressure out of sharing personal details (7). Although I do not prefer online interactions to in person conversations, I really liked having people respond to my compositions (7). After I read the comments on my posts I felt more comfortable commenting on other posts and then talking about them in the classroom (7). Also, having these first interactions online sort of broke the ice a little bit, at least I felt that it did (7). Because we posted online first I think it gave us more ideas to discuss (7).

Growing up in this generation we all are very comfortable communicating online (2). Social media is definitely responsible for this (4). Because we have become so comfortable with online communication I think using Moodle to share our short stories works very well (7). Even though Moodle would not be my first choice as a method of

sharing our stories, I understand its purpose and I believe it is effective (7). Online posting goes hand in hand with the typical behaviors of someone our age (2).

Moodle is effective but I think reading our short stories or essays out loud in class is more valuable (7). I think reading out loud in class would be more effective because we are so accustomed to posting online (7). I also believe that because we are so comfortable with the internet, our daily interpersonal interactions suffer, and that it is a good thing to be forced out of your comfort zone every once in a while (7).

The first short narrative I wrote was an embarrassing story about how I used to burn my hands on grills as a young boy (7). I forced myself to raise my hand and volunteer my story to the class (7). When I was called on I could feel my face quickly warming (7). I knew if I raised my hand I would be called on because very few students actually volunteer (7). So why did I start freaking out (7)? I remember thinking to myself; “What the hell are you doing” (7)? I only volunteered my story because I knew I needed to participate more (7). Now I am going to embarrass myself in front of the whole entire class for a couple of participation points (7). As I began to read my story I felt more and more relaxed as I drew closer to the end (7). I started out of my comfort zone, but I was getting slightly more comfortable as the story progressed (7). Near the end of my short story was the part of my narrative that was intended to be funny (7). Nothing is more awkward than telling a bad joke or a boring story (7). I was so relieved to hear laughter (7)! In the end I was glad that I decided to read my narrative out loud (7). I forced myself out of my comfort zone and it turned out to be a positive interaction

between me and the class, and the fact that I could make everyone laugh greatly boosted my confidence in my writing ability (7).

Up until recently, I have always considered my writing to be sub-par, math and science are more my cup of tea (7). For as long as I can remember writing has been a huge challenge for me (7). I struggled through a writing class I was required to take in High School, and honestly, my heart sank when I realized I was going to have to take a writing class in college (7). Surprisingly, I have actually enjoyed this writing class (7)! It is so different from what I had expected (7). Having daily discussions about readings and our own writings has forced me to learn and incorporate new writing styles and tactics into my essays (7).

In the past I believe that I have always written boring academic papers and had little to no interaction with peers or teachers about writing (neither my own writing nor others writing) (7). Hearing different people read their own stories and interpretations of the essays helped me hear everyone's individual "voices" (7). It was not until recently that I really realized everyone's writing is different; there is not a right or wrong way to do it (7). Being a math person I thought that I could just state facts and opinions and it would be right (7). That is why I believe I have struggled so much in the past (7). Because of my approach on writing, my essays would always become boring and robotic (7). Writing is not like math, there is no one correct way to write an essay (7).

The second narrative became even more personal than the first (7). I was starting to find my "voice" (7). I have written about people that I look up to before, but I have never been so honest about it (7). Being totally honest made writing this narrative so

much easier, and I am sure that it was more interesting to read than many other similar compositions I have written in the past (7). I titled it “Hard Work Beats Talent”, that is part of a quote said by Kevin Durant that has had a huge impact on my life (7). The full quote is; “Hard work beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard” (7). This quote also resonated with someone who commented on my post (7). I was happy to see that my favorite quote meant something to another person as well (7).

The last post was about the nickname I was given in High School and then again in college (7). Smiles (7). The name is pretty self-explanatory (7). People call me Smiles because I am almost always smiling, and am known as a nice guy (4). This post got the most replies out of all of the ones I wrote (7). I thought that was interesting (7). Why did people respond to this one more than the others (4)?

I found the answer to that question to be how well people could relate to it (7). People will respond to posts that they can either relate to or sympathize with, and I realized that I did the same thing when choosing which posts I wanted to reply to because it was the easiest way to do so (3/2). Drawing parallels between me and my classmates online made it easier for me to do the same in both large and small class discussions (2).

I have really enjoyed being able to connect with my classmates through the writing assignments we have done so far (7). So far there have been countless moments of interaction between everyone in the class (7). Each of these interactions has had a positive effect on my writing (7). I would never have thought that a writing class could have so much to offer (7)! Through online posts and essay interpretation we, as a class, have interacted in such a way to improve each other’s writing and analytical skills as well

as learning how to make our own unique voices be heard through our writing (7). I have learned many new techniques on how to make my writing more interesting, and I will be forever grateful for these experiences (7).

## Appendix G: Directions for Peer Review

### Directions for Students

Before reviewing your peer's work, please familiarize yourself with Breuch's "Peer Review Tutorial."

Please post your complete draft to this forum by (insert date students should post their drafts). To post your draft, please click "Add New Discussion Topic" and then upload your assignment. Make sure your subject is "NAME'S draft of Narrative Analysis" and don't forget to leave a note for your reviewer regarding what you would like help with specifically.

Once you and your peer have posted your drafts, please read the draft, and use the "track changes" feature of MS Word to insert comments, questions, and suggestions throughout the draft. At the end of the draft, write a response no less than 300 words in which you summarize things you have noticed about the draft.

When you have finished your "track changes" comments and your 300-word response, save your document by adding your initials to the file name and post it as an attachment to the message the student author posted in the Peer Review forum.

You should complete peer review by (insert date students should complete their review).

**Peer Review Tutorial**  
**Dr. Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch**  
**August 2010**

- Section 1: Peer Review Rationale and Instructions for Peer Review**
- Section 2: Roles of Authors and Reviewers and Articulating Constructive Criticism**
- Section 3: Methods for Inserting Electronic Comments in an Author's Draft**

# Peer Review Tutorial: Section 1

This section addresses a rationale for using peer review and instructions for conducting peer review.

## What is Peer Review?

*Peer review is an exercise in which students review each other's written work. Peer review is connected to revision—a part of the writing process in which writers refine and make substantive changes to their written work.*

To conduct peer review, students exchange written work with other students, read the work, and provide feedback to help the author improve. The benefits of peer review are that students can see how others have approached their work, they can receive comments that may strengthen their writing, and they can practice being part of a writing community.

## Why conduct Peer Review?

Receiving constructive feedback from peers is a common and valuable activity for workplace writers. Written communication should be checked for accuracy, expression, appropriate address of audience and purpose, and adequate support. Peer review is frequently practiced by professional writers and is regularly expected for published works.

## How will we conduct Peer Review in this class?

Peer review can be conducted in many ways, but in this class we are conducting peer review online in designated student groups. Within each group, students are assigned to give written feedback in electronic form to least one other group member. Generally, your peer review task involves reading and inserting electronic comments in the author's document, and providing summary comments based on assignment criteria. Please consider these additional tips:

1. **Save your peer review worksheet with your initials.** For example, if the document name is "ReflectivePeerReview.doc," add your initials in all caps to the title of the document: "ReflectivePeerReviewLKB.doc." Then save this document somewhere on your computer where you know you can access it. This step is critical, for sometimes attachments get lost, and students may need you to resend your peer review worksheet.
2. **Tell your group whose paper you are reviewing.** Send a quick note online to members of your peer review group identifying whose paper you will review. Coordinating the process this way will help eliminate confusion later. Also try to

avoid pairing up with someone and exchanging papers. Doing so can exclude someone later. Make sure everyone has a reviewer.

## Peer Review Tutorial: Section 2

This section addresses roles of reviewers and authors, and how to articulate constructive criticism.

### Roles of Reviewers and Authors in Peer Review

A peer review may consist of two or more persons, but generally, there are two roles in peer review: the author (writer), and the reviewer.

The role of the person whose writing is being reviewed is known as the **author**. During the peer review, the author may be asked questions by the reviewer. The author might take the opportunity to discuss ideas for revision with the reviewer.

The role of the person or persons reading the paper is known as the **reviewer**. The reviewer will take time during the peer review to read through the author's paper, and then will ask questions of the author for further clarification. The reviewer should feel free to point out areas that need improvement as well as areas that are done particularly well. The reviewer's role is to constructively provide feedback from a reader's point of view.

During a peer review, participants will switch roles, so that everyone gets a chance to be the author whose work is reviewed and everyone gets a chance to be a reviewer. Peer review should be a positive experience, and it is helpful if persons involved approach peer review with a positive outcome in mind. It is easy to fear the response of others, but both author and reviewer should keep in mind that reviewing each other's work is a fruitful, constructive experience. Approaching roles positively in a peer review is key to a good peer review experience.

### Avoid the "Sounds Good" Comment: Provide Comments with Reasons

It is tempting for reviewers to fall into a trap of the "sounds good" comment. Instead of providing constructive feedback, reviewers might simply tell the author "Your paper sounds good. Everything seems to be in place. Good job!" Giving the "sounds good" comment does little to help an author with the process of revision. Reviewers should be prepared to positively provide comments that help the student improve his or her writing.

If you want to provide a positive comment, write the comment PLUS a reason. For example, if you were commenting on a thesis statement, instead of saying "Your thesis statement sounds good," you might write: "I like your thesis statement because it indicates a clear stance. I have a good understanding of your argument."

***A good formula for commenting is: comment + reason***

### **Make Your Comments Constructive**

A reviewer may often feel awkward making comments about another student's paper, particularly if the reviewer finds something that needs to be improved. However, peer reviews are not productive if the reviewer only provides positive comments. It is important that the peer reviewer feel comfortable to offer their perspective about trouble spots in an author's paper, but we advocate doing this gently. Reviewers should keep in mind that peer review is the opportunity to provide constructive criticism, not negative feedback.

To achieve constructive criticism, it is helpful if the reviewer phrases his or her comments in terms of "I" statements to address trouble spots in an author's paper. The reviewer might follow up with a question to help the author articulate his or her intention in the paper. The following examples in Table 1 below show original, negative statements and ways those statements might be revised to demonstrate constructive criticism.

**Table 1. Negative Comments Transformed to Constructive Criticism using "I" Statements**

<b>Negative Comment</b>	<b>Constructive Criticism</b>
"Your paragraph on the history of Turf-grass industry doesn't make sense."	"I am having trouble understanding your paragraph on the history of Turf-grass industry. Can you tell me what you are trying to convey in this paragraph?"
"You haven't addressed audience at all in your letter of transmittal."	"I do not get a strong sense of audience in your letter of transmittal. Can you tell me who you are trying to address?"
"This section is really poorly organized."	"I don't understand the organization of this section. Can you explain what you are trying to do here?"
"This figure in your lab report is not clear. It looks terrible."	"I'm having a hard time seeing how this figure fits in with your lab report. What does this figure address? Where is the title of this figure? As a reader, it would be helpful to me to have labels and a clear title for this figure so I can understand what you want to illustrate with this figure."

## Peer Review Tutorial: Section 3

This section focuses on online feedback strategies and methods for inserting comments online.

### Appropriate Online Feedback Strategies

We encourage online peer review to be an opportunity to provide many different forms of constructive feedback. Research has shown that when feedback is provided online, students remember it better and are more likely to integrate it into final drafts. However, not all online feedback is good feedback. For example, online reviewers might suggest word choices or edits that are incorrect. **A good strategy is to provide more comments, questions, and suggestions than online edits.** The strategies mentioned here will help you develop good online feedback habits.

### Comments vs. Edits

What is the difference between “comments” and “edits”? Comments are responses from reviewers, often stated in first person voice and in complete sentences. Comments are reactions to what they have read. Here are some examples:

- “I like your opening paragraph. It includes an interesting illustration that hooks the reader.”
- “I’m having a hard time understanding this paragraph. It seems to cover a lot of different topics.”

Edits, on the other hand, are typically word changes in the document. Online review tools, like “track changes,” allow reviewers to go directly into a text and change wording while preserving the old wording. Edits might point out spelling and grammar mistakes, and even suggest different wording. Here is an example:

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Comments and edits both serve an important function. Comments allow you more power to explain why you like or do not like elements in a paper. If the author is missing something, comments give you the chance to explain what it is. Edits, quite often, are subjective and sometimes assume a different voice than that of the writer. **If you see glaring editing errors, it is fine to point those out to the author, but resist the urge to rewrite sentences to wording that you think is better.** Instead of rewriting, provide a comment that explains your reason for wanting different wording. Example: “I don’t

understand your sentence here. Can you rephrase?” Below are more examples of constructive comments that you can use.

### **Use Questions to Reflect Reader Response**

An excellent strategy for commenting online is providing questions throughout. Questions allow for pure reader response and bring you closer to a face-to-face experience, where reviewers often ask questions of authors and discuss specific passages of writing. You might ask questions about sentences that are unclear, paragraphs that don't make sense, or about the author's intention with a certain section. Here are good examples of questions:

- “What is the topic sentence for this paragraph? I'm not sure I understand the focus of this paragraph.”
- “Can you include a story, example, or fact here to support your claim? I don't find this paragraph convincing.”
- “Have you thought about the counter argument to your claim? Where will you address that?”
- “Can you use an attributive tag here? Is this sentence your wording or it is from a source?”

### **Make Suggestions for the Author to Consider**

Suggestions are ideas for the author to consider. They often elaborate on comments or questions that reviewers provide. For example, if a reviewer writes a question: “What is your thesis statement? It is unclear to me.” They might follow up with a suggestion: “You seem to be saying that you don't agree with way the city council has handled land appropriation. Could you write a thesis statement with that argument?”

### **Use Complete Sentences**

A good suggestion for commenting online is to use complete sentences. Complete sentences allow reviewers to express their thoughts and responses more clearly, and they are less confusing to authors. Authors may not understand your shorthand online.

***It is simply good practice to write online comments in complete sentences.***

### **Focus Your Comments on Criteria from Each Assignment Sheet**

To make your comments even more on target, address the areas of the assignment that are directly stated in the criteria for each assignment. Each assignment sheet will have a bulleted list of “Criteria for Evaluation.” Looking at that section will tell you exactly what will be graded for that assignment. As you make comments throughout, try to address areas of the paper that directly speak to those criteria for evaluation. And of course, use constructive criticism as we reviewed earlier.

## **Methods for Inserting Comments**

Here are suggestions for inserting comments in the text: (1) using “track changes” or highlighting your comments in another color or font, (2) using the “comments” function, and (3) writing an “end note” or summary comment at the end of the document. We’ll review each of these methods below.

### **Using “Track Changes”: Inserting Comments Directly into the Text**

You can insert comments directly by a word, sentence or phrase. These types of comments are great for providing quick reader response to a specific word or sentence.

***They also work well for edits, but do not rewrite the author’s text.*** Try to insert comments that include your reaction and response to the student’s text.

You can insert comments by simply writing in the document and highlighting your comments in a specific way. You could bold your comments, or use a different color or font. I like to set off my comments with brackets and my initials **[LKB: like this]**.

Another way to insert comments is to use the “track changes” feature of MSWord. If you would like to use this feature, follow the instructions below.

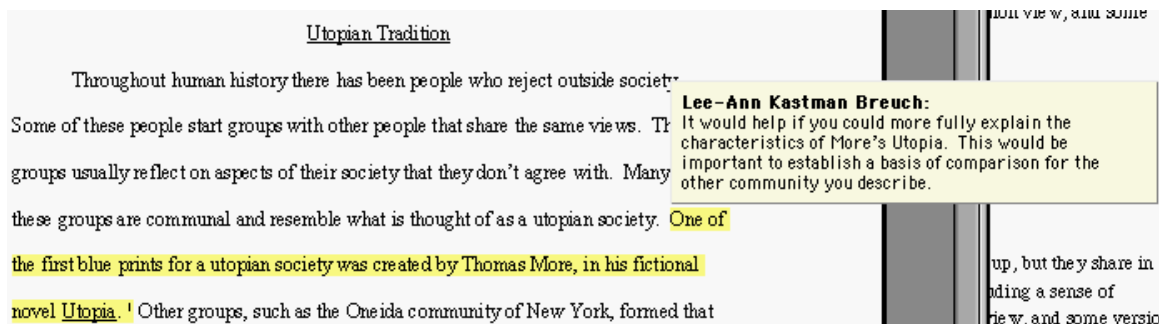
1. Go to the “Tools” menu bar.
2. Select “track changes” (it may also be called “highlight changes”)
3. Start typing in the document. When you type, your comments will show up in a different color and will be underlined (you can change these settings if you like). See Figure 1.
4. Add all your comments.
5. When finished with your comments, go to the “File” menu and select “Save As.”
6. Add your initials to the title of the document to let the author know it’s your review (example: If the author’s paper is titled “Paper1.doc,” save the document by adding your initials: “Paper1LKB.doc”).
7. Once the document is saved, you can send it back as an attachment to the author. Your comments should be saved as underlined and in a different color.
8. To turn off “track changes” at any point, simply return to the “Tools” menu and click on “track changes” again.

### **Using the “Comments” Function to Highlight Sections and Write Questions, Suggestions, or Comments**

The “comment” function of MSWord allows you to highlight a word, sentence, or even an entire paragraph, and to write a comment, question, or suggestion about the highlighted passage. Then, when you are finished, you will see sections of highlighted

text. When you put your mouse over these sections, your comments will pop up. To use the “comments” function, follow the steps below.

1. Go to the “Insert” menu bar.
2. Select “comments.”
3. Use your mouse to highlight a word, sentence, or paragraph about which you’d like to offer a comment. Your screen will split into two boxes.
4. Enter your comment in the boxed portion on the bottom of your screen, similar to a footnote. After you enter your comment, the split screen will remain until you have entered all of your comments.
5. To write another comment, go to the upper portion of your screen, highlight another passage, and enter a comment.
6. Go to the “File” menu and select “Save As.”
7. Add your initials to the title of the document to let the author know it’s your review (example: If the author’s paper is titled “Paper1.doc,” save the document by adding your initials: “Paper1LKB.doc”).
8. Once the document is saved, you can send it back as an attachment to the author. To see your comments, authors will need to roll their mouse over each highlighted portion, and the reviewer’s comment will pop up like a sticky note on the screen. See Figure 2. (Note: if you cannot see the example, put your mouse on the box below and double click. It should appear on another screen.)



***Writing an “end note” comment in which you provide an overall summary***

End notes are summary comments in which the reviewer provides overall suggestions and observations. In an end note, a reviewer might summarize the individual comments made throughout the document. An end note can easily be written using “track changes” so that your end note comment is in a different color. For example:

END NOTE FROM LKB: Overall your report reads well, but I had trouble understanding the introduction. As I wrote in your “Results” section, it would be helpful to have more

detail about your interview results (who did you interview and what did they say? How do their answers compare to one another? Your recommendation is clear and strong, but the “results” section needs more information to justify your recommendation. As for audience, I do not have a strong sense of your client as the main audience. Maybe look at the introduction again to see how you can address the client’s original situation and how this report will benefit them? Also remember to include the front and back matter in this version, and I think you will need that to receive full credit.

***Remember to Save Your Reviewer Document***

Whichever method you use, remember to save your document after providing your comments. It is best to save the document with the author’s original title, plus your initials. Example: If the author’s paper is titled “Paper1.doc,” save the document by adding your initials: “Paper1LKB.doc”. This will allow the author to know who reviewed their paper, and it will help you make sure you don’t lose your comments.

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