

Intentional Connections in the Writing Space

The event of writing is a commonplace in all areas of life. There are countless different mediums used to conduct writing. Whether you are drafting an email, composing a research article, creating a grocery list, organizing a novel, or sending a text, you are practicing writing. Though seemingly different, these avenues of writing are related by one principle: intention. In other words, the author has an understanding of the need or requirement for composition; an event, thought, exchange, or need has occurred that needs to be communicated. Writing practices understand this communication to be necessary by the commitment of form, diction, and message through formulated syntax and wording. Derived from the analysis of scholarly articles, conducting interviews, and the observation of higher education writing instruction, it is evident that this intention is formed through connection: connection to self, others, ideas, and so on, which creates a need for communication via writing. Connection to the things we write ensures that writing is intentional. This intention is first created through connection, and we, as writers, find the intent to write in the connection of message to meaning. Identifying these connections is a product of writing as a social and rhetorical practice. This allows us to ask investigative questions about the practice of writing: How do authors connect with audiences? Though seemingly independent, how is writing a collaborative act? Are writers aware of the choices they make during the writing process to satisfy the needs of their writing, and more importantly, their audience? Understanding the answers that satisfy all of these questions is essential to creating the formula for successful and effective writing. As writing instructors, it is necessary that we take the time to dissect these multiple modes that contribute to the product of writing. Multiple modes in the writing process work to facilitate connection to intention.

What is writing with intention? In the social space, writing a text most likely calls on the intention of communication of an idea. Sharing a story, sending a reminder, or saying “hello” all has the intention of communicating with someone else. What I aim to understand is how this translates to the academic space. Why do young scholars write? Irvin answers this practice in his essay “Changing Your Mindset About Revision”: “to say ‘writing is an inquiry process’ means it is a developmental process in which we discover ways to get what we mean closer to what we say and what we say closer to what we mean” (Irvin). Intention, or “what we mean” is the governing reason for writing. When analyzing a novel, poem, journal, or even a text, the audience is guided by the same questions: what is the writer’s intent? What point are they trying to communicate? The more pressing matter of intent occurs when the author asks these very questions during the writing process.

In the higher education classroom, young writers are being taught to identify and understand their reason in writing. In an interview with UMass Amherst graduate professor Dr. Haivan Hoang, she explains how she takes time to ensure she guides students to discovering what we “mean” in our writing, highlighting the importance of the process of finding that clarity. In the classroom, Prof. Hoang takes time to teach the importance of this intention in writing:

“If time permits and the class is small enough, I try to conference with students early-ish in the semester around their writing, and as you know, with rough drafts I try to start with ‘what are they trying to say?’ and what I see as some of the best parts of their draft and we go from there”

Identifying intention in writing can be difficult to the novice writer. When asked why we write, it may seem easy to say: “I wrote this essay on poetry because it was an assignment in the syllabus,” but the experienced writer knows this is not true. Finding the true meaning of the

“why” in writing can be a tedious task. The formation of this awareness can be referred to as the development of metacognition. Brian Jackson writes and defines it as “thinking about our thinking.” It can be thought of as “a purposeful, deliberate awareness of what we are doing and how we could do it better” (Jackson). Professor Hoang supports this position, and integrates it into her writing instruction.

Truthfully, identifying intention in writing can be a secondary thought in the writing process. As previously mentioned, writing is a form of connection. The writer must connect with something to begin the process of writing. This connection is up to the author’s discretion. Once the author aligns with a reason to write, connection does not stop there. The phrase, “it takes a village” is applicable to the writing process. Though it may not appear so, the writing process is actually an incredibly hands on system. Writing students receive support from various avenues to ensure their intention is clear and worthwhile. Prof. Hoang integrates the formation of these avenues in her curriculum through one-on-one advising and peer editing. Creating and identifying intention is achieved best when the writer is connected to others. Writing professors promote this practice in the writing process. Prof. Hoang says: “We discussed the impact of writing with intent, building student’s writing confidence, and the value of identity in writing.” Said discussion is a form of connection, although it seems minor. As she mentioned, this discussion builds confidence, which strengthens the binary between connection and the formation of strong writing intention.

However, connection does not end at formation. Intention must stay prevalent throughout the writing process, all the way to the final writing product. Throughout the writing process, connection exists through a variation of means. When assigning writing pieces, Prof. Hoang always conferences with her students to stay connected to their process: “I think that feeds into

my teaching in that I really enjoy conversations with individual students and getting to know each student's development and what they're thinking about their own journeys and I try, as best I can, to respect that." Prof. Hoang and I have talked extensively about the importance of this practice when students are writing. We idealized the impact of writing with intent, building student's writing confidence, and the value of identity in writing. She has expanded this discourse to her classroom, too. When observing this myself, students seemed eager to talk about their writing, thus connecting with each other about their intentions in composition. Most of the conversation was led by students responding to each other, though Prof. Hoang would occasionally inject clarifying questions and related comments. As the writing process begins, Prof. Hoang makes sure the intention is clear with her authors. She is kind and supportive, as she believes that: "starting more positively about what they want to say I also feel like I get to know them a little bit better." Further, this creates a student-centered classroom, making the discourse on the writing process more approachable and inviting. This collaboration defends writing to be social, as well. Moreover, confirming and clarifying writing intent supports writing as a social act. It "encompasses the countless people who have shaped the genres, tools, artifacts, technologies, and places writers act with as they address the needs of their audiences" (Roozen). The audiences' needs play a factor in the writer's intent. Are they working to satisfy a conflict? Is their piece serving as entertainment, persuasion, or information? Does the audience engage better with colloquial or academic language? Though these questions seem elementary, they are necessary to intentional writing. Connecting with the intended audience serves as a form of connection, ensuring that the author's writing is intentional. These intention/connection techniques are still being taught in the higher education environment, opening the binary of writing socially and rhetorically, meaning that once intention has been identified, the author must

make conscious choices to ensure consistency of intent in their writing. “Writing rhetorically then is not just creating sentences and paragraphs that are grammatically correct; writing rhetorically involves understanding how an audience feels about the situation that the writer is focusing on, how the audience feels about the writer, and making sound choices with this understanding” (Wright). Sound choices are intentional, driving home the necessity and importance of intent in writing.

After considerable discourse, the relationship between connection and intent can have a “chicken or egg” riddle feeling associated with it. Based on scholarly research, conversations with professionals who teach writing, classroom observations, and my own experiences with social and intentional writing, I believe that it is determined on a case-by-case basis. Though, there is no question that the two are related. Ideally, this relation is supported by writing professors, researchers, and spaces. Accomplished writers create connections with their intent. When done correctly, this often comes from a social and rhetorical place. Establishing community with intended audiences permits authors to be aware of the choices they make in their writing. It is my understanding that these writers are our strongest. As an aspiring writing professional and instructor myself, I hope I continue to see values in these writing principles and echo them in my own classroom. I plan on taking a page from Prof. Hoang’s book and including conferencing in the writing process. I will have a strong emphasis on effective communication in the classroom, aiding in facilitating connections between students as writers and editors. I hope to promote investigative questioning in the writing process, allowing students to identify intent in their own and others’ writing. The writing process is truly a process. It is a multi-tiered system of modules. It is my hope that my students will dissect this process and to achieve a comprehensive

understanding, and thus become tomorrow's strongest writers. To achieve this, though, students must start with an intent.

Works Cited

- Irvin, L. Lennie. "Changing Your Mindset About Revision." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, vol. 5, Parlor Press, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 318–333,
<https://writingspaces.org/writing-spaces-volume-5/>. Accessed 2024.
- Jackson, Brian. "Metacognition and Mindful Writing." *Teaching Mindful Writers*,
University Press of Colorado, Utah State University Press, 2020, pp. 33–42,
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv11sn6hn.7>. Accessed 2024.
- Roozen, Kevin. "Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity." *Naming What We Know, Classroom Edition: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*,
https://books.google.com/books?id=M7BVDAAAQBAJ&dq=DOI:+10.7330/9781607325789.c001&source=gbs_navlinks_s. Accessed 2024.
- Wright, Elizabethada. "Secondary-School English Teachers Should Only Be Taught Literature." *Bad Ideas About Writing*, West Virginia University Libraries Digital Publishing Institute, Morgantown, WV, 2017, pp. 344–349,
<https://textbooks.lib.wvu.edu/badideas/badideasaboutwriting-book.pdf>. Accessed 2024.