Historical Studies of Composition

David R. Russel

*Iowa State University, drrussel@iastate.edu*

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Historical Studies of Composition

Abstract
WRITING IS a technology used by people in myriad human activities for myriad purposes, from producing the grandest texts of religion, government, and science to the humblest government forms, grocery lists, and graffiti. And its history of uses reaches far beyond the subject of "composition," defined here as the conscious and explicit development of students' writing in formal education, from preschool through higher education. Some historical research on writing extends beyond this definition and will be mentioned only in brief in order to set the limits of this review and suggest the work that many historians of composition have used (or ignored).

Disciplines
Rhetoric and Composition

Comments
CHAPTER 10

Historical Studies of Composition

David R. Russell

Writing is a technology used by people in myriad human activities for myriad purposes, from producing the grandest texts of religion, government, and science to the humblest government forms, grocery lists, and graffiti. And its history of uses reaches far beyond the subject of “composition,” defined here as the conscious and explicit development of students’ writing in formal education, from preschool through higher education. Some historical research on writing extends beyond this definition and will be mentioned only in brief in order to set the limits of this review and suggest the work that many historians of composition have used (or ignored).

First is the research on reception and circulation of texts that does not discuss its production. These generally are termed literacy and reading—by far the most predominant foci of historical research on writing. Of the several traditions of research on the history of literacy, the most provocative traces the effects of the introduction of literacy into an oral culture, such as Havelock’s (1982, 1986) study of writing as a technology in ancient Greece, Goody’s (1968, 1986, 2000) studies of the origins and effects of literacy in the ancient Middle East and Europe, and Ong’s (1958, 2002) studies of Renaissance writing and African literacy. These studies of how writing shapes thinking and social organization are supported by cultural-historical research in anthropology, such as Scribner and Cole’s (1981) study of literacy among the Vai in West Africa, Street’s (1984) study of literacy in rural Iran, and many others (e.g., Besnier, 1995). Closely allied to this tradition are studies of the effects of print (Eisenstein, 1979) and the “history of the book.” Literary studies sometimes have treated the composing of literary texts as well (e.g., Plimpton, 1963).

A few historical studies of writing by “nonliterary” people exist (Gere’s [1997] history of writing groups; Brandt’s [2001] literacy histories), but these do not focus on writing in formal education. The history of handwriting and its instruction (Thornton, 1996) is related to composition in some ways in that the technology of writing influenced pedagogical practices in writing instruction (as computers do today).

More relevant to composition are studies of the history of literacy related to formal schooling. H. J. Graff’s (1987, 1991) radical reading of literacy and Myers’s (1996) history of literacy in U.S. schools, beginning with signature literacy, provide insights into writing instruction in terms of changing standards of literacy, although
the emphasis is on reception, not production. These studies are, in a sense, answers
to those who argue, through historical analyses of test scores, that literacy is declin­
ing (e.g., Chall, 1996; Coulson, 1996; Stedman, 1996).

Along with the history of literacy, the history of reading instruction also em­
phasizes reception (Gordon & Gordon, 2003; Kaestle & Damon-Moore, 1991). These
accounts sometimes discuss briefly the teaching of writing in formal schooling, but
they are not framed as histories of composition per se. Similarly, the history of En­
GLISH as a profession has been the subject of much research in the past 20 years, and
I will refer to the major studies and those that treat figures and programs whose
importance to composition is discussed in detail.

And then there is the history of rhetoric, discussed in Chapter 7 of this volume.
It is hard to separate rhetoric from composition, as composition grew out of rhetoric
in the 19th century and in many ways returned to it in the 1960s. Indeed, composi­
tion often is referred to as “composition-rhetoric.”

I exclude histories of teaching students to write literary criticism, or physics, or
any specific field—unless the studies are explicit about the role of writing in that teach­
ing, as with the Writing Across the Curriculum movement. This distinction is par­
ticularly fuzzy when considering fields devoted to specialized kinds of writing, such
as creative writing and journalism (Adams, 1993). The history of technical commu­
nications instruction has a much larger literature and one more directly related to
composition, as these courses often have been taught in English departments, as com­
position has been. There have been histories of writing (or more generally commu­
nications) in the workplace and professions (e.g., Yates, 1989), and in the academic
disciplines (e.g., Bazerman, 1988, 1999). There is an even larger literature on the
history of business and technical writing, notably Longo (2000), and its teaching
(Adams, 1993). But research on the teaching of technical and business writing is not
considered in this chapter.

Finally, the history of education has treated literacy rather extensively and in­
fluenced much research in the history of composition. But there has been little com­
munication between the two endeavors. Indeed, none of the 15 articles on literacy in
History of Education Quarterly, the leading journal in the field, mentions composi­
tion. This omission is regrettable, as the historians of composition can learn much
from the archival and social historical methods of educational history and could
contribute much to that field’s research. Indeed, historical methods in composition,
in my view, rely too much on published sources and not enough on archival materials,
with some important exceptions, which I note below.

I’ll first discuss elementary and secondary education and proceed through higher
education, taking each in roughly chronological order. I have not discussed a num­
ber of short articles (five pages or fewer) that do not include developed historical
research but do point to a “then and now” connection of some current practice or
problem with the past, although these may offer interesting brief insights.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

There is far less historical research on composition in elementary and secondary
schools than in higher education because composition in elementary and secondary
schools has been subordinate to reading (particularly literature) and has remained
largely so, while in higher education, composition courses have been separate and, during the past 3 decades, have become professionalized. As that happened, composition looked to define itself by studying its history. Indeed, much of the historical research on elementary and secondary composition was motivated by a desire to understand the origins of pedagogical practices in higher education. Although there is a very large body of historical research on reading in elementary and secondary education (and very little on reading in higher education), it treats writing and composition mostly incidentally.

Research journals devoted to elementary and secondary English did not publish much historical work on composition (see Chapter 1 of this volume) until recently. Indeed, the major research journal, Research in the Teaching of English, published only three historical studies from its founding in 1967 until 1994. Nevertheless, the research on K-12 composition is important, because a great many of the practices and theories that are central to composition (at any level) had their origins in the schools. And, of course, the vast majority of composition instruction (as well as literature and language instruction) takes place in K-12.

The relative paucity of research on the history of writing in elementary and secondary schools perhaps can be explained also in part by the towering presence of Applebee’s (1974) definitive (and only) comprehensive history, a magisterial study that functioned in the way, say, Boring’s (1929) history of psychology did, both as a reference work and a definition of the field. Applebee’s book was researched rigorously from an impressive range of archival resources, which was necessary as there was very little historical research to build on. Yet it is written in a very readable style, with immense confidence. Although Applebee would go on in his career to study writing, his history gives relatively little attention to composition and writing in comparison to literature and reading—not surprisingly, as the teaching of K-12 English did not either. Indeed, the book has only 10 index entries for composition and none for writing, as compared with dozens each for literature and reading (even drama gets 10). Nevertheless, there has been some excellent historical work on K-12 composition since 1984.

The 19th Century: From Handwriting to Composition

Before about 1830, “writing” at all but the highest levels of formal education was defined as penmanship, or transcription (Monaghan, 2003). This conception persisted well into the 20th century (Thornton, 1996). The origins of what today is called composition occurred in elementary and middle school, for students about ages 6 to 16 (which in part may explain its low status). The teaching of composition, as distinct from handwriting, began with a series of educational reforms in schooling during the 1830s. Woods (1985a) sketched out that history, and his formulations have been refined by others since. As Woods shows, the teaching of handwriting occurred in what aptly were termed grammar schools that emphasized rote drill in the rules of Latinate grammar and spelling, as well as vocabulary and proper handwriting. Writing generally was confined to copying or imitation of adults’ texts. But in the 1830s American reformers such as Bronson Alcott, under the influence of European romantic educational reformers—Froebel, Herbart, and, mainly, Pestalozzi—began to introduce “self-active” methods, which came to include students writing about objects in their environment, experiences, and so forth. Woods (1985a) shows how composition
(and the culture as a whole) inherited central myths about grammar: its power to discipline the mind, preserve culture from decay, and acculturate new generations.

Schultz (1999) greatly developed Woods's (1985a, 1985b, 1985c) research to produce, as she claims, "our profession's first history of school-based writing instruction" (p. 4), although it covers only the 19th century. Schultz's history begins with the introduction of composition in the 1830s as part of the "Great Awakening" in education, a widespread—if halting—move toward universal primary education, motivated by a Jacksonian democratizing politics and a slightly more secular—although always moralizing—approach to religion in public life. With it came a new and romantic concept of the child as a developing and active learner, rather than a container for content or miniature and defective adult. While pointing out that the old drilling continued to be the dominant pedagogy, Schultz focuses on books that were less popular but advocated "reform pedagogy."

In the new "object teaching," as it was called, students wrote about lived experience, not just abstractions, in an attempt to prepare students for "life," not just college. For example, Frost (1839) introduced topics on how haymaking supports other trades, "drawing from real objects in order to apply the art (of composition) to useful purposes" to "insure success in business" (p. 54). Textbooks, says Schultz (1999), reproduced cultural and class values such as manual labor and a "well-ordered home" (p. 156).

Reformers argued against beginning with rules and in favor of learning to write by writing, not strictly following models but using models in more complex ways. Students began to develop their own subject matter and even write journals. As textbooks gradually moved toward the concrete and practical in writing, students got regular practice in composition, not just memorization or dictation of adult texts. Textbooks began to incorporate visuals (using the new wood engraving technology) as part of the pedagogy, for composition prompts. Indeed, Schultz (1999) concludes, "The school climate was more encouraging of innovation than the university setting" (p. 151).

Schultz (1999) forces a rethinking of Connors's view of the 19th century as dependent on static abstractions—she finds "How I Spent My Summer Vacation" prompts much earlier than Connors does. But it's difficult to know, then as now, how widespread such innovations were, because Schultz, like other historians of the 19th century, relies very heavily on textbooks for her account, although she does bring in some other materials such as school newspapers, prize essays, letters, and memoirs. Because archival material is so important for getting at the actual practices and consequences of classroom instruction, as well as the institutional and social environments, of classroom practices, it would be good to have more of the patient archival digging (particularly using methods of social historians) that allows historians to construct "solid, ethical histories based on fragmentary evidence," as Eldred and Mortensen (2002, p. 41) point out. And it would be important as well to have richer theories of the connections between school practices and wider ideological contexts.

One area that has received a good deal of treatment is the place of women in 19th-century composition—more treatment, indeed, than composition in general has received. Historians have put classroom practices into the context of women's lives, as in Gere's (1994) study of writing workshops and her book-length study of literacy practices (and learning) in women's clubs (see also Greer, 2003). Eldred and Mortensen's study of "composing women of the early U.S.," drawn from descriptions of
schools in novels, provides little on composition. Rouse (1995) uses colonization theory to account for women’s struggles at eastern and southeastern girls’ schools, against patriarchal ideals of “republican motherhood” and “true womanhood,” and girls’ resistance, in their writing. She argues that the girls constructed identities out of their experience rather than the biological determinism enforced in the schools. This kind of ideological analysis based on sound archival research is, I would suggest, precisely what is necessary for K–12 history research.

African Americans’ role in composition has not been researched systematically, but Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) has studied the opportunities for, obstacles to, and uses of literacy for African American women from colonization to the present. Given such scope, Royster is able to devote little attention to composition per se. In the few mentions she gives to specific instructional practices for writing, Royster opens up a rich area for historians of composition interested in the specific practices of communication instruction and acquisition in schools attended by African Americans, from the Sabbath schools and missionary schools of the 18th and 19th centuries to the “elocution and oratorical training [that] were common interests practiced among African American women during this era, in support of their obvious desires to develop public speaking abilities” (p. 158). Composition needs more of Royster’s rigorous archival research, but focused on the teaching and learning of writing by people of color. Such archival work is especially difficult given the paucity—for reasons that should be obvious—of the kinds of documents composition histories have mainly relied on, textbooks and articles.

The remaining research on 19th-century K–12 education includes a number of brief “then and now” articles that discuss the precedents of some teaching or curricular practice, particularly ones that I believe should be more prominent today. Among these one might note Aulbach’s (1994) reminder of the importance of the Committee of 10 in 1893 and Rodd (1983) on precedents for the use of models in composition instruction. The practices of elementary and secondary education are crucial to understanding composition’s origins, as well as its influence on college composition, as Connors (1997) makes clear in his history of college composition and the history of education in general. It is important to have more of that history available.

The 20th Century: Mass Education

Twentieth-century composition in elementary and secondary schools has received even less attention by historians than that of the 19th century. In the period this review covers, there were no book-length studies and few major articles. The majority of work came in the form of what I have called “then and now” articles (usually published in the periodic special issues of English Journal devoted to history) that look at some contemporary practice in light of some historical moment from the past. There has been little attempt to deepen or rethink Applebee’s (1974) categories.

Nevertheless, some work treating major figures provides useful insights: Monseau’s (1986) study of Dora V. Smith’s pioneering work in the 1930s and 1940s; Thomas’s (2000) appreciation of Lou La Brant, president of the NCTE in 1954 and advocate of an open curriculum and child-centered teaching; and Thompson’s (2000) study of Sylvia Ashton-Warner, an Australian educator of the Maori who anticipated the whole language movement in the 1940s and 1950s. And some of the then and
now studies are equally engaging, such as Shadiow’s (1984) collection of comments from teachers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries on teaching practices or Waber’s (1987) article on finance, curriculum, and teacher recruitment, both of which illustrate plus ca change, plus c’est la même chose in K–12 composition teaching. More substantial are Donelson’s (2000) presentation of quotes to illustrate that there was no “golden age” of composition instruction (pace conservative critics of the 1990s) or Nelms’s (2000) historical reflections on the inability of composition to be more than a “handmaid” of the “master,” literary criticism, with all that implies about “the inequity those gender-laden terms imply” (p. 51). More rigorous in method is Donsky’s (1984) study of trends in elementary school textbooks, from 1900 to 1959, which shows the ebb and flow of interest in teaching practices such as oral language, grammar, modeling, and prewriting. And Strain (1993) provides a fascinating “hermeneutic” history of the ways the English used composition in the early 1960s both to secure federal funding and to continue composition’s marginal status.

**English/composition teaching as a profession.** There also is, unfortunately, little work on the role of composition in the growth of elementary and secondary English teaching as a profession. Haugh (1996) provides a brief retrospective of the origins and development of English Education, the journal of teacher education founded in 1969. And Durst (1992) analyzes the NCTE Promising Research Award dissertations from 1970 to 1989, finding the emphasis overwhelmingly on empirical work on students, although a range of methodologies and theories were borrowed from other disciplines to enrich English studies. Fowler and Fowler (1984) briefly discuss the history of the unfortunate split between composition and speech communication, which occurred just after the formation of the NCTE in 1911, but had roots in the 19th-century elo­cution movement and lamentable consequences for later attempts to integrate communication teaching and learning. This crucial historical break in disciplines, which separated speaking from writing, deserves much more study.

**Women.** The role of women in 20th-century K–12 education began to be researched in the period of this review, most notably Gerlach, Monseau, and the NCTE Committee on Women in the Profession’s (1991) collection. This appreciation of 10 pioneering women in English education begins with the first woman NCTE president, Rewey Belle Inglis (1928) and ends with Ruth G. Strickland, David H. Russell award winner in 1965. Although these essays are often more hagiographical than critical or analytic, they mark the outlines of women’s contributions to K–12 English. It is revealing to read them through the lens of composition (more space is devoted to liter­ature instruction). These teachers and educational leaders did a range of work that might well have been groundbreaking if the profession had taken their innovations into widespread practice: Rewey Belle Inglis on viewing the classroom as laboratory for exploration; Dora V. Smith on the “thought method” of teaching grammar, formal grammar instruction as an impediment to learning, analysis of error as individual and caused (a precursor of Shaughnessy, 1977), composition as means of socializa­tion by broadening student interests, and the systematic use of visuals; Harriett Sheridan on analysis of film and teaching the writing process; Ruth G. Strickland on the use of functional rather than formal grammar, concern with process over prod­uct, and teaching composition in the whole curriculum; and Ruth Mary Weeks and Luealla B. Cook on research on talk and other spontaneous language use. Almost all
were disciples of Evelyn and John Dewey—progressives, not least in their concern for students disadvantaged ethnically, economically, or geographically. The line of work opened by Gerlach and colleagues (but not much pursued since) would yield important insights into the past and the present.

**People of color.** A good deal of work on the literacy practices of people of color in formal schooling has been done in the history of elementary and secondary education over the past 2 decades, notably Willis (2002) on literacy at Calhoun Colored School from 1892 to 1945, Goodburn (1999) on the Genoa Industrial Indian School, and Lockard (1996) on Navajo literacy in the 1930s and 1940s, in which a Navajo elementary teacher weaves together archival materials (BIA and school) with anecdotes of her father’s and her own experiences in both school and church. All discuss writing instruction, although none is framed explicitly as an historical study of composition and none published in a composition journal. Despite the recent interest in ethnic minorities within composition studies, there has been very little work in the history of composition in this crucial area, with the exception of Royster (2000), which treats 20th-century K–12 schooling in vignettes, such as the women’s campaign against efforts in the 1910s to “deny African American children access to literature after the sixth grade, a policy supported by the industrial education movement” (p. 216), which led to the founding of the first African American public high school in Atlanta.

**Whole language.** The whole language movement—important politically as well as pedagogically—deserves thorough historical treatment, but there exist only brief accounts. One of the whole language movement’s founders (Goodman, 1989) traces the intellectual roots of the movement, in learning theory (John Dewey, Jean Piaget, L. S. Vygotsky), in reading theory (Louise Rosenblatt, Frank Smith, Ken Goodman, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, and the individualized—anti-basal—reading instruction movement), in composition theory (Alvina Burrows, Donald Graves, James Britton, and the National Writing Project), and in experiments with integrated curriculum beginning with Kilpatrick in the 1920s. She then tells her personal history of the movement’s beginnings in the mid- to late 1970s among groups of teachers in the United States and Canada. Daniels, Zemelman, and Bizar (1999) summarize 60 years of research that, they argue, supports holistic, literature-based approaches to writing.

**Writing across the curriculum.** Attempts to improve writing (and improve learning through writing) in secondary school content areas were chronicled by Russell, from the earliest days of the NCTE and its first president’s advocacy of “cooperation” (1986) and the Dewey-inspired correlated curriculum movement of the 1930s to the work of the Bay Area (later National) Writing Project (1991, 2002b).

**Assessment.** Trachsel (1992) has written the only comprehensive history of the crucially important subject of assessment—focused on the college entrance examinations, not classroom or programmatic assessment practices (other areas ripe for historians). Her book covers the changes in the College Entrance Examination Board (and its successor, the Educational Testing Service), from its origins in the Committee of 10 in the 1890s, through the first exam in 1901 (mainly memory of set books), to the Scholastic Aptitude Test in place in 1990—exclusively multiple choice (and that has since changed again). She sees this history as a battle between competing definitions
of literacy associated with geographical, professional, and philosophical interests: the formal, which is associated with schools, "achievement," the eastern United States, literature, form/grammar (a legacy of the Committee of 10); and the functional, which is associated with learning for life (not school), "aptitude," the midwestern and western United States, composition, content, and the legacy of F. N. Scott and other Deweyan reformers.

The formal generally won out, as the notion of "aptitude" became formalized and achievement-oriented, redefined according to the professionalized English (read, literary criticism), which used testing by the literary and formal definitions to mark out its professional place. There was some erosion of eastern college dominance (e.g., the 1920s test included a writing section on nonliterary composition but the reading section remained all literary). Thus, the test was part of the literature/composition split, with literature remaining a discipline and composition reduced to content-free "skills."

But as tests became "objective," literature itself lost control to psychometricians. "Literacy" as officially defined and enforced (the use of tests skyrocketed in the 1950s and beyond) became separated from pedagogy, and from either literature or composition—hence so many "How to Pass the SAT" books. Trachsel's conclusion: Tests are good at predicting academic success but not promoting it. They are essentially conservative, reproducing the status quo. And both literature and composition should work together to regain control over the definition and testing of writing and reading. Trachsel's (1992) analysis is partial and open to much revision, and I hope other historical analyses of assessment will follow.

**Disabilities.** I have been able to find only two historical studies of writing instruction for students with disabilities (neither framed as composition research), but they provide a starting point for important work yet to be done. Katims (2000) gives a five-page review of historical studies on literacy instruction for people with intellectual disabilities between 1800 and 2000. He divides them into skills-based instruction and "integrated and contextualized" instruction, the former mainly devoted to decoding without writing, the latter offering much more writing instruction, often integrated with reading and speaking. Sawyer (1991) reviews the history of the whole language approach with reference to students with learning disabilities.

**Composition in Other Elementary/Secondary Educational Systems**

The following review of histories of composition in other educational systems is admittedly partial, owing to the very different ways formal writing instruction is conceived in various systems—and to my own lack of knowledge of the languages and educational systems of the vast majority of nations. Nevertheless, I mention several useful historical works.

ing of literacy before the advent of formal elementary education, Christie on the decline of rhetoric and the “corruption” of grammar, and Burgess on the effects of diversity on literacy in the postwar period. Pandian (1997) provides a history of literacy efforts in Malaysia since it gained independence in 1957.


Herrlitz (1984) surveys language teaching in nine western European educational systems, with a section for each system devoted to history, including writing instruction. The history of writing instruction has not (as far as I can tell) received specific treatment in francophone nations, but Chervel’s (1998) history of French schooling devotes a good deal of attention to writing, particularly the history of the genres required on the secondary school exit (and university admissions) exam, the baccalauréat, and the pedagogical practices that prepare students to write the exams (cf. Jey, 1998).

COMPOSITION IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION

The historical research done from 1984 to 2003 on 19th- and 20th-century writing instruction in higher education is primarily a search for origins by an emerging profession, composition studies. The history is seen through the lens of debates over what the profession should be and what form its central activity, the teaching of first-year college composition courses, should take.

General Histories

There is no standard work at this point that covers the entire history of composition. Connors (1997) comes closest with his collection of essays that he previously published along with material on the 20th century. He covers gender influences, textbooks, grammar and correctness, issues of disciplinary identity and workload, discourse taxonomies, the emphasis on static abstractions, and the role of invention in relation to assignments. He proceeds from a rationalist and pragmatic epistemology, deliberately not a “a work of criticism” (p. 22) but a series of stories, “traditional” history—although the stories always take into account the social and educational contexts. Spear (1997) too provides a brief but helpful overview of composition’s history and activity, written to explain the field to those not in it.

Nineteenth-Century Origins

The 19th-century origins of composition in higher education were studied first by Kitzhaber (1953/1990), whose work forms the starting point of most of the studies in the early 1980s. And there was some excellent work on composition before 1984
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(see Scott & Castner, 1983). The most balanced and thoughtful short account of the origins of college composition is Brereton’s (1995) introduction to his important collection of historical documents from 1875 to 1925.

Berlin (1984) wrote the first published book-length study of writing instruction in 19th-century American colleges. In the first two-thirds of the book, Berlin—always a classifier—draws two of his three “rhetorics” (approaches to writing instruction) from Kitzhaber: classical rhetoric and what Berlin terms “eighteenth century rhetoric”—the psychologized rhetoric drawing heavily on the Scottish Enlightenment. He adds a third, romantic rhetoric, “growing out of the transcendental movement and in most ways uniquely American in its development” (p. 4). Berlin’s emphasis is on the theoretical and philosophical (mainly epistemological) roots and assumptions of these rhetorics (he relies on textbooks and accounts rather than archival materials), as he traces the decline of the classical tradition and the growth of the “eighteenth century rhetoric” to become the dominant approach to writing instruction through American imitators of Hugh Blair, George Campbell, Richard Whatley, and others. Berlin clearly prefers what he identifies as an Emersonian, “democratic,” romantic rhetoric. He acknowledges it had little effect on either 19th-century or later practice, although he speculates on a connection through Dewey to 20th-century progressive education.

Berlin (1984) looks at the origin of composition at Harvard and locates it philosophically in a “scientistic” approach—positivism. He then praises Fred Newton Scott of Michigan (along with Gertrude Buck and Joseph Denney) in describing a democratic and rhetorical alternative that, he laments, also disappeared under the pressure of scientistic approaches. Woods (1985b) surveys the central psychological theories that informed 19th-century writing instruction: mental discipline, Scottish Commonsense Philosophy, Bain’s associationism, and James’s functionalist pragmatism.

Johnson’s (1987a, 1987b) rethinking of 19th-century rhetorical theory reads the period not in terms of a decline in classical rhetoric or oratorical tradition or in terms of a practical (pedagogical) lens that traces the roots of current problems. Instead she tries to see 19th-century rhetorical theory in 19th-century terms, as a useful synthesis of 18th-century thought that broadened interest from the oral to include the written and that valued the resulting “new rhetoric” in terms of its contribution to liberal education and moral/social betterment. She concludes that this attempt to provide “habits of eloquence” (p. xx) made a significant contribution to 19th-century culture and thought and thus deserves to be studied and valued in its context, not as a scapegoat for late-20th-century projects to revive classical rhetoric and reform pedagogy.

From rhetoric to composition. The issue of origins was debated endlessly from 1984 to 2003 in terms of what Young (1978) termed “current-traditional rhetoric,” borrowing Fogarty’s (1959) term. Current-traditional rhetoric emphasizes writing in modes (exposition, definition, narration, argument—EDNA); division into words, sentences, and paragraphs; mechanical correctness; the reading of professional models; and other things, depending on the historian. It does not emphasize communication, invention (in the classical tradition), or the process of writing. The current-traditional oxymoron suggested that this paradox was composition’s tradition of pedagogy and that the tradition was still very much with us. The highly flexible term provided a useful category, a paradigm, for the emerging profession to position itself against, in
Decline of classical rhetoric. As composition became professionalized, it looked to a

time before the long winter of current-traditional rhetoric and rediscovered classical

rhetoric (long studied in speech departments). Corbett (1965) remade classical rhetoric

into a composition pedagogy and positioned it as a historically more legitimate al-

ternative to current-traditional rhetoric—one that was beholden to neither modern

literary criticism nor modern educational theory and research, the two main alterna-

tives then available to English department composition teachers. Indeed, some of the

historical articles of the late 1970s and early 1980s read like jeremiads on the evils of

the present age and a call to return to the ancient ways (see, for example, Murphy,

1982). But the historical research gained a less polemical edge quickly, drawing on

the work of Halloran and others, to become a major contribution to the field of

rhetoric.

An excellent introduction to the issues is Wright and Halloran (2001). They see

the 19th century (as do most historians) in terms of a shift from an oral to a written
discourse, and from Latin (and to a lesser extent Greek) education to a vernacular

curriculum. In the 18th and well into the 19th century, at the highest levels of educa-
tion, writing was considered primarily as a means of preparing to speak. And it was

termed Rhetoric, a distant but strong legacy of ancient rhetoric. Today it often is

termed “oratorical culture” (see Clark & Halloran, 1993). Composition ordinarily

meant composition in Latin and Greek, when that term was used in higher education

(then usually called “colleges”). And students wrote as a means of preparing to speak

publicly, providing a rich environment for integrated language learning and prac-
tice. The oratorical culture endured in the form of extracurricular student literary

societies that provided lively discussions of contemporary learning and issues as well

as the opportunity to practice speaking and writing. (Note that until the mid-19th

century, many students attended “colleges” at age 16 or even earlier. It’s important

to understand that the levels of education taken for granted today in the United States

evolved slowly.)

The shift from what Wright and Halloran (2001) call “scripted orality to silent

prose” (p. 222) has been viewed as an inevitable consequence of social changes, such

as technology, American individualism (especially the rise of a middle class with edu-
cational aspirations), and professionalism (G. Graff, 1987). Crowley (1990) argues

that it lost power mainly through theoretical innovations in philosophy, logic, and

psychology. Johnson (1991) sees the shift not as a decline but as a creative synthesis

in the face of social and educational exigencies, which lost its creative edge in the

late 19th and early 20th centuries. In any case, the emphasis on writing led to a

belletristic emphasis on “polite literature,” imported mainly from Scotland through

such highly influential textbooks as Blair’s Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Letters,

a trend that led eventually to the dominance of literary criticism over rhetorical edu-
cation and practice, as Horner (1993) and Miller (1997) have explicated in terms of

the split between reading and writing and its consequences for the professionalization

of composition (see below).

Connors (1986b, 1987b, 1997) argues that the belletristic influence led to per-

sonal writing assignments in higher education (see Schultz’s [1999] disagreement

order to define new—professionalized—paradigms. And it provided an umbrella term

that motivated much historical research on the origins of practices and, more broadly,

the theories that lay behind them.
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above) and a move from objective, “centripetal” writing assignments concerned with issues in the world toward individual, subjective, “centrifugal” tasks. Liu and Young (1998) analyze several problems in reviving rhetoric as a modern academic discipline, locating current-traditional rhetoric in terms of the institutional histories of speech communication and composition studies.

**Modes and invention.** Perhaps no other current-traditional practice was more confining than the modes of discourse (EDNA) for a profession wishing to teach writing as communication instead of as traditional rules. Connors’s (1981) article explaining the modes’ long influence in terms of 19th-century social conditions spawned several articles. D’Angelo (1984) investigated further the ways early 19th-century lists of types of discourse (which proliferated in the age of mass printing and literacy) evolved (or to some, devolved) into textbook formulas, which varied in complex ways, according to various theories (particularly Alexander Bain’s psychology) and became more or less stabilized as a textbook tradition around 1900. Crowley (1984b) challenged Connors’s social explanations by delving further into the desiccated theory of 19th-century rhetoric (from Kitzhaber, 1953/1990) that ignored audience and reduced authors’ aims to textual features (cf. Adams, 1984). Connors (1997) provides the most complete treatment of discourse taxonomies, especially the modes, including his work on the evolution of scientific discourse in composition under the mode of exposition.

The work on modes spawned a deeper consideration of the decline of the classical canon of invention. How do students (and writers in general) find things to say? The fullest theoretical treatment of this issue is Crowley (1990). Although chiefly a work on rhetorical theory, it digs deeply into the roots of current-traditional composition teaching. She argues that the 18th-century British rhetoricians (George Campbell, Richard Whatley, Joseph Priestly, Adam Smith) did not, as Howell (1971; Howell & Ramus, 1956) and Kitzhaber (1953/1990) had argued and others generally accepted, create a modern, psychological rhetorical theory that was desiccated in the 19th century. Rather, the very problems of current-traditional rhetoric lay in the 18th-century mentalist assumption that there are general principles, true of all people, that allow writers to take fully formed ideas introspectively from memory and transfer them to the page (and know their audiences because they know themselves). This assumption leads, in Crowley’s view, to ignoring the communal social processes—especially the role of audience—that were central to classical rhetoric and the differences among people that motivate and necessitate communication. It also leads to an emphasis on textual forms, locating authority in texts rather than in authors and communities, teaching by general principles (“intellectual prescriptions”), a lack of attention to ethos (including ethics) and pathos, the banal five-paragraph theme, and generally prose that “establishes no voice, selects no audience, takes no stand, makes no commitment” (p. 149). In summary, Johnson’s (1991) appraisal suggests the usefulness and importance of the 19th-century theoretical synthesis for that century; Crowley shows the unfortunate consequences of the theory’s uncritical appropriation and codification in the 20th.

**Correctness.** The historians’ project to understand—and reform—current-traditional rhetoric had no more important task than resisting the pervasive focus on mechanical correctness in composition. Historians all pointed to the extraordinary sameness of complaints about student errors and the lack of any good evidence that students
are indeed making more of them than in the past. Connors traces the origin and development of composition’s (and the nation’s) obsession with correctness, locating it in a cultural and class-based “linguistic anxiety” that developed in the 1840s, as well as the pedagogical constraints of mass education, where the decline of rhetoric and growth of emphasis on the written and the practical, in both secondary and higher education, left poorly trained and overworked teachers “bereft of a discipline” scrambling for handbook answers to this social “problem.” Predictably, he looks to the newly emerging discipline of composition to restore the imbalance between rhetoric and correctness. Similarly, Connors (1986a) explains the reduction of grammar instruction and theory from the central and elaborated tradition of classical rhetorical education in the liberal arts (chiefly Latin grammar) to a means of correcting errors and “the strange amalgam of buzzwords, legends, handbook nostrums, half-understood transformational concepts, and decayed eighteenth-century prescription that most of us know today” (p. 22). Boyd (1993) extends Connors’s cultural analysis by arguing that the obsession with correctness became a pedagogical ritual for dealing with the modern cultural anxiety, “transporting the novice writer to a new cultural space free of destabilizing elements” (p. 451).

The Beginning of FYC: Harvard and Beyond

The outlines of the origin of first-year composition courses (FYC) were sketched out by Kitshaber (1953/1990), with important quantitative archival work on programs by Wozniack (1978) (efficiently summarized by Brereton, 1995). Instituted at Harvard by President Eliot in 1872, the course was a first step in moving away from the emphasis on classical languages and toward an elective, fully specialized curriculum (English A soon became the only required course). It grew out of an admissions test that was an attempt—very successful—to exert control over secondary school curricula. And, despite a number of other extant approaches, it set the model for the modern U.S. university, which was just emerging after the Civil War (Stewart, 1992; see Wright & Halloran, 2001, for a dissenting view).

Various historians have emphasized Harvard’s influence. Berlin (1987) points to the growth of scientific specialization in the preparation of a new middle class of professionals through the teaching of a “narrowly scientific and rational discourse” (p. 30). Connors (1997) emphasizes a turn away from the oral and social toward individualistic self-expression of the written word, with style instruction reduced to static abstractions and a focus on sentences and paragraphs. Jolliffe (1989), who surveyed student themes and forensics from 1865 to 1900 in the Harvard archives, found not a scientific turn, as Berlin theorized, but rather a moralizing tendency, in line with the Arnoldian ideology of belletristic idealism (in the tradition of Blair) that linked art and morality. And he found (in Wendell’s pedagogy) many noncurrent-traditional features (pace Kitshaber, 1953/1990). Crowley (1984a, 1986, 1998) pushes the argument further, interpreting English A as, in Foucault’s term, “a political technology of individuals,” designed not to teach argumentation or rhetorical communication but rather to make “the bourgeois subject docile” by emphasizing error (Crowley, 1998, pp. 77–78). Miller (1991) locates the origin of FYC in broad cultural terms, as part of nationalistic, colonizing, and political projects of 19th-century American ideologies, and takes to task historians who look for “neoclassical continuity” in their accounts while ignoring, in her view, the changes in technology.
and literacy practices since the ancients. Russell (1991, 2002b) also draws on the Harvard archives to argue that English A was originally part of a “forensic system” that required writing of upper classmen in the disciplines in a cross-curricular effort to improve it. Simmons (1995a) profiles a chief player at Harvard, Wendell, and also describes the alternative to the Harvard composition that the women of its sister institution, Radcliff, chose (Simmons, 1995b).

Belles-lettres: Origins of English Departments and the Literature/Composition Split

Before the professionalization of composition in the late 1970s, there was very little written on the history of English departments at all, much less in relation to composition, although Parker (1967) and Ohmann and Douglas (1976) are important exceptions. But in the period of this review, such studies exploded, largely as a way of understanding—and resisting—the dominance of literary study in English departments, where the vast majority of composition courses were and are taught. This search not only for origins but for independence—or at least respect—has spawned such a large literature that it is impossible to do justice, in this review, to even the major arguments. So I simply will mention some essentials and some essential texts. The appreciation and criticism of belles-lettres (originally “beautiful writing” in any genre) began to be taught in the late 18th century, especially under the influence of Scottish rhetoricians (notably Blair), “as both an education in intellectual and moral taste and as a means by which practical rhetorical skills could be acquired” (Johnson, 1991, p. 225). Courses in English literature began in the 1830s in a curriculum dominated by Latin. But with the rise of the new, departmentalized university after the Civil War and the decline of Latin, departments of English (by various titles) emerged. And they quickly began to privilege literary study over rhetorical study or, as it came to be called, composition, and the two became separated in the departments’ curricula, with composition eventually reduced to FYC. Miller provides excellent background in his study of rhetoric and belles-lettres in the British cultural provinces. Stewart (1985) chronicled the decline in papers about composition at the MLA between 1880 and 1902, as the primary professional organization for English gradually became concerned almost exclusively with literary subjects and disbanded its pedagogical and phonetics (speech) sections.

Berlin (1987) interpreted this history as a continuation of the ancient dialectic between rhetoric and poetic. In his reading (which owes much to Ohmann & Douglas, 1976), the fledgling English departments originally took a scientific approach to both (teaching literature as historical and philological facts) but developed beyond that epistemology to see literature as morally improving “spiritual beauties” (p. xiv). Literary critics left the texts that current-traditional rhetoric read and wrote in a theoretical backwater and derided them as “embodiments of the fallen realms of science and commerce and politics” in an attempt to mark off literature as privileged and gain status—while nevertheless teaching composition as a mark of utility (p. 28). Berlin posited three rhetoric-poetic strands: the meritocratic-scientific, the liberal-cultural, and the social-democratic.

Miller (1991) reads the origins of the literature/composition relation not so much in economic terms but in postmodern (and often Bakhtinian) terms, as the creation of a carnivalesque “low” in the “wholly symbiotic system” of English (p. 53), to legitimize literary studies as the “high” and to give them a secure place in the modern
university and thus "assure the maintenance of bourgeois reason" and its power relationships (p. 54; cf. Clifford, 1987).

Crowley argues that it was FYC that made the creation of English as a discipline possible by breaking the hold of Latin and providing a secure curricular base from which to teach literature (which, she emphasizes, was central in FYC classrooms from very early on, as part of developing—and weeding—students based on moral ideals rather than rhetorical action). It was not, as Berlin (1987) argues, separate, although it was certainly not equal. Russell (1992) sees the literature/composition relation in institutional terms, as part of the process of disciplinary "purification" in which composition played a mediating role between literary (disciplinary) purity and the messy institutional politics of higher education. Harkin (1992) engagingly retells the many (conflicting) retellings of the story of Francis Child (1825–1896), hero of literary critics because he professionalized literary study, and villain of composition scholars because he refused to teach English A—and in doing both, she argues, changed the nature of academic labor.

**Women.** In the period of this review, coinciding with the explosion of feminist scholarship worldwide, there is a wealth of historical studies of women and composition. Perhaps because the role of women in composition was ignored, this work is based on archival research more than other historical work in composition, and is much the better for it. Hobbs (1995) surveys the "cultures and practices" of U.S. women's literacy from colonial times to 1900, an important phase as women often learned to write outside formal schooling in a wide array of practices, and in cultures not official or even recognized by the patriarchal structures. Of particular interest is her discussion of "formal higher education and advanced literacy" (p. 12), which suggests the great variety and innovation in institutions for women, and, she argues, the lack of change in institutional practices with the rise of co-education beginning in the 1870s. Connors's (1997) overview of women's education differs on this point, as he argues that women's entrance into the academy was associated with a decline of agonistic argument and an increase in personal assignments. (For another overview, see Wright & Halloran, 2001).

Particularly important archival work was done by Campbell (1996, 1997), who examined in a series of studies the relationships of women to male authority, specifically their male teachers at Radcliffe, Mount Holyoke, and elsewhere. In her studies of a Radcliffe student's relationship with her tutor Barrett Wendell, one of the founders of composition at Harvard, Campbell shows the relations between service learning and composition, the dominance of male rhetorical structures, and the subtle forms of resistance among women at Mount Holyoke. Campbell develops a nuanced reading of the social and psychological contradictions women faced and, very often, overcame, although at a price. Weidner's (1995) reading of the diary of one of the first women at co-educational Butler University (c. 1860) is also noteworthy, as is Ricks's (1995) reading of the ways composition instruction both helped and hindered women at Mount Holyoke, Vassar, and Radcliffe at the turn of the 20th century. Harmon (1995) tells the contrasting story of a co-educational public university, Illinois State Normal, where there was a more egalitarian ethic by which writing and speaking instruction were distributed across the curriculum and extracurriculum. Mastrangelo uses archival research as well to tell some of the women's histories not included in Berlin's (1984) 19th-century history.
People of color. Although several studies have been published on writing by people of color in the 19th century, there is little on formal writing instruction for or by people of color in 19th-century colleges. Again, the little that has been published focuses on the writing of women of color, such as Logan’s (1999) history of how five African American women learned to write in literacy clubs or with personal mentors. Royster and Williams (1999) argue that the experience of African American women in college composition classes in 19th-century colleges was typical of other students, but she gives fascinating detail in her case studies of the extracurricular debating and literary societies that African American women founded or struggled their way into at Oberlin College and Atlanta University. Mihesuah’s (1995) brief account of writing in the Cherokee Female Seminary, founded in the Oklahoma Territory as the first nonsectarian institution of higher learning west of the Mississippi in 1851, is one of the few studies that specifically looks at composition. There is a great deal of room for work in this area, particularly by historians willing to do serious archival digging.

The 20th Century: Mass Higher Education

Berlin (1987) published the first history of college composition during the 20th century, drawing primarily on articles published in the professional literature and previous historical studies (especially the work of Stewart, 1985). His interest was in classifying approaches to composition teaching, which he calls rhetorics: first into objective, subjective, and transactional, then into four major “schools”: current-traditional rhetoric, the rhetoric of liberal culture, transactional rhetoric for a democracy (his favorite), and the ideas approach. He traces these approaches through the pre-World War I efficiency movement, the interwar progressive education movement, the post-World War II communications movement, the revival of rhetoric in composition during the 1960s and early 1970s, and the early professionalization of composition (to 1975). Although his categories were and are roundly contested, the book remains the most-cited treatment of the 20th century.

FYC history, 1900–professionalization in the 1970s. A good deal of historical research and debate on 20th-century composition has centered on the status of FYC and its teachers, particularly in relation to literary study, but also in relation to other disciplines and the university at large. As with debates over the 19th-century literature/composition split, this history often has been overtly polemical, a way of debating the future of the new profession. Tuman (1986) sees the origins of contemporary composition in the early 20th century in NCTE founder James F. Hosic’s advocacy of composition as constructing a personal response to experience, in contrast to the teaching of literature as composition. Connors (1996, 1997) sees the low status of composition largely as an effect of the newly imported German ideal of scholarship in philology and literary history. He argues that this ideal devalued rhetoric, reduced composition to remedial status, and lowered (and “feminized”) composition to the status of an ordeal or an apprenticeship. Crowley (1998) sees 20th-century composition’s low status as the effect of its teaching not communication but a “humanistic subjectivity,” with composition relegated to an adjunct supporting literary studies. Miller (1991) extends her interpretation of composition history as discontinuous and carnivalesque to the 20th century by analyzing English offerings in 75 catalogs from...
15 institutions between 1920 and 1960. She found a surprisingly large variety of writing courses early in the period, but these gradually were replaced by literature courses. She then examines the growth of the composition “industry” and the formation of what she sees as a self-sacrificial identity in composition teachers that has perpetuated the myth that FYC must be central to composition studies.

Given these controversies over FYC, historical attempts to abolish composition courses as a requirement were hotly debated by historians. Russell (1988) collected and discussed the major historical statements on the abolition of composition, which he sees as an attempt by advocates of liberal culture to purify English of its utilitarian uses. These statements (and a few others) then were re-interpreted to support or oppose the “new” abolitionists of the 1990s, either pro-abolition (e.g., Connors, 1996; Crowley, 1990; Goggin, 1995) or anti-abolition (e.g., Brooks, 2002a; Roemer, Schultz, & Durst, 1999).

The founding of an organization for college composition in 1949, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), evoked several founding narratives, particularly to explain the origin of what became, some 2 decades later, a professional organization. Bartholomae (1989) argues that the founding was an assertion of identity against literature as well as a response to the huge numbers of military veterans flooding higher education. Heyda (1999) argues that composition in fact threw its lot with literature in the 1950s rather than continuing a budding collaboration with speech programs to build an identity beyond literature. Others have examined the persistent lack of interest in the fourth C, oral communication, since the early 1950s. George and Trimbur (1999) trace the decline of oral—and visual—communication, as it pushed composition toward textual readings rather than toward a study of the circulation of culture in many interrelated communicative modes.

**Composition teachers.** The portraits of teachers collected by Brereton (1985) is a very large cut above the then and now study. These rich portraits of eight figures, from Barrett Wendell through Mina Shaughnessy, show composition in something like its full dimensions, although piecemeal, illuminating the social as well as the personal contexts. More recent histories—autobiographical reminiscences, really—are contained in Roen, Brown, and Enos (1999). Bizzaro (1999) presents personal histories of major figures in composition who wrote dissertations in literature, and Taylor and Holberg (1999) trace the history of graduate students’ involvement in composition—both analyses of the complex and conflicted status of graduate students in English department composition programs.

**Textbooks.** Textbooks have exerted a particularly strong influence on composition, as so many of its teachers had no formal training in the teaching of writing and relied on them. Thus, textbooks have been a powerful means of keeping current-traditional rhetoric traditional. Connors (1986b) traces the history of U.S. textbooks since the 1820s and finds many elements of current textbooks remarkably similar to those of the 19th century. U.S. teachers borrowed from Scottish and English books, such as Blair and Campbell, but introduced drills to aid untrained teachers. Connors shows how textbooks responded to a variety of social and pedagogical influences, such as the reform of higher education after the Civil War, the German influence, and, mainly, the move from the oral to the written. These changes, in his view, took a rich theory and impoverished it, introducing largely untheorized concepts of the modes, paragraph
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structure, and grammatical correctness. Textbooks, he argues, largely became frozen until the revival of rhetoric in the professionalization of composition beginning in the 1960s. Hawhee (1999) extends Connors’s work with her Foucauldian analysis of the history of the most popular 20th-century textbook, the Harbrace College Handbook, which constructs student subjectivity as “lacking”—dull and docile.

Grammar and paragraphing. Connors (1986a, 1997) reviews the whole history of grammar and paragraph rhetoric, including the 20th century. Rose (1999) explains the history of sentence-combining exercises, which originated in the 1890s, and D’Angelo (1986) traces the history of the topic sentence, which became engrained in current-traditional rhetoric through F. N. Scott and J. V. Denney in the early 20th century, despite the lack of topic sentences in nonschool writing.

Technology. The role of computers in composition was given a book-length historical treatment by Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran, and Selfe (1996). They discuss pedagogical developments since this technology was introduced in FYC in 1979, including the World Wide Web, and they tell the story of computers and the writing conference and journal, which the authors played a major role in creating. Unfortunately, there has been little work since to bring greater critical purchase on this increasingly powerful and widespread technology for teaching writing (cf. Baron, 1998).

Collaboration and peer review. Collaboration and peer review, common practices in composition from the 1980s, have received historical treatment from Gaillet (1994), who examined the work of Scottish educator George Jardine. He elaborated a democratic education based on collaboration and peer review in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Holt (1993, 1994) traces current practices to the Deweyan progressive philosophy of the 1920s and its elaboration, in very different ways, in the 1930s and 1950s.

Assessment. Apart from Trachsel’s (1992) book-length study of entrance exams (discussed earlier), there has been little on assessment history. White chronicles the development of holistic writing instruction (or holisticism, in his coinage). Yancey (1999) interprets the history of assessment as successive waves, from assessment as objective testing (1950s–1970s) to assessment as a rhetorical act (late 1990s). Anderson (1994) looks at the tradition of impromptu writing for assessment, from the 1920s through the 1950s. There is much room for further work on this crucial aspect of composition practice to extend the work of Trachsel to classroom and program practices.

Writing centers. Although there is no comprehensive history of writing centers, there has been significant historical work, much of it conveniently gathered in collections (Barnett & Blumner, 2001; Murphy & Law, 1995). Carino (1995) summarizes the few previous historical accounts from the 1980s and early 1990s as locating writing centers’ origins in the open admissions movement of the 1970s and casting pre-open admissions centers in negative contrast to a purportedly more enlightened age. He then lays out an alternative reading of that history, starting with the turn of the twentieth century “laboratory method” of teaching. He finds in the past many of the methods and attitudes present in contemporary centers. Carino (1996) elaborates his earlier argument by constructing a poststructuralist model of writing centers’ history.
from 1968 to 1983. He argues that open admissions initiatives did not give rise to
contemporary centers or make a crucial contribution to the debate on remediation,
points he supports with a case study of the Purdue University lab in 1975. Boquet
(1999) supports Carino’s interpretation with additional historical detail, particularly
on the post-World War II, pre-open admissions era, although she draws a distinction
between writing centers as pedagogical method and as institutional sites. Kinkead
(1996) gives a personal history of the first decade of the National Writing Centers
Association. Lerner’s (1998) history of writing center technology from drill pads to
computers puts teaching technology in amusing context.

**Basic writing.** The most influential article in the movement or subfield of composi-
tion known as basic writing (formerly remedial writing) is Rose’s (1985) study of
how writing came to be thought of as an elementary skill rather than as a developing
accomplishment, a discipline. Early 20th-century behaviorist notions of writing as a
basic skill, combined with a medical model of remediation, led to what he terms the
myth of transience: that students who have not mastered literacy at a particular level
are “illiterate” and can be remediated through some quick method (not yet found).
The myth assumes that writing instruction at “higher” levels thus can be phased out.
This myth, he argues, has led to a history of excluding students from higher educa-
tion who do not already have particular literacies, rather than teaching them what
they need to enter new educational and social practices.

Rose (1985) was interpreted as describing the “dark ages” of remediation, in con-
trast to the enlightened age following the birth of basic writing in the open admissions
movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and especially in the work of Mina P.
Shaughnessy of CUNY (although see Carino, 1995, for a reassessment). The many his-
torical articles and chapters on the history of basic writing are fundamentally—and
usually explicitly—debates about Shaughnessy’s work and legacy.

Two of these are the closest the field has to a full-fledged history of the basic
writing movement. The first chapters of Mutnick (1996) give a richly detailed and
admiring description of Shaughnessy’s work and the environment at CUNY during
the period, as well as a less detailed account of the pre-open admissions era of basic
writing (see Maher, 1997, for a biography of Shaughnessy). Horner (1996; see also
Horner & Lu, 1999) gives an appreciative but highly critical re-reading of basic writing
history, using CUNY archival documents from the period to argue that Shaughnessy
and others did little to resist the marginalization of students and teachers, particu-
larly in material terms, despite protest movements going on at the time. A range of
other articles debate this founding moment and interpretations of it. These are sum-
marized by Gray-Rosendale (1999) in her spirited defense of Shaughnessy. See also
Lu’s (1992) critique of Shaughnessy for overlooking the political, Shor’s (2001) eco-

donomic analysis of basic writing history in defense of his proposal for mainstreaming,
Lewiecki-Wilson and Sommers’s (1999) oral histories of open admissions teachers,
and Connors’s (1987a) history of basic writing textbooks.

**Program histories.** In the 1990s historians began to question the narrative of current-
traditional rhetoric as the dark ages of composition. They examined program archives
and interviewed teachers and students to “reclaim lost generations.” Varnum’s (1992a,
1992b) history of Theodore Baird’s revolutionary program at Amherst from the late
1930s through the 1960s shows how students wrote often and from experience,
sharing their drafts and creating a climate of intellectual rigor out of their own imagi­
native resources released through progressive pedagogy. Varnum connects the pro­
gram history to social changes in America. Kates (2001) provides similar curricular
detail drawn from archives in her book on four composition programs serving middle­
class women, African Americans, and workers (spanning the years 1885–1937) that
had a specifically activist agenda of engaging civic issues and community service
also provide insight through archival research into, respectively, innovative compo­
sition at Texas Woman’s University from 1901 to 1939 and midwestern literary so­
cieties, especially a “university for the ‘farmer and the poor.’” Worth mention are
Winterowd’s (1998) personal and polemical history of the Rhetoric-Linguistics-
Literature Program he started in 1972 in the Department of English at the University
of Southern California and Guinn’s (1998) appreciation of it (and analysis of its “vir­
tual demise” with Winterowd’s retirement in 1997).

**Writing across the curriculum.** The history of attempts to improve students’ writing
(and learning through writing) outside composition courses, across the curriculum
in the disciplines, is told by Russell (1991, 2002). His book begins with the 19th­
century liberal (oratorical) curriculum, where writing supported speaking across the
curriculum and extracurriculum, to the split between content and expression that
occurred with the birth of college composition courses at Harvard and the resulting
“myth of transience.” Twentieth-century developments covered include the growth
of the German-influenced ideal of research and the “research paper” tradition, the
emphasis on utilitarian writing for professional education, and a range of attempts
to reform general education originating in the 1930s, such as the cooperation move­
ment to integrate education through writing, the Great Books movement, progressive
education’s “correlated curriculum,” and the project method. Post-World War II
efforts to deal with the expansion of higher education include the communications
movement, the rise of multiple choice testing, and the growth of business and technical
writing. He ends with a history of the writing across the curriculum movement (WAC)
from its beginnings in faculty workshops in 1970 to a national education reform move­
ment by the turn of the 21st century. Quinn overviews the history of reading and writ­
ing as modes of learning in the 20th century, emphasizing highlights in attempts to
integrate reading and writing for learning in higher education. Thaiss (1997) provides
a personal history of an important WAC program at George Mason University. Ambron
(1991) reflects on the history of WAC and its importance for community colleges. For
WAC in historically Black colleges, see Zaluda (1998), discussed later.

**Women in composition.** There has been somewhat less work on women in composi­
tion in higher education from 1900 to professionalization in the 1970s, than on women
of the 19th century, despite the fact that there were many important women theo­
rists as well as countless women teachers and researchers in the period during which
college composition was “feminized.” Campbell’s (1996) collection of the writings
of Gertrude Buck deserves special mention. Buck was an early-20th-century pioneer,
along with Fred Newton Scott, of what Berlin calls “transactional” democratic rho­
toric, an early alternative to current-traditional rhetoric. Campbell’s introduction makes
a case for Buck as a feminist rhetorical theorist. Similarly, Bordelon (2002) describes
the work of Mary Yost at Vassar in the early 20th century, who developed a peda-
gogy based on social engagement and argument. Bordelon challenges Connors's (1997) claim that the “feminization” of composition moved it toward more interior emphasis through personal assignments.

Ritchie and Boardman (1999) provide an excellent overview of the many feminist narratives of composition written since the beginnings of professionalization in the 1960s, narratives aimed at including women, at making intuitive connections, and at relating feminist disruptions. In keeping with feminist and postmodern historiographical practice, these are for the most part personal testimonies and histories (dating from the efforts of Emig and others in the 1970s to valorize and nurture women’s work in composition, as well as protect women from discrimination and abuse in the workplace). They are aimed at consciousness raising and rattling as they read the theory and practice of composition in light of possible futures. Miller (1991) explains the marginalization of composition not only in relation to literature but also by its place in a patriarchal symbolic order (by analogy, the “sad woman in the basement” in Freud’s analysis of the 19th-century bourgeoisie domestic). Enos (1996) provides personal histories of women in composition, in light of survey data, but no systematic history. Hill (1990) uses the midwife metaphor to read several of composition’s male “expressivist” founders as gendered in terms of “birthing” an experiential self and an emphasis on nurturing—an emphasis that, she argues, later was compartmentalized as theory and devalued. Schell combines personal narratives of nontenure track women with institutional and labor history to track the ideologies that co-opt feminism to perpetuate exploitive practices. Gere (1994, 1997) provides an important history of extracurricular writing groups in relation to composition pedagogy, particularly groups for women. And Adams (2001) tells the stories of famous literary women and their experience of composition courses.

**People of color.** There is unfortunately no book-length history of people of color in composition during the 20th century, and very few articles, despite the fact that historians such as Royster have found many African Americans and other people of color who have contributed to the field. Royster and Williams (1999) have begun what they call “the work of recovery” of teachers of color that suggests “a history of scholarship and a tradition of professional engagement” that began in the 19th century (see also Royster, 2000) and is—pace much discourse in the field—not about basic writing but about basic fairness. Gilyard (1999) provides the central outlines of such a history in his overview of African American contributions to composition studies. He begins with context: the famous DuBois/Washington debates over the future of Negro higher education in the early 20th century and, most important, a sketch of the College Language Association (CLA), established in 1937 as the Association of Teachers of English in Negro Colleges, and in the late 1960s the CCCC Black Caucus (cf. Davis, 1994). Gilyard goes on to mention some of the many pedagogical and political reforms accomplished by CLA and CCCC Black Caucus members and allies, especially the landmark *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* of 1974. Gilyard calls for “impassioned archival research” (p. 626) on people of color in composition, and although there is still relatively little such work (and a great need as this history is excluded from “standard” histories), there is some fine work that provides excellent models.

Zaluda (1998) traces the history of writing assignments in four disciplines (philosophy, English, history, and sociology) at Howard University, a historically Black
institution. He sensitively analyzes them, finding contradictions arising out of the ideological contestation present in the Harlem Renaissance. Similarly, Kates (1997, 2001) analyzes the ideological dimensions of Hallie Quinn Brown, professor of elocution at Wilberforce University from 1893 to 1923, whose "implicitly politicized" (2001, p. 55) pedagogy honored African American cultural identity and developed new features of elocutionary theory. Rose uses citation tracing to show how the profession has iterated Shaughnessy's (1977) concept of a logic of error rather than Smitherman's (1977) description of the grammar of African American English, because of the profession's focus on deficit and error rather than the grammar, rhetoric, history, and politics of African American English. There is room and need for much more such careful archival and statistical work, sensitive to ideology as it is played out in institutional contexts.

Professionalism in U.S. Composition

Although the CCCC was founded in 1949, composition became professionalized only in the 1970s, with its own theories, research agendas, graduate programs, and refereed publications. I hesitate to venture a review of the recent histories of a highly and overtly political era, written by historians in the midst of making that history. But debates over the recent history of the field have been important in its emergence, and I will emphasize work that fronts history as its object (a discussion of the past) rather than reflections on its history in, say, the epideictic of chairs' addresses (e.g., Faigley, 1997; Hairston, 1985), the deliberative rhetoric of "the future of the profession" discussions (Schilb & Pickering, 1989), or personal reflections on personal history (Reynolds, 1990)—realizing that there is no satisfactory way to draw this distinction. (A useful collection on the history of professionalization is Rosner, Boehm, & Journet, 1999.)

North's (1987) early and brief discussion of the origin of professionalization locates it in 1963, with an NCTE committee report on "the state of knowledge in composition." The professionalization of composition also might be said to have begun with the "revival of rhetoric" in English departments in the 1960s (it had been revived 50 years earlier in speech departments)—a story told, only briefly, by Mulderig (1999). Whatever the moment, there was clearly a movement toward re-examining current-traditional rhetoric and pedagogy. Young and Goggin's (1992) study of College English and CCC articles published between 1950 and 1965 showed a "radical decline" of articles that took up "current-traditional" rhetoric. They argue that "in this period, the questions that were the focus of interest in current-traditional rhetoric (e.g., questions having to do with normative features of finished discourse) ceased to be as vital, interesting, and urgent as questions having to do by and large with the activity of thinking and communicating in actual rhetorical situations" (p. 23). Goggin (2000) develops these insights into a full study of composition journals since World War II.

Histories of professionalization have, understandably, fronted the interests of their authors in current debates. Bizzell (1992) reads the history as a movement from emphasis on personal style (1960s and 1970s) to cognitive writing processes (1970s and early 1980s) to analysis of social and cultural contexts, especially discourse communities. Faigley (1992) gives a postmodern political analysis of professionalism as a response to a series of political battles with the right, beginning in the 1960s and
proceeding through the back-to-the-basics literacy "crisis" of the 1970s and the culture wars of the 1980s. He reads the many arguments about the process movement as being fundamentally about whether literacy should be, in the tradition of Dewey, about offering students the means to greater (democratic) control of their lives (cf. Faigley, 1999). Nystrand, Greene, and Wiemelt (1993) locate professionalization not in the political debates within composition, English departments, or the wider cultural discourse on literacy, but rather in intellectual history: the shift in conceptions of language and meaning within several fields that profoundly influenced composition (especially literary criticism and linguistics), from formalism in the 1950s to structuralism/constructivism in the 1970s to social processes ("the rhetorical turn") in the 1980s, to the dialogism of Bakhtin—and the authors. Nystrand (2002) is continuing this line of research with work on the Cambridge (MA) "psycholinguistic revolution" of the 1960s, from which James Moffett, Emig, Frank Smith, and other pioneers emerged.

Movements in composition's early years of professionalization have received a good deal of attention. Tobin (1994) discusses the early years of the process movement—the heady first move toward a theory-based pedagogy—and the stereotype of those years that developed. For a range of criticisms of the process movement based on historical readings, see Pullman (1999), Couture (1999), and Schreiner (1997). Crowley (1998) extends the analysis of process pedagogy's beginnings in a range of important and largely unrecognized contexts: class size, the emergence of theory, student unrest, and student subjectivities.

Harris (1997) traces five key terms since the Dartmouth Seminar of 1966—growth, voice, process, error, and community—to locate movements such as expressivism, cognitive process, and discourse community in historical and political contexts—both before and after they became reduced to counters in theoretical/pedagogical battles. He shows the links between, say, expressivist and process approaches in terms of valuing students' "own writing." Zebroski (1999) traces the ways expressivism (and, later, cognitive psychology) came to be constructed, historically, as a "menace." He sees this construction as a way of distancing the new profession from its old ally, English education, using counts of textbook advertisements in CCC from 1969 to 1990, to evidence his claim.

Almost all of the historians of professionalization take politics into account. But particularly worth noting is Ohmann's (1999) reflection on his classic 1977 study. He tries to account for the way composition, unlike most other professions, overtly embraced the political during the process of professionalization. Murphy's (1993) critique of what he calls the "essentialist allegiance to the idea of 'progress'" (p. 345) in composition studies is also worth noting. But a history of composition's debt to the progressive movement in education has yet to be written.

Composition in Other Higher Education Systems

Composition courses in higher education are a relatively new phenomenon in countries other than the United States, so there is little history to tell. In the 2 decades covered by this review, there have been a few attempts to introduce such courses in Canada, Belgium, Denmark, and other countries, and this effort in places has sparked some interest in the history of the teaching practices designed to improve students' writing.
The most significant work has been in Canada, where composition courses (in part influenced by the United States) have been increasingly common. Johnson (1987a) has told the story of Anglophone Canadian efforts in the 19th century (referred to above) in the context of North American efforts more broadly. Hubert (1994) devotes a good deal of attention to composition in his history of English studies in 19th-century Anglophone Canada. Brooks (2002b) describes the 20th-century history of first-year university English instruction in Anglophone Canada in the context of changing conceptions of literacy and nationalism, as well as providing a fascinating case study (1998) of one institution, the University of Manitoba, and important work comparing U.S. and Canadian practices historically (1997). As composition becomes more common in higher education systems of other countries, we can look forward to their histories and comparative work to illuminate historical differences.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The very large effort to write the history of composition was accompanied by a lively discussion of historiography, usually framed in terms of the historiography of rhetoric rather than of composition (Crowley, 1984a; Schilb, 1986; Vitanza, 1986), although the distinction (as in the field of “composition/rhetoric”) was blurred. Pre/Text devoted a special 1987 issue (8, 1–2) to the historiography of rhetoric, emphasizing new approaches, and Rhetoric Review published an “octalog” among eight historians on the politics of historiography (Murphy et al., 1988). Historians of rhetoric and composition found congenial the postmodern critical theory and, often, the feminist historical approaches that rebellious historians brought to the discipline of academic history during the 1980s (e.g., Bizzell, 2000; Jarratt, 1986, 1990). They saw these new approaches to history as more politically explicit and engaged than traditional historiography, with its attempt to be objective and tell a conventional story. Some historians, notably Connors, continued to write more traditional narrative history and defended the practice. But historians generally eschewed traditional approaches, including quantitative social history, in favor of postmodern ones, and attacked the idea that objective—even more and less objective—history could be written.

Berlin (1986, 1990), advocated a dialectical, neo-Marxist historiography, fronting the political commitments of the historian. Miller (1991) called for a composition historiography separate from rhetorical historiography and argued for (and wrote) history as discontinuous and carnivalesque, emphasizing ruptures, accidental associations, and juxtapositions. Strain (1993) proposed and exemplified a hermeneutic model of historiography.

Most historians did relatively little archival work, focusing on textual readings of published materials instead (methods more familiar in literary study in the period in which most composition historians were trained). There were a number of complaints about the lack of archival work. Miller (1994) calls for institutional histories based on archival work in local programs rather than broad categorizations (as part of his attack on G. Graff's [1987] leaving composition out of his history of English studies). Nelms (1992) advocates oral evidence in composition historiography as an antidote to binary oppositions built on readings of published work rather than pri-
mary or archival sources. Varnum (1992a) argues against using the “terministic screen” of current-traditional rhetoric to read composition history as it can lead to ignoring valuable work of earlier generations, available primarily through archival work.

There were a few attempts to provide systematic help for those learning to do historical research. Connors (1984) and North (1987) published brief “how to’s” in the 1980s. And there is a chapter in one of the popular composition research methods textbooks on historiography (Connors, 1992), although it devotes only half a page to archival research.

**CONCLUSION**

My main conclusion is obvious: There was a great deal of excellent historical research published from 1984 to 2003—by far more than in any other profession I know of. And that is something composition studies can be proud of and find useful in understanding itself, representing itself to others, and negotiating its future. My second conclusion is that historical research can be better and more useful. I have two suggestions. First, the profession would profit from more archival research, even from the methods of quantitative social history. The paucity of archival work is certainly not due to the lack of archives; almost every university and many school districts have one, as do professional organizations. And since 1989 there has been an archive devoted to composition at the University of Rhode Island (for papers) and the University of New Hampshire (for textbooks). Where archival work has been necessary—as with the contributions of women and people of color—the results have been impressive. Composition exists within institutions, first of all. So to understand composition one must look deeply into institutional histories, preserved most fully in archives and the memories of teachers and students. Moreover, composition is also a social phenomenon with wide reach, and the methods of social history may be of great help. The lack of archival work is understandable, as composition scholars are not trained in the profession of academic history (although several have formal training in the history of rhetoric). But I look forward to the new generation of historians of composition pushing further into archives, perhaps even sitting in on courses in historical methods of research.

Second, in reviewing this historical literature I often was struck by how little explicit debate there is among authors, as suggested by the few times historians cite one another’s work to show where they agree, disagree, add, modify, and so on. Although historians cannot, in my opinion, attain a “God’s-eye-view” objectivity, there can be a socially constructed objectivity—an engagement with others’ work borne of respect for one another and our mutual enterprise—that lifts scholarship out of solipsism. Where composition historians have focused on particular problems, searched for and debated evidence, there has been remarkable progress in understanding.

Finally, with the turn of a new century, it is time for senior historians to undertake the important work of synthesis, to create work accessible to beginners in the field and stakeholders beyond it. Sadly, many of our finest historians, equipped to undertake that work, passed away in the 1990s (see my note below). But there are many to take up the work and a new generation of historians to further the work.
AUTHOR’S NOTE

This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Jim Berlin, Bob Connors, Wally Douglas, and Don Stewart.

REFERENCES


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