FROM IMPRESSIONS TO EXPECTATIONS: ASSESSMENT AS A FORM OF
STYLE PEDAGOGY

by

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DEDICATION

for my family, who taught me that learning is greater than knowing

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS—*Continued*

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

Recovering from a steady decline since the late 1980s, style is finding relevance in current approaches to composition pedagogy that make writing its focus. Yet despite this renewed interest in style and more general turn toward language study in rhetoric and composition, scholarship on style continues to be guided by a narrow view of what constitutes style pedagogy. This dissertation argues that in many composition classrooms, where style instruction is not prioritized, teachers' assessments of student writing can stand in for style instruction and become the primary means through which style is taught. What this suggests is that style is often taught implicitly, with little consciousness on the part of the teacher. As a result, style may be caught between conflicting values, those that are communicated to students through written feedback and grades and those that teachers actually endorse. This dissertation approaches the issue of style assessment from the perspectives of assessment scholarship, composition teachers, and advanced composition students to better understand how style is being "taught" through assessment and what values guide those evaluations. Ultimately, it seeks to extend the notion of pedagogy to include the assessment of students' writing styles and to contribute a more fully-realized treatment of style to its recent revival in rhetoric and composition.

PREFACE

This project began two years ago, when I was asked to define "good" writing. What should have been a simple task for any writing teacher left me with more questions than answers. It was not that I didn't know what I valued, but rather that what I valued I hadn't ever explicitly taught. I recognized good writing by the impression it left on the page and on my mind as I read it in preparation to assign it a grade. Peter Elbow explains that "[m]ost of what we do in the classroom is determined by the assessment structures we work under" (388). In my "assessing" of good writing, or what I later more precisely came to identify as style, Elbow's claim proved true. I was *teaching* students what I valued about their writing through the ways I was reading it, responding to it, and assigning it a grade. I didn't have a precise vocabulary to draw upon, a shared language my students and I could use to guide conversations about what makes writing good. Months later, I was introduced to the concept of style and learned that the task of defining good writing had been the subject of decades of scholarship in rhetoric and composition. I began to build a stylistic vocabulary, carry this language with me into the classroom, share it with my students, and teach it before I ever sat down to grade.

Quite literally, then, my research questions grew out of a tension between my interests in style and assessment: How do we assess style? How do we assign value to a concept that is at once ambiguous and deeply complex? In searching for the answers to these questions, I found very little research that made an overt connection between these fields of study. As a result, I opted to conduct primary research. I originally planned to design and administer an online survey asking teachers nationwide how they evaluate

stylistic concerns in student writing but found that the complexity of the term "style" gave my survey questions little meaning. I then decided to collect teaching materials from teachers instead, as they represented actual classroom practices, and to conduct follow-up interviews to learn more about how the documents were used within each teacher's specific classroom context. The accounts these teachers shared with me were surprisingly similar to my own experiences with style and, more specifically, with assessing style.

The title of this dissertation reflects my progression from evaluating style based on first *impression* to teaching it with a stylistic vocabulary that allows me to articulate my *expectations* to students. The title is also a call for other teachers to make this transition by recognizing that assessment is not only pedagogical but is pedagogy embodied. When we become aware of what we teach when we react to student writing, we may use those reactions to begin conversations about the features that prompted them and to define the rhetorical effects of those features more precisely. The structure of the dissertation itself argues that how we approach style in the classroom is shaped by how we talk about style as a discipline, as it mimics a linear movement from the meaning made by our scholarship to the meaning received by students in our classrooms. The first two chapters analyze scholarship that has shaped our disciplinary understanding of style pedagogy, while the remaining three chapters trace an evaluation process that moves from how we read for style (chapter three) to how we assign it a grade (chapter four) and ends with how students analyze their own styles as a reflective exercise (chapter five).

Most importantly, this dissertation is a call to the discipline for a more explicit pedagogy of style, one that considers students' own stylistic choices. Such a pedagogy must begin with a vocabulary that is shared among members of our discipline and consciously taught in first-year composition classrooms. That is, we need a way to talk about style with each other and with our students if we are to be specific about what we mean by style and develop best practices for teaching and evaluating it. Luckily, much of this work as already been done. We have a rich history of style in rhetoric and composition to draw upon, including stylistic terminology that has been nearly abandoned. As I argue in the first chapter of this dissertation, we are beginning to rewrite the longstanding and largely inaccurate narrative that equates style with current-traditionalism. Developing a 21st-century pedagogy of style is dependent on the reimagining of style's potential as more than a set of product-oriented exercises so that we see the relevance in reviving the stylistic vocabulary we already have. Once that language is in practice, we may begin to adapt it for our current disciplinary priorities and make the teaching of style more transparent and productive for students.

CHAPTER ONE: PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO STYLE AND THEIR

IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

> When we recall the sensory aspects of past events, we image them. When we manipulate parts of existing images into new combinations and/or when we enrich images with affective associations, we imagine.

—Mark Sadoski, "Imagination, Cognition, and Persona" 266

Despite its rich history in composition studies, style has been largely neglected in our scholarship and in our classrooms since the late 1980s. As this dissertation argues, style's near absence from our pedagogical theory also has important implications for how we assess student writing. As teachers, we have all struggled with defining what constitutes "good" writing and evaluating the aesthetic pleasure we gain from it, knowing that its grace is not something we have explicitly taught. I argue that these reader reactions are a form of assessment, that we evaluate style every time we read student writing, and that those evaluations are often not conscious because style has been moved to our periphery. As a result, style assessment can be reactionary rather than deliberate and based in our feelings as readers rather than the strategies of student writers. This is significant because in composition classrooms where style instruction is not prioritized, teachers' assessments of student writing can stand in for style instruction, becoming the primary means by which style is taught. If we teach students about style through our feedback on their writing, it would benefit us, our students, and the validity of our assessment methods, to explore *what* it is we are teaching students about style and *how* we are teaching it.

That style has been seen as a "throwaway element of writing pedagogy" for the past twenty or so years has much to do with our disciplinary memory of style, the "linear narrative that assumes more complex writing theories supersede less complicated ideas about composing" (Pace 5). Seen as a concern of the past, style has been erased along with the current-traditional pedagogies with which it is so strongly associated. Robert Connors—in arguing that style's near absence is due to a disciplinary shift toward anti-formalism, anti-behaviorism, and anti-empiricism—bluntly proclaims, "[t]he problem was in the exercises" ("Erasure" 115). With this statement Connors suggests that it is not only our discipline's changing priorities that led to style's disappearance; it is also the assumption that style can only be taught one way, through exercises that no longer hold much value in contextual, cultural, and process-driven approaches to writing. In other words, we as a discipline have done little more than simply *image* style, to borrow Sadowski's term. We have, in the past twenty years, recalled a memory of style as a skill taught by decontextualized exercises and have subsequently rejected it.

Very recently, however, style has seen a resurgence in composition studies, a turn that I believe is due in large part to scholarship that has moved beyond *imaging* style to *imagine* it. We have begun to enrich and rework, rather than merely recall, what style means and how it can be useful for our evolving priorities. While this new wave of scholarship on style has highlighted style's role in our discipline and given it contemporary legitimacy, it has also made the task of evaluating style in student writing increasingly more complex. Throughout this dissertation I explore some of the ways this paradox is made manifest. Approaching the issue of style assessment from the

perspectives of assessment scholarship, composition teachers, and advanced composition students, I present a multifaceted account of how style is being taught through assessment and what values guide those evaluations.

Because one of the greatest problems with studying and teaching style is the vague nature of the term, I find it necessary before I continue to define style as it is used in this chapter and in the dissertation more broadly. The concept guiding my research is Ross Winterowd's term *pedagogical stylistics*. In its simplest sense, the phrase *pedagogical stylistics* refers to the study of stylistic features of writing within the context of the writing classroom. While stylistics has been discussed in literary and linguistic theory, I will take a rhetorical approach to the study of style. According to Jeanne Fahnestock, a key difference between literary stylistics and rhetorical stylistics is that while literary stylistics is an analytical art, rhetorical stylistics is a productive one. Drawing on classical rhetoric, she explains that language features are chosen based on their functionality and their desired effects on the audience. Using this framework, then, I will be primarily interested in the effects created by particular stylistic devices.

To further clarify how I will discuss stylistics within this dissertation, I must draw a distinction between linguistic and rhetorical understandings of the study of style. Aside from the differences in terminology between the two fields (rhetoricians typically discuss style in terms of rhetorical schemes and tropes and linguists in terms of register and semantic patterns), their conceptions of pedagogical stylistics also differ in terms of classroom use. Within linguistics the subfield of pedagogical stylistics is used primarily to teach or assess foreign language competence and is therefore concerned with the

development of language skills. In rhetoric, on the other hand, the teaching of style is largely associated with the effectiveness of language in relation to audience, purpose, and context. My rationale for drawing on the concept of pedagogical stylistics in this dissertation is that I am interested specifically in the study of style within the context of the composition classroom and from a rhetorical perspective.

Any discussion of style pedagogy is dependent on a clearly articulated definition of style. For the purposes of my research, I define style as the patterns of language features that define a particular author's writing within a given rhetorical situation. Purposely vague, this definition does not restrict style to solely conscious (as the word *choices* might) but rather allows for unconscious processes as well. The word *patterns* suggests that while style can be learned, writers have natural stylistic tendencies that can reveal their life contexts and epistemologies. Further, I do not restrict style to sentence-level features in this definition because I believe style can be found in all levels of writing processes and products. In defining stylistic features in this way, I am arguing that form and content must be separate in order for us to teach writing but that they are inextricably linked.

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine style's place in our disciplinary memory, reviewing major pedagogical approaches from the height of style's popularity in composition. I then turn to recent scholarship on style to demonstrate how our collective memory of style is being reimagined in ways that make the teaching of style possible in 21st-century composition classrooms. I argue that while scholarship that reimagines

pedagogical stylistics has helped to revive style, it has also introduced new challenges for style assessment.

Traditional Approaches to Style Pedagogy

In his "Theories of Style and their Implications for the Teaching of Composition," Louis Milic outlines three theories of style—rhetorical dualism, psychological monism, and aesthetic monism—and claims that if we are to study style, we must subscribe to one of them. Rhetorical dualism is the theory that form and content are separate entities and that, as a result, writing is a process of finding the language to fit preexisting ideas. Psychological monism suggests that style is inherent to an author's personality; thus, no two people can have the same style. This is problematic for teachers of writing, because if good writing can only be produced by good people, composition becomes a course in character-development rather than in writing.[1] Milic's third theory, aesthetic monism, acknowledges no distinction between form and content, meaning that style as an entity cannot exist and is impossible to study or teach. Milic's taxonomy leaves us with one option if we are to teach style: the theory of rhetorical dualism.

Monroe Beardsley, on the other hand, views form and content as inseparable such that any change in style inherently changes meaning. This is the theory Milic would refer to as aesthetic monism. A key difference between the two theorists is that while Milic would argue that style ceases to exist when we view form and content as inseparable,

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[1] John Gage addresses this claim in a response to Milic, arguing that Milic's theory of psychological monism is actually not a theory of style at all but rather is a theory of personal psychology.

Beardsley explains that style still exists, but it exists as meaning. This conception of the

form/content relationship poses obvious problems for both pedagogical and theoretical

stylistics.[2] For theoretical stylisticians it means that they must speculate about an author's

intent in a piece of writing. If style and meaning are inseparable, any judgment of style is

a judgment of meaning. This theory makes it impossible to study only language in a

stylistic analysis. Beardsley also argues that writing is "good" when there is congruity

between what a sentence suggests and its explicit meaning. Unfortunately, because we

rarely have insight into the intended meaning of a text, we cannot always make an

assessment of good style as Beardsley defines it. For pedagogical stylistics Beardsley's

theory of the relationship between form and content means that style cannot be taught at

all and that when we comment on aspects of style in student work, we are inevitably

changing the students' ideas. Therefore it is the idea that form and content can exist

separately (Milic's rhetorical dualism) that informs the traditional approaches to style

pedagogy in composition, including generative rhetoric, imitation, sentence combining,

and alternate styles.[3]

How consciousness is understood in regard to style also influences how style is

taught. Milic argues that style is a combination of both conscious and unconscious

processes, bringing together the New Classists' view that style is completely conscious

and the New Romantics' view that style is mysterious and unconscious. He calls the

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[2] *Theoretical stylistics* and *pedagogical stylistics* are terms developed by Ross Winterowd to distinguish between stylistic methods used by literary scholars to examine literature and those used in the composition classroom to analyze and teach style. While most of my response focuses on pedagogical stylistics, it is important to mention theoretical stylistics in this paragraph, as Beardsley is a literary scholar.

[3] For my purposes here, I am looking at how these classifications relate specifically to style pedagogy. For a more detailed historical account of sentence-based pedagogies including generative rhetoric, imitation, and sentence combining, see Robert Connors' "The Erasure of the Sentence."

conscious processes *stylistic options* and the unconscious processes *rhetorical choices* wherein stylistic options suggests that writers have a bank of language options from which to choose and rhetorical choices assumes we have control over what we write and that our choices are rhetorically situated. With these two terms also comes a necessary order—stylistic options come first as part of the idea-generating stage, and rhetorical choices follow, as part of the revision process. Milic's theory of consciousness tells us quite a bit about how he views style. First, he views it as a combination of conscious and unconscious processes that must work in a particular order. A pedagogy based on this theory is one that encourages students to prewrite in order to get their ideas on the page and then revise to most closely match the words on the page with the meaning the student intended. Milic's theory shows us not only that style can be both conscious and unconscious but also that it is much less conscious than previously thought. That is, the order Milic assigns to the writing process suggests that the unconscious process is our default while the conscious process serves to "clean up" the work of our unconscious mind. The concepts of stylistic option and rhetorical choice can help us better understand the style scholarship of the past and the emerging scholarship discussed in this chapter, as all forms of style pedagogy are based in how one views the relationship between form and content and how conscious one believes style to be.

The concept of generative rhetoric, developed by Francis Christensen and explored in his two major works ("A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence" and "A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph"), came out of the idea that sentence exercises were too prescriptive and product-oriented and instead should aid in idea generation. In "A

Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence," Christensen argues that writing—and more specifically, the sentence—is how writers construct meaning. His generative rhetoric of the sentence allows students to manipulate their styles while they are processing ideas; therefore, it is the production component of his method that makes it generative. The first component of Christensen's generative rhetoric is addition, the process by which students make cumulative sentences out of periodic sentences with the end goal of making their style more complex. Another principle that guides his generative rhetoric, direction, is created by adding modifiers to sentences. According to Christensen, all sentences must have "movement" to make them dynamic and varied. Where a student chooses to add a modifier (at the beginning or end of the sentence) affects the way the sentence moves. By incorporating movement into his generative rhetoric, Christensen draws a useful connection between grammar and rhetoric in that the structure of a sentence directly affects the structure's stylistic effect. The final principle Christensen introduces in his theory of generative rhetoric is texture. Texture always relates back to addition, as thin texture can become rich simply by adding detail. Christensen equates thin texture with plain style and rich texture with denser, and thus more effective, style. Two years after "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence," Christensen published "A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph," in which he explains that the paragraph has "a structure as definable and traceable as that of the sentence and that it can be analyzed in the same way" (144). In other words, Christensen built upon and extended his own theory to make it applicable to broader elements of student writing. Christensen's generative rhetoric is useful to us as scholars in rhetoric and composition because it offers a way to join grammar and rhetoric.

It is important to any discussion of style as well, because it demonstrates how a theory of style can articulate itself in practice. The concept of generative rhetoric inspired many studies on the effectiveness of his work, most producing positive gains in student writers (See Faigley; Bond; Davis).

Since Christensen others have employed his methods and elaborated on them. Frank D'Angelo's "A Generative Rhetoric of the Essay," for example, applies Christensen's concept of idea generation to an analysis of whole essays. D'Angelo claims that because the essay is "a kind of microparagraph," the organizational structures offered by Christensen's generative rhetoric can help us to understand the form of extended units of discourse (whole texts) as well (389). Specifically, D'Angelo argues that the "ability to perceive form" beyond mere impression may be even more important for the invention of essays as it is for the more localized units of the sentence and paragraph (396). Robert De Beaugrande's theory of generative stylistics is also drawn from the work of Francis Christensen (and Louis Milic) and considers mental processes as part of stylistics. Specifically, generative stylistics involves the decision-making processes that lead to written discourse, including "such variables as communicative intention, presupposition, focus, reference, emotional stress and other factors of the situation in which the act of communication takes place" (241). De Beaugrande offers a two-phase model that a composition course enacting his theory would follow. The first phase of the course, governed by De Beaugrande's belief that once students know the rules of language use they may begin to write effectively, is spent teaching students grammar and the specific differences between written and spoken discourse. The second half of the course De

Beaugrande proposes involves arranging written content, and the concept of
"informational value" is offered as one way to teach students about arrangement at the
sentence level. The theory is that sentences should always include a balance of both old
and new information, whereby old information is knowledge shared by both the author
and reader and new information is known only to the author. Generative stylistics applies
the concept of idea-generation to an explicit study of style and extends Christensen's
exercises beyond the act of writing to the act of thinking. The connection De Beaugrande
draws between spoken and written language makes style instruction about much more
than exercises and, because of its emphasis on communication, foreshadows current
scholarship on style that treats style more as a language than as a tool to be applied.

As generative rhetoric was becoming a popular form of style pedagogy, so too
was imitation. Classical rhetoricians advocating imitation, specifically Dionysius of
Halicarnassus, Longinus, and Quintilian, conceived of imitation (*mimesis*) not as mere
copying but as providing exposure to multiple writing styles to ultimately improve one's
own style. The *Ad Herennium* introduces a method of acquiring oratorical skills—
referred to by Edward P. J. Corbett as the "triad of theory, imitation, and practice"—that
has become a standard form for imitation pedagogy ("Theory and Practice" 244).
Specifically, this triad informs the pedagogical approach of prose analysis. In his
Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, for example, Corbett introduces a method of
analysis of prose style that begins with counting and analyzing stylistic features of
published writing and then applying it to one's own writing. Students then record their
data in prose charts, which are divided into two columns titled "professional" and

student." Corbett's "A Method of Analyzing Prose Style with a Demonstration Analysis of Swift's *A Modest Proposal*" illustrates the method of prose analysis set forth in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. Corbett explains that the "objectively observable features of style" include words, sentences, and paragraphs. In analyzing words students may look for whether they are "general or specific; abstract or concrete; formal or informal; polysyllabic or monosyllabic; common or special; referential or emotive" (84). In regard to the sentence, students can study length, type, and varieties of sentence patterns, as well as tropes (i.e., metaphor, irony, oxymoron) and schemes (i.e., parallelism, climax, anastrophe). And when analyzing paragraphs, students can observe "length…levels of movement or development…the means of articulating sentences within the paragraph, and the transitional devices used between paragraphs" (85). After gathering the stylistic data from published work (literature), students analyze another piece by the same author, a piece by a different author, and, eventually, a piece of their own work to gain practice with the forms they have studied.

"James Baldwin's Style: A Prospectus for the Classroom" similarly demonstrates how the analysis of prose styles can work to teach students about their own styles. In it, John Fleischauer argues that stylistic analysis can offer students models of effective prose and allow them to see the identity of the writer, since "the evidence of his patterns of expression is directly before the students' eyes" (141). Like Corbett, Fleischauer's purpose is to show how analyzing a well-known and respected text can teach students about their own writing. However, Fleischauer also offers students a way to understand *authors* by analyzing their styles. Concerned primarily with the author's "recurrent

traits," he suggests that these are better indicators of an author's style than the rarer

qualities of the prose and should be analyzed more closely. Thus he establishes style as a

component of an author's identity and a way that students can see writing as always

connected to a real self.

In the 1970s sentence combining became a primary form of style pedagogy.

Based in Chomskian transformational-generative (TG) grammar, sentence combining

involves the joining of sentences to result in a more complex sentence. Typically the goal

is to move students beyond the overuse of simple sentences and to create sentence

variety, or "syntactic maturity." The catalyst for the sentence combining trend in

composition was Frank O'Hare's 1973 study *Sentence Combining: Improving Student*

Writing without Formal Grammar Instruction. Unlike previous studies of sentence

combining (See Bateman and Zidonis; Mellon), O'Hare studied the effects of sentence

combining on students who had not received formal grammar instruction as part of the

study. In an effort to test the hypotheses that an experimental group receiving sentence

combining practice would "score significantly higher on the six factors of syntactic

maturity" than the control group not receiving sentence combining practice and produce

writing "significantly superior in overall quality" to that of the control group, O'Hare

studied the writing of eighty-three seventh-grade students for eight months (35-36). His

experiment confirmed both of his hypotheses; the experimental group showed "highly

significant growth" in the six factors tested (words per t-unit, clauses per t-unit, words per

clause, noun clauses per 100 t-units, adverb clauses per 100 t-units, and adjective clauses

per 100 t-units), and the English teachers judging overall quality of both groups' prose

favored the experimental groups' 70 percent of the time (55). O'Hare's study influenced

many others, including Donald Daiker, Andrew Kerek, and Max Morenberg's oft-cited

1978 study, which further solidified the place of sentence combining in composition.

Like O'Hare, Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg found that their experimental group, which

comprised six sections of college freshmen, achieved significant gains in syntactic

maturity and essay quality.

Despite the popularity and apparent success of sentence combining in the 1970s

and early 1980s, its presence in composition scholarship and classrooms faded quickly

and criticism grew. Marion Crowhurst's 1983 article "Sentence Combining: Maintaining

Realistic Expectations" describes the results we can expect to see from sentence

combining as a pedagogical approach to writing. Specifically, Crowhurst evaluates the

two criteria studied by O'Hare and Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg—syntactic fluency and

overall writing quality—and argues that while we can expect syntactic fluency to increase

as a result of sentence combining exercises, those gains will likely decrease shortly after

instruction. Crowhurst offers one explanation for this decrease:

> Sentence combining does not produce . . . automatic or involuntary use of
> syntactic operations. It makes readily available certain syntactic resources.
> Linguistic resources which were already within the student's competence are
> raised to conscious control. The student must still be taught when and how to use
> these resources to rhetorical advantage. (64)

While sentence combining can lead to increased syntactic fluency, albeit temporarily, we

cannot expect it alone to improve overall writing quality. The scholarship on sentence

combining is not consistent enough to generalize about gains in the quality of whole texts

and the contextual nature of writing and writing classrooms must always be considered,

Crowhurst argues. Despite the perhaps inflated claims made by proponents of sentence combining, however, sentence-level rhetorics had a profound influence on composition pedagogy of the era and directed attention to students' own writing instead of literature, as imitation often did.

The concept of alternate styles became popular in the early 1980s. Winston Weathers' introduction of alternate style, or what he refers to as "Grammar B," was a significant move toward a rhetorical approach to style and toward seeing style as play. According to Weathers, we must give students options for developing their styles, as "[w]ithout options, there can be no rhetoric" ("Grammars of Style" 219). However, we must also be open to creating new options for students, moving beyond traditional the rules of "Grammar A," which is his name for traditional academic discourse. In using the term *grammar* to describe his alternate approach to style, Weathers seeks to establish Grammar B as a set of conventions as legitimate as those that comprise Grammar A. That is, the alternate grammar Weathers proposes has its own rules, in a sense, in that it can be characterized by "variegation, synchronicity, discontinuity, ambiguity, and the like" and as "open-ended in structure," with "less well-defined beginnings and endings" than we might expect in traditional forms (237). According to Weathers, Grammar B is an alternative to Grammar A but one with its own defining features and rhetorical aims. The concept of alternate style has influenced recent scholarship on and approaches to style pedagogy. A 1997 collection edited by Wendy Bishop, *Elements of Alternate Style*, draws from Weathers' notion of Grammar B to offer techniques for developing alternate styles and subsequently blends creative writing and composition pedagogies. The collection

encourages students to play with language, to take risks, and to extend academic writing beyond a singular genre.

Current Approaches to Style Pedagogy

My purpose in reviewing the major pedagogical approaches to style from the 1960s to 1980s, when style study was most popular in composition, is to illustrate how our disciplinary memory of style has been shaped and why it is just now recovering from a steady decline. In this chapter I suggest that the near absence of style for the past twenty years is due to a reluctance to rewrite our disciplinary memory. We have simply recalled style along with its current-traditional connotations, decided that its pedagogical applications do not fit our contemporary needs, and subsequently rejected it. Style's recent resurgence, then, is a result of recent scholarship that has been able to reimagine style by detaching it from its traditional pedagogical *applications* and instead treating it as a *language* that can be reworked and reapplied for various contexts and help us make meaning of those contexts. To further explain this viewpoint, I will offer some themes I see emerging from recent style scholarship in order to show how style is being reimagined and how these conceptions of style relate to the traditional applications of style already outlined.

One recent conception of style, introduced in T. R. Johnson's *A Rhetoric of Pleasure*, is that of style as a means of personal transformation. Johnson argues that when students produce quality writing, they gain a sense of authorial pleasure from it. This pleasure is not simply enjoyment gained from the play of language but rather has

transformative power. Style, as understood this way, can become an agent of change.

Johnson relies heavily on sound metaphors in his theory and pedagogy of style, arguing

that "we can willfully close our eyes anytime we wish, but we can never really close our

ears" (31). He explains further that students already use this metaphor when describing

their own writing but that, perhaps, it has been misrepresented and underappreciated:

> This, I think, is what my students are talking about when they say they are
> bringing their writing closer to speech through the use of stylistic devices: not the
> dubious rhetorical value of sheer personality or 'true voice,' but the opposite, the
> transpersonal, transformative force of sound. (31)

Johnson's pedagogy is not unlike traditional approaches to style pedagogy; it involves

practice with stylistic devices and prose analysis. What makes this pedagogy different is

that while current-traditional style exercises were often means to produce the end result

of "better" prose, Johnson's approach makes the transformation of individual writers its

goal.

Jane Walpole reinforces the importance of sound to style pedagogy,

recommending that writing teachers read excellent prose aloud to their students, "just to

let students attune their ears to the rhythm and resonance of vigorous prose" (164).

Walpole also recommends sentence play as an ally in "the vigorous pursuit of style and

grace." She has her students study a model sentence and then rework and revise it in

various ways: changing its diction; deleting, transposing, and transforming certain

elements within it; reversing the sentence combining process by reducing it to a series of

short sentences; and finally generating new sentences imitating the pattern of the model.

This exercise, she hopes, will "increase our students' sensitivity to words and rhythms . . .

, enlarge their repertoires of grammatical and stylistic options . . . , and enhance their

appreciation of subtle grace, apt style, clean vigor" (169). Essentially, Walpole's pedagogy is built on the same premise as was sentence combining, but its purpose is to build an appreciation of the sounds produced by graceful style.

The recent work of Min-Zhan Lu has extended the goal of transforming individual writers to consider cultural difference more broadly in the classroom. In her 1994 article "Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone," which helps develop a multicultural approach to style, Lu explains that the features of writing that often characterize the work of non-mainstream students "are commonly displaced to the realm of 'error' and thus viewed as peripheral to college English teaching" (448). Lu provides two anecdotes in which Gertrude Stein's and Theodore Dreiser's publishers questioned their styles because they strayed from what was considered typical, Stein's purposeful stylistic deviations being mistaken for errors and Dreiser's colloquial style being called "uneven" and therefore in need of revision. Lu's multicultural approach to style asks students to recognize voices that do not represent traditional academic discourse, consider their own positions among these voices, and think critically about the language choices they make in regard to their individual cultural contexts.

While these approaches have sought to reimagine style's role in the classroom, Paul Butler's *Out of Style* (2008) has initiated a conversation about style as it pertains to public intellectuals and our purposes as a discipline. He claims that because we have largely overlooked style as a discipline, we have allowed others outside our field to speak for us. He provides the example of the popular *Eats, Shoots, & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* as one text that characterizes the public's fascination

with grammar and style. The public, Butler argues, is talking about style, looking to engage in conversations about it, and yet we as scholars in rhetoric and composition are not. This argument can expand our role as a discipline beyond the teaching of writing and toward public knowledge-making and sharing. It also moves style as a concept beyond the decontextualized, arhetorical exercises with which it is often associated and toward a sort of language through which we can extend conversations about writing outside the academic realm. Further, it is a call to take style back from the public realm where it has relevance and make it relevant again in rhetoric and composition.

Barry Brummett's *A Rhetoric of Style*, while out of communication studies and not rhetoric and composition, is an example of the universality of rhetoric and of style. Brummett moves style beyond the realm of the classroom, investigating how it works as a larger system of communication that controls our everyday decisions. He places style at the center of popular culture, looking at how it affects social relationships and politics, and ultimately argues that style is the basis for a 21st-century rhetoric. The book's final chapter is an analysis of gun culture in the United States that illustrates the "rhetoric of style" he proposes in the book. The idea that style can be used as a way to critique social systems and popular culture gives it the potential to become a "language" of our field, a way that we communicate with other disciplines. This is not unlike Butler's argument, that style should be a language that we use to communicate with the public. Imagining style in this way removes it from the current-traditional realm with which it has been associated and destructs the style/invention dichotomy. We can begin to see that not only

do style and invention work together, but that style may soon become a concept that helps us understand invention.

The Problem for Assessment

When I refer to *assessment* throughout this dissertation, I do so with an awareness of the complex nature of the term. I use it in the chapters that follow as an umbrella term that embodies all the methods of evaluating student writing I explore throughout the dissertation: written response, reading, grading, and self-assessment. The fundamental claim that joins all five chapters is that assessment is a form of style pedagogy, a point based on scholarship that argues that assessment is not just a means of measuring one's aptitude but a formative, value-laden process that communicates ideologies about what constitutes effective writing to students (just as teaching is). It is this scholarly conversation on the productive nature of writing assessment, begun in the 1980s with the work of Nancy Sommers and reinforced most notably by Peter Elbow, Edward M. White, Richard Straub, and Chris Anson, that I use to situate my related point about assessment's role in our teaching of style. In specific, I draw heavily on Elbow's assertion that "[w]e evaluate every time we write a comment on a paper or have a conversation about its value" (388).

The scholarship laid out in this chapter sets up three claims that guide my overall research project: (1) the fact that there has been very little recent scholarship on style means that we must rely on outdated scholarship to inform our teaching and assessment of style; (2) the style scholarship that does exist has ignored assessment as a form of style

pedagogy; and (3) while recent style scholarship has increased style's visibility in the field, it has also made assessing style more difficult.

The first of these claims has been made by Rebecca Moore Howard, who uses the term *fossil pedagogy* to describe the methods of style pedagogy that were most prominent in the 1960s to 1980s. She defines fossil pedagogy as that which is

> focused on the plain style and its hallmark, clarity; pedagogy whose stylistic principles are derived from analysis of literary texts and that thereby positions student writing in negative contrast to literary genius . . . ; pedagogy that does not position students as critical writers in complex (and sometimes oppressive) social, political, and cultural situations. (50)

While recent scholarship that debunks these traditional notions of style exists, it constitutes a small minority of the scholarship available on style. As a result, those who wish to teach style must rely on scholarship that defines style in ways that no longer align with our goals as writing teachers. In the classroom this reliance on outdated theories and applications of style, should we choose to incorporate them at all, affects how students conceptualize style.

Further, scholarship on the teaching of style has almost completely ignored the element of assessment.[4] This absence suggests either that style cannot be assessed or that it does not warrant assessment. Depending on how one perceives style, a case can be made for the former. However, because the scholarship that has omitted discussions of assessment is the same scholarship that has offered pedagogical approaches to style, it would seem that a notion of style as teachable (and therefore assessable) would be inherent. Another explanation is that because style is often taught as supplementary to

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[4] The one exception I have found is a five-page appendix in Wendy Bishop's *Elements of Alternate Style* that offers heuristics for self- and peer evaluation.

course content and by means that decontextualize it, style may not be considered a concern that requires assessment.

In this dissertation I establish assessment as a form of pedagogy and present the problems created when we do not take seriously its role in style instruction, namely that style is something always embodied in student writing and that when we fail to acknowledge its presence, we send students conflicting messages about what we value. When we recognize that assessment is a form of style instruction, we may think more consciously about how we are evaluating style. Specifically, we may consider more fully the factors influencing our conceptions of style, their accuracy, and whether they accurately communicate to students our expectations for effective style. When I refer to the assessment of style, I limit myself to evaluations of student writing that take place in the classroom. The act of evaluating students' writing styles has been treated on a large scale, primarily in error studies that categorize the types of errors found in student writing in an attempt to see how they occur and which occur most frequently. Because of the lack of style scholarship that addresses assessment, in chapter two I draw on assessment scholarship (specifically response scholarship) to better understand how style is constructed in that realm.

Finally, recent scholarship on style tends to move style outside the realm of textual features and, therefore, makes assessment more challenging. Although the "fossil pedagogies" of generative rhetoric, imitation, sentence combining, and alternate style are criticized for their focus on the text and their dismissal of more complicated contextual factors, they do allow for a teachable and assessable concept of style. The recent style

scholarship discussed here, which is more closely aligned with the current values of our

discipline, tends to use style to effect change in students (through authorial

transformation or cultural awareness) or bring style outside the classroom altogether (by

way of the public intellectual or a way of understanding popular culture).[5] While these

sources in no way represent all the recent scholarship on style, they are some of the most

prominent and so serve the purpose of illustrating a central tension of this dissertation:

The scholarship that popularized style study and does not accurately represent the values

of our current field makes style an assessable concept, while the recent scholarship that

does reflect the values of our field extends style so broadly as to not be recognizable as a

body of textual features and therefore makes it difficult if not problematic to assess. The

resulting binary we find ourselves in is that of assessing what we do not value and

valuing what we cannot assess. This paradox, while necessarily generalized and

oversimplified here for sake of my argument, revealed itself after I analyzed the results of

my primary research and began to put them in writing.

Outline of the Dissertation

      The remainder of this dissertation explores how the opportunities and challenges

for style assessment set forth in this chapter are revealed in the contexts of our

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[5] Another topic that has been central to contemporary style scholarship is style's period of absence from the 1980s until very recently in the field of rhetoric and composition. Much of the work that has been published in recent years has explored this absence. See Butler's *Out of Style* and "Style in the Diaspora of Composition Studies," Pace's "Style and the Renaissance of Composition Studies," Rankin's "Revitalizing Style: Toward a New Theory and Pedagogy," Connors' "The Erasure of the Sentence," Elizabeth Weiser's "Where is Style Going, Where Has It Been?," and Rebecca Moore Howard's "Contextual Stylistics: Breaking Down the Binaries in Sentence-Level Pedagogy."

scholarship and composition classrooms. Chapter two serves the larger argument of the dissertation by establishing the notion that assessment, particularly written responses to student writing, is pedagogical and is often the primary means through which we teach style. I analyze three major studies of response to student writing to illustrate how teachers' expectations of effective style are communicated to students. From this analysis I found that the assessment scholarship I analyzed serves to reinforce and reproduce notions of style as current-traditional and therefore concerned with mere form. I conclude that to teach style productively through response, we must use language that moves beyond impression and considers the rhetoricality of students' stylistic choices. The findings of chapter two—that we respond to style impressionistically because we do not recognize it and identify it as a local-level concern when we do recognize it—illustrate the dichotomy presented in this chapter.

Chapter three uses the concept of *rhetorical distance* as a framework for understanding what constitutes effective style according to interviews I conducted with six teachers at different institutions across the country. This chapter first explores the complexities of the "teacher-reader" identity and then uses rhetorical distance to describe how the relationship between the teacher-reader and student text affects judgments of stylistic effectiveness. Specifically, I found that in all the interviews I conducted, teachers identified themselves as readers and student writing as texts they read for enjoyment or their aesthetic value. Thus effective style is that which decreases the metaphorical distance between reader and text and ineffective style is that which disrupts that connection. Based on these findings, I suggest that the concept of rhetorical distance can

help us reimagine style's role as a liaison between reader and text but can be problematic for assessment. Namely, when effective style is a judgment that resides solely with the reader, it is an effect and not something that can be actively created.

Building on chapter three, chapter four reports the results of a large-scale study of 120 scoring rubrics I collected from composition teachers nationwide in an effort to determine how style is assigned a quantitative value. From the conceptions of style presented in the rubrics, I identified four main evaluative criteria for style: readability, appropriateness, consistency, and correctness. While style is defined as a global-level concern in the majority of the rubrics—in contrast to how style is defined by the assessment scholarship analyzed in chapter two—its placement into scoring guides compartmentalizes and restricts our assessment of it. What this chapter reveals, then, is that when our conceptions of what make writing good are translated for students through our modes of assessment, they can be obscured if not entirely lost.

The final chapter reports the results of a study of advanced composition students' stylistic analyses of their own writing, exploring the definitions of style reflected in the analyses and their relationship to representations of stylistic awareness. The representations of stylistic awareness in students' analyses correlate to an ability to detach themselves from the stylistic features of their writing; students who exhibited the highest degree of awareness saw style as choices, while those with the lowest degree of awareness saw style as habitual, an element of who they are as writers. This chapter both promotes self-assessment as a tool for evaluating students' writing styles and illuminates the problems that arise when we assess an aspect of writing that students see as internal

and process-driven. I conclude with a brief chapter that offers suggestions for future

research.

CHAPTER TWO: STYLE AND THE PEDAGOGY OF RESPONSE

Everyone who has tried to say something about an author's style has probably committed this kind of fault. He has read, let us say, a very impressive writer, and he is full of the desire to say what possessed him and what fascinated him about the writer's language, but he has nothing to fall back on except burning intensity and the tendency of sentences to mean something.

—Louis Milic, "Metaphysics in the Criticism of Style" 124

Milic's words describe a typical encounter between reader and text. A reader is particularly moved by an author's words but relies on "desire" and "burning intensity" to justify the favorable reaction. For Milic, the metaphysical nature of style means that we often do not recognize effective style until we see it and, most likely, cannot name it even then. Though Milic's observation refers to the criticism of literary style, it is applicable to teachers' responses to student writing as well. While we may not explicitly teach style in our classrooms, our commentary on student writing is a means of style instruction. However, this implicit approach to instruction leaves us with "nothing to fall back on" when evaluating students' styles, causing us to rely on first impressions rather than contextualizing our responses within students' own stylistic choices. As a result, style can be caught between conflicting values, those communicated to students through our commentary and those we actually endorse.

While Milic suggests that we evaluate an author's style every time we read, style scholarship has neglected to consider the role of classroom assessment in the teaching of style. This chapter looks at one specific type of assessment, teachers' written commentary

on student writing, as a site of style pedagogy that is often overlooked.[6] In his recent *Rhetoric Review* article "Style in the Diaspora of Composition Studies," Paul Butler offers one possible explanation for this oversight. According to Butler, when style is treated as a higher-order concern it "is often not *called* style but instead is named something else" (5). When style is called style, however, it tends to be used reductively and as synonymous with grammar, usage, and correctness. That style is only understood as *style* when connected to aspects of writing we consider low-priority has important implications for how style is assessed: style is either something we name but do not value or value but cannot name. Yet in many composition classrooms, where style instruction is not prioritized, teacher commentary is the primary means through which style is taught. Adequately teaching style through our commentary, then, requires that we take advantage of assessment's pedagogical function in our responses to student writing.

Edward White and Brian Huot acknowledge that teachers' responses to student writing are pedagogical. Huot points out that "[a] common assumption about the teaching of writing and its assessment is that there is a lack of fit between the way we assess and the way we teach" (11). This is because assessment is seen as primarily summative, an evaluation of a finished piece of writing. Instead, Huot calls for "instructive evaluation," which involves "learning a specific task while participating in a particular literacy event" (69). According to Huot, teachers and students can learn about writing through

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[6] I use the term "response" interchangeably with "commentary" to refer to teachers' comments on student writing and "evaluation" to refer more generally to a summative assessment of a piece of writing. "Judgment" refers to a determination based on a particular value system and is not meant to refer to a type of assessment; therefore it is used only as part of the phrase "value judgment" in this chapter. Finally, my use of "assessment" is limited to evaluations of student writing by a teacher within a classroom context.

assessment, rather than assessment simply being something the teacher creates and the student passively receives. Edward White also highlights the importance of connecting assessment to teaching, asserting that the "educational purpose of responding to and evaluating student writing ought to be the same as the purpose of the writing class: to improve student writing" ("Teaching and Assessing" 103). My point here differs slightly from White's in that my primary concern is not how assessing style and teaching style can work together but rather that assessing style *is* teaching style.

Considering the pedagogical nature of response and the limited ways style pedagogy has been theorized, I expand style pedagogy to include teachers' written comments on student writing. Despite our resistance to teaching style in our classrooms, style exists in student writing and is considered in our responses to student writing. Unfortunately, our present-day conceptions of style are largely based on a memory of the past that associates style with current-traditional rhetoric. As a result, style is either judged impressionistically or is equated with mere form and is treated as a lower-order aspect of student writing. To explore how our expectations for effective style are communicated to students, I review three major studies of response to student writing. Locating style within each, I highlight the ways in which these assessments fail to teach students important lessons about style. Ultimately, I argue that to teach style effectively through response, we must use language that moves beyond impression and considers the rhetoricality of students' stylistic choices.

"Remnants of the Past": Style and the Current-Traditional Era

"Current-traditional" has come to represent the negative past from which composition has escaped. As a result, "the more elite parts of the profession still consider language study, grammar, or work on style to be remnants of the past rather than vital subjects for current professional research" (MacDonald 612). The near disappearance of style for the last twenty years has been attributed to style's association with the formalist thinking that characterized the current-traditional era (Johnson and Pace; Butler) despite the fact that style was most popular in the 1980s, at the height of the process movement. In this "Golden Age" of style study, as Paul Butler calls it, style pedagogy was "one of the innovations of the field" as inventive approaches to language study including sentence-combining and generative rhetoric took hold. (*Out of Style* 57). Francis Christensen's generative rhetoric exercises were in all senses inventive; they served to generate ideas through form and focused attention on the creation, rather than revision, of writing. Still, the connection between style and current-traditionalism has roots deeply embedded in our discipline's historical narrative, one in which "a writing teacher's development can be measured by the degree to which that person has become liberated from current-traditional rhetoric" (Stewart 134).

Our discipline since the current-traditional era has essentially been a reaction against it. In "The Erasure of the Sentence," Robert Connors attributes the decline of sentence pedagogies to the anti-formalist, anti-behaviorist, and anti-empiricist thinking that guided composition studies as it burgeoned into a discipline. Critiques against formalism can be seen as critiques on current-traditionalism itself, as "[w]hat matters

most in current-traditional rhetoric is form" (Crowley, "Composition" 95). Anti-formalists argue that when we emphasize form, we teach writing in a decontextualized, arhetorical, and superficial way, a notion that came about in the 1970s as composition was first becoming professionalized and invention replaced style as the more "legitimate" canon to guide our new field. As a result of this paradigmatic shift, style was seen as antithetical to invention and a conception of the writing process as linear, beginning with invention (prewriting) and ending with style (revision), was inscribed. The idea of style and invention as "competing paradigms" helped engender a "noticeable decline in the status of style as a pedagogical concept" (Rankin 8).

Today, contemporary pedagogies informed by antiformalism see style instruction as both atheoretical and arhetorical, mere exercises having no place within curricula that emphasize process-oriented and sociorhetorical approaches to writing instruction. In their introduction to "Refiguring Prose Style: Possibilities for Writing Pedagogy," T. R. Johnson and Tom Pace aptly describe style as "the elephant in the classroom and in our scholarly field that we constantly pretend isn't there." Their analogy is useful for reconceptualizing style's place in our pedagogy, as style is not something we bring into our classrooms, but rather something that already exists and is waiting to be acknowledged. That is, students bring their writing styles into the classroom and we assess those styles, whether or not we formally and explicitly *teach* style.

Response to Style as Impressionistic Description

The association between current-traditionalism and style has led to a reductive view of style while also discouraging contemporary, process-oriented approaches. When style is treated as anything other than mere form, we tend to respond to it in ways that describe our initial reactions rather than the prose itself, a tendency Louis Milic refers to as "impressionistic description." Until the end of the eighteenth century, "good" style was defined as an adherence to standard stylistic approaches, as opposed to individuality. Since then style has generally been studied one of two ways: impressionistically or quantitatively. The impressionistic method involves an observer identifying a writer's style and then searching for the stylistic traits that contribute to a particular overall effect. In the 1930s, when scientific methods were applied to stylistic analysis, quantitative study became popular. Concerned with the occurrence and frequency of specific stylistic features, the quantitative method is criticized for being too scientific to adequately account for the nuanced nature of writing, while the impressionistic method is criticized for its grounding in an observer's own value judgments about a piece of writing. Impressionistic description, as I define it in relation to response to student writing, encompasses all commentary that does not refer to the student writing itself. It is the embodiment of our own reactions to texts as readers and is especially problematic for evaluating student writing, as it influences the grade that is ultimately assigned.

At least part of the reason we assess style impressionistically is that we lack the vocabulary to talk about style in specific and meaningful ways. Robert Connors refers to the terms we use to describe style as "static abstractions," static because "they exist in an

unchanging theoretical context, are presented as paradigmatic and absolute, and are concerned with labeling finished texts . . . and abstractions because they exist only as general terms, without qualifiers or specificity" ("Composition-Rhetoric" 270). Using language that describes a reader's reaction to a text rather than the writing itself shifts attention away from the student's words and onto one subjective interpretation of them. In "A Study in Prose Styles: Edward Gibbon and Ernest Hemingway," Curtis Hayes explains that response to literature is often guided by a reader's "intuitive ability" and that we describe these intuitions with "impressionistic labels" of prose styles, such as simple, direct, or grand. A problem with these labels, Hayes notes, is that they do not describe the writing style itself, but rather "mirror an impression one receives" when reading the text (371).

Joseph Williams also acknowledges the response-focused nature of impressionistic labels of style:

> Most of the words we use to describe style displace our responses to a text into that text or its writer. When we say a sentence is clear, we mean that we understand it easily; when we say a speaker is coherent, we mean that we have no trouble following him or her. Such qualities are neither in the speaker ("*You* are clear") nor in the speaker's language ("*Your sentence* is clear"). They are in our responses to particular syntactic, lexical, and other features on the page (or in the air), uttered or written and heard or read in a particular context. ("Bakhtin" 351)

What Hayes and Williams point out is that even when we use the language most commonly associated with style to respond to stylistic features of writing, we still may respond to style impressionistically. Impressionistic description, then, does not only refer to comments that impart our own value judgments on a text ("I like your style") but also those that describe style by focusing on a reader's reaction to it ("Your style is clear").

In addition to being vague and reader-centered, impressionistic descriptions can be misleading and inaccurate. Rosemary Hake and Joseph Williams' "Style and Its Consequences: Do as I Do, Not as I Say" illustrates the ways our limited (and limiting) vocabulary about style can fail to accurately communicate our expectations to students. Through a series of four experiments in which teachers were given sets of essays differing only in their styles, Hake and Williams find that while high school and college writing teachers say they value a "verbal" (direct) style, they actually prefer a "nominalized" (indirect) style in their evaluations of prose. The rationale for their study is that "[i]f in fact we are behaving in ways that contradict our stated values, then we ought to know about it" (435). An important implication of Hake and Williams' work is that how we respond to students' writing styles is largely based on our impressions, which are in conflict with the qualities we say we attribute to effective style. To adequately articulate our expectations to students through our commentary, we must use language that is text-specific and that treats student writing as comprised of conscious choices.

Form, Error, Product: Conceptions of Style in Studies of Response

Before we can critically evaluate how we respond to students' writing styles, it is necessary to first understand the generic conventions that comprise response. While there is no scholarship related directly to the role of classroom assessment in style pedagogy, Summer Smith's "The Genre of the End Comment: Conventions in Teacher Response to Student Writing" offers useful ways of understanding how our perceptions of style are communicated to students through our commentary. Smith's analysis of end comments

on student writing reveals that of the sixteen primary genres of response she identifies, "evaluation of style" is third in frequency with 118 total comments. According to this finding, style is a high priority in teacher commentary. Unfortunately, the evaluations of style in this study fall into the "judging genre" of response and were found by Smith to be neither positive nor negative, despite that the majority of the genres were associated strongly with praise. Taking a closer look at how these comments are constructed, Smith finds that teachers tend to construct their comments as fragments when evaluating style. One negative effect this can have on students is that "[f]ragments provide no reasons for the praise and may give the impression of hastiness, thus weakening the praise" (255). Therefore, even if we respond to style and do so in positive (or not negative) terms, the style of our response can weaken its effectiveness.

Smith's analysis also considers how style's association with lower-order concerns affects how we respond to it. According to Smith, one of the end comment's most identifiable generic conventions is the progression from positive to negative and back to positive. In an example typical of the genre, the end comment attends to the essay as a whole positively, to the paper's organization positively, to the style negatively, to correctness negatively, and finally makes a suggestion for the next draft. The negative evaluation of style relates significantly to the place of the comment in relation to the others that comprise the total end comment. What Smith does not directly address is that end comments also tend to move from higher-order concerns to lower-order and back to higher-order. When style is treated as a lower-order concern, then, it is likewise placed in the middle of the end comment. Smith's analysis demonstrates that how we respond to

style is both guided by our treatment of style as a lower-order concern and is inherently built into the generic conventions of our commentary.

While Smith helps us better understand how comments about style are typically constructed, I looked to studies of teacher commentary to explain how our conceptions of style are transferred to students through our written feedback. I analyzed the three most widely cited studies of response to student writing in our field—Nancy Sommers' "Responding to Student Writing," Robert Connors and Andrea Lunsford's "Teachers' Rhetorical Comments on Student Papers," and Richard Straub and Ronald Lunsford's *Twelve Readers Reading*— to see how style was considered both by the studies and by the written comments that were collected as data for the studies.

The three selected studies vary in both their approaches and objectives. In her 1983 article "Responding to Student Writing," Nancy Sommers—along with Knoblauch and Brannon—analyzes the comments of thirty-five teachers and conducts follow-up interviews with a number of them and their students. The study's major findings are that teachers' comments tend to appropriate students' writing by imposing the teachers' own ideas about what the text should say and do and that the comments could be interchangeable, or "rubber-stamped," from one student's paper to another. Influenced by Sommers' work, Robert Connors and Andrea Lunsford's 1993 "Teachers' Rhetorical Comments on Student Papers" was the first large-scale study of comments on student writing to be conducted in our field. The purpose of their study was to look for patterns of response to "global rhetorical issues," including "issues of rhetoric, structure, general success, longitudinal writing development, mastery of conventional generic knowledge,

and other large-scale issues" (206). Along with twenty-six writing teachers, Connors and

Lunsford analyzed the global comments on the 3,000 essays and found that comments

were used primarily to justify grades, the majority of comments went from positive to

negative, and the rhetorical element most commented on was "supporting details,

evidence, or examples." The final study analyzed here is Richard Straub and Ronald

Lunsford's 1995 *Twelve Readers Reading*. For this study, well-known teacher/scholars in

the field of rhetoric and composition were chosen to respond to a set of student papers.

The responders were all given the same set of student papers, which were not produced

by their own students. Readers were then asked to respond to nine student essays. The

first section of *Twelve Readers Reading*, from which I draw my examples, provides four

responses to each of the nine essays.

All three studies contribute an understanding of how style is being considered in

student writing and illustrate the implications of responding to style impressionistically.

The influence of style's association with current-traditionalism can also be seen, as the

primary ways style is conceptualized in these studies are also defining features of the

current-traditional paradigm.

Style as Form

In all of the studies, style was closely associated with form. In many cases this

association also meant that style was treated as separate from or even antithetical to

meaning. The representation of style as form, as it exists within the analyzed teacher

commentary and descriptions of teacher commentary by authors of the studies, disregards

theories of style that argue for the indivisibility of form and meaning. Monroe Beardsley,

for instance, sees form and meaning as inseparable, such that any "difference of style is

always a difference in meaning" (199). Through this lens, teacher commentary that

encourages stylistic revisions is calling for a reconceptualization, at least on some level,

of the student's ideas. Yet the language used to describe style in the following examples

constructs style as the "dressing" of thoughts.

The first example of style as form is from a section of *Twelve Readers Reading*

that outlines the authors' methodology for analyzing the comments they collected:

> Even after a brief survey, it is clear that the 12 readers' responses differ markedly
> from traditional ways of responding to student writing and, in their broad outline,
> reflect many of the practices endorsed by contemporary theory. . . . They spend
> most of their time commenting on matters of content, organization, and purpose,
> often in subtle and complex ways, and give only moderate attention to the obvious
> and outward features of writing: mechanics, word choice, sentence structure, and
> style. (Straub and Lunsford 153)

This characterization of effective commentary privileges "content, organization, and

purpose" and devalues "mechanics, word choice, sentence structure, and style." In this

passage a dichotomy and corresponding priority are established. Content, organization,

and purpose comprise one group that is prioritized over the other group, which includes

mechanics, word choice, sentence structure, and style. The value assigned to the more

"global" aspects of writing is to be expected; after all, the authors directly refer to this

hierarchy as "endorsed by contemporary theory." The choice to group style with

mechanics, word choice, and sentence structure instead of content, organization, and

purpose, however, reveals the authors' own biases about how style fits into the writing

process. Style is to be given "only moderate attention" in teacher comments on student

writing. With the classification of style as a local and therefore low-priority concern is the description of style as both "obvious" and "outward." In fact, much of the scholarship on style has sought to show how style is often overlooked, hidden, metaphysical, impressionistic, anything but obvious and outward. Yet when style is characterized as mere form, it becomes little more than the outward appearance of content.

The idea that style is dressing for content is most apparent in an end comment on the student essay "The Four Seasons" in *Twelve Readers Reading*. Donald Stewart writes, "I've already commented on aspects of the style of this paper. The good details tell us that you are capable of fresh insights, but, for the most part you do not provide them or clothe them in language which is distinctive" (56). Before making this comment, Stewart extensively critiques the student's description of the seasons, suggesting that they are clichéd. We may assume, then, that this is what Stewart refers to when he states that he has "already commented on aspects of the style" of the essay. The comment suggests that while one can have "fresh insights," it is the language which with those ideas are "clothed" that make them clichés. The metaphor of style as clothing is longstanding, as illustrated most famously by the aphorism "style is the dress of thoughts." In "Theories of Style and Their Implications for Teaching," Milic claims that there are "only three real theories of style"—rhetorical dualism, psychological monism, and aesthetic monism— and that the only theory that allows us to teach style is rhetorical dualism, which "implie[s] that ideas exist wordlessly and can be dressed in a variety of outfits, depending on the need for the occasion" (67). According to Milic, the notion of style as dressing is not only necessary but is a prerequisite if style is to be taught at all.

A struggle with the form/content relationship can be seen in the section of Chris Anson's end comment (which is a transcription of his tape-recorded comments) to the same student essay that focuses directly on stylistic features of the student's writing. I quote it here in its entirety for context:

> The exaggeration problem is pretty quickly remedied. Bruce talked about how he was bothered by the image of bears and squirrels and rabbits all carrying on a kind of woodland conversation, and I think I agree, but you really didn't rethink that much. Along those lines, some specific expressions we questioned in the conference group were things like, um, "enormous amounts of families" (by the way, if you're going to say that, it should be "numbers," and we've talked already about that mass vs. count noun business), and "humongous pile," and "stimulating your olfactories," and the cliché about Jack Frost. And Jody also objected to the sex-role stereotyping of wives planting flowers while husbands rake leaves and mow the lawn. Anyway, all this is a matter of a few stylistic revisions which are easily done. (58)

It is unclear whether Anson's description of stylistic revisions as "easily done" relates specifically to the revisions he suggests in the comment or to stylistic revisions in general. If the description of "easily done" refers to stylistic revisions in general, then we see a conception of style as a local-level and thus low-priority concern. Revising for style becomes nothing more than changing the "dressing" for the ideas in the essay, suggesting that meaning and style are separate entities. If the statement about stylistic revisions relates specifically to those revisions he mentions in the comment, a contradiction emerges in his treatment of style and meaning. The comment that style is easy contradicts his point that the student is perpetuating sex-role stereotypes. Clearly, the objection is to the meaning the student has constructed through the use of a stereotype, not to the way that stereotype is worded. And yet, the way to correct it is to revise the style. Anson's comment illustrates the complex relationship between form and content in discussions of

style and how it affects our ability to comment on style in student writing. If we construct style and content as inseparable, style ceases to be a determinable entity and, therefore, we cannot respond to stylistic features of student writing at all (Beardsley). If style and content are treated separately, our comments will more than likely prioritize content, establishing a hierarchy for revision that favors ideas and underestimates language.

Style as Error

  Closely associated with the conception of style as form, the conception of style as error again reflects a local, sentence-level treatment of style. There have been numerous studies relating local aspects of writing with error (Johnson; Witty and Green; Connors and Lunsford; Haswell; Sloan; Lunsford and Lunsford). Because style is seen as a local level writing concern, the relationship between local aspects of writing and error becomes transferred onto style, such that ineffective style becomes a mistake and something easy to correct. This reductive portrayal of style treats style as a single line-item in the grand scheme of localized mechanical issues, taking no account of style's more qualitative nature.

  The conception of style as error is, in many cases, created through the use of language that treats it as beyond the writer's control. Nancy Sommers, for example, equates style with error while also referring to style as accidental:

> This appropriation of the text by the teacher happens particularly when teachers identify errors in usage, diction, and style in a first draft and ask students to correct these errors when they revise; such comments give the student an impression of the importance of these errors that is all out of proportion to how they should view these errors at this point in the process. The comments create the

> concern that these "accidents of discourse" need to be attended to before the meaning of the text is attended to. (150)

In this example, the words "error" and "accidents" are used to describe style that is ineffective. "Error" suggests a lack of adherence to a set of standards, while "accident" connotes a situation over which the writer has little control. In both of these cases, agency is removed from the student writer, resulting in an arhetorical construction of style. This passage also suggests that stylistic concerns are of little importance in first-draft writing and that when teachers point out errors in style, they exaggerate their importance. As a result, style is something we react to but are encouraged not to comment on. The one comment that directly refers to style in Connors and Lunsford's study—"There are some lapses in style that need attention."—similarly treats style as error.[7] While Sommers refers to ineffective style as accidental, this comment treats inconsistent stylistic choices as "lapses." Like "accidental," the word "lapses" suggests that errors resulted from a temporary lack of attention on the part of the writer, suggesting that stylistic choices are somehow haphazard, or not deliberate.

The conception of style as error, and therefore outside the writer's control, is also reinforced by commentary that treats style as subordinate to other features of writing. The way Connors and Lunsford report their study results reveals their own stance on response and style's relationship to it:

> So the news we bring back from the Tropics of Commentary is both good and bad. The good news is that teachers are genuinely involved in trying to help their students with rhetorical issues in their writing. Counter to the popular image of the writing teacher as error-obsessed and concerned only with mechanical issues, the teachers whose work we looked at clearly cared about how their students were

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[7] This comment was not written by Connors and Lunsford but was collected as data for their study.

planning and ordering writing. The classical canons invoked in more than three-quarters of the papers we examined were invention and arrangement, not merely style. (218)

The first line of this passage echoes the famous line from Nancy Sommers' study: "the news from the classroom is not good" (154). Stylistically, Connors and Lunsford both side with Sommers and break from her. The keywords "news," "from," and "good" create a structural imitation of Sommers' sentence, while the phrases "Tropics of Commentary" and "both good and bad" set their work apart from Sommers.' This simultaneous adherence to and deviation from Sommers on the sentence level can be seen in the subject matter of the example as well. Connors and Lunsford appear to break with Sommers in terms of the "error-obsessed" writing teacher while siding with her in their characterization of style as subordinate to invention and arrangement. Also in this passage "mechanical issues" is tied to "style" while "planning and ordering writing" relates to "invention and arrangement," respectively. The associations that accompany those definitions make assumptions about the value of style, invention, and arrangement. Style becomes the subject for "error-obsessed," while invention and arrangement are the subjects of "teachers whose work . . . clearly cared about how their students were planning and ordering writing." Separate identities are formed for teachers who respond to style (error-obsessed) and those who respond to invention and arrangement (caring). The word "merely" further reinforces the subordinate position of style in this example.

Style as Product

The final conception of style present in these studies is "style as product." When response assigns a value judgment to a student's style rather than referencing the student writing, it treats the text as a product. The effectiveness of the student's style, then, is determined by the reader's enjoyment of it. As a result, the reader has more control and access to style than the writer does, setting up a hierarchical paradigm in which only the reader has power. The concept of control in response to student writing is the focus of Brannon and Knoblauch's "On Students' Rights to Their Own Texts: A Model of Teacher Response," wherein they argue that "the teacher more often than the student determines what the writing will be about, the form it will take, and the criteria that will determine its success." The student, as a result, is "put into the awkward position of having to accommodate, not only the personal intentions that guide their choice-making, but also the teacher-reader's expectations about how the assignment should be completed" (158). When style is assessed based on the effect it has on a reader, the student writing is judged on its ability to accurately predict a reader's reactions.

The comments that define style as a product also tend to be more impressionistic than those that equate style with form or error. Donald Stewart's end comment to the student essay "Against the Seat Belt Law" describes the reader's reaction to the author's style in a way that is not only evaluative but also provides an evaluation that is relatively neutral: "[t]he organization of the paper is satisfactory, and the style is all right" (17). "All right" could be positive, in that it meets the evaluator's standard of effective style, or could be negative, in that it does not exceed those expectations and is simply acceptable.

Regardless, this response is also too vague to aid the student in revision which, as Sommers notes, should be our primary concern when commenting on student writing. Instead, it treats the student's style as a product, something that exists but was not consciously created.

Edward White's end comment on another student essay titled "What if Drugs Were Legal?" is similarly impressionistic. The comment, "I enjoy the energy of your style," is more positive than Stewart's but makes a value judgment about the student's style that is not substantiated with details (30). Further, the move to relate energy to style reinforces some of our ideas about style as a nebulous term, akin to voice, tone, or mood, and reflects a conception of style as metaphysical (Milic) and therefore not easily pinned-down. In this realm style can only exist as a reader's reaction; energy is felt by the reader but is not produced by the student writer.

Though less impressionistic than the others, Frank O'Hare's response to the student essay "A Broken Man" in *Twelve Readers Reading* offers a product-oriented evaluation of the student's style:

> You assume sensitivity and intelligence in your audience and convince your readers not just by the logic of your evidence and argument, but by the effectiveness of your style. I have marked with [symbol] the many instances where your style is particularly effective. (85)

While O'Hare points to specific examples of effective style within the student's text with a symbol in the margins, his description of the student's style as "particularly effective" in his end comment is a value judgment on a finished piece of writing. To determine why O'Hare may have found the particular passages he indicated "particularly effective," I analyzed the six passages of student writing he marked throughout the text. Through this

analysis I found that the stylistic devices of anaphora (the repetition of words at the beginning of neighboring clauses) and tricolon (a series of three parallel units) were used by the student six times, and the afterthought construction (a construction that is reliant on the phrase that immediately precedes it for its meaning) was used five times. Also, in all of these passages, the stylistic devices the student uses reinforce the content of the sentences. For example, in the sentence "I cannot believe that he can find happiness *by casting aside his family* and *by pursuing his goals* without the support of his family, or *by having an affair*," the use of the tricolon builds the intensity in the sequence of events, indicating that each action in the sequence is dependent on the previous one (83, emphasis added). I can only speculate that the sophistication with which the student employed these stylistic devices is why O'Hare found these passages effective. Similarly, the student writer cannot determine from the end comment alone what contributed to her "particularly effective" style.

Making Style Conscious: Implications for Teaching

Style pedagogy as it is typically theorized removes style from the components of the writing process that are perhaps the most important to students' growth as writers—the creation and evaluation of their work. While assessment scholars have noted that responding to student writing is pedagogical, more importantly, it may be the primary means by which we teach writing and offer feedback to students. The pedagogical function of response has significant consequences for style in specific, as style is rarely considered until we react to it as readers. However, because of style's long association

with current-traditional exercises (such as imitation, prose analysis, generative rhetoric, and sentence-combining) and misconceptions about the purposes of such exercises, style pedagogy is often relegated to the first step of a linear process in which we teach, students write, and then we respond to the student writing. Not only is this an artificial representation of what we do as teachers, it is one in which style is only momentarily conscious and then quickly ignored.

To reconceptualize style, we must first recognize where our reactions to style originate. Often our lack of a unified theory of style leads us to resort to stereotypes resulting from style's association with current-traditional rhetoric. We see three of these—form, error, and product—in the studies of response analyzed here. For example, when style is conceptualized as form, it is also treated as antithetical to content. One potential effect on students is that they see style as detached from their ideas, such that style becomes external to the writing process. When ineffective style is viewed as error, the rhetoricality of style is removed. Instead, style becomes haphazard and accidental and assessment can be perceived as both random and unmotivating. Finally, when we equate style with a finished product, we teach students that style is out of their control and that revision is futile. When we respond to students' writing styles with vague language describing our impressions, we enact through our commentary our own struggles with and misconceptions of the concept of style. Students learn that writing well means anticipating and somehow meeting teachers' unarticulated stylistic preferences.

For years style has maintained a contested role in rhetoric and composition, as arguments about whether or not style should be taught dominate style scholarship.

However, when we recognize that our response to student writing is pedagogical, our relationship to style changes considerably. The division between those who teach style and those who do not becomes much more blurred, perhaps better understood as those who teach style explicitly through direct instruction and those who teach it implicitly through commentary. What this suggests is that every teacher of writing is also a teacher of style, as style is always embodied in the writing of our students. I would like to put forth, then, suggestions for assessing style specific to both of these types of style pedagogy.

When we teach style explicitly, we can benefit from a precise and shared vocabulary of style. Therefore, responding to students' writing styles specifically and in ways that encourage revision requires that teachers and students communicate with one another about what constitutes effective style and that teachers use the same vocabulary established in the classroom in their written feedback. The studies of response to student writing analyzed in this essay illustrate the problems that arise when we comment on a concept that "seems to mean a number of things, perhaps so many that, at last, it means nothing at all" (Johnson and Pace, Introduction). By naming the devices students use when they compose, we construct style as the result of rhetorical decisions made by the writer and not mere afterthought, and we prioritize style as an aspect of the writing process dependent upon and interrelated with other writing concerns, akin to invention rather than product. Perhaps most importantly, a specific stylistic vocabulary can give students the control over their own writing that is taken away from them with impressionistic responses.

For composition teachers who do not explicitly teach style in their classrooms, our task is more difficult. Because in this case responses to style in student writing stand in for classroom instruction, they can become the primary (and often unconscious) means of style pedagogy. Therefore, a useful first step to providing productive stylistic feedback may simply be to acknowledge style's presence in student writing. Once we are conscious of style's presence and of the influence our commentary holds as a mode of instruction, we must consider how best to respond to features of student writing we have not taught. Frank O'Hare's end comment in *Twelve Readers Reading*, while impressionistic, offers a way out of this bind while maximizing response's pedagogical function. While O'Hare's end comment makes a value judgment about the student's style, it works in conjunction with selected passages of actual student writing. Employing a specific stylistic vocabulary in our commentary is certainly ideal, but it requires that we have first established stylistic terminology in our classrooms, that we have had conversations with students about style before we even read their writing. What O'Hare's model contributes is a way to *begin* these conversations about style. By identifying instances of effective style on student papers marginally, as O'Hare does, we show students what we appreciate about their writing. This approach could then lead to classroom discussions of what constitutes effective style. In this sense, response truly is pedagogical, as it becomes the instruction that further classroom teaching then serves to enhance. Pointing to specific features of student writing, even if only to justify a vague reaction, offers the potential of initiating more complex discussions of style with students.

For teachers who explicitly teach style, responding effectively may mean simply maintaining consistency between the values articulated to students about style in the classroom and in written feedback. For those who do not directly teach style, commentary may be a place where values about style are established, rather than reflected. In both cases, it benefits us to ask whether the messages we communicate to students about style accurately reflect our values. As the studies of response to student writing demonstrate here, our supposed values and those we communicate through our commentary may be conflicting. That these studies are the most cited in our field means that the conceptions of style they portray will live on as burgeoning scholars are introduced to this work and as experienced scholars continue to draw upon it. However, both of the suggestions I offer here can provide a more rhetorical understanding of style, one that treats style as a recursive part of the writing process and that appreciates the triadic relationship between reader, writer, and text. Presently, style is lying dormant in all our students' writing. When we make style a conscious rhetorical feature of student prose, it can be discovered, awakened, and recognized as such.

CHAPTER THREE: REMOVED FROM REALITY: RHETORICAL DISTANCE AS A

MEASURE OF STYLISTIC EFFECTIVENESS

This chapter analyzes the results of interviews with six composition teachers with

different institutional affiliations and varying levels of composition teaching experience.

Typically, pedagogically focused style scholarship is anecdotal, limited to one teacher's

account of his or her classroom experiences. As a result, style scholarship rarely takes

into account the teacher who does not have experience with or an interest in style

pedagogy, and therefore does not represent typical classroom practice. In an effort to

extend traditional approaches to style study, I conducted interviews with teachers of

varying levels of experience and within diverse institutional backgrounds to see how they

teach and assess stylistic features of student writing. Revealed in all the interviews I

conducted is a strong relationship between stylistic effectiveness and rhetorical distance,

the degree to which a reader connects with a text. Ineffective style, then, is that which

disrupts that connection, moving a reader too far away from the discourse to be

persuaded. While I did not enter into these interviews with a focus on how style is read—

I had not even considered this aspect of style assessment—it emerged as I transcribed and

analyzed the interviews as the predominant theme of these teachers' accounts.

In chapter two I argue that because style often is not explicitly taught, it may not

be recognized by teachers until they read student writing. Therefore exploring what

happens at the moment teachers encounter student texts can help us understand responses

to and evaluations of students' writing styles more fully. Edward M. White speaks to this

when he explains that the "way that we conceive of reading has a profound effect on the

way we understand and respond to what we read" ("Teaching and Assessing" 88).

White's point is relevant to this study in particular because all the interview participants

represented themselves, at least at some point in their interviews, as readers. This chapter

explores the concept of rhetorical distance, as defined by speech communication scholars

David Hunsaker and Craig Smith, as a framework for understanding what constitutes

effective style according to my interviews. I first introduce the concept of rhetorical

distance and explore the complexities of the "teacher-reader" identity, drawing on related

assessment scholarship that both argues for and extends the notion of the teacher as a

reader. Then I use rhetorical distance to describe how the relationship between the

teacher-reader and student text affects judgments of stylistic effectiveness. Finally, I

argue that the resulting conceptions of style can help us reimagine style's role as a liaison

between reader and text but also carries with it problematic implications for assessment.

Rhetorical Distance: A Framework for Understanding Teachers' Conceptions of Style

In the field of rhetoric and composition, rhetorical distance is typically defined as

the perceived metaphorical distance that exists between rhetor and audience (Crowley

"Ancient Rhetorics"). As such, rhetorical distance is directly tied to persuasion: the closer

the connection between rhetor and audience, the more persuasive the rhetor will likely be.

Shortening the rhetorical distance between reader and writer results in the Burkean

concept of identification.[8] An extension of persuasion, identification seeks to establish a

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[8] For a detailed discussion of Kenneth Burke's identification, see *A Rhetoric of Motives*.

"consubstantial" space for both rhetor and audience, or more specifically writer and reader. Identification, according to Kenneth Burke, fulfills a human need to connect by allowing individuals separated by social class and status to "overlap." It is important to note that identification is not always fully conscious but may result from our subconscious participation with or use of symbols. For example, a writer may deliberately use repetition for emphasis or casually use colloquial language which could create a less overt but equally powerful identification between reader and writer. Sharon Crowley suggests that to decrease rhetorical distance and thus increase persuasion rhetors should ask, "How much distance is appropriate, given their relationship to an audience? How much distance is appropriate given their relationship to the issue?" (97). In this regard, rhetorical distance can be seen as a strategic consideration involved in the development of an ethos. These questions also suggest that like all rhetorical elements, rhetorical distance is determined by genre and purpose. The distance between friends in a personal e-mail will generally be shorter than the distance between an applicant and a potential employer in a letter of interest for a job, for example. This is due both to the conventions of the genres, the e-mail presumably less formal than the letter, and to the relational distance between rhetor and audience, the relationship likely more familiar and therefore more casual between friends. In this example it can also be assumed that the level of desired persuasion will be greater in the business letter than in the e-mail, because of the hierarchical nature of the relationship between the participants in the communicative event; the rhetor is not communicating solely to share information but rather to persuade the reader of her aptitude.

While this conception of rhetorical distance—as the space between reader and writer—is certainly useful for understanding both ethos and persuasion (or identification), for this chapter I draw upon speech communication scholars David Hunsaker and Craig Smith's definition of rhetorical distance as the "measure of the percipient's rhetorical involvement with the discourse" (246). Thus, I see rhetorical distance as a tool that allows us to understand how texts engage and persuade readers and to what extent they do so. This definition is valuable for my own work most obviously because the text, independent of the student author, is what teachers most often encounter when assessing writing. For a study of style assessment, the relationship between reader (or evaluator) and text is central. Second, style in a piece of writing is a textual concern. While style is, undoubtedly, both embodied by writers and part of a larger writing process, it is evaluated in written form as a set of textual features or devices. Finally, the relationship between reader and text was the most prominent in my interview results, so it is logical to use an analytic framework that also focuses primarily on this relationship.

Hunsaker and Smith see rhetorical distance as a continuum, ranging from "distractive fascination" to "technical composition," with the innermost core representing the range into which persuasive discourse falls. This is the range of rhetorical involvement, where an audience is engaged and persuaded by discourse. Distractive fascination and technical composition represent the poles at either end of the continuum of rhetorical distance; these qualities interfere with persuasion by bringing the audience too close or too far away, respectively, from the message. Distractive fascination describes an audience's overidentification with discourse, rhetoric that is "too close" to

its audience and therefore causes an "over-empathic involvement" (247). Reader

responses that are so emotional as to distract from the content of the message, for

example, mean that the rhetorical distance necessary for rhetorical involvement cannot

be reached. If distractive fascination moves an audience too close to discourse, technical

composition moves an audience too far away. This extreme is characterized by discourse

"so revealed in its technical composition, the strategies being so blatant or transparent,

that it move[s] the percipient outside the range of rhetorical involvement" (247). To

discourage an audience's focus on the technical composition of discourse, the rhetor must

encourage "imaginative involvement," or mutual participation, with the text. While

Hunsaker and Smith define imaginative involvement in terms of art, I see it as an ideal of

rhetoric as well, a way to counteract preoccupation with the technical aspects of prose. As

such, imaginative involvement may be the ultimate goal of persuasive discourse, in that it

blinds the reader to the strategies of rhetorical argument and "draw[s] him to aesthetic

involvement, participation with the work" (244).

Student Texts and the Construction of the Teacher-Reader

The interview responses I analyze in this chapter construct the interview

participants, who are also composition teachers, as readers. While none of them explicitly

identified as a teacher-reader, I believe this characterization best represents the role they

created for themselves in their responses to questions about style and its place in their

classrooms and informs how they define stylistic effectiveness. The interview responses

revealed a correlative relationship between style and distance, such that effective style is

that which brings a reader close to a text, and ineffective style is that which increases distance. That all of the interview participants chose to discuss style from the perspective of a reader does not discount that they are all teachers and were certain to also bring this identity, as one responsible for imparting knowledge to students and all the pragmatic tasks that entails, into their responses. The hybrid term "teacher-reader" allows for the multiple identities interview participants used to represent themselves.

Assessment scholarship has argued for responding to student writing as a reader instead of an evaluator (Bazerman; Brannon and Knoblauch; Chiseri-Strater; Flynn; Fuller; Probst; Purves; Sommers; Straub; White). The primary reasoning behind this approach is that it treats students as authors, rather than just students of writing, and it treats their writing as texts worthy of response. In other words, when teachers are readers, they no longer exert control over the text as a judge, but rather engage in the text as an active participant. This view is reinforced by Edward White, who argues that poststructuralist, as opposed to formalist, readings of student writing allow us to see writing as a "process of the creative imagination, not a mere product to be analyzed" and suggests that the roles of reader and judge, respectively, relate to these approaches to reading ("Teaching and Assessing" 102). Formalist and poststructuralist reading styles differ primarily in their interpretations of where meaning lies, the former maintaining that it is found in the text, the latter that it is created by the reader. While the formalist and poststructuralist theories White invokes have their roots in literary critical theory, they can be useful ways of conceptualizing how meaning is made and negotiated in reader-text interactions.

Elizabeth Flynn, like White, illustrates that how we read student texts can be an indicator of how we respond to them. Flynn promotes a feminine style of response, one that, unlike traditional, masculine styles that "evaluate" writing, creates the teacher as a "sympathetic reader" (50). Drawing on one of her previous studies, Flynn suggests that men and women read in different ways:

> [F]emales often oscillate in a productive way between the opposite poles of empathy and judgment, identification and detachment, whereas males tend to become fixated at either extreme—to dominate texts by judging them overharshly or rejecting them, or to subordinate themselves to texts by becoming entangled in textual detail or identifying too strongly with characters or situations described in them. (52)

The interview results I analyze in this chapter fall into the category White defines as poststructuralist in that they treat reading as "a creative interaction between reader and text" but, I would argue, enact "masculine" response styles (White 91). One of the most apparent aspects of rhetorical distance found in the interviews was a preoccupation with the "textual detail[s]" of students' writing styles. As a result, the lack of entanglement in these details is what characterized "good" style. That stylistic effectiveness is judged by avoidance of a negative behavior as opposed to creation of a positive one—often called the "deficit model" of assessment—illustrates what I believe Flynn would call "masculine."

. Responding to student writing as a reader involves much more than simply choosing a response style. As Alan Purves points out, teachers assume many readerly roles when responding to student writing, and these roles must be recognized and communicated to students. According to Purves, the first role teachers should assume is that of "common reader," or "the person who is reading out of pleasure and interest, with

no practical end in mind, who might be enlightened or pleased by the text and who might read the text esthetically" (260). The common reader, who *responds* to writing, is followed by the proofreader, editor, reviewer, and gatekeeper, who *judge* writing, the critic and anthropologist/linguist/psychologist, who *analyze* writing, and finally the diagnostician/therapist who *improves* writing. These roles are context- and purpose-specific, such that one teacher may assume some or all of these roles while responding to one student paper, depending on the purpose of the assignment and the reasons for assessing it.

In breaking down the identity of "reader" into various types of readers that correspond to particular parts of the evaluation process, Purves conceives of audience-awareness as an understanding of the multiplicity of roles one reader may embody. But as Jim Corder illustrates, student texts also embody multiple roles simultaneously:

> I think there is a text that each [student] wanted to write. I think there is a text that each thought he or she wrote. I think there is a text that each did write and turn in. That's three, but not all. There is the text we hoped they would write (ours). There is the text we hoped they would write (theirs). There is the text we try to read. That's six, and no doubt there are other permutations. ("Asking" 92)

Corder's perspective blurs the boundaries of the formalist/poststructuralist dichotomy by arguing that texts exist apart from our interpretations of them, but that they "keep sliding out from under us [because] the author is still inventing them, and the texts are inventing themselves, and we're still inventing them as readers" (89). Corder gives weight to all participants in a given rhetorical situation, acknowledging that the author is not, in fact, "dead," nor is the text, but that the reader does not have full control in inventing the text's meaning either.

It has been established that readers and texts embody multiple roles and that they combine in every act of reading with an author's multiple roles. Patricia Murray explores this intersection in regard to voice, asking, "What happens when the student's voice meets the teacher-reader's voice?" Her answer is that the reaction will be favorable if "the match is satisfactory, pleasing, [and] within expected bounds" (78). However, if the student writing does not meet the expectations of the teacher-reader, other features of the student writing will be emphasized in favor of voice. A similar theme comes through in my interviews about style. "Pleasing" style is equated with effectiveness, while style that disrupts that pleasure is ineffective. We can see the relationship between the teacher-reader and student writing as one of expectations, either met or unmet.

Research Methods and Interview Participants

To better understand how style is defined, approached, taught, and evaluated in various classroom contexts, I collected assignment sheets and scoring rubrics from composition teachers nationwide (See Appendix A) and conducted interviews to further clarify and elaborate on the teaching documents and the rationale for their use. In keeping with the arrangement of this dissertation, which structurally mimics the evaluation process, this chapter reports the findings of the interviews, which center on the act of reading student writing, and chapter four will discuss the study of the assignment sheets and rubrics, which represent the act of assigning a grade to style. That is, despite the fact that the collection of teaching documents preceded the teacher interviews, writing must

be read before it is assigned a grade, and I wanted to reinforce this linearity with the chapters' organization.

On May 5, 2009 I made an initial request for these teaching documents via the Writing Program Administration listserv (WPA-L), which had 2,648 subscribers at the time of my query. I asked specifically for one assignment sheet for an essay of any genre (i.e., research, narrative, analysis, argument, reflection, etc.) and any level (i.e., first-year composition, advanced composition, etc.) and the corresponding grading sheet for that essay. One week later, I contacted individual composition instructors at institutions of various types, regions, and program sizes and asked them to post the same request to their Writing Program listservs.[9] At this time I also posted the request to the University of Arizona's listserv for graduate associates in teaching (GATs). On May 30, I followed up on the WPA-L, thanking those who had contributed documents and asking once more for participants. As a result of these multiple requests, I received 120 total rubrics with corresponding assignment sheets. In a few instances, the grading criteria were embedded into the assignment sheets and, therefore, I received only one document from participants rather than two. Some participants sent materials for more than one assignment, as well. One hundred twenty represents the total number of rubrics I received, taking these other factors into account. After analyzing all 120 rubrics, I narrowed the documents down to the twenty-three that included the word *style* and then requested follow-up interviews with the instructors from whom I had collected those rubrics. Of those twenty-three requests, six instructors responded and agreed to be interviewed.

[9] Institutions include University of Maine, Duke University, University of Alabama, Highline Community College, University of Hawaii, Mount Union College, Fort Lewis College, Columbia University, Madisonville Community College, and Denver University.

The interviews I conducted were guided by a list of questions that asked participants to consider the role of style in their scholarly work, their teaching, and their classroom assessment practices (See Appendix B). That said, these interviews can be best described as qualitative in nature, because they "sacrifice uniformity of questioning to achieve fuller development of information." Unlike fixed-question interviews, in which all participants are asked the same questions in the same order regardless of their responses, I opted for an approach that encouraged respondents to speak about what they found significant, even if that meant deviating slightly from my planned questions. The qualitative approach also explains my small sample size; the open-ended format typical of qualitative interviews encourages participants to respond in great detail and, therefore, is "likely to rely on a sample very much smaller than the samples interviewed by a reasonably ambitious survey study" (Weiss 3). I wanted to know how style was being defined, taught, and assessed in actual classroom contexts and decided that only by allowing teachers to talk about their practices could I learn what was truly happening in these diverse settings.

The interview respondents were chosen based on two criteria: (1) they explicitly included style in both their assignment sheets and rubrics and, (2) they agreed to participate in a follow-up interview when submitting their initial documents and responded to a later request after their documents were received. To include a range of teachers with various levels of experience and diverse institutional settings, I chose to conduct the interviews over the phone. This method provided the most convenient and

effective means of communication with participants in various parts of the country. The interviews averaged about 45 minutes and were audiotaped and transcribed for accuracy.

The interview participants all have experience teaching composition, though their experiences and geographical and institutional contexts varied considerably[10]:

- **Rachel** is a doctoral candidate in rhetoric and composition at a large, public university in the Southwest. She has been teaching composition for six years, one year at another institution while earning her master's degree, and five years as a graduate associate in teaching at her current institution.

- **Jake** is a second-year PhD student in rhetoric and composition at a large, public university in the Southeast. He taught high school for two years and has taught at the college level for an additional two years while in graduate school.

- **Candace** is the acting director of the first-year writing program at a prominent private school on the east coast. When I spoke to her, she was completing a postdoctoral position and moving in three weeks to begin an assistant professorship. She has been teaching for fourteen years total, five of which have been at her current institution.

- **Michelle**, an assistant professor of English at a large, private university in the Southeast, has been teaching about thirty years. She has been teaching in a tenure-track position since she received her PhD in 1991 and served as the director of the first-year composition program for six years at her current institution. Because there is no composition rhetoric and composition track at her current institution,

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[10] All names are pseudonyms.

she has been developing upper-level writing and rhetoric courses that she teaches

regularly for both students in the discipline and nonmajors who are seeking an

elective. Therefore, while she primarily teaches composition courses, they are not

necessarily labeled as such.

- **Laurie** is an assistant professor and Director of Composition at a large, prominent

  public institution in the Northeast. She has been teaching composition for twenty-

  one years, five of which have been spent at her current university, and has taught

  at a total of five institutions of varying sizes. Laurie has taught first-year

  composition, a junior-level composition course, advanced composition for

  English Education majors, a pedagogy class for TAs, and an editing class. Before

  teaching composition, Laurie taught a range of courses from multicultural

  literature and American literature to creative writing.

- **David** is an associate professor and director of the University Writing Program at

  a large, public institution in the Southwest. He has been teaching composition for

  about twenty-five years, including part-time teaching. His teaching experience

  ranges from developmental writing to 300-level composition courses. He directed

  the writing program at another institution for six years before coming to his

  current university.

While the interview participants have diverse teaching experiences, they had similar

answers to my questions about style. They approached style largely from the perspective

of a reader, perhaps because they do not explicitly teach or assess style as such.

The interviews further illuminated the documents that respondents provided with my initial request. While the teaching materials gave me a sense of how expectations for writing and, more specifically, style were communicated to students, the interviews allowed me to understand the belief systems underlying those pedagogical practices. While the primary theme I explore in this chapter (rhetorical distance as a measure of stylistic effectiveness) was not the only one that came up in these interviews, it was the most dominant and the most useful for the topic of assessment. Another prominent theme, that style is both genre- and discipline-specific, contributed to my understanding of how style is defined by these teachers but did not, in my opinion, warrant a chapter-long discussion. I do touch on this idea in chapter five, where I explore students' own beliefs about their styles. However, what struck me about the interview responses described in this chapter, and the reason I chose the framework of rhetorical distance to analyze them, is the extent to which the participants identified as readers. Because my interview questions assumed the participants' roles as writers and teachers, I expected their responses to be much more focused on the production and evaluation of writing. I was surprised and intrigued by the extent to which all six participants described the act of reading as an evaluative measure.

Encouraging Closeness: Effective Style as Imaginative Involvement

> [G]reat distancing is required if rhetorical distance is to function as aesthetic experience. We do not appreciate the speech as art until we are removed from its reality; only then does its language and symmetry unfold as an art.

> —Hunsaker and Smith 251

For the teachers I interviewed, style is effective when it promotes imaginative involvement, or allows the reader to become a participant in the text rather than a mere receiver of it (251). When writing is experienced by readers in this way, its function becomes primarily aesthetic. That is, to avoid distractive fascination and promote involvement in the text, style must create a subdued pleasantness in its readers, an aesthetic experience, rather than one characterized by flamboyance or overly-technical language. This characterization of effective style as a central point between overinvolvement and underinvolvement relates to the "levels of style" in the Roman rhetorical tradition, wherein the "middle" style was equated with pleasing an audience. Hunsaker and Smith point to the role of pleasantness in art, describing the importance of creating a "pleasant 'feeling tone'" for the percipient when an artist wants to encourage open-mindedness to their work (246). In the study of style in particular, Richard Lanham famously calls for style instruction to create "a self-conscious pleasure in words" rather than promote the oversimplified notion of "clarity" (18). My interviews also reinforced the conception of style as aesthetic and, therefore, capable of evoking pleasure. Representing this theme most articulately is Candace's description of style:

> I guess what I'm trying to say is I probably don't have a very conscious definition of style but, thinking back over the things that I've said over the last who knows how long, that style seems to mean to me something beyond grammar that has to do with the pleasantness or the appropriateness of the way words are put together. And grammar's like the correctness. And once you get into style you're either dealing with pleasantness and/or appropriateness. Because what counts as pleasant is different in different fields. My scientist colleague down the hall finds the sentences that I encourage my students to use to be too long and too convoluted, full of what she considers flowery words. That sort of thing. And so it seems like there's style on the sentence level and style on a broader sense.

Here a distinction is made between grammar, which is technical and rule-based, and style, which is "something" beyond grammatical conventions that "has to do with" both pleasure and rhetorical appropriateness. These ambiguous and evaluative descriptions of style contribute to its depiction as an artistic medium, one that is more aesthetic than pragmatic and highly subjective in nature, an end in itself. This description also captures style's aesthetic dimensions by juxtaposing it with an aspect of writing that is commonly seen as lacking any artistic merit: grammar. Of added importance is Candace's description of style as rhetorical, which indicates that pleasure may not be a universal aesthetic quality, but rather, one that is dependent on genre and reader. When stylistic effectiveness is determined by its appropriateness for a particular rhetorical purpose, style is a means to an end and *not* an end in itself. That is, Candace's description of style as "pleasantness and/or appropriateness" assumes multiple interpretations of style: style is pleasant and therefore its purpose is aesthetic; style is appropriate and therefore its purpose is rhetorical; or style is both and its purpose is both an end (pleasure for a reader) and a means to an end (persuasion or identification of a reader).

As revealed in my interviews, the state of imaginative involvement induced by a writer's style is created by removing the reader from his or her own reality and into the "reality" created by the text. One interview participant, Jake, describes effective writing by "star students" as that which makes him "forget" he is reading student writing:

> I think what I tend to do is I tend to praise the star students where their style plays in. And again that's not always what I'd always like to be doing, but it's those students who when they write something that's really awesome that makes me stand back and forget that I'm reading a certain paper for a class that's really excellent, then I'll definitely . . . I think I praise specific things too. Like, I notice that you're really using some interesting writing or language here. Or when you

ended your paragraph with that really short sentence it had a kick to it that I really appreciated. But definitely, not as much as I'd like.

In this example, Jake is removed from the reality that he is a teacher assigned with the task of assessing student writing. According to Hunsaker and Smith, it is at this point of being removed from reality that writing begins to "unfold as an art." We can see the "unfolding" of writing into art in Jake's response: when this student's style transformed his role from that of evaluator to reader, it subsequently changed the task of reading from obligatory to pleasurable. In this passage Jake also uses impressionistic language to explain his reactions, describing writing as "interesting" and a short sentence as having a "kick to it that [he] really appreciated." Jake seems to be quite conscious of what he does to assess student writing and what he does not do, acknowledging throughout his response that he would like to change his approach. Despite these references to his pedagogy, however, good style is defined as that which he enjoys *as a reader*.

That the expectations with which we enter a text affect how we conceptualize our role, as either evaluator or reader, illustrates our own values about what constitutes good style: good style is that which we read for pleasure. This theme can be seen in Rachel's description of her own writing:

[Where would you say style falls in your writing process?]

It really is how it comes out of me. I compose in my head. The sentence appears and then I type it. It's almost hard to think about how you actually write. And then other times, a lot of my stylistic stuff comes out a lot in the first draft. But it comes out in revision too, because then I'll notice the kind of thing where I've used unhelpful repetition or, hey this would be a great . . . I've almost done anaphora here, if I change one thing . . . so it comes in in both places. But it's always important. It's always important. I am very unhappy with my writing if I don't get self-satisfied. I call it my pretentious . . . but I like that. I like that coming out of me.

[Can you point to specific features that that self-satisfaction comes from?]

I'm a big, big reader. I've always been a huge reader, like I'll read a novel a day. And so when stuff gets stuck in my head, even if it's a phrase from a book or something, and then when I write something and it gets stuck in my head, and I have it turning around in my head, that gives me that self-satisfaction, because I'm like oh it's catchy, I don't know. It's catchy the same way a song gets stuck in your head or something that annoys you, or anything. But when I'm playing it back in my head . . . that's what gives me that feeling. So I guess the point about the reading is it sounds like something that a real writer would do. When you sound like a real writer.

Although describing her own style and not students' styles, Rachel reinforces the idea that effective style is that which resembles the writing she finds pleasurable as a reader. Thus, as a writer, she aims to produce the type of writing she would want to read.

According to these interviews, teachers' expectations of achieving imaginative involvement with student writing are shaped by experiences with literature and reading for recreation. Therefore, teacher-readers respond favorably to student writing that lies within "expected bounds" when these "bounds" are the features of literary genres (Murray 78). Murray reinforces the idea that style lies outside the boundaries of academic writing when she states that "the world created by the text of a research report does not invite the reader's recreative imagination to the extent that a novel will" (76). Not only does the ideal of imaginative involvement relate primarily to literature, these interview responses construct it as virtually unattainable in the "academic" genres students write in composition courses. That student writing style is judged by how closely it represents literature is not surprising when we consider how style is typically taught in composition classrooms. Imitation exercises perhaps most obviously reinforce the idea that literary

style is an ideal to be reached in academic writing. As a result, stylistic effectiveness lies in a student's ability to create prose that reads as if it were not created by a student.

For teaching, this means that our criteria for effective style in academic genres are based on our expectations of literary genres, creating a conflict between the roles of "teacher" and "reader" that make up the "teacher-reader" identity. The reader judges effective style by the degree of imaginative involvement the prose creates, while the teacher must then translate that aesthetic value into something measurable that relates to the goals of the assignment. As a result, there is not only a disconnect between our supposed values and those we assess, but also there is an inherent tension between the roles embodied in the "teacher-reader" identity. This complicates Alan Purves' observation that the identity of "reader" can be divided into various types of readers that correspond to different tasks within the evaluation process, in that it looks at the tensions that arise between these types. Where style is concerned, we as teacher-readers are torn between the value systems that motivate our multiple identities.

Interrupting Involvement: Technical Composition and Stylistic "Error"

[A] rhetorical strategy is successful only insofar as it is unobtrusive in operation.

—Hunsaker and Smith 249

If imaginative involvement is the result of effective style, ineffective style is that which interrupts the connection between reader and text. According to Hunsaker and Smith, this interruption can occur as a result of overinvolvement or underinvolvement with the text, the two poles that lie outside the desired range for persuasive discourse.

However, in the interviews I conducted, none of the respondents mentioned overinvolvement in relation to style, either in positive or negative terms. It was underinvolvement, created when attention is called to the technical composition of the writing, that characterized ineffective style. This suggests that these readers would rather be too close to a reader's style, too involved, than not involved enough. Further, it suggests that imaginative involvement is an expectation and that style is only noticed when there is a break in it. This is illustrated in an interview with Michelle: Skillful is when I can read the whole paper and not get distracted by the moves that you're making rhetorically. It keeps my attention and it seems consistent and there are no big glitches that mark it as student work." Here Michelle defines effective style as that which "keeps [her] attention," or promotes imaginative involvement with the text. Ineffective style, conversely, is that which is marked by "glitches" that disrupt her involvement, bringing her back to the reality that she is reading student work. Michelle's interview response is insightful. It suggests that style can function as a liaison between a reader and a text, a means by which readers can engage with a text and forget their reality. In this case, the reality is that this particular text is "student work." Marking that reality are the "big glitches," the errors in student writing that exist as interruptions of style. These errors remind readers of the technical composition of writing, the work that goes into creating persuasive discourse and the subsequent struggles that reveal themselves in inconsistencies or inaccuracies in rhetorical and stylistic devices.

Other interview responses also reinforce the conception of effective style as that which is not *in*effective. Laurie, for example, defines effective style as that which

possesses grace, but then defines grace as a lack of struggle, not as a distinctive feature of writing style:

> When I think of style . . . I think of it as clearance, the way pole-vaulters have clearance, that it's not just doing the hard thinking and arguing but you're doing it with grace. You're up over the edge; there's no sign that you're under stress. What we know about writers, including ourselves is that if you're under cognitive stress trying to solve the big issues, working on what's pro and what's con, about how to handle the sources, about what the overall structure of the essay is, that other sorts of things break down. So, your   sentences start to break down, your ability to finish a paragraph and bring it to conclusion   before leaping to the next one tends to fly away. . . . And so grace for me is a kind of absence of that sense of difficulty, if that makes sense.

Three of the six teachers I interviewed talked about style as "grace," perhaps not surprisingly, as style scholarship and textbooks often associate style with grace (most famously Joseph Williams' *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*). Typically, grace is considered an ideal, one that can be reached through balance, symmetry, emphasis, and rhythm, according to Williams. That is, grace is created when certain principles of writing are employed effectively. Laurie's response seems to treat grace as an ideal when she employs the metaphor of the pole-vaulter. This metaphor, beneficial for its imagery, allows us to see stylistic effectiveness as a range that moves from the pole upward, such that those with more physical clearance also have more clearance, or authorization, to experiment with style. The conceptual metaphor of height as an indicator of stylistic ability stands for something very different in this case, though. It symbolizes one's distance from "stress" and "difficulty." Clearance is not being "up over the edge" in the sense of achievement, though the beginning of Laurie's explanation would lead us to think so. Rather, clearance, or grace, is a lack of ineffective or problematic style.

Other interview responses furthered the notion that desirable style is that which lacks error. Jake, for example, points out that stylistic evaluations often *begin* with error, and therefore emphasize it:

> [I]f I'm reading a lot of papers where I feel like something has been nagging me a lot and it seems like something they don't really understand, then I'll try to find something that helps me be able to teach that. But I usually don't . . . actually, I've never come into the semester, in my four semesters of teaching, saying 'oh yeah I know I'm definitely gonna hit this part of style.'

Like others, Jake equates style with error when he says that he becomes aware of style when it nags him or when he feels that students do not understand it. Jake also hints at some of the larger pedagogical problems associated with this perspective of style. Namely, when error is noticed before effectiveness, style is only taught when it is a problem. This corrective approach to style is not unusual. As I point out in chapter two, style is not a consideration in most composition classrooms. This is in part because of time constraints, lack of awareness of style and how to teach it, and negative connotations of style as local-level and therefore irrelevant to process-oriented curricula. However, this corrective approach to style instruction has negative effects, not only on how students conceptualize style but on our pedagogies in general. When teachers do not "come into the semester" planning to teach style but then discuss it when it becomes a problem, the pedagogical rationale for teaching it is built on students' errors rather than teachers' values or priorities. Further, when style *is* taught (after a teacher has identified it as a problem-area), the instruction will likely be negative, focused on the behaviors students should avoid rather than engage in.

The corrective approach to style instruction likely stems from the fact that teachers do not seek out style. That is, they do not look for it, but rather wait for it to make itself present. David illustrates this in his description of the category "economical, varied sentences" within a rubric he submitted to me:

> For me, "varied sentences" is probably something I would never notice unless somebody was writing "See spot run. See Jane kick spot. See dog yell." If it were that simplistic I would notice it but I really don't look at that, so the "economical, varied sentence," I'm not sure what that is. [Laughs]. The other one does say . . . "there's some wordiness, repetition, and choppiness," and that continues on, so there probably are teachers who pay attention to that. I don't unless I happen to notice it. And if somebody were starting out each paragraph "I, I, I," then I would notice it.

The category of "economical, varied sentences" is one of the few I encountered that lists specific qualities of effective style. However, these qualities are assessed in the same way as the negative features "wordiness, repetition, and choppiness." David explains that he does not notice wordiness, repetition, or choppiness unless they are exaggerated, so as to be too obvious to overlook. But he evaluates features of effective style—economical, varied sentences—the same way. In regards to economical, varied sentences, he not only admits that he's "not sure what that is," but he also claims that he would not notice them unless they were simplistic. David's response reveals a ubiquitous notion of style as error, such that both effective style and ineffective style are unnoticed unless attention is drawn to a text's technical composition.

All of these interview responses reinforce a connection between style and error, in that style is only noticed when there is a break in it. As a result, what is "read" by teachers when evaluating style are the problems with style. When only the moments of distraction are noticed by teachers, these errors will be the focus of their evaluations of

the student text as a whole. Effective style may go unnoticed in teacher evaluations of

style, because it is considered a default, an expectation that is not taught but is expected

as it would be in novels, or other literary prose that one reads for pleasure. When style

can only present itself negatively, a deficit model of assessment is reinforced: evaluations

of style focus on repairing weaknesses, and thus there is no recognition of achievement.

Joseph Williams' conception of error in "The Phenomenology of Error" can help

us better understand error and its relationship to style. While the teachers I interviewed

describe stylistic errors as "glitches," or misuses of style, Williams sees error as a

miscommunication between the reader and writer:

> [It is] necessary to shift our attention from error treated strictly as an isolated item on a page, to error perceived as a flawed verbal transaction between a writer and a reader. When we do this, the matter of error turns less on a handbook definition than on the reader's response, because it is that response—"detestable," "horrible"—that defines the seriousness of the error and its expected amendment. (153)

Williams shows how the aspects of writing that are traditionally thought of as problems

can instead be conceived as a miscommunication of values. While the teachers I

interviewed purported to view stylistic error as a fault on the part of the student, their

main complaint about those errors is that they disrupted a sense of imaginative

involvement. That is, stylistic errors resulted in "a flawed verbal transaction" between the

reader and the student text. Williams' notion of error reinforces style's function as a

liaison between reader and text, one that is capable of producing imaginative involvement

but exhibits vulnerability to error.

Implications of Responding to Style as a Reader

The interviews analyzed in this chapter construct style as more than textual features of writing; because style has the ability to remove readers from reality through the connections it creates between reader and text, style functions more as a communicative medium than a written product. When style is communicative, it can move outside the aesthetic realm and become a means to an end instead of an end in itself. We can imagine style, then, as a liaison traveling between student-writer and teacher-reader by way of the written text. Style is not static but rhetorical, dependent on the multiple identities and purposes of the writer, reader, and text. While the interview participants did base determinations of stylistic effectiveness on its pleasantness, or aesthetic value, they ultimately appreciated this aesthetic quality because it removed them from their reality and into the reality of the text by allowing them to connect with the text and, essentially, its writer. Therefore, the literary notion of style as aesthetic was subdued by a larger rhetorical conception of style as textual involvement.

As Jeanne Fahnestock notes, [r]hetorical stylistics is rooted in the transactional nature of language and discourse, and its principles are grounded ultimately in communicative goals (227). The primary "communicative goal" of style in these interviews is to maintain a reader's involvement in the student text. When style is the language through which writers communicate to readers and readers make meaning of texts, as it is here, style becomes transactional. According to Louise Rosenblatt, we have traditionally viewed language as a "self-contained system or code, a set of arbitrary rules and conventions, manipulated as a tool by speakers and writers, or imprinting itself upon

the minds of listeners and readers" (5). Instead, a transactional model allows for a relationship "in which each element conditions and is conditioned by the other in a mutually-constituted situation" (4). Students can become involved in how their text is read once they are aware of the influence their styles have on readers, in particular how stylistic features differ in their effects on rhetorical distance.

These interviews highlight the potential of rhetorical distance as an approach to style pedagogy. As the teachers I interviewed illustrate, style can bring readers into a state of imaginative involvement with a text but can also disrupt that connection when its technical composition reveals itself. Teaching style with the theoretical framework of rhetorical distance would involve experimentation with stylistic features and their effects on an audience, to determine which stylistic choices increase the distance between reader and text, and which decrease this distance. Once students are aware of how style affects rhetorical distance, they may begin to make decisions about the appropriateness of these choices for a given assignment and its rhetorical situation. The metaphor of distance can also increase students' awareness of audience, ethos, and persuasion, because style becomes not only a result of the devices an author employs, but also a way of representing one's self to a reader.

As well as the benefits these interviews offer to style pedagogy, they also encourage us to think more critically about how we as teacher-readers evaluate student writing for style. The most important result of these conceptions of style is that, in both cases, style as such ceases to exist. First, when style is something that promotes pleasure and involvement in a text, our reader identity and teacher identity are in conflict. We read

style as effective or ineffective but cannot assess it as such, because there is nothing but impression guiding our reaction. That is, the "reader" does not provide tangible criteria to guide the "teacher's" evaluation of style. Additionally, when style is only noticed when there is a break in it, when attention is drawn to errors in technical composition, style is defined for students as what not to do. Style pedagogy becomes one of avoidance and deficit, rather than creation.

While I did not initially set out to investigate how teachers *read* style, this theme reveals quite a bit about the process that ultimately leads to evaluations of style. As this chapter indicates, the identities readers embody affect how they judge a completed text. In the next chapter, the process of assigning a grade to style is examined. I analyze assignment sheets and rubrics collected from teachers nationwide, in an effort to see which features of student writing are considered "stylistic," and how those features are evaluated against others. While the self-reporting this chapter offers allows us to better understand how teachers conceptualize style, the grading criteria analyzed in the next chapter come directly from these teachers' classrooms, and therefore, represent how these conceptions are concretized in documents that are developed for actual use by students.

CHAPTER FOUR: GRADING STYLE WITH SCORING GUIDES: A CONFLICT OF

VALUES AND METHOD?

While previous chapters have dealt with how we respond to and read for style,

this chapter focuses on how those qualitative judgments are translated into a grade. By

exploring how style is graded, we can better understand our processes as evaluators of

writing, specifically how the ways we read and comment are captured in a final "score"

and how those scores reflect greater ideologies about what constitutes good writing.

Studying the process of grading also helps us better understand how students internalize

their performance as writers. For students, a final grade is a synecdochal representation of

their success (or failure) in a course, one letter that quantifies their potential, motivations,

and aptitude and that defines a semester-long experience well after the course has ended.

Despite its power, however, grading has been largely ignored in assessment scholarship

in favor of the processes of reading and responding to student writing. Of the scholarship

that addresses grading, "almost none confronts the task of actually deciding how to assign

a grade" (Speck and Jones 17). Process-oriented approaches to assessment have created

the stigma that grading is merely a chore, not a part of the writing process and certainly

not a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry. Pat Belanoff famously calls grading "the dirty

thing we have to do in the dark of our own offices," a practice that takes place behind

closed doors, in isolation (61). Even more significant than our field's general devaluing

of grading, though, is our lack of agreement about which features of student writing we

value. This can be seen in a long history of low inter-grader reliability and single-grader

consistency. Even as a field of writing teachers, we cannot agree on what constitutes "good" writing.

I have found this same theme to be present in the research I conducted for this chapter. In an effort to understand just how we assign style a grade and how we outline our expectations for effective style to students, I analyzed scoring guides (rubrics) I collected from composition teachers of various levels of experience and within a variety of institutional contexts nationwide. Because scoring guides are an attempt at standardizing grades and thus increasing inter-grader reliability and consistency from student to student and paper to paper, they serve particularly well as a site for analysis of grading practices. Further, all the rubrics I collected have been used in a composition classroom, making them genuine artifacts that were created by teachers, for students, and for specific writing assignments. As such, they provide insight into actual teachers' and departments' (rubrics are often departmentally created for use by teachers) beliefs about style and how those beliefs are communicated to students.

My motivations for studying rubrics were not only related to value systems and the transference of those systems to students via scoring guides, however. I also wanted to know what happens when the values that guide our judgments about style (discussed in chapter three) are placed into a format that compartmentalizes them into discrete criteria and assigns grades to them. What is gained or lost when we attempt to standardize and quantify "good" writing? Do our values remain intact? In this chapter I provide a history that establishes an inherent relationship between scoring guides and the concept of style in student writing. I then describe the definitions of style that emerged from an analysis

of style's place within the rubrics and argue that based on those definitions, there are four key evaluative terms used to describe effective style: appropriateness, readability, consistency, and correctness. Finally, I argue that even when we tend to see style as global, we are restricted in how pedagogical our assessment can be because of the very structure of the rubric and the type of evaluation it encourages.

History of Style and Rubrics

The history of writing assessment establishes an inherent relationship between writing style and rubrics, making rubrics a useful place to begin a study of how style is graded. According to Bob Broad, "Modern writing assessment was born in 1961," when *Factors in Judgments of Writing Ability* was published by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) (5). The authors of the study, Diederich, French, and Carlton, sought to "reveal the differences of opinion that prevail in uncontrolled grading—both in the academic community and in the educated public" ("Abstract"). To do so they recruited fifty-three readers in six fields—English, social science, natural science, law, writers and editors, and business executives—to grade three hundred essays written by college freshman. By "taking readers at random and writing captions under which their comments could be classified until no further types of comments could be found," Diederich, French, and Carlton developed fifty-five categories that were divided into seven main topics: ideas, style, organization, paragraphing, sentence structure, mechanics, and verbal facility (21). From these topics the authors of the study decided on five factors that they felt best represented the readers' comments, acknowledging that the

readers may or may not agree with these characterizations because they did not explicitly

identify them as such:

I. Ideas:	relevance, concise-wordy, clarity of ideas, quantity of ideas, development, too brief or long, persuasiveness, ending, generality
II. Form:	spelling, clarity of expression, organization, coherence of ideas, reader agreement, analysis, maturity
III. Flavor:	quality of ideas, style (general), mechanics (general), originality, interest, beginning, sincerity, information and illustrations
IV. Mechanics:	punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, phrasing, idiom
V. Wording:	general, word choices, logic, clichés, jargon-slang (24)

This taxonomy initiated the birth of the "rubric" as we currently know it. Further, it

established an inherent relationship between rubrics, as representations of value-systems,

and style.

When Diederich, French, and Carlton condensed their seven topics into five

"factors," style was repositioned from its own category to a component of the category

"flavor." Characterizing the flavor category is "a predominant emphasis on style and

interest; a weaker emphasis on sincerity; and an emphasis . . . on the quality of ideas—

ideas that will sell an article rather than ideas that will pass an examination" (37). That is,

this category represents writing that is enjoyable to read. Diederich, French, and Carlton

describe the comments on style that comprise the factor of flavor as having to do

primarily with the "personality expressed in writing (forceful, vigorous, outspoken,

personal, inflated, pretentious, etc.) rather than with the word choices and felicities of

expression associated with [the "wording" category]" (36). Not only did *Factors in

Judgments of Writing Ability* establish a relationship between rubrics and style, then; it

also instilled a notion of style as "personality" within the context of the rubric.

This study also illustrates the difficulty with assessing style in student writing: "It is likely that Factors IV and V can be measured by objective tests well enough for a practical judgment, but we see no way at present to measure Factors I, II, and III reliably, either by objective tests or by essays" (42). This could be the result, according to Diederich, French, and Carlton, of the conception that the "idea," "form," and "flavor" categories represent creative aspects of writing. The authors note that while the word *creative* itself did not appear enough in the readers' evaluation of the essays to be acknowledged in their study results, "originality" was the closest description to creativity, and it was mentioned most frequently in Factor III, "Flavor." Cherryl Smith and Angus Dunstan reflect this romanticized notion of writing as a primarily creative endeavor when they argue that "[t]he writing student is not asked simply to learn about writing but to create it" (164). They elaborate on the idea that writing is a creative process, an art, rather than a skill and point out the subsequent problem this creates for assessment:

> Writing courses . . . can be considered to be much like other courses in the creative or performing arts, music or drawing or dance, in which the student's entire assignment consists of producing original work rather than mastering a particular body of knowledge. . . . Traditional grading is not appropriate for a creative activity and the result of this mismatch is that we have adopted . . . evaluation tools that are ultimately in conflict with our own pedagogical goals. (164)

While this passage refers to writing in general, it is useful when combined with Diederich, French, and Carlton's problematizing of style assessment in particular because it illustrates the conflict, or "mismatch," that can exist between our beliefs about what constitutes effective style and how we assess it. If we value style as a productive art, rather than mastery of "a particular body of knowledge," then the means by which we

assess it should allow for the encouragement of that productivity. That is, it should be pedagogical in addition to evaluative.

Furthering the notion that style is creative is another finding by Diederich, French, and Carlton that "the factors do not run along occupational lines . . . with one exception: the three readers with highest loadings on the factor called "Flavor" . . . were all writers or editors" (42-43). That is, of the six fields that comprised the essay readers (one of which was college English teachers), the group "writers and editors" most noticed stylistic features of student writing. In "How Writers Evaluate Their Own Writing," Susan Miller reports similar findings. Her study analyzed the ways in which three groups—professional writers, undergraduate and graduate students, and teachers and professionals in writing programs and publishing—self-evaluated their writing. Miller found that "[w]ith the exception of the English professors and graduate students attending the Big Ten writing directors' conference, none of the writers interviewed, student or professional, noted specific qualities of the sentences, form, dialogue, plot, or style of a piece" (180). The findings of these two studies—that those involved in commercial industry were more focused on style (i.e., effect), while those in academia were focused on ideas and precision—highlight the relativity of values related to writing and writing assessment and the contextual nature of value systems.

The historical connection between style and rubrics established by *Factors in Judgments of Writing Ability* marked style as an aspect worth considering in our evaluations of student writing but one that is complex and inextricably linked to value systems guiding conceptions of good writing. As I argue throughout this dissertation,

style has seen a decline in popularity since the 1980s, and as a result, it is rarely taught in contemporary classrooms. Because rubrics are often created programmatically and then used in individual classrooms with little modification, they may encourage teachers who otherwise would not have thought to assess style in student writing to consider it in their evaluations. While this may increase style's presence in the classroom, it can also perpetuate negative and/or outdated notions of style:

> If . . . checklists are included in required texts for composition classes and alluded to in teachers' injunctions and paper responses yet are not being taught in the composition class, they become a means of mystifying the act of writing . . . [y]et if the items on style checklists *are* taught in composition classes, those classes become current-traditionalist purveyors of context-free standards for writing (Rebecca Moore Howard, et al. 216).

This point illustrates the double-bind that exists if instruction and evaluation do not work together and when they are guided by problematic notions of style. A positive result of this transfer of value systems via the rubric, however, is that it introduces teachers to aspects of student writing they may not have considered otherwise and provides a specific vocabulary for communicating expectations to students. That is, while our commentary on student writing is shaped by and limited to our experiences with writing, reading, and teaching, rubrics allow us to move beyond first-impressions by requiring specificity. We can see rubrics, in this sense, as not merely tools for assessment but also for teacher education. Rubrics have the ability to guide teachers to particular qualities of writing that otherwise may have gone unnoticed and to teach students at least one definition of "good" writing.

Treatment of Style in Scoring Guides

       As outlined in the previous chapter, I collected rubrics and contextualizing

assignment sheets from teachers nationwide to better understand how style is assigned a

grade. I narrowed the total number I received (120) down to the twenty-three that

explicitly mention style, and those twenty-three are the subject of my analysis here. Of

these rubrics, twenty-one provided scores for individual subskills and are therefore

considered analytic rubrics. The other two rubrics are holistic, grouping criteria together

under the larger headings of letter grades ranging from A to F. According to Edward

White, analytic rubrics "[i]n theory . . . should provide the diagnostic information that

holistic scoring fails to provide and in the process yield a desirable increase in

information from the writing sample." However, analytic rubrics are often problematic in

practice despite their prevalence here, as "[t]here is as yet no agreement (except among

the uninformed) about what, if any, separable subskills exist in writing . . . [and]

[r]eliable analytic writing scores are extremely difficult to obtain, because of the lack of

professional consensus about the definition and importance of subskills" ("Teaching and

Assessing" 233). Most often, the scores in these analytic rubrics were in the form of

descriptive words or phrases, such as *excellent*, *good*, *needs improvement*, and

unacceptable. Letter and number scores were the next most frequent, and two of the

rubrics used a combination of descriptions and numbers. The number of categories in the

rubrics ranged from two to eleven, within which there were subcategories in several of

the rubrics. Despite this range in number of categories, however, the style category was located in the bottom half of the rubric in all but one of them.[11]

Absence

Of the 120 scoring guides collected, only twenty-three included the word *style*.[12] This means that in over eighty percent of the rubrics, features of writing that could be considered stylistic were either not assessed or were replaced with synonymous terms. One reason for this absence could be the general resistance to style in our discipline in recent history. If we are not talking about style as a discipline and therefore not explicitly teaching it, style will not likely turn up in departmentally created rubrics to be used in composition classrooms or in those created by teachers to reinforce their assignments' expectations. However, that style is absent in the majority of the rubrics I collected is not necessarily because it is not valued or assessed but that it is not being *called* style. This may be less a result of a devaluing of style and more an effect of the structure of rubrics themselves. That style is often not called style and is, instead, replaced with terms that better suit our discipline's current values is an observation that has been made by style scholar Paul Butler. Here, Butler's point is reinforced by the very nature of the rubric as an assessment method. Because it is the work of rubrics to compartmentalize features of prose into discrete categories and to assign them individual scores, concepts as broad as

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[11] In seven of the twenty-three, it was the bottom category, in nine the second-to-last, in six the third-to-last, and in one it was in the second of four categories.

[12] In fourteen of these twenty-three rubrics, style was a criterion, and in nine, it was a descriptive standard. I use the term *criteria* to refer to the features of writing assessed by the rubrics (typically falling in the left-most column) and *descriptive standards* to refer to the statements that describe expectations for performance for each criterion.

style may be broken down into subcriteria for the sake of the rubric. When the word *style* is not present, then, it may be because the elements that constitute effective style, according to the creator of the rubric, are replacing it. Because I am concerned here with how we define the word *style* and communicate our expectations for stylistic effectiveness to students through the use of that word, the remainder of this chapter will explore only those instances in which the term is used explicitly.

Presence

The word *style* was absent from a large majority of the rubrics I analyzed, and when it was present, there was little agreement about what it means. From the twenty-three rubrics that used the word *style*, I found seven main definitions for the term, determined by the placement of style in the list of criteria and within the descriptive standards for a given assignment. The most frequent characterizations of style in the rubrics I analyzed were style as eloquence and style as rhetoric, each occurring in eight of twenty-three rubrics. Style was also defined as tone, mechanics, sentence structure, documentation, and word choice, in that order of frequency. These characterizations of style, when listed from the most to least frequent also tend to move from global to local, with eloquence, rhetoric, and tone comprising the most popular characterizations of style and mechanics, sentence structure, documentation, and word choice comprising the least. I will explore each of these characterizations of style with examples from the rubrics I collected, in order to highlight the implications of these definitions of style on our evaluations of student writing.

Major Themes

Style was equated with eloquence, which includes references to expression, grace, and readability, in eight of the twenty-three rubrics. This theme was also the most prominent in the interviews I conducted with teachers, which indicates that teachers both value expression and are aware that they assess it in their students' writing. In other words, this category (and the fact that it is the most prominent of all conceptions of style I found in the rubrics) appears to reflect most closely teachers' actual values. One of the eight rubrics had a criterion explicitly titled "style and expression," while the others related effective style to readability and grace. The one rubric that contained the criterion "style and expression" included five subcriteria, or competencies, that are evaluated on a scale ranging from "fails to meet competency" to "exceeds competency" with corresponding letter-grade scores (See Table 1). This rubric functions differently than the others analyzed here because it does not include descriptive standards for every score category; instead scores for each of the subcriteria are indicated to students by check marks in the appropriate boxes. The grouping together of style and expression in this example treats them as one criterion that can be achieved by the same means. While this may not have been the intent of the creator of this rubric, the lack of definition between the two criteria makes the referent of the subcriteria unclear. It cannot be determined whether "non-sexist language," for instance, is a concern related to style or expression, or both. Further, the inclusion of "sentence patterns," "sentence meaning," and "sentence structures" in the subcriteria for "style and expression" suggest that effective expression and style are achieved at least partly by local-level writing competencies and are

evaluated by their correctness and clarity. This conception of style differs dramatically

from those of the other rubrics in this category, despite the fact that they all relate to

expression in writing.

Table 1: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Expression

	Competency	Fails to Meet Competency F to D	Meets Competency C	Exceeds Competency B to A
Style and Expression	Uses stylistic options such as tone, word choice, sentence patterns			
	Writing is clear and precise			
	Sentence meaning is clear			
	Sentence structures generally are correct			
	Reflects current academic practices, including non-sexist language			

In the instances in which style was its own criterion or was included within a

descriptive standard for another criterion, it was defined as grace and/or readability. In

two rubrics style is defined by way of grace while in two others grace is defined by way

of style. When style is defined as graceful writing, grace describes local-level writing

features. For example, within a criterion titled "Prose," the descriptive standard for A-

level work is that the writing "exhibit stylistic grace and flourishes (subordination,

variation of sentence and paragraph lengths, interesting vocabulary)." That is, writing

will be graceful when sentences and paragraph lengths are "varied" and when vocabulary

is "interesting." In another example within a holistic rubric, A-level writing is described

as such: "The style is energetic and precise: the sentence structure is varied and the words are carefully chosen. *How* the writer says things is as excellent as *what* the writer says." Again, varied sentence structures and word choice are the primary factors contributed graceful, or "energetic," style. In this case, the description of words as "carefully chosen" is slightly more specific than the former description of "interesting," but both assume that there is a universal standard for graceful style.

In other instances, grace was defined by way of style. One holistic rubric includes a category titled "Grace" that includes "organization, sentences, source-use, and style" as its subcriteria. The expectations for performance for each of these qualities are not defined. But what is significant is that this particular rubric measures the degree to which several aspects of the prose ranging from global to local (organization, sentences, source-use, and style) embody grace. Grace, then, is not a quality related solely to sentences or words but rather one that describes prose as a whole. In another rubric a criterion is "how gracefully you present your writing (including grammar and style)." Grammar and style act as the subcriteria, or means, to creating graceful writing. That grace is defined two different ways means that how we frame the relationship between style and grace is meaningful. When style is graceful, it is because it is functioning at the sentence level in a way that is appealing to a reader. When style is a component of grace, however, it is but one contributing factor to an overall effect.

Another conception of style I categorized under the larger heading of "eloquence" is readability. Despite readability being an effect of writing and not a quality that can be created by a writer, in one of the examples of style as readable writing, readability is

defined in terms of an author's control over his/her prose (see Table 2). What this

assumes is that when a writer is in control, his/her prose will be error-free and thus easier

to read. In another example, style is defined as "[h]ighly readable, engaging prose that

provides evidence of the writer's ability to think critically and read/view/listen closely."

In this instance, readability is not defined as control over error but rather a reflection of

the writer's thinking and analytical processes.

Table 2: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Readability

Style	A	B	C	D	F
Readability	Essentially error-free. Demonstrates control except when using sophisticated language.	Demonstrates emerging control, exhibiting frequent errors that make reading slightly difficult.	Demonstrates developing control, exhibiting error patterns and/or stigmatizing errors that make reading difficult.	Repeated weaknesses in mechanics, spelling and/or grammar, demonstrating a lack of control.	Mechanical and usage errors are so severe that ideas are hidden.

What is significant about the category of style as eloquence is that expression,

grace, and readability are all related but interact in complex ways that are based in the

element of control. Expression is something a writer does, a way of describing a writer's

control over his/her prose; grace is a quality a writer embodies but that serves the

aesthetic desires of a reader; and readability lies solely with the reader but is expected to

be somehow created by a writer. In these three conceptions, which are all related to each

other by way of the rubrics, lie varying degrees of control and the expectation that style is

a way to relate to a reader.

Rhetoric was another characterization of style occurring eight times in the twenty-

three rubrics. To demonstrate how I arrived at the characterization of style as rhetoric, I

use segments—the heading columns and the relevant row only—of three rubrics to demonstrate the relationship between style and various rhetorical aspects of writing. In the first example, the criterion on which the student writing is evaluated is style and the descriptive standards that outline expectations for stylistic performance are rhetorically focused (see Table 3). That is, whether a student paper meets the "beginning competencies" or the "accomplished competencies," or any level in between, for the criterion *style*, is based on how rhetorically situated the student's style is. In this particular example, the emphasis on rhetoric can be seen in the use of the terms *audience, context,* and *genre.* What is of particular importance in this rubric is not only how each level of competency is defined but also how the expectations for stylistic performance change as competency levels increase. In the transition from beginning to developing competencies, the expectations become much more specific, moving from "appropriate" style to that which is clear and appropriate "but may call attention to itself." The word *audience* also becomes much more specifically defined as "the particular discipline and/or genre in which the student is writing." In the transition from developing competencies to practicing competencies, clear writing becomes clear and "precise" writing, and language use develops from "call[ing] attention to itself" to "above average." The specificity of the teacher's expectations similarly shifts just as the standards from writing that calls attention to itself to that which is above average do. Specific examples are given for writing that calls attention to itself while no examples are given for the already ambiguous description of "above-average" writing. Finally, as the rubric progresses from practicing to accomplished competencies, there is one minor change in

the descriptive standards—from "above average" to "proficient" use of language. Again, the expectations are expressed in terms of value judgments, which can already be assumed by the titles given to each category, instead of referring to textual features of the student writing. Here, the most specific descriptive standards are those in the "developing competencies" category, which appears to correlate with a C or D grade. More importantly, the categories all seem to be communicating to students the same basic standards, just with varying levels of specificity. That is, the "beginning" competencies (of style that is "appropriate for the rhetorical context" and "suit[s] the audience") are essentially the same as the "accomplished" competencies, except that the accomplished competencies are more accurately defined within the rubric.

Table 3: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Rhetorical Effectiveness

Rubric	Beginning Competencies	Developing Competencies	Practicing Competencies	Accomplished Competencies
Style	The style is appropriate for the rhetorical context and the language choices suit the audience.	The writing is clear and language is appropriate to the rhetorical context and audience but may call attention to itself in minor ways (e.g., the purpose of this paper is…; I feel that…; etc.). The student is beginning to use language in a way that is appropriate for the particular discipline and/or genre in which the student is writing.	The writing is clear and language use is precise. The student makes above average use of language in a way that is appropriate for the particular discipline and/or genre in which the student is writing.	The writing is clear and language use is precise. The student makes proficient use of language in a way that is appropriate for the particular discipline and/or genre in which the student is writing.

In another rubric that equates style with rhetoric, "audience" is one of the criteria on which the writing is being evaluated while style is included in the descriptive standards (see Table 4). That is, in this rubric, *style* is a term used to define what constitutes audience awareness. Even though style is not the criterion being evaluated here, it is defined though this rubric in relation to audience and genre, two recurring rhetorical concepts. Here, style and genre are defined as ways in which a writer can and should reach an audience. As in the last example, the expectations change as competency levels change (in this case, decrease, from "great" to "grim"). "Great" consideration of audience requires that the essay "is written in a style and genre applicable to the assignment's audience;" that is, both style and genre must be considered. Attention to audience is "good" when *either* style or genre is "not applicable to the assignment's audiences." So, style and genre are no longer joint considerations, but rather they are interchangeable and given equal value, such that a "good" paper is one that uses a style applicable to audience *or* uses a genre applicable to audience. The "fair" essay is one that has style and genre problems and therefore is "not applicable" to the intended audience. Style is dropped out of the "grim" category altogether, suggesting that either "grim" writing would not embody style anyway, or that it ceases to be an important consideration at that grade level.

Table 4: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Audience

Category	Great (10-8)	Good (7-5)	Fair (4-2)	Grim (1)	Total
Assignment's audience	The paper is written in a style and genre applicable to the assignment's audience, which are members of the scientific community.	The paper is written in a way that either the style or genre is not applicable to the assignment's audiences, which are members of the scientific community.	The paper is written in a way that the style and genre have problems which make the paper not applicable to the assignment's audience, which are members of the scientific community.	The paper is written in a genre that does not fit the purpose of the paper, nor does it meet the needs of the intended audience.	

In another example of style as rhetoric, "ethos" is a subcategory of the criterion "style" (see Table 5). So implicit in the structure of this rubric is that ethos is one contributing factor to style and that effective style is that which is rhetorically situated. Because style is defined in terms of ethos here, we can look to the descriptive standards that measure the effectiveness of the writer's ethos to see how they relate to specific stylistic features of the student prose. For instance, the descriptive standards for an A-grade include "clear and concise" sentences and "advanced vocabulary," as well as the demonstration of "knowledge, credibility, and trustworthiness." We can assume, although not stated outright, that there is a causal relationship between how students use sentences and vocabulary and how knowledgeable, credible, and trustworthy they appear to be in their writing. In the B-grade and D-grade categories, tone is also a consideration and is measured according to its maturity and appropriateness for the rhetorical situation of the writing assignment.

Table 5: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Ethos

Style	A	B	C	D	F
Ethos	Sentences are clear and concise; may use advanced vocabulary; demonstrates knowledge, credibility, and trustworthiness.	Sentences are mostly clear and concise; diction is generally appropriate; tone is mature and appropriate to audience, subject, and purpose; demonstrates knowledge and credibility.	Sentences show some variety and complexity; may use words inaccurately; leaves some question about knowledge and credibility.	Uneven control; sentences are simplistic; diction is inaccurate; tone is inappropriate for audience, subject, and purpose; creates questions about knowledge and credibility.	Superficial and stereotypical language; oral rather than written language patterns, erodes confidence in knowledge and credibility.

These examples illustrate three ways in which the theme of style as rhetoric was communicated through the rubrics I analyzed. While they all measured different criteria—style, audience, and ethos, respectively—they used the term *style* in regard to rhetorical concepts including audience, context, ethos, and genre. In all eight of the rubrics that defined style as rhetorical, including the three discussed here, stylistic effectiveness was evaluated according to appropriateness. In the first example, effective style is that which is appropriate for context, audience, and genre. Appropriateness for audience and genre are also considerations in the second example. And in the third, diction and tone were judged on their appropriateness for the assignment's particular rhetorical situation. What these rubrics reveal is that when style is tied to rhetoric, it is also evaluated according to appropriateness. To make language choices appropriate is to understand the conventions of the genre and the needs of a particular audience. As a result, what is being evaluated in these instances is students' understanding of the *effects* of their prose, more so than individual stylistic features.

In six instances, style was defined by how it is "heard." In five of the six rubrics, the word *tone* was used to describe style while in the other instance, effective style was defined more broadly as that which "pleases the eye and ear." Despite the fact that sound metaphors such as tone describe the reaction of a reader, rather than the actions of a writer, tone was described twice as a tool, something to be "used" by the writer. In one instance, good writing is that which "uses stylistic options such as tone, word choice, sentence patterns." While tone is certainly achieved by the relationship between a subject and writer and is accomplished by word choice and sentence patterns, the listing of tone, word choice, and sentence patterns together as "stylistic options" treats them all as tools a writer can control and "use" to create a particular style. All three "stylistic options" are given equal weight, instead of word choice and sentence patterns being "stylistic options" that *contribute* to tone. Another rubric defines good writing as that which "uses a formal, academic tone, devoid of the words "you," "thing," and other informal styles." Again, tone is "used," but in this case, it is defined in terms of formality, which itself is even further defined by specific words (*you* and *thing*) that should be avoided. Using tone as a tool, then, requires avoidance of "informal styles" created by specific word choices.

If tone is a tool to be "used" by a writer, other rubrics offer insight into the ways it should be used. Two rubrics contained categories that pair style with tone and describe effective use of style and tone as consistent ("style and tone consistent" and "consistent style and tone"). In another example, writing should "maintain[] an articulate tone." The word *maintain*, like *consistent*, assumes a degree of control and regularity. Perhaps the most relevant premise apparent in this grouping of rubrics, then, is that when style is

defined as tone, it becomes a tool a writer can use and that must be used consistently.

Consistency as a measure of tone is a carry-over from the sound metaphor itself; it is the

conceptualization of tone as a tool one uses that disturbs the metaphor. It has been

established that tone is a way a reader, or hearer, evaluates consistent style. Evaluating a

criterion that resides solely with the evaluator on the basis of the writer's control over it,

however, delivers conflicting expectations to students and a challenging assessment task

to teachers. It is not the conceptualization of style as tone that is problematic here; when

style is tone, it is inherently audience-based and therefore rhetorical. Rather, the concern

is the placement of an audience-based criterion into a structure that purports to evaluate a

student writer's use of particular "tools." The major themes analyzed here begin to

illuminate the ways in which our values (specifically, a rhetorical notion of style) are

communicated to students when placed into the scoring guides that are supposed to

accurately represent and quantify them.

Minor Themes

The other conceptions of style present in the rubrics were much more local,

defining style as synonymous with or the result of mechanics, sentence structure,

documentation, and word choice. While these themes emerged in the other categories

already discussed, they were all framed as means to a more global conception of writing.

For example, style when equated with tone (a global feature) is created by word choice (a

local feature). In the rubrics I discuss in this section, however, style was equated directly

with local features of writing. This suggests that unlike the more global conceptions of

style as rhetoric, expression, and tone, these local conceptions define stylistic effectiveness by adherence to rules. Style is not evaluated by appropriateness, readability, or consistency but rather by correctness.

Style was defined as mechanics six times in the rubrics. In four of these instances, style was grouped with a term that suggests this relationship: two rubrics included categories titled "style and mechanics," another included a "style/grammar/format" category, and yet another had a "style/conventions" category under which the descriptive standard of "mechanical precision" was listed. It can be assumed that when qualities of writing are lumped into one category together, the creator of the rubric sees them as parallel, if not synonymous. In another example, the criterion style fell under a larger category titled "language use and mechanics," signifying that style and mechanics were not synonymous but that "appropriate style" is one element that contributes to effective language use and mechanics. I also noticed the opposite, a category called style under which "correct use: sentence fragments, run-on sentences, misspelling, usage, punctuation" were listed. While all of the rubrics that conceive of style as mechanics also impart a rules-based notion of style, this last example does so more obviously through the phrase "correct use." Also relevant is that many of the features listed after "correct use"—"sentence fragments, run-on sentences, misspelling, usage, punctuation"—are negative and are, therefore, things that can't be used correctly.

Style was defined in terms of sentence structure in five instances. In one rubric it was simply listed as "sentence structure" within the criterion heading "style." In the others more specificity was given as to what qualifies as effective sentence structure:

maturity ("mature style"), variety ("varied sentence patterns"), clarity ("sentence

meaning is clear"), and correctness ("sentence structures generally are correct"). Despite

these qualitative terms, there is still little indication of what constitutes maturity and

clarity. Variety and correctness are slightly more specific but still depend on a knowledge

of how to vary sentence patterns and compose a structurally "correct" sentence. One

rubric that lists "sentence-level issues" as a subcriterion under the heading "Style and

Language" provides more insight, as it offers a list of descriptive standards on which the

prose will be evaluated:

- Varies sentence length (avoids short, single sentences in favor of stylistic variation that includes compound-complex sentences)
- Uses effective parallel structure
- Does not overuse "to be" verbs (is/are/was/were, etc.)
- Remains consistent in point of view, without switching between 1st, 2nd, ("you"), and 3rd person

When style is defined at the sentence-level, as this examples and others show, it is

equated with correctness and, therefore, with a student's ability to follow specific rules in

his/her writing.

Four times, style was defined in terms of documentation style, or proper use of

MLA or APA formatting. This use of the word *style* is perhaps the most broad, because it

refers not to the concept of *style* but to the concept of *a style*, or a way of doing

something. Twice in categories titled "style," the descriptive standards for the category

involved documentation. In one rubric "MLA format in heading, paging, Works Cited"

were listed as stylistic concerns. In another, "Uses MLA citation conventions without

error (at least eight sources are cited in the Works Cited page)" was a descriptive

standard within a style category. Style also appeared as a descriptive standard for the

criterion of documentation, as well. In one category explicitly called "documentation,"

effective documentation was defined by "appropriate style accurately used in

documenting sources." In an "incorporation of research" category, style was also listed as

a standard. This use of the term *style*, because it relates to a method versus traditional

rhetorical style, is conceptually very different from the others this chapter explores.

However, its prominence in the rubrics I analyzed is an argument in itself for its inclusion

in this chapter. Also, its presence in these rubrics further illustrates the ambiguity of the

word *style* and the implications of basing our evaluations of writing on a term with so

many meanings.

The phrase "word choice" was actually present in more rubrics than any other

language feature analyzed here, but it was the least popular characterization of style. That

is because although word choice was mentioned in ten of the twenty-three rubrics, it was

grouped with other writing features. Word choice was the primary descriptor of style in

only three instances. In only one of these instances, descriptions were provided for what

constitutes effective or ineffective word choice once. In this example, "word-level issues"

included writing that is "correct in terms of diction and usage, avoids wordiness, avoids

cliché, shows sensitivity to gender, ethnicity, religion, class, nationality, and disability,

[and] offers effective sensory detail and figurative language." The other two times, the

criteria were simply listed as "diction" and "word choice," with no indication as to what

makes its use effective or ineffective. Word choice, when considered an element of style,

was never described with specificity and never held a prominent place in the rubrics. It

was listed, in every instance, as a single item in a list of equally vague criteria.

Conclusion

From the conceptions of style in rubrics emerge four evaluative criteria for style: readability, appropriateness, consistency, and correctness. When style was equated with eloquence, its effectiveness was judged by the readability of the prose, including the reader's enjoyment of it. This theme was the focus of chapter three, where the concept of rhetorical distance was used to evaluate the connection a reader felt to a given text. In the rubrics where style is seen as inherently related to rhetoric, appropriateness is the primary criterion for effectiveness. Style is not developed by adherence to rules but rather by an awareness of genre and audience expectations. Tone was another term linked to style, suggesting that style is not only created but also heard. This conception of style is tied to audience perception and thus creates a reciprocal relationship between writer and reader, or listener. Finally, in the more local conceptions of style, stylistic effectiveness is determined by correctness, or how well the student writer follows a particular and universal formula. What all of these conceptions and their related evaluative criteria reveal is that there is little agreement on what we mean by style and that each definition we attribute to style results in its own expectations for effectiveness.

I found from analyzing these rubrics the same global conceptions of style (as eloquence, rhetoric, and tone) that I found in analyzing interview transcripts discussed in the preceding chapter. However, despite the prioritization of global conceptions of style in the rubrics (and thus the matching of theory to practice), the form of the rubrics themselves matters: When global conceptions of style are placed into an assessment

method that serves to compartmentalize and quantify aspects of writing that are conceptually bigger than the rubric allows for, they are reduced to the same quantification as local writing concerns. That is, the rubric in itself restricts how we can evaluate style, regardless of how we conceptualize its value. What this means is that we are more specific about those aspects we value least (according to their frequency in these rubrics) while we are less specific about the qualities we value most. Qualities like eloquence, rhetorical appropriateness, and tone are less quantifiable when placed into the context of a rubric than are the qualities we value least about style—mechanics, sentence structure, documentation, and word choice. While this critique can be made about rubrics in general, it is especially relevant to style in particular, as rubrics that are created programmatically often supply the word *style* for teachers who otherwise would not assess it. Consequently, teachers are forced to acknowledge style's presence in student writing and to assess it, perhaps without even knowing how to define it or what it constitutes in student writing. This means that a rubric's confining structure has the potential to impede how teachers and students alike understand style.

Further, the rubric, restricted by its form, may not serve a pedagogical function beyond right and wrong despite its intentions. Building on the fundamental premise of this dissertation, that assessment is a form (and often the most explicit form) of style instruction students ever receive, the fact that rubrics do not teach students how to *reproduce* the style we value means that they are serving more as judgmental measures than instructional ones. This is a limitation of rubrics in general, enhanced when a term whose ambiguity already poses problems for assessment is involved. Assessing style in a

way that is productive for students, then, requires much more than conceptualizing style in ways that move beyond mere form. It requires assessment practices that allow us to express our values and to teach students how to achieve them.

CHAPTER FIVE: ACCESSING AWARENESS: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON

STYLE IN COMPOSING PROCESSES

> There seems to be a line between conscious writing and unconscious writing and sometimes, there is no boundary at all. What I mean by this is that when I start a thought, I am consciously thinking of my ideas and what I want to write. When I finally have a solid idea of the concept I want to convey, I run with it. It seems like this is when my writing is unconscious.
>
> —Lydia, an advanced composition student[13]

As was illustrated in chapter two, published studies on response to student writing tend to construct style as mere form that can be changed with little to no effect on content, as error that is unintentional, careless, and easily "fixed" in the final stages of revision, and as a product over which students have little control. This chapter developed out of a desire to understand students' perspectives. How would students describe their own styles, if asked to do so? Would these same themes arise? To answer these questions, I examined forty-seven stylistic analyses that students conducted on their own writing in an advanced composition course I taught in spring of 2009. The student passage above is representative of the analyses I received. Lydia, like others, clearly sees her ideas and form as related, unlike the published teacher responses to student writing. The very struggle this student experiences in defining her own composing process suggests that style is not unintentional or haphazard and that a poor stylistic decision may not be an error but may represent cognitive difficulty with formulating a particular idea. This student's response most evidently reveals that style is much more than a product.

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[13] All student names are pseudonyms.

Here, style is a process that begins when the student "start[s] a thought" and continues even as she "run[s] with it."

What student perspectives can offer the assessment of style, as illustrated by Lydia, is access into their stylistic awareness. According to Jane Walpole, "the whole reason for teaching composition is to increase our students' awareness of prose and of their own options for expression so that they can make more effective decisions" (208-09). Wendy Bishop cites this same goal as her rationale for style instruction, explaining that pedagogy promoting alternate styles should "[d]iscuss writers' options, ask for suggestions about how texts can be made riskier, and more conventional, and how style can be altered" ("Teaching Grammar" 184). Those who believe style is comprised of choices also believe that the power of teaching style lies in its ability to make those choices transparent. However, teacher commentary on style rarely considers a student's awareness and instead makes a judgment about the effectiveness of stylistic features of the text as they exist on the page, ignoring the inventive process that led to their creation. This is not purely an oversight on the part of teachers; rather, it stems from a lack of access to students' composing processes. When a text is apart from its writer, we are only privy to the choices that make their way onto the page and that have withstood revision.

This chapter reports the results of a study of students' stylistic analyses of their own writing, exploring the conceptions of style reflected in the analyses. I ground this discussion in self-assessment theory, which, as a "mechanism that gives us access to students' ideas about their own learning," serves as an entryway into assessing stylistic awareness (Kusnic and Finley 7). I first provide the theoretical context for the chapter

with a discussion of the cognitive movement in composition, exploring key texts that encourage a focus on learning and on the self. Then I use self-assessment scholarship to illustrate the benefits and complexities of having students think and write about their own styles. Finally, I demonstrate how style is not simply a local consideration; it is central to the writing process, both revealing students' assumptions about writing and functioning as an important teaching tool.

From Learning-to-Write to Writing-to-Learn: Cognitive Approaches to Composition

In the 1970s to the 1980s, our field experienced a shift into the process era, which was joined by a large body of research on cognition that connected writing to learning. Borrowed from psychology, the concept of metacognition gained particular importance to composition scholarship. J. H. Flavell defines metacognition as "knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena "or, more simply put, thinking about thinking (906). The idea that awareness of one's writing process could affect writing ability shifted the focus of writing instruction from the product to the creation of that product, emphasizing learning and the "self." Writing was no longer only something we learned to do but rather something we could learn from. Even more, writing became an epistemic medium, capable of reflecting and creating an author's ways of knowing. The concept of metacognition is particularly useful for understanding how students see their own writing, as it considers whole processes of composing, including what students learn from writing and how they learn it.

Janet Emig's 1977 article "Writing as a Mode of Learning" prompted the writing-to-learn movement as well as WAC. In it Emig argues that writing is a "unique mode of learning" because it attends to both process and product (122). Unlike speaking, reading, and listening, writing is a process of higher-level thinking that simultaneously produces writing and "self-provided feedback" (128). Emig describes her distinction between these language processes in detail:

> Writing is originating and creating a unique verbal construct that is graphically recorded. Reading is creating or re-creating but not originating a verbal construct that is graphically recorded. Listening is creating or re-creating but not originating a verbal construct that is not graphically recorded. Talking is creating and originating a verbal construct that is not graphically recorded (except for the circuitous routing of a transcribed tape). (123)

Drawing on John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Jerome Bruner for her definition of learning, Emig explains that if learning involves the reinforcing of a particular experience, then the fact that writing is constantly reinforced by review and reevaluation makes it a useful and unique mode of learning. In addition to its value as an originating, reflective mode of learning, writing promotes engaged, committed, personal, and "self-rhythmed" learning. The notion of writing as "self-rhythmed" means that it is dependent on the writer and allows for a necessary restraint that causes past, present, and future to work together, connecting the "three major tenses of our experience to make meaning" (127). Emig's argument that writing is actually a heuristic for learning gave added significance to our work as composition teachers by increasing writing's importance as a mode of communication and means to metacognitive awareness of composing processes.

The application of metacognition to writing pedagogy was furthered by Nancy Sommers, whose "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult

Writers" drew attention to revision at a time when "the primary focus of writing research [was] on the production of texts rather than on their comprehension" (qtd. in Sitko 94). Sommers argues that theories of writing tend to be linear and model themselves on speech, which is irreversible and, thus, treats revision as an afterthought. Instead, theories of writing should treat revision as a practice that occurs at all stages of composing and that encourages discovery. Sommers' definition of revision as "a sequence of changes in a composition—changes which are initiated by cues and occur continually throughout the writing of a work" illustrates this process-oriented approach (380). To better understand revision in general and how student writers and experienced writers differ, Sommers conducted a case study that involves both student writers and experienced writers from Boston University and the University of Oklahoma. The writers each wrote three essays, revised the essays twice, and participated in interviews. From this study Sommers found that the students tended to focus on the word level in their revisions while the experienced writers sought to find the "form or shape of their argument" (384). What the experienced writers expressed that the student writers lacked is "the dissonance of discovery, utilizing in their writing" (387). Sommers' work is a call for a reconceptualization of revision as "discovery" and for more research that investigates how student writers revise. Sommers work also extends Emig's idea of writing as learning; because revision is a process of constant rewriting, it consistently promotes learning throughout the writing process.

A year after Sommers' study was published, Flower and Hayes' landmark *College Composition and Communication* article "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," with

which the cognitive approach to composition is now synonymous, introduced cognitive process theory. This theory focused on the role of thinking processes in the production of writing and questioned the dominant (at the time) conception of writing as a "series of decisions and choices," asking "[w]hat guides the decisions writers make as they write?" (365). Using protocol analysis, wherein a "protocol" is the transcript produced by writers who were given a prompt and then asked to compose aloud into a tape recorder, they sought to answer this question. Flower and Hayes' model of composing includes the processes of planning, translating, and reviewing, all of which are consistently guided by an internal "monitor." The monitor "represents metacognitive awareness of how and when to invoke strategies appropriately" and helps explain writers' composing styles (Sitko 96). For example, it is what differentiates heavy revisers, those who write a draft knowing it will have to be significantly revised later, and heavy planners, those who plan before they write and revise as they draft. It is the evaluative function of the monitor that gave the Flower and Hayes model such influence in research on metacognition and self-assessment.

In "Is Teaching Still Possible? Writing, Meaning, and Higher-Order Reasoning," Ann Berthoff extends the scholarship on writing and learning, calling into question developmental models of language. She argues that we must move from a pedagogy of exhortation to a pedagogy of knowing (a phrase she borrows from Freire), so that writing can be seen not only as a method of communication but also as a way to make meaning. One way to get at this conception of writing as meaning is through "triadicity," which acknowledges the roles of the "symbol-user, the knower, [and] the learner" in the process

of meaning-making (751). The rhetorical triangle, which is dyadic and focuses on writer, audience, and message, leaves out purpose, meaning, and intention, while the triadic conception of the sign emphasizes the role of the learner and thus the process of meaning-making. Reconceptualizing language's role in meaning-making also requires that we consider the hypostatic and discursive qualities of language, moving us from a developmental model that "sanctions the genetic fallacy that what comes first is simple, not complex, and that what comes after is a bigger version of a little beginning" toward a discursive one that instead "encourages the recognition that meaning comes first; that it is complex from the start; that its articulation is contingent on the mind's activity in a human world" (752). While the cognitive approach, in general, leads us to see how writing promotes learning, Berthoff offers us a model that includes the learner in the process of meaning-making.

Assessing One's "Self": Self-Assessment Theory in Composition

As cognitive approaches to composition teach us, writing is a means of learning. But as writing teachers who are responsible for assessing student writing and yet have little access to students' cognitive processes, we often use student texts as the sole means by which to evaluate their learning. The assumption that students' learning can be judged by their writing ignores that students learn more about writing than we can judge by their papers, in part because students' ability to critically read their own work may develop more quickly than their ability to apply that gained knowledge in their writing (Rubin). As a result, metacognitive awareness gained by students through drafting or revision may

not be accounted for in their papers. This incongruity between the processes of growth in thinking and in writing is important to consider because "assessing growth in thinking could reflect students' ability to translate teacher and peer evaluation into their own conceptions and then use those conceptions in revising" (Beach 164). Having students self-assess in conjunction with traditional teacher commentary can allow for a more comprehensive portrayal of *why* students made particular choices by allowing them to reflect on their own critical readings of their work.

While my study in this chapter examines students' *analyses* of their writing, and therefore was not assigned to students as a *self-assessment*, the theoretical rationale for self-assessment and its critiques are relevant to my work. Self-assessment is generally used as an umbrella term for other related concepts, including self-reflection and self-evaluation. Kathleen Blake Yancey and Jane Bowman Smith point out that self-assessment tends to refer "(a) to the processes that a learner uses to realize (in the sense of making real) and to enhance learning; (b) to an assessment of one's text; and (c) to an assessment of a self-as _____, for example, an evaluation of self-as-writer" (170). Self-assessment is built on the idea of metacognition in that it encourages an awareness of a student's own composing process, text(s), and/or self. It asks students "to think not only about what they have learned but also about what they have learned in relation to themselves" (Kusnic and Finley 9).

In "How Writers Evaluate Their Own Writing," Susan Miller advocates strongly for self-assessment—she uses the term "self-evaluation"—declaring that "those who do not evaluate their own writing do not gain from *having written*" and that "[i]t may be that

practice becomes developmental (instead of merely incremental) only if self-evaluations

follow it" (181-82). In a study analyzing the responses of three groups, including

professional writers, undergraduate and graduate students, and teachers and professionals

in writing programs and publishing, she finds three kinds of "evaluative experiences," or

measures of success for a written piece, that emerged from her data: how the audience

received it, the degree to which it reflected the author's intentions, and how much the

author "learned" or "discovered" by writing it (178-79). Interestingly, these measures of

success for writing are all related to the author or the reader, not to features of the text

itself.

It is this focus on the individual that differentiates self-assessment from traditional

assessment methods, yet it is also a source of critique. Competing notions of "self" make

self-assessment, as a term and method, difficult to define. It is generally accepted now,

with the influence of social-constructivism, that the notion of "self" in self-reflection

refers not to an autonomous self but one that is socially, culturally, and historically

conditioned. However, as Susan Latta and Janice Lauer explain, the idea of a "socially

constituted subject" carries with it its own problems:

> If we add to our consideration of possible subject positions that the writer may
> assume other social and cultural factors than gender, such as race, religion,
> socioeconomic class, family background and beliefs, and so forth, we can see how
> finding appropriate voices in writing becomes a difficult task. This also
> complicates the issue of self-assessment, for when we ask a student to assess her
> "self," exactly which self is she supposed to assess? (29)

As Latta and Lauer demonstrate, we seem to have shifted from one problematic notion of

the self, as autonomous, to another, as embodying too many positions to make it

definable. Further, as Sam Watson explains, "Although no one intends it, the very

language of the phrase invites one's assessment, not of writing being done, but of his or her self" (75). That is, the term suggests that the self is being assessed, as opposed to doing the assessing.

While conflicting notions of what constitutes the self pose a challenge to self-assessment, so does the idea of having students "assess" themselves. According to Ellen Schendel and Peggy O'Neill, self-assessment "is an attempt by writing professionals to assuage the problematic effects of assessments by asking students to participate democratically in the assessment process" (200). That is, while self-assessment is promising in its potential to make students more aware of their composing processes and to help teachers better understand those processes, self-assessment is essentially another form of assessment, and with that comes the primary objective of assigning value to writing. Further, in having students assess themselves, we assume they are capable of and comfortable with doing so. Many students are reluctant to judge their own writing, either because they cannot achieve necessary distance from it, are unable to be self-critical, or have difficulty switching into the "teacher" role of evaluator (Miller; Beach). Another, and perhaps more important, feature of self-assessment is that it "may privilege certain writers, because experienced, effective writers have also been characterized as capable self-evaluators" (Schendel and O'Neill 200). McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer describe this same phenomenon in their work on self-evaluation, which they define as the assessment of self-efficacy. They explain that "[i]ndividuals with strong efficacy expectations evaluate themselves as capable, while individuals with weak efficacy expectations evaluate themselves as less capable of effective performance" (466). Despite

these problems, self-assessment can be useful if the complexities of "self" are acknowledged and if self-assessment is used in combination with other forms of evaluation.

Class Context and Background

To better understand how students perceive their own writing styles, I examined student analyses, completed as the final assignment of an advanced composition course themed "Style in the Disciplines," which I taught spring semester of 2009. The course was comprised primarily of juniors and seniors who needed an upper-division English course to fulfill the requirements for their major. The overall objective of the course was that students learn the stylistic conventions of the scholarship in their major, minor, or prospective career so as to better understand how a particular discourse community makes and shares knowledge and to become a participant in that community. The major analytical assignments for the course included a journal analysis and article analysis, in which students analyzed an entire issue of a journal in their field as well as one published article within the issue in depth. Students gathered stylistic statistics related to word, sentence, paragraph, and whole-text length and structure for the issue, noting significant patterns about what constitutes publishable prose in the journal and, more broadly, within their discipline. Students then conducted a close reading of an individual article of their choosing, identifying the most-used stylistic devices and analyzing their rhetorical effects.

The second half of the course focused on employing the strategies students observed in the scholarship of their disciplines. Students chose a topic/controversy/issue of current relevance to their field of study to research both first-hand and with secondary sources, culminating in an argument-driven research essay. I use the metaphor of the Burkean parlor to explain to students the relevance of knowing a discourse community before making a contribution to it. My hope is that students see stylistic awareness not just as a means of making more sophisticated and deliberate language choices but also of becoming more knowledgeable participants in their discipline. The final assignment of the course builds upon the research essay, asking students to "examin[e] the essay's craft and its rhetorical effects" (See Appendix C). The analyses were to be divided into the headings "Stylistic Statistics," "Words, Sentences, Paragraphs," "Copy and Compose,"[14] "Ethical, Logical, and Emotional Appeal," and "Other," and students were to write at least one paragraph of analysis for each. The assignment is, admittedly, context-specific. The criteria on which they were to focus their analysis were the same as those in their analyses of published texts earlier in the semester. So these categories were part of a vocabulary that had been developed all semester long.

I noticed increased stylistic awareness in my students as a result of this curriculum. Many students remarked that they had never learned stylistic devices or had never thought about what constituted their own styles until taking this course, despite the fact that most of them were in English-related fields. What I also noticed, however, is that

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[14] For the "Copy and Compose" category, students were to identify the stylistic devices from Winston Weathers and Otis Winchester's book *Copy and Compose* that they used most frequently in their research essays. I used exercises from *Copy and Compose* in the first two weeks of the semester to introduce students to a sampling of stylistic devices, so they were familiar with these terms and their meanings when conducting their analyses.

the component of writing for their discipline probably did not actually help students do

the kind of writing they are doing or will be expected to do in their fields. As Elizabeth

Wardle argues, in FYC "[t]eaching genres out of context is difficult, though there may be

some value in teaching genre forms *if* we know what students will be writing later and *if*

we can discern what aspects of what genres to teach about and *if* we can find methods for

helping students apply those lessons elsewhere in meaningful ways" (771). Because the

course I taught was at the 300-level, I did not have to "know what students will be

writing later," because the students enrolled in my course were already doing this writing

and were familiar with its conventions. Secondly, I chose style as the aspect of genre on

which I wanted students to concentrate, so their analyses of academic writing in their

fields were adequately focused. It was Wardle's third criterion, that we "find methods for

helping students apply those lessons elsewhere in meaningful ways" that was difficult,

perhaps because once students were to create writing representative of that in their

disciplines, rather than analyze it, the genre was no longer one I could sufficiently assess

as a teacher of composition. Furthermore, in a course that had been rhetorically focused

all semester, one in which audience awareness was a primary factor, students were now

being asked to write for an audience that was artificial, contrived. They were not writing

for readers in their discipline; they were writing for their teacher and their peers.[15] With

that discrepancy in audience also came confusion about the purpose of the assignment.

As much as I wanted my students to become contributing members of their academic

community, they were writing outside of that community and inside the community of

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[15] This is apparent in the students' analyses as well. For example, in the analysis that follows, Jenna
describes writing her research essay for "the general public."

the composition class. The ultimate purpose of this assignment for many of them, then, was not to make knowledge but to fulfill the requirements of the course and to receive a high grade.

Despite these problems, which are to some extent inherent in composition courses that are "funded with the expectation that [they] will carry out the task of teaching students 'to write' for what comes next," the final analysis assignment revealed quite a bit about how students see their style and their composing processes in general (766-67). I began my analysis by reading the forty-seven student self-analyses multiple times, noting significant patterns in the ways students used the assignment. I initially planned to look for which stylistic features were mentioned most by students but then found that regardless of which features students wrote more about, they were all writing about their stylistic features in similar ways. As a result, my interest changed through the course of my analysis from *what* features students were writing about to *how* students were writing about them. The assignment asked students to analyze their research essay as a completed text, but the patterns I uncovered all describe students' inventive processes. This suggested that students saw relevance in the effort and stylistic choices leading to their final drafts, enough to mention them in an assignment that was essentially product-focused. Interested in how significant this focus on process was, I divided the essays into categories that described those processes and placed them in order based on frequency.

Findings

I found five main ways that students used the assignment, each of which correlates to a related conception of style: to relate stylistic features to effects on their audience (style as rhetorical choice), to justify stylistic decisions made while composing their research essays (style as option), to suggest changes they will make in the future (style as skill), to reflect upon choices that they were likely unaware of at the time of composing (style as intuition), and to criticize habitual stylistic features of their writing (style as habit). Unlike the patterns I found in published responses to student writing in chapter two, the patterns found here construct style as an ongoing struggle for meaning, a concern that is central throughout the composing process. These patterns also suggest that students see their language choices as inseparable from their ideas and their ideas as inseparable from themselves.

The student analyses range in their representations of stylistic awareness,[16] which can be seen in these patterns. Students who used their analysis to illustrate the audience-appropriateness of their stylistic choices represented the highest degree of stylistic awareness, as they saw stylistic devices as having the power to persuade an audience and made choices that best achieved their goal of persuasion. On the opposite side of this spectrum are the analyses that criticize habitual features of the students' writing, those that construct style as a series of habits that are tied to the individual writer. These results can be understood by using Richard Lanham's style/substance matrix, which plots four

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[16] I use "representations of stylistic awareness" so as not to make a claim about students' awareness but to describe how their analyses *represent* that awareness. This is a significant difference that I want to make clear.

variables—signal, perceiver, motive, and life—along a spectrum of "stylistic self-consciousness." His spectrum ranges from "the *through* ideal" to "the *at* ideal," whereby "through" represents minimal awareness of a medium and "at" represents maximum awareness. Insofar as the "perceiver" in Lanham's matrix is the student and the "signal" is that student's text, we can conceptualize the end goal of stylistic awareness as a movement from the "through" ideal to the "at" ideal. What is useful about Lanham's matrix to this study is that it is a continuum and therefore represents all levels of stylistic self-consciousness I found in the student analyses. Further, it avoids dichotomizing conscious and unconscious the way other theories of style—most notably Louis Milic's poles of "rhetorical choice" and "stylistic option"—tend to do, and accounts for the grey area into which most students fall.

Style as Rhetorical Choice

The most frequent use of the students' analyses was to relate them to possible effects on their audience. The analyses that fall into this category represent the highest degree of stylistic awareness and treat the stylistic features of their writing as rhetorical. That students considered which stylistic features would best reach their audience suggests that some devices would have been less effective at achieving persuasion than the ones they chose. In *A Rhetoric of Pleasure: Prose Style and Today's Composition Classroom*, T. R. Johnson notes this same tendency when describing the results of a similar self-reflective assignment about style: "Amber feels that, through writing, she can open an array of options for her public personae, casting off and reinventing these selves at will in

order to connect at will with her audience" (69-70). This can be seen in Jenna's analysis,

where she explains that she "specifically avoided using direct quotes in this essay and

rather used paraphrasing to get across the main idea of each source." She goes on to

justify these choices, relating them to her audience:

> There is a two-fold reason for this. First, many of the sources were written specifically for an audience who was scientifically familiar with the topic. Since my essay was not aimed for this audience but was rather aimed for the general public, I avoided using direct quotes as they were filled with discipline-specific jargon. . . . On top of this, by inserting ideas from sources in my own words, I made the essay flow and transition better because everything followed the same writing style and structure.

Her decision to limit direct quotations in an essay about electroshock therapy

acknowledges the potential effects excessive jargon can have on an audience outside her

discourse community. Jenna then relates her stylistic choices to a desire to "appear more

credible" and to maintain a "friendly ethos." Again, Jenna's stylistic choices are

audience-focused, as she considers how her use of language affects her readers'

perception of her (credible and friendly). Another student, Jeff, illustrates the same

audience-awareness in his statement that "all the uses of the rhetorical question in [his]

research paper served the purpose of getting the audience to take [his] side on the

argument." Jeff's analysis constructs the choice to use this particular stylistic device as

deliberate and chosen out of many possible alternatives that would have been less likely

to achieve his desired outcome.

Other students' responses revealed more of a struggle with making stylistic

decisions, but still illustrate a great deal of audience awareness. According to Erica, her

choice to end her essay with a metaphor "might have been a bit of a stretch" but "was one

of those things that you write and even though you're not sure about it you really like it and decide to keep it anyway." She describes her introduction similarly, justifying her choice to begin with a series of quotations. While she was "not sure if that would fly," Erica chose to include the quotations. With these statements, it is clear that the student sees her choices as deliberate, but also recognizes the negotiation that took place between her own personal preference and the anticipated reaction of her readers. That these students see their stylistic choices as audience-motivated gives newfound importance to style as a vehicle through which students may begin to understand and contemplate their relationship with their audience.

Style as Option

Students who used the analysis as an opportunity to justify stylistic choices reinforce the notion of style as option. That is, students reflected on their style in a way that makes their choices seem both deliberate and selected from a number of available options. One way this conception is reinforced is in the use of the word "use." To "use" stylistic devices suggests that those devices are tools at their disposal and that they have authority over the implementation of them. Kathryn, for example, describes her tendency to present an author's viewpoint and then offer a differing perspective with the transition "however" linking them together. Kathryn justifies her use of this structure with language that comes across as stylistically aware and confident:

> I often use this format, because I find it easier to express my opinion, such as whether I agree or disagree, after I discuss someone else's argument. I believe that this method makes my arguments stronger and more specific, because of its close physical proximity to others' arguments.

Here Kathryn describes her process of discussing another author's argument as an entry point into her own by describing it as a "format" and "method" that she uses. She seems deliberate in her choice and its rhetorical effects, namely, making her "arguments stronger and more specific." Another student, Carly, justifies her choices in a similar way: "A common structure I use in my writing is introductory clauses. These dependent clauses transition from previous sentences and provide detail. I used this structure to transition between paragraphs as well, as it provides a bridge between the two ideas." Like Kathryn, Carly justifies her stylistic choice with the word "use" and describes the result—a bridging of two ideas—of choosing introductory clauses.

Another way students justified their stylistic choices is by comparing them to alternatives. This approach similarly treats their stylistic features as options, as they have chosen them out of a bank of possible alternatives. In her passage in the previous section, Jenna draws comparisons between her stylistic devices and possible alternatives; she chose to paraphrase, rather than quote, and to use her own words rather than using jargon. The justification of her stylistic moves, then, is built on the weaknesses of their alternatives. At a later point in her reflection, this technique is reinforced when Jenna asserts that it "takes more understanding to be able to explain the idea of a source than it does to copy and paste a sentence from the source." Again, Jenna compares the option she chose to an alternative and justifies why explaining an idea in one's own words "takes more understanding" than simply copying and pasting source material. It is clear that Jenna sees her stylistic choices as situated both within a rhetorical context and within a larger body of potential options.

Style as Skill

The third way students used their analyses was to describe how they will alter their styles for future writing assignments, the underlying idea being that style is a skill that can be obtained or strengthened with practice. Brendan, for example, describes integrating direct quotations as his greatest difficulty: "To understand most of my quotations it was required for me to include large blocks of texts. I might also have been able to preface them better, and this is likely what I will work on in the future." The pattern revealed in this response, of stating a weakness and then making a future goal of changing it, is present in all the responses that treat style as a skill.

Some of these responses make evaluative claims about the writing as it stands or how it will be in the future. Tanya, for example, feels that her writing "would be much more varied, effective, and interesting" if she had begun her paragraphs with the ideas of the authors she cites, rather than with information about the authors themselves and "look[s] to change and improve" this aspect of her style. For Tanya, then, beginning paragraphs with other authors' ideas is one way of reaching an ideal style, one that is "varied, effective, and interesting." In discussing what she wishes she had done in this draft ("compare the situations of pirate radio stations and guerrilla radio stations, emphasizing that successful pirate stations are run on the model of a guerrilla station, such as, Radio Venceremos"), another student, Lauren, illustrates the potential advantages of a future revision over what she ultimately chose to do. ("That would have been a long paper, but it would have said something new. I was frustrated by the fact that

I did not.") She, like Tanya, uses the reflection not only to set future goals, but as a measure of evaluation. ("Upon reflection, I would say that this was a good first draft. I am very interested in radio, and even more so in illegal ones, so perhaps I will rework it in the future.")

The analyses that treated style as a skill all acknowledge that writing is a long-term process and that this one assignment affects future writing tasks. Writing assignments serve as a way to collect various skills, to try them out, see which ones work and which do not, so as to improve one's style. That is, style is a means to accessing and promoting learning. These analyses ranged from those that identified specific textual features, such Tanya's and Lauren's, to those that expressed the more vague sentiment "I know I can do much better next time I have a paper like this to write" (Jamie). Represented in analyses like these are students who still seemed to see style as a set of skills but saw themselves as lacking those skills, or access to them. However, the overriding idea that style is a process of learning suggests that students who do not feel they have the necessary stylistic skills to be effective writers believe they can and will gain them in the future.

Style as Intuition

Others used the assignment to reflect on features of their writing that were treated in their analyses as unintentional, perhaps determined intuitively. This was done primarily through "guessing" language that seeks to make conscious choices that may not

have been deliberate at the time the student composed the essay.[17] For example, Sara

writes,

> I think I utilized rhetorical questions because as I did the research I kept coming
> up with more questions of my own which the reading then answered, so I kind of
> put it into the essay how it came to me initially, without adding unnecessary
> explanation as to what went on in the middle of my thought-process. I always
> expect that the more natural the flow of the essay as it comes out of my brain
> through my fingers, the more personal and passionate it becomes—in theory.

Sara's explanation of why she used rhetorical questions as much as she did begins with

the words "I think," illustrating that she may not have questioned this particular stylistic

choice until she was asked to reflect on it. Even more interesting is how she describes her

writing process, as an organic movement from her brain to her fingers. She values

"natural," "personal," and "passionate" writing, and sees the simple device of the

rhetorical question as a means to achieving those qualities.

Another student, Mark, describes unhelpful repetition in his writing in language

that is similarly speculative: "After reading my research essay numerous times, I've

noticed that I use the word 'yet' a lot. I noticed five sentences in which the word 'yet' is

used, and I believe that I use it for establishing an antithesis of the sort." The phrases

"I've noticed" and "I believe" create a distance between the student and his text,

constructing him as a reader responding to a text not written by him. He continues,

"Another word I noticed that I use a lot is the word 'stated' . . . and I believe to use this

word over other words such as 'said' or 'declared' because it sounds more professional,

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[17] Of course doubting language may also be a result of the uncomfortable task of analyzing one's own writing. The hesitance students feel in closely reading their own work may manifest itself in language that questions, or that seeks the approval of the teacher, who will ultimately see the analyses. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that while some students treat style as something they can control, others are more doubtful of their choices. The tentativeness present in this group of analyses represents a desire to understand one's own writing and choices, making it relevant to a study of representations of awareness.

but not too professional." Here, the phrase "I believe" turns up again, indicating that his decision to use the word "stated" may not have been deliberate but, in retrospect, was useful to his argument.

That style seems to come intuitively may be part of the ongoing mythology of artistic genius, that style is a quality some writers are born with. While in the categories above, style seems an important pedagogical tool for teachers, here we are reminded of some of the cultural myths built up around style that may need to be dealt with if we are to use style as a teaching tool.

Style as Habit

Among this group of self-reflections is the notion of style as part of the writer and, more specifically, a part the writer is discontented with. Some students explicitly refer to features of their writing as "bad habits" while others indicate this through more vague, negative statements. Most students who pointed out habitual features of their style first justified their habit positively and then argued for why it has a negative effect on their writing. Mark points out that "one bad habit" is that he "visually structure[s] the size of paragraphs because [he] like[s] to keep paragraphs around the same size for aesthetic reasons," but then says "if I'm writing a paragraph on one topic that has a lot of vital information, I shouldn't just cut it off because the paragraph is getting too big." Mark first justifies his habit of trying to keep paragraphs of consistent length, claiming that this makes his writing more aesthetically pleasing, but then criticizes that approach.

That students used the analyses to criticize habits they see as inherently tied to their writing reveals that they see style as something they embody, but these responses also reveal how they define desirable versus undesirable style. Sara uses the phrase "nasty habit" to describe "getting too passionate" about what she's writing. Sara explains, "I used to be really good about being completely impartial, but then I was told I had no voice and that was also a bad thing. It seems I have not as yet found a happy medium." Here, Sara sets up a dichotomy between impartial writing and voice, struggling with how to balance them. She simultaneously negotiates varying ideas of what constitutes good and bad stylistic habits.

For other students, including Brittany, the assignment seems to have pointed out habits she may not have been aware of but now notices. She explains that through the process of analyzing her own writing, she noticed that she would "always state the author and sometimes the work it was from" when introducing quoted material, "even if [she] had already mentioned the author and their work previously." She says "[i]t appears almost as a reflex to surround my quote with information rather than finding a different way to place it." In her analysis the word "reflex" suggests that this aspect of her writing is habitual. However, the word reflex is actually a quite complex way of discussing habitual stylistic traits, as it suggests that it is reactionary. A reflex is a response to an influence, while internal, can be caused by external force. While there is an underlying negativity to all the responses that conceptualize style as habit—they are all bad habits—Brittany's response shifts some of that blame from herself, decreasing some of the self-negativity.

Significance to Style Pedagogy

The representations of students' stylistic awareness revealed in this study all relate style to process and discovery. Like the "evaluative experiences" Susan Miller finds in her study of self-evaluations, the purposes for which my students used their analyses highlight the act of writing, not just the writing itself. The students who justified their stylistic choices in their analyses were rhetorically aware, focusing on the benefits of their options over others and considering how an audience might be influenced by their writing. Those who emphasized future writing tasks reinforced the process of writing as one that extends beyond the immediate assignment; the "skills" these students hope to obtain can be carried with them from one writing task to another. The students who approached style more intuitively used the analysis assignment as a place to dissect their own writing, in an effort to better understand it. Much like readers of an unknown author's work, they analyzed their work with a distance that allowed them to question and make sense of their choices. And students who saw their styles as habitual recognize that their writing is a reflection of themselves. All of these patterns define style as much more than dressing for ideas. Rather, style is a way students make sense of their ideas and a means by which to learn from them.

This study also shows how students' various understandings of style can affect how they interpret their own writing. The notions of style explored here—rhetorical choice, option, skill, intuition, and habit—are not simply themes that developed out of my own analysis of these students' uses of the assignment; these notions also likely

informed what students chose to write about. How embodied students' see their style is related to which stylistic traits they choose to include in their analyses and how they write about them. The range of awareness present in the students' analyses can be understood, according to Lanham's matrix, as points along a continuum that correlate to "degrees of detachment" (Beach 163). In a study of students' self-evaluation strategies, Richard Beach found that students who revised extensively were more able to remove themselves from their writing than those who did not revise; that is, the "ability to detach themselves from their set approaches to writing," was greater (163). In the student analyses examined here, the representations of stylistic awareness in students' analyses also seem to correlate to an ability to detach themselves from the stylistic features of their writing. Those who exhibited the highest degree of awareness saw style as choices with rhetorical implications, detached from themselves, while those with the lowest degree of awareness saw style as habitual, an element of who they are as writers.

In regard to the teaching of style, these patterns represent various opportunities and challenges. The first two items in this taxonomy suggest positive ways to use style as a teaching tool, while the latter two suggest challenges of working with style. The first three patterns treat style as rhetorical, as option, and as skill. All of these conceptions make style both teachable and learnable. The latter patterns, however, reinforce unhelpful and even harmful notions of style. Namely, these challenges revolve around students' prior convictions about writing: That it is something that "just happens" and that they are "bad" writers for possessing stylistic habits they have been unable to break. While this study reveals the potential of style instruction as a means by which to teach audience-

awareness and experimentation with language, it also speaks to the difficulties in working with a concept that students see as embodied and personal.

When students analyze their own styles, they grant us access into the aspects of their composing process and to the conceptions of style that guide their stylistic choices in a way that traditional teacher-based assessment cannot. According to Richard Ohmann, "[t]hat which is not immediately obvious may be just as central to the spirit of the writer, and therefore just as valuable to know, as that which starts up unbidden from the page" (48). Ohmann's notion of style as epistemic choice asks us to increase our understanding of our students, whose worldviews are embedded in their prose, as a means of better understanding their written word. The pedagogical approach of having students analyze their own writing, as the history of self-assessment scholarship indicates, is certainly not new. However, when applied specifically to style, this approach is especially useful. One reason is that, as these analyses indicate, students see their styles as present in all stages of their writing. Composing processes, and all of the negotiations and effort composing entails, are rarely considered in teachers' evaluations of student writing, and therefore style is similarly ignored. Another reason having students analyze their own writing is particularly useful for style is that style is typically either ignored completely or assessed negatively by teachers. It is an aspect of writing that still carries with it the label of "local-level" concern, one that is superficial to meaning-making and to revision. When students write about their styles, we are made more aware of style as an aspect of student writing and of students.

CONCLUSION: DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY

Despite the prevalence of style pedagogies in the thirty-year period from the 1960s to the 1980s and style's very recent revival in rhetoric and composition, style scholarship has neglected to adequately theorize classroom assessment of writing styles. It is the work of this dissertation to point out this gap in our scholarship and to begin to fill it by studying the role of style in various forms of classroom assessment. A foundational premise of my research is that assessment not only reflects our pedagogy but also serves a pedagogical function and indeed *is* pedagogy. Even more, style's near invisibility in most contemporary composition classrooms means that assessment is often the *only* way our expectations for effective style are communicated to students. Therefore another objective of this research project is to identify what it is we are teaching students through our written evaluations of style and how these evaluations are both informed by our scholarship and received by our students.

Perhaps above all, this dissertation illustrates the problems that occur because we do not have a shared vocabulary of style. Despite the varying conceptions of style presented in the scholarship on responding to student writing I reviewed, the teacher interviews I conducted, and the rubrics I analyzed, chapters two, three, and four all come to the same conclusion that there are no definable, shared criteria for effective style. Instead effective style is judged by our impressions or our enjoyment of its aesthetic qualities. There are, however, shared criteria for ineffective style. When style is form, error, or product, for example, it can exist as style and be assessed as what *not* to do. We need a way to talk about style that is productive, that allows us to teach students what *to*

do to achieve the type of writing we enjoy reading. To conclude this dissertation, I would like to offer directions I see for continued research that have the potential to move us toward a place where we may begin to develop a shared vocabulary of style:

1. Including Assessment in Our Discussions of Style Pedagogy

As chapters one and two suggest, our conceptions of style are largely based on a past that never was, a false nostalgia of style as current-traditional and as attached to sentence-level exercises that are both inherently arhetorical and decontextualized from student writing. As the history set forth in chapter one indicates, however, style burgeoned in the process era and many of the approaches used to teach it were quite rhetorical in nature, including Christensen's generative rhetoric. Despite the actual history of traditional style pedagogies, our disciplinary memory of style as mere form has remained so engrained in our shared narrative that it continues to affect our perceptions of style. This false memory is perpetuated through assessment scholarship that remains as the most influential in our discipline still today, as chapter two reveals. Furthermore, I argue that because current style scholarship has brought style outside the realm of the classroom or aligned it so much with the student writer that it becomes removed from textual features, what we now value about style is not accounted for in the ways we are assessing it. As a result, there is a conflict between how we currently conceptualize style and the features of student writing we identify as stylistic.

To ameliorate this conflict between our current beliefs about style and our assessment practices I call for further style scholarship that, continuing the research I have begun in this dissertation, considers classroom assessment as a form of pedagogy. While this project has attempted to achieve both breadth (through the collection of teaching documents) and depth (through interviews with teachers), more research that explores how we are currently responding to stylistic issues in writing and offers approaches and best practices for teachers is necessary. Specifically, I see the need for a large-scale, national study that asks composition teachers how they define style, whether or not and how they include style in their classrooms, and how they assess stylistic features of student writing. Once we know what is actually occurring in classrooms, we may begin to build scholarship that speaks to the typical composition teacher. As is illustrated in this dissertation, much of our discipline's canonical assessment scholarship reflects and reproduces outdated notions of style. Scholarship built out of our actual pedagogies, on the other hand, has the potential to more accurately reflect our values and effect change.

2. Developing Pedagogies That Promote What We Assess

While we must involve assessment in our discussions of style pedagogy, we should also develop pedagogies that allow us to ultimately assess what we value. Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle imagine such a pedagogy in their recent article "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies,'" which has come

to be known as the "writing about writing" approach to composition instruction.[18]

Downs and Wardle make a case for reading and writing to become content areas

themselves, instead of just means through which students study the content of

other fields. They argue that the content of their Introduction to Writing Studies

course "does not distract from writing (the perennial difficulty of writing-course

content), since the content *is* writing" (578). Essentially the course they propose

is one that is topically focused on style, although they never explicitly describe it

as such. And, although they refer to the curriculum they propose as "radically

reimagined" first-year composition (558), it is built upon a strikingly similar

sentiment as that expressed by Richard Lanham thirty-three years earlier:[19]

> A course in writing has no immediate context—it is not writing *for*
> anything—and it has no *subject*. What do you write *about*? . . . Any
> writing course in America today should aim at an acute self-consciousness
> about style. For this purpose, style itself must be the object of
> contemplation. (13)

The approach promoted by Downs and Wardle (and, philosophically, by Lanham)

builds a curriculum around style so that when teachers assess stylistic features in

student writing, they may do so with more cogency and awareness. Ideally,

because assessment begins with clear expectations, every assessment we make

about a writer's style would be contextual and would employ a vocabulary

established by the course's curriculum and shared by teacher and student.

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[18] Elizabeth Wardle furthers this idea in her 2009 article "'Mutt Genres' and the Goal of FYC: Can We
Help Students Write the Genres of the University?" in *College Composition and Communication*.
[19] This claim is my own. Downs and Wardle do not draw upon Lanham or cite him in their article.

3. Teaching Style as Rhetorical

The idea of a writing course in which writing itself is the content is a promising direction for composition and allows for more concrete style assessment, as students in such a course would presumably be more conscious of their stylistic choices and teachers more conscious of their assessment of them. However, style is embodied in all student writing and therefore exists regardless of our curricula. In addition to reconsidering the content we teach students, then, we should also look to evolve our conceptions of style so they more accurately reflect our current values. In this dissertation, style is consistently defined by teachers and students in terms of its effects on audience. This conception of style has its disadvantages: namely, it gives agency to a reader rather than the writer, treats student writing as literature read for enjoyment, and results in impressionistic descriptions rather than comments related to students' own stylistic choices. However it also reinforces a notion of style inherently connected to an audience and, therefore, rhetorical.

In chapter three, I propose that the metaphor of rhetorical distance has potential for the teaching of style. Further research beyond this dissertation should be done to determine if this theme was unique to the particular population I interviewed or more universally apparent. Assuming teachers evaluate stylistic effectiveness according to the distance they believe it creates between the text and themselves as readers, a pedagogy built on teaching students to shorten this distance would reflect how teachers are already reading for style. Such a

pedagogy could involve developing a stylistic vocabulary, experimenting with various stylistic devices, and analyzing how these devices are at work in published writing and in students' own writing, based on the distance students perceive between themselves and the texts. The audience-based pedagogy would continue with assessment—teacher commentary and peer review workshops—that responds to specific features of student writing in regard to how they affect rhetorical distance.

4. Involving Students in Style Assessment

The research begun in chapter five that analyzes students' evaluations of their own writing styles has direct implications for style instruction and assessment. If, as my research indicates, students conceptualize style as a "self" in constant communication with a constructed reader, it is not only beneficial to teach style in terms of audience awareness but to consider students' own voices in our assessments of their writing. Our written feedback on student writing in order to be specific must assume students' stylistic choices were fully conscious. However, as students themselves point out in their analyses, style is often largely unconscious at the time of composing or represents an ongoing struggle to find the "right" words to match their ideas. When we grade a written product, we do not have insight into these struggles and we cannot determine how conscious students' stylistic decisions actually are.

The assignment that concludes the Style in the Disciplines course I have taught and that is the topic of my fifth chapter allowed students the opportunity to

analyze their own styles. However, after students completed the assignment, several commented that they wished they had done the assignment sooner. Since that semester, I have found ways to incorporate self-assessments throughout the curriculum, not just at the end as I did in the style course. When students submit writing assignments, they also submit brief cover letters that describe their process of composing the essay and that describe the stylistic choices they made for the given rhetorical situation of the assignment. The cover letters serve the dual purpose of allowing students to reflect on their own styles while allowing me to consider their processes as part of my assessment. While cover letters are by no means a new form of assessment, they offer particular advantages for style assessment, in that they make a largely unconscious process visible for students and teachers. They also help achieve Downs and Wardle's goal of making writing instruction *about* writing. As a component of curricula not centered exclusively on writing, self-assessment cover letters can help call attention to writing processes and make students more aware of their styles.

5. Reconceptualizing Style as a Communicative Medium

As explained in chapter one, recent style scholarship has begun to treat style as a language that extends beyond our discipline and allows for communication with other fields and with the public at large. This conceptualization of style makes it much more than a set of language features and has the potential to give it newfound prominence publicly and in our field. Recent scholars have emphasized style's potential as a way of communicating with the public, both by way of the

public intellectual (Butler) and as a way of making sense of popular culture (Brummett). More work can be done to increase style's prominence in these realms, to give style significance beyond composition classrooms and beyond the field of rhetoric and composition. Engaging in public conversation about style can not only benefit style but also our discipline. Maxine Hairston, in her 1985 CCCC chair's address "Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections," says that to "establish our discipline on solid ground," we must "reach beyond our immediate world and make connections with business, industry, technology, and the government" (279, 280). Though Hairston argued her point thirty years ago, it is one that is still being made and that style (as a concept the public is already interested in) can help achieve.

Within our field, reconceptualizing style as a communicative medium can help rewrite our disciplinary memory of style as mere form and as inferior to invention. When style is involved in generating communication, it has much more in common with invention than product. It becomes a way to create information instead of a means through which information is recorded in words. Style as conceptualized in this way is no longer fixed and static, as our memory has constructed it, but rather it is dynamic and movable.[20] Because style's prominence in its golden era was a result of composition studies drawing on classical rhetoric for its theoretical grounding, future research might also apply a communicative notion of style to a rereading of classical rhetorical theory in

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[20] Richard Lanham's substance/style matrix and Collin Brooke's treatment of style in his recent book *Lingua Fracta* move toward this conception of style.

order to expand upon the commonly accepted role of style in our history. In particular, if style is a language we can use to understand other aspects of rhetoric and writing, it could also become the most central of the rhetorical canons. I can imagine a restructured taxonomy that has style at its core and that uses it to better understand various *styles* of invention, arrangement, delivery, and memory.

I have outlined here five possible extensions of the research begun in this dissertation: including assessment in our discussions of style pedagogy, developing pedagogies that promote what we assess, teaching style as rhetorical, involving students in style assessment, and reconceptualizing style as a communicative medium. When I first began this research project, I wanted to know how style was defined and assessed by teachers nationwide who had various levels of teaching experience and types of students. That is, I sought to contribute a new perspective to the existing scholarship on style pedagogies by investigating the actual classroom practices of teachers who may or may not have any familiarity with style. I had been surprised by and drawn to assessment's virtual absence in style pedagogy and I saw this as an oversight my research could begin to reconcile. What I found was that assessment serves a far greater role than just a measure of student learning or performance and carries with it a complex system of competing values that are often unaccounted for in the methods we employ to evaluate students' writing styles. I hope that the fields of style and assessment will begin to talk to each other, and that a reimagined and shared vocabulary of style will guide those conversations. I invite others to open themselves to the possibilities style has for a reinvigorated discipline and pedagogy. Specifically, I encourage teachers to find a place

for style in their composition curricula to make their evaluations of style more conscious

and focused on student writing.

APPENDIX A: REQUEST FOR TEACHING MATERIALS

Sent May 5, 2009 via the Writing Program Administration listserv (WPA-L):

My name is Star Medzerian, and I am a doctoral candidate in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English at The University of Arizona. I am gathering research for my dissertation, which focuses on how teachers nationwide consider issues of craft in their assessment of student writing. As part of this research, I'm collecting assignment sheets and grading criteria (rubrics, checklists, policies) for writing assignments in composition courses at all levels.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please send the following to starmedz@email.arizona.edu:

1. one assignment sheet for an essay of any genre (i.e. research, narrative, analysis, argument, reflection, etc.) and any level (i.e. first-year composition, advanced composition, etc.)

2. the corresponding grading sheet for that essay

In addition, please indicate whether or not you would be available for a brief follow-up interview.

As per IRB regulations at The University of Arizona, participation in this study is voluntary and all identifying information will be kept confidential. If you choose to participate and later change your mind, you may withdraw your materials and information without penalty. I will not use your materials without your permission.

Thank you, and I look forward to learning more about your assignments.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Institution where currently teaching:
Course(s) currently teaching:
Courses previously taught:
Years of experience teaching:

1. What do you think of when you hear the word style?

2. How frequently do you read scholarship (books, articles) about style?

3. How important is an understanding of style to your own scholarly work?

4. Do you think about style when you write?

5. Do you teach style in your classroom? If yes, how? If not, why not?

6. How do you respond to style in student writing? (If the participant's grading rubric and/or assignment sheet includes style, or a related component.)

7. Why do you allocate this particular percentage of the student's grade to style? (referencing participant's grading rubric).

8. What makes an effective writing style?

9. (How) do you consider these factors in your classroom? Promote them?

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH ANALYSIS ESSAY ASSIGNMENT SHEET

In Unit One, you used stylistic analysis to better understand how a speech functioned rhetorically. In Unit Two, you analyzed the stylistic conventions of writing in your discipline and made a claim about the values of your academic discourse community. In Unit Three, you researched a topic of importance to your discipline, employing the conventions of academic writing. For this assignment, you will conduct a stylistic analysis of your own research essay, examining the essay's craft and its rhetorical effects. The goal of this assignment is to use what you have learned in the last three units to better understand your own writing style.

This assignment is not an essay; rather, it is a written report of your findings. To do this assignment, you will probably want to read over your research essay several times, annotating as you read. The document you submit to me should be divided into the following five sections with appropriate headings to indicate each section:

1. **Stylistic Statistics**
   number of words
   number of paragraphs
   number of sentences
   number of sentences per paragraph (average)
   number of words per sentence (average)
   number of characters per word (average)
   number of words per paragraph (average)
   number of one-sentence paragraphs, two-sentence paragraphs, three sentence paragraphs, four-sentence paragraphs, and five-or-more-sentence paragraphs
   percentage of passive sentences
   reading ease

2. **Words, Sentences, Paragraphs**
   Here you will note anything significant you noticed about your word choices, sentence lengths, structures, or types, and paragraph lengths or organization. For example, you may find that you used the word "explain" too much, that you tended to begin your sentences with "however," or that your body paragraphs were longer than your introduction and conclusion. Explore these trends; ask why you made the choices you made.

3. **Copy and Compose**
   For this section, refer back to the Copy and Compose exercises we did in Unit One. What devices did you use in your research essay? Which were the most frequently used and why do you think that is? Maybe you used antithesis to highlight a negative aspect of your issue. Or, maybe you

found yourself using the tricolon to structure series of items. You do not have to write about all the devices, just the ones that stand out to you.

4. **Ethical, Logical, and Emotional Appeal**

What ethos did you establish in your research essay (friendly, strict, compassionate, credible, etc.) and how? By what point in the essay do you feel you have earned the trust of your readers? How do you appeal to your readers' emotions and logic? For example, a personal narrative may have affected your readers' emotions while a chart with statistics about your issue may have convinced them with logic.

5. **Other**

What other aspects of your style do you want to discuss? You may decide that you want to explore your use of figurative language (metaphor, personification, etc.) or discipline-specific jargon. Maybe you found that you always introduce quotations with the author's name or the title of the text or that you have difficulty with transitions. What you write about here is up to you, but this section is required.

Requirements

- Each section of your analysis should be at least one paragraph long.
- Please support all your points with examples from your research paper. This means that you will be quoting yourself quite a bit. There is no need to cite your quotations, since I know they are coming from your research essay.
- Explain your observations. If you write about the fact that all of your paragraphs are seven sentences long, you will also want to tell why you think that is. Remember, this is an analysis, and analysis requires you to explain yourself thoroughly.
- Because this is a report and not an essay, it can be single-spaced. Please stick to TNR 12-pt. font though, as usual.

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