

Edited by

Rachel Spilka

**Writing
in the
Workplace**

New
Research
Perspectives

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Contents

Preface vii

Part One: Research Studies of Writing in the Workplace 1

1. Situational Exigence: Composing Processes on the Job by Writer's Role and Task Value 4
Barbara Couture and Jone Rymer
2. Beyond the Monkey House: Audience Analyses in Computerized Workplaces 21
Barbara Mirel
3. Becoming a Rhetor: Developing Writing Ability in a Mature, Writing-Intensive Organization 41
Jamie MacKinnon
4. The Reciprocal Relationship of Workplace Culture and Review 56
Susan Kleimann
5. Moving Between Oral and Written Discourse to Fulfill Rhetorical and Social Goals 71
Rachel Spilka
6. Writing and Medicine: Text and Context 84
Judy Z. Segal
7. Negotiating Meaning in a Hospital Discourse Community 98
Jennie Dautermann

Sub V Acy 93

Contents |

8. Discourse Regulations and the Production of Knowledge 111
Anthony Paré
9. Genre as Community Invention: A Central Bank's Response to
Its Executives' Expectations as Readers 124
Graham Smart
10. The Interrelation of Genre, Context, and Process in the
Collaborative Writing of Two Corporate Documents 141
Geoffrey A. Cross

**Part Two: Implications of Recent Research Findings for Theory, Pedagogy
and Practice, and Future Research 153**

11. Corporate Authority: Sponsoring Rhetorical Practice 158
Mary Beth Debs
12. Intertextuality and the Writing Process: An Overview 171
Jack Selzer
13. Research on Discourse Communities: An Overview 181
Leslie A. Olsen
14. Bridging the Gap: Scenic Motives for Collaborative Writing in
Workplace and School 195
James A. Reither
15. Influencing Workplace Practice: A Challenge for Professional
Writing Specialists in Academia 207
Rachel Spilka
16. On Theory, Practice, and Method: Toward a Heuristic Research
Methodology for Professional Writing 220
Patricia Sullivan and James E. Porter
17. Reflexive and Reflective Tensions: Considering Research Methods
from Writing-Related Fields 238
Mary Beth Debs
18. Research as Rhetoric: Confronting the Methodological and Ethical
Problems of Research on Writing in Nonacademic Settings 253
Stephen Doheny-Farina
19. Surveying the Field and Looking Ahead: A Systems Theory
Perspective on Research on Writing in the Workplace 268
Tyler Bouldin and Lee Odell

Bibliography 285
Contributors 317
Index 323

Preface

This anthology is about possibilities. Although some consider the discipline of professional writing to be at its maturity (see, for example, Souther, 1989), this text takes a different stance by assuming that too many questions have yet to be asked, too much research has yet to be conducted, and too much knowledge has yet to be discovered before this discipline can reach its maturity. Instead of attempting to provide answers for the discipline, this collection attempts, instead, to ask helpful questions intended to provide more direction to the discipline and therefore assist in its continuous growth. Therefore, readers will find in this collection a deliberate focus on future possibilities for professional writing research.

Before the discipline can mature further, it needs to determine where it has been and where it needs to go next. It needs to discuss research conducted so far of workplace writing and to identify new research directions that can help the discipline move closer to fulfilling its goals. This type of self-analysis is critically important if the discipline is to advance significantly in strengthening the integrity of its research, which, in turn, seems a prerequisite for strengthening the integrity of its approaches to theory, pedagogy, and practice. This anthology, by evaluating research advances to date and proposing research directions for tomorrow, suggests how future research on workplace writing might be conducted. In fact, every chapter in this volume identifies gaps in or new directions for research, or asks questions

aimed at inspiring new empirical directions that can help promote the discipline's continued maturation.

In many respects, this book is a follow-up to the 1985 anthology *Writing in Nonacademic Settings*, edited by Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami. If there were ever a watershed event in the evolution of professional writing research, it was that collection of essays, which inspired a new generation of researchers to conduct studies of workplace writing and which motivated professional writing veterans as well to approach the discipline in new, more expansive ways. In particular, the two articles in that anthology authored by Odell and Faigley, who both called for more research about the "social perspective," provided valuable theoretical focus and guidance that resulted in a new energy and spirit among researchers in the discipline.

During the middle and late 1980s, most researchers of workplace writing, inspired by the Odell and Goswami anthology, chose the social perspective for textual analyses, surveys and interviews, and other types of research. An increasing number of these researchers initiated qualitative studies aimed at exploring the relationship between social contexts and the composing process in workplace settings, and these studies often introduced new approaches to research design, methodology, and analysis. Whereas previous researchers of workplace writing tended to rely heavily on prewriting and postwriting measures (mostly surveys and interviews), these qualitative researchers now relied, as well, on "process measures" designed to trace cognitive and social behavior throughout the writing process (these process measures included observations of informal social interactions and formal meetings, writing and reading protocols, the recording in log books of data about social interactions, discourse-based interviews of drafts, and interviews conducted consistently throughout the evolution of documents). With expanded research designs and methodology, writing researchers were able to discover new and interesting patterns of rhetorical and social behavior. As more qualitative studies of workplace writing were in progress and completed, and as more preliminary and final research findings were reported at conferences and in publications, excitement grew among scholars about what these patterns might mean for advances in the discipline.

The idea for this book emerged from a number of informal discussions among these scholars about the need for the discipline to develop a clearer perspective of what researchers have been discovering since Odell and Faigley's 1985 call for more qualitative research on the social perspective of workplace writing, how these researchers have been designing, conducting, and analyzing their studies, and what these research discoveries and approaches might mean for continued growth of the discipline. Scholars agreed that the time had come for the discipline to collect its thoughts and assess

where it has been, where it is now, and where it wants to head next in light of recent research discoveries and innovations. In particular, there is a growing consensus that if the profession intends to take significant strides forward in research, theory, pedagogy, and practice, it needs to gain more certainty about research advances to date. If researchers are unaware of what other researchers have been discovering or of how other researchers have been conducting their studies, they will have difficulty initiating new studies that build on knowledge already gained, and the discipline will have difficulty determining how to strengthen the integrity of its research on workplace writing. This book attempts to be a healthy boost toward realization of all these goals.

In a sense, this volume is a snapshot of the best-quality research, and thinking about research, among professional writing specialists approximately a decade after publication of the first results of initial qualitative studies of composing processes in the workplace. Besides serving as a follow-up to Odell and Goswami's *Writing in Nonacademic Settings*, I envision this anthology fulfilling multiple purposes for the discipline: providing a history of research inspired by that anthology; capturing (and describing) what is, in my opinion, the best-quality research that has emerged in the past decade and the best scholarly thinking on professional writing in the discipline today; and raising questions aimed at inspiring and providing direction for future professional writing research and, subsequently, for future advances in professional writing theory, pedagogy, and practice.

While designing this anthology, I was interested in two types of contributions: reports of quality, completed studies of workplace writing since the mid-1980s, and essays introducing new and important arguments about research to date on workplace writing and future research directions for the discipline. Another aim was to include a variety of contributors and contributions to represent as many different perspectives and viewpoints in the discipline as possible. To solicit high-quality contributions, I sent letters of invitation to two types of professionals: professional writing researchers who had completed (or were close to completing) well-regarded studies on workplace writing, and professional writing scholars who already had made valuable empirical and theoretical contributions to the discipline. From the proposals received, I selected contributions representing a diverse cross section of the discipline's best researchers and thinkers. Among this volume's contributors are both newcomers to writing research and veterans in the field, both professional writing specialists in academia and those in the workplace, both Americans and Canadians. Yet I consider all these contributors similar in being pioneers in the discipline. All of them assume an important role, here, of evaluating how research to date might influence

the research of tomorrow. In a sense, this anthology makes all of them collaborators in carving out new directions for the discipline's future empirical and theoretical inquiries.

The ideal audience for this anthology consists of current and future professional writing researchers, as well as all those in the profession who perceive high-quality research as key to the continuing progress and maturity of this discipline. The anthology's structure is designed to accommodate the needs and interests of both types of readers.

Part One is a collection of chapters reporting on specific studies of workplace writing. These chapters represent research since the 1980s of the social perspective of workplace writing and can serve a number of roles. First, each chapter presents a unique perspective on the relationship between social contexts and workplace writing and can inspire new ideas for empirical and theoretical inquiry in their respective areas of inquiry. Part One contributors were encouraged to speculate on how their studies contribute to growth in professional writing theory, practice, and pedagogy, and readers of this anthology are invited to make their own conclusions about these studies' contributions, as well. Second, each Part One chapter describes an approach to writing research that current and future professional writing researchers can analyze, critique, and either emulate or modify as they deem best.

Part Two authors assess the implications of recent professional writing research of the social perspective for professional writing theory, pedagogy and practice, and future research directions. Before composing their first drafts, all Part Two authors had the opportunity to read Part One chapters, so they would have the option of responding in their arguments to those studies along with other studies of workplace writing completed since the mid-1980s. The key role of Part Two chapters is to inspire new ideas, discussions, and debate so the discipline can make significant and responsible strides forward toward strengthening its research programs, thereby strengthening as well its future approaches to professional writing theory, pedagogy, and practice.

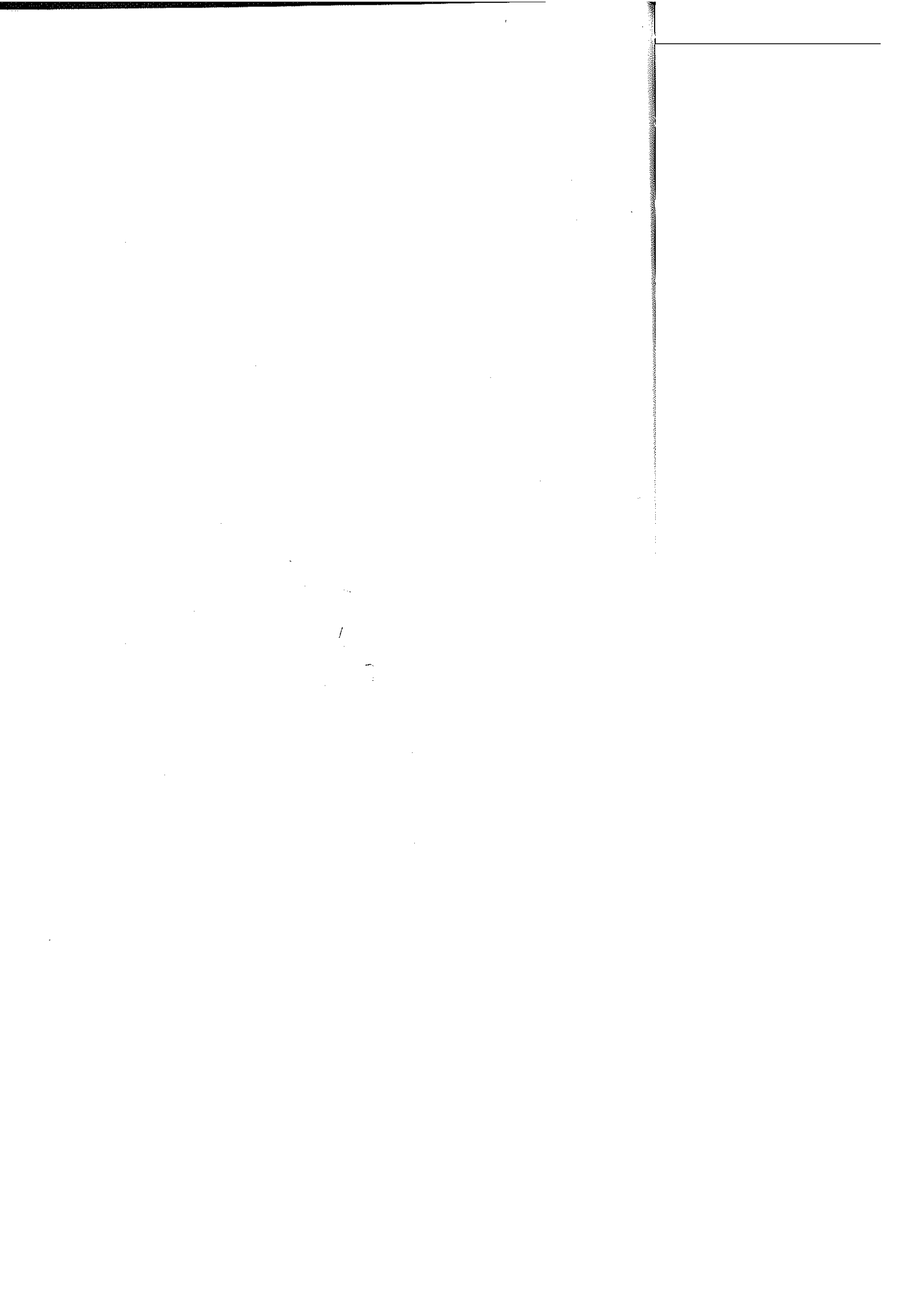
Part One and Part Two chapters do not aim to exhaust their respective subject areas; to do so would be impossible in the scope of a single anthology. They do attempt, however, to provide a sense of recent research advances and future research needs at this exciting juncture in the discipline's continued growth. Above all else, this volume exists to invite the discipline to make a more concerted effort to discuss the important issues raised here. The discipline needs to make greater progress toward reaching a consensus perspective as to which research approaches it considers most valuable, and to have the most potential, in strengthening the integrity of its scholarly

| Preface

inquiries. Perhaps this collection of essays will be an important first step toward this type of initiative.

In closing, I wish to thank Barbara Mirel, who assisted me so ably in editing first drafts of the anthology's chapters; her comments were instrumental in sharpening the arguments of those drafts and in helping contributors think through issues more expansively than they might have done otherwise. I also thank the anonymous reviewer chosen by the publisher, whose comments on second drafts led, as well, to significant improvements. All contributors to this collection have my highest admiration and respect for the originality of their thinking and the importance of their insights; I thank them, too, for their patience with revision requests and deadline pressures. Of great assistance in project management, copyediting, and production decisions were Kenney Withers, Curtis Clark, Carol Burns, Julie Bush, and Natalia Nadraga of Southern Illinois University Press; I especially thank Kenney Withers for his wonderful enthusiasm throughout this project. Of great assistance in keeping me strong and healthy during initial phases of manuscript editing were Dr. Jeremy M. Ramp and Dr. Madalyn K. Squires. In addition, my colleagues in the rhetoric and composition program at Purdue have kept me intellectually strong. I am grateful, as well, to Mark, Jane, and Aaron Spilka for their continued love, support, and encouragement of my scholarly efforts.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this anthology in memory of my mother, Ellen Potter Spilka, 1926–1990. As a professional librarian and onetime social worker, a lifelong scholar of social history, and an advocate for mill workers and the poor in New England industrial towns, she believed strongly in the social dimensions and possibilities of this project. She would have enjoyed seeing this book through to its completion and would have appreciated, especially, its potential to inspire the type of intellectual curiosity, debate, creativity, and growth needed to discover ways to use communication altruistically to enrich the social contexts of our worksites, and not just the social fabrics of our own lives.



Part One

Research Studies of Writing in the Workplace

Part One is a collection of chapters reporting on research on workplace writing conducted by the authors in the late 1980s or early 1990s. While most authors report on qualitative studies of composing processes in the workplace, three authors (Couture and Rymer, Mirel) report on surveys they conducted, and one author (Segal) reports on a textual analysis of medical discourse. Yet, all authors use “the social perspective” in their approach to the research of workplace writing.

The first three chapters of Part One present research findings on social perceptions of workplace professionals and strategies of learning about and then analyzing social effects on composing behavior in workplace settings. In the first two chapters, the authors report on surveys they conducted in which they relied on the social perspective both to design survey instruments and to analyze survey data. In a survey of over four hundred professionals in a variety of business and technical occupations, Couture and Rymer found that two writing variables—whether the type of writing task is routine or special, and whether the writer is a professional who writes or a career writer—can shape writers’ initial social perceptions and subsequent composing behavior at work. They suggest that such global situational exigencies as a writer’s functional relationship to writing and the importance of a writing task can have far greater impact on composing processes than the writer’s discipline or occupation, or the genre of a document. Mirel reports on other surveys suggesting that if manual writers hope to develop manuals

that meet user needs, they need to understand not just what users need to learn, but also how users learn; they need to consider that users' instructional needs "have a social and organizational base, not just a cognitive one." In particular, Mirel suggests that manual writers need to analyze what workers wish they could do, what strategies they have relied on to do what they want, and what they have been unable to do and why. In the third chapter, MacKinnon reports on a qualitative study describing what workplace professionals might need to learn about social contexts and workplace writing and how they might need to learn it, and then analyzes this learning process in light of social cognition theory. According to MacKinnon, for new employees, writing can serve as a form of apprenticeship that can result in more active participation in a corporate community. From his research, MacKinnon concludes that "context would appear to be a critical element in any speculative model of rhetorical development of on-the-job writing ability."

In the next two chapters, Kleimann and Spilka report on multiple case studies they conducted that help explain the value during the composing process of social interaction between the participants of a rhetorical situation. Kleimann describes how social interaction at a federal agency can open up opportunities for negotiation between writers and multiple reviewers. She argues that a dynamic relationship exists between the organization and the review process. Her findings demonstrate how organizational cultures can affect every aspect of the review process, including the structure of the process and reviewers' decisions and behavior. Whereas Kleimann describes social contexts influencing social interaction in the workplace, Spilka describes social interaction influencing social contexts. Her study of the composing process in state government suggests that in some workplace cultures, oral and written discourse may have an interdependent relationship that encourages and facilitates a back-and-forth movement throughout the composing process between oral and written modes of expression. Her results suggest that this back-and-forth movement can serve rhetorical functions that, in turn, can help fulfill social goals critical to the success of individual projects and contribute, as well, to social acculturation in the long term.

In the remaining chapters of Part One, the authors discuss various aspects of the reciprocal relationship between social contexts and workplace writing. Segal reports on a textual analysis that explores the negotiation between the character of Western medicine and the nature of its professional discourse. With a textual case study, she examines the relationship between the authority of texts and the authority of doctors and the ways in which the conversation of a profession can perpetuate the values of that profession. Her study suggests that the effect of some medical writing is not so much

to inform as to affirm what the community already knows. Dautermann then describes a qualitative study in which a group of nurses, while revising policy and procedure manuals, were influenced by social contexts, but also attempted to influence both their own nursing division and the greater hospital community. "Composing together," Dautermann notes, "enabled [the] nurses to mediate their own experience through language, to recognize the discourses of others, and to begin to carve out a place for their own voices in the community." In a case study of writing done by social workers attached to a juvenile court system, Paré describes the tension that can exist "between individual vision and community expectations" during the evolution of workplace documents. He found that these social workers struggled to determine what they could or could not write in their reports and that this struggle was influenced by both official and unofficial discourse community restrictions. According to Paré, because discourse communities act as arbiters of appropriate discourse, both allowing and disallowing certain types of writing, writing in any context can be constrained heavily by socially imposed limitations and restrictions.

The last two chapters explore various roles of genre in workplace composing processes. Smart reports on a study of discourse conventions influencing both the writers and their executive readers in a financial institution. From this study, Smart develops a theory on how a discourse community can invent the particular genres it needs to create written knowledge required by decision makers in that community. He hypothesizes that four major contextual influences can shape executives' reading practices and consequent expectations. In the final chapter, Cross reports on a case study that considers the interrelation of genre, context, and process in the group production of an executive letter and report. Using the language theory of Bakhtin (1981) to provide a conceptual framework, Cross analyzes in this case the social, generic, and dynamic features of language production. He argues that since the combination of the type of corporate culture and the type of genre can influence composing decisions and behavior, the influence of generic constraints should be considered along with their interaction with social forces in the context of document writing.

**Situational
Exigence****Composing Processes
on the Job
by Writer's Role and
Task Value**

In their text on research methods in composition studies, Lauer and Asher (1988) claim that composition research has two focuses: rhetorical studies that develop theories about how discourse is produced and interpreted, and empirical investigations that report data validating the rhetorical theories (pp. 3–15). Our study combines the strategies of rhetorical and empirical research and offers a new approach to explore the influence of social context on professional writing.

Our goal was to identify some situational exigencies, or key contextual elements, that shape the process of workplace communication. Our rhetorical theory is based on two aspects of writers' composing situations: the relationship between the task and the writer's profession, and the value of the composing task. We assumed that professional writers' procedures differ from those of members of professions in which writing is not their primary responsibility. We also assumed that writers' procedures for producing texts differ depending upon whether the assignment is routine or significant.

Our empirical investigation of the validity of this theory consisted of a survey of over four hundred professionals employed in a variety of occupations by thirty-one organizations. For this study, we developed a special instrument, the Writers' Survey. Answers to this questionnaire provided information about practices of expert writers common across many workplace genres and professions.

In interpreting the survey data, we devised a new method for categoriz-

ing discourse communities and types by the nature of the context in which the writing is produced. Instead of grouping responses by the discourse communities traditionally defined by profession (e.g., Barnum & Fischer, 1984; DiSalvo & Larsen, 1987; Smeltzer & Gebert, 1986), we postulated two rhetorical communities that reflect a motivated relationship between the writing task and the writer's functional role: *professionals who write*, those for whom writing demonstrates their competence in another profession (for example, engineering); and *career writers*, those for whom writing is their profession (for example, technical communication) and hence a direct demonstration of their professional/technical competence. Further, rather than examining the distribution of professional texts in memos, letters, and reports (e.g., Anderson, 1985; Kirtz & Reep, 1991; Pinelli, Glassman, Barclay, & Oliu, 1989), we established two categories that identify a dominant functional relationship between writing and its context: *routine tasks*, for which speed of completion is more important than product quality; and *special tasks*, for which quality is as or more important than efficiency.

Our four rhetorical categories reflect some earlier research about the influence of context on workplace writing. Some researchers have noted that writers change procedures to correspond with their focus on a technical or rhetorical problem (Mathes & Stevenson, 1976). These scholars' observations parallel our distinctions between the professional who writes primarily to demonstrate technical or administrative competence and the career writer who writes primarily to demonstrate rhetorical expertise. Further, several researchers (e.g., Broadhead & Freed, 1986; Couture & Rymer, 1989; Odell & Goswami, 1984) have shown that writers on the job adjust their practices according to the importance of the task or the efficiency with which it must be completed. However, previous research has not elaborated on how these distinctions contribute to a theory of professional writing, nor has it verified empirically that these categories are situationally based. Specifically, research has not yet linked composing strategies to writers' investment in the task, contrasting professionals who simply write as part of their jobs with career writers' investment in writing as professional identification, nor has it linked writing behaviors to the situational exigence of routine versus nonroutine tasks.

This chapter presents findings that verify that the planning and revising procedures of professionals who write as part of their jobs differ less among this broad group than they differ from the writing practices of career writers, and that members of all surveyed professions recognize the task distinction between routine and special writing. In presenting these results, we discuss our rhetorical theories, which define composing strategies by the writer's role (professional who writes/career writer) and define genres by task value

(routine or special). In this chapter, we describe our methodology, elaborate the discourse categories, present and discuss our survey results, and suggest implications for future research.

Empirical Method: The Writers' Survey

The Writers' Survey, a five-part questionnaire on workplace writing, focuses on writers' composing strategies for two categories of writing, routine and special. In exploring composing processes in context, our research expands on past surveys that have focused on varieties of workplace writing, time spent communicating, and conventional purposes and constraints (e.g., Anderson 1985; DiSalvo & Larsen, 1987; Keeler, 1990; Northey, 1990; Pinelli et al., 1989). Respondents indicated on a 5-point Likert scale (None to Very Much) how much time they spend writing each of ten common documents and identified their most typical routine and special writing tasks. For composing a specific document in each of these categories, subjects responded to questions asking how frequently (Never to Very Often) they practice fifty-five specific procedures, such as outlining or taking notes.

The survey population is an expert sample of 431 subjects experienced in occupations that involve writing and that are predicted to offer employment for future college graduates ("Job Outlook in Brief," 1982). The subjects hold thirty-three different jobs distributed among eight categories: administrators (30%), writers and technologists (19%), engineers and architects (19%), scientists (10%), health professionals (6%), marketing professionals (4%), police and corrections officers (4%), social workers (3%), and others (5%). Managers representing thirty-one Detroit-area organizations selected the subjects from among experienced employees they considered to be expert writers (see Couture, Goldstein, Malone, Nelson, & Quiroz, 1985). In asking managers with communications responsibilities to select effective writers in their companies as our survey subjects, we were proceeding on two assumptions: First, writing competence is determined by members of the discourse community itself, not outsiders (this premise reflects the theory that defining the value and truth of a text is a function of the interpretive community for whom the writer writes [e.g., Clark, 1990; Cooper & Holzman, 1989; Raftery & Rubin, 1988]); and second, composing methods of expert writers in the workplace would differ from those of novices and those less skilled (e.g., Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Beach & Anson, 1988) and would provide a sharper view of the influence of context on composing. (Our subjects, averaging seven years of experience with their current employers, could not be unaware of the specific contexts in which they write.)

| Situational Exigence

This social constructionist approach characterizes not only rhetorical scholarship but also management studies of expertise in organizations. Organizational expertise of any type cannot be defined by academics or others outside a firm because effectiveness is an elusive concept that differs in every context and varies over time; even the members of the organization itself can define it only imperfectly (Cameron, 1986; Cameron & Whetten, 1981). Conventionally in business, of course, it is not the performance of an employee that counts, but rather managers' perceptions of that performance, further reinforcing our choice of organizational insiders to identify our survey subjects. Moreover, research shows that supervisory evaluations of communication skills correlate well with employees' overall competence within the organization (Scudder & Guinan, 1989); effective writing is not an atypical measure of performance.

Rhetorical Theory: Categorizing Situational Exigence

In analyzing professionals' composing strategies for this study, we adopted a social perspective. Assuming that writing is socially constructed, we acknowledge the challenge of documenting the influence of context on professional discourse, including data on "all familiar aspects of the composing process" and data on how the text is disseminated, who reads it, how it is read, and how it shapes other texts (Faigley, 1985, p. 242). Scholars participating in this research effort are faced with the theoretical problem of speculating about how multifaceted social contexts motivate writers to think and act, and then with the empirical problem of conducting studies of writers' situations in a wide variety of organizations. This is a very ambitious agenda, and despite a growing number of case studies exploring hypotheses with a limited number of subjects, a gap still exists between rhetorical theory and empirically verified findings about the social construction of discourse.

As one means to help traverse the gap between rhetorical theory and empirical research on the social contexts for writing, we propose theoretically that situational exigency represents a primary motivation for writing behaviors in the workplace. Situational exigency refers to the environmental factor in a social situation that is interpreted as a dominant demand by the writer. Our concept of situational exigence has its roots in both rhetorical and linguistic theory. Bitzer (1968, 1980) notes that rhetorical discourse reflects its situation, responding to audience, constraints, and "exigence"—that is, a specific combination of persons, events, and instruments that creates a need for communication. Vatz (1973) supports a modification of Bitzer's view, holding that rhetorical exigence—while admittedly linked to situation—is specifically a function of an author's or audience's particular inter-

pretation of what a situation means. From this rhetorical tradition, we have developed the broader concept of situational exigence, which names the phenomenon of rhetorical response linked to a kind of situation. In linguistics, Halliday (1978, 1985) has most thoroughly developed a theory of social meaning as it is linked to grammatical function. From this linguistic tradition, we have adopted the convention of viewing the social context for communication as a system of conditions in which writers make a series of choices that guide their communicative responses.

We have postulated two conditions of situational exigence that define an oppositional choice. The first condition is the focus of the writer's functional role: Is it solving technical or managerial problems, as for professionals such as engineers, scientists, and marketing managers? Or is it solving communication problems, as for career writers who may work in a variety of occupations (such as public relations officer, technical writer, or editor) but whose profession is "writer"? The second condition is the importance of the writing task: Is it routine, concerning business as usual, therefore dictating the writer's conventional, efficient response? Or rather, is it special, concerning what is nonroutine, addressing, for instance, an exceptional problem, a significant audience, a sensitive issue, therefore demanding the writer's considered response, one that is as effective as possible?

The Writer's Functional Role: Professional or Career Writer

We speculated that a dominant situational exigency might distinguish the composing strategies of the professional who writes from those of the career writer. Those whose professional affiliation is writer, whose role focuses on rhetorical problems rather than on technical or other functional problems, will likely conceive of composing tasks differently from engineers, architects, or administrators—professionals who must write as only part of their responsibilities. In making this distinction, we do not mean to imply that these categories are static or discrete. Many engineers, for example, become managers and move from technical to administrative problems; many career writers become managers and no longer function primarily as rhetorical problem solvers.

Harrison and Debs (1988) make clear how technical professionals conventionally view writing and writers:

Traditionally, scientists and engineers have considered documents to be secondary to the "real" work at hand: developing a product or solution to a problem. . . . The product is independent of the documentation, while any writing is dependent on the product. . . . Denying co-product status to writing seems to relegate the technical communicator to a secondary support role. (p. 16)

This limited view of the career writer's function is based on the classical separation of rhetoric from scientific discourse—a logical description of the facts, with invention playing no part in the enterprise (Miller, C. R., 1985). Although we now acknowledge that science is rhetorical and that technical writing involves invention, the scope of many career writers' involvement in nonrhetorical matters may be more limited than is suggested by some models of the writing process in technical communication (Anderson, 1984; Keeler, 1990).

The context for the activities of career writers is typically very different from that of professionals who write. In fact, our demographic data linking genres with these two groups reveal a dramatic difference in their typical writing tasks. Confirming previous research (e.g., Anderson, 1985), most of the professionals who write spend their time (Some, Much, or Very Much) on four document types: memos (69%), short reports (59%), letters (56%), and procedures (53%). Despite a few exceptions (for example, social workers designate minutes among their most common documents), members of many different professions typically do the same kinds of writing. Most career writers, in contrast, spend their time writing manuals (76%), and nearly as many spend that much time on procedures (67%). Further, nearly half of the career writers (47%) spend at least some time each month writing bulletins, a document type professionals do not even mention.

These results strongly support our argument that the writing tasks of career writers and professionals differ in major ways and that this difference constitutes a dominant situational exigency, one that potentially differentiates their composing strategies. Career writers, like professionals, produce documents that help conduct business—memos to superiors and co-workers and letters to clients, for instance. But unlike professionals, their major task is to write specialized documents directing or reporting the activities of others, such as user manuals for computer software or bulletins recording corporate activity (e.g., Feinberg & Goldman, 1985; Kalmbach, Jobst, & Meese, 1986; Little & McLaren, 1987). Furthermore, career writers are typically affiliated with these tasks in ways quite different from professionals who write. Engineers, for example, do write procedures (career writers' most common task), but they tend to have developed the information themselves, whereas career writers typically prepare procedures originated by others (e.g., Harrison & Debs, 1988, p. 6). Although career writers may know a great deal about technical subjects and contribute to making meaning, their area of perceived expertise is not technical; typically, they are not "subject matter" experts (Little & McLaren, 1987). In short, career writers tend to document others' activities without having the central re-

sponsibility for invention or the personal stake in constructing meaning that is characteristic of professionals who write.

The Task Value: Routine or Special Writing

Our classification of writing into routine and special tasks is intuitive, but it is based on a wide variety of reported practice and research (e.g., Suchan & Dulek's distinction between sensitive and nonsensitive texts, 1988). Further, it is grounded in our own experience as writers: Some of our composing tasks seemed routine—our primary goal was efficient completion; for other writing tasks, our goal was the most effective product possible. The importance of the situation influenced our strategies throughout composing, so much so that our procedures for routine and nonroutine tasks defined two quite different methods of writing.

The distinction between routine and nonroutine appears universal in the business environment. Routine work involves known, structured problems with repetitive tasks; nonroutine work, by contrast, focuses on unstructured problems and uncertain tasks. In fact, the rhetorical conception of "writing as problem solving" has tended to emphasize nonroutine writing (for example, formal reports that require numerous revisions) at the expense of routine writing (conventional memos that rely on scripts or standard solutions). Our model of task value is a step toward correcting this bias that neglects routine communication, the more common task in the workplace (DiSalvo & Larsen, 1987).

Distinguishing routine from nonroutine business writing has long been a significant way to classify texts, though the distinction typically emphasizes the product and its reception, not writers' procedures (for example, internal versus external correspondence; informative versus persuasive messages). In fact, historical studies suggest that the concepts of routine and nonroutine work influenced the development of business genres. Yates (1989) notes that at the turn of the century, reports to upper management consisted of "routine or periodic reports, which were issued at regular intervals to provide information on normal operations; and special reports, which analyzed (usually in response to a special request) a specific problem, opportunity, idea, or physical entity" (p. 77). Moreover, the memorandum developed as an efficient counterpart to the formal, external letter as a means of conducting routine business between internal units and departments (pp. 95–100).

Some case studies have shown that workplace writers do distinguish their composing procedures according to what they perceive to be routine and nonroutine (e.g., Odell & Goswami, 1984). Some studies report that employees make their first draft "the final one with only a few minor revisions, if any" when they write "routine business memoranda and corre-

spondence," but compose important documents in multiple drafts, often collaboratively (Van Dyck, 1980, p. 8; see Broadhead & Freed, 1986). In fact, writers may make distinctions that cut across document types, perceiving that one memo is simply a routine matter, reflecting what they would do if they "were in a hurry," while another is quite significant, reflecting what they would do if they "wanted highest quality" (Gould, 1980, pp. 106-107).

The contrast between what is routine and what is nonroutine assumes a dichotomy rather than a continuum from the mundane to the truly exceptional. Like any model, this one glosses over differences and classifies things identically when they may only be similar. Moreover, some factors may characterize either category. Certainly some standard of quality may govern even the most routine document, and the necessity for urgency frequently characterizes highly important matters. Thus, either the routine or nonroutine task may be governed by conflicting goals for meeting an imminent deadline and achieving excellence in the product. In addition, many characteristics of the individual writer and attributes of his or her organizational role will surely impact these basic distinctions.

However, such a dichotomous classification of task value does reflect the nature of human choice—"not one, but the other"—in linguistic and other social behaviors (Halliday, 1985), and it reflects the presentation of such choice in many textbooks. For example, one text contrasts the formulaic, fill-in-the-blanks nature of routine communication with the creativity and unique character of special documents (Andrews & Andrews, 1988, p. 343). The almost universal recognition of a distinction between routine and special writing tasks warranted our investigation of this phenomenon to determine whether writers respond to these situational exigencies with distinctly different composing strategies.

Results: Composing Processes by Writer's Role and Task Value

Researchers have begun to describe the composing strategies of professionals in the workplace, but most have studied either individual members of a specific profession (e.g., Winsor,³¹⁵ 1989) or small work groups in a single organization (e.g., Doheny-Farina,²⁹³ 1986). Although such qualitative research permits building generalizations across several studies, results of specific case studies sometimes contradict one another and contrast with results from quantitative research. Therefore, in discussing our findings, we have not reported exceptions in individuals' practices as contrary evidence.

In presenting our results, we have developed a characterization of the

writing behaviors of professionals who write and career writers through grouping the aggregated responses of subjects by these categories; this approach responsibly reflects the manner in which data were collected. In responding to our survey, subjects first defined their role in an organization and typical writing tasks and then were invited to make distinctions, if any, between routine and special writing. Further, we have characterized how writing behaviors during planning and revising are linked to specific social values, situationally based in workplace communications. We believe that this is a valid starting point for developing and testing a rhetorical theory about a writer's role and task.

For all comparisons of responses of professionals and career writers, significance was determined on the 5-point Likert scale by a chi-square test. For comparisons of responses reported for routine and special writing, a *Z* test of the equality of two proportions was conducted and all differences were found to be significant at the level of $p < .001$ (therefore, we will not report the statistical significance within the text). In discussing the results, we have combined the Often (O) and Very Often (VO) or the Never (N) and Rarely (R) responses.

Composing Processes of Professionals Who Write

Professionals who write, no matter what their field, take strikingly different approaches to routine and special writing tasks. They devote more time and attention to their nonroutine tasks, both in planning and revising.

Although our respondents claim to plan much of their writing, including routine work, they do so more for special assignments. Nearly all professionals (90% O & VO) mentally plan before drafting special writing. In fact, whereas nearly a third (32% O & VO) do not plan routine tasks, only 13% (O & VO) regularly omit planning for nonroutine work (table 1.1). Most professionals (86% O & VO) jot down notes or lists before drafting special writing, but only 55% (O & VO) plan on paper when doing routine tasks. Furthermore, a majority (60% O & VO) claim to outline their special documents, whereas less than a quarter (22% O & VO) typically outline routine writing.

Professionals also revise their special writing far more often than their routine, preferring to revise after drafting more often than during it (table 1.2). While drafting, 25% (O & VO) of those surveyed revise special documents in major ways, but only 15% (O & VO) revise routine assignments. After drafting, however, 39% (O & VO) of these professionals make major revisions of their special writing, with only 21% (O & VO) revising their routine writing in major ways. Professionals give particular attention to nonroutine writing: The majority (69% N & R) do not regard a first draft

Table 1.1. Planning Before Drafting by Professionals (N=351)

	<i>Never/Rarely</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Often/Very Often</i>
I mentally plan a lot			
Routine (NA ^a 3%) ^b	9%	17%	72%
Special (NA 1%)	1%	8%	90%
I mentally plan very little			
Routine (NA 2%)	45%	21%	32%
Special (NA 1%)	72%	14%	13%
I write notes and lists			
Routine (NA 3%)	19%	24%	55%
Special (NA 1%)	4%	10%	86%
I outline			
Routine (NA 5%)	52%	21%	22%
Special (NA 1%)	21%	19%	60%

^aNA = "No answer" in this and subsequent tables.

^bRows in this and subsequent tables may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

as the final draft for special assignments. However, when doing routine writing, many (44% O & VO) simply prepare a single draft.

Additional analysis of the data on planning reveals that professionals focus more on planning their nonroutine documents than on revising them. Of those professionals (61%) who claim a difference in their tendency to mentally plan beforehand as opposed to revising afterward, almost all (92% O & VO) claim to do more mental planning. Of those (58%) who claim a difference between taking notes beforehand and revising after, almost all (98% O & VO) claim to take notes beforehand more frequently. And of those (59%) who claim a difference between their outlining beforehand and revising after, a majority (66% O & VO) claim to outline before more often. In short, planning is a significant characteristic of professionals' composing procedures.

This profile of professionals' planning and revising is clearly different from writers' procedures for routine and special tasks, regardless of the kind of document. These professionals approach routine writing expeditiously, moving quite spontaneously to drafting and completing the task without looking back. In fact, over a third claim to plan and draft at the same time, especially for routine tasks (35% O & VO compared with 23% for special

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