Rebranding Mediocrity: A Rhetorical Analysis of Common Core Textbooks for College-Bound Writers

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REBRANDING MEDIOCRITY: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF COMMON CORE TEXTBOOKS FOR COLLEGE-BOUND WRITERS

by

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This project analyzes the quality of high school writing textbooks from major publishers, textbooks purported to align with The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for writing. I measure the textbooks against the promise of CCSS’s tagline, “college and career readiness,” focusing specifically on the former goal to discern how “college-ready writing” is constructed and to analyze the degree to which the textbooks align with relevant research and theory in the fields of English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies. I begin the project by situating this study in current U.S. educational policy and rhetoric. Specifically, I describe the politicized rhetoric of school failure and subsequent policies—namely the No Child Left Behind Act—that promote market-based principles as a key component of school reform. Textbook publishers, I posit, capitalize on reform rhetoric and claims of CCSS alignment to promote their curricular materials, though the quality of their products remains mediocre at best.

To investigate my premise, I articulate five traits of composition pedagogy that recur in the scholarship on college preparatory writing—rhetorical knowledge and versatility, process-based writing, critical thinking, language and conventions, and new literacies—and use qualitative document analysis to describe the continuities and discontinuities between the scholarship and the textbooks in my sample. Though there is some variation in quality among the
four textbooks, in general I find that they are often topically aligned with standards and research-based principles. However, when I analyze the exercises, exposition, heuristics, and major projects for the development of these principles, I conclude that the books are often reductive, insufficient, or inconsistent in their presentation of those very concepts. I also contend that although this project focuses narrowly on pre-college writing instruction, my findings are a paradigmatic example of false promises from major educational corporations—promises that particular products will beget heretofore-unseen student improvement in fundamental academic skills even though those products do not reflect the consensus of scholarship in related fields.
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E. Suzanne Ehst
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INTRODUCTION

Tossing Aside the Textbooks, Then Picking Them Up Again

To teach writing well, leave the textbook on the shelf. Get a good anthology and maybe accompany it with a style guide. Browse *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, or your best friend’s blog for examples of what words can do when strategically and artfully combined. Be a writer yourself and make your own process transparent to your students. Devote several hours each weekend to sitting with your students’ texts, scrawling notes in the margins and serving as both their reader and coach. But do not, under any circumstances, require your students to read textbook chapters that walk them through reductive processes and lead to compositions that taste like stale bread. This was my philosophy as a teacher of college-bound juniors and seniors.

I taught high school English for 11 years, and my experience of writing instruction was that it was the most pedagogically difficult sub-category of English instruction—and perhaps the most significant for its personal, academic, and professional relevance. Teaching an effective writing lesson required analyzing my students’ work; devising mini-lessons based on their development to date (while also figuring out how to individualize for the variety of skills and styles in my classes); generating various in-class exercises, because skills are ultimately developed through practice; and digging through real texts to find exemplars in that “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1986)—texts beyond students’ current skill level, but aspirationally within reach. I happily put in the time. The reward was celebrating with students when they discovered a unique turn of phrase or easily wrote six pages instead of my assigned five (which had seemed to them so daunting at first) because they found engaging angles on their
topics and were drawn into the exploration. From the beginning of the academic year to the end, I could see their growth as writers and as scholars.

Because writing was so important to me, I resisted most textbooks. When I started teaching in the fall of 1997, I inherited a classroom set of *Writers Inc.* (Kemper, Sebranek & Meyer, 1992), a precursor to the ubiquitous *Write Source* series. Though I had enough books for every student, and though writing was central to my curriculum, I used about five pages from the textbook through the course of the year. Overall, I found the text reductive and formulaic, directing students toward frameworks that were inappropriate for the critical thinking and reflection that I wanted them to do. Whereas my own writing and scholarship bolstered my classroom instruction, the prescriptive and standardized nature of the mass-market textbook closed off the very skills I hoped to foster in students. On rare occasions, I asked my students to turn to a particular page in *Writers Inc.* and read a paragraph or two to reinforce a mini-lesson, but never did they progress linearly through the textbook’s chapters to develop their understanding of the substance of composition.

In the spring of 2016, I was in a vastly different classroom context. I hadn’t taught high school since 2008, and now, as the primary Professor of Secondary Education at Goshen College (Goshen, Indiana), I found it essential to refresh my classroom experience. So I joined an area high school teacher in her 10th grade English class twice a week. The class I landed in was a supplementary English class, a second class in addition to the required one for students whose performance suggested that they might not pass the state’s 10th-grade language arts assessment. Here, we practiced everything I had tried to avoid as a teacher. Students repeatedly wrote five-paragraph essays with a thesis that forecasted their three main points, three body paragraphs developed around predictable topic sentences, and trite conclusions that restated the uninspired
thesis statements. At one point, in response to a practice prompt that had stumped some students, the teacher advised, “What do you do if you don’t have anything true to write about? You make it up! The people grading your test will never know.” Thus the only writing that students did in this test-focused class depended on prescriptive formulas, minimized the importance of authentic content and, coincidentally, relied heavily on photocopied pages from Write Source (2012).

To be clear, the teacher I was working with was excellent in many ways, especially her relationships with students and her encouragement of their work. She cared deeply about making her struggling students more confident writers. But three years into her career and evaluated in part by her students’ test scores, she did what she needed to do to help her students “beat” the test. There simply wasn’t time for anything else.

As a supervisor of English student teachers from 2004 to the present (notably, from the early days of No Child Left Behind through its peak of influence), I have seen an increase in the writing pedagogy similar to what I experienced in that 10th grade class, especially with students who work in high-poverty, linguistically diverse schools. My student teachers, under the mentorship of their qualified, experienced English teachers, often drill formulas and structures that score well on standardized tests. I commonly hear directives like, “Restate the prompt in your opening,” and “Make sure every paragraph has at least four sentences.” Occasionally I work with student teachers whose writing pedagogy is more authentic—prizing exploration, critical thinking, flexibility of form, and peer engagement with one another’s work—but they tend to be teaching in classrooms where most students easily pass standardized tests based on the cultural capital they bring to the testing situation, independent of the schooling they receive.

In my experience, standardization—whether through text or test—takes away the nuance, complexity, and contextual nature of writing instruction. It externalizes the locus of curricular
control, shifting the teacher’s role from writer and professional to the mere implementer of external mandates. And yet many of our educational reform policies facilitate this type of standardization that curtails authentic disciplinary study. There is a prodigious disconnect between the reform rhetoric that claims to equalize and bolster student achievement and the actual effects of the standards-based policies. Instead of pushing students and teachers toward deeper, broader, and richer learning, the overwhelming emphasis on accountability through standardized test scores has, according to the National Education Policy Institute, led to the de-professionalization of teachers, a reduction in creative pedagogy, “fetishizing” a few discrete elements of curriculum, and marginalizing reasoning and cooperative skills (Welner & Mathis, 2015, p. 4-5). These critiques of education reform in general are evident in the experiences cited above, where teachers centralize test-driven practices and marginalize research-based, authentic composition skills.

Yet out of this era of standardization has emerged a whole host of generic products that promise to support a level of student achievement that teachers—relying, as I had done, on authentic resources and their professional knowledge and communities—have heretofore failed to achieve. Over the past several years, I have browsed numerous writing textbooks from major publishers, textbooks not unlike the ones I tossed aside as a high school teacher. But now, due to their alignment with Common Core State Standards, many of these publishers promise that their products will foster “college and career readiness” in all students. Is there anything substantive in this promise that a textbook, due to its alignment with purportedly more rigorous standards, will facilitate increased student achievement? Or is it a merely a marketing ploy, a rebranding of the same mediocre product that I rejected nearly two decades ago? My skepticism about this promise warrants further investigation.
To further explore this question, I systematically analyze four college preparatory writing textbooks (two of which are bundles of two products) that are produced by major publishers and/or widely adopted by states that still practice textbook adoption. Using Qualitative Document Analysis as my primary research methodology, I examine this sample of textbooks by doing three things: 1) situating them in the 21st-century educational “reform” context from which they emerged; 2) developing a framework for effective composition pedagogy based on scholarship in English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies; and 3) closely reading the textbooks in my sample for the ways in which they align with or run counter to that scholarly framework. Through this analysis, I arrive at conclusions about the validity of publishers’ claims that these particular textbooks will foster increased college readiness in student writers. Though small in scope—four textbooks focusing on pre-college writing instruction—I hope to also speak to the broader educational landscape that positions market forces and corporate involvement as a solution to the United States’ “failing” public school system.

In Chapter One, I trace the recent history of education reform, beginning with the implementation of No Child Left Behind in 2002 and progressing through the broad adoption of The Common Core State Standards. I situate the textbooks that I examine in their broader political context, namely standards-based reform movements and the increased influence of for-profit corporations and market-based principles on public education. In keeping with core principles of Qualitative Document Analysis, I contend that the textbooks in my sample cannot be separated from the educational reform era during which they emerged, especially given the corporate growth of three of the four publishers in the sample during this era.

In Chapter Two, I describe five rhetorical principles that form the framework for analysis of each textbook’s quality. These principles are distilled from three professional documents
about the teaching of writing at the high school and college levels. I selected these three statements about writing as benchmarks for quality because they are collaboratively authored under the auspices of three professional organizations—The National Council of Teachers of English, The Conference on College Composition and Communication, and The Council of Writing Program Administrators—and are therefore guided by values of research and scholarship, not testing and profit. All three documents describe these five principles as traits of effective writing pedagogy: the development of students’ rhetorical knowledge, an emphasis on authentic writing processes, the fostering of critical thinking through writing, the teaching of grammar and usage in context, and the integration of new literacy practices. I further develop each of these five “benchmark” traits through a survey of seminal and contemporary composition scholarship.

Chapter Three, my methodology chapter, further justifies my selection of these four textbooks to serve as a representative sample. I use publicly available financial information to determine publishing companies that have the largest market share, and combine this with adoption lists from the states that still practice statewide adoption at the secondary level. This leads me to a selection of four textbooks that, based on these indicators, are widely used in schools. The chapter further explains my application of Qualitative Document Analysis to multiple, iterative readings of the textbooks to determine not merely the frequency with which these principles are mentioned, but the quality of their representation and development in each textbook.

Chapters Four through Seven contain my analysis of the sample of textbooks, organized around the rhetorical principles that I outlined in Chapter Two. Each chapter contains examples and analyses from the close reading of each textbook, describes traits that are common across the
sample, and compares the books to one another, noting especially when the quality of
development in one particular product is stronger than in others. I select writing samples,
graphics, heuristics, exposition, and exercises directly from each textbook to demonstrate that
even when products “align” with standards and these rhetorical principles, the pedagogy of the
text may not reflect the quality of development and presentation that we should associate with
the aim of “college readiness.”

The final chapter contains my conclusions about the quality of these textbooks based on
my close reading, summarizing the ways in which the entire sample falls short of composition
scholarship while also describing the one textbook that is slightly superior to the others. I
describe this project’s implications for composition pedagogy specifically and for the role of
scholarship in educational publishing and policy more generally, while also considering how
national education policy has developed over the course of my research and writing.

Systematically plodding through high school writing textbooks certainly is not the most
glamorous research topic, but I do believe that it is essential. These widely distributed books
stake a claim in the field of composition, often in reductive ways. As scholars, we need to be
invested in the P-12 curricular market, ensuring that the representations of our fields reflect the
rich research traditions and contemporary scholarship. It is a form of resistance—resistance of
the rhetoric of school failure that would move the locus of control out of professional
communities and into the educational marketplace where the winners are neither the students nor
the teachers, but the CEOs and shareholders.
CHAPTER ONE
“Common Core Aligned!” Pre-College Writing Textbooks
and Standards-Based Reform

Sitting on my shelf are two copies of Glencoe/McGraw-Hill’s Grammar and Composition Handbook for grade 11. The books have identical blue covers and similar structures. They both feature several hundred pages of a grammar handbook that begins with an overview of parts of speech and progresses through topics of increasing complexity, like sentence diagramming and the rules governing comma usage. After these handbooks, both textbooks feature short chapters on composition, each structured around a different mode of writing—narrative, analytical, argumentative, etc. The presentation of writing in each of these chapters is also the same, with a repeated emphasis on a five-step writing process that moves in a linear fashion from initial brainstorming to publication of a polished document. The main difference between the two textbooks is that the one, published in 2012, features a Common Core alignment chart in the back and a “CCSS” alignment stamp on the front. Beyond that, the 2012 textbook is remarkably similar to the other—published in 2001, prior to the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Apparently the new and ostensibly more rigorous standards had minimal impact on the structure and content of this particular text.

This textbook is part of the sample of writing texts—all Common Core aligned and promising to prepare college-ready writers—that I analyze for pedagogical quality. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative repeatedly invokes the phrase “college and career readiness” as the paramount goal of these standards. The promises embedded in the standards suggest that if students progress through these sequenced, scaffolded learning targets, they will
emerge from high school ready for the challenges of collegiate scholarship and various workplace demands. College preparatory writing textbooks that are aligned to these standards—like Glencoe/McGraw Hill’s *Grammar and Composition Handbook*—ostensibly enact the promise to build students’ writing skills through high school so that graduates are prepared to enter college and take on the writing tasks typical of higher education.

If only the equation were so clean.

To evaluate the “college ready” promise of CCSS-aligned writing curriculum, I compare the sample set of textbooks to core composition principles in the fields of English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies. However, this first chapter neither examines the textbooks in my sample nor articulates the rhetorical principles that I use as benchmarks of quality. Instead, I begin by situating the curricular materials in their broader political context, namely the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2002, well known as “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB). These textbooks are not isolated documents that can be analyzed merely for what the text says explicitly (Rapley, 2007); rather they are situated in broader discourses about U.S. education, including the purported “failure” of public schools, the supposed lack of rigor in prior standards, and the positioning of for-profit corporations (like the publishers of these texts) as providing much-needed innovation.

Though The Common Core State Standards were not an explicit mandate of NCLB, in this first chapter I trace a trajectory that shows how the 2002 act paved the way for both national standards and for stronger ties between public education and for-profit corporations. I posit that the confluence of these three forces—NCLB, Common Core, and the burgeoning education market—have not significantly improved the quality of secondary writing materials, though they have increased profit opportunities premised upon the rhetoric of school failure. While broad
claims about the quality of all Common-Core-aligned materials is beyond the scope of this research, by comparing this sample of textbooks to peer-reviewed composition scholarship, I illustrate the importance of critical evaluation of educational materials despite publishers’ guarantees of standards alignment. I also suggest that this sub-set of materials is a paradigmatic example of false promises from major educational corporations, promises that particular products will beget heretofore-unseen student improvement in fundamental academic skills when those very products do not reflect scholarship in related fields.

This contextual narrative could begin earlier than NCLB with the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, which charged that public education was responsible for the “rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report, authored by an 18-member committee, fomented a series of local and national school reform efforts. While few of the report’s specific recommendations were enacted, that rhetoric of public school failure and the fear-mongering claim that the United States was lagging internationally echoes loudly in the NCLB era. The narrative could also begin in the 1990s with *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, which included the charge to develop “a mechanism” to review and certify voluntary national and state standards. The act articulated goals that included student proficiency in core subjects, assessed in grades 4, 8, and 12; it proposed that this proficiency be achieved through standard-setting and regular, standardized measurement (H. Res. 1804, 1994). By 2000, very few of these goals were deemed successful; however, the core tenet of standards-based, external assessment was further developed by No Child Left Behind and ossified as a cornerstone of education reform. While these moments in recent history certainly set the stage for NCLB, I begin in the early 2000s because this policy
context most directly opens the path for national standards and for a burgeoning educational marketplace, the combination of which purports to improve our educational outcomes.

**The Markets Can Save Us from Failure: NCLB Opens Pathways for Corporate Profit**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 marked significant shifts in federal education policy. Though education is primarily the responsibility of states, the new provisions tied to federal subsidies impacted education in three ways that are particularly relevant to this study: First, NCLB (like *A Nation at Risk* and *Goals 2000*) furthered the narrative that our public schools are failing, potentially causing economic and national security crises. Secondly, it proposed a way to ameliorate such crises: rigorous standards, tested annually, with punitive consequences for schools that do not show growth. Finally, and most insidiously, it created pathways into education for for-profit corporations, both explicitly and through market opportunities in testing, curriculum, and other educational products.

The introduction to No Child Left Behind (PL 107-110, 2001) reads as a noble continuation of the civil rights emphasis in the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act: “The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (SEC. 1001 Statement of Purpose). The urgent anxiety that introduces *A Nation at Risk* (1983) is appropriately tempered throughout No Child Left Behind, and concerns for educational equity are threaded through the text. However, fear of a national crisis bought about by failed public education is evident in speeches and documents by President Bush and Secretary of Education Rod Paige from the early years of NCLB. For example, as President Bush signed NCLB into law
at Hamilton High School in Ohio, he gave a speech that explicitly tied this education reform to the terrorist threats that had been manifested just several months earlier in the attacks on The World Trade Center. Bush stated,

As you know, we’ve got another challenge, and that’s to protect America from evil ones. And I want to assure the seniors and juniors and sophomores here at Hamilton High School that the effort that this great country is engaged in, the effort to defend freedom and to defend our people, the effort to rout out terror wherever it exists, is noble and just and right, and your great country will prevail in this effort. (as cited in Strauss, 2015)

Then, President Bush transitioned immediately to the topic of education reform, professing, “Our schools will have higher expectations.” He used the word, higher, a comparative term implying that to date, standards have not been high enough and, in the context of the terrorist attacks on September 11, the connection was implicit: our country’s low educational attainment is a national security concern.

A summary of NCLB by then Secretary of Education Rod Paige (2004) also lacked the urgency of prior documents, foregrounding praises for educational progress in the U.S. However, Paige’s overview eventually articulated this critique of U.S. public education: “Even after four years of public schooling, most students perform below proficiency in both reading and mathematics. Minority and disadvantaged students are most at risk for falling behind” (2004, p. 11). Paige also emphasized the link between education and international competition, claiming that “upon graduating from high school, few students have acquired the math and science skills necessary to compete in the knowledge based economy” (p. 12). Thus the problem was clearly and repeatedly framed: To date, schools have neither achieved competitive academic standards nor have they equalized educational opportunity for disadvantaged subgroups. NCLB, wrote Paige, was a way of suggesting that “all students count” (p. 18).
The now notorious solution to this potential crisis was the implementation of mandatory standardized testing in grades three through eight, and once in high school. Schools not showing “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) toward 100% student proficiency in reading and math faced a series of scaled consequences, from providing supplementary educational services, to an outright restructuring of the school. On the one-year anniversary of No Child Left Behind, President George W. Bush touted the potential impact of this new legislation, stating that for the first time “poor performance cannot be disguised or hidden” (2003). Relatedly, in a guide explaining NCLB to parents, Paige (2003) promised that the testing required by NCLB would give parents “objective data on where their child stands academically” (p. 1), implying that other sources of information—namely those from classroom level assessments—were often too subjective to be of any real value. Again, the political rhetoric implied that for too long, ineffective public schools had proceeded unchecked, and this new system of accountability required schools to either prove empirically that they were effectively educating their students, or bring in external forces to remediate the problems.

Although standardized assessment of writing was not explicitly mandated by NCLB—the actual language mandated testing in reading or language arts—many states already had standardized assessments in place that tested the entire domain of “language arts,” including writing. For example, the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP), Michigan’s standardized test at the time of NCLB implementation, gave students in grade 11 “the opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency in writing” through timed responses to prompts (Michigan Department of Education, 1995, p. 54). In Indiana, 10th grade students were already taking the Indiana Statewide Test for Educational Progress (ISTEP), which included sections on reading, writing, and mathematics. The ISTEP had been implemented in 1999 as part of
Indiana’s performance-based accountability system and continued as the primary test under the federal NCLB mandate (Indiana Department of Education, 2016). In this way the “high stakes” attached to reading and mathematics were attached to writing as well.

A final significant shift in K-12 education policy was the way in which No Child Left Behind forwarded neoliberal reform efforts by linking public education to private markets in an unprecedented way. I use the charge of “neoliberal reform” to indicate a market-based ideology that posits individual choice, test-generated data, and privatization as traits that will boost educational quality and achievement (Apple, 2006; Burch, 2009; Picciano & Spring, 2013; Ravitch, 2014). Neoliberal education reform suggests that by encouraging competition among teachers, schools, and service providers, we will ostensibly raise the quality of education as competing systems vie for students and funding; as quality rises, we will see gains in student achievement. One can hardly overstate how dramatic a shift this is. In this neoliberal framework, social institutions—including our public education system—are recast as markets rather than “deliberatively democratic systems” that have equity and collective social progress as fundamental goals (Hursh, 2007, p. 494). Additionally, Apple (2006) argues that neoliberalism requires education professionals to shift their practices in response to external mandates and “client” demands rather than operating from within established professional communities and knowledge bases.

Particular mandates in NCLB that explicitly marked this shift toward neoliberal reform included the statutes around schools not meeting annual progress targets in reading and mathematics, as measured by standardized tests. Schools not making AYP for three years were required to use some Title I funds to provide after-school assistance for students from a state-approved provider, many of which were for-profit corporations. In 2002, an executive from
Sylvan Learning Systems, Inc. acknowledged that this portion of NCLB was “an opportunity for [the corporation] from a business perspective” (Walsh, 2002). The law also mandated that a school not making AYP for five years must restructure, and two of the options for restructuring were re-opening as a charter school or contracting with an outside agency to operate the school, both of which created pathways to channel federal education money toward for-profit entities. In 2010, for-profit Education Management Organizations (EMOs) managed 758 US schools enrolling about 394,000 students, a jump from about a dozen EMO-managed schools in the 1990s (Picciano & Spring, 2013). This was an historic shift in education policy in that it presented corporations as possessing a degree of expertise not held by the trained faculty and administration who daily work with students and communities in “failing” systems. Lack of student growth was attributed solely to failures in the institution and personnel, and not to any of the complex personal, social, cultural, and economic factors that indisputably influence student performance.

In addition to these explicit provisions, the very core of NCLB reflected a shift away from education as a locally governed endeavor and toward a market-based service that is strengthened by principles of competition and consumer choice. As noted earlier, the hallmark of NCLB is the mandated annual testing, and one of the stated purposes of this testing was to generate data that parents could ostensibly use to assess the quality of their schools and to measure schools against one another. This use of comparative testing data significantly shifted the role of parents from contributors to the policies and welfare of their neighborhood schools (written into earlier iterations of ESEA) toward that of consumers who compare information to assess the quality of products for the personal gain of the individual child (Apple, 2006; Burch, 2009; Hursh, 2007; Picciano & Spring, 2014).
Relatedly, these testing requirements created a boon for the for-profit generators of educational materials because of the increased demand for testing, scoring, standards-aligned curricular materials, and online education services. For example, the U.K. based Pearson Corporation, a publisher of one of the textbooks in my research sample, saw their education profits leap between pre- and post-NCLB years. According to a 2010 financial report, the company’s profit in 1999 was $694.19 million with “education” representing 35% of this profit. In 2010, eight years into NCLB with most states moving toward adoption of the Common Core, Pearson reported $1.32 billion in profits—essentially doubled in a decade—with 81% coming from “North American Education” and “International Education.” CTB/McGraw-Hill—another of the four publishers in this textbook sample—also positioned themselves to enter the educational testing and data-management market. Their website cites the enactment of NCLB as a boost to the company, which boasted roughly $1 billion in revenues from their School Education Group (as cited in Picciano & Spring, 2013, pp. 75-78).

Certainly private corporations and outsourcing have long been part of U.S. education. Historically, schools have outsourced non-curricular services like food, transportation, and sanitation; publishers have developed and sold curricular materials to teachers, districts, and states. However, the beginning of the 21st century marked a shift toward the business sector wielding power and influence over multiple aspects of education, including governance, curriculum, and even classroom management (e.g. “Edison Learning FAQs” from the Indiana Department of Education, n.d.). In this new era of education, Burch (2009) charges, a significant shift has occurred: “Ideologies of neoliberalism are remaking education policy to fit the needs of the market” (p. 135), rather than actually serving the real needs of students and schools.
In my examination of writing textbooks, this context is essential. The textbooks are products of these growing corporations that, in the NCLB era, position education as a marketplace. Each writing textbook and program I study carries the promise of increased rigor that will beget improved student achievement; they are the curricular packages that supplement the supposed failed expertise of the writing teacher. However, the context begs the question, “Are these products really any stronger, or are they just an example of major publishers using the rhetoric of school failure and standards-based rigor to promote a mediocre product?”

**Assessing Reform: NCLB’S Failures**

In addition to examining the promises of NCLB, it is essential to describe its failures, yet another essential contextual piece of this study. It is difficult to argue with the articulated intention of ESEA/NCLB: Ensure quality education for all students regardless of race, economics, location, disability, etc. However, the implemented reforms have in many ways taken us even further from that goal of equity. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act is now transitioning from No Child Left Behind to its latest iteration, this time called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While it is too soon to say how ESSA will play out in classrooms and curricula, we now have the value of hindsight to more conclusively describe NCLB’s failures. The test-based reform failed to achieve the stated goals of proficiency and equity; additionally, it has bruised both K-12 curriculum and the trust in public education as an imperfect but essential pillar of US democracy (Baker et al., 2010; Ravitch, 2014a; Welner & Mathis, 2015).

The impact that NCLB has had on curriculum has been described and critiqued from many angles. On the one hand, the mandate for annual testing in reading and math has brought more emphasis to those subjects, often to the detriment of “enrichment” subjects like music,
physical education, and the arts. Many financially strapped school corporations have directed money and time away from non-tested subjects and toward those two subjects by which schools will be measured. Even within the two tested subjects, we see evidence of a “narrowing of the curriculum” as schools, texts, and teachers drill only the skills that will be measured and quantified by standardized assessments (Baker et al., 2010; Ravitch, 2014; Welner & Mathis, 2015).

With regard writing specifically, multiple composition scholars have documented the negative effects of standardization on students’ conception and production of writing (e.g. Addison & McGee, 2015; Applebee & Langer, 2009; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; McCrimmon, 2005; Shafer, 2005). Though standardized writing assessments have been part of the educational landscape for decades, the high stakes attached to current tests deepen the impact that such tests have on curriculum and classroom practice. Because of the import of school and teacher evaluations, expressive or multi-modal projects are often pushed aside to devote extra time to tested genres like thesis-driven essays, and longer compositions are replaced by more frequent, shorter essays like the five-paragraph theme (Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010). Peer review sessions might direct students toward a checklist of easily quantified traits instead of asking them to engage their peers’ content as an authentic reader. In a teacher’s instruction, product takes precedence over authentic process (Shafer, 2005). In general the impact of standardized testing has yielded critiques that student writing is more formulaic in structure, more simplistic in content, and more generic in voice.

Certainly this narrowing of curricula was not the stated aim; rather, NCLB articulated the outcome of educational equity as its driving motivation (as did Goals 2000 and A Nation at Risk). Whether this was an honest motivation or empty political rhetoric is debatable, but
regardless of the authenticity of the claim, it was not achieved through the standards-based testing reform movements. Four years into NCLB, Lee (2006), working with The Civil Rights Project of Harvard University, used data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to show that the test-based reforms had not narrowed the racial achievement gaps in math and reading scores. Eight years in, Baker et al. (2010), working with The Economic Policy Institute, again used NAEP data to produce the same critique. Even if the policy had shown gains in language arts and mathematics, there is absolutely no evidence that the reform contributed to the overarching goals of graduating more students ready for critical thinking, civic participation, and the challenges of 21st-century higher education and careers (Hursh, 2007; Welner & Mathis, 2015).

Perhaps the harshest critique of these policies is that they merely reinscribed the very inequities that they sought to ameliorate. Repeatedly, the lowest performing schools, the ones facing take-overs and forced restructuring, the ones cutting the arts to add an extra reading class, correspond to the regions with the highest concentrations of minority and low-income students (Burch, 2009; Ravitch, 2014a). Instructional methods in these schools often shift to emphasize rote test preparation over critical thinking, dialogic exchange, and divergent exploration of content. By contrast, schools that serve wealthier populations can often count on students passing the exams by virtue of the cultural capital they bring to the test, so class time can be devoted to more authentic learning activities (Hursh, 2007; Kozol, 2006). Additionally, in the annual quest to show test score gains, schools often focused their supplementary education time and dollars on students just below passing who were the most likely candidates to move from failing to passing (Lipman, 2004). In my regional school district, the school board proudly reported on a reading camp that provided supplementary instruction for what they called “the bubble kids,” those close
to passing who might cross the line with a little extra help, a term also used by Lipman (2004, p. 43). While such supplementary instruction can be good for a select group of students, the instruction is narrowly focused and often results in less attention for advanced students and students with the greatest educational needs.

While NCLB did more to bolster markets than to close achievement gaps, one additional legacy of the legislation continues even today as we transition out of No Child Left Behind and into the Every Student Succeeds Act: the false narrative of failing public schools. The annual testing mandates prompt us to believe that such accountability is necessary because, prior to this legislation, the public school system had proceeded, unchecked, to fail in its mandate to educate our youth. This oversimplified narrative shrouds reality, namely that public schools reflect broader societal inequities, and so schools struggle more to meet quantitative benchmarks in areas of high poverty and racial segregation (Baker et al., 2010; Ravitch, 2014a; Welner & Mathis, 2015). Real solutions to these educational gaps are complex and related to a broad array of social services, economic opportunity, and financial appropriations to support struggling schools, the web of which is beyond the scope of this project. However, I note this fact in the context of this study to substantiate this key claim in my research: The simplified narrative of failing schools and underprepared students creates a handy marketing line for educational support services and curricular materials—including the textbooks studied here—by tying a particular product to a perceived need.

**Enter: Common Core State Standards Initiative**

It is in this context that the Common Core State Standards Initiative developed. Although the Common Core standards were widely adopted by states nearly a decade after President Bush
signed NCLB into law in 2002, core mandates of the act, along with the accompanying rhetoric that public schools were dangerously broken, paved the way for a common set of standards that could be uniformly tested. While NCLB required that states show gains in reading and math in order to receive federal funds, standards were not consistent across states; thus while all states were given the same mandate of proving 100% of students “proficient” by 2014, the exact articulation of proficiency was determined by each individual state.

This problematic discrepancy in standards was illustrated in part by a comparison of each states’ standards to benchmarks from NAEP, a project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that has been consistently testing students since 1969 to generate data on US student learning and growth over time. Through the first decade of the 2000s, biennial reports from NCES compared state standards and related tests to NAEP proficiency scales; using the NAEP scale as a benchmark, they displayed wide variation among states’ definitions of proficiency. The 2009 report found that the majority of states set reading “proficiency” for grades 4 and 8 at or below the NAEP “basic” level. The report also charged that the percentage of students deemed “proficient” in reading and math via state assessments was often far above the percentage of students deemed “proficient” by NAEP testing (Bandeira de Mello, 2011). The graph in figure 1.1 maps each state’s reading standards to NAEP standards for reading proficiency; the resultant graph demonstrates the varying levels of rigor across states.

If states and schools were to be rewarded or penalized by students’ proficiency, then clearly there needed to be a common definition of proficiency. The Common Core State Standards Initiative promised to provide “consistent learning goals across states” (2017a), creating a universal benchmark that described the rigor needed for college and career success. Paralleling state standards, Common Core developed comprehensive language arts standards,
including writing, language, and speaking/listening skills along with reading. Thus while NCLB did not directly create the Common Core Standards, it did create a perceived need for such standards.

Despite the seeming logic of nationally consistent benchmarks, there are competing narratives about the impetus for the standards, the development process, and the initiative’s relationship to the for-profit market. The CCSS website describes the standards as a state-initiated movement through National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers and explicitly states that the federal government had no part in their development. Though they are designed to provide national consistency, their adoption by states is not federally mandated. The main impetus, according to CCSS, is the need for consistency across states and for college- and career-ready standards that have been internationally benchmarked (2017). As with NCLB, The National Governor’s Association (NGA) also ties the standards to equity, citing research that says disadvantaged students are most often the recipients of “a watered-down curriculum” (NGA, 2008, p. 6).

Critics promote a counter-narrative that contradicts many of the claims put forth by the standards initiative and the National Governor’s Association. One central critique of the equity
claim is that reform through standards alone is at best incomplete, at worst dishonest in its proclaimed motivation. Merely giving students access to the same curriculum or holding schools accountable to the same standards does little to address the ideologies and financial disparities that created the unequal treatment in the first place (Leonardo, 2014; Kornhaber, Griffith, & Tyer, 2014). Additionally, Kornhaber, Griffith, & Tyler (2014) note that among proponents of Common Core, concerns for equity are consistently tied to an overarching economic interest, with multiple “policy entrepreneurs” citing educational equity as central to national economic growth. Similarly the NGA’s report (2008), cited above, articulates a concern for equity that is subordinated to an overarching interest in macro-economic growth and international competition.

Critics also challenge the narrative about the standards’ development, claiming that the involvement of testing industries, private foundations, and corporations far outweighed the input of education professionals. Those educators who were brought to the table reviewed the standards late in the game, with little chance of influencing the core content (Ravitch, 2014a; Schneider, 2014; Zancanella & Moore, 2014). Additionally, the claim of developing the standards from a solid research base is dubious at best, and there is very little evidence of the proclaimed international benchmarking (Ravitch, 2014a; Whitney & Shannon, 2014). The documented financial support of The Gates Foundation to develop, promote, and test the standards has led many to suggest that the standards are more about creating corporate opportunities than ensuring student learning (Layton, 2014; Zancanella & Moore, 2014). In line with this last charge, a report from Simba Information Group, a source for market research and data on the publishing industry, names the Common Core as a lucrative investment opportunity. The advertisement for one research report titled “Getting Ready for the Common Core 2013-2014” (which, at the cost of $3,250, I cannot afford) promises to “help decision-makers, strategic
marketers and product developers…make decisions for seizing opportunities in the U.S. school market” (2013). This report again illustrates the increasingly pervasive intersection of public education and for-profit markets.

Despite the competing narratives about the formation and development of CCSS, one point of Ravitch’s 2014 speech to the Modern Language Association is virtually indisputable: The standards cannot be divorced from the policy context from which they emerged. Following is her description of that context, quoted at length here for the way that she connects the dots of standards, privatization, and the rhetoric of school failure:

Five years ago, when [Common Core State Standards] were written, major corporations, major foundations, and the key policymakers at the Department of Education agreed that public education was a disaster and that the only salvation for it was a combination of school choice—including privately managed charters and vouchers—national standards, and a weakening or elimination of such protections as collective bargaining, tenure, and seniority. At the same time, the political and philanthropic leaders maintained a passionate faith in the value of standardized tests and the data that they produced as measures of quality and as ultimate, definitive judgments on people and on schools. The agenda of both Republicans and Democrats converged around the traditional Republican agenda of standards, choice, and accountability. In my view, this convergence has nothing to do with improving education or creating equality of opportunity but everything to do with cutting costs, standardizing education, shifting the delivery of education from high-cost teachers to low-cost technology, reducing the number of teachers, and eliminating unions and pensions. (2014b, n.p.)

Though Common Core was not an explicit mandate of NCLB, Ravitch’s charges here succinctly show how the policy context both created a path for Common Core and then through that path, continued to develop and promote a neoliberal education reform ideology. These connections raise suspicion that although the CCSS initiative claims to be about improving U.S. education, creating greater equity, and developing the skills young people need to succeed in college and careers, it is motivated at least in part by the creation of more pathways into education for for-profit corporations that stand to benefit from a large, captive consumer base. I concede that it is
too simplistic to claim that the motivation for current reform efforts was *purely* profit-driven; however, when data show that educational quality is not improving but corporate profits are, it’s time to either correct the trajectory or admit false advertising.

**CCSS.ELA.Literacy.W.11-12: The Path to College Writing?**

Given that this research focuses on college preparatory writing textbooks, I want to specifically discuss the grade 11-12 writing standards, the set of standards that supposedly ensures high school graduates will be prepared for the demands of college writing. If I put aside the previous policy context and evaluate the 10 writing standards for grades 11-12 solely for what they say about college-ready writing, I can assert that they are relatively in line with composition scholarship. Specifically when I compare the standards to the five rhetorical principles that form my framework for textbook analysis, I see a fairly strong degree of alignment. In the next chapter, I go into much more detail to summarize the scholarship supporting these rhetorical principles, their application to writing pedagogy, and the specific alignment to the standards; here, I just briefly highlight examples of alignment to demonstrate that the document itself, when taken at face value, is not highly problematic in what it suggests high school writers should know and be able to do.

Here are some examples of particular writing standards that align with the rhetorical framework that I use to evaluate textbooks: 1) Composition scholarship emphasizes awareness of a text as situated, not isolated, so writers must compose with an awareness of their specific “task, purpose, and audience.” This exact language recurs in CCSS standards 4, 5, 8, and 10. 2) A central component of quality writing instruction treats writing as a process, not merely a final product. CCSS standard 5 states that students will “develop and strengthen writing as needed by
planning, revising, editing, rewriting,” explicitly listing common activities in process-based approaches to writing. 3) The link between critical thought and writing is prominent in composition scholarship, and while the term “critical thinking” is further defined in the next chapter, here I note the Common Core’s link between particular modes of writing and higher order thought processes. When writing arguments, students are to demonstrate “valid reasoning” (standard 1); when writing informative texts, students must “convey complex ideas, concepts and information clearly” (standard 2); and when writing a narrative, students are to “reflect on what is experienced” (standard 3.E). 4) Rather than teaching language and conventions out of context, effective writing instruction guides students to make decisions about usage in the context of expected conventions of particular forms. Several writing standards also emphasize the importance of students attending to the “conventions of the discipline” in which they are writing (standards 1.D and 2.E). While there is less alignment to the particularities of my final rhetorical trait, new literacies, my general assessment of the standards is that they promote many practices that are in line with the scholarship on pre-college composition.

Reviews of the secondary-level ELA standards from English educators are mixed and name both restrictions and possibilities for writing instruction. A 2014 issue of The English Journal with the theme “The Standards Movement: A Recent History” demonstrates this mixed review in the variety of articles by English teachers and scholars. Charges against the language arts standards include that they curtail the spirit of the humanities in ELA, namely expressive processes and imaginative thinking (Gilbert, 2014); do not promote authentic writing processes (Jolley, 2014); and encourage generic adherence to modal conventions over exploration of content and ideas (Peel, 2014). Other more positive readings see the document as inviting multiple possibilities for classroom instruction, including the teaching of digital and visual
literacies (van Cleave & Bridges-Rhoades, 2014); promoting critical thinking in reading and writing through an emphasis on intertextuality (Cunningham, 2014); and encouraging collaboration across the curriculum around authentic, discipline-based literacy and writing (Lannin, Kohnen, Kline, Singer, Stokes, & Knowles, 2014).

What these mixed reviews make clear is something that the CCSS website states explicitly: these standards prescribe neither curriculum nor pedagogy (2017c), and so any given standard may be enacted in multiple ways with wide variations of pedagogical quality. With regard to my research specifically, it is noteworthy that a textbook’s claim of standards alignment is not a guarantee of instructional quality. To illustrate, consider two different ways in which CCSS standard one, writing argumentatively, could be enacted in classroom pedagogy or instructional literature. Instruction aligned to this standard could take a prescriptive approach that reduces complex skills to simple steps, rules, and processes, a critique articulated by Jolley (2014) and Peel (2014), cited above. This approach might be encapsulated by directives such as, “Make sure you have at least three body paragraphs.” “Begin each paragraph with a claim and follow that claim with evidence.” “Conclude by restating your thesis.” While these might be useful guidelines for beginning writers, on their own they do not sufficiently develop a sophisticated understanding of how to draft a complex argument that is responsive to a broader conversation, and that is developed with considerations of audience and purpose in mind.

A rhetorically grounded enactment of the same standard would couch argumentative writing in theoretical frameworks about why we write and how argument functions socially, culturally, and politically. Students might study how the argumentative mode varies across writers, contexts, and themes; they might examine different types of evidence, argumentative structures, and rhetorical moves, thus deepening their understanding of the genre through
intertextual study described by Cunningham (2014), cited above. In the process of writing, students might read and respond to one another’s arguments to emphasize composing for real readers, not disembodied assessors. In this approach, prescriptive rules are subordinated to a more complex study of argument and a writing process that emphasizes flexible moves and authentic discourse. While both of these approaches technically align with the same standard, the latter enactment demands more critical thinking and discourse analysis on the part of the writer, skills that are essential in college-level work.

The CCSS writing standards for grades 11-12 could beget either of these two pedagogical illustrations. If a textbook truly promotes college-ready writing, then the readings, prompts, heuristics, and exercises would reflect applications in line with the latter illustration. Surely the forces of market-based competition will push publishers toward superior quality…right?

**Zooming In: Textbooks, Standards, and Profit Opportunities**

Thus far, I have discussed the broader context of market-based reform efforts via No Child Left Behind and have examined both the Common Core Standards Initiative and the ELA writing standards themselves. Now I want to hone in on textbook publishers in this same era, namely the market opportunities created by these policies and the growth and dominance of a few major publishers from 2000 to the present. Given the documented marketization of education and the misrepresentations embedded in the failing schools discourse, I hypothesize that the enactment of CCSS through major textbook companies will not consistently reflect or respect the research and scholarship of academic fields, but will merely re-brand former materials and/or promote aspects of composition that are most easily tested in standardized
format. Thus the promise of college readiness becomes a mere marketing tagline and not a substantial, research-based revision to curricular products.

There are several themes in the NCLB/CCSS era that create excellent marketing strategies for textbook publishers. First is the emergent role of corporations in improving education, suggesting that when public schools fail, we must look to corporate saviors to right the wrongs, whether administrative, financial, or curricular. Second is the rhetoric of school failure, implying that we have a crisis of public education and that prior curriculum and instructional strategies have failed to make our youth “college and career ready,” thus creating a need that a newly minted product will meet. Third is the introduction of a new set of standards, which will be tested to generate the data by which schools are evaluated, creating a market of 40+ states that must now ensure their schools align with these newly adopted, ostensibly more rigorous standards.

Predictably, the publishers in my research sample use such promotional lines. For example, in the brochure that advertises Prentice Hall’s “Writing Coach” (Prentice Hall is a subsidiary of The Pearson Corporation), the very first page quotes the Nation’s Report Card (2013): “About one-quarter of students perform at the proficient level in writing” (1). The materials foreground this “deficiency” and imply that their product will help the failing 75% of students to achieve proficiency. Similarly, the brochure promoting Perfection Learning’s Writing with Power assures potential buyers that the product will “help students meet and exceed performance expectations” (22) through their product that boasts “comprehensive coverage of the Common Core State Standards” (3). Phrases like “fully aligned” and “100% Common Core alignment” also provide recognizable taglines for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s Write Source and McGraw-Hill’s Writer’s Workspace. This stamp of alignment implies rigor, achievement, and
curricular quality; more importantly, it ensures that school districts in the 42 states that have adopted Common Core will choose from these “fully aligned” materials, thus yielding a greater market share for the corporations that tout their alignment.

These first two decades of the 21st century have also seen the exponential growth of a few educational publishing companies that dominate the market. The diminishing diversity of P-12 publishers threatens to further concentrate curricular influence into the hands of a few decision-makers, often the same corporations that create and sell the standardized tests that millions of students will take (namely Pearson and CTB/McGraw-Hill, which have been awarded contracts for the PARCC and Smarter Balanced Common Core assessments respectively). Burch, writing in 2009, noted the beginnings of this trend of mergers and acquisition in textbook publishing that she posited would lead to less market diversity. At that point, seven years ago, she highlighted the activity of Pearson Education as illustrative of this trend. From 2003 to the publication of her book in 2009, Pearson acquired Chancery Software, Compass Learning, Powerschool, English Language Learning, ecollege, and Safari Books online. She also observed similar trends in Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and McGraw-Hill, thus citing three of the four publishers in this study to illustrate the concentration of P-12 educational publishing in a few corporations (p. 37).

I accessed publicly available corporate data to further trace these trends in education’s “Big Three” (Pearson, McGraw-Hill, and Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt) beyond Burch’s 2009 publication date. The fourth publisher in my study, Perfection Learning, is a privately owned company based in Iowa with fewer than 200 employees (according to the company’s LinkedIn profile page). It boasts one acquisition in its 90-year history, the 2013 acquisition of AMSCO School Publications. The relatively small scale of this publishing company becomes an interesting contextual detail as I later compare the quality of the four textbooks in the sample.
But back to the growth and dominance of the big three. Following is a brief overview of how each corporation has grown and restructured in recent years.

**Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt.** The publisher emerged from bankruptcy in 2012 after a financial restructuring plan and was first publicly traded in 2013. Acquisitions reported by the company’s press releases since the restructuring in 2012 include the following: Webster’s reference titles and CliffsNotes from John Wiley and Sons (2012); Choice Solutions, data analytics for state and district-level education systems, and Tribal Nova, game-based digital learning for early childhood (2013); School Chapters, Inc., a cloud-based portfolio platform, and Channel One News (2014); MeeGenius, an ebook subscription service for children’s literature, and the educational technology and services divisions of Scholastic (for $575 million) (2015).

**McGraw-Hill.** In 2012, McGraw-Hill announced plans to sell its education unit, including its K-12 product lines, to Apollo Global Management, which also owns the for-profit University of Phoenix. The rationale for the sale was strictly framed in terms of its advantage to investors; it was part of a larger plan to separate the faster-growing business sectors from the slower-growing sectors for the benefit of investors. The company’s chair and chief executive, Harold McGraw III, said that the agreement “generates the best value and certainty for our shareholders.” McGraw-Hill was advised in this deal by Evercore Partners and Goldman Sachs (de la Merced, 2012), and was sold in 2013 for about $2.4 billion (Porter & Barinka, 2016). Still doing business as McGraw-Hill Education, the company has announced plans to shift its products toward digital content. In 2013, it acquired ALEKS, the online adaptive learning technology used by millions of students, and in 2014, it acquired Area9, an adaptive learning system; Engrade, a learning management system; and ClearLearning, an online assessment product.
**Pearson.** Over the past five years, Pearson has strategically sold off portions of its company and acquired other education-focused companies (like Connections Education, Schoolnet, TutorVista, and Grupo multi) to put forward its new corporate plan to be “100% focused on education.” According to the company’s website, Pearson is now an education giant with 35,000 employees in over 70 countries with 72% of its corporate profit coming from the education market in North America (retrieved on June 24, 2016). A 2015 analysis suggested that Pearson had cornered about 39% of the total US education market, due in large part to its astronomical grip on the US testing and online education industries. This is nearly triple the size of its nearest competitor (Simon, 2015).

These summaries, admittedly brief, give a general picture of corporate growth and concentration in the field of K-12 educational products and services; a report from Simba Information focuses on these three corporations as industry leaders in instructional materials specifically. The table of contents of the annual report titled “2015 Instructional Materials Adoption Scorecard and 2016 Outlook” includes the following headings: “McGraw-Hill Education Tops 2015 Adoption Publisher Scorecard;” “Pearson Places Second;” “HMH Secures Third Place.” As with Simba’s Common Core report cited previously, this report also promises investors that it will be “an essential tool in their strategic arsenal.” Thus educational publishing is forwarded as an investment opportunity; these three corporations are strategic investments; and we are to assume that product quality is bolstered by competition and guaranteed by the large market share.

This abbreviated window into the dominance of three major publishers does not, on its own, prove anything about the quality of the products that I will be evaluating. However, Burch (2009) puts forth a caution that is worth noting now and tracing later as I examine particular
texts. As the power to shape curriculum is increasingly concentrated in a few for-profit corporations, she notes the tendency toward isomorphism—that is, the few education leaders will look to one another for cues as to what to publish, thus creating a closed loop where different products start to look remarkably similar. Additionally, she charges that as corporations grow, innovation can actually decrease. While large publishers might promote the innovative character of their products, they are often simply repeating “common, but outdated and ineffective practices” (p. 17).

Several broad studies of Common-Core-aligned materials suggest that claims of innovation and rigor are widely unfounded. A study by William Schmidt, professor of statistics and education at Michigan State University, found that many Common Core textbooks in the K-8 market are virtual copies of their pre-Common Core companions. Schmidt and a team of researchers analyzed approximately 700 textbooks from 35 different publishers marketed for K-8 alignment with CCSS. Many of these texts left out topics detailed by the Common Core and, according to Schmidt and his research team, failed to live up to the rigor in the standards. In many cases, the textbooks simply re-packaged the curriculum and pedagogy of pre-Common-Core textbooks (as cited in Herold & Molnar, 2014). A recent review by EdReports.org, an independent reviewer of curricular materials, found that high school mathematics textbooks from Pearson and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt failed to live up to claims of Common Core alignment. The Pearson Corporation responded by calling EdReports’ methodology “plagued by inaccuracies…and a lack of understanding of effective curriculum development and pedagogy” (Heitin, 2016).

While my research is centered on secondary composition, it also further complicates the findings of these two studies, which cite textbooks’ misalignment with the standards as the main
problem. As described previously, there are multiple ways to pedagogically enact the standards, and so I claim that a textbook might be found to “align” with them, yet not reflect current research and scholarship in related fields in the development of the instructional content. Still, the studies support my hypothesis that CCSS alignment is potentially an empty marketing promise that sells textbooks without significantly improving curriculum.

Though my research is much narrower than NCLB’s broad-reaching reforms and Common Core State Standards’ dubious beginnings, my focus on writing textbooks serves as an exemplification of the impact of market-based reform on curriculum and instruction. Certainly the market for educational materials has always existed, and products are continually being published with varying degrees of quality and different research paradigms backing their utility. Ideally, the top-selling products would be those that have repeatedly been of use to skilled teachers and that align with the most current academic research and scholarship. In reality, I hypothesize, this is not always the case.
CHAPTER TWO

Principles of Composition Instruction for High School and College

The supporting commentary for the Common Core State Standards articulates the goal of ensuring that every student graduates from high school ready for college or career (2017a). As described in Chapter One, publishers then appropriate this promise to market their curricular materials and, in the case of the composition textbooks analyzed here, use “Common Core Alignment” to suggest their products effectively prepare high school students for the rigor of college writing. While this discourse implies that college writing can be defined and codified, research in English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies clearly suggests that describing the skills needed for college composition is a complicated endeavor.

Having taught 12th-grade English, I know this quite well. As a high school teacher, I anticipated my graduates’ reports about their first-year writing experiences. I recall the pride I felt when some of my students who had repeatedly earned B’s from me went on to easily earn A’s in their college writing classes, as if that somehow indicated that my rigor had prepared them well. At the same time, one of my A students, our school’s valedictorian, went on to a rigorous undergraduate program and found first-year composition to be the one class that threatened his 4.0 GPA. Through my eleven years of teaching high-school writing, it became clear to me that my college-bound students would go on to have vastly different experiences of first-year writing that varied by region, campus, and major.

My anecdotal experience teaching 12th grade is confirmed by the breadth of scholarship that suggests those who teach college writing are not in agreement about the curriculum, aims, and theoretical framework of a first-year college writing class (e.g. Lafer et al., 2002; Alsup &
Bernard-Donals, 2002; Sullivan, 2006). The benchmark of “college readiness” is often associated with students’ abilities to enroll in credit-bearing, college-level courses (CWPA, 2011), but course content and placement metrics for first-year writing vary from institution to institution, thus complicating the idea of a fixed high-school curriculum that will help students avoid remedial coursework. Due in part to this diversity of expectation, DeBarger (2002) argues that it is too simplistic to label any component of secondary writing instruction “an essential rung on the ladder” of a writer’s development (Lafer, Gardner, Hoadley, DeBarger, & Sawyer, 108).

Additionally, this curricular diversity is complicated by the fact that the writers in question are just as diverse as the definitions of college writing (Sullivan, 2006). When we talk about the curriculum of pre-college writing, we have to acknowledge that this curriculum will be employed with students like my 12th grader who read War and Peace twice on his own accord, as well as my 12th grader who struggled to organize a single, cohesive paragraph. There is no singular college writing, and—because of diversity in language, home literacy practices, socioeconomic status, prior schooling, etc.—there is no singular college writer.

With this diversity in mind, how do we describe the traits of effective college-preparatory writing curriculum? Despite the diversity of students and curricula, there are several core traits that recur across the literature and scholarship as markers for effective writers and writing instruction. In the following pages, I will further complicate the definition of college preparatory writing before detailing five traits that should be employed at both the high school and college levels to create cohesion in the way that students understand and practice writing. These traits—distilled from professional organizations’ statements on writing instruction—then form my framework for analyzing textbooks that claim to prepare students for college writing via their alignment to the Common Core State Standards.
Complicating “College Readiness”

Ironically, the challenge to prepare students for college writing can beget sub-par curriculum and instruction. Such pedagogy is often built around the flawed notion that there is a set of facts that is true about good writing in any situation, a belief that can lead to teachers drilling rules and “covering” specific genres that students ostensibly need to know for success in higher education (Budden et al., 2002; Alsup & Bernard-Donals, 2002). Additionally, testing students to make sure they’re “college-ready” often leads to “teaching to the test,” or teaching prescribed forms and traits that are counterproductive for developing students who can write fluently and flexibly in a variety of situations (Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; Strachan, 2002). Such pseudo-college preparation can also lead to prescriptive and mythological rules like, “Never use ‘I’ in a research paper,” or “avoid contractions in academic writing.” Teaching toward imaginary college standards, high school teacher Mary Nicolini (2002) argues, often manufactures the appearance of rigor at the expense of real thinking and authentic writing (Budden, Nicolini, Fox, & Greene, p. 76-77).

When high school composition is governed by pressure to prepare students for college, a teacher’s pedagogy can also shift away from the central rhetorical principle of writing for specific, real-world audiences and purposes (discussed in the next section as one trait of solid writing instruction). When composition is framed as an ever-increasing progression toward some mythological college standard, students lose the focus on purposeful writing for the current contexts in which they are embedded (Budden et al., 2002). If, on the other hand, secondary English teachers treat writing as a social, communicative act—as entering ongoing conversations and influencing real people—the pedagogical questions shift from, “What do professors expect?” to questions like these: How are students currently communicating? To what degree are they
reading the contexts and norms of their various writing situations and positioning themselves within those conversations? And how can we help them do that better? (Thompson, 2002; Sullivan, 2006). Ironically, by centralizing high school writers’ current communities of practice, teachers are better preparing their students to be successful, context-minded, college writers.

Unfortunately, multiple high school teachers cite the ways in which the institution of high school is detrimental to quality writing instruction. Because of the structure of the school day, many teachers admit to prioritizing efficiency over what they know to be best practice. Kittle (2006), a former high school teacher, explains, “Expedience and efficiency matter tremendously when facing five classes a day” (p. 138). Other contextual pressures, such as the NCLB mandate that schools be evaluated based on standardized test scores, lead teachers to emphasize a set of clearly defined and easily measured rules, which gives students the impression that these rules are the primary markers of quality (Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010). To be clear, teaching students to write for their current contexts does not imply that they should be centralizing the stale, formulaic essays that score well on standardized tests. But it could mean that we teach students to understand testing as a particular context, requiring particular structures and conventions that are not generalizable to every writing situation.

The discussion of college-preparatory writing also reflects broader notions of literacy development. Phrases in education reform such as “college readiness” and “grade-level proficiency” create the illusion that there are certain indisputable targets that students must reach, on par with their peers, if they are to be successful college students. However, what we consider “literate” changes as language changes and modes of communication evolve; contemporary literacy is not merely reading and writing in academic forms, but includes multiple text structures, venues, and media (Bomer, 2011; Kadjar, 2010; Moore, 2016). For example, a student
who regularly uses Twitter might be quite literate with the grammar and conventions of tweets, the use of hashtags to create communicative networks, and the manipulation of digital platforms and tools, yet might struggle to create a cohesive argument in essay form. Students come to high school “multiply literate,” but the college readiness discourse promotes and prizes classroom-based, academic literacy practices as the limited set of standards that defines who is actually demonstrating proficiency. Additionally, when we talk of literacy as a static construct, the markers of that literacy most likely ignore language variation and reflect usage that is closest to the home language of privileged groups (e.g. Rose, 1985; Lippi-Green, 1997). As detailed in the next few sections, composition scholarship recognizes and promotes a broader definition of literacy that includes digital platforms, language variation, and multiple modes of communication.

Given these complications, how do we ensure that there is some continuity between high school and college composition? One way to respond to this sense of ambiguity is collaboration among high school and college faculty (Lafer et al., 2002; Budden et al, 2002; Otte, 2002). Notably, the point of such collaboration is not to arrive at a “seamless” transition, which Alsup and Bernard-Donals (2002) call a “fantasy.” Rather, being informed about one another’s practices, concerns, and constraints paradoxically increases teachers’ abilities to work autonomously in their own contexts, informed by—but not bound to—the needs and concerns of those in other institutional contexts (Otte, 2002). It allows the faculty of different institutions to collectively address questions like this one posed by Patrick Sullivan (2006): “What is the relationship between writing that students do as they transition to college, as they write in the first year of college, and as they write throughout their college career?” (p. 19). Sullivan’s wording is noteworthy because it does not suggest that these are different steps on a ladder of
progression, but rather that there is and should be a curricular and instructional relationship between these communities of practice; the ways in which students understand and practice writing at the high school level should be complementary to the ways in which they will compose in college.

One final question that is worth noting is whether there is any significant difference between pre-college and pre-workplace writing instruction. The Common Core State Standards explicitly name “college and career readiness” as a goal and present just a single set of writing standards to address preparation for both contexts; however, one of the critiques of the CCSS language arts standards is that the career-readiness goal is virtually invisible and college preparation receives is most heavily emphasized (Bomer & Maloch, 2011). I would argue that many of the rhetorical principles that I use to evaluate textbooks for college-preparatory pedagogy would apply just as well to writing for the workplace; it is the forms that differ by context, but the principles of composition are relatively consistent. However, I adopt the distinction of “college ready” for my research for two reasons: 1) the transition from high school to college writing is an existing conversation in the field of rhetoric and composition (e.g. Addison & McGee, 2010; Alsup & Bernard-Donals, 2002; CWPA, 2011) and I am positioning myself within that discourse, and 2) college readiness, as defined by NAEP, provides quantitative data that reinforces the narrative of school failure and is readily used in curricular marketing, as described in Chapter One (e.g. Pearson’s promotional materials, 2013).

Given this diversity in both high school and college writing expectations, are there any traits that can be claimed as indicators of an effective college preparatory writing program? While there is no singular definition of college writing, there are several principles that recur across the literature and professional scholarship. By looking specifically at statements from
professional organizations—The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), The Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), and The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)—and cross-referencing these statements with other scholarship from the field, I distilled five principles that are indicators of effective pre-college writing curriculum and instruction: developing students’ rhetorical knowledge and versatility; emphasizing recursive, process-based writing practices; fostering critical thinking; teaching grammar and language variation in the context of writing; and developing students’ understanding of and facility with new media. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather represents a core group of traits that recur in the scholarship from English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies.

I intentionally borrow the word “principle” from CCCC’s document, “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” (2015). A principle moves away from specific rules, modes, and assignments that students must complete prior to entering college and instead suggests generalizable traits that can be enacted in a variety of contexts, disciplines, and modes. They are transferrable across institutions and develop in their sophistication at each progressive level of education. The following sections further defend and describe each of the five principles; this list—including the nuances brought out in the scholarship—then becomes the framework for my analysis of the top-selling, pre-college writing textbooks.

Each section begins by describing the principle as it appears in three documents about high school and college writing, authored singly or collaboratively by the organizations named above: “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing” (NCTE, 2016), “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” (CCCC, 2015), and “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” (CWPA, with NCTE & The National Writing Project, 2011). After
synthesizing each principle as represented by these documents, I further develop that principle with references to scholarship in the fields of English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies. I then discuss the degree to which the Common Core writing standards for grades 11-12 reflect this principle. In the section on grammar and language variation, I examine the Common Core language standards, too, as well as some of the problems with separating language standards from the communicative acts of writing and speech.

As noted in Chapter One, there are multiple ways to enact the Common Core standards that vary greatly in pedagogical quality. In light of this, I follow the standards by describing a particular text about composition pedagogy from the field of English Education or Rhetoric and Writing Studies, a text that references some of the scholarship cited here and blends that with practical classroom applications for teachers at the high school or early college levels. These pedagogical texts are written for the audience of teachers, not students, and so are not intended to serve as parallel comparisons to the textbook sample. Rather, the description of research-based pedagogical practices helps to further define what quality enactment of these rhetorical principles might look like in the sample. Finally, I end each section by summarizing specific traits that I will look for in textbooks, applications of these rhetorical principles that serve as indicators of curricular quality or mediocrity.

**Rhetorical Knowledge and Versatility**

A foundational principle in all three professional organizations’ statements on composition is that effective pedagogy develops students’ rhetorical knowledge and versatility. In each professional statement this is the very first principle discussed, foregrounding and underlying all subsequent commentary on effective writing instruction. This trait refers to a
writer’s ability to understand the existing discourse into which they are entering—including the context of, audience for, and purpose of a text—and to employ conventions and strategies that are most appropriate for that situation (CCCC, 2015; CWPA, 2011; NCTE, 2016). This principle recognizes that there is no universal blueprint for “good writing”; rather, structure, register, grammar, and style vary across purposes and platforms. Thus student writers must analyze the differences among text types and write in such a way that adapts their own unique voices and insights to the expectations of those who read, study, and communicate in a particular discourse community.

NCTE’s “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing” (2016) explicitly names the ways in which school-based assignments frequently subvert this foundational principle: “Often, in school, students write only to prove that they did something they were asked to do…. Or, students are taught a single type of writing and are led to believe this type will suffice in all situations.” In contrast, effective instructional practice creates ways for writers to engage with real audiences, including peer readers and teachers as respondents (not mere assessors), instead of invented situations (CCCC, 2015). Students read a variety of text types so they can analyze choices that authors make in different contexts (CWPA, 2011) as opposed to absorbing a false set of static rules. In an effective writing classroom, students write for various purposes, such as developing social networks, arguing a political point, or supporting personal growth (NCTE, 2016); this is a significant shift from writing one’s way through a checklist of different modes where the motivation is merely proving one’s facility with the form.

The research and theory that supports these professional documents emphasizes and further defines three essential aspects of rhetorical knowledge and versatility: Authentic writing is engaged; it is flexible; and it addresses real audiences.
A specific practice that permeates the scholarship is creating opportunities for students to produce meaningful texts that engage other writers, texts, and communities. Any particularities of form or convention are subordinated to the activity of analyzing the existing discourse and positioning oneself within a particular field and conversation. Kastman-Breuch (2002) applies post-process theory to pedagogy by noting that students must understand writing as situated, meaning that it responds to situations rather than relying on stable principles. Bernard-Donals (2002), in a written conversation with Alsup about the transition from high school to college writing, states that although there is no “seamless transition” from high school to college writing, all student writers are more effective when they recognize that they live in a polis, and thus conceptualize writing as a means of civic and social engagement with others. Such emphases move the curriculum away from the modal approach common in secondary writing instruction (Kittle, 2006) and toward a presentation of writing as a social exchange, mirroring the ways in which writing naturally occurs beyond the classroom walls. An example of what this shift might look like in practice is assigning students the task of writing a letter to the editor (socially situated) instead of writing an argument (modal and decontextualized).

Relatedly, student writers must learn to adapt their existing skills to different contexts, thus the inclusion of the word “versatility” in the above heading. Harris (2006) illustrates the necessity of flexibility in the university with an anecdote from her writing center experience: One student was baffled when his elegant sentences and robust introduction were critiqued as circumlocution by his engineering professor. What the student had learned was “good writing” in high school did not match the particular academic discipline for which he was composing. Too often, writing instruction emphasizes a few generalizable principles that ostensibly apply to all situations instead of analyzing the conventions of particular media and communities, including
(but not limited to) variations among academic disciplines, conventions in social media platforms, aesthetic traits in expressive writing, and forms of civic exchange (Hillocks, 2005; Smagorinsky & Smith, 1992). To exemplify, consider the advice students are often given that a striking anecdote makes for a compelling introduction. Instead of absorbing this as a universal principle, students should be asked to consider the contexts in which this is an effective approach: In a lab report? A timed writing situation? An exam essay? A feature article?

Because writing is situated in particular contexts, audience analysis is also an essential rhetorical skill that should be developed in secondary students. Related to her assertion that writing is situated, Kastman-Breuch (2002) also describes a central trait of composition as public, arguing that it is dependent on a real audience to which it is addressed. Meaning, she claims, arises not from static text but from the interaction of reader with text. While Kastman-Breuch emphasizes the importance of a real audience, Ede & Lunsford (1984) further delineate two types of audiences: audience addressed and audience invoked. In addressing the audience, the job of the writer is to learn as much as they can about the real readers of the text. Who are they? What do they already know? What are their beliefs and biases? Invoking an audience refers to the writer’s concept of the reader, not a real flesh-and-blood person. The text itself actually creates and characterizes the audience. In both cases, however, awareness of a reader is central to the development and shape of the content.

Though audience analysis is important, multiple writers caution against an oversimplified, stereotyped approach to one’s readers, real or imagined. There is no singular, collective “audience” to which we write, and any attempt to anticipate audience response by gender, age, class, race, etc. has the potential to lead to stereotyping (Ong, 1975; DeJoy, 1999). It is an ethical imperative, argues Bernard-Donals (2002), that we “understand audience as
something more than a demographic set of like-minded individuals who will read an essay and react to it in stereotypically predetermined ways” (p. 129). Rather, when we speak of “audience,” we need to conceptualize that as the many diverse people potentially impacted by our text—impacted socially, emotionally, politically, and intellectually.

In examining the Common Core ELA standards for this principle, I look for recognition that effective writing is not merely a matter of adhering to universal or genre-specific traits; it also requires consideration of the context for which one is writing. This includes not mere identification of audience and purpose (DeJoy, 1999), but an analysis of how these conditions will and should impact the development of the text itself. Such an emphasis does recur through the Common Core ELA writing standards, repeatedly showing up as sub-standards under text types and as standards related to skills developed in student writers over time. The following standards for grades 11-12 explicitly address audience and purpose (emphasis added):

- Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases. (W.11-12.1.B)

- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing. (W.11-12.1.D/2.E, referring to argumentative and informative writing respectively)

- Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic. (W.11-12.2.B)
• Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events. (W.11-12.3.A)

• Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (W.11-12.4)

• Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (W.11-12.5)

• Write routinely over extended time frames…and shorter time frames…for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. (W.11-12.10)

This notable reiteration of purpose and audience as an essential feature of high school writing is a positive aspect of the CCSS in that it directs secondary English educators away from the oft-taught myth that there are stable, universal principles of good writing, and it moves beyond simplistic identification of a generic “audience.”

However, it is also important to note the structure of the standards in comparison with the three professional documents referenced. In statements by CCCC, CWPA, and NCTE, rhetorical knowledge and versatility is introduced first, as the trait that grounds effective writing instruction. In CCSS, the first three standards address modes of writing that students should master—argumentative, informative, and narrative—and analysis of purpose and audience is subordinated to the modal emphasis. I note that discrepancy here to emphasize that mentioning purpose and audience is not the same as grounding writing instruction in “rhetorical knowledge
and versatility”; rather, to truly align with this principle, both the standards and textbooks must purposefully integrate those considerations throughout the entire development of a text.

One book on composition pedagogy that illustrates an effective enactment of rhetorical knowledge and versatility at the desired level of sophistication is Transforming Talk into Text (McCann, 2014). McCann’s book describes how a teacher might foster purposeful, engaged writing within the confines of the typical high school structure. The book describes a pedagogical approach for teachers of grades 6-12 that structures writing to emerge from authentic student dialogue and collaborative inquiry. In McCann’s curricular framework, students discuss both local and perennial social issues, and their writing emerges from these conversations. Thus students are positioning their compositions within the “immediate conversation” of the classroom and the “broad conversation” of public discourse (p. 19) rather than merely articulating preconceived ideas to meet assignment criteria.

Of the many benefits of this approach, McCann describes the impact of students’ awareness of the situatedness of their smaller classroom conversations in larger social and political conversations. Additionally, because of the culture of exchange developed in the classroom—both oral and written—students have “an authentic audience to react to what they have written” (p. 6) rather than composing for either the singular audience of a teacher or a vaguely imagined, external audience. The diversity of classmates’ authentic responses also addresses the concern about stereotyping (Bernard-Donals, 2002; DeJoy, 1999) that can occur with imagined audiences; in these exercises, students are aware that they cannot view their classmates as one homogenous readership.

In analyzing my sample for this trait, it will be essential to determine not only if audience and purpose are mentioned, but also the degree to which are interwoven with the development of
students’ compositions. As will be detailed later, all of the textbooks in this sample repeatedly encourage student writers to attend to audience needs and writing purposes. While this might appear to indicate alignment with this fundamental principle, it will be essential to examine the major writing assignments in each textbook for the degree to which purpose and audience drive the composition process. Do the textbooks move away from a modal approach to writing that prioritizes static forms and oversimplified rules? Additionally, I will look for tools and exercises that guide students to the level of sophisticated audience analysis described by the likes of Ong (1975), DeJoy (1999), and Ede & Lunsford (1984). Do they promote stereotyped expectations that emerge from a vaguely imagined, like-minded group of people, or do they help students understand the complexity of writing for a diverse group of readers?

Process-Based Writing

A second trait that recurs across the documents from CCCC, CWPA, and NCTE is the emphasis on process-based writing. This emphasis on process is so ubiquitous that Petraglia (1999) referred to it as “the right answer to a really boring question” (p. 53). Nevertheless, an emphasis on teaching process as opposed to merely drilling traits of a desirable product spans professional organization’s documents on writing instruction and is also featured in the Common Core State Standards as a macro-standard, not subordinated to other standards (as with rhetorical knowledge and versatility). However, multiple scholarly sources reject the idea of a process-based approach as a sequential movement through a series of prescribed steps. Rather, writing processes are best represented as different activities or “moves” that can be described and appropriated by student writers, used repeatedly and idiosyncratically as a composition moves from vague idea to finished product.
Oversimplified versions of process-based writing tend to describe it as beginning with some sort of pre-writing, including brainstorming and planning; progressing neatly through a series of complete drafts, each of which undergoes a thorough revision when finished; and ending with a final round of editing and, ideally, some type of publication or response. It is this oversimplified approach that often permeates high school writing instruction (Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; Thomas, 2000). While such a linear and clearly defined process does provide students with some useful tools, it can actually impede natural, effective writing impulses when the linearity of the process is overemphasized.

In contrast, CCCC, CWPA, and NCTE describe a much more idiosyncratic, recursive process. NCTE’s “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing” (2016) describes process as “a repertory of routines, skills, strategies, and practices,” and CCCC’s “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” (2015) describes it as “iterative and complex.” “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” (2011) similarly promotes a “flexible” writing process, describing it as the “multiple strategies writers use to approach and undertake writing and research,” and explicitly articulating that writing processes (note the plural) are not linear (p. 8). Each of these documents promotes pedagogy that makes visible the oft-hidden messiness that occurs before a printing a clean, final product. Granted, it is much easier to walk students through a five-step process that is guaranteed to yield a good product every time; however, it is more authentic to teach a variety of strategies that students employ as needed, based on the particularities of the composition and their own writing style.

Additionally, a process-based pedagogy is incomplete when it only teaches the substance of different writing moves. In addition to learning about methods of invention, strategies for arranging ideas, approaches to revising, etc., pedagogy must also develop “a meta-awareness
about writing” (NCTE, 2016). Students must learn to pay attention to their own processes, including a “metacognitive awareness” of the particular strategies that work for them (CCCC, 2015). The completion of a particular writing project might end with students assessing their own composition; however, equally important is student reflection on the process itself (CWPA, 2011), including particular strategies that were effective for the writing situation and that might be used again in different contexts.

The promotion of writing as a process is not new. Seminal texts that mark a pedagogical shift from static product to writer’s process include Murray’s (1972) manifesto, “Teach Writing as a Process, not a Product” and Elbow’s (1973) Writing without Teachers. Such texts successfully shifted pedagogy away from the strict emphasis on traits of a finished product and toward the cognitive and compositional moves that writers make as they progress from raw idea to polished text. Murray (1972) argued that most of us who trained as English teachers were trained by “studying a product”—finished compositions—but the successful composition curriculum will recognize that “we are teaching a process” (p.3), or the hidden activities of the writer that are not evident in the finished product. Elbow (1973) further described this process with organic metaphors of “growing” and “cooking,” what he called the various “generative actions” that transform the raw ingredients of initial ideas into a structured final product (p. 48). While post-process theory now critiques the a-contextual presentation of writing process in these earlier works (e.g. 1999), the shift brought with it important pedagogical questions of how to teach writing as activity and how to assess a student writer’s work given this shift in emphasis.

The easiest instructional approach is to teach process as a series of steps that applies universally to writing, regardless of genre, purpose, and situation. However, cognitivists of the late 1970s and 1980s successfully complicated this approach through the study of composition
processes in everyone from “unskilled” writers to those who write for a living. Through a variety of research methods, including think-aloud protocols and textual analysis, scholars like Perl (1979/2003), Sommers (1980/2003), and Flower & Hayes (1981/2003) noted multiple traits of authentic processes that challenged the simplified linear model. Writers use a recursive composition process that moves repeatedly and unpredictably through invention, drafting, and revision. A writer may, for example, begin drafting a short story with only the roughest concept in mind, then pause to brainstorm or to move back through the draft to revise before again generating new text. Sommers (1980/2003) also described a composition’s meaning as emerging through the process of composing, not predetermined by an initial “brainstorming” phase that is then merely articulated. Additionally, simple categories like “pre-writing” or “revising” were further disaggregated to describe a variety of cognitive processes. Planning, for example, involves multiple types of internal representations of a topic, including visual, verbal, and general senses of ideas. The idea of “translating” further breaks down “drafting” into the many processes that a writer uses to move a mental concept into a verbal representation on the page (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003). Effective writing instruction thus includes promoting a meta-awareness of the moves that student writers naturally make and also describing other types of strategies that can be employed as needed in the process of composing.

Further complication of writing processes is found in the work of post-process theorists such as Kent (1999), Petraglia (1999), and Kastman-Breuch (2002). Though the very title of “post-process” theory might suggest an abandonment of the emphasis on writing processes, Kastman-Breuch (2002) argues that it is the codified and universalized process—transmitted as knowledge from teacher to student, with little emphasis on external situation—that she and other scholars reject. When process begets “what-centered” instruction, “based solely on content or a
body of knowledge,” that is an unhelpful step away from the “how-centered origins” of process theory. The value in post-process scholarship is not found in a rejection of process, but in “the rejection of the belief that writing can be categorized as a thing to be mastered” (p. 130).

The Common Core standards also emphasize that students should understand writing not as a single-draft progression from introduction to conclusion, but as a multi-stage, recursive process. Among the ten standards, explicit references to process are found in writing standards 5 and 10, respectively housed under the headings “Production and Distribution of Writing” and “Range of Writing”:

- “[Students will] develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach….” (W.11-12.5)
- “[Students will] write routinely over extended time frames…and shorter time frames.” (W.11-12.10)

While the list of “planning, revising, editing, rewriting” (W.11-12.5) might suggest the very linearity that we would hope to avoid, the phrases “as needed” and “trying a new approach” both indicate a degree of flexibility that composition scholarship also promotes. Standard W.11-12.10 is positioned as the final, summative standard of the set, and it is noteworthy that the emphasis is on activity and the importance of the procedural knowledge that emerges from doing, not merely the declarative knowledge transmitted by a teacher or text. Additionally, a parenthetical insertion states that there should be “time for research, reflection, and revision,” again describing the traits of activity, not product.

There are many texts for English teachers that describe an effective process-based writing pedagogy. Two well-known English educators, Nancie Atwell and Randy Bomer, have devoted much of their scholarship to promoting a workshop-style classroom pedagogy, which they
describe in *In the Middle* (Atwell, 2014), and *Building Adolescent Literacy in Today’s English Classrooms* (Bomer, 2011). In both of these books, classroom instruction involves more than merely teaching students about process and assessing their application of several “steps”; rather, the pedagogical framework has more to do with how teachers structure the elements of the classroom—time, space, interactions—and less to do with the content that is explicitly taught. The authors devote many pages to concerns like the flow of a class period, the management of asynchronous student activity, and the dialogic interactions among students, teachers, texts, and external communities. Rather than teaching *about* process, Atwell and Bomer create environments where students can *employ* process. The texts do acknowledge the role of direct instruction, and the instruction does at times feature lessons about aspects of process. For example, Bomer describes his approach to teaching revision, including both techniques for revising and different ways of understanding revision’s purpose. However, these mini-lessons are embedded in a workshop structure and are useful only insofar as students employ them autonomously in authentic, purpose-driven projects.

In analyzing secondary writing textbooks for this trait, it is critical to distinguish between a simplistic representation of process and instruction that encourages student writers toward a more sophisticated and flexible understanding of the moves that they make when composing. Texts in the sample all foreground and repeat a five-step process model as a central heuristic. Key questions for analysis will include the following: Are processes represented as recursive and idiosyncratic rather than linear and universal? Are simple categories like “pre-writing,” “drafting,” and “revising” broken down and described to include multiple types of moves and strategies? Is the process model presented more as content to be known or activity to be
engaged? This framework for analysis will help to distinguish between simplistic process models and an approach to writing processes that reflects the scholarship cited above.

**Critical Thinking**

A third trait that recurs across both the professional organizations and the CCSS writing standards is that writing is both a display of critical thought and a catalyst for it. The protracted activity of composing allows writers to formulate complex thoughts through recursion and contemplation, traits of the written word that are less inherent in the immediacy of speech.

The use of writing to both develop and articulate critical thought is a principle affirmed by NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA; however, the phrase “critical thinking” is so common in education that it risks becoming as clichéd as “college and career readiness,” so it warrants further definition. As used by these professional organizations in the context of writing, critical thinking as a category includes the following specific types of cognitive activity: considering problems and situations from multiple viewpoints, identifying and challenging assumptions, moving beyond surface-level interpretations of texts and real-life scenarios, synthesizing multiple texts and ideas, approaching writing situations flexibly, and generating new ideas through the act of writing (NCTE, 2016; CWPA, 2011; CCCC, 2015). One could map this list onto Bloom’s taxonomy of cognitive activities—both the classic version and the revised version (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)—to align these cognitive activities with the higher-order thought processes of creating, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing.

The act of writing is not merely a transcription of these types of complex thoughts; rather, critical thinking happens through the very process of writing. Thus, according to NCTE (2016), teachers should incorporate various types of writing into the classroom in order to deepen
students’ association of writing with generative thinking. These include informal writing practices such as journals, summaries, reflections, and observations along with more formally constructed assignments like thesis-driven arguments and research-based analyses. Additionally, students build the connection between writing and thinking when instructors exemplify, describe, and model sophisticated thought processes, thus making mature, higher-order thinking transparent to students. “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” notes that this thinking-writing connection is not merely the responsibility of English programs; across the curriculum, writing acts as a mode of inquiry, as a catalyst for critical thinking in all academic disciplines (CCCC, 2015).

Students must also exercise critical thinking about and throughout the process itself. This involves analysis of different writing situations, including a critical examination of audience needs and rhetorical purpose. It also includes ongoing reflection on one’s own drafts and using revision not merely for error correction, but as an opportunity to find “more wrinkles and implications” in the topic at hand (NCTE, 2016). Students must also develop metacognitive awareness of their own writing processes, including their writing strengths and potential growth areas, and should use this reflection to continually improve both process and product in future writing situations (CWPA, 2011).

Standardized curricula and formulaic writing assignments are the antithesis of critical thinking as they do not reinforce “habits of mind” essential for authentic writing—habits such as curiosity, creativity, persistence, flexibility, and metacognition (CWPA, 2011). When students merely insert their ideas (authentic or not) into pre-established, static forms or repeatedly walk through a linear, inflexible process, they are not exercising critical thought about purpose, audience, and process but are rather subordinating their thoughts to artificial structures (CCCC,
While certain structures can function as helpful heuristics, when ideas are fitted to structures—preoccupying students with questions like, “Does your paragraph have four to five sentences,” not, “Is your thought fully developed”—students’ ideas are more likely to be simplified or truncated.

Cognitive theorists helpfully elucidate the link between writing and thinking. One of the most noteworthy models is Flower’s and Hayes’ (1981/2003) cognitive process model, which sought to describe writing processes as a series cognitive tasks rather than externally imposed stages. Specifically, they named the movement between cognitive tasks such as “planning,” or developing internal representations of ideas; “translating,” or the process of verbalizing the sometimes abstract internal representations of ideas; and “monitoring,” or the ongoing evaluation of the writing tasks performed. While such theorists were later critiqued for ignoring sociocultural and situational factors of writing, their research still stands as a helpful window into the act of writing as a nuanced, idiosyncratic series of cognitive moves.

Relatedly, writing is not merely “talk recorded,” (Emig, 1977/2003, p.9) but is rather a unique process that is distinct from the three other language processes of speaking, reading, and listening. Emig (1977/2003) charted multiple ways in which learning processes parallel writing processes. By their very nature, both writing and learning are integrative, connective, and engaged; they are personal and self-rhythmed activities. The very act of writing—of externalizing abstractions through visible signs—distances the thinker from her/his thoughts (Ong, 1986/2001), allowing her/him to examine, re-word and rearrange them to augment their complexity with each iteration. Additionally, in the cyclic nature of brainstorming, drafting, and revising, the writer engages in what Vygotsky (1986) called “deliberate semantics,” or the intentional structuring of a web of meaning through written language (p. 182). In all of these
cases, the process-based nature of writing encourages multiple types of thinking that we would label “higher order,” most notably metacognition, or thinking about one’s own thoughts.

In keeping with the Vygotskyan (1986) description of the zone of proximal development, such higher order writing is best developed through modeling of the thinking-writing process by the instructor and followed by scaffolded student performance, with both formative and summative feedback interspersed. The goal is that the student internalizes critical thinking behaviors that then become part of their “inner self-regulating voice” (Thompson, 2013, p. 272), or the metacognitive guide that influences the students’ process and rhetorical moves. Such an approach effectively fosters “deep learning,” or writing that requires students to use skills like summarization, analysis, argument, and synthesizing ideas from multiple sources (Addison & McGee, 2010).

Unfortunately, the hyper-testing environment that has accompanied the standards movement often reduces writing to pre-determined structures into which students must fit their thoughts. In a comprehensive survey of the state of writing instruction, Applebee and Langer (2009) reiterated the common finding that high-stakes testing is negatively impacting writing, in part by an increased focus on how to answer particular types of questions in high-stakes writing environments. High school teachers often feel compelled to teach particular structures that will score well on standardized tests, and college professors then articulate a need to “unteach” these rigid prescriptions in favor of protracted critical thinking about particular topics, issues, and writing situations (Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010). Again we hear that common lament that the very policies and practices that aim to promote “college and career readiness” work against some of the core principles of effective curriculum and instruction—in this case, emphasizing static forms that may truncate authentic thought.
The Common Core State Standards for writing do not use the precise phrase “critical thinking”; however, there are multiple phrases throughout the standards for grades 11 and 12 that align with the definitions of critical thinking articulated by professional organizations. What follows is a list of phrases extracted from multiple standards that reflect an emphasis on critical thinking as discussed previously. According to CCSS, students should be able to do the following across genres, modes, and writing situations:

- [Use] valid reasoning (W.11-12.1);

- Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly (W.11-12.1.B);

- Organize complex ideas (W.11-12.2.A) and clarify the relationships among them (W.11-12.2.C);

- [Establish] one or multiple point(s) of view (W.11-12.3.A);

- Synthesize multiple sources on [a] subject (W.11-12.7);

- Assess the strengths and limitations of each source (W.11-12.8);

- Draw evidence…to support analysis, reflection, and research (W.11-12.9); and

- Write routinely…for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences (W.11-12.10).

Broadly and repeatedly embedded throughout the standards is an emphasis on higher-order thinking about issues, sources, and strategies. The final bullet also implicitly resists simplistic processes and echoes NCTE’s (2016) call for students to write in a variety of forms.

Dombeck’s and Herndon’s *Critical Passages: Teaching the Transition to College Composition* (2003) serves as a superior example of how one might foster the writing-thinking
connection in late high school and early college students. Their text is built around exercises that use sentence, paragraph, and essay forms to structure and promote complex thought. For example, in one exercise, students are to pose a question, then develop a paragraph solely of questions, each of which responds to the previous one. By answering questions with additional questions, students experience paragraph development as *complicating* one’s original thought, not simplifying it. These and other exercises are designed to promote what the authors describe as “writing as not-yet-knowing” (p. 13). Too often, students commonly treat composition as confidently articulating what one already knows, believes, or has experienced. In contrast, argue Dombeck and Herndon, our writing exercises should push students to experience writing as “long periods spent without a strong, authoritative idea, and periods of having too many at once” (p. 14). This state of uncertainty is a condition that is necessary for authentic critical and creative thought.

In analyzing CCSS writing textbooks, one complicating factor is that they often explicitly address “writing as a way of thinking” while simultaneously promoting forms and processes that subvert these very goals. They frequently “tidy up” writing processes and forms whereas texts that truly develop pre-college writing build student work around ambiguities, exploration, and tension. Thus coding the textbooks will involve looking beyond explicit affirmation of the link between writing and thought to examine the heuristics, exercises, structures, and assignments for evidence that they can and will promote the kinds of thinking described here.

**Language and Conventions**

When we speak of necessary knowledge, skills, and understandings for students with regard to language, it is essential to describe and discuss two different yet related aspects of
language: grammatical conventions and dialectical variation. The former refers to the ways that writers apply the conventions of Edited American English (EAE) to develop their prose in ways considered “polished” by a general audience. The latter refers to knowledge about inherent variations in language, awareness of the stigmatization of some dialects, and best practices for instructing student writers about variation. Though inextricably related, articulating this distinction is essential due to the fact that writing instructors often conflate variation and error. In reality, when students make a grammatical error in EAE, they are incorrectly applying a rule that governs the dialect in which they are attempting to write. This is distinctly different from the correct application of a rule that governs a students’ home language/dialect but might be considered inappropriate for a given writing context. In high-quality writing instruction, teachers help students leverage their knowledge of both grammar and dialect to develop effective, dynamic writing.

Statements on the teaching of writing from NCTE, CWPA, and CCCC all frame the discussion of language differently, but with some overlapping considerations. NCTE’s “Professional Knowledge” (2016) discusses conventions and variation as two separate principles of effective communication; CWPA’s “Framework” (2011) discusses the two collectively as conventions that must match particular genres and occasions; and CCCC’s “Principles” (2015) does not mention either as an explicit concern but rather subordinates their discussion to broader topics of rhetorical, social, and process-based writing principles. Despite these differences in framing, the following concepts are noteworthy and repeated across the three documents:

First, all documents link language usage to considerations of purpose and audience described earlier. Editing a document for error or selecting a linguistic register is not a matter of incontestable right and wrong, but is rather an attempt to “match the conventions generally
established for published texts” in a given genre (NCTE, 2016). Similarly, CWPA’s “Framework” (2011) describes conventions as “creating common expectations between writer and reader” (p. 9), again framed more as an issue of readability than correctness. CCCC’s very first principle of sound writing instruction is that writing is rhetorical in nature and so the qualities of any given document emerge from the shared expectations of the writer, reader, and context. The job of the writing teacher is to help students understand the “expectations, values, and norms” associated with particular contexts (CCCC, 2015), and while the grammar of EAE is not mentioned explicitly, it is implicit in the afore-quoted phrase. The noteworthy commonality among all these documents is that they contextualize language as social; it is the triangle of writer, reader, and situation that writers use to govern their choices about usage. Teaching from this baseline principle is distinctly different from teaching that grammatical conventions are static and incontestable; it is arguably a more accurate representation of language and writing, and it does not divorce declarative knowledge of language structures from their use in speech and writing.

With regard to the simple act of editing, unencumbered by discussions of language variation, the three professional documents link this to later phases of writing processes. In the discussion of process, NCTE, CWPA, and CCCC separate “editing” from “revising,” naming as a distinct step the final read-through during which the writer scrutinizes his or her draft for grammatical and typographical errors. While the writing process is iterative, as noted earlier, student writers are best served when they move through phases of invention, arrangement, and revision, then concern themselves with grammatical corrections after these iterations are complete. All documents also address—some implicitly and some explicitly—the critique that grammatical precision is often wrongly prized above substantive content. The act of writing itself
is linked to critical inquiry (discussed in the previous section) and to over-emphasize surface features of text detracts from the primary purpose of communicating complex, original thoughts for a specific purpose. Despite this seeming unanimity among the professional documents, I will later complicate this notion that grammatical concerns are “lower order” and most appropriately relegated to the editing phase of writing; rather, many professional resources frame grammar as effectively integrated into all phases of writing to inform and structure invention, arrangement, and revision.

Finally, all three documents note that language is social and develops in particular cultural contexts. Because of this, every student has a “home language” that varies in some degree from the conventions of EAE. Literate practices are embedded in a student’s cultural identity, and such language is “the bedrock on which all other language traditions and forms will be constructed” (NCTE, 2016). For teachers, it is imperative to move students toward greater flexibility with language, and not to eliminate or discredit students’ home dialects. Sound writing instruction builds an awareness of dialectical variation and linguistic prejudice in all students and also increases the flexibility with which they can switch between different registers based on purpose, audience, context, and medium. The goal of such instruction, states NCTE, is to add to a students’ skill set, not subtract from their linguistic resources by nullifying their home dialects.

Multiple sources confirm what these professional documents claim about instruction in Edited American English: it is most effective when it occurs in the context of authentic writing. Though many teachers and texts persist in treating grammar as a static body of knowledge to be learned, studies show that decontextualized grammar instruction has minimal impact on student writing. Looking back over 100+ years of research, we see that studies repeatedly show that when students learn and practice grammar as isolated rules and categories, this learning does
little to improve their writing with regard to content, style, and even surface correctness (e.g. Hoyt, 1906; Strom, 1960; Elley et al., 1976; Weaver et al., 2006).

Hartwell (1985) further clarifies this argument by delineating the multiple meanings of grammar into five categories, then using those categories to explain the mismatch between traditional grammar instruction and effective usage in communication. He defines five different meanings of grammar this way:

- **Grammar 1**: the rules we learn unconsciously as we acquire language
- **Grammar 2**: the scientific study and description of language by linguists
- **Grammar 3**: usage, or commonly accepted standards of speech that are governed more by preference than by rules
- **Grammar 4**: the grammar commonly taught in schools, representing a small and often imprecise subset of grammar two
- **Grammar 5**: stylistic grammar, or the application of grammatical principles to text for rhetorical effect

Drawing on this specific breakdown, Hartwell articulates the critique of typical school grammar instruction in this way: We futilely teach grammar four in the hopes of impacting grammars three and five. Instead, he states, we must teach “language as language”—not categories and labels, but as the “verbal clay” to be molded toward meaning and impact (p. 125). Stylistic concerns and language choices are inextricably linked to meaning making, and thus to the generative phases of writing.

To apply Hartwell to instruction, teachers must embed the majority of grammar instruction in the production of meaningful text. By studying and imitating well-crafted, published prose, a student writer internalizes and appropriates the “structural design” (Noden,
of a more advanced “mentor” writer. While labels might later be imposed on the appropriated structures, the student begins with the particular imitated structures in the context of the original piece. As students develop their own compositions, grammar can again be effectively taught by linking particular features directly to their texts: complex sentence structures for detail and developing, implementing transitional phrases and clauses for cohesion, using phrasing and diction to enhance voice, and yes, proofreading for a select few error patterns particular to the writer (Noden, 1999; Weaver, 2006). Undergirding such instruction is the theory of literacy development that says established writers are not referencing rules as they write, but are rather drawing on internalized systems and structures that have developed both tacitly and formally in the context of their own reading and writing (Hartwell, 1985).

Relatedly, grammar must not be relegated to a final editing phase, as popularized by the likes of Murray (1972/2003) in his description of process-based writing. Rather, grammatical considerations can serve a student writer throughout their process of composition. Weaver (2006) charted examples of how students used grammar, word choice, and punctuation to “enrich and enhance” organization, ideas, fluency, and content throughout the development of their text. Focusing even more specifically on sentence structure, Noden (1999) used the analogy of “brush strokes” to describe multiple types of sentences as frameworks for detail and development. Similarly, Dombeck & Herndon (2003) used various sentence and paragraph structures as frameworks for critical thought in college students’ writing. While I agree that the surface “correctness” is not a primary indicator of quality, and that true revision and editing are indeed two different considerations, we do our student writers a disservice when we frame grammar as a “lower-order concern” to be addressed in a final proofreading stage. Instead it is powerfully taught as the very structures that configure our thoughts and bring style to our prose.
Any instruction on language is incomplete without developing students’ metalinguistic awareness of how language develops socially, evolves through use, and varies across communities. As students develop their grammar and writing skills, they often acquire the misunderstanding that there is a clear-cut “standard English” that applies equally to speech and writing, and that this version of English is stable, “correct,” and value-neutral. In reality, all spoken languages change, develop uniquely in particular social and cultural contexts, and are equally effective in meeting communication needs in a given speech community. What is commonly viewed as “standard” most often aligns with the speech patterns of those with racial, cultural, educational, and economic prestige, but is in no way more rule-bound or superior in its ability to serve communicative purposes (Gee, 1989/2001; Zuidema, 2005; Lippi-Green, 2012).

One’s dialect is inextricably linked with one’s identity, cultural history, and group affiliation. Gee (1989/2001) uses the term Discourse to encapsulate the “saying-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” that function like an “identity kit” (p. 526). Discourse refers to the words and syntax of our particular dialect, but also the web of actions, beliefs, and values that accompany and permeate our use of our particular language. We do not acquire a Discourse through overt instruction, but rather through enculturation and immersion in a community; thus, a students’ home dialect is an inextricable part of her/his cultural identity. To claim that one dialect is superior and another inferior “amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another” (CCCC, 1974, p. 1).

Failure to integrate such awareness could lead to linguistic prejudice, or false judgment based on one’s language or dialect. Zuidema (2005) charges that while educators are intolerant of most stereotyping and prejudices, linguistic prejudice is still generally accepted both in schools and among the general public. Combatting this prejudice through language education is
essential for both students who speak stigmatized dialects (such as Black English Vernacular or Appalachian English) and students who speak dominant Discourses. Students who do speak stigmatized dialects often experience linguistic bias in schools, in everything from teacher treatment to over-diagnosis of disabilities to standardized testing (Hilliard, 2002). For students who speak what Smitherman (1987, 1999) called “The Language of Wider Communication”—a moniker more accurate than “standard” to describe features of widely shared English—it is also imperative that they learn about variation lest they adopt the myth of superiority and become less capable of “hearing other cultures and, thus, learning from them” (Wynne, 2002). Finally, when we avoid discussions of variation, we keep all students from fully understanding and appreciating the powerful rhetorical features unique to particular communities, for example the rhythmic discourse, call and response, or sampling so common in African American speeches, sermons, and stories (Perryman-Clark, 2013).

Teaching language variation in no way undermines the teaching of written grammatical conventions described above. Instead, “we must simultaneously teach the prescriptive grammatical rules and empower students to think critically about them” (Curzan, 2009, p. 871). Multiple scholars who are advocates of “Students’ Right to Their Own Language”—the 1974 resolution from CCCC that promoted the validity of students’ home language in academic discourse—also advocate teaching the conventions of Edited American English (e.g., Smitherman, 1987; Delpit, 1999/2001; 1989/2001; Perryman-Clark, 2013). In addition, knowledge of variation can actually aid students’ facility with writing by developing metalinguistic awareness. Students who actively study a secondary Discourse are more likely to demonstrate a greater awareness of and facility with their primary Discourse (Gee, 1989/2001).
due to their comparative study of structures and their appropriation of features from the secondary Discourse that expand their rhetorical repertoire.

Analyzing how the Common Core State Standards align with this cited scholarship is complicated. It is noteworthy that, although the literature cited above integrates language and writing considerations, the CCSS language standards are separated from the writing standards. This is problematic because the structure suggests that “language and style expectations can be evaluated...separately from writing expectations” (Aull, 2015, p. 60), an assumption that contradicts the scholarship of Noden (1999), Weaver and Bush (2008), Hartwell (1985), and the documents from professional organizations. In contrast to the CCSS, the NCTE/IRA standards (2012) for English language arts contain no stand-alone grammatical standards. Any discussion of usage or conventions is interwoven with communicative purposes. Aull (2015) suggests that this separation is in part due to an historical distinction between composition and language studies that can be traced back through more than 60 years of practice; however, she argues, the task is not to further disaggregate our assessment criteria with regard to language and style, but to “further clarify their connection and overlap” (p. 61).

Looking beyond the standards’ framework to items within both the language and writing standard sets produces some evidence of alignment with scholarship, including the suggestion of a language-writing connection. The following alignments to scholarship can be found in the standards for both writing and language:

- Several writing standards emphasize the importance of attending to the “conventions of the discipline” in which students are writing, thus aligning grammatical choices with expectations for particular genres and contexts (W.11-12.1.D, 2.E), as emphasized in composition scholarship.
• The standards under “Production and Distribution of Writing” reference the common
delineations of process and, as with the three professional documents on the teaching
of writing, explicitly separate revision and editing (W.11-12.5).

• The standards for language state that students should understand that usage can
change over time, is sometimes contested (L.11-12.1.A), and that “appropriate” usage
is dependent upon context (L.11-12.3), thus reflecting the reality of variation.
However, it should be noted that the dominant emphasis in the language standards is
declarative grammatical knowledge; additionally, they use the phrase “standard
English” as opposed to some of the other phrases in the scholarship (such as “the
language of wider communication” or “Edited American English”).

The standards also reflect the scholarship that names the connection between syntax and
meaning-making, in this one regard trumping the statements from NCTE, CWPA, and CCCC.
Writing standard 11-12.1.C states that students should “use words, phrases, and clauses as well
as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the
relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s)
and counterclaims,” and a similar standard is repeated through three different modes of writing.
What these standards suggest, and what is neither explicitly named nor implied in the three
professional statements on writing, is that a writer’s grammar gives purposeful shape to ideas
and cannot be relegated to a mere end-of-process editing concern, an understanding of grammar
that I wholeheartedly affirm.

One text that smartly integrates EAE knowledge with language variation is David West
Brown’s (2009) In Other Words: Lessons on Grammar, Code-Switching, and Academic Writing.
The text contains a series of mini-lessons that teachers might use with all students, lessons built
around common vernacular speech patterns of youth and diverse English-speaking communities. Brown suggests that teachers begin by helping students understand the rules that govern certain vernacular usage patterns, then help students develop their facility with comparable mainstream or formal forms. For example, one lesson uses contrastive analysis to help students compare the subject-verb agreement and tense/aspect patterns in texts by Zora Neale Hurston, William Shakespeare, and Jay-Z. By using such diverse examples, students see and normalize the variations in usage while also acquiring a sophisticated understanding of particular grammatical constructions. Woven throughout these classroom-ready lessons is information about grammar and linguistic diversity to build background knowledge for the teacher and ground the practical lessons in the overarching goal of developing students’ respect for the legitimacy of diverse languages and dialects.

In analyzing textbooks for their treatment of language, there are several clear markers of quality. First, grammar and conventions must be addressed, but not as decontextualized exercises or a detached handbook. Rather, a powerful text will integrate language lessons into student writing assignments, encouraging active and immediate use of newly learned features for purposeful communication. Secondly, grammar will not merely be integrated as a final editing phase, but will also show up throughout the writing process, linked explicitly with meaning-making. Finally, quality textbooks will include some discussion of variation, framed as an essential understanding for all students; relatedly, they will not present grammatical and syntactical features associated with particular dialects as error, but will rather discuss such features in terms of appropriateness for particular audiences and occasions.
New Literacies

The fifth and final principle is the one that receives the least emphasis in the Common Core State Standards, despite the fact that it is affirmed by all three professional documents that inform my research framework. The three professional documents all affirm that effective composition instruction must attend to new literacy practices and cannot merely teach and re-teach age-old, linear essay forms. Increasingly, “college and career readiness” involves students being able to read images critically, to compose for digital platforms, to make an argument through the juxtaposition of verbal and visual content, and to collaborate with others (often in virtual spaces) to produce text. The forms and spaces in which people compose outside of school are continually changing as new communication technologies evolve; to limit school-based instruction to traditional modes—such as a personal narrative, a thesis-driven argument, and an informative essay—is to do students a disservice. These traditional forms need not be discarded, but the English class risks irrelevance if modal essays delimit the writing curriculum for any high school student, college bound or not.

In this section, I use the phrase “new literacies” to encompass the skills needed for effective communication in a diverse range of media and contexts. “New” indicates 21st century modes and genres that have co-evolved with computers and personal electronic devices—genres such as blogs, fan fiction, podcasts, and zines. “Literacies” indicates that we are addressing much more than the mere integration of new tools; rather, the use of the term literacies refers to communicative processes and capabilities that emerge from the widening use of digital tools—skills such as collaborative composing, hyperlinking, hybridizing, and remixing (Swenson, Rozema, Young, McGrail, & Whitin, 2005). In contrast, I use the phrases “essayistic literacies” and “school-based literacy practices” to connote the skills and forms associated with traditional
print-based texts. Versions of the former phrase were also used by Trimbur (1990) and Hesse (1999) to describe the specific skills needed to read and write an essay, “a sub-genre of short prose, modest and self-limiting in its truth claims” that attempts transparency in both meaning and perspective (Hesse, 1999, p. 37). In a similar but somewhat more critical vein, I use the latter phrase to refer to those forms and practices popular in academic coursework and prized by standardized tests, but rarely seen beyond the classroom—forms such as a five-paragraph essay, book report, or common research paper.

According to CCCC’s “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” (2015), “Writing is inherently technological”; even when writing with a pencil and paper, the writer is using those particular technologies to compose, and the traits of that final composition will be mediated by the technology. CWPA’s “Framework” (2011) similarly affirms that all forms of composition require technology of some sort, whether that is a wood-encased pencil, a vintage typewriter or the video camera in a student’s smart phone. NCTE’s “Professional Knowledge” (2016) notes that even when students have limited access to digital devices, related composition principles—such as the strategic pairing of text and image or collaborative composing—can be taught with more rudimentary tools.

Such statements are instructive in two ways: first, they implicitly speak to resistance expressed by some, resistance that claims that allowing students to compose in new forms is somehow a “watered down” version of what rigorous pre-college curriculum is supposed to be. Teaching students to analyze the conventions of social media or to compose a brochure that uses Photoshop to combine text and image is not a mere pedagogical trend but is rather a contemporary application of a core rhetorical principle about the interdependence of writing and technology (Baron, 1999; Ong, 1986/2001). Secondly, these statements affirm that the
technology used is not neutral; rather the medium is an inextricable part of the message. When we speak of digital composing we are speaking of content and processes that would have to substantively change their form to exist as an ink-on-paper essay. For example, a traditional, thesis-driven research paper uploaded to a webpage is not a “new literacy” practice; the tool is simply a more convenient way of distributing a school-based form. However, a Wiki page, complete with hyperlinks and community authorship, would qualify as a new literacy practice because the medium of production impacts features of product, process, and audience reception. At the same time, we can extract these very literacy practices from the tools to teach them in “unplugged” environments (Bomer, 2011 p. 243), a pedagogical note that is especially useful in schools with limited resources.

It is tempting to fall victim to the “digital native” myth (popularized by Prensky, 2001), which presumes that our students are growing up in a technological era, leaving little for teachers to actually teach them. However, this falsely assumes students have equal access to tools and to skill development in the context of their home and self-sponsored literacy practices. In reality, young adults’ comfort with, understanding of, and dexterity with digital technology is highly variable (Vaidhyanathan, 2008). Additionally, the digital native myth conflates students’ ability to manipulate a tool with their ability to critically and rhetorically analyze the discourse and to mindfully compose. Teachers, claim DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, and Hicks (2010), must guide students to understand the social and political contexts in which digital writing occurs. They should assist students in choosing the best technology for their rhetorical purposes and must coach them to analyze the rhetorical structures of new composition spaces. Thus, instruction in new literacies includes not only functionality, but also attending to social and rhetorical concerns.
Such integration aligns well with the previously described trait of rhetorical knowledge and versatility, namely the importance of writing for real audiences and purposes. One recurring trait in the scholarship on new literacy instruction is that digital composition is highly participatory, yielding multiple opportunities for people to join political conversations, share stories, and create aesthetic texts, often with the assumption that one’s text will be read and possibly responded to (Baron, 1999; Stroupe, 2000; DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, & Hicks, 2010). Jenkins et al. (2006) define this participatory culture as having low barriers to engagement, a sense that one’s contributions matter in some way, and a sense of social connection through the medium. This very description of participatory culture is the sort of authentic and engaged writing that teachers struggle to achieve with school-based literacy practices. Thus, rather than viewing new literacies as a potential distraction from serious writing endeavors, we might better frame them as one way to achieve the purposes that underlie our traditional assignments.

Indeed, there is a fear that if we shift our composition paradigm at the high school level away from essayistic literacies, we might do our students a disservice with regard to college preparation and literacy development. This concern highlights the fact that visual and multi-modal literacies are often subconsciously associated with illiteracy. Current notions of literacy are so deeply tied to alphanumeric text that the move toward integration of new literacy practices might be viewed as a regression (Trimbur, 2002). This could partially explain why, in a recent survey of first-year writing curricula, Moore et al. (2016) acknowledged that a 21st century writing framework is far from mainstream in U.S. colleges. The authors found that while college students do use a wide variety of technologies in their school and self-initiated writing (including pen and paper), and while some first-year writing professors are shifting assignments in their
composition courses, most first-year writing programs are far from a curricular framework that integrates real-world, 21st-century composition practices.

Nevertheless, Yancey (2009) argues that educators must move forward together in developing a new paradigm for K-16 writing, one that includes and centralizes the ways in which technological advancements have shifted the ways in which people write. About a decade earlier, Hawisher and Selfe (1999) argued that although academic communities cannot provide students with a “stable and unchanging body of knowledge” with regard to digital communication, their literacy instruction must acknowledge the rapidly changing and increasingly global landscape of communication (p. 4). In 2016, we are still far from composition instruction that has fully integrated the genres, forms, and tools used outside of classroom practice, despite the fact that such instruction would meet the two-fold Common Core aim of making students “college and career ready.”

The Common Core Standards are comparatively thin on new literacy practices. The opening three standards are built around the traditional essay modes of argument, information/explanation, and narration; there is nothing in those first 16 sub-standards to suggest that these modes might take a different shape—more visual, more auditory, less linear—by production through a newer technology. The two standards to mention technology—housed under the headings “Production and Distribution of Writing” and “Research to Build and Present Knowledge”—suggest that technologies merely support traditional school-based literacy practices:

• Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information. (W.11-12.6)
• Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience. (W.11-12.8a)

While 11-12.6 could include new literacy practices, it could also be met by producing a traditional essay, uploading it to a class Dropbox, and using a computer to make further revisions. Nothing in the articulation of this standard requires students to analyze the intersection of technology and form to produce a text where communication strategies are inextricably linked to the mode of production. Standard 11-12.8 does require students to use some receptive new literacy skills since it describes gathering and evaluating both print and digital sources, but it does not require any expressive literacy practices.

One text that serves as a pragmatic discussion of new literacy practices in high school is Hicks’s *Crafting Digital Writing: Composing Texts Across Media and Genres* (2013). In keeping with the above arguments, Hicks insists that such study of digital writing is an integral—not tangential—part of what it means to be literate in the modern world. He ties the teaching of digital writing to the rich history in English education of the writers’ workshop, an instructional approach that invites student writers to study exemplars, confer with peers throughout the composing process, and publish or present their work to a variety of real audiences. He also uses the acronym of MAPS—mode and media, audience, purpose, situation—throughout the book, bringing a rhetorical framework to the writer’s decision-making process and emphasizing that digital literacy is not about learning to manipulate tools (which many students already know how to do). It is about broadening students’ understanding of the particular conventions that make different media most effective at reaching target audiences.
Hicks’s (2013) book unfolds around several chapters that explore composition projects in several different, ubiquitous forms: web texts, presentations, audio texts, video texts, and social media. This is not a comprehensive list of genres within the category of “digital writing,” but it is a representative sample of the types of genres that students commonly encounter and will continue to use in their adult lives. Chapters contain examples of both successful and unsuccessful mentor texts (analyzed using the MAPS heuristic), discuss the different elements of effective design, and include some technical information or links to resources as appropriate—though as Hicks notes in the introduction, teaching the technology itself is the least important consideration when teaching digital composition. Also noteworthy is that each chapter contains several pages on the writing process and describes specifically how the process varies within different mediums.

In a chapter on composing for the web, for example, Hicks begins by naming some of the many “push-button publishing” sites that allow students to compose web text without an advanced understanding of coding. He goes on to use a 2012 NASA webpage as an example of a page with many design flaws, analyzing its failures in light of the MAPS framework. He also clearly distinguishes between what he calls “digitally convenient” and “digitally enhanced” texts, the former being a traditional alphabetic composition made more accessible through web distribution, and the latter including digital elements like hyperlinking, embedded media, and other features unique to a digital platform (p. 42). Finally, Hicks applies the traditional writing process, but notes some ways in which the digital platform make each stage unique. For example, ideas can be collected and shared with tools such as Diigo or Google Bookmarks; drafts might be revised and edited collaboratively; revision also includes making decisions about color, layout, links, and embedded media (pp. 44-45). Every subsequent chapter of Hicks’s text
is a similarly rich and media-specific guide to helping students compose purposefully and informedly in digital spaces.

When analyzing secondary writing textbooks for this trait, one clear distinction to make is how any given technology is integrated into student production. It is clear that textbooks are integrating technology in some way; to ignore any technological developments would be to risk being shelved with the Luddites. However, a clear distinction to make is whether these technologies are being used in support of traditional literacy practice, or whether the substance and processes of composition are reflective of the technologies in question. Do the textbooks merely lay standard essay-based processes and structures overtop of Web-based genres? Are students encouraged to “publish” traditional essays in digital spaces without any attention to medium throughout the composition process? Are computers used primarily to write and revise school-based forms? If so, a textbook might have integrated new technologies, but cannot be said to have integrated new literacies.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, these five principles are not an exhaustive list of traits of effective pre-college writing instruction; however, they are research-based traits promoted widely in professional literature that form my lens for textbook analysis. Though the prioritization of principles differs, the Common Core State Standards for writing also include references to the first four of these five traits. The textbooks in this research sample align with the Common Core Standards and so ostensibly reflect the composition scholarship, too. However, as I have emphasized repeatedly, alignment does not indicate pedagogical quality. The scholarship and pedagogical exemplars summarized here give helpful indicators that can be applied to the textbooks to determine not only nominal alignment, but whether mass-market textbooks are truly contributing to the mandate of increased college readiness.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology: Qualitative Document Analysis

The preceding literature review forms the framework that I use to analyze my sample of four pre-college writing textbooks, two of which are print, one digital, and one a hybrid package of a print and online text. All of the textbooks in the sample are explicitly marketed for their Common Core alignment and their college preparatory content. Using Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) as the primary method of inquiry, I analyze these four books/bundles for the ways in which they conform to or digress from the principles outlined in the previous section—rhetorical knowledge and versatility, process-based writing, critical thinking, language and conventions, and new literacies—to determine if they actually offer the rigor and quality that the publishers tout in their marketing.

The general process of QDA, as described by Bowen (2009), involves first finding and selecting the documents; appraising the content of the documents; and synthesizing the data contained in the documents. The process of content appraisal is described by Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, and Schneider (2008) as “emergent,” meaning that conclusions emerge from the recursive application of an original inquiry framework to the studied texts, with each cycle of data refining the framework for subsequent applications to the sample. Using this recursive framework, the researcher then synthesizes data to describe themes and patterns in the sample, and not merely to quantify the frequency of particular references (128). By moving beyond quantitative data, the researcher is also positioned to describe not only the “manifest” (explicit) content, but also to describe “latent” (implicit) themes and ideas in the texts (Saldaña, 2011, p.10). The result of this recursive examination of text is a rich description of the themes and
patterns with multiple textual examples supporting the interpretation and analysis (Bowen, 2009). In the case of my project, quantitative data—such as the amount of references to a particular rhetorical principle or the number of pages devoted to a topic—is helpful, but only insofar as it is part of a rich description of the ways in which each principle is enacted throughout the text.

My use of this methodology operates within a constructivist paradigm that is built on certain epistemological understandings. Within the QDA paradigm, meaning is not presumed to be inherently present in the studied texts, and there is no singular, objective “truth” that a researcher seeks to uncover; rather, meaning emerges from the relationship between investigator and text and is created through a dialectical process of investigation. Meaning also emerges from comparisons among documents—in this case, comparisons of the textbooks to one another and to the professional literature cited in Chapter Two. Such juxtaposition of documents elucidates each textbook’s quality relative to the others in the set and to the composition principles described by the cited scholarship.

Finally, the investigator must consider how a document’s context influences the particular meanings that a reader assigns to text (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the economic and political context described in Chapter One informs my readings of the textbooks and research design. In the case of this study, I use one corpus of text—position statements and composition scholarship—as the standard-setter for another—high school writing textbooks—and I justify this relationship primarily by the context of the two different text sets. As described in Chapter One, the four textbooks that I analyze are influenced by profit-driven corporate values and emerge from a political context that questions the professional knowledge of teachers and the efficacy of public education. In contrast, the scholarship cited in Chapter Two emerges from
a context that prioritizes peer review and research-based instructional practice, and is driven by the ethical imperative in academic communities to contribute to greater collective knowledge. The result of these contextual differences is that when a textbook’s representation of a composition principle does not align with the scholarship, I critique the textbook and not the scholarship, thus assigning more value to the representations within scholarly communities over those that emerge from a corporate or politicized context.

Even when context is carefully considered, the articulated interpretations and analyses that emerge cannot be assumed to be objective, uncontestable truth; rather conclusions about meaning are evaluated by the standard of “trustworthiness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). In other words, the burden of proof is on the researcher to demonstrate that the texts have been evaluated fairly, that all conclusions are anchored in comprehensive and careful readings of the investigated texts, and that conclusions are thoroughly supported by representative examples from the sample. Malterud (2001) describes this as similar to a quantitative researchers’ concern with validity and reliability, but established through different mechanisms. In this case, I establish the trustworthiness of my findings by 1) being transparent about my preconceptions in Chapter One, 2) establishing a systematic frame of reference in Chapter Two, and 3) describing my system for data collection and analysis in the following pages. These three considerations are among the processes that Malterud (2001) says “[distinguish] scientific approach from superficial conjecture” (p. 486).

In this study, the five principles from the previous section formed the initial framework for analysis, but it was insufficient to merely quantify the explicit references to rhetorical knowledge, writing process, critical thinking, language, and new literacies. All textbooks explicitly address all five principles to some degree; however, since my core argument claims
that mere alignment does not guarantee quality, the richest content for analysis is found in the exposition and application, the specific ways in which representations of these principles conform to or digress from the scholarship on composition pedagogy. Thus, multiple readings of the textbooks and scholarship allowed me to describe patterns that emerged within and among the texts, patterns that are described in more detail in the subsequent chapters.

Selection of Documents for the Theoretical Framework

I created the framework for textbook analysis by first selecting and coding three position statements on the teaching of writing. These statements are authored by professional organizations; their intent is to synthesize the scholarship on best practices in writing instruction and to promote pedagogy that aligns with this scholarship. For the sake of clarity, I consistently use the phrase “professional documents” to refer to the standard-setting documents that created the framework for analysis, and “textbooks” to refer to the sample being analyzed. I selected these three professional documents using the following criteria:

- The documents are published and distributed by professional organizations that articulate a mission to promote research-based teaching practices in high school and college English and writing classes.
- The documents explicitly describe and promote “best practices” for composition curriculum and instruction at the high school and/or college levels. They articulate knowledge and skills for student writers that apply to both college-preparatory and first-year college writing.
- The documents reflect and are informed by peer-reviewed research and scholarship in the fields of English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies.
These criteria led to the selection of the following three documents: “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” (Council of Writing Program Administrators, in collaboration with the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Writing Project, 2011); “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2015); and “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2016). Some documents that I eliminated from the study include statements on writing from particular universities or individuals because they often lacked evidence of peer review beyond the initial author(s), and statements on writing from the U.S. Department of Education, due to the political context from which they emerged, a context that (as argued in Chapter One) is often more influenced by political and economic forces than by scholarship.

Open coding1 of these professional documents led to the framework described in the previous chapter. Each of the five principles outlined in Chapter Two are explicitly affirmed and discussed by all three statements on writing. Principles of quality writing and writing instruction that showed up in only one or two documents were not included here despite their ostensible validity and discussion in ancillary scholarship. For example, “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” (CWPA, 2011) describes eight “habits of mind” that are essential for success in postsecondary writing, habits such as curiosity, openness, and engagement (p. 1). While these characteristics may be helpful in describing college readiness, they were not articulated by either of the other two documents and so were not included in this framework.

1 Open coding commonly refers to the development of initial categorical codes from the documents to be analyzed. It is often used early in the qualitative research process to develop an initial framework that subsequently guides a more detailed analysis (e.g. Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 2013).

2 In my selection of textbooks, I do not make a strong distinction between 11th and 12th grade materials because the
I further refined this theoretical framework through extensive reading in the fields of English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies, focusing especially on recent scholarship as well as seminal texts from both fields. The ancillary texts refined the initial framework in two key ways. First, they developed the theoretical and research bases for the comparatively brief descriptions of composition instruction in the three professional documents from NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA. Secondly, they further illuminated effective applications of the five composition principles, thus providing specific comparisons to exercises, writing projects, and heuristics in the mass-market textbooks.

**Selection of Textbook Sample**

To select the textbook sample for this study, I used several parameters, detailed here. First, I selected materials that are marketed for their explicit alignment with the Common Core State Standards. Because of the promises embedded in the standards—promises of increased rigor begetting college readiness—and because I am suggesting that these national standards provide convenient marketing catchphrases, I limited my sample to only those textbooks that are promoted as CCSS-aligned. Some of the textbooks feature alignment charts and CCSS branding; others tout alignment to Common Core in their promotional materials only. All materials in the study explicitly claim alignment to the standards in some form.

Secondly, all selected materials are designed for upper high school student use (11th or 12th grade) with emphasis on college preparation. These textbooks are designed to coach students’ writing and language development, and thus influence students’ constructs of what constitutes “college-level writing” in both practice and product. Professional texts written for the

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2 In my selection of textbooks, I do not make a strong distinction between 11th and 12th grade materials because the standards themselves group together grades 11 and 12, thus suggesting that CCSS textbooks marketed for either grade will be relatively similar in their goals and content.
audience of teachers would also make an instructive parallel study; however, the revenue generated by professional development texts is miniscule in comparison with the revenue generated by student textbooks. Because one layer of this study examines the influence of market forces on education, I elected to focus on materials that have the highest market value due to the sheer volume needed to populate a school curriculum library as opposed to a book generally purchased by an individual as a single volume.

Third, the selected materials have several indicators that would suggest comparatively large sales and distribution. This was determined by using two measures: publicly available financial information such as market cap and textbook adoption scorecards and the rate of adoption by the 18 states that still practice statewide materials adoption at the secondary level. Both of these are imperfect indicators of a specific textbook’s sales. The high market value of a publishing company does not indicate which particular products yield that high market value. The statewide adoption list represents fewer than half of the states. However, this study neither claims to be exhaustive nor claims to determine the top-grossing materials; rather it is a qualitative analysis of a representative sample of widely marketed and distributed Common Core writing texts, and this publicly available information does indicate comparatively broad distribution in the instructional materials market.

Using these three criteria, I arrived at the following sample:


McGraw-Hill was cited by Simba Information’s textbook scorecard as leading the 6-12

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3 Overviews of textbook adoption scorecards are available through Simba Information, self described as “a market intelligence leader” for the publishing industry. Full reports cost more than $1,000, but overviews are available online, and the tables of contents provide definitive statements about particular publishing companies’ value and projected earnings.
McGraw-Hill Education was purchased by Apollo Group in 2015, a company with a market cap of $1.01B (Yahoo Finance, retrieved May, 2016). This particular writing package has been adopted by North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah. While only adopted by four states to date, Texas is the largest market and a noted driver of content; additionally, the fact that the electronic platform was just released in 2014 means that it may not have been considered in some states’ adoption cycles.

2. *Prentice Hall Writing Coach, National Edition, Grade 12* (2012). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. E-book and electronic writing program. Prentice Hall is a subsidiary of Pearson, which was ranked second on the National Textbook Adoption Scorecard (2015) and is also considered a mid cap at 9.65B (Yahoo Finance, retrieved April 2016). Prentice Hall’s *Writing Coach* has the second-longest state adoption list of the four in this sample, adopted by the following: Alabama, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia.


Houghton Mifflin Harcourt holds a considerably smaller market share (2.48B as of April 2016); however, the company topped Simba Information’s textbook adoption scorecard in 2013 and was third in 2015. Additionally, the *Write Source* series was adopted by 10 states, making it the most commonly adopted textbook in this study: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.


Perfection Learning Corporation. Print. Despite the limited information about revenue (due
to the fact that Perfection Learning Corporation is not publicly traded), I included this text because it is heavily marketed to align with Common Core and has been adopted by the following eight states: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. Additionally, as mentioned in Chapter One, this textbook provides an interesting contrast to the other three in that it meets my selection criteria but is not publicly traded and does not have the same documented degree of dominance in the curricular materials market. Thus this textbook provides a way to test Burch’s (2009) hypothesis that as corporations grow, innovation may actually decrease.

It is also helpful to describe several high school writing textbooks considered for this study but eventually eliminated. I initially reviewed Scholastic’s *English 3-D: Language and Writing* because of its alignment with Common Core Standards, and because of the corporation’s $1.13B market cap (Yahoo Finance, retrieved July, 2015). However, in reviewing the state adoption lists, I found that *English 3-D* was only adopted by New Mexico, thus indicating a comparatively smaller circulation. The *Mirrors and Windows* series by EMC Publishing also meets some of the above criteria. It appears frequently on the state adoption lists and is promoted as Common-Core aligned. However, the texts are organized first and foremost around literature study (Grade 11 is the *American Literature* textbook, for example), and writing is integrated in response to the literature and themes. While this integrated approach to teaching writing is quite common and valid, I limited the sample to textbooks that claim writing development as a primary—not secondary—aim.

Finally, Bedford/St. Martin’s, part of the Macmillan publishing group, publishes the frequently adopted *Patterns for College Writing* by Kirszner and Mandell. This was an attractive
book for the study because of its adoption by many states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah) and its explicit focus on college preparatory writing. Some of the state adoption sites do comment on the textbook’s alignment with Common Core—for example, Idaho notes 95% alignment with CCSS writing standards—but nowhere on the publisher’s website nor within the textbook itself is CCSS alignment explicitly promoted.

**Data Collection: Coding of Textbooks**

To analyze the high school writing textbooks, I developed a code from the three professional documents described above. Based on the presence of specific composition practices in each of the three professional documents, I arrived at the following a priori code, to be applied to the content of the textbooks:

- **RKV = Rhetorical Knowledge and Versatility**
  *Definition: The textbook addresses rhetorical concepts like purpose, audience, and context, and/or advises students to tailor their compositions to particular situations.*

- **WP = Writing Process**
  *Definition: The textbook presents writing as an activity or process, not merely a final product.*

- **CT = Critical Thinking**
  *Definition: The textbook names critical thinking or other recognized higher-order processes as an objective, describes critical thinking, and/or explicitly structures it into writing exercises.*

- **LC = Language and Conventions**
  *Definition: The textbook addresses conventions of Edited American English, gives usage advice, and/or informs students about language variation.*

- **NL = New Literacies**

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4 A priori coding is commonly used in qualitative research to refer to the application of a pre-set code to the documents in question (e.g. Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 2013).
Definition: The textbook includes instruction, examples of, and exercises related to digital, visual, and multimodal composing and/or the use of related technologies.

I first used these codes to identify occurrences of keywords, exercises, diagrams, and heuristics that addressed these five principles. In this first round of “manifest coding”—or coding of explicit occurrences (Saldaña, p. 10)—I applied the codes liberally to the texts, meaning that if the textbook explicitly addressed one of these five areas but, in the development of the trait diverged from the scholarship, I still coded it accordingly. For example, when Glencoe’s *Writer’s Workspace* suggested at the end of the writing process that students consider publishing an essay online, I coded this advice as NL (New Literacies) for the mention of online publishing, even though the integration of this tool at the end of a traditional essay-writing process does not align with the description of new literacies in the scholarship, which requires the form and conventions of the composition to be influenced by the medium of production. This explicit coding was my method of merely tracking occurrences to be analyzed later for patterns and for the degree of alignment with the composition principles as described in scholarship. Such liberal application of codes also addresses the question of trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) in that it ensures I consider all examples in the textbooks, not merely the ones that confirm my biases and critiques.

Textbooks present information and develop students’ writing practice in a variety of ways, and so I applied this identificatory coding to a variety of types of content, including student exercises, exposition, major assignments, student sample texts, professional sample text, sidebars, call-out boxes, and visual diagrams and graphics. This became instructive as I analyzed the data because it illuminated contradictions within texts. For example, several textbooks in the sample describe the writing process as recursive and represent it as such in a diagram, but
proceed to walk students through major writing projects sequenced in a notably linear fashion. Thus, when extracting the data from the textbooks for organization and analysis, I included the type of content, the principle addressed, and the location of the example to facilitate comparison in the data analysis. (Example from Write Source: Diagram, WP, p. 10.) When content recurred throughout a text, I tracked frequency by page numbers instead of repeatedly summarizing each occurrence. (Example from Writing with Power: “Power of Language” supplementary grammar exercise, LC, pp. 65, 93, 145, 175, 202, 250.)

In addition to coding examples of occurrence, QDA emphasizes the importance of analyzing structure and format (Altheide et al., p. 130). Thus after coding textbooks for manifest content, I named and described latent content such as patterns and recurring features that relate to the five principles of effective pre-college writing. The tables of contents were useful in making patterns visible through repetition of structures and heuristics. For example, Writing Coach e-text unfolds in a modal structure, walking students through common modes of essay writing such as exposition, narration, and persuasion. Though an early chapter suggests that the writing process is recursive and that students cycle back through various stages, the feature assignment in each modal chapter unfolds in linear fashion around the steps of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, thus employing a heuristic (made visible in the table of contents) that suggests a linear process. Another informative source of data was to quantify the amount of page space devoted to these five topics because more pages devoted to a particular topic implies greater emphasis on and value of that topic. For example, Write Source devotes 160 pages to traditional prescriptive grammar instruction; in comparison, only 7 pages address new literacies, thus suggesting that 1) new literacy practices are not as important as essayistic literacies, and 2) the text’s presentation of grammar is misaligned with the practices described in the professional
literature (e.g. Hartwell, 1985; Noden, 1999; Weaver et al., 2006). Finally, I repeatedly noted how page layout framed content as dominant or subordinate. For example, in Prentice Hall’s *Writing Coach*, several sidebars contain questions that direct student writers to reflect on process, genre, and audience in ways that *do* reflect rhetorical knowledge and versatility; however the dominant content (indicated by amount of text, centralized placement on the page, and the size and presence of headers) emphasizes a decontextualized, linear writing process.

Once each text was initially coded, I isolated the data and organized it in an excel spreadsheet, assigning each individual textbook to a row and each composition principle to a column. Using this initial data chart, I compared each textbook to each of the five rhetorical principles in turn, focusing on the degree of alignment with the principles outlined in the scholarship. This allowed me to form provisional conclusions about each text’s degree of alignment with each of the five principles, conclusions that I later tested, confirmed, revised, and/or complicated through subsequent readings and comparisons among texts.

**Synthesis of Data**

These provisional conclusions about a textbook’s degree of alignment to the five rhetorical principles were further refined and clarified through three intertextual comparisons: I compared my conclusions about the textbooks to 1) specific constructs in the professional documents and related scholarship that formed the initial framework, 2) to one another, and 3) to the selected pedagogical texts (described in Chapter Two) that instruct teachers in each of these five elements of writing pedagogy. I engaged in the “constant comparison” emphasized by Altheide et al. (2008, p. 130), returning again and again to the corpus of data to further confirm or revise initial assessments of quality.
In comparing the textbooks to the scholarship that formed my initial framework, it was especially useful to make two distinctions: 1) distinguishing between what the textbooks said and what they directed students to do, and 2) distinguishing between the enactment of a particular principle in the scholarship and the enactment of a particular principle in the textbooks. To illustrate the first distinction, I offer an example from *Writing Coach*. The online textbook begins with a chapter titled “You, the Writer” that acknowledges the types of writing that students do in their everyday lives, including texting and emailing (p. 3). This framing would appear to prioritize and validate new literacy practices as worthy of inclusion in the composition classroom. However, the following chapter titled “The Writing Process” repeatedly directs students to apply this process to develop a “well-organized paper” with “an obvious plan” (p. 26); thus while Chapter One’s exposition might give a nod to a particular rhetorical principle, subsequent activities do not centralize related skills.

With regard to the second distinction, examples and discussions in the scholarship help to illuminate when textbooks might address a rhetorical principle but without the degree of sophistication and complexity required of college-level writing. For example, in McCann’s *Transforming Talk into Text*—one of the texts included in Chapter Two to illustrate the principle of critical thinking—the author clearly outlines discussion practices that require student writers to weigh contradictory ideas against one another before and during composition. This student process as described by McCann is a central part of the development of a critical argument. In contrast, a textbook like Pearson’s *Writing Coach* repeatedly directs students to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of an argument and to fairly address multiple viewpoints (e.g. pp. 182, 183), but there are few exercises and processes that develop this complex skill beyond the mere directive.
Also useful in this comparative analysis was examining common chapters and constructs across the four texts in the sample. For example, each textbook contains some form of a grammar “handbook” that spells out detailed grammatical knowledge, including everything from basic parts of speech to more complex grammatical structures like subordinate, restrictive, and nonrestrictive clauses. This common feature allowed me to compare the percentage of pages devoted to decontextualized grammar instruction, quantitative data that then suggested adherence to or divergence from the common advice in the scholarship to teach grammar in the context of student writing (e.g. Elley et al., 1976; Noden, 2011; Weaver & Bush, 2006). Another helpful feature was the comparison of common chapters across textbooks. For example, to analyze the treatment of the writing process, I reviewed a chapter on the expository mode of writing present in all four textbooks. This allowed me to compare features like the relative degree of linearity in the application of process, and whether contextual considerations guide the composition process or are introduced only in the final “publishing” phase.

The most noteworthy shift to emerge from this iterative application of my research framework was a change from five composition principles to four. In the reporting and analysis of data that follows, I combine writing process with rhetorical knowledge and versatility because all four textbooks in the sample treat these two principles in tandem. In sum, all textbooks in the sample are structured around modal chapters that employ a process model and subordinate rhetorical knowledge to steps within the process. For example, in Writing with Power, the chapter on expository writing begins with directions on “prewriting” and within that context, asks the student writer to address questions such as, “Who are my readers? What do they need to know to understand my subject” (p. 239)? In the drafting phase, students are instructed to “monitor how well [they] are addressing [their] purpose and audience” (p. 255). Such
interweaving of rhetorical considerations into a linear process model (with varying degrees of sophistication) continues through the chapters and across the textbooks. My choice to conflate these two principles thus mirrors the textbook structure, which repeatedly subordinates rhetorical knowledge to the linear process model and thus positions the process model as the dominant heuristic, in essence the fundamental rhetorical knowledge for student writers.

The potential limitation of my research methodology is the dependence on the subjective interpretation of a single investigator. By acknowledging that texts contain a multiplicity of meanings, and that meanings emerge from the interaction of reader, text, and context, I am also acknowledging that my conclusions are subjective and situational. However, qualitative researchers would argue that the quest for incontestable truth in any research depends on positivist notions of objective knowledge (Rapley, 2007), an epistemological stance that is ultimately rejected in qualitative methodologies. What is offered by the methodology is the potential to uncover, articulate, and defend a rich web of representations and meanings—in this case, to make visible the rhetorical shortcomings of curricular materials that claim to align with rigorous composition standards but, upon further analysis, reveal varying degrees of superficiality in their enactment of research-based practices.
I began coding the textbooks with “writing process” and “rhetorical knowledge and versatility” as two separate codes, as influenced by my literature review. Given the critique of process-based models as falsely linear representations of writing, I wanted to see if writing processes were framed as flexible and idiosyncratic, a set of tools and “codifiable shortcuts” (Kent, 1999, pp. 1-2) that writers use. In my original definitions, rhetorical knowledge and versatility differed from process in that it refers to students’ abilities to analyze different audiences and purposes in order to write effectively into a variety of rhetorical situations (CWPA, 2011, p. 1). For example, students should understand how quality evidence varies in writing for different academic disciplines; they should be able to analyze and address the existing discourse when writing an argumentative piece.

After my first cycle of coding, however, I found that these two elements were inextricably linked in all four of the sample textbooks. Along with the trademarked Six-Trait Writing Rubric, a linear process model forms the primary, repeated heuristic that governs choices across different modes of writing. Rhetorical considerations—such analysis of audience and situation—are consistently subordinated to different phases of the writing process, most commonly mentioned during pre-writing and publication phases. For example, in Pearson’s Writing Coach, students are directed to write a “classification essay,” and among the prompts subordinated under “prewriting,” students are directed to “consider [their] audience and purpose.” (See the detail of this prompt on p. 107 of this chapter.) This pattern of interweaving generic rhetorical prompts through a repeated linear process model is common across all
textbooks in the sample. Thus, in my discussion of the four textbooks in the sample, I treat my analysis of the process-based models in a way that mirrors the structure of all four textbooks: The writing process is a foundational component of students’ rhetorical knowledge that will, ostensibly, help them write flexibly into a variety of writing situations.

Despite the conflation of two traits into one chapter, I nevertheless examine the textbook sample for the specific indicators named in Chapter Two. With regard to rhetorical knowledge and versatility, I look for core writing projects that are built around analysis of particular writing situations, not the decontextualized genres or modes that Kittle (2006) claims are all too common in high school composition. While learning particular traits and patterns are not bad in and of themselves, if students are not prompted to adapt those traits to authentic writing situations, they develop false ideas of “good writing” as static and prescriptive (Kastman-Breuch, 2002). I also examine the treatment of purpose and audience in each textbook, noting whether they coach students toward complex analysis of these considerations, or merely mention audience in the generalized and stereotyped ways described by DeJoy (1999). With regard to writing process, I scrutinize the sample for oversimplified representations of process, representations that treat writing as overly linear or static steps rather than the “iterative and complex” process described in “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” (2015). I examine exercises and exposition to see if these texts help students develop those “multiple cognitive moves” described by Flower and Hayes (1981) that can be applied flexibly as students move from vague ideas to polished compositions.

Three of the four textbooks unfold around a remarkably similar structure that prioritizes modal writing projects developed through a generic, linear process. These three textbooks begin
with a summary of the writing process and an overview of the trademarked “Six Traits,\textsuperscript{5}” with
some textbooks adding additional introductory material. The majority of each textbook then
reiterates these heuristics over subsequent chapters for different modes of writing (also common
across the texts) with the writer’s choices being directed by a rubric and mode, not a real-world
genre (such as an op-ed) or authentic audience awareness (such as McCann’s (2014) description
of classroom-based discourse, described in Transforming Talk into Text and summarized in
Chapter Two).

In terms of book structure, the one outlier in my sample is Glencoe’s Writer’s
Workspace, which varies a bit from this pattern in that it is a digital platform that foregrounds
published texts as examples of the forms in which students will eventually write, not descriptions
of each form. Students are prompted to do a closer, more specific analysis of these particular
mentor texts rather than beginning with general admonitions about generic forms. However, in
the primary writing assignments, the online platform moves students through the same linear
process as the other textbooks and hyperlinks to a seven-trait rubric that mostly reflects the
trademarked Six Traits. Bundled with the print Grammar and Composition Handbook, the print
handbook also reflects a modal-process structure that is quite similar to the other textbooks in the
sample. (The structure of Writer’s Workspace is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.)

Table 4.1 is a comparative list of all the modes, as named by each textbook, that form the
topic of each chapter. The highlighted rows align most directly with Common Core Standards for
Writing. Items that are the only item in their row are unique to that book. In the following pages,
I compare traits of these textbooks by looking across a chapter that all four have in common. I
first describe common weaknesses and strengths that span all four texts, then follow with a text-

\textsuperscript{5} Trademarked by the Northwest Education Association, the Six-Trait writing rubric evaluates writing on ideas,
organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. The revised “Six + 1 Trait” writing model also
includes presentation as a seventh trait.
by-text analysis of some of the distinctive traits of each that set it apart as somewhat stronger or weaker.

Table 4.1. Modes of Writing in the Textbook Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Coach</th>
<th>Write Source</th>
<th>Writing with Power</th>
<th>Writer’s Workspace/Handbook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction Narration</td>
<td>Narrative Writing</td>
<td>Personal Writing</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonfiction Narration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry and Description</td>
<td>Creative Writing</td>
<td>Descriptive Writing</td>
<td>Poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creative Writing: Satire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td>Expository Writing</td>
<td>Expository Writing</td>
<td>Response: Expository</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Persuasive Writing</td>
<td>Writing to Persuade</td>
<td>Argumentative Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Literature</td>
<td>Response to Literature</td>
<td>Writing about Literature</td>
<td>Response: Literary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Writing</td>
<td>Research Writing</td>
<td>Research Writing</td>
<td>Research Report (print only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7&amp;8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Writing</td>
<td>Writing Across the Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td>Analytical Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Script</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All four textbooks repeatedly emphasize writing as a process, which appears to align with professional emphases for pre-college and college writing, as well as the Common Core Standards for writing (W.11-12.5 & 11-12.6). However, when examining the details of how process-based writing is presented, there are some clear deficiencies in the textbook sample. Recall from Chapter Two these details that serve as a benchmark for effective descriptions of process: NCTE’s “Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing” (2016) describes effective writing pedagogy as that which helps students “identify the processes which work best for themselves as they move from one initial idea to final draft.” Thus the process of writing is framed as
idiosyncratic, or unique to each writer and each writing situation. Furthermore, the language of the Common Core Standards also suggests that formulaic application of a linear process model is reductive, declaring that students shall “develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting” and by “addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5, emphasis added). Notably, the latter part of this particular standard also interweaves consideration that I had labeled “rhetorical knowledge and versatility”—namely considerations of purpose and audience—with process-based discourse.

In contrast to this emphasis on flexibility and rhetorical situation, all four textbooks in the sample use a linear process model as their primary heuristic to structure each of the modal chapters that unfolds much like the critiqued “formulaic set of steps.” Figure 4.1 is the table of contents from Glencoe/McGraw-Hill’s Grammar and Composition Handbook, illustrating the application of a linear process model to every chapter.

With the exception of the e-platform Writer’s Workspace (bundled with this handbook), this particular table of contents is representative of the entire sample in that each of the other three textbooks is structured with chapter divisions by mode and a repeated process model providing the primary framework within each chapter. The texts do vary, however, in the following positive traits: the degree to which the process is emphasized as recursive and the amount of flexible “routines, skills, strategies, and practices”
(NCTE, 2016) emphasized within this structure. (These differences are further detailed later in a text-by-text analysis.)

Though the terminology varies slightly, all textbooks lay out the following writing process as steps that govern effective composing: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. All texts also explicitly state that the process of writing is recursive, meaning that as students write, they may cycle back through these different types of composing moves, and both Write Source and Writing Coach include visual representations of the writing process that reiterate this. For example, figure 4.2 is the visual process model used by Write Source with arrows indicating that as one’s draft moves forward, the writer may need to circle back through an earlier step. At first glance, this appears to be a positive trait in that writing is presented as a somewhat flexible process, and not a falsely linear one as describe above. However, the instruction that students see the process of composition as flexible is not borne out in the major composition assignments that form the bulk of each chapter. (This is a recurring critique as I examine the textbooks for each trait in my analytical framework: The textbooks often mention a composition practice that appears to align with the scholarship cited in Chapter Two and with elements of the Common Core State Standards; however, they undermine that very trait by not integrating it purposefully into the major projects and activities in the bulk of the chapter.)

An additional common weakness of all textbooks is that they do little to help students analyze rhetorical situations and use these analyses to inform their writing.

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choices. As indicators of rhetorical knowledge and versatility, I was looking for some of the following traits that recur in the scholarship cited in Chapter Two:

- Assignments and prompts framed as authentic writing situations (e.g.: an op-ed to promote a contested opinion; a letter to a company about their products)
- Extended guidance to help students analyze audience and context as they develop their compositions
- Prompts to analyze an ongoing conversation to which the student writer will contribute
- Elements of a particular composition—such as tone, register, structure, content—considered in light of purpose and audience
- The application of the above points to choices made by the writer throughout their composition process. (CWPA, 2011, p. 6; Kent, 1999; McCann, 2014; NCTE, 2016)

One of the traits common among textbooks is the recognition of audience and purpose, in alignment with CCSS writing standard 11-12.5, which states that students are to develop their writing by “addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.” However, there is minimal development of the necessary concepts and analytical skills through the composition process. In this regard, all textbooks again exemplify what I call “teaching by mentioning”—that is, student writers are admonished to “interest your reader” (Write Source, p. 169) or to “appeal to an audience that…has an opposite view” (Writing Coach, p. 172) but with little guidance about how to analyze the complexity of a rhetorical situation or integrate that analysis into the development of a piece from the beginning. In contrast, McCann’s (2014) description of using classroom-based dialogue to yield a more complex and realistic sense of audience documents multiple benefits of this approach, including that students can actually “hear and judge the views expressed by others” (p. 98) rather than merely imagining them. In
McCann’s text, a concrete pedagogical move—classroom discussion of issues throughout the process of composing—supports the goal of understanding the complexity and reality of one’s audience; in contrast the textbooks give a directive with no concrete path to explore and apply that directive.

After these general reminders of audience, the bulk of each chapter unfolds around a linear process model and the Six-Trait writing rubric, without purposeful integration of contextual considerations through the development of a students’ composition. By repeatedly framing projects with this process and rubric, the textbooks focus students’ attention on general traits purported to yield good writing in any situation; however, there is little direction for students to analyze how these general traits might manifest in specific writing situations. Thus the traits of the composition are decoupled from the particularities of purpose and audience.

In Pearson’s *Writing Coach*, for example, a prompt early in the Exposition chapter gives students three different writing scenarios and asks them to discuss the best essay form for the given purpose and audience. The text asks students to consider what form—problem-solution, cause-effect, pro-con—would be most fitting for presenting to a parent a problem they are having with a pet or for critiquing a movie in the school newspaper. Though some of the scenarios might feel forced to students, they are at least being asked to consider the intersection of form, audience, and purpose. However, when I logged in to Pearson’s electronic writing platform to attempt the main essay of the unit, I was presented with three decontextualized prompts and directed to focus on writing a “classification essay” about winter Olympic sports, green packaging, or late-20th century technological advances. All directives were about characteristics of a traditional essay form—for example, the importance of a thesis or paragraphs developed to a certain length. While these are valid considerations to include in a writing
textbook, there is no integration of or elaboration on the directives to consider audience and situation. (See figure 4.3.)

Figure 4.3 Writing Coach’s Online Platform. The text under “Introduction” is my beginning attempt at the writing prompt.

Of note is the prompt on the top left and the bulleted list on the right. One of the directives for this prewriting stage (middle of the right-hand column) is to “consider your audience and purpose”; however, the writing prompt asks the student writer to simply describe the environmental benefits of three different packing products. While an astute writer might invent a hypothetical purpose and audience for this essay—a local business that does a lot of shipping, perhaps—she or he can proceed smoothly through the e-writing platform without doing so. In fact, serious consideration of audience and purpose might lead the student to write in ways that are then deemed sub-par by the electronic feedback. For example, when I began the assignment with a brief, two-sentence opener, reflecting how I might begin a to-the-point

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7 From Writing Coach 2012 Student Edition E-Text 1-Year License Grade 12 by Pearson Education. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.
business letter, I received abysmal scores from my electronic writing coach, indicating that the paragraph was insufficiently developed.

Interestingly, in the linear process model, the final stage in all four textbooks is publishing. Students are encouraged to consider an audience for their work beyond their teacher, again suggesting alignment with CCSS W.11-12.5, which instructs students to address what is “most significant” for a particular audience; however, this consideration is introduced as a final step, mentioned after students have completed and revised their essays. *Writer’s Workspace*, for example, invites students to consider where they might publish the expository essay they’ve written—a response to a *Time Magazine* article about the authoring of the United States’ Declaration of Independence. They are given the following ideas: “create a class anthology, enter your article into a writing contest, publish your paper online.” However, this very classroom-based, thesis-driven response to a nonfiction article does not reflect any features of online publishing nor does it reflect any valid purpose for sharing one’s writing in a class anthology. The audience for the composition is a mere afterthought.

One final trait that recurs throughout the sample is the integration of the Six-Trait writing rubric (trademarked by Education Northwest), or a version close to it. All textbooks instruct students to reference this rubric throughout their writing process and repeat the following traits as core elements of writing: ideas, organization, word choice, voice, conventions, and sentence fluency. *Writer’s Workspace* includes all six and adds “focus and coherence” as a seventh, distinct trait. As with the linear writing process, there is nothing inherently wrong about claiming that these things matter in writing; the problems come from what is lacking or from what is too generic to be authentic. In the case of this sample, there is no recognition of form, audience,
context, and the way that these six traits must be interpreted and adapted to the context of unique writing situations.

This overview of all four textbooks summarizes common traits in the sample before further elaborating on particular strengths and weaknesses in a book-by-book analysis. In general, the sample does repeatedly mention audience and purpose and integrates a writing process model throughout the chapters, thus demonstrating ostensible alignment with the scholarship cited in Chapter Two and with related Common Core State Standards. However, the positive traits of rhetorical analysis and flexibility of process are not purposefully integrated into the major composition projects of the textbooks, thus demonstrating my critique that recurs throughout subsequent data chapters: Often “alignment” to standards and scholarship is cursory, and the pedagogy of the text is insufficient to actually develop students’ skills in the noted area. The following pages consider some of the unique features of each textbook more closely to determine strengths and weaknesses that emerge when comparing the four books to one another. To make this comparison, I examine the presentation of writing across a commonly themed chapter: Exposition. In this and the following data chapters, I treat these four textbooks in the same order for the sake of clarity and cohesion, so that a reader can better trace the emerging comparisons not just between the sample and the composition principles, but among the different textbooks within the sample.

Write Source

The expository writing chapter in Write Source begins with several introductory pages then moves students through the writing process to develop an informative article. The graphic
on the “Prewriting” page (figure 4.4) frames the main assignment by reminding students that the writing process is recursive. This visual suggestion of recursive moves has minimal impact on verbal content of the chapter, however.

Across six pages of prewriting, students are directed to generate ideas, narrow a topic, find secondary sources, write a thesis, and outline the paper. By the time one flips the page to “Writing,” one presumably has a clear focus, ample supporting detail, and a solid outline. The principal advice on the six “Writing” pages focuses on putting what one already knows into prose form. As the student writer works through the 12 pages on “Revising,” she is prompted to check for a variety of details and check the clarity of the thesis statement, but at no point does the chapter mention that she might need to return to a generative stage to fill in a gap or reorient the angle of the thesis, which might have shifted in the development of the article. The final two stages—editing and publishing—are similar in their assumptions that the student will continue to press forward on her essay, not follow those backward arrows into earlier phases of this linear process.

Within this linear, forward-moving process, in what ways does the text include “flexible moves,” or strategies for composition that are not necessarily predetermined but are rather responsive to particular needs of the situation? In this regard, Write Source again gives a mix of positive and negative suggestions. Across the five writing stages, multiple prompts, suggestions, and explanations ask students to reflect on their writing and make decisions based on their needs. For example, the “Prewriting” section suggests multiple ways to investigate a topic further (p.

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171); revision suggestions are worded as questions, prompting student reflection on multiple aspects of their essays like structure, coherence, and tone (p. 182-191); editing for conventions is appropriately separated and framed as different from revision (194-196). All of these are flexible composition strategies that are not mandated by the genre or stage, but rather require self-assessment on the part of the student writer to determine the next step at each point in this particular composition. This is decidedly in line with NCTE’s (2016) statement that skilled writers will develop a “meta-awareness” of their own composing processes.

At the same time, the chapter contains writing advice that is out of step with good rhetorical practices. The focal assignment of the chapter suggests that students write an informative article for a magazine or newspaper, yet within the prewriting stage, they are prompted to generate a thesis statement and develop at least three or more main points (p. 173). Despite the fact that students are to write with a magazine or newspaper in mind, the textbook defaults to a form suggestive of the classroom-based five-paragraph essay, not an informative article that one might read in the feature section of the Sunday paper. The “Writing” section reminds students to begin each paragraph with a clear topic sentence, again a practice that is not necessarily a golden rule in real-world writing in the stated genre (p. 178). The student writer is to end her article by restating her thesis and summarizing the main idea of the article—again advice indicative of the ubiquitous five-paragraph essay, not a composition for a real-world audience or publication (p. 180).

While this chapter of Write Source does contain some isolated suggestions that promote rhetorical knowledge and versatility, the governing structure of the chapter is a linear process model and adherence to features of common classroom-based forms. There is little in the main
expository project that connects students’ compositions to real-world audiences or that prompts them to write for a clearly defined and analyzed context.

**Writing with Power**

*Writing with Power* is also noticeably linear in its approach to the writing process; the chapter on expository writing mirrors *Write Source* in that it begins with a few introductory pages, introduces a feature assignment, then walks students through a five-step linear model as the primary guidance for text production. Across the chapter, the language implies chronological movement through sequential steps, repeatedly invoking phrases like, “Once you have done X, you are ready to do Y” (e.g. pp. 241, 242, 246), “the second stage of the writing process is...” (p. 251), and “the final step in writing the rough draft is…” (p. 256). These transitional words and phrases in the chapter’s exposition imply a forward progression with no verbal indicators of recursion. During the drafting stage, one sentence acknowledges that students might generate additional ideas as they write, but the primary aim of drafting is to put previously generated ideas “in sentences and paragraphs” (p. 251). As with *Write Source*, composing activity is represented as falsely linear, with each cognitive process falling into place and each step wrapping up completely before the writer is ready for the next one.

Similar to *Write Source*, the chapter includes a blend of helpful composition strategies and rhetorical moves that are intermingled with some falsely prescriptive rules and processes. Some positive prompts include the following: Throughout their writing processes, students are prompted to share in-process drafts with peers and writing groups for feedback (p. 248), which is somewhat reflective of McCann’s (2014) use of classroom discourse as a way of integrating authentic audience response. One page introduces students to parallelism, invites them to
practice it, and to discern appropriate places to use it in their current writing projects, thus teaching a specific rhetorical device in the context of writing (p. 250). Reflective questions ask students to evaluate the success of their writing in for traits like tone, clarity, and coherence (p. 258), again developing the meta-awareness promoted by NCTE (2016). These composing moves are transferrable to a variety of writing situations and require student discernment as to when to use them and how, thus indicating the flexibility described by both the Common Core State Standards and the professional statements on the teaching of writing.

Mingled with these positive traits are several oddities that stand out as pronounced weaknesses antithetical to strong pre-college writing and that are quite similar to the weaknesses described in Write Source, above. For example, students are prompted to begin their expository essay by choosing a subject that interests them and will interest their readers, but there is no context for who those readers might be (p. 239). Students are also encouraged to reflect on the genre or form this project should take (p. 240), implying a helpful rhetorical skill of reflecting on the intersection of form, purpose, and content. In subsequent pages, however, student writers receive prompts that direct them toward the traditional, thesis-driven classroom essay such as “formulate a working thesis” (p. 242), write an outline with Roman numerals and letters (p. 246-248), and ensure that all paragraphs have topic sentences (p. 258). An additional oddity is that after students have outlined their essays, they are prompted to check their outlines for 10 traits framed as questions; these include, “Did you use capital letters for subtopics?” and “Did you capitalize the first word of each entry?” (p. 248), but the text prompts no reflection on the progression of ideas—students are merely checking the format of their traditional, classroom-based outline (see figure 4.5). In the final publishing stage of the writing process, students are invited to consider where and how they might share their drafts with others. Suggestions include
a speech, an electronic presentation, or a video (p. 261), though absolutely nothing in the preceding pages coached students toward these final, suggested forms.

Amid this flurry of varied advice in *Writing with Power*, the dominant, repeated message is fidelity to features of a traditional essay form and adherence to a stepwise process. The suggestions that do align with research and scholarship on pre-college writing are subordinated to those dominant heuristics; as exemplified above, they are merely mentioned in the chapter’s exposition or positioned in sidebars and are only occasionally developed through exercises or integration into the chapter’s feature assignment.

**Writing Coach**

As with *Write Source*, *Writing Coach* includes a graphic of the writing process that suggests it is not necessarily a linear process (figure 4.6). The circle suggests a cyclic movement and the exposition that frames this graphic reminds student writers, “Remember, you can go back to a stage in the process. It does not

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9 From *Writing Coach 2012 Student Edition E-Text 1-Year License Grade 12* by Pearson Education. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.
always have to occur in order” (p. 30). However, the arrows of the diagram only move in one direction, and both the subsequent pages of the textbook and the structure of the online interactive writing platform employ a linear process model.

In contrast to the previous two textbooks, Writing Coach’s “Exposition” chapter is transparent about the fact that students do not have free choice with regard to form. Rather, at the outset of the chapter, the text informs students, “You will write an analytical essay in classification form” (p. 145). Thus when students are directed in subsequent pages to draft a thesis and organize their evidence (p. 154), or to begin a conclusion by restating their thesis (p. 157), the advice at least aligns with how the assignment is framed. One discontinuity is that students are, as with the previous two books, admonished to consider their audiences early in the writing process (p. 153), but it is not clear how they are to discern who this audience might be or the context in which they would encounter a classification essay about the winter Olympics or green packaging (two of the suggested topics).

One potentially transferrable writing skill that is repeated throughout the Writing Coach chapters is the acronym RADAR to remind students of possible actions in the revision stage: Replace, Add, Delete, and Reorder. A sample text shows how a student writer used this acronym to replace dull words, delete unnecessary sentences, add examples to develop a counter-argument, and reorder sentences to improve the organization of ideas (p. 158-159). While it is somewhat limited in scope, it does include both generative and corrective actions within a later stage of writing (rather than other models that limit generative thinking to “prewriting” and “drafting” phases). It also provides students with a tool that could be used effectively in multiple situations to encourage reflection on the composition at hand.
One unique feature of *Writing Coach* is its digital platform with an electronic textbook and online writing lab. The platform is used to create layers of writing activities within each phase of the writing process. For example, as students are planning their essays, the sidebar reminds them that they can go to the interactive *Writing Coach* to find graphic organizers that assist them with their planning (figure 4.7\(^{10}\)). Students are also reminded that at any point, they can compose in the interactive writing coach and receive “immediate, personalized feedback” (p. 157). Thus, a benefit unique to the format could be that at any point in the writing process, students make choices about which tools to integrate and which to ignore, which is a kind of flexible writing process described by some of the professional literature. However, the quality of some of these tools is further explored and evaluated in the next few paragraphs.

To further explore the ways that the electronic features do or do not support rhetorical knowledge and flexible writing processes, I began one of the essays in the interactive writing coach. I wrote the introductory paragraph to reflect the skill level of a strong high-school writer and to align with the directions of the textbook. Figure 4.8 shows the online prompt, my introductory paragraph, and a portion of the electronic feedback I received on this paragraph. (More feedback was available as I scrolled down and clicked on the arrows.)

The quality of the platform for developing skilled, flexible writers really depends on how one uses it and what prior knowledge and confidence one brings to it. For example, this screen shot shows that I was prompted to check my work for organization. When I clicked on the arrow

\(^{10}\) From *Writing Coach 2012 Student Edition E-Text 1-Year License Grade 12* by Pearson Education. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.
by the prompt, I was given reminders about the importance of transitions and all of my “transition words” were highlighted (in this case, only the word “while”). I was prompted to consider whether I needed more transition words to improve the cohesion of my paragraph. Because I understood that my repeated words and pronouns also created cohesion, I could critically review my paragraph and decide that it was already well organized. If, however, I had brought less confidence and prior knowledge to the task, I might have found ways to include unnecessary words that *Writing Coach* nevertheless recognized as transitions, thus *decreasing* the quality of my introductory paragraph while increasing my feedback scores.11

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**Figure 4.8 Writing Coach’s Online Writing Platform 2.** This graphic displays the opening paragraph of my expository essay; the right-hand column is an image of the "personalized" feedback that I received.

The same critique is true of the “grammar” prompt, visible when I scrolled down in the right-hand column. The feedback highlighted my first sentence in red, suggesting incorrect construction, and was preceded by this prompt: “Review the words in red below and decide if

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you need to correct errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics.” To get further assistance in making this decision, I could click on “Tips from Your Writing Coach,” which took me to a prompt that suggested I go back to the e-text and review 20 major grammatical problems to determine if I had made any of those errors in the highlighted section (figure 4.9). Nowhere could I find what, specifically, my “personal” writing coach thought was wrong with the construction of my opening sentence. I reviewed that sentence (“Every day, thousands of people order products through the mail: clothing, kitchenware, books, toys, tools, and more.”) for subject-verb agreement, comma usage, colon usage, and other structural problems, but could not align any of the 20 “major grammatical errors” with my own sentence construction.

In some ways, this electronic feedback could develop students’ “meta-awareness” in that they are prompted to consider if the feedback is accurate and helpful, or the result of an algorithm that determines strengths and corrections that a human reader would understand differently. In this way, the forum would prompt critical thinking about one’s writing while in the process of composing. On the other hand, it could send the less confident writer through a spiral of unproductive revisions as he changes words, sentences, and organization to achieve the gold trophy icon in all categories, not improving the writing at all in the attempt to appease the robo-reader—a scenario quite removed from any real-world writing situation and audience. My

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provisional assessment is that, with regard to writing process and rhetorical knowledge and
versatility, the digital platform has no advantage over the print textbooks reviewed earlier.

**Writer’s Workspace/Grammar and Composition Handbook**

As with *Writing Coach*, the Glencoe/McGraw-Hill products offer several ways to engage
a given chapter. The primary textbook that I analyze is the online text featuring eight modules
built around different modes of writing (listed in the table on page 99). In each mode, students
read, analyze, and respond to professional mentor texts, then write their own version of that
mode in response to a given prompt. The supplementary *Grammar and Composition Handbook*
provides a summary of several modes of writing and develops each chapter around the linear
process model of writing.

In each online module, students progress through an electronic workbook that highlights
features of a sample essay that they will later emulate. After reading a model essay, students are
guided to identify and analyze the admirable features of that sample, then practice that same
feature in a text box. For example, in the “Expository Response” prompt, students read a sample
response to Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience,” then open a digital workbook titled “Reading-
Writing Practice” (which, interestingly, begins with page 4; there is no page 1-3 anywhere to be
found). The workbook begins by defining a thesis statement and showing a thesis from the
sample essay (p. 4); the next page analyzes the strengths of the sample thesis statement (p. 5);
then students are prompted to draft a practice thesis in response to any text that they have read
(p. 6). This structure is repeated through the subsequent 25 workbook pages for traits like
organization, use of quotations, and sentence structure. Unlike the other three textbooks in my
sample, *Writer’s Workspace* spends ample time deconstructing elements of a successful
composition and creating opportunities for student writers to practice these traits before they integrate them into a feature assignment. While the repetition in this workbook structure is potentially tedious for students, it does a somewhat better job of helping students develop “flexible strategies” (CWPA, 2011) that they might employ “as needed” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5) in future writing projects.

Additionally, in this electronic workbook, attention to audience and purpose is integrated a bit more specifically and helpfully, not as a cursory reference. For example, in coaching students about the types of content to generate, one page instructs students, “Put yourself in the place of a reader who has not read the text as carefully as you have” (p. 15). This is a more specific directive than Writing with Power’s directive to students to select a topic that might interest their readers. While the primary form is still a classroom-based expository response, this module at least integrates audience into a generative writing move, moving beyond the mere mentioning in the other three texts.

When students are ready to begin composing their own essays, they see a screen like this one, adapted from the publisher’s expository response module (figure 4.10):

![Writer’s Workspace Writing Platform (Approximation)](Figure 4.10 Writer’s Workspace Writing Platform (Approximation). Permission was not granted by the publisher to use screen shots of the interactive writing module, so this figure is an approximation of the page layout that students see when they are ready to begin writing.)
On this screen alone, students have several options of how to engage the prompt. They can click on the highlighter icon for a pop-up that explains a positive feature of the mentor text. Clicking on the “play” button will read the piece aloud. One tab over, students click on the “interactive” version of the model where they see the same essay with a series of questions on the right-hand side. In the upper right corner, a button takes students to an editable rubric for this assignment, built around the generic Six Traits, plus one: focus, organization, development, word choice, sentence fluency, voice, conventions. As with Writing Coach, this use of an online platform could have the effect of initiating rhetorical decision-making, as students must decide which tools will be most useful to them at any point in their composing process. However, also similar to Writing Coach is my critique that the utility of some of these tools depends on the degree of prior knowledge that students bring to the feature assignment. For example, the use of a rubric to evaluate one’s writing in process depends in part on the degree of understanding one already has of the traits detailed in the rubric.

When students are ready to begin writing, they click on “plan” and see a screen resembling a Microsoft Word document. Instructions down the side feature a series of drop-down hints that give students various prompts within the initial planning phase; they receive brief advice on choosing a focus, drafting a thesis statement, gathering evidence, and evaluating sources, among other topics. Figure 4.11 shows an approximation of this sidebar. This feature gives students multiple layers of prompts and advice; the pop-up box is
the result of clicking on the hyperlinked words “thesis statement” in the sidebar. Again, this feature is comparable to *Writing Coach* in that the digital platform creates layers of advice and instruction that students can select to refine their writing; however, these traits are built around modes and rubrics, not authentic writing situations, also a common critique of all four textbooks in my sample.

As with *Writing with Power*, multiple linguistic markers in this writing assignment suggest that the writing unfolds in linear steps, and that once one step is completed, it is closed and the writer is ready for the next step: “Now that you have chosen a focus…” and “Before you begin your draft…” After completing the planning instructions, the student then clicks on “draft,” and the planning notes are copied into the next screen to be converted into an organized, paragraphed draft. While students might return to invention within their drafting, the drop-down menu suggests that the primary tasks of this stage are organizing ideas into paragraphs, writing smooth transitions, and drafting an introduction and conclusion to frame the body of the essay.

As noted earlier, the final stage of this thesis-driven essay is “publishing.” All students have just completed a response to the TIME Magazine article, “How They Chose Those Words,” a historical chronicling of the drafting of the Constitution. For this particular assignment students are offered three brief suggestions about where to publish: a class anthology, a writing contest, or online. Oddly, this final stage is the first mention of these venues, and there is no further instruction to students about how to adapt their classroom-based essay to any one of these different platforms. Additionally, all of these venues are sufficiently vague, so even if they were integrated into the writing process at an earlier stage, they would need to be defined with much more specificity. For example, “online” could include blogs, comment boards, open-source
journals, or personal websites (to name just a few of the many genres contained within the vague venue, “online”).

While the overall structure of *Writer’s Workspace* is somewhat different from the other textbooks in its foregrounding of textual analysis and response, the core substance of the writing instruction is remarkably similar to the previous three. The bulk of the instruction is built around general and repeated traits and processes with very little attention to authentic writing situations and audiences. *Writer’s Workspace*, like the other three textbooks, does have some notable features that align it with practices promoted by composition scholarship: it promotes flexible writing strategies, uses reader awareness to guide decisions about content, and embeds tools that could promote metacognition about writing. However, these features are isolated descriptions and exercises within the context of a falsely prescriptive and linear framework.

**Summative Assessment**

Each textbook in the sample contains some unique features related to rhetorical knowledge and versatility. However, these unique features tend to show up in the form of short directives, sidebars, brief exercises, or supplemental pages. The dominant heuristic in each text is a progression through a five-step writing process that begins with prewriting and ends with publishing. While there is nothing wrong with teaching students that writing is a process, the instruction is anemic if a linear process model is presented as the primary, repeated consideration for composition. Ideally, a text would introduce writing as a process, then repeat and subordinate that information in subsequent chapters, building instead around unique writing situations and devoting more page space to rhetorical analysis than to re-emphasis of linear steps.
Within this structure, students are encouraged to attend to audience needs and concerns as they prewrite and draft, but there is very little development in any textbook that helps students do this analysis with any degree of complexity. Additionally, in each text, the form of a given classroom-based genre takes precedence over analysis of writing situations. Most instructions default to thesis-driven essays with some books—like *Write Source*—including directives that are reminiscent of the five-paragraph essay. While students do consider venues for publication, in every chapter, this occurs at the *end* of the assignment, and the suggested venues are usually out of step with the style of essay that students have just written. In sum, the textbooks, when analyzed for both writing process and rhetorical knowledge and versatility, are basic at best. Although they do ostensibly align with the Common Core Standards for writing, they do very little to move students toward a sophisticated understanding of composition worthy of the adjective “college-ready.”
CHAPTER FIVE

Critical Thinking

In Chapter Two’s review of scholarship, one of my essential tasks was defining what I mean by the phrase “critical thinking.” While all the rhetorical terms that I use require some degree of definition, “critical thinking” is perhaps the most vague, in part because of its frequency of use without careful definition. The phrase is often employed with the same degree of ambiguity as “college and career readiness” or “rigor,” used to imply some presumably shared understanding of high standards without defining the particularities. In order to analyze these textbooks for their promotion of the link between thought and writing, I identified traits that distinguish critical thinking processes from other types of thinking; here I recap those indicators before analyzing their occurrence in each textbook.

The documents from NCTE (2016), CWPA (2011), and CCCC (2015) that ground my framework for analysis each describe specific thinking moves that fall within the category of “critical thinking.” As used by these professional organizations in the context of writing, critical thinking includes the ability to do the following: consider problems and situations from multiple viewpoints, identify and challenge assumptions, move beyond surface-level interpretations of texts and real-life scenarios, synthesize diverse ideas, and generate new ideas through composition activities. In general, critical thinking as tied to writing necessitates discovery—uncovering complexity or new insight in a given topic or field rather than merely reporting what one already knows or believes.

Further clarification of the thinking-writing connection comes from Dombeck’s and Herndon’s Critical Passages: Teaching the Transition to College Composition (2003) also
summarized in Chapter Two. Their book describes how first-year college writing courses can build students’ critical thinking skills through a sophisticated series of writing activities that begins at the sentence and paragraph level, interweaving grammatical structures with complex prompts to improve students’ focus on “thinking moves” instead of default composition structures. In the introduction, the authors describe essays that demonstrate critical thought in the following way: “They should ask writers to pose rigorous questions and speculate about multiple possible answers, analyze several texts at once, sustain complicated trains of thought, wrestle with contradiction and paradox, and develop new ideas” (p. 4). The authors state that they wrote this book in response to a common problem that they saw in early college writing: using default forms that “manufacture the appearance of knowledge...at the expense of thinking” (p. 12). Thus another hallmark of critical thinking involves identifying complexities in one’s topic and allowing the form of the composition to evolve in tandem with the topic, not fitting the subject to a predetermined “default form.”

While the Common Core standards do not explicitly reference critical thinking, there are aspects of the above definitions embedded in the writing standards. The first anchor standard delineates traits of argumentative writing (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1) and includes the following aims for students: “introduce precise and knowledgeable claims” (1.A), “develop counter-claims fairly and thoroughly” (1.B), and “[point] out the strengths and limitations” of both the one’s argument and counter-claims (1.B). The standard addressing informative/explanatory texts requires that writers “examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2). Finally, research-based writing requires students to conduct research in order to “answer a question or solve a problem.” Students must also “synthesize multiple sources” to demonstrate their mastery of the subject
(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7). Across these standards the link between writing and thinking is evident; in keeping with the professionally described traits of critical thinking, students are asked to examine multiple viewpoints, synthesize various sources of information, and use writing to generate new ideas and insights, not merely to report previously held ideas or simple truisms.

To analyze the textbooks in this sample, I first look at the overview of writing presented by three of the four textbooks. As noted in Chapter Four, three of the textbooks begin with a general overview of composition, emphasizing transferrable processes and traits common across genres. In the first three of the four sample textbooks, I examine these generalizable traits for the presence of critical thinking. Then, I look carefully at one chapter from all four of the textbooks, selected for their alignment with the specific Common Core State Standards above that name the importance of critical thinking in particular modes. Specifically, I analyze persuasive, expository, and analytical chapters closely to determine if they guide students to write in ways that foreground the thinking-writing connection named by the Common Core standards and further described in the supporting literature. In the two e-textbooks, I also explore the features of the electronic writing platform for the ways in which these interfaces promote or impede critical thought.

In examining the textbooks, I coded them first for places where the promotion of critical thinking was evident in the language of the exposition, annotations of mentor texts, or in specific writing prompts. However, it was equally important to examine my sample for places where complex thinking skills were either absent or subordinated to lower-level concerns, specifically surface features of the students’ compositions. Throughout the following book-by-book critique, I use Dombeck’s and Herndon’s (2003) book as a helpful counterpoint to my sample, contrasting
the pedagogy described in *Critical Passages* with examples from the four textbooks to determine if these high-school texts are guilty of enacting Dombeck’s and Herndon’s critique of using “default structures” that “manufacture the appearance of knowledge” at the expense of real thinking (p. 12).

In general, these four composition textbooks all explicitly acknowledge the link between thought and writing and use language that appears to value critical thinking skills. However, when examining the actual *development* of such skills through the mentor texts, exercises, and major projects, it becomes clear that these resources do very little to foster the development of such skills in student writers. Most texts are guilty of giving “lip service” to critical thinking while assignments and exercises do not necessitate that students employ higher-order thinking to complete the tasks at hand. In this sample, exceptions to this critique are most often found in *Writing with Power*, which rises to the top for some of its unique features and assignments, though all fall short of the standard defined by the three professional documents and illustrated by *Critical Passages*.

*Write Source*

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s *Write Source* is one of the textbooks in which the development of critical thinking skills is the least evident. Although multiple spots in the textbook do make mention of the link between thought and writing, there is little in the text that actually develops students’ critical thought as described by professional organizations and *Critical Passages*.

*Write Source* begins with several introductory chapters, addressing general questions of why we write and putting forth transferrable traits of good writing. In Chapter One, stated
purposes for writing include working out a problem and questioning or solidifying a belief (p. 5). These briefly named purposes are accompanied by a sample paragraph from a student notebook intended to exemplify this purpose for writing. Notably, these motivations—which initially appear to align with the trait of critical thinking—are framed as journal exercises or as ways to brainstorm an initial topic, not as extended lines of inquiry that span the entire composing process.

Additionally, in these opening chapters, Write Source explains the Six Traits of writing that are a frame of reference throughout the modal chapters. The trait that best aligns with critical thinking is “ideas,” defined in the introductory chapters as “the topic, the focus (thesis), and the main supporting points and details” (p. 48). A rubric describes the highest score for good ideas as “compelling from start to finish” and showing “a clear relationship between thesis and supporting evidence” (p. 41). As with many of the exercises and evaluative tools in these textbooks, there is nothing wrong with these named characteristics; however, they do not meet the benchmark of positioning student writers to think critically about their topics. Nothing in the description suggests that excellent ideas involve multiple viewpoints, tensions and contradictions, or the uncovering of complexities. Though these traits could be inferred from the vague descriptor, “compelling,” they are not explicitly named in the rubric or described in the supporting exposition.

The introductory section on “ideas” further develops the notion that the most important aspect of a composition’s content is that the topic interest the writer (p. 54) and the writer uses “effective supporting details” (p. 56). The final page in this eight-page section coaches students to “include surprising realities”; an exemplar authored by Jack London describes the desperate poverty of people in 1902 and leads up to the fact that this scene is set “in the heart of the
greatest, wealthiest, and most powerful empire the world has seen” (p. 58), ostensibly the U.S.A.

This example of thwarting expectations and holding contradictory ideas in tension clearly aligns with the definition of critical thinking. However, the one-page advice functions like an afterthought at the end of the chapter in that it never moves beyond the simplistic advice to find “surprising realities,” share them with classmates, and attempt to integrate them into the next essay. The brevity of this advice is depicted in figure 5.1.

In the eight-page introductory section on organization—another of the Six Traits—the textbook asserts the same critique as Dombeck’s and Herndon’s (2003) text: that formulas and patterns can actually impede effective writing. Good writing, argues Write Source, “blazes an unpredictable path” (p. 59). This is good advice, and this section attempts to strike a balance between suggesting organizational structures that are not prescriptive while still giving frameworks for the writer’s ideas. To this end, the book devotes several pages to depicting common organizational patterns both verbally and visually, patterns like cause and effect, problem-solution, and chronological order. One exercise lists assignments that students might encounter in school—described in a single sentence—and asks them to choose the best organizational pattern for that assignment. (For example, students are asked what organizational pattern they might use for “an art paper describing a Van Gogh painting” (p. 61).) In this

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exercise, students select a “default structure” based merely on a single-sentence description, not based on any exploration of ideas, thus enacting one of foundational critiques of *Critical Passages* and the textbook’s very advice to “[blaze] an unpredictable path” (p. 59).

The “Organization” chapter also introduces a common heuristic that is then repeated through subsequent chapters: An effective piece of writing must have a beginning, middle, and end (p. 60). This advice is strikingly general—perhaps too general to be construed either as prescriptive or as helpful—yet it is presented as good advice for any situation, thus neglecting the complex interplay between essay structure and thought. A later page in the introductory chapter on revision gives students this advice: If students’ papers are “choked by an overly tight organization,” they should “change the structure in order to more freely present [their] ideas” (p. 116). Again, the advice that most clearly aligns with the trait of critical thinking is limited to a single sentence with no additional guidance, and so is outweighed by the many pages that present linear, thesis-driven approaches as the gold standard of essay structure.

In addition to the Six Traits, these introductory chapters also devote 61 of the 139 pages to the linear writing process model described in Chapter Four. While “thinking moves” (Dombeck & Herndon, 2003, p. 33) could be embedded within multiple stages of the process, the directives throughout the process model prioritize clean cohesion and uncomplicated assertion-support structures. Consider, for example, the revision checklist in *Write Source* compared with revision prompts from *Critical Passages*. In *Write Source*, the questions for revision begin with these: “Is my topic important and relevant? Have I developed a specific…thesis statement? Does each paragraph support my thesis?” (p. 117). In contrast, Dombeck and Herndon (2004) begin their revision checklist with these questions: “Does the writer have a clearly articulated problem? Is it complex and compelling? Does the problem avoid obvious and/or unanswerable
questions…establishing instead tensions and dilemmas that will be thought about in the essay?” (p. 59). In the former text, students review their compositions for fidelity to their initial assertion; in the latter text, students review their compositions for the degree of complexity they bring to their selected topic.

In sum, the introductory chapters mention links between writing and thinking and explicitly promote traits like originality, surprising connections, and flexible structures. However, across the 139 pages of introductory material, the amount of page space devoted to critical thinking is limited to two complete pages (pgs. 5 & 58) and two additional sentences (pgs. 59 & 116). Thus as students move from the introduction to the specific modal chapters, their constructs of writing are built not around thinking moves but around predictable steps.

After these introductory chapters, the majority of the book unfolds around seven modal chapters that employ the Six Traits and the five-step writing process within each form. To further examine the presence of critical thinking in the textbook, I look closely at the “Expository Writing” chapter, which is subdivided to discuss several different genres within the expository mode. I selected this chapter because it ostensibly enacts CCSS W.11-12.2, cited previously. Additionally, introductory comments tell students that this mode of writing involves “handling information” that comes from multiple sources, and each genre within the chapter coaches students to support and develop ideas while drawing on multiple sources of information. Thus the chapter’s focus suggests that if the textbook does indeed promote critical thinking, this would be one logical place to identify it.

No part of this chapter mentions critical thinking explicitly at any point, and while I identified phrases that do align with my working definition of critical thinking—such as asking a “provocative question” (p. 177) to begin an informative article or taking “a close look at two
separate ideas” to compare and contrast them (p. 203)—these named traits are not integrated into the primary writing assignments in ways that ensure the development and execution of complex, critical thought. They are mentioned as traits and characteristics of expository forms, but are not sufficiently developed in the core writing exemplars and assignments. The following paragraphs are critical descriptions of three subsections of the expository writing chapter, developed around the following forms: an informative article, a comparison-contrast essay, and an on-demand essay.

The informative article frames its purpose as being “to inform and entertain” and to “present information in a logical sequence and explain a topic clearly” (p. 163). It includes the ubiquitous advice to have a strong “beginning, middle, and end.” In developing the middle, where students might ostensibly lay out the most critical and complex information, the simple advice to writers is to “begin each paragraph with a topic sentence” and “add a variety of supporting details” (p. 178). The revision rubric, developed around the Six Traits, describes the score of 6/6 for ideas in this way: “My essay brims with fascinating details that engage the reader” (p. 182). While these “fascinating details” could require critical thinking on the part of the writer, one can also imagine how this standard might be met through the mere reporting of novelties without analysis of those details. In this particular writing project, the primary emphasis is on clean organization and variety of content; nowhere is there emphasis on uncovering the complexities of the topic about which one is writing.

The second expository assignment in this chapter is a comparison-contrast essay, and Write Source informs students that one goal of this form is to provide “fresh insight” to a reader (p. 203), a trait that does indeed necessitate critical thought. Students then encounter a writing sample that compares hybrid and fuel-cell cars, but the annotations of this model text merely
identify the thesis, main points of similarity and difference, and concluding summary (p. 204-205); no annotation highlights ways in which this sample essay provides that “fresh insight,” which is ostensibly a goal of the form. Following this model, students encounter a prompt to compare and contrast two technologies. They develop their own essay around a thesis statement, which they derive from a T-chart, and their thesis statement is to “sum up” the comparison between the two selected technologies (p. 207). The advice for developing the middle is to write topic sentences and include examples to support each topic sentence (p. 208). There is no further guidance about how students might achieve that earlier goal of providing “fresh insight” to a reader.

The final section of this chapter discusses on-demand writing, specifically how students would respond to an expository prompt in a timed writing situation. When introducing this section, Write Source notes that such prompts will ask students to do a variety of types of thinking, including analysis, comparison, and categorization. Once again, however, these types of thinking are merely mentioned in the framing of the core writing assignment, but are not borne out on the subsequent pages. I found the strongest evidence of critical thinking in the advice about how to analyze the prompt itself under time constraints. Using the acronym STRAP, students are to identify the subject they are being asked to write about and the type of writing they are to generate. They identify the role they are to assume and the audience they will address. Finally, they determine the purpose of this timed composition. These prompts suggest that students will be doing analysis of their situation, identified earlier as a higher-order thinking skill, and not merely selecting a default form. However, it is crucial to note that students’ analysis is directed toward identifying this information in the given prompt, not generating it through their writing. An annotated sample essay then identifies the beginning, middle, and end
of the essay, pointing out features of the structure that students are to emulate in their own compositions, but no annotations highlight examples of complex thought in the essay, or even the rhetorical considerations named by the acronym STRAP.

The chapters in *Write Source* all include questions and prompts for self-evaluation after students have drafted the feature assignment. These prompts are built around the Six Traits, so I return again to the trait of “ideas” to see if, in the revision stage of writing, students are prompted to examine their writing for the quality of thought developed in their drafts. Students are asked to make sure that they have a clear thesis with a variety of details. However, rather than examining their supporting evidence for the synthesis of multiple information sources, students are merely asked to check off the types of information—facts, statistics, quotations, etc.—that they use (figure 5.2). Nowhere are they prompted to review their ideas for the level of sophistication and complexity that they have brought to the discussion of their topic.

![Figure 5.2 *Write Source* Self Assessment. Students are prompted to check their compositions for types of information, but not for the quality of thought (p. 182).](image)

Beyond these modal chapters, one 10-page section on “Critical Reading” toward the end of the textbook suggests the possibility of critical thinking developed through reading and transferred to the act of writing. The chapter begins with the SQ3R strategy, which is widely recognized as a comprehension strategy, not a critical reading strategy (p. 534). It goes on to describe strategies for taking notes (p. 537), summarizing the text (p. 538), and reading fiction.
and poetry (p. 539-542), but again, these strategies are geared toward comprehending the text and taking it at face value rather than asking key questions about perspective, context, bias, validity, etc.

In its entirety, *Write Source* does very little to encourage the development of critical thinking skills. The text does align with the basic modes of writing detailed in the Common Core State Standards and includes many of the considerations detailed by each standard’s sub-points. However, while students’ ideas are clearly presented as the core substance of compositions, the level of thought stays with organized reporting of information, and more emphasis is placed on generalized patterns and forms rather than the development of new, challenging, and complex insight.

*Writing with Power*

In comparison to *Write Source*, *Writing with Power* is somewhat stronger in both its explicit discussion of critical thinking skills and its integration of critical thinking throughout the textbook. While the opening chapters contain very little emphasis on critical thinking, several features within the modal chapters do a better job of linking writing to complex, higher-order thinking processes.

That said, the textbook’s first chapter, titled “A Community of Writers,” is no stronger than any others in my sample in its presentation of critical thinking. This chapter directs students to choose subjects that interest them (p. 14), limit that subject (p. 15), and generate supporting details (p. 19). The prompts to develop these ideas do not necessarily move students beyond previously held perceptions and opinions; neither do they move students toward more sophisticated understanding of their subjects. The chapter provides an overview of revision
strategies, asking student writers, “Are your ideas interesting, fresh, and original, rather than ones that people have heard over and over?” If the answer to that revision question is “no,” this same page provides a list of “quick fixes” for that problem (p. 25), though one can easily argue that “quick fixes” are the antithesis of sustained, complex thought.

The second and third chapters, housed under the unit title “Style and Structure of Writing,” include rubrics aligned with the Six Traits of writing. Chapter Three includes a rubric for evaluating the development of ideas in writing, pictured in figure 5.3. While this rubric names originality and intellectual risk-taking as traits of a top-scoring composition, there is no elaboration or exemplification to help students understand what taking risks looks like in composition. The rubric is preceded by two pages on paragraph development that strongly emphasize “supporting details” and “adequate development”—not bad traits, but also not ones that necessarily beget the “meaningful connections” and “risks” named in the rubric category. Thus when this final rubric is read in the context of the preceding pages, the dominant emphasis falls heavily on assertion-support structures that, according to Dombeck and Herndon (2003), often cause students to “close out all possible counter-arguments…because they feel they must protect their idea from any complexity that may threaten its appearance of rightness” (p. 13).

Beyond these opening weaknesses, the text does integrate critical thinking in some unique and comparatively more effective ways. Chapters Two through Eleven
(introductory chapters through modal chapters) all begin with a writing warm-up titled “Think through Writing,” a title that suggests obvious alignment with this particular composition principle. Many of these prompts, linked to the featured genre of the chapter, do promote thinking moves that could be characterized as “critical thinking.” In keeping with the definitions at the beginning of this chapter, these prompts require that students synthesize multiple ideas, consider topics about which they likely do not have preconceived ideas, and undertake real-world and textual analysis. Some of the more interesting prompts include the following:

- A narrative prompt asks students to reflect on the cultural groups with which they identify, noting that “most people think of themselves as a part of overlapping groups.” I coded this prompt as promoting critical thinking because of the emphasis on intersectionality, which requires students to consider the influence of multiple groups with which they identify (“Personal Writing,” p. 132).

- A descriptive writing assignment asks students to write about their method for navigating the hallways between classes when “the distance is great and the time is short.” I coded this as promoting critical thinking because it requires invention on the part of students—it is likely that they have not often sought to engage readers through describing a commonplace occurrence such as walking from class to class (“Descriptive Writing,” p. 158).

- An expository prompt asks students to describe a technological or cultural change in their lifetimes that has required people to adapt. I coded this as critical thinking because analysis is essential to successful completion of the assignment, namely the impact of a societal shift on human behavior (“Expository Writing,” p. 234).
While not all of the prompts are equally strong, as a group they are notable because the parameters of the writing exercises require innovative, complex thought for students to successfully complete the assignment. Additionally, in each of these exercises, students develop the structure of their compositions and the organizational pattern around the generation of these ideas rather than first being given a structure and asked to fit ideas into that default form.

Each of the aforementioned prompts is followed immediately by a mentor text with annotations; unfortunately, the annotations do not highlight the thinking moves within these sample compositions. The three mentor texts that follow the prompts above contain a total of 23 annotations. Of these 23, only three could be considered to promote critical thinking, and not overtly. Annotations are mostly identificatory, highlighting and naming the types of support and development, sentence structures, and strategies for cohesion. The three comments that could possibly indicate critical thinking include pointing out details that “help the reader understand the author’s dilemma” (in “The Good Daughter,” by Caroline Hwang, p. 135) and two occasions where the use of metaphor is noted (both in “The Point of No Comment” by John Hockenberry, p. 160). I count these as possible examples of critical thinking because the first highlights an unresolved problem in the mentor text and the second two highlight an effective use of metaphorical thinking, further developed elsewhere in the “Thinking Critically” inserts described in the next paragraph. Ideally, however, more annotations of these texts would describe the ways in which these published authors nuance a theme, develop their own uncertainties, weigh conflicting ideas, and/or delay assertion.

In addition to these brief writing prompts, each chapter (two through twelve) includes a one-page insert with the label “Thinking Critically.” The pages address topics including generating effective similes and metaphors, interpreting personal experience, effectively
implying so a reader might infer, evaluating evidence, and anticipating counter-arguments. Each page includes a brief overview of the thinking/writing skill followed by further deconstruction of the skill, often in the form of t-charts or checklists. Every page then ends with a “thinking practice” exercise for students to apply the skill. While brief in description, the repeated insertion of these pages emphasizes an essential link between writing and generative types of thinking beyond recapitulation and reporting.

These two features, while positive indicators of critical thinking, are not the main content throughout the modal chapters; their positioning as inserts subordinates them to the featured assignments of each chapter, which are similar in structure to Write Source and Writing Coach (discussed next) in that they give fairly general prompts within a broad form, include a mentor text, and walk students through a linear writing process. Again, however, I note that Writing with Power is somewhat stronger because while it does enact some of Dombeck’s and Herndon’s critiques of default forms, it also includes exposition and exercises that align with some of the indicators of critical thinking. In the following paragraphs, I report on a close reading of the persuasive writing chapter to exemplify how the featured composition assignment both contrasts and promotes the goals of critical thinking in writing.

As with Write Source, one of the most common heuristics across these chapters is the generic guidance to be sure the composition has “a beginning, middle, and end,” and the persuasive writing chapter is no exception. In this chapter, the instructions to students are that the introduction should capture the audience’s attention, present the issue, and express the writer’s opinion in a thesis statement; the body of the essay should present a variety of types of content that support the writer’s opinion; and the conclusion should be a paragraph that “drives home the writer’s opinion” (p. 289). This generic structure stands in direct contrast to Dombeck’s and
Herndon’s assertion that “writing that manifests engaged wrestling with a complicated problem will break out of a thesis/supporting points/conclusion form. …The order of things will be governed by the kinds of questioning and speculation being done” (p. 16). The predominance of this generic form creates an emphasis on the very types of default structures that Dombeck and Herndon critique. While critical thinking could still unfold within this framework, the emphasis falls heavily on predetermined structures, not those that develop in tandem with authentic thinking moves.

Despite this generic structure, several of the modal chapters do include more attention to thinking moves rather than just the clean structuring of uncomplicated ideas. In my close reading of the persuasive writing chapter, I found several sections that promote elements of the Common Core standard W.11-12.1, specifically the mandates to “develop counter-claims fairly and thoroughly” (1.B), and “[point] out the strengths and limitations” of both the one’s argument and counter-claims (1.B). In this chapter, two essays present different perspectives on climate change (p. 290-293), two pages discuss the difference between fact, supported opinion, and unsupported opinion (p. 294-295), two pages coach students on drawing logical conclusions (p. 296-297), and four pages are devoted to avoiding logical fallacies (p. 310-313). Thus while the main composition project employs generic, predetermined structures, multiple parts of the chapter develop students’ understanding of what it looks like to develop fair claims and counter-claims (W.11-12.1.B).

Additionally, a revision checklist directs students to evaluate the quality of their arguments, asking questions like, “Have you presented the whole range of relevant perspectives and accurately and honestly worded opposing views?” “Have you conceded a point if appropriate?” Thus, while the thesis-driven essay is again the dominant form, more pages are
directed toward the *quality* of student thought than in a comparable *Write Source* chapter: 13 pages in *Writing with Power*’s “Writing to Persuade” versus approximately 2 pages in *Write Source*’s “Persuasive Writing.”

In sum, *Writing with Power* is similar to the other texts in that, despite its alignment to Common Core Standards, it subordinates students’ thinking to pre-determined structures, processes, and genres. However, it better illustrates various types of thinking and includes more frequent exercises and more extended exposition than any other text in the sample, thus doing a better job of actually *developing* students’ thinking instead of merely *mentioning* the importance of critical thought.

*Writing Coach*

While the previous two textbooks make cursory mention of some form of critical thinking in their respective introductions, Pearson’s *Writing Coach* makes no mention of it at all. Chapter One begins with the rhetorical question, “Why do you write?” and follows with four purposes named in the following ways: to share, to persuade people, to inform, and to enjoy (p. 2). Though an earlier introduction lists seven reasons to write and alludes to critical thinking with the reason “to sort things out” (p. iii), the first chapter makes no mention of writing as a way of thinking. The implication is that we structure and share knowledge that we already hold—stories, information, and opinions—but in no way is writing framed as an exploration of what students do not already know (Dombeck & Herndon, p. 13).

Chapter Two, also an introductory chapter, unfolds around different forms that writing may take and proceeds to enact the main critique of Dombeck’s and Herndon’s text: that high school writing too often unfolds around default forms, not actual thinking moves. While a modal
approach to writing may have some validity, the fact that Chapter Two spans 17 pages and briefly describes 60 different forms of writing suggests little extended attention to the nuances of any one mode or genre. A sidebar contains a quotation from writer and educator Jeff Anderson about the link between writing and thinking; he names the intersection of form and thinking. However, this two-sentence quotation is placed beside brief descriptions of expository forms that are built around basic organizational structures, not strategic thinking moves, as illustrated by the overview of an analytical essay (figure 5.4).

![Writer to Writer](image)

Figure 5.4 Writing Coach Description of Forms. A sidebar quotation by Jeff Anderson is undermined by the default forms that make up the majority of the instruction in the chapter (p. 15).

A revealing and more specific comparison to Critical Passages comes from the two books’ chapters on sentences and paragraphs. Both Writing Coach and Critical Passages include a chapter that focuses on sentence- and paragraph-level writing. However, the way in which these “building blocks” of essays are presented is vastly different, especially with regard to how thought patterns influence the structure and development of a composition. Consider these two passages side by side:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Coach</th>
<th>Critical Passages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A clear topic sentence is a good start, but it needs to be accompanied by good details that support the paragraph’s main idea. Your supporting sentences might tell interesting facts, describe events, or give examples. In addition, the supporting sentences should also provide a smooth transition, so that the</td>
<td>Just as students tend to write in simple, declarative sentences coming out of high school, they also tend to construct paragraphs that follow the cumulative pattern—they articulate the most important thought in a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph, and add and modify in the following</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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15 From Writing Coach 2012 Student Edition E-Text 1-Year License Grade 12 by Pearson Education. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.
It must be noted that these two excerpts do not offer a strictly parallel comparison. *Writing Coach* is written to students and is an explanation of a solid paragraph; *Critical Passages* is written to teachers as a way to understand and further complicate their students’ writing. Nevertheless, they provide a strong contrast in the way that they describe the connection between the basic structures of language and students’ types of thinking. In the *Writing Coach* paragraph model, students put forward a clear topic, then support it with facts or examples. Quality arises from smooth transitions and clarity, but there is no mention of the complexity of the content itself. In *Critical Passages*, the hallmark of a well-structured paragraph is that it moves inextricably with the development of a complex thought, suggesting that students would do well to discard the “cumulative” style promoted by *Writing Coach*. In many ways, the *Writing Coach* directive is an illustration of the very structure that *Critical Passages* critiques.

As with the previous two print textbooks, the majority of the online textbook unfolds around different writing modes with a feature assignment and a linear process model as the dominant structure of each chapter. In these chapters, one feature does promote critical thinking: A sidebar that connects the mode and writing prompt to “Big Questions.” For example, in “Nonfiction Narration,” the text asks students to consider this question: “What should be put in and left out [of an essay] to be accurate and honest” (p. 65)? The chapter titled “Fiction Narration” asks students, “What can fiction do better than nonfiction” (p. 91)? Though they are only sidebars, these types of questions elicit higher-order thinking about the limits and
possibilities of the featured genres. Additionally, the textbook returns to the same big questions at the end of each chapter after the students have worked through their writing assignments (pp. 85 and 112 in these examples); it is pedagogically effective to ask students to reconsider the same questions in light of their writing experience, thus using new knowledge to revise previously held ideas.

To further analyze some of the features of the modal chapters, I focus on a close reading of the chapter on persuasive writing because it is a genre that promises multiple opportunities for critical thought if it indeed aligns with the cited Common Core writing standards. At the macro level, it is clear that the chapter unfolds around default forms and processes. After a brief introduction to the genre and two mentor texts, the bulk of the 22-page chapter unfolds around the linear writing process (prewriting through publishing), and emphasizes the common “introduction—body—conclusion” structure as a hallmark of quality.

More nuanced presentation occurs at the micro level, or the prompts, explanations, and examples within this overarching chapter structure. There are multiple prompts that meet the earlier definition of critical thinking. Student-writers are prompted to include a range of relevant perspectives in their writing (p. 172), evaluate the strength of arguments in a mentor text (p. 177), consider multiple audiences (p. 179), and consider the validity of their selected evidence (p. 180). These are all prompts that could lead student writers to produce text with a good degree of complexity. However, I’m reluctant to claim that the presence of these prompts will yield increased critical thinking because it is not clear that such things compose the dominant messages of the chapter. To further explain, I include the following screen shot for close analysis, taken from the “drafting” stage of the persuasive writing chapter (figure 5.5\textsuperscript{16}).

\textsuperscript{16} From Writing Coach 2012 Student Edition E-Text 1-Year License Grade 12 by Pearson Education. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.
There are several prompts on this page that could beget critical thinking. Students are prompted to weigh the strength of their arguments and structure accordingly. They are also instructed to include divergent viewpoints and to represent those with attention to bias. (See bullet points under the heading “Structure Your Ideas.”) I also affirm that the text describes the graphic organizer as an organizing structure, implying that it is one form among multiple options. However, the presence of these indicators must be considered against several other traits of this page. First, the brevity of the prompts and the simple directives are such that students could engage them at a variety of levels of thinking. One might follow the directive to “include a complete range of relevant perspectives,” but not necessarily synthesize or evaluate those perspectives in a way that complicates the preconceived opinion. There is also no further guidance as to what constitutes a “complete range.” As with my critique of Write Source, here again a student writer could include a variety of types of evidence (quotations, facts, anecdotes), yet not process that evidence with any degree of complexity or insight. Thus the brevity of this
checklist form requires a certain amount of prior knowledge or supplementary instruction if these prompts are to foster critical thinking.

Also of interest is the layout and visual rhetoric of the page and the way that it contrasts the ultimate goal of thoughtful, persuasive writing. The page is titled “Outline for Success” with an image of a sunrise over the word “success.” The colors surrounding the words mirror the color pattern of the graphic organizer below them, thus implying that success lies in following the basic “introduction—body—conclusion” structure that is a repeated heuristic through the majority of the text. The parallel pencil and bulleted lists present good writing as a neat and tidy checklist, not a messy process of weighing ideas to revise or nuance one’s stance. It is especially noteworthy that this page is in the “drafting” section of the writing process, where one is ostensibly organizing and refining raw ideas for the first time.

As students continue to draft, they are reminded to include valid evidence from reliable sources and represent multiple, relevant perspectives “accurately and honestly” (p. 183). Several pages later, in the section on revision, students are prompted to think about the rhetorical purpose of their essays and consider the way that particular rhetorical devices can function in persuasion (p. 187). In these brief bits of advice, the prompts do direct students to consider multiple viewpoints and to analyze the ways that their craft intersects with an audience. However, the accompanying writing platform, discussed next, does not further the goals of critical thought.

In the interactive writing platform, students write about several suggested topics and submit their compositions for feedback, either by the paragraph or as a whole composition. In this persuasive writing chapter, students choose from one of the following three prompts: a year of mandatory service, expansion of protection for animals, or changing the voting age from 18 to 21. I began writing a response to the topic that asks if 18-year-olds should be required to
complete a year of mandatory service, composing a piece that I would be pleased to receive from
either a high school or early college student. I began the essay with the following introduction,
then submitted it for feedback:

When students graduate from high school, they enter the workforce, go on to
college, or drift for a time while figuring out what to do next. But what would it
look like if all 18-year-olds spent that first year after high school serving their
country in some way? What would be the benefits to the graduate, and to the
people and communities that they serve?

The feedback from my writing coach was that the introduction was sufficiently developed, but
that it lacked focus. My sentence beginnings and structures were sufficiently varied, but I
received a low score because the lengths were not varied. Additionally, I was prompted to check
my work for vague adjectives, pronoun/antecedent agreement, spelling and grammar. In an
attempt to improve the scores, I spent about 15 minutes revising and resubmitting the paragraph,
finally ending up with the following paragraph that, according to my “personal writing coach,"
showed improved focus, sentence lengths, and spelling; however, my writing coach still claimed
that I needed work on organization, vague adjectives, and grammar:

When students graduate from high school, they enter the workforce, go to college,
or drift for a time while figuring out what to do next. However, what would
happen if they all volunteered for a year? Recent graduates might work in a high-
needs school, monitor water quality of a river, fill a need in a retirement
community, or help to build houses. What would be the benefits to the graduate
and to the people and communities that are served?

While this revised introduction does include some specific details not in my original, it subverted
my overall writing plan, which was to establish the initial question then reveal specific details
later in the text. However, in an attempt to improve my scores on certain surface features of the
text, I needed to revise my plan for content development, thus fitting my thoughts to the form
and not the other way around. Even the feedback that was ostensibly aimed at my topic
development prompted me to increase paragraph length and tweak transition words, drawing my
attention away from things like the complexity of my topic and the foundation that I was attempting to establish for the exploration of my ideas. Thus the platform emphasizes quantifiable, objective surface traits—like word count, sentence length, and grammar—and necessarily subordinates the more complicated features of composition, namely students’ development of ideas.

While *Writing Coach* does include a few more critical thinking prompts than *Write Source*, it is weaker than *Writing with Power* because these thinking prompts are decidedly undermined by the use of the electronic writing program. It is not surprising that a writing platform that gives instant, electronic feedback is based merely on algorithms that can only measure surface features of a text. Nevertheless, in my use of this e-platform, my attention was drawn away from the quality of my ideas and toward small linguistic tweaks that would please the “e-valuator.” To be sure, the exercise was a form of critical thinking—but it was critical thinking about how I might please the disembodied writing coach, not about the actual topic of my essay.

*Writer’s Workspace/Grammar and Composition Handbook*

When reviewing the previous three textbooks, I first analyzed the general overview chapters for evidence of critical thinking; however, this e-text has no comparable introduction. It is structured into eight modules with two specific genres and one “challenge” (a vague, open-ended prompt) in each section. The structure of each module is generally consistent in that it follows this three-step process: Students complete a series of readings and questions; they move on to a “reading-writing connection” that engages them in exercises based on the readings; they
finish by moving to a writing prompt that walks them through a linear process model to write an essay in an online platform.

In the absence of a general overview, I begin by looking closely at one assignment that appears conducive to the purpose of critical thinking: the “political/social essay” that is a specific genre in the “Analytical Essay” tab. As part of this assignment, students must draw on primary and secondary sources to develop their analysis, and the assignment’s placement under the “Analytical Essay” heading implies that, in the language of the CCSS standards, they will “synthesize multiple sources” to demonstrate their mastery of the subject (W.11-12.7). In the absence of introductory chapters, I also describe the features and heuristics within this one module that are repeated throughout Writer’s Workspace.

There are three readings that inform this particular writing assignment: Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience,” Gandhi’s “On the Eve of the Historic Dandi March,” and an excerpt from Mandela’s Long Walk to Freedom. Prior to writing, students read these pieces and respond to questions that will ostensibly help them write well in this genre. To gauge the degree to which critical thinking is present in this first step, I counted the reading response prompts for “Civil Disobedience,” categorizing the thinking type either as comprehension and recall, or higher-order thinking like evaluation, synthesis, and analysis. 17 Thirty-two of the questions fell into the category of recall and comprehension with only 12 at the level of evaluation and synthesis. For example, I counted as recall/comprehension the following question: “Thoreau was put in jail because he ________” (p. 9). I counted as higher-order thinking the following question: “As I read this page, one thing I agree with is _________” (p. 9). The former question simply requires students to recall a fact that is explicit in the text; the latter question requires students to

17 While these prompts are related to critical thinking through reading, I still consider them here because Writer’s Workspace builds their writing assignments around what they call the reading-writing connection, using analysis of mentor texts to influence the development of original compositions.
articulate a personal stance based on the content of the text. Even this question is only
moderately aligned to the aims of critical thinking, as students could merely assert assent without
complex engagement with the issues presented by the text. Nevertheless, aware of my own
emerging biases against these textbooks, I employed a liberal approach to coding, meaning that if
a question could prompt critical thought in the student, I counted it as such.

What is even more striking, however, is that there are 44 total questions for a six-page
essay (not including the vocabulary work also spread throughout the essay). While one might
argue that the abundance of prompts and questions encourages close, critical reading, the
placement of questions on every other page and in the margins suggests interrupted reading and
highly directed thinking. While close reading is an essential skill, and one highly valued by
CCSS, the structure of questions encourages a strong dependence on the textbooks’ authors, not
independent reading and analysis that will then transfer to the student’s own writing processes.

To illustrate: “Civil Disobedience” begins on page four of the argumentative chapter, and
as one nears the end of the first page of text, one reads, “For government is an expedient by…”
and the page ends. The reader clicks on the arrow to turn the page, expecting a continuation of
Thoreau’s thought, and instead is greeted by a page of questions, beginning with, “Thoreau
believes that ‘government is best ____________.’” After this one page of reading, cutting off
mid-thought, the student encounters five questions that prompt her/him to summarize Thoreau’s
arguments and respond to one new/interesting thought. On any given page of the reading,
students are also peppered with prompts in the sidebar that define vocabulary, prompt a
connection, ask for summary, or invite evaluation. As with the inserted pages, the goals of close
reading, integrated vocabulary instruction, etc. are fine goals that are aligned with standards, but
the profusion and placement interrupts any sustained attention to how this writer develops his thoughts over time. (See figure 5.6 on the following page.)

After some comparison of the three essays, student writers move on to the reading-writing connection step. The text walks them through a linear writing process, pointing back to examples from the just-read texts and prompting students to create the same components and use similar types of devices in a practice essay. The “steps” in the reading-writing connection illustrate a clear focus on form and structure in writing that unfold independently of the writer’s authentic thinking moves. Student writers are prompted to identify then develop the following, in this order:

- A controlling idea or thesis statement
- An effective introductory paragraph
- A clear organizational schema
- Relevant and substantial evidence and well-chosen details
- Multiple relevant perspectives
- Primary and secondary sources
- A variety of sentence structures
- Transitions between paragraphs
- Rhetorical devices
- A concluding paragraph

Figure 5.6 Recall and Comprehension Question. Multiple recall and comprehension questions interrupt the flow of reading in Writer’s Workspace (p. 8).
In contrast to Dombeck’s and Herndon’s (2003) admonition to treat writing as further discovery, the very first step of this reading-writing connection is to draft an authoritative thesis statement. In preparation to write about a social or political issue, student writers are given this directive to prepare for the practice essay: “Research what others have said about your subject and give the issue careful thought. Then craft a clear sentence or two stating what you will prove in your essay” (p. 7). Thus students begin with a settled opinion, and the process of writing merely supports (rather than inspects, probes, or complicates) that opinion. After writing their thesis statements, students build an introductory paragraph around that thesis statement. In subsequent pages, the students develop that thesis statement with evidence, structure the evidence, and even include multiple perspectives, but the core idea of the persuasive essay is established as the very first step in the writing process and maintained through subsequent steps.

This workbook progression is merely a warm-up, a “reading-writing connection” preceding the main writing project. After completing this, students then write the feature assignment, beginning by studying an annotated model text. As with the other three textbooks, the annotations point out things like thesis placement, transitions, sentence variety, and rhetorical devices. Of the 14 annotations, two could be considered to highlight the writer’s critical thinking, and both of these comments highlight the writer’s incorporation of multiple perspectives.

When students begin their own compositions, the prompt they encounter is fairly open-ended and broad. They are to select as a focus a social or political issue that interests them and lends itself to analysis. The multiple prompts in the drafting stage use a variety of verbs weighted toward lower levels of thinking, but including some verbs that are associated with higher-order thinking. Primarily, students are to gather, organize, pick, choose, review, summarize, and look for. However, they are also to evaluate, analyze, and interpret. The directives indicate that some
degree of critical thinking is required to complete the assignment at hand, though the elaboration on these moves is minimal, as illustrated by my recreation of the module in figure 5.7. After the bulleted list of types of support, students read that they are to analyze and interpret their evidence, but there is little development of those thinking skills beyond the directive. The annotations in the aforementioned mentor text also do not highlight what such analysis looks like in a well-crafted essay.

When students click on subsequent tabs to draft and revise their essays, there are again several prompts in a side drop-down menu that might align with the working definition of critical thinking: reviewing one’s thesis in light of the gathered evidence, synthesizing ideas and information, and evaluating the development of one’s ideas. However, these prompts are just a few among many and unfold with a degree of unsupported brevity similar to the example in figure 5.7.

In sum, Writer’s Workspace does include both reading and writing questions and prompts that address critical thinking skills. However, they are included with an overwhelming number of prompts and directives, receiving brief, unexemplified, and undistinguished treatment, the structure of which could allow readers to treat them with the same degree of uncritical thought as the fill-in-the-blank recall questions on the workbook pages. Even in the particular assignment that was examined closely—a political or social analysis and commentary—students begin with assertions, not questions, thus prompting a biased search to support what one already believes instead of authentically exploring the complexities of a difficult issue.
**Summative Assessment**

The link between critical thinking and writing is an essential component of effective pre-college writing instruction and is also integrated into multiple Common Core Standards. The four textbooks in the sample vary slightly in the degree and manner of incorporation of critical thinking. Common among the texts is that no feature writing project is built around the exploration of multiple perspectives, ambiguities, or uncovering what one does not already know/think/believe. Most assignments, even those in forms that should depend heavily on critical thinking, emphasize an assertion-support structure that can be achieved without complex analysis by the student writers. Also common among the textbooks is the explicit affirmation of students’ ideas and critical thought as the substance of writing, but a failure to integrate exercises, examples, and assignments that actually foster the development of such higher-order thinking.

*Writing with Power* stands out as somewhat stronger than the other three texts for the way that authentic critical thinking exercises are intentionally integrated throughout the entire book. Still, all four textbooks are framed around the “default structure” critiqued by Dombeck and Herndon and the linear writing process models described in the previous chapter. No textbook includes any major writing project that subordinates process and form to the intellectual activity of the student writer. Thus all books in this sample fall short of the ideals discussed in the scholarship and illustrated by *Critical Passages* (Dombeck & Herndon, 2003).
CHAPTER SIX

Language and Conventions

To analyze the presentation of language and conventions in the sample, I identified two distinct yet interrelated traits that textbooks should address through exposition, models, exercises, and composition projects. As described in Chapter Two, strong writing instruction presents grammar not as stand-alone declarative knowledge; rather it advances students’ written usage by embedding language instruction in communicative contexts (Hartwell, 1985; Weaver & Bush, 2008). Additionally, quality writing instruction builds students’ understanding of the social and contextual nature of language—specifically that what is considered appropriate varies depending on the situation. However, a quality instructional text will discuss language and dialectical variation beyond the common generalities of “formal” and “informal” registers. As students advance their facility with Edited American English (EAE), they also must begin to analyze and understand their own and others’ dialects so that they become increasingly skilled at choosing linguistic registers based on context while avoiding prejudice that treats some dialects as “sub-standard” (Zuidema, 2005). In Chapter Two, I described Brown’s (2009) In Other Words as a model text because of the way that it weaves together all of these considerations, integrating knowledge of language structures and conventions with dialectical variation and giving students multiple exercises to develop their ability to “code switch,” or choose their language based on rhetorical situation.

As noted prior, the CCSS language standards both address some of these considerations and deviate from them in their very structure. For example, standard L.11-12.1A states that students “apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time,
and is sometimes contested.” Although this standard does not explicitly mention variation, it is rooted in the understanding that language is living, and as such, grammar and usage are not static bodies of knowledge. Additionally several writing standards emphasize the importance of attending to the “conventions of the discipline” in which students are writing, thus aligning grammatical choices with expectations for particular genres and contexts (e.g. W.11-12.1.D, 2.E). However, by their very structure, the standards contradict composition scholarship. By creating separate sets of language and writing standards, CCSS suggests that “language and style expectations can be evaluated…separately from writing expectations” (Aull, 2015, p. 60), a concept that runs counter to the practices promoted by Noden (1999), Weaver and Bush (2008), and others.

Ideally, grammar instruction should be generative, meaning that language structures are inextricably linked to conceptual expression and can be strategically manipulated for effect. For example, in Noden’s text Image Grammar (1999), the author links imagery and motion in visual arts to common grammatical structures, presenting these to students through the analogy of “brush strokes” that can enhance the detail in their writing. Weaver and Bush structure the text Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing (2008) around that very principle: that grammatical elements should be introduced to “promote expression of ideas, organization, voice and style…and sentence dexterity” (p. 203). While we do not want students to stymie their generative thinking by worrying too soon about surface correctness, final editing should not be the first time that they slow down and consider the language of their text and its relationship to their rhetorical purposes. The Common Core language standards do address this concern to some degree with the following standard: Writers should “vary syntax for effect, consulting references…for guidance as needed…” (L.11-12.3.A).
The textbooks in the sample vary quite a bit in their treatment of language, while also sharing some common weaknesses. Most notably, all textbooks contain a large grammar handbook, devoting hundreds of pages to a systematic (and, in my assessment, unnecessary) outline of grammatical rules. The books vary in the degree to which they integrate this grammatical knowledge into students’ writing in purposeful, generative ways. They also vary in the degree to which they address dialectical variation, with three of them including little to no acknowledgement of variation and one, Writing with Power, including some helpful exposition on this topic. In the pages that follow, I first investigate the presentation of conventions and usage for traits that are common across all textbooks, then I briefly do the same for the topic of language variation. Following the general overview, I complete a specific text-by-text analysis to describe the strengths and weaknesses unique to each individual textbook.

What should students know about the structure of the English language by late high school? Interestingly, all four textbooks devote a high percentage of pages to addressing parts of speech, sentence structures, punctuation, and mechanics, and there is a universal attempt to be comprehensive, not to sort by developmental level. This separation also reflects the structure of the Common Core language and writing standards; although the connection between language and composition is articulated, the structure of both the standards and the textbooks nevertheless isolate a body of declarative grammatical knowledge to be mastered. For example, Write Source includes rules as basic as the need for a period at the end of a sentence (p. 605) and progresses through more advanced concepts like the proper use of a semicolon with a conjunctive adverb (p. 618). Writing with Power begins its chapter on sentences with a review of subjects and predicates (p. 656) and continues to discuss diagramming various sentence structures (pp. 672-
This attempt to include a comprehensive handbook of declarative grammatical knowledge leads to a disproportionate amount of text devoted to grammar with only minimal connections to the production of meaningful compositions. Thus in the overall presentation, concerns of language remain a separate content area, a set of declarative knowledge to be acquired or, at best, rules to guide the proofreading of one’s final draft.

Table 6.1 lists the number of pages and percentage of text devoted to a comprehensive grammar handbook. Note that in the two online forums—Glencoe’s Writer’s Workspace and Writing Coach—I only measure the elements that contain cumulative pagination, and so I exclude the eight genre-based modules from Glencoe’s Writer’s Workspace and the online writing lab from Pearson’s Writing Coach. This makes the percentage of text devoted to grammar appear higher than it actually is; however, excluding non-paginated forums was the only way to arrive at a quantifiable percentage.

Table 6.1. Grammar Handbook Pages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTBOOK</th>
<th>TOTAL PAGES (not including index)</th>
<th>PAGES DEVOTED TO GRAMMAR</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF TEXT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write Source (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing with Power (Perfection Learning)</td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar and Composition Handbook (Glencoe)</td>
<td>572 (not including e-text)</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Coach (Pearson/Prentice Hall)</td>
<td>628 (not including electronic writing interface)</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though all textbooks in the sample tout their Common Core alignment, according to CCSS most of the topics included in these pages should have been mastered prior to high school, making much of this content out of step with the progressions in the current standards. For
example, all textbooks include descriptions and examples of basic parts of speech in their 11th and 12th grade versions. According to CCSS, the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs should be mastered by grade three (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1.A). The use of active and passive voice, also present in all four textbooks is to be mastered by the end of grade eight (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.1.B). In fact, the only declarative grammatical knowledge explicitly named in the standards for grades 11 and 12 is the use of hyphenation (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.2.A). While some might argue that such handbooks are necessary for review and remediation, all knowledge contained in these pages is publicly accessible and similarly organized in multiple online forums. Additionally, as is described later, the handbooks are rarely cross-referenced within the composition chapters and assignments, thus further isolating grammar as stand-alone, declarative knowledge.

Across the textbooks, three good practices are integrated, though with varying degrees of quality and comprehensiveness. In addition to the amount of space devoted to declarative grammatical knowledge, a key factor for analysis is the way in which language—its structures, vocabulary, and conventions—is linked to the generative/inventive acts of composition. In all textbooks, elements of language are woven throughout the composing process in multiple chapters to some degree, thus linking linguistic knowledge to more than editing (Weaver & Bush, 2008). Secondly, in the textbook sample, mentor texts are paired with every genre/mode and are sometimes used to illustrate the way that language structures are linked to style and meaning-making in published texts (Noden, 1999). Finally, in every textbook, editing is separated from revision and presented as the final step, the last check of mechanics before submission and not the whole substance of revision, as is sometimes practiced by students. These general traits are further delineated later in this chapter in a text-by-text analysis.
The final overarching area for analysis is the degree to which the textbooks present language variation as natural and complicate the idea of a single “standard” English. All four of the books under scrutiny do very little to acknowledge language variation. In many cases, they either ignore this reality, presenting “standard English” as the gold standard of correctness, or they mention variation in passing, though very little is done to advance students’ understanding of the regional and cultural nature of language and the constantly evolving structures associated with correctness. As with the analysis of critical thinking in Chapter Five, Writing with Power emerges as somewhat stronger in its attention to language variation; as described on the following pages, its treatment of the topic (though brief) is distinctive.

In most of the textbooks, the discussion of the contextual and social nature of language is limited to brief tips and admonitions to use a formal tone and to avoid slang and conversational phrasing. While this is certainly not bad advice, very little is done to develop students’ understanding of what we mean by “formal”; additionally, the discussion of variation gives the impression that there are just two varieties of English: a common “formal” version and more colloquial “informal” version. The image in figure 6.1 is from Glencoe’s Grammar and Composition Handbook and represents the typical extent to which language variation is discussed.

The following text-by-text analysis describes the specific ways in which each textbook integrates connections between grammatical structures and composition, and further delineates the degree to which language variation is addressed. As

Figure 6.1 Formal Voice. This writing tip represents the degree of depth typical of the texts in the sample when discussing language variation (Grammar and Composition Handbook, p. 443).
described in the previous two chapters, all textbooks use a linear process model and Six-Trait writing rubric (or a rubric close to it) to guide students’ work with different genres and modes. In each textbook, I look at the writing process to see at what point language structures are integrated, and I also examine the integration of this rubric—namely the traits of “voice,” “word choice,” “sentence fluency,” and “conventions”—for the way in which quality is represented in these areas of language usage. Additionally, the textbooks all have supplementary activities and information that address aspects of language like register, tone, and grammatical conventions; these pages are noted as strengths when they include the above traits and are linked meaningfully to students’ text production, not merely presented as isolated bits of knowledge to be acquired.

*Write Source*

In general, *Write Source* is a model illustration of the sample’s overall strengths and weaknesses described on the previous pages. The textbook does draw students’ attention to multiple aspects of grammar and usage that are important to attend to in the context of one’s own writing. However, throughout the chapters, these features are not developed with any significant depth, and language variation is essentially absent from the entire text.

Introductory chapters on “The Writing Process” associate voice, word choice, and sentence fluency with “revising” and conventions with “editing” (p. 9), and a subsequent model of a student’s use of this process shows how a hypothetical student, “Lakendra,” made the following choices as she revised: formalized voice, combined sentences, improved verb choice, integrated a colon, moved a phrase, and fixed a fragment (pp. 20-25). After revision, Lakendra completed a final round of editing, focusing on punctuation, mechanics, grammar, and source documentation (pp. 26-27). This is a positive division, common among the texts, in that mere
error correction is presented as distinct from language revision for clarity, effect, and flow. Students are not prompted to worry about “correctness” until later stages of writing, and editing for grammatical error is just one of several important features of written language. However, unlike Noden’s (1999) framework in *Image Grammar*, sentence fluency, word choice, and voice are not explicitly associated with the generative “writing” stages, but only with revision, framed as a kind of corrective move after ideas have been generated (p. 9).

The introductory chapters also include an extended description of the trademarked Six Trait writing rubric. This includes an overview of the traits “voice,” “word choice,” “sentence fluency,” and “conventions.” The following paragraphs summarize the presentation of these traits of writing through the lens of their alignment with valuable pre-college traits and understandings regarding language and conventions.

**Voice.** The six-page description and exemplification of voice revolves around the repeated idea of finding and developing one’s “natural voice” (pp. 67, 68, & 69), that nebulous uniqueness of style. Subsequent advice instructs students to tailor voice to their audiences and to understand the variations of formal and informal diction. Colloquialisms, slang, and jargon are defined in one sentence each, and students are instructed to avoid first and second person in academic writing (p. 71). Nowhere on these pages is one’s “natural voice” associated with dialectical variation. The strongest part of this section is the last page, a list of 12 prompts to help students actively experiment with voice. Suggestions include making a serious topic sound humorous, revising a piece to begin in the current middle, and limiting writing to what fits within a particular shape (p. 72). These exercises provide students with concrete frameworks that have the potential to boost students’ “awareness of language as language” (Hartwell, 1985, p.125).
**Word Choice.** The section on word choice also begins with emphasis on personal style, noting to readers that “when you write, you should simply be yourself” (p. 73), and again, simply “being yourself” is not linked to one’s unique language patterns; in fact, it is not linked to any concrete directive that might help a student figure out how to enact that advice. Beyond this vague guideline, the section spends one page each on specific nouns, vivid verbs, effective modifiers, sensory details, word connotations, problems with word choice, and ways to add style. This particular section does succeed in linking these considerations of word choice to the communication of ideas, but the primary activities and directives are integrated during revision only, not earlier generative phases, with the word “revise” used six times, not including synonyms like “review,” “change,” “substitute,” etc. Attention to precise diction is a worthy facet of revision, but attention to language is again solely tied to corrective measures.

**Sentence Fluency.** The introduction to sentence fluency notes that “for the most part, writers work unscientifically” (p. 81), which echoes Hartwell’s (1985) assertion that experienced writers are not explicitly referencing rules as they write; however, the section attempts to explicitly name effective features of sentences in quality writing. Advice to students includes common directives like varying sentence structure, combining sentences, using repetition, and checking for errors. The stated reasons for attending to sentence structure are readability and aural quality, or the “sound” of the text. The primary teaching method in this section is the rewriting of sentences to adhere to different features. Whereas Noden’s (1999) and Weaver and Bush’s (2008) texts explicitly and repeatedly link different sentence structures to content production and idea generation, *Write Source* only links them to sound and flow, worthy qualities but incomplete on their own.
**Conventions.** This is a mere one-and-a-half pages that essentially instructs students to check for conventions once they have finished revising. The primary teaching tool is to group conventions under the headings “punctuation,” “mechanics and spelling,” and “grammar” and to reference later pages in the textbook that deal with these conventions in more detail. Instructing students to complete a final proofreading step is a good goal, but there is little time spent on why this matters, and there is no discussion of strategies for how one might proofread effectively.

As was described earlier, subsequent chapters unfold around different modes of writing, and the Six Trait rubric is integrated through each chapter, thus repeatedly reminding students at various stages in their writing to attend to their sentence structures, conventions, word choice, and voice. The primary pedagogical tools for prompting student self evaluation are checklists (e.g. pp. 148, 192, 196, 265) and rubrics (e.g. pp. 150, 198, 310). Through these mediums, students are repeatedly reminded to attend to these features of text in the context of their own writing, not as decontextualized exercises in correctness. The utility of these checklists and rubrics for developing a sophisticated understanding of language is negligible, however. See, for example, the revision checklist in figure 6.2 as a representation of the level of depth repeated throughout the chapters. While students are repeatedly reminded to check drafts for these features, there are few exercises, examples, or constructs included to advance the level of sophistication of students’ understanding of these features.

Thus as students review their drafts in

![Revision Checklist](figure6.7.png)

**Figure 6.7 Revision Checklist.** This checklist represents the level of depth and reflection on language encouraged by many of the prompts in *Write Source* (p. 148).
light of these questions, they may not effectively use this reflective tool to improve their written language if they do not already bring significant prior knowledge to the project at hand.

Throughout each mode of writing, an annotated “student sample” serves as a mentor text; however, none of these annotations provides the kind of close reading that could aid student writers in understanding the function of the grammatical structures in the mentor text (e.g. pp. 142, 178, 279, 290). The annotations mostly describe blocks of content and name their purpose in the overall composition, exemplified by the following comments: “The writer includes some quotations from the author to support her ideas,” or “The middle paragraphs include paraphrased and quoted material” (pp. 290-291). These are fine things to include, but no annotation leads students to close analysis of textual structures and the way in which they intersect with meaning and tone. In contrast, *Image Grammar* (1999) suggests several sentence structures with extensive elaboration and exemplification of how the structures produce more vivid, dramatic, or precise content. Noden (1999) explains the use of an appositive, for example, as a structure that “expands details in the reader’s imagination,” then exemplifies with a simple sentence expanded with an appositive (pp. 7-8). Though Noden’s text is written for teachers, not students, the core concepts and examples provide a helpful illustration of the types of connections that are missing in *Write Source*.

In sum, the limited strengths of *Write Source* are its integration of some textual features in the context of student writing projects. As they develop their compositions, students are repeatedly reminded to check their word choices, sentence fluency, level of formality, and conventions with each assignment. However, the textbook is notably weak in its inclusion of exercises and examples to advance students’ flexible, intentional use of textual structures and features of language, so students employ the prompts at the level of skill they bring to the
assignment. The book also relegates attention to grammatical structures to revision, not generative stages of writing. Write Source is blatantly out of step with composition scholarship in its absolute lack of attendance to language variation at any point in the text.

**Writing with Power**

As with Write Source, the Six Traits are foregrounded in this textbook; in Writing with Power, they are linked to that titular goal of “writing with power,” and a brief description of each trait links voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions to audience and occasion. These brief descriptions of six different traits are followed by a one-page overview titled “The Power of Language,” a page that features a sampling of grammatical conventions that is more sophisticated than Write Source in that it links punctuation and grammatical structures to purposeful invention and arrangement, not merely proofreading and revision (p. 7). For example, the introductory page mentions parallelism as one of multiple “language strategies” that can add interest to a work; then in the later chapter on expository writing, students encounter a page that describes this language feature and prompts them to compose three sentences that could be integrated into their current project, thus linking a grammatical feature to an in-process composition (p. 250). This is a noteworthy feature of the textbook because of the expository development of the initial advice and the direct application not merely to an exercise, but to an in-process composition.

Immediately following this grammatical introduction is a trait unique to this textbook: a full page of exposition is devoted to language variation, noting that our language choices evolve from our social contexts and that the conventions an individual follows “are therefore not absolutely right or wrong. Rather,” the book’s author notes, “good communicators learn how to
‘code switch’” (p. 8). This recognition of code switching does not include any exercises that help students develop their skills (as in West Brown’s [2009] text, described in Chapter Two); however, the three-paragraph explanation moves beyond a passing tip, and does a better job than the other three textbooks of raising students’ awareness of language variation. The very next page gives students tips on editing for “mainstream” conventions, a subtle shift from the typical phrase “standard” English, which is often disavowed by linguists for its inaccuracy.

The second introductory chapter is titled “Developing Style and Voice” (p. 38), and this is a prime spot to include exposition, examples, and exercises that develop students’ understanding of the link between language features and rhetorical purpose. The chapter does move successfully beyond mere admonitions to advance students’ understanding in key ways. After a brief introduction, Chapter Two includes an annotated model—“A Ride Through Spain,” by Truman Capote—that highlights this published author’s use of figurative language, diction, and foreshadowing, as well as his switch from extended description to direct, action-oriented language (pp. 39-43). After reading, students are then prompted to identify some of the linguistic devices employed by Capote and to describe their effect on readers (p. 44), explicitly linking language usage to expressive and aesthetic purposes, not mere correctness.

In the middle of this chapter, the text returns to the earlier theme of language variation, spending three pages on the topic of “Understanding the Varieties of English.” It describes, in cursory form, English variations among countries and within the United States; though cursory, it does describe variation in positive terms, claiming that dialects “add color and richness to American English” (figure 6.3, p. 45).
“Standard English,” the text claims, reverting back to the more value-laden phrase, “is the formal English taught in school and used in newspapers, scholarly works, and many books” (p. 46). The primary benefit of this discussion is the knowledge of variation that it provides for all students, regardless of how close their home language is to the language of power. However, the advice to “use standard English when writing for school or for a large general audience” (p. 46) implies that a student reader has already mastered code-switching. Again, there are no detailed activities to develop students’ structural understanding of dialectical variation, as there are in West Brown’s (2009) *In Other Words*, summarized in Chapter Two. Thus, these pages provide a valuable foundational awareness to all students, but very little skill development for those who have not mastered Edited American English.

The chapter concludes by addressing topics common among the textbooks: denotation and connotation, figurative language, clichés, sentence variety, concision, and structural errors. In all, this 40-page chapter on style and voice—developed through explanations, examples, and student exercises—does more work than any of the other three textbooks both to develop students’ understanding of language variation and to foster their ability to use language structures purposefully to achieve a particular effect in their compositions.

After the introductory chapters, the textbook devotes six chapters to what it calls “Purposes of Writing” and an additional three chapters to research writing. Inserted into each chapter is a page titled “The Power of Language.” These pages feature extended descriptions and prompts that further develop the features mentioned in the introductory chapters. In the narrative chapter, for example, there is a page on fluency that begins with a description of what fluency is and why it matters. Students read a short sample paragraph that is then dissected for sentence structure, then they are encouraged to “Try It Yourself” (p. 145). The page concludes with a
short punctuation tip about commas after introductory elements. In every chapter, these
language-focused pages are inserted between prewriting and drafting prompts, thus directing
students’ focus to language much earlier in their writing processes than in other textbooks,
prompting them to use particular linguistic features intentionally as they compose.

Later in each chapter, as part of editing, students see a “Language of Power” page (the
inverse title of “Power of Language”) and read about a “power rule.” These pages focus on a
single rule and prompt students to edit their developing compositions for these rules. As research
on grammar instruction repeatedly notes, a targeted focus on a few rules is more instructional
than the general directive to proofread for all standard/mainstream conventions (Weaver,
McNally, and Moerman, 2001). Examples of “power rules” include the following:

- Use mainstream past tense forms of verbs (p. 152).
- Use subject forms of pronouns in the subject position (p. 209).
- Use only one negative word to express a negative idea (p. 361).

Notably, the power rules listed above also address common features of stigmatized dialects;
while Writing with Power does not make this connection explicit (other than perhaps hinting at it
with the phrase “language of power”), the choice to integrate these as “power rules,” not
“errors,” is a subtle distinction that hints at code-switching skills.

These chapters also provide annotated mentor texts from real-world publications and,
unlike the other textbooks, occasionally focus on features of the language in the mentor texts
such as sentence variation (pp. 43, 159), diction (pp. 42, 186), and transitions (pp. 235-236),
noting specifically how these structures influence things like meaning and tone.

In sum, Writing with Power contains features that are notably stronger than Write Source
and the two following textbooks. Writing with Power addresses language variation at several
points, and at times uses the phrase “mainstream English” instead of the value-laden “standard English.” Word- and sentence-level considerations are introduced at early stages of students’ compositions to promote the integration of intentional usage with idea generation, and conventions are interspersed and discussed with more attention to depth than to breadth. There are times when the textbook’s coverage of a specific topic is descriptive only, lacking exercises to develop students’ verbal skills, but overall the amount of content and approach to language is stronger in this textbook than in any of the other three.

**Writing Coach**

Pearson’s e-texts and online modules have several features similar to the two print textbooks and a few that are unique to this online platform. I begin by analyzing the e-text, which has a structure similar to *Write Source* and *Writing with Power*, then I move on to analyze the online writing platform for its presentation of language and conventions.

In keeping with the pattern of other textbooks, Pearson’s e-text begins with four introductory chapters that address topics like writing purposes, processes, genres, and structures. The first time language and conventions are addressed is in Chapter Three, which features an overview of the Six Traits and the writing process, and as with the prior two textbooks, I look specifically at voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. Unlike *Write Source* and *Writing with Power*, both of which spend several pages on each trait, *Writing Coach* introduces all six traits in a short paragraph followed by an overview that merely repeats the paragraph description in bulleted form, then a rubric that again repeats the same concepts in the interrogative. There is minimal elaboration on these traits beyond the repetition. As an example of the repetitive brevity, see figure 6.4, which is a side-by-side comparison of how sentence
fluency and conventions are described in these three formats. There is no elaboration in chapter three beyond what is depicted here.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Sentence Fluency} & \textbf{Conventions} \\
\hline
Sentence fluency refers to the rhythm and flow of writing. Keep the rhythm of your writing level by varying sentence patterns, and create flow by choosing sentence structures that match your meaning. For example, you might show the connection between two ideas by joining them in one longer sentence, or you might create emphasis by breaking off a series of long sentences with one short sentence. & By following the rules of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage, you help readers understand your ideas. \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Use of the Six Traits. Writing Coach uses the Six Traits as a heuristic, but the introduction to those traits is characterized by repetition, not progressive development of students’ understanding (pp. 26-28).}
\end{table}

After the description of the Six Traits, the chapter goes on to describe the common writing process, spending comparatively more time on each stage than was spent on each of the Six Traits. The first time that language and conventions are introduced is in the “revision” stage, where the acronym RADaR is used to describe revision moves: revise, add, delete, and reorder. Of the more particular advice given for each of these types of moves, the only mention of language and conventions is related to word choice—students are to “replace” unspecific words, “add” descriptive adjectives and adverbs, and “delete” repeated words. Sentence-level revision is mentioned only in terms of clarity of content, not structure and flow of language. When the chapter moves from “revision” to “editing” in the writing process, it gives students a checklist of common spelling, grammar, usage, and mechanical errors and a one-page reference for typical proofreading marks (p. 43). As with Write Source, this checklist review structure does not build students’ metacognitive awareness of editing strategies or their own error patterns, and so students will likely engage the prompt ineffectively, if at all.

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Chapter Four begins with six pages that are explicitly about sentence structure and paragraphing in compositions (pp. 48-53), describing sentences and paragraphs as the “building blocks to structure and style” (p. 48). There are a few examples of restructuring sentences by combining, compounding, and subordinating, but the main reason given for doing so is that it makes the writing more “interesting” (pp. 49 & 52), with no further explanation of how exactly varied sentence structures make content more interesting. This admonition to check for varied sentence structures and lengths is repeated in subsequent chapters, primarily in the “editing” stage, and this advice stays at the level of a repeated reminder, not a developed investigation or exercise. Additionally, the main reason given for attending to sentence structure is the flow and sound of text, both good traits of writing, but the given rationale does not mention the ways in which structures can emphasize and augment the meaning and tone of a composition. The Gallagher quotation from a sidebar (figure 6.5) illustrates a typical level of depth in Writing Coach’s advice with regard to this feature of writing.

In sum, the introductory chapters in the Writing Coach e-text do spend time describing features of language desired in a traditional composition, and the emphases of the foundational chapters are reiterated through the particular modal chapters. However, the link between grammatical structures and meaning is virtually nonexistent, and unlike Writing with Power, there is no introduction to the different registers and variations of the English language anywhere in these foundational chapters.

To further explore the integration of language and grammar into the genre-based writing chapters, I look closely at the chapter titled “Poetry and Description,” a genre that is ripe for

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exploration of the intersection between language structures and meaning. In the opening pages of the chapter, the text does mention the importance of “the musical qualities of language” and notes that free verse has a rhythm that reflects “the patterns of natural speech” (p. 120). In the three mentor texts that follow, however, none of the annotations highlights examples of these two descriptions, nor do they point out the ways in which sentence structures augment meaning or establish tone. Howard Moss’s poem (figure 6.6) is one clear example of a missed instructional opportunity. In this piece, an allusion to William Shakespeare’s Sonnet #18, the opening lines are highlighted and Moss’s figurative language is named in the comment. This very highlighted section also uses two, two-word sentences in succession in the second line, but this terse, conversational paraphrase of Shakespeare’s poem goes unnoted, as does the slightly irreverent tone established by this sentence construction.

Throughout the chapter and into the student’s main writing assignment, the dominant emphasis falls on sensory details, poetic conventions, and a few select poetic forms, all of which are simplified to a “toolbox” and checklist. As students brainstorm and draft their poems, no prompts help them consider the structures of their sentences and the ways in which poets manipulate structures for rhythm, musicality, and tone. As they are revising, students are prompted to “evaluate the natural sound of the rhythm” if writing a free verse poem. If they find that the poem sounds unnatural when read aloud, they are to “replace words to mimic natural speech patterns” (p. 134). That brief advice is the extent of the
instruction. While text sounds and rhythms have been mentioned in the chapter, student understanding of these features is not developed through mentor texts, examples, structural analyses, or exercises.

As with every other chapter in this and other textbooks, editing for conventions is separated from revision as a final consideration before proofreading, generally a good trait. *Writing Coach* employs the mini-lesson model, including a somewhat more detailed description of one grammatical feature among the repeated advice to check one’s draft for errors in grammar, mechanics, and spelling. In this poetry chapter, the mini lesson is on commas and phrases, giving an explanation of when commas are needed, a few examples, and the advice to “Apply it!” to one’s own poem (p. 137). Similar to *Writing with Power*, this focus on one or two features is a stronger instructional approach than the comprehensive grammar advice and extensive checklist in that the more limited grammatical scope yields better student learning (Weaver, McNally, & Moerman, 2001).

Attention to language is continued in the online writing platform, with students receiving feedback on in-process drafts on their sentence variety, structure, grammar, spelling, and capitalization. While this in-process focus on language is potentially good, the electronic feedback has no way of measuring artistry or the connection between structures and meaning. To further explore this disconnect, I wrote a response to a prompt and took one paragraph through multiple revisions. In response to a prompt that asked me to compare and contrast two brands of a similar product, I wrote the following introductory paragraph, intentionally written to reflect what I consider to be strong high-school writing:

For those in the market for a hybrid car, the options are continually increasing. However, two of the more classic and longstanding models are the Toyota Prius and the Honda Civic. Both are reliable cars made by companies with longstanding
In response to this paragraph, I received low scores on sentence length and sentence structure; too many of my sentences were similar in length, and *Writing Coach* highlighted sentences three and four as too similar in structure, not recognizing the parallelism that I intentionally employed to underscore the similarity of the two cars I was comparing. After taking the paragraph through three more revisions, making changes in response to *Writing Coach*'s feedback, I ended up with a paragraph that was more basic in its construction, but that pleased my e-valuator in every area but topic focus (consistently a 2/3):

In this report, I will describe a few differences between the Toyota Prius and the Honda Civic. These cars are the most commonly purchased hybrid vehicles, and they are very similar in that they are reliable, made by reputable companies, comparable in price, and get a similar amount of miles per gallon. It is difficult to decide which one is superior. However, consumers should know about the differences in style, maintenance costs, and overall environmental impact.

To my ears, the final paragraph lacks the style and flow of my initial paragraph and reads as something constructed by a less mature writer. However, in order to improve my scores on language features, I had to ignore my developed sense of linguistic style and focus on structural variety and basic length variation in isolation, divorcing these choices from meaning-making and intended impact. The immediate feedback, which is advertised as a strength of *Writing Coach*'s electronic platform, has the potential to actually reduce the quality of students’ prose by sending them through surface-focused revisions where their only source of information on the quality of their language comes from a computer algorithm.

Finally, across all of these sections of the e-text and writing platform, there is no mention of language variation. While *Write Source* essentially ignores variation, *Writing Coach* misrepresents it in another common and more egregious way: by including certain constructions
under a “common usage errors” heading. For example, double negatives are housed under the chapter heading “Miscellaneous Problems in Usage” and are framed as something that “may sometimes be used in informal speech” (p. 520); there is no acknowledgement that this construction is organic to certain regional varieties of English, such as Appalachian American English. While *Writing with Power* also speaks to double negatives (described earlier in this chapter), that textbook frames the elimination of double negatives as a “power rule,” a decision to be made in the context of formal writing (p. 361). In *Writing Coach*, such patterns are grouped by structure, labeled “informal” at best and “error” at worst, and corrections are suggested. In this case, neither the student who uses double negatives nor the student who scoffs at the “obvious” nature of this admonition, is served by the absence of discussion of cultural and contextual variations.

Though the format is different, *Writing Coach* shares many common weaknesses with *Write Source*; it ignores language variation and does very little to develop students’ ability to manipulate grammar and syntax purposefully for effect. Similar to my critique in Chapter Five, Critical Thinking, the online writing platform further weakens the textbook because it gives students feedback and directives for revision based solely on easily measured surface features of text. This inability to give feedback based on style or effect further divorces grammatical structures from the substance of a piece, reducing language to mere correctness and, as in the case of my revised paragraph, encouraging linguistic choices that actually reduce the maturity and sophistication of the text.
**Writer’s Workspace/Grammar and Composition Handbook**

As described in Table 6.1, McGraw Hill’s textbook package includes both a print *Grammar and Composition Handbook* and the electronic *Writer’s Workspace* that emphasizes reading-writing connections. The print handbook is 542 pages. Three hundred and forty-five of those pages are devoted to grammar, usage, and mechanics, and are restructured as content to be learned, not as skills to be integrated into composition. There is no preface in the handbook that frames the presentation of grammar in any way; rather, students jump right into a glossary of terms and abbreviations, then move into multiple chapters on parts of speech, parts of a sentence, subject-verb agreement, capitalization, etc. Because there is no introduction, it is unclear how the publishers imagine these grammar pages being used. The online features only occasionally refer to the handbook for supplementary knowledge, implying that it could function as a reference during composing, but the e-text does not systematically build this cross-referencing into every assignment. The layout of the handbook is progressive, working from basic parts of speech to the construction of sentences then into common problems, so the structure suggests the possibility of chronological work through the chapters. In typical “handbook” fashion, students learn what a particular feature of writing is, read examples of it in isolated sentences, then complete some kind of activity (identifying, correcting, selecting) to further solidify this knowledge.

The other 40% of the print handbook is mostly developed around a brief description of five different modes of writing, framed with the five-step writing process described in Chapter Four. While the electronic platform makes a few references to the grammar handbook, the writing chapters in the print textbook make no such references, even as students are instructed to revise their essays for specific linguistic features. For example, the response essay gives students a “sentence-editing checklist” that asks them to check for things like fragments, run-ons, and
subject-verb agreement (p. 460). These exact features are detailed on prior pages with examples and explanations, but the text does not point students back to the earlier pages, thus further detaching the declarative grammatical knowledge from the procedural knowledge of written language usage.

Additionally, the print handbook makes almost no mention of the ways in which language varies. The only mention is the brief advice to take a formal tone, depicted earlier in this chapter in figure 6.1. Interestingly, this very box is repeated several times, word for word, in different writing chapters (pp. 443, 457, & 476) but the advice is never exemplified, developed, or varied in any way. There is no mention on any page of the ways that language varies by regional, class, and racial/ethnic groups; neither does the text discuss how usage changes across the featured writing modes. The structures of language tediously detailed across 345 pages are presented as the static, standard version of the English language, and no examples help students structurally understand variation, or even formality/informality.

A review of the online Writer’s Workspace reveals a somewhat better integration of grammar with writing, though it, too, contains nothing to assist students in further developing their understanding of language variation. As described earlier, the online platform builds modules around eight different modes, with three more specific assignments under each broad category. Each assignment contains three steps: reading, reading-writing connection, and writing. The questions and prompts in the reading section all deal with comprehension of, response to, and evaluation of the content and not an analysis of features of the text. These types of analyses are reserved for the second step, the reading-writing connection.
Of the 24 different writing prompts (eight parent modules with three assignments in each), 16 contain a similarly structured “Reading-Writing Connection” workbook that looks like a fillable pdf. (Each of the eight parent modules includes a “challenge” assignment that is an open-ended, general prompt, and these do not contain the reading-writing workbook.) These electronic workbooks, depicted in figure 6.7, use the mentor text to exemplify different features of writing that the students are then to emulate for practice before moving on to the final, feature assignment. The structure of these workbooks is fairly parallel, with most of them treating topics like thesis statements, paragraphing, and organization. (Exceptions to these topics are found in the poetry and script modules, which appropriately focus more on literary elements.)

Among the essay-based workbooks, an oft-repeated feature is analysis and practice of sentence structures. For example, in the “Political/Social Essay” depicted in figure 6.7, students re-read a paragraph from Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience,” then are asked, “How does Thoreau vary his sentence structures in this passage, and to what effect” (p. 19)? An answer to this question is provided for students with a description of the different lengths of sentences and the observation that shorter sentences and delayed subjects are used to emphasize certain details, and varied structures avoid monotony. On the following page, students are then prompted to write a practice paragraph for their own essays, focusing on varied sentence length.
This particular section of the workbooks, repeated in most of the essay-based modules, is among the more solid features of the textbooks in that it uses a mentor text, asks students to reflect on sentence construction and its effect, provides an interpretation for students that repeatedly moves beyond Writing Coach’s generic rationale of making writing “interesting,” then asks students to immediately draft a paragraph for their own essays while focusing intentionally on grammatical structures prior to the revision stage. This multi-step approach reflects Noden’s (1999) approach to developing students’ facility with varied sentence structures through model texts and explicit discussion of the link between structure and meaning, structure and tone.

Also noteworthy in the “Reading-Writing Practice” workbooks is that all 16 of them do include a grammar e-worksheet, even the creative genres. These e-worksheets focus on a single grammatical feature, such as the adverb clause in the “Praise Poem” module (figure 6.8); they explain the feature, show where it occurs in the mentor text, then have students practice it in decontextualized sentences. The strength of this feature is that it focuses on a single grammatical component and uses the mentor text to exemplify that component in the context of a published text. The weakness is that across the two pages, the subsequent explanations and student practice use mostly decontextualized sentences that are repeatedly shown by research not to transfer to students’ writing (e.g. Elley et al., 1976; Lindblom & Dunn, 2006; Strom, 1960; Weaver et al., 2006).

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**Grammar Practice**

*Adverb Clauses*

Adverb clauses are one type of subordinate clause—they contain a subject and a verb but cannot stand alone as a sentence. Adverb clauses tell where, when, why, under what conditions, or to what degree a situation or an action occurred.

Look at this line from "I Hear America Singing":

> The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,

The clause as he measures his plank or beam is an adverb clause that modifies the verb singing.

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Figure 6.8 *Writer’s Workspace* Grammar Practice. Each reading-writing workbook contains two pages that focus on one grammatical feature ("Praise Poem," p. 10).
The third and final step in each module is to move from the reading-writing practice into the featured composition assignment. Each writing screen in the 24 assignments includes an annotated sample, and tabs across the top walk students through their composition from planning to publishing with five to ten drop-down instructions along the side (approximated in figure 6.9 on the following page). While the integration of grammar and language concerns is not completely consistent across the modules, I closely read the political/social essay, featured here, for where and how the module integrates the focus on sentence fluency depicted earlier in figure 6.7.

![Figure 6.9 Writer’s Workspace Writing Platform 4 (Approximation). The above image is an approximation of the layout that students see when they begin writing.](image)

Students are to begin by visiting the “guided model tab,” so I look at the 14 annotations of the model for further reinforcement of the skills practiced in the “Reading-Writing Connection” workbook. The tabs focus on a wide variety of text features, including thesis placement, organization, and primary source usage; one of the annotations does highlight the writer’s sentence variety and another one highlights the use of a rhetorical question, reinforcing the earlier practice and emphasis. When students begin composing, they are reminded to vary their syntax in the drafting stage of the process, one step earlier than most of the other textbooks,
which usually do not address syntax until revision. This emphasis is again repeated in the revision and editing stages, with editing for correctness separated from construction for rhetorical effect. Sentence variety is also a component in the hyperlinked rubric (upper right of figure 6.9), but here, the descriptions of quality sentence variety reference only smooth flow as the goal, not strategic use of structures to enhance meaning or tone.

Overall, the *Grammar and Composition Handbook* contains some notable weaknesses and *Writer’s Workspace* contains a few distinctive strengths. Of the four textbooks in the sample, this package ties *Write Source* for the least attention to language variation with only one pull-out box repeated three times in the print handbook naming the difference between formal and informal tone. The print handbook and the e-worksheets are largely decontextualized, static grammar instruction, and the composition sections of both the electronic and print texts do not even reference the 345 pages of detailed grammatical instruction. However, a distinctive strength of the online writing platform is the integration of sentence structures into the composition process more thoroughly and consistently than any other textbook, with this feature highlighted in mentor texts, then practiced, integrated, and discussed for its impact on the message and reader, not merely for aural flow.

**Summative Assessment**

With regard to grammar and conventions, all four textbooks devote copious page space to a comprehensive handbook-style layout of rules, structures, and parts of speech, a weakness given that 1) such handbooks are easily accessible elsewhere if needed for remediation, 2) in terms of basic standards alignment, they cover content that is associated with much younger grades, and 3) such an approach implies “grammar” as a static body of declarative knowledge.
Because there is almost no cross-referencing between these handbooks and composition assignments, they serve to further disconnect language and meaning-making, reflecting Aull’s (2015) critique of the Common Core Standards. Of the four textbooks, however, *Writing with Power* and *Writer’s Workspace* rise above the others in their connections between linguistic structures and generative stages of writing, and in their use of mentor texts to demonstrate the ways in which grammatical features function meaningfully in published texts.

With regard to language variation, only *Writing with Power* addresses this in a way that is reflective of composition research and scholarship. While this textbook’s discussion is far from comprehensive, it moves beyond a mere description of dialects to actually affirm variation as a rich feature of language, and it avoids framing dialectical features as errors. The other three textbooks only describe language variations via two registers—formal and informal—and do very little to help students understand even this basic difference. No textbook, however, comes close to David West Brown’s *In Other Words* (2009), described in Chapter Two and highlighted for its ability to simultaneously develop students’ knowledge of linguistic structures, stylistic choices, and code switching.

In sum, with regard to language and conventions as a whole, *Writing with Power* is the strongest textbook, followed by the electronic platform from McGraw-Hill, *Writer’s Workspace*. *Writing Coach, Write Source*, and the print *Grammar and Composition Handbook* may purport to align with Common Core Standards, but they are far out of step with current scholarship on pre-college writing and emphasize declarative, decontextualized grammar while completely excluding any focus on language variation.
CHAPTER SEVEN

New Literacies

The final trait that I identify and analyze in this textbook sample is the integration of new literacies into the composition curriculum. True twenty-first-century “college and career readiness” includes an understanding of digital and visual literacy and multimodal composing. The phrase “new literacies” is used by scholars in English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies as a blanket term to include a set of literacy skills not addressed by standard, school-based composition forms like the personal narrative, persuasive essay, informative paper, response to literature, and research paper. “New literacies” includes more recently validated and ever-evolving literacy skills like reading images, composing collaboratively, developing audiovisual and multimodal compositions, synthesizing and remixing multiple information streams, and communicating globally (Hicks, 2013; Kajder, 2010; Swenson, Rozema, Young, McGrail, & Whitin, 2005).

To contrast the phrase “new literacies,” I use the phrases “essayistic literacies” and “school-based forms” to refer to the commonly taught essay forms and practices like the personal narrative, a thesis-driven essay, a five-paragraph theme, etc. (Hesse, 1999; Trimbur, 1990). The term “digital literacies” refers to a specific sub-set of new literacies that requires students to successfully use computers and other electronic devices to skillfully consume and produce text types that are dependent upon the electronics that support them. For example, a report on climate change composed in Microsoft Word would still be a school-based form because that same essay could be composed independently of the electronic tool. However, a student’s climate change podcast would be categorized as a digital literacy because it is dependent on the recording and editing technology for its production.
While the previous traits of pre-college writing all align with the Common Core State Standards to some degree, this particular trait is the least aligned with standards. The CCSS only mention digital media in the service of essayistic literacies; students are to “use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.6). They are also to use both print and digital sources to access information for research writing (W.11-12.8). These are all good skills and worthy uses of digital tools; however, this standard could be applied in what Hicks (2013) calls a “digitally convenient,” not “digitally enhanced” way (p. 42). In other words, as with the above climate change example, students might compose only in school-based forms and meet these standards by gathering information electronically, composing an essay in a Word document, and sharing it through a Dropbox rather than using features unique to the medium. There are no standards that explicitly require students to understand and apply the conventions, design considerations, and unique features of particular digital, visual, or multimodal forms.

In contrast, scholars in English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies promote students’ study of the intersection of form and content and argue that students must develop reading and writing strategies that allow them to skillfully consume and produce text in digital, visual, and multimodal formats. CWPA’s (2011) “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” for example, names the importance of explicit instruction in how technologies mediate content; in this framework, students are to “analyze print and electronic texts to determine how technologies affect reading and writing processes.” They “use technology strategically and with a clear purpose that enhances the writing for the audience” (p. 10). In order to address this aspect of pre-college writing thoroughly, textbooks that claim to be college preparatory must apply the technology standards in a way that reflects the considerations put forth by CWPA and other
professional organizations, namely the intentionality of medium selection and analysis of the way that the composition platform is inextricably linked to content generation.

Utilizing digital tools and publishing platforms often naturally connects in-class text production with real-world writing situations, as new literacy forms are likely to be found in real-world situations. As noted in Chapter Two, one recurring trait in the scholarship on new literacy instruction is that digital composition is more likely to yield natural audiences, with opportunities for people to join conversations, share stories, and create aesthetic texts, often with the assumption that one’s text will be read and possibly responded to (Baron, 1999; DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, & Hicks, 2010; Hicks, 2013; Stroupe, 2000). Thus in my analysis of the textbooks, I choose to code any sections that attend to real-world writing situations; although not all “real-world writing” can be classified as new literacy practices, this is often where textbooks do give attention to digital and visual forms because of the pervasive nature of new literacies in the workplace, entertainment, and social communication.

As noted in the earlier analysis of rhetorical knowledge and versatility (Chapter Four), across the sample, textbooks mention the importance of technology in the publishing stage of the writing process, but they revert to traditional forms in the prewriting and drafting stages, repeatedly making reference to things like “introduction, body, and conclusion” (e.g. Writing with Power, p. 23) or drafting a working thesis (e.g. Writing Coach, p. 180), not necessarily relevant when one is composing outside of school-based forms. In contrast, Hicks’s (2013) Crafting Digital Writing: Composing Texts Across Medias and Genres also uses a common process-based approach, but considerations unique to the medium are embedded throughout the process and notably influence what students are doing at every stage. This book, described in Chapter Two, serves as a helpful comparison throughout the following textbook analysis,
providing an example of what “best practices” in new literacy pedagogy look like from conception to publication, and across several different mediums.

Across the four textbooks, I examine several common locations to indicate quality or lack thereof. First, as three of the four textbooks feature introductory chapters on composition in general, I look here to see the degree to which new literacy forms are acknowledged in the foundational chapters. Secondly, I review the modal chapters that form the bulk of each book. As textbooks develop chapters around modes like narrative, exposition, and response, to what degree do they acknowledge the way that such forms can be employed in the creation of digital and multimodal compositions? And is the medium tied to the composition process and not merely mentioned at the end of the process as a way to publish students’ work? Finally, I look for the inclusion of chapters specifically on new literacy forms and real-world writing practices. While entire chapters are devoted to personal narratives, persuasive essays, responses to literature, and research-based assignments, I’m interested in which textbooks give new literacy practices similar extended attention, developing skills like blogging, video editing, and web communication not in the service of a traditional school-based form, but as unique and complex forms in their own right. Because the treatment of new literacy practices varies greatly across the textbooks, I do not begin this analysis by noting general trends across the sample as I did in previous chapters. Rather, I move directly to a text-by-text analysis of the degree of attention to new literacy practices.

*Write Source*

In Chapters Four, Five, and Six of my analysis, *Write Source* repeatedly fell short of the composition principles I use to analyze pre-college writing textbooks, and this final point of
evaluation is no different. *Write Source* prioritizes essayistic literacies almost to the exclusion of new literacies, with the exception of a few mediocre pages on “Writing in the Workplace” (pp. 507-521), further described on the following pages.

The introductory chapters in *Write Source* ground composition in traditional essayistic literacies. An early chapter titled “Using the Writing Process” clearly ties process-based composition to traditional forms in multiple ways. In the very overview to this writing process, the computer is mentioned as a tool that might “speed up the process” of composition, but the textbooks’ authors immediately go on to note that when it comes to writing, “speed doesn’t count for much” (p. 7). This is true advice; however, it is interesting that the start of this chapter clearly frames computers as a tool (of negligible use) in the service of traditional forms. This relegation of digital tools is furthered on subsequent pages as the writing process is described; in the second stage of the process, students are repeatedly told to get their ideas “on paper” (pp. 9, 10), perhaps just a common figure of speech, but also furthering the suggestion that composition means writing in traditional alphabetic forms.

After a brief overview of the writing process, the process is modeled by a hypothetical student, Lakendra Harris. The textbook walks the reader through Lakendra’s process to write an expository essay for history class on the Cuban Missile Crisis. Key steps in her process include taking notes on note cards (p. 16), generating a thesis statement (p. 17), and developing a paragraphed draft with a clear “beginning, middle, and ending” (pp. 18-19). Interestingly, the “publishing” stage of the writing process gives two sets of tips on format and presentation: one set for submitting a handwritten copy and another for submitting a computer-generated copy, establishing that there is little difference between the handwritten and digital version of this text other than surface features of presentation (p. 28). Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with
modeling a students’ use of process-based writing, but as the illustrative example of a
universalized process, this clearly establishes for the student reader what we mean when we
speak of composition: alphabetic text on paper to generate a strictly verbal essay.

Another foundational chapter in this and other textbooks is the explication of the Six
Traits. As with the chapter on process, these traits are purported to apply relatively universally to
all composition. There are several traits that could align well with a discussion of digital and
visual literacies. For example, within the Six-Trait paradigm, “Organization” is a logical place to
integrate different forms of composition, as one must organize content differently among genres
and across platforms. Indeed, the introduction to this trait asserts that “writing cannot be a cookie
cutter operation” (p. 59); nevertheless, as this trait is developed, the textbook again provides
universalized advice that supposedly applies to any form. It notes the importance of things like
having a “beginning, middle, and end” in an essay or report (p. 60), achieving paragraph
coherence (p. 65), and organizing main points to support a thesis (p. 66). Again, these are all fine
traits to promote for some types of composing; it is the use of them in introductory chapters as
the guiding principles of all composition that clearly suggests the types of writing students must
master are traditional, school-based forms.

Additionally, *Write Source* includes a section on “Presentation,” sometimes included as a
“plus one” in the “6+1 Trait Rubric,” and this would be another logical place to discuss new
literacies since the conveyance of content is most visibly altered in different forms. However,
most of this five-page section is about formatting a document: selecting appropriate fonts, setting
margins, and spacing the writing. The only mention of anything remotely digital or visual is a
single page that describes the value of adding graphics to an essay (p. 95). This one page does
include images of tables, graphs, and diagrams; a call-out box briefly describes how these visual
representations of information communicate and gives the student writer a practical tip for their incorporation, so there is at least some acknowledgement that the information in writing can take forms other than alphabetic, paragraphed text.

After these preliminary overviews, the textbook returns to the writing process with greater detail. Both within and following these introductory chapters, digital tools are mentioned as part of the final “publishing” stage of the writing process. In the introductory section on publishing, students are invited to consider multiple print-based and electronic places to publish, including creating their own website. As evidenced by figure 7.1, however, web sites are presented as places to showcase students’ finished work; the compositions are developed independently of the medium with no consideration of the conventions of web-based publishing while students are drafting. Additionally, a one-page explanation of web creation is insufficient to thoroughly address both the technical considerations and the conventions of the form.

Note, for example, the response to the question, “How do I make the pages?” The answer to this question is to use a word processing program, ask a teacher, or look for answers on the Internet, hardly a thorough explanation of web-based composition. In contrast, Hicks’s (2013) book, described in Chapter Two as a model of excellent digital writing instruction, spends 24 pages on composing for the web and integrates

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considerations of the medium from the very beginning of the writing process.

In the modal chapters that follow this introduction, electronic platforms are also mentioned in the publishing stage of writing, but little attention is given to composing specifically for online or multimodal forms. The problem, as noted earlier, is that digital media are introduced as an afterthought, at the end of a composition process during which students did not consider the traits of particular 21st-century genres at all. For example, after writing a thesis-driven analysis of a poem, student writers are invited to consider publishing this analysis on a blog or message board (p. 322); however, throughout the composing process, there was no attention given to the voice and style of online reviews and analyses. Characteristics of blogs and message boards were completely absent from the instruction, and so the product of rigid adherence to the chapter is a traditional classroom-based essay that would be out of step with the conversational style of a message board or the comparatively informal style of a blog.

In addition to the publishing stage of the writing process, another common place to acknowledge new literacies is in the context of a research paper, most notably the use of digital and online sources and student evaluation of validity and reliability. Write Source devotes one page to “using the internet,” detailing brief guidelines for how a student might use the web to gather sources for a thesis-driven research paper (p. 374). As is increasingly common, there are pieces of advice that address thoughtful navigation and consumption of web sources, including the observation of URLs, the use of hyperlinks, and experimentation with keywords. However, there is very little content that addresses the particular ways in which students might collect, organize, and document their digital resources through digital tools such as Shelfster, Evernote, or Zotero, tools explicitly named by Hicks in his chapter on composing web texts (2013, p.43). While the advice itself is not faulty and does align with the one Common Core standard that
mentions digital resources (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8), it is again an approach that relegates new literacies to the role of convenient tools used in the service of essayistic literacy practices.

The most unique treatment of new literacies occurs within a chapter on “Writing Across the Curriculum,” which includes a 16-page sub-section titled “Writing in the Workplace.” In this section, students are introduced to writing business letters, reports, proposals, memos, email messages, and brochures. While not all of these forms can be categorized as “new literacies,” brief instructions on composing an email do introduce students to the more formal conventions of a ubiquitous electronic form, and brochures acknowledge the role of the visual in communicating a message. Each genre includes a page of writing guidelines and a sample of the genre. Interestingly, throughout this chapter, the heuristics of earlier chapters are applied, namely the linear writing process, six-traits of writing, and the structural advice of beginning, middle, and end (p. 518). Unique considerations and conventions are sometimes discussed within these frameworks—for example ending an email by letting the recipient know what follow-up action is needed (p. 518) or revising a brochure for effective use of headings and images (p. 520). The treatment is terse, given that each form receives a mere two pages of discussion; however, it is the one place in the text that actually brings together real-world composing, new literacies, and a consideration of authentic purposes throughout the composition process.

In sum, I tally these sections to conclude that Write Source devotes a total of seven pages exclusively to new literacies, and the treatment within these seven pages is cursory. Digital tools are mentioned throughout the school-based forms of writing, but are most often named as a means to publish a traditional essay; the composition itself is not influenced by digital technologies in any way prior to the suggested publishing. The overall message of the textbook is
that the forms that matter most are the traditional thesis-driven essays and personal reflections written for academic purposes; the changing forms of real-world communication are only briefly addressed as isolated pages, not as full chapters devoted to developing students’ understanding the genres and conventions.

**Writing with Power**

Compared with *Write Source*, *Writing with Power* includes more attention to new literacies as distinct genres and skills, not merely as tools. Essayistic literacies are still primary, taking up the bulk of the 1000+-page tome (along with the extensive grammar handbook, discussed previously in Chapter Six), but at several points, digital, visual, and web-based composition and analysis are addressed in comparatively more purposeful and thorough ways.

The introductory chapters include brief discussions of topics such as the Six Traits, “The Power of Language,” “The Writing Process,” and a short discussion on “Writing in the 21st Century.” The exposition on this latter page acknowledges that students already engage in multiple forms of digital writing that follow “unique and often evolving conventions” (p. 13). Appropriately, the textbook goes on to note that “there is no single way to write that is ‘right’ for every occasion” (p. 13), acknowledging that writing shifts with purpose, audience, occasion, and genre. This is a helpful grounding concept that receives little development in the introductory chapters beyond this one-page acknowledgment; the majority of the 129 pages of foundational material direct students toward essayistic literacies with more extensive discussions on topics like manuscript appearance (p. 33), paragraph development (p. 90), and thesis statements (p. 114). Nevertheless, the importance of new literacies as legitimate forms of study in the
composition classroom is a concept that is at least introduced, and is also reinforced throughout the textbook.

Throughout the chapters on essayistic literacies, two unique features remind students of the introductory information on new literacies. Chapters that house traditional classroom-based forms (persuasive writing, writing about literature, research and report writing, etc.) take up 336 pages and develop mostly around linear process models and mentor texts. However, each chapter includes what I call “enrichment pages,” one-page inserts with a colorful sidebar indicating how they augment the main content of each chapter. Repeated in these modal chapters are pages labeled “In the Media,” which prompt students to analyze and reflect on media representation, forms, audiences, and language usage. Each page includes both the description of a genre or media-based issue and is followed by a suggested activity to further develop students’ facility with the discussed medium, genre, or issue.

The image in figure 7.2 displays the typical focus and depth of the inserted “In the Media” pages. This particular page, though brief, does guide...

Figure 7.10 In the Media. This is a typical "In the Media" page, inserted in each chapter throughout Writing with Power (p. 221).
students to consider how they might read an image and names traits unique to visual communication (e.g. shape, line, color, texture). The final paragraph suggests an activity for students to extend their learning into a unique creation, thus coupling receptive activity with expressive activity. Each page on its own is insufficiently brief (especially when compared with the 21 pages devoted to the particularities of video text in Hicks’s (2013) Crafting Digital Writing); however, the repetition within each chapter coupled with the reinforcement at the end of the chapter (described next) communicates that the complexity and artistry of digital and visual forms are valid aspects of a composition classroom and are distinctly different in their conventions and structures.

Each of these chapters also ends with a two-page “Writing Lab” (figure 7.3) that connects the core project of the chapter to other genres. In these pages, students are exposed to different forms of composition, including some digital, visual, and real-world forms. The exposition provides brief instruction and information on composing in these forms. The strengths of this repeated, two-page insertion is that students are repeatedly encountering forms beyond classroom-based essays and are prompted by the textbook to think about how the content of their composition

![Writing Lab](image)

Figure 7.3 Writing Lab Extensions. At the end of each chapter, students are prompted to adapt traditional compositions to different forms (p. 182).
would shift for these different forms. The drawbacks are that there is no extended discussion of the rhetorical moves and choices one must make within these forms, and they’re positioned at the end of the chapter as a post-script, the afterthought to the central content of the chapter.

In a chapter on descriptive writing, for example, students complete a feature assignment describing how they get from one classroom to another. After 20 pages focused on this particular essay, the textbook presents a two-page writing lab with extension projects that ask the student to adapt aspects of their content into other forms. On the first page of this writing lab, featured in figure 7.3, student writers are prompted to use the contents of their essay to develop an oral proposal, plan a video game, draw a map, or compose in another genre. The second page of this lab (not pictured) focuses on descriptive writing more generally and asks students to write a business letter, a business proposal, and practice timed writing. Though not all of these forms within the “Project Corner” fit the definition of new literacies, several of them do (such as the design of a video game), and students are prompted to actually adapt their content for these new forms, not merely publish a prior essay online. However, as seen in figure 7.3, the instruction to complete this adaptation in an informed way is quite minimal, and could end up functioning as what Hicks calls a “superfluous add-on” (2013, p. 121), a token activity and not something that makes students conscious of their thinking and writing process within the genre.

In addition to the chapters focused on essayistic literacies, this 1000-page tome includes a 150-page section devoted to “21st Century School and Workplace Skills.” Within this section—which includes subtopics like “Taking Standardized Tests” and “Vocabulary”—the textbook devotes 27 pages to “Media and Technology” (pp. 589-615). Of all four textbooks, this is the most extensive discussion of new literacies, and multiple pages adapt the composition process to
reflect the unique choices that writers make in digital platforms. Some of the uniquely positive features of this section include the following:

- Information and advice about typeface choices that reflect visual considerations, especially readability for audience and font type for particular situations (p. 592)
- Composing processes for audio and video that don’t just repeat the same five steps used to compose print texts, but include many considerations unique to the medium, such as writing a brief or creating a storyboard in pre-production (p. 598)
- Advice for web publishing that includes considering purpose and audience in light of the medium at the beginning of the composing process, not as a final step (p. 604)
- A section on “netiquette,” or etiquette for online communication that advises against all uppercase or lowercase text and cautions against forwarding others’ work or unwanted messages (p. 614)

These 27 pages cover multiple forms and so naturally lack the depth of Hicks’s (2013) text, which spends the same amount of pages exploring just one form of digital writing. Additionally, the textbook’s placement of this content makes it appear less important than the essayistic forms; all the traditional forms are listed under a unit titled “Purposes of Writing,” and this “Guide to 21st Century School and Workplace Skills” is structured as a supplementary sub-section between the writing and grammar foci. Despite this subordination, in comparison with other textbooks, *Writing with Power* goes well beyond them in its detailed attention to processes and conventions that are unique to the different media.

In sum, *Writing with Power* devotes the most space to traditional school-based forms; however, in comparison with the rest of the sample, it gives much more extensive attention to new literacies. Roughly 40 pages are devoted exclusively to new literacies, and this does not
include the “Writing Lab” pages that sometimes prompt students to adapt their compositions to digital and visual genres. As with the previous evaluative foci, *Writing with Power* again shows better alignment to the scholarship on pre-college composition, though there is noted room for improvement.

*Writing Coach*

Analyzing these final two textbooks for new literacies is interesting because they both include an e-text and an online writing platform as part of their package. Thus it would seem likely that these two textbooks have the advantage in promoting digital literacies given their format. However, analysis of *Writing Coach* and *Writer’s Workspace* show that these two publications promote school-based forms just as heavily as the previous two print textbooks. They both have unique features that promote a few new literacy practices, and they both make use of hyperlinking and embedded media in their instruction of students; however, *Writing Coach* especially emphasizes essayistic literacies, and neither of the electronic platforms are superior to the print *Writing with Power* with regard to building students’ understanding of conventions of and opportunities with digital and multimodal composition.

As with the previous two textbooks, *Writing Coach* begins with introductory chapters that establish basic purposes for writing and frameworks for the composing process. The first chapter, titled “You, the Writer,” acknowledges the types of writing that students do in their everyday lives, including texting, emailing, and writing essays in school (p. 3). Brief notes on technology explain that the Internet can facilitate collaboration in writing. Though limited in depth, it is promising that this textbook begins by acknowledging students’ everyday literacy practices. Chapter Two, “Types of Writing,” is simply a long list of genres and forms within
those genres. Across the 18 pages of summarized forms, the text does note new literacies, including blogs (pp. 9, 24), internet articles (p. 17), advertisements (pp. 19, 24), blog comments (p. 20), emails (p. 22), and multimedia projects (p. 25). Despite these acknowledgements, the overall instructional value of such a chapter is dubious—it is unclear what a student writer might gain from 18 pages of genre summaries averaging three to four sentences in length. Nevertheless, an implicit message of these opening two chapters is that writing takes many forms and is encountered in many contexts, a message in line with new literacy practices.

If this is a message of the opening chapters, it is almost immediately undermined by Chapter Three, “The Writing Process.” This foundational chapter, as with most other textbooks, is built around the Six Traits and the linear writing process. On the first page of the chapter, students are informed that “good writing has specific qualities, or traits” and that one of these traits is a “well-organized paper” with “an obvious plan” (p. 26). Despite the fact that students ostensibly read through a list of 50+ forms that places blogging on the same plane of validity as a traditional cause-and-effect essay, this foundational chapter moves students back toward the notion that when we speak of composition we are talking primarily about “a paper” in the traditional, school-based sense. Throughout the chapter, the thesis-driven essay dominates this foundational writing instruction, with students advised to include their thesis in the introduction, elaborate on and support that thesis in the body of the paper, and restate the thesis in the conclusion (p. 35). In the final publishing stage, new literacies are mentioned as students are advised to consider where to publish their work, including venues and forms like blogs, online journals, multimedia presentations, and visual displays (p. 47). However, as with the repeated practice in Write Source, these forms are imposed at the end, after a writing process devoted to
traditional essayistic forms, and they do not direct the choices students make throughout the composition process.

The final introductory chapter is titled “Sentences, Paragraphs, and Compositions,” and unfolds with fidelity to that title. The first few pages of the chapter—instructions on combining and compounding sentences—could apply to any form, but the chapter progresses to apply the sentence lessons to paragraphs with a clear topic sentence (p. 50) and thesis-driven compositions with a clear beginning, middle, and end (p. 53).

Throughout the modal chapters of this textbook, a distinguishing feature is the use of the electronic forum in the service of traditional essayistic literacies. As students progress through nonfiction and fiction narration, exposition, persuasion, and responses to literature, the chapters unfold in a uniform fashion, suggesting topics and guiding students through a linear writing process. In support of these central projects, sidebars direct students to several digital tools that they can use as they develop their writing. Writing Coach provides students with an online journal, and they are repeatedly prompted to write in that. They can use pop-up sticky notes to record responses to prompts or mentor texts (figure 7.4). An embedded audio feature will read aloud the mentor texts to students. Throughout the array of traditional compositions, students can follow hyperlinks to graphic organizers, mostly digital worksheets that they can complete electronically to organize their ideas.

On the one hand, this mirrors Hicks’s (2013) adaptation of the writing process for digital platforms. For example, in Hicks’s chapter on composing for the web, he encourages students to

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22 From Writing Coach 2012 Student Edition E-Text 1-Year License Grade 12 by Pearson Education. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.
use web-based tools like Gliffy for mind mapping or Diigy for collecting and sharing ideas; digital tools are naturally a part of a digital writing process. The main difference is that Hicks uses these tools in the service of writing a web page while *Writing Coach* uses the tools in the service of school-based forms. Students use the digital tools, but they do not use them to produce digital compositions, thus displaying that distinction between what Hicks (2013) called “digitally convenient,” and “digitally enhanced” (p. 42). While the tools may make production and distribution more convenient, at no point are students using them intentionally to augment their alphanumeric text.

Supporting each featured composition is the interactive “writing coach,” the electronic platform where students can compose and get feedback on sentence variation, coherence, idea development, grammar, and other traits of their writing. Though several genres ask students to upload a paper for human grading by the teacher, most of the genres feature given topics that students compose within the digital platform and submit for electronic feedback. As with the other electronic features, the interactive writing coach serves merely as a tool to support essayistic literacies. The screen shot in figure 7.5 is representative of the interactive writing feature that accompanies most chapters. After selecting a topic and choosing to receive feedback either by

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23 From *Writing Coach 2012 Student Edition E-Text 1-Year License Grade 12* by Pearson Education. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.
paragraph or on the entire essay, student writers encounter a composition screen. The right-hand side in figure 7.5 displays a portion of the feedback given to students in process, and all feedback supports traditional school-based essays.

For example, an opening paragraph of a sentence or two would receive low marks on “topic development” even though journalists often begin with such short, catchy openers. An intentionally chosen fragment would yield low marks on “sentence structures.” While these features don’t directly relate to new literacies, they serve as examples of the narrow parameters in which students must compose; despite the digital platform, the predominant emphasis is the thesis-driven essay with paragraphs of a specific length, traditional sentence structures, and easily measured cohesion.

As with Writing with Power, these chapters end with extension or enrichment projects that introduce students to different forms of “Writing for Media,” subtitled “21st-Century Learning.” The strength of connection to both the core content of the chapter and to new literacies varies from chapter to chapter, as noted in table 7.1 below, which lists the topic of each genre-based chapter and the focus for the two-page “Writing for Media” section. In some cases, the writing for media builds on the main content of the chapter and moves students toward a logical form for a second composition, as in a fiction narration leading students to a short movie script that is then filmed (though it’s questionable how much helpful information about the form can be conveyed in two pages that are tied to the linear writing process). In other cases, leaps in content or form make this “Writing for Media” section feel forced, as in a poetry chapter that moves to a definition essay to be shared as a multimedia presentation. The explanation of what a definition essay entails is not at all tied to the contents of the chapter (p. 140), and the writing
process walks students through a thesis-driven essay that only considers the incorporation of graphics, images, and sound in the final “publishing” stage (p. 141).

Table 7.1. Suggested Forms of Publication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Focus</th>
<th>Writing for Media Focus</th>
<th>Suggested Forms of Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nonfiction narration</td>
<td>fictional interview</td>
<td>podcast, video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiction narration</td>
<td>movie script</td>
<td>read aloud, video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poetry and description</td>
<td>definition essay</td>
<td>multimedia presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exposition</td>
<td>script for news interview</td>
<td>video recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persuasion</td>
<td>evaluative essay</td>
<td>share with class, school website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>response to literature</td>
<td>music review</td>
<td>school website, video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research writing</td>
<td>summary of research report</td>
<td>online forum, blog entry, anthology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workplace writing</td>
<td>set of instructions</td>
<td>blog</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sum, *Writing Coach* would appear to align more strongly with new literacies primarily because it uses a digital platform to convey information, and students compose in a digital space. The text also uses the digital platform for students to hyperlink to resources that can assist them in the process of composing. However, the platform is used primarily to support traditional school-based literacy practices and forms, and there is no major writing project that requires students to generate their own composition for a digital space. While new literacies are mentioned a bit more than in *Write Source*, they lack the development that *Writing with Power* contains, and they are not at all centralized as key forms that college-ready writers need to understand.

**Writer’s Workspace/Grammar and Composition Handbook**

Neither the online *Writer’s Workspace* nor the print *Grammar and Composition Handbook* has introductory writing chapters similar to the other three textbooks in the sample. Rather, the online platform contains eight genres built around a “Reading-Writing Connection,” and the print handbook features five of the same genres with brief introductions to the genres but not to composition in general. Without introductory chapters to code, I pulled the data from just
two places: the integration of new literacies within the traditional genre chapters, and the integration of chapters devoted entirely to new literacies. While there is some integration of digital literacy practices, school-based forms remain paramount, and poor use of the digital platform for the e-text itself undermines the credibility of the book.

As with Writing Coach, the use of a digital platform does not necessarily mean that this product will be better at supporting new literacies. There are distinct ways in which this digital platform models “digitally convenient” composing, not “digitally enhanced” (Hicks, 2013, p. 42), meaning that it appears to be a convenient way to distribute content rather than to use the unique tools for maximum student learning. Several modules appear to be a scanned workbook with questions inserted on every other page that break the flow of reading by their placement, sometimes mid-sentence. There is also not consistency of format across the genres, with some genres appearing to be scanned workbooks and others more updated digital platforms. This basic trait of visual inconsistency—including multiple sections that do not make any use of unique digital features—undermines some of the most basic principles of online composing.

Additionally, there are some fundamental design flaws that undermine the very credibility of the forum. For example, in the “Reading-Writing Connection” under the “Consumer Brochure” section, one clicks through pages of a guide and eventually ends up on page “15 of 12.” As a reader clicks through mentor texts, the writing repeatedly breaks off mid-sentence and is interrupted by a page of questions before returning to the main narrative; this is one clear way in which a digital platform could be superior to a print book by embedding or hyperlinking these close-reading questions. Another oddity is that when one clicks on the readings for the “argumentative essay” and “narrative” modules, one finds the same set of three mentor texts as in the analytical essay, though they ostensibly represent different genres, and
there is no mention of how writers do not necessarily adhere to the strict genre boundaries presented by this e-text. These and other glitches give the impression of a hastily-developed product for the selling-point of being a digital platform, and not demonstrating the enhanced quality of instruction often promised with online products.

As with Writing Coach, students can highlight, respond to questions online, and add notes, even in the pdf-style modules. Once they move into developing their own compositions, the forum is layered in that from a single home page, a student has several choices of how to engage the page based on what they need at particular points in their writing process. Students can have a model text read aloud, follow hyperlinks to common grammatical errors, or click on highlighters to pull up annotations of desirable features in a mentor text. This is one example of a feature that is unique to the online platform; though students are not the ones making these rhetorical decisions, the writing modules are at least a model of features that are distinctive to communicating in digital spaces.

In the publishing stage of most writing modules, students are briefly encouraged to share their work in several venues, with slight variation depending on the topic and genre. Suggestions include creating a class anthology, entering their essay into a writing contest, publishing the paper online, publishing specifically in an online literary magazine, and performing readers’ theater. However, as is the case with the other textbooks, these online venues are mentioned for the first time in the publishing stage, not as students are developing their compositions. Figure 7.6

Figure 7.6 Writer’s Workspace Writing Platform 5 (Approximation). This drop-down hint demonstrates the brevity of the advice about online publishing.
demonstrates the extent of the instructions about different forms. The simple advice offers no
guidance about how the assignment may or may not be appropriate for certain online venues or
about how to adapt it to make it more fitting; thus it cannot count as a trait of the book that
develops new literacies.

The Grammar and Composition Handbook is similar to the online modules in the brief
treatment of new literacies. The chapters on composition walk students through an argumentative
essay, response essay, analytical essay, research report, and a narrative. One of these chapters
mentions new literacies in the introduction. The argumentative essay chapter begins by
acknowledging the many places that students encounter persuasion (used interchangeably with
“argument”). These include advertisements on television, radio, and billboards (440). Beyond
these brief mentions, the composition handbook is void of directives about composing an
argument specifically for digital spaces and contains no information about visual or multimodal
argumentation.

In addition to these genre-based chapters and modules, one supplementary resource in the
online platform walks students through the adaptation of a paper into a multimedia presentation.
A seven-page document—embedded as a “resource” and not part of the eight main modules—
gives more detailed advice about some of the conventions of a multi-media presentation and
acknowledges the role of images in either conveying or reinforcing information. It appropriately
breaks away from the repeated process and six-trait models to convey steps unique to this
process: for example, the selection and limitation of text, selection of images, rehearsal of
delivery, and attention to timing. Though it is the only piece of this nature in the resource bank,
this is one section that is somewhat comparable to the way that Hicks (2013) adapts process-
based writing to specifically name features unique to multimodal presentations.
Of the eight online modules, one is devoted to “documents” and includes one major assignment that had some potential to qualify as a new literacy practice because of the attention to the intersection of visual and verbal text. In the first module, students are tasked with developing a brochure. They begin by analyzing a sample titled “Get Fit, Get Moving,” and the analysis includes an examination of how images and layout are used to effectively and concisely convey information. Students are directed to notice things like size of typeface, use of boldface, structure beyond traditional paragraphing, and the use of graphics to reinforce a verbal message. Interestingly, in the student workspace, students are directed to consider what images they might use to get attention and convey information; unfortunately, there is no way to insert any graphic other than a table. Even dragging a picture into the workspace yielded only the path to the file. As with the critique above, this again seems like a flaw of hasty design in the push to “go digital”; the one potentially positive module is undermined by the inability of students to carry out one of the core directives unique to the genre.

In sum, Writer’s Workspace contains a few features that acknowledge new literacies and attempt to coach students’ skill development. One supplementary resource on multimodal composing is relatively strong because it requires students to consider unique implications of multimodal composition from the outset, not merely as a final “publishing” stage. However, the predominant emphasis is on traditional, essayistic forms, and the one genre that could possibly be considered to address visual literacy is undermined by the inability of the student to integrate images into the composition. Because of its design flaws and usability errors, the electronic platform does not model the best traits of digital communication.
Summative Assessment

As a group, these four textbooks do reflect the Common Core writing standards’ treatment of new literacies; however, in this case, reflecting CCSS is not an indicator of strong pre-college writing instruction. In the same way that the standards treat new literacies primarily as tools used in the service of essayistic literacies, the textbooks most commonly integrate new literacies as tools to be used to “publish” a school-based form. All four textbooks build the majority of their content around different essay modes and none of them includes a new literacy project that is granted the same prominent space as school staples like the persuasive essay, the personal narrative, or the analytical essay. Students are often encouraged to publish these traditional forms online, or to convert them into audio or visual texts, but such considerations are only brought up after students have completed their traditional essays.

Two of the textbooks do include at least one section that contains a more robust treatment of a digital or multimodal genre, reflecting traits found in Hicks’s (2013) Crafting Digital Writing such as mentor texts, discussion of traits of the genre, and implementing composition processes tailored to the medium. Both Writer’s Workspace and Writing with Power contain at least one new literacy section that integrates considerations unique to the form at the very beginning of the composing process and carries these considerations through to publication. Though they are treated as resources or supplementary assignments, they at least contain more detail than what is found in either Write Source or Writing Coach.

The two textbooks that are delivered electronically—Writing Coach and Writers Workspace—are not the strongest in the sample. They both use some features that are unique to online communication, such as hyperlinking, annotating, and embedding media. However, in both cases, the digital platform contains traits that undermine their credibility, traits such as
*Writing Coach* assessing students’ essays in ways that promote only school-based forms, or *Writer’s Workspace* directing students to incorporate images but then not ensuring they can actually integrate them within the platform. If these e-texts are to have any credibility, they themselves must reflect best practices for online publishing.

As a group, these four textbooks are quite weak in the area of new literacy practices, with *Writing with Power* once again rising to the top of the sample for its in-depth treatment of the topic relative to the other textbooks. Still, the mass-market textbooks fall far short of the vision laid out by composition scholarship, and the Common Core State Standards do very little to encourage development in this area.
I began this project by situating the textbook sample in the current educational context of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Prior to analyzing what the selected books actually contained, it was essential to position them as part of the broader discourse about school failure and neoliberal reform efforts that imply market principles will improve the quality of education. I posited that Common Core alignment was a good marketing tool for publishers, with its embedded promise to make students “college and career ready,” but hypothesized that such alignment did not necessarily improve the quality of the curricular resources being marketed.

I then laid out five rhetorical principles that I extracted from position statements and scholarship on high school and early-college writing, principles that would be my “standard-setters” to measure textbooks for their quality. It is impossible to categorically define “pre-college” or “college writing,” as I explained in Chapter Two; however, research does suggest key rhetorical skills and understandings that will prepare secondary college-bound students to write confidently and flexibly in a variety of academic situations. While not an exhaustive list, these five principles reflect a collation of scholarship from the fields of English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies. It was these five principles—rhetorical knowledge and versatility, writing process, critical thinking, language and conventions, and new literacies—that then became the framework for textbook analysis.

To select my sample, I reviewed publicly available financial data about educational publishers and textbook adoption lists from states that still practice statewide adoption to select
books that, based on these indicators, likely have a comparatively wide distribution. I also limited my sample to composition textbooks for high school students that are marketed explicitly for their alignment with Common Core State Standards. Using these criteria, I arrived at the four textbooks (two of them a bundle of two resources) in this sample. I then used qualitative document analysis as my primary research methodology to determine the ways in which these books conform to or divert from the five rhetorical principles as represented by the scholarship reviewed in Chapter Two. I began this qualitative approach by coding each textbook for occurrence of the rhetorical principles; then, through recursive examination and comparison, I analyzed the general quality of these references, making my case through rich description of each of the textbooks (Bowen, 2009). Thus the selected methodology allowed me to do more than quantify explicit references to the principles in question; I also interpreted the ways in which references to many of the five rhetorical principles do not actually align with scholarship in their development and application.

Chapters Four through Seven summarized the data from my qualitative document analysis and examined the ways that high school writing textbooks promoted as making students more “college ready” do or do not align with each of the five rhetorical principles described in Chapter Two. The following is a summary of the findings reported in the previous four chapters, followed by a discussion of the implications of this research.

**Summary of Findings**

When compared with the scholarship on the transition from high school to college writing, all four textbooks in the sample repeatedly fell short of the ideals put forward in the scholarship and the pedagogical practices exemplified by my selected comparison texts. Writing
*with Power* was the one textbook that, on some of these indicators, rose above the rest of the sample while still demonstrating many flaws common among mass-market textbooks.

With regard to rhetorical knowledge and versatility, I examined textbooks for the degree to which they centralize the skills of analyzing purpose and audience, skills that would help students write flexibly in a variety of situations. Are students encouraged to write for some generic, vaguely imagined audience (Bernard-Donals, 2002; DeJoy, 1999), or are they guided to understand the variety of individuals who might interact with their compositions given a particular publication venue? I especially wanted to see that rhetorical purpose was foregrounded as the driver of students’ choice-making, not default forms and generic rules to which they were admonished to adhere.

All of the textbooks in the sample repeatedly mention audience and publication as they guide students through the major writing projects. However, each chapter typically develops around a linear process model (described next) that invites students to consider their audience in an early brainstorming stage and suggests publication venues at the end of projects. In between, the major drivers of a composition’s development are default forms such as a thesis-driven essay; generic advice to ensure that compositions have a “beginning, middle, and end”; and characteristics of forms to which the writers are supposed to adhere. There is minimal guidance from any of the textbooks about how writers understand their audiences and use particular situations, not default forms, to direct the development of a composition.

With regard to process-based writing, a cursory glance at the tables of contents revealed that all of the textbooks in my sample implement a five-step process throughout the chapters. However, in my close reading of each textbook, I distinguished between oversimplified versions of process and representations that acknowledge process as recursive and idiosyncratic, housing
multiple types of generative and corrective moves that writers employ as needed while developing a piece. Additionally, I looked for evidence of what Kastman-Breuch (2002) called “how-centered” instruction, not “what-centered” instruction, meaning that knowledge of process itself should not be the main substance of instruction; it is merely the guiding framework—the “how”—directing activity as students develop the substance of their compositions, the “what.”

Interestingly, every textbook in the sample appeared to be the epitome of Kastman-Breuch’s (2002) critique, with process becoming the “what” of composition, along with genre or mode. The most robust rhetorical knowledge provided to students is a repetition of a linear writing process, represented through visual diagrams, repeated writing frameworks, exercises, and exposition. I repeatedly found myself coding textbooks with “rkv/wp,” combining the codes for rhetorical knowledge and versatility with writing process in multiple sections of text because there was almost no analysis of rhetorical situation outside of the five-step process framework.

As noted above, rhetorical considerations are embedded in this linear writing process model, which is so dominant that process itself becomes the primary substance of rhetorical knowledge. Because of this intertwining, I found it most effective to conflate the first two rhetorical principles in my data analysis to reflect the pedagogy of the textbooks. With regard to treating writing processes as idiosyncratic and avoiding the oversimplification of a linear movement from beginning to end, all textbooks mention recursion to some degree and some textbooks even include visual diagrams to represent recursion; however, in the actual development of major composition projects, a linear model is the dominant, guiding framework.

As a trait for analysis, “critical thinking” is a categorical term that encompasses cognitive processes like synthesizing, evaluating, and analyzing. Writing is not a mere record of what one has thought, or, as Emig (1977/2003) says, it is not just “talk recorded”; rather pedagogy that
develops critical thinking helps students understand how the “deliberate semantics” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 182) of written language are uniquely generative. A common weakness in high school writing pedagogy, explained by Dombeck and Herndon (2003), is the dependence on default forms, not authentic thinking moves. In addition to critical thinking about content, such pedagogy also encourages metacognitive awareness on the part of the students about their own writing processes and the rhetorical situations into which they are writing. The Council for Writing Program Administrators (2011) lists seven “habits of mind” that students should develop through the very act of writing, habits such as creativity, curiosity, persistence, and flexibility, all hallmarks of critical thinking.

The textbooks in the sample all assert that students’ unique insights and critical thinking are the substance of their compositions; however they all fail to develop these skills through exercises, exposition, and assignments. No major writing project in any of the textbooks is built around the exploration of multiple perspectives, ambiguities, or uncovering what one does not already know/think/believe. Most of the major assignments, even those in forms that should depend heavily on critical thinking, emphasize default forms into which students then fit their ideas. In this area, however, the textbook Writing with Power emerged as slightly stronger than the rest for its intentional integration of supplementary exercises and short compositions that I concluded do have the potential to develop divergent, complex thought about and through the writing process.

My analysis of language and conventions was twofold. In keeping with scholarship, I wanted to see a treatment of grammatical structures and conventions that 1) is integrated into communicative processes, and 2) builds students’ understanding of language variation. As multiple scholars described, teachers and textbooks cannot hope to impact students’ usage by
teaching grammatical structures and conventions out of context (e.g. Hartwell, 1985; Noden, 1999; Weaver & Bush, 2008); logically, teaching grammar as declarative knowledge leads to little more than students’ possessing (then forgetting) declarative knowledge of grammar. Additionally, in the presentation of language, textbooks should develop students’ understanding of the linguistic reality and richness of variation and the skill of code switching for particular situations (as exemplified by Brown’s *In Other Words*, 2009). It was also essential to see that textbooks did not conflate variation—the correct application of a rule within a stigmatized dialect—with error, the incorrect application of a rule within any dialect.

All textbooks devote many pages to decontextualized grammar handbooks, from 21% to 60% of the paginated text, thus sending the message that declarative grammatical knowledge is a central goal of language instruction. The textbooks vary in quality with regard to the trait of actually applying this declarative knowledge to writing situations, with two books—*Writing with Power* and the electronic *Writer’s Workspace*—demonstrating slightly stronger pedagogy in this regard. Additionally, the only textbook to include any extended treatment of language variation is *Writing with Power*, though even this treatment is comparatively brief and falls short of the goal of developing students’ facility with code switching.

Finally, when analyzing textbooks for their inclusion of new literacies, I wanted to see that digital and multimodal forms were presented as being as important as traditional essayistic literacies. Ideally, a form like a blog post or multimedia presentation would receive the same amount of instructional development as an argumentative essay or research report, with guidance for students to understand the unique features of the medium and how to leverage them for the most effective communication. Additionally, to truly qualify as a new literacy practice, textbooks
needed to include forms that depend on the features of the medium, and are not merely made more convenient through digital distribution (Hicks, 2013).

All four textbooks build the majority of their content around different essay modes and none of them include a new literacy project that is granted the same prominent space as school staples like the persuasive essay, the personal narrative, or the analytical essay. All textbooks are also guilty of integrating electronic communication only in the final “publishing” stage of writing, often encouraging students to publish forms that don’t fit the suggested medium (such as publishing a thesis-driven essay in an online discussion forum). Once again, however, Writing with Power rose slightly above the rest of the textbooks in the sample for its repeated integration of new literacy practices and its more developed skill-building exercises.

In sum, what I found through this detailed analysis is that textbooks that claim to be Common Core aligned can indeed demonstrate alignment while still falling far short of the research-based pedagogical ideals described in composition scholarship. The scholarship, standards, and textbooks are all topically aligned. All three of these sets demonstrate at least minimal attention to considerations like purpose, audience, use of digital tools, process-based writing, context-appropriate conventions, etc. One could make an “alignment chart” not unlike what’s found in some textbooks in my sample to show that there are indeed explicit references to these and other essential topics across the standards, textbooks, and scholarship. However, as noted by the commentary on the CCSS website, these standards prescribe neither curriculum nor pedagogy (2017c) and so can be enacted in a variety of ways with great variations in quality. It is in the development and application of these topics that the textbooks are guilty of gross oversimplification of the complexities of language and composition, an oversimplification that one cannot claim promotes “college readiness.”
Oversimplified composition principles are much more easily tested. When writing is reduced to a predictable, repeated five-step process, or when language usage is merely a grammatical rule to be known, it is easier to write test questions for the masses. As noted in Chapter One, two of the four publishers in this sample also write standardized tests aligned with Common Core and distributed en masse. When creating large-scale assessments of writing, it is much easier and more profitable to test a students’ knowledge of a linear composition process, for example, than it is to test the complicated rhetorical analysis required of actual writing. Consider for example, the difference between asking the question, “Which of the following might a writer do to brainstorm for an upcoming composition on school vouchers?” versus the question, “You are preparing to write an op-ed for your local newspaper on school vouchers; how will you go about analyzing your audience so that your argument can have the most impact?” The former could beget one correct response in a list of four options; the latter, to be answered well, would require the student to articulate an understanding of audience analysis particular to their location—much more valuable but less reducible to one of four options because of the nuance of location and multiplicity of valid responses. Though these tests do include writing prompts, The National Council of Teachers of English describes in a policy brief how machine scoring (or rapid human scoring) of actual writing prioritizes certain surface features like mechanical correctness or sentence length (2014, p. 2), which I certainly found to be true with the feedback from Pearson’s electronic Writing Coach. I cannot go so far as to claim that standardization and testing is solely responsible for the oversimplification of writing content, but it is essential to note the correlation.

Also noteworthy is this: The best textbook in the sample is Writing with Power, the book produced by the one publisher that is significantly smaller than any other in this sample. As
described in Chapter One, the publishers of the other three textbooks—Pearson, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and McGraw-Hill—represent market dominance in the educational publishing industry. Simba Investment Group (2015) cites all three publishers as lucrative investment options, and in Chapter One I traced the many acquisitions that have caused these three to grow to dominance. Whereas Pearson employs approximately 40,000 people, Perfection Learning, publisher of *Writing with Power*, employs fewer than 200 people according to their LinkedIn corporate profile. Recall that Burch (2009) posited that the consolidation of educational publishers would lead to “isomorphism,” or a kind of closed loop where major publishers look to one another for cues as to what to publish, thus becoming remarkably similar. She also posited that, as corporations grow, innovation may actually decrease, as scaling products for a larger market, or scaling a corporation to include a greater variety of products, is likely to lead to more generic content in the interest of reaching larger audiences.

The integration of new literacy practices and fostering understanding of language variation are perhaps the most “innovative” characteristics that I examined this sample for, and it was *Writing with Power* that trumped their peer publishers in these two regards. The former is innovative because of its focus on recently developed tools and the ways in which they are changing composition. The latter topic, while perhaps more “mainstream” in the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies is noticeably marginalized in the Common Core State Standards, limited to a passing reference. *Writing with Power* does contain many flaws of the other mass-produced textbooks that I’ve duly noted, including a superfluous grammar handbook, repetitive heuristics that are not sufficiently adapted to different writing situations, and a modal structure that begins with form, not situation. The “isomorphism” that Burch (2009) warned of is, to some degree, evident is this textbook as well. Taken as a group, all of the books in the sample appear
to be responding to a market that wants comprehensive coverage of all standards, housed in one convenient text. However, the influence of the academic community is also evident in multiple ways, most notably in the book’s treatment of language variation and new literacies to a degree that far surpasses the other texts in the sample. I cannot unequivocally claim that this is due to the smaller size of the publisher. However, a publisher developing fewer products for a comparatively more focused distribution is better positioned to maintain the nuance and distinctiveness of each individual product.

Thus I would conclude that my hypothesis proves true for this particular sample: that composition textbooks marketed for their alignment with Common Core State Standards and touting their promotion of college readiness often do not live up to this claim when examined in light of relevant scholarship. The sample of four also suggests that large-scale presses demonstrate less fidelity to composition scholarship in the development of their products, possibly as a result of scale. While this sample is too small to make broad claims about the quality of these publishers in general, it does point toward the role of critical scholarship in the development of their products, when applied to education, do not necessarily beget greater learning gains. This latter critique is explored further in the final section of my project.

Implications

Since I started this multi-year research project, much has changed and much has stayed the same. We are over a year into the Every Student Succeeds Act, and schools are still burdened by over-testing and underfunding. We have also had a national political transition that has brought with it a new Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. In the vein of neoliberalism, DeVos
and the Trump administration tout increased privatization as the path to school improvement. Echoing previous presidents and the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Mr. Trump recently called education the “civil rights issue of our time” (Klein, 2017), and used this humanitarian argument to promote his agenda of school choice, suggesting that tax dollars for education will be better spent if we position parents as consumers who use their money to select the best “product” for their children. DeVos is also a vociferous proponent of school choice, and has supported for-profit charter schools in Michigan (many of which are underperforming), thus clearly marking her comfort not merely with the neoliberal principles of choice and competition, but also with education as a profitable investment opportunity (Collins, 2017).

We are waiting to see if there will be an aggressive attempt to dismantle Common Core under the auspices of decentralization. Mr. Trump ran on a platform that said Common Core was “a total disaster” (Turner, 2016), though his Secretary of Education is more vocally supportive of these standards, perhaps (though this is only my speculation) informed by her perspective as an ally to education markets. DeVos has money in Apollo Investment Corporation (Miller & Jimenez, 2017), which is a subsidiary to Apollo Global Management. Apollo Global Management also owns McGraw-Hill’s education division, which has produced the Smarter Balanced Common Core assessment, along with other Common Core aligned products, including a new GED test used by big buyers such as New York state (Abello, 2017). My knowledge of the financial world is not sophisticated enough to fully trace DeVos’s economic connections and to predict how these might influence her policy decisions regarding CCSS. However, this basic connection is clear: Our Secretary of Education has a great stake in public education as a market

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24 It is important to note that Trump or DeVos cannot actually dismantle Common Core since the standards are a collaborative initiative of governors and state school superintendents and standards remain the purview of the states. However, as we saw with the Obama administration, there can be financial incentives to adopt or abandon such standards, though ESSA makes it harder for the federal government to do so.
opportunity and, as evidenced by the lax oversight of Michigan for-profit charter schools (Collins, 2017), she appears more interested in preserving the large-scale construct of market-based reforms than in the actual efficacy of the schools operating within this construct.

Whether the standards change or stay the same over the next four years of education politics, the rhetoric of school failure and market-based reforms persists. This is a continuation of the rhetoric that, as noted in Chapter One, promotes the narrative of failure that allows publishers to position their materials as remedies to sub-par student performance. Education markets, like any market, will respond to such political rhetoric and so, should these standards change, I would expect to see mediocre products rebranded once again without careful attention to the constructs and pedagogy within them, without critique of how they might fail to enact the promises in their marketing materials. It is imperative that scholars stay engaged with these markets that stake shallow claims in our fields of expertise as a way of resisting the policies that would have us believe corporations and competition are the bastion of reform.

Thus one of the primary implications of this study is that I intend it as an example of the kind of methodical, external scrutiny to which we should subject any products that promise increased student achievement through mass-market materials. Anecdotal evidence or vague impressions of poor quality are not enough to actually prove the sub-par quality of such materials. Rather, measuring curricular products against disciplinary standards of excellence is a way of staking a claim in the reform conversation not merely through measuring student learning outcomes, but through articulating the substance of the curriculum itself, what it is that is worth knowing and doing in our fields.

Interestingly, in 2015, Pearson launched their own “efficacy studies,” promising to review the impact of their products on student learning. While Writing Coach has not yet
undergone an efficacy study, other products related to literacy—like the phonics-based “Bug Club” for elementary students and the online “My English Lab” for English language learners—have undergone such reviews, which are publicly available on Pearson’s website. However, the usefulness of the data to ensure quality is questionable at best. For example, in the report on “My English Lab,” the data are used to measure and improve factors like “time on task” and “activity completion rate” (p. 7); there is no data about how this product helps students perform on benchmarked tasks outside of the Pearson-generated product. What good is increased “time on task” if the task itself isn’t valuable? Good data on bad activities is not quality assurance. Again, in contrast to Pearson’s self studies, my research does not examine outcomes, but rather backs up to first analyze the validity of the very activities that the product would have students engage in.

As I suggested in Chapter One, this study is not merely a critique of the quality of these four textbooks, or of writing textbooks in general; the books themselves are a paradigmatic example of the false marketing that particular products will beget heretofore-unseen improvement in fundamental academic skills that, for some reason, could not be achieved by professionals and academics working outside market structures. The textbooks are situated in this political and educational context that would have us believe market-based principles will yield greater student achievement, an oversimplified claim that, as we see with this new administration, is not going away anytime soon.

This raises a broader question about the role of the scholar in P-12 education, particularly with regard to disciplinary standards and curriculum. Thus, a second implication of this study is the promotion of the scholar’s role in P-12 composition specifically and P-12 curriculum more broadly. On a broad scale, one can point to multiple ways in which scholarship is marginalized in the P-12 realm, repeatedly subordinated to political or economic interests. For example, the
Texas standards debate, popularized in part by the documentary *The Revisionaries* (2012), depicts the repeated marginalization of scholars’ voices in the writing of Texas history and science standards, repeatedly trumiped by political ideologies that reflect concerns of some constituents but not the consensus of scholarship. Additionally, the debate still roils as to what degree of meaningful influence scholars had in the writing of the Common Core ELA standards, with some consulted scholars refusing to sign off on the final version (Robbins & Bauerlein, 2013). Apple (2006) argues that this very marginalization of the scholar is a hallmark of neoliberalism’s influence on P-12 education, which requires teachers to shift their practices in response to external mandates and “client” demands rather than operating from within established professional communities and knowledge bases.

Despite this trend of a market-responsive curriculum, it is common for publishers to cite the scholars with whom they consulted. For example, *Writing with Power’s* promotional materials tout their collaboration with Peter Smagorinsky and Constance Weaver, both of whom are cited in this dissertation for their quality scholarship. *Writing Coach* promotes their collaboration with teacher-scholars Jeff Anderson and Kelly Gallagher, both of whom have written books that I could use as exemplars of positive application of rhetorical principles. There are multiple ways in which the textbooks appear to pay homage to core rhetorical principles, perhaps a result of these consultations. However, none of these scholars are listed as authors, and in fact only two of the four books in the sample list individual authors, *Write Source* and *Writing with Power*; only *Writing with Power* bothers to name the credentials of the lead author, Joyce Senn. Despite my good-faith effort to find the credentials of the authors listed on *Write Source*, I could not find that any of them had any credible depth or breadth of scholarship in either English Education or Rhetoric and Writing Studies. Thus it seems that the position of the scholar in these
materials is marginal, used to validate claims of rigor without significantly influencing the content. However, I again would note that *Writing with Power*, which cites Smagorinsky and Weaver, does show greater influence of the scholarship on the product. This suggests that perhaps the structure of smaller, more narrowly focused presses might have the ability to better ensure the integration of scholarship into these materials. One lead author with credentials in the field seems more likely to demonstrate fidelity to the scholarship than a team of authors with minimal content expertise and fidelity to the growth and gain of the publisher.

It is also noteworthy that Heinemann published four of the texts that I use throughout this project as positive examples of enacting the five composition principles in the instructional context. Heinemann is a subsidiary of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, which publishes the *Write Source* series; nevertheless, throughout the project I describe ways in which *Write Source* repeatedly falls short of the ideals presented by *In the Middle* (Atwell, 2014), *Building Adolescent Literacy in Today’s English Classrooms* (Bomer, 2011), *In Other Words: Lessons on Grammar, Code-Switching, and Academic Writing* (Brown, 2009), and *Crafting Digital Writing: Composing Texts Across Media and Genres* (Hicks, 2013), all published by Heinemann. Even within this one corporation, there appears to be a bifurcation of research-based composition pedagogy and mass-market textbooks. Investigating the structure of different publishing houses is beyond the scope of this project but would be a valuable angle for future study.

I am inclined to blame the publishing industry for this bifurcation. However, those of us in academic systems also need to acknowledge the ways in which deep investment in P-12 textbook publishing is not rewarded. Notably, The Textbook and Academic Authors Association (TAAA), the only nonprofit dedicated to supporting scholars who author textbooks, describes the position of textbooks this way: They are “poised precariously between the not-for-profit
university and the commercial publisher,” often “representing a significant investment for a publishing house” (2016). In their position statement, this organization describes how authoring a textbook used to be a lauded scholarly endeavor, the noble job of synthesizing key principles of one’s field for a larger audience. In more recent years, textbook authorship has occupied the position of “second rate,” and it is not as likely to be rewarded in academic systems as peer-reviewed articles in academic presses with notably smaller audiences. Textbooks by their very nature consolidate established knowledge and so are less likely to be considered “cutting edge” research, a course of scholarship that is indeed less rewarded. I would justifiably speculate that the prestige of writing a high school textbook is even less than that of writing a college textbook.

An unintended consequence of this bifurcation, according to TAAA, is the “loss of control over the production of knowledge” as large publishing houses seek out teams of writers who are removed from academic institutions (2016). Indeed, as several sources in Chapter Two describe, promoted composition practices at the high school level are often grossly reduced versions of what scholars and writers understand composition to be (e.g. Budden et al., 2002; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; Kittle, 2006). It is understandable that high school composition curricula would be somewhat more simplified than college writing curricula; however, when the simplification is a misrepresentation and not a scaffold, we do, as TAAA notes, lose control over the production of knowledge. Moving forward, it is necessary for academic systems of promotion and tenure to value scholarly contributions to the P-12 education market. Composition faculty are the ones who can best scale the scholarship—which by its very nature has a narrow, specialized audience—so that it is accessible to a wide student readership without losing the integrity of the work.
Potentially, this project could take a form that reflects the ideal of composition scholarship staking a claim in P-12 curricular content. The content here has implications for curricular decision-makers, whether those decision-makers are individual English teachers selecting textbooks for their composition classes, district-level curriculum directors selecting materials for entire districts, or state-level curriculum committees determining which books will end up on a statewide adoption list. Regardless of the level at which decisions are made, this research suggests that we must complicate our ideas of alignment with standards, recognizing that mere surface alignment with “college and career-ready standards” does not on its own ensure that writing curriculum and instruction will have the level of rigor that scholars within the discipline would deem “college preparatory.”

Should a teacher be saddled with one of the books in this sample, this research can point toward ways to use the book as a reference, not a curriculum. By beginning with deep and broad knowledge of the rhetorical principles outlined here, then critically selecting sections of the textbook to use with students as supplementary materials, teachers can augment the pedagogy embedded in the textbook rather than defer to it. For example, were I to teach with *Writing with Power*, I would flag a section like the three pages on language variation (pp. 45-47) for students to read as an introduction to the concept, then follow that with my own discussion prompts on how and why we stigmatize certain dialects, informed by scholars such as Curzan (2009) and Zuidema (2005). I would extend the conceptual instruction into applied activities adapted from exercises in Brown’s (2009) *In Other Words*. By doing so, I have centralized myself as the arbiter of curriculum and instruction, not the textbook, and have augmented the resource with related professional knowledge and research-based activities.
Even the odious grammar handbooks described in Chapter Six could be augmented through an understanding of their critique, the integration of scholarship, and a teacher’s intentional mediation of the text. A teacher with any one of these four textbooks could do better work with it by understanding Hartwell’s (1985) foundational critique that when we teach decontextualized grammatical knowledge hoping to impact students’ usage, we are not going to see any great learning gains. That same teacher could then access pedagogical ideas in Weaver’s and Bush’s *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* (2008) for ways to weave language instruction into the writing process. Convinced of the efficacy of highlighting a select few error patterns for each individual student, they might then strategically point students to specific sections of the grammar handbook, thus making the link between that content and the process of writing that the textbooks themselves fail to make.

These are just a few of the ways in which I imagine that composition scholarship could help a teacher augment a poor textbook, using it as a reference mediated by their professional knowledge. While it does not address the financial channels that support and propagate the product itself, it is at least one way for teachers to bring scholarship to bear on sub-par curricular products, thus staking their claim as the arbiters of professional knowledge, not the publishers and certainly not markets.

Multiple stakeholders—politicians, publishers, parents, teachers, and scholars—are genuinely invested in the quality of education in the United States. However, what I have aimed to demonstrate is that simplified, market-based “solutions” are not going to bring us any closer to the learning outcomes that we seek. The articulation of rigor is easy; the enactment of rigor is not. Those of us who teach any subject, but especially writing, know that good pedagogy and
student improvement requires a deep and broad understanding of writing’s complex and idiosyncratic process. It requires flexible constructs and tools that we use, as needed, in response to student production. It cannot be reduced to linear processes, declarative knowledge, and repetitious frames.

As we scale up and consolidate curriculum, we lose its complexity and integrity. I would be tempted to say that the solution to this is to merely encourage composition teachers, school districts, and scholars to pull out of the textbook market as much as possible. As noted in my introduction, I rarely used textbooks, and when I did, it was to point to a page for a quick reference. As a teacher-scholar, my curriculum was generated by me, developed from my professional knowledge and study and monitored by participation in scholarly communities. But I am also convinced by the argument from TAAA that to give up on textbooks is to give up control over the production of knowledge in our fields. In an era when for-profit paradigms are repeatedly touted as the solution to “failing” schools, it is imperative that we stay engaged with products that claim their roots in our field, providing detailed study of the pre-packaged curricular product and giving voice—at times through collaboration with publishers—to the nuances of true learning.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Write Source Permission to Reproduce

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Thank you,
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2 May 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to request your permission to include several images from the textbook *Writing with Power* grade 11 (ISBN 978-1615636341) in my dissertation: *Rebranding Mediocrity: A Rhetorical Analysis of Common-Core Textbooks for College-Bound Writers*, written for completion of my Ph.D. from Western Michigan University. The dissertation analyzes writing textbooks that aim to make high school students “college ready” and finds that a comparatively small press like Perfection Learning actually produces a product that is superior to the major presses like Pearson, McGraw-Hill, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. The larger presses, I find, tend to simply “re-brand” old products without significantly improving the quality of the writing pedagogy within them.

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elizabeth.s.ehst@wmich.edu

Figure 4.5, *Writing with Power* p. 248

![Questions for Checking an Outline](image)

Figure 5.3, *Writing with Power* p. 92

![Ideas Rubric](image)
Appendix C: Writing Coach Permission to Reproduce
Appendix D: *Writer’s Workspace/Grammar and Composition Handbook* Permission to Reproduce

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To: Suzanne Ehst
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