Everything's a Text
Readings for Composition

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DAN MELZER

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1

What Is Literacy?

Today information about the world around us comes to us not only by words on a piece of paper, but also more and more through the powerful images and sounds of our multimedia culture. . . . If our children are to be able to navigate their lives through this multimedia culture, they need to be fluent in "reading" and "writing" the language of images and sounds just as we have always taught them to "read" and "write" the language of printed communications.

—*Center for Media Literacy*

Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning. Take for instance the multimodal ways in which meanings are made on the World Wide Web, or in video capturing, or in interactive multimedia, or in desktop publishing, or in the use of written texts in a shopping mall. To find our way around this emerging world of meaning requires a new, multimodal literacy.

—Professors Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, *Multiliteracies*

Twenty-first-century readers and writers need to

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
- Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information

- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments

—from *Toward a Definition of 21st Century Literacies*
by the National Council of Teachers of English

ewrite Definitions of Literacy
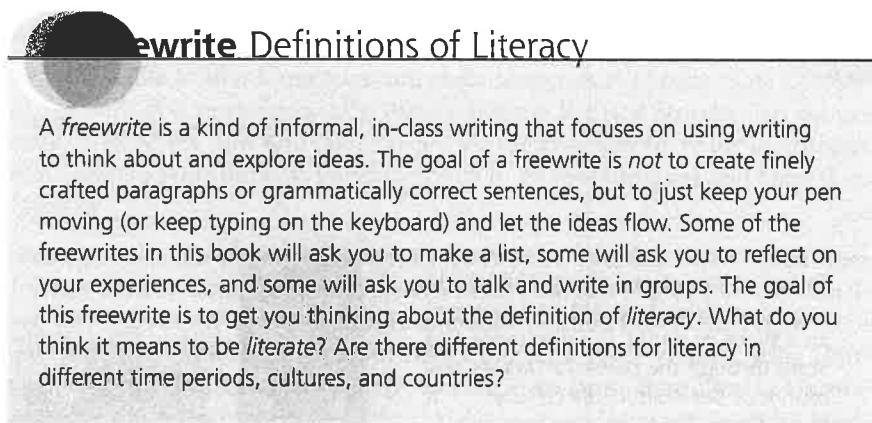
A *freewrite* is a kind of informal, in-class writing that focuses on using writing to think about and explore ideas. The goal of a freewrite is *not* to create finely crafted paragraphs or grammatically correct sentences, but to just keep your pen moving (or keep typing on the keyboard) and let the ideas flow. Some of the freewrites in this book will ask you to make a list, some will ask you to reflect on your experiences, and some will ask you to talk and write in groups. The goal of this freewrite is to get you thinking about the definition of *literacy*. What do you think it means to be *literate*? Are there different definitions for literacy in different time periods, cultures, and countries?

Definitions of Literacy

When you hear the word *literacy*, the first thing you might think of is print literacy—reading words in books, magazines, and newspapers, or writing essays for a class. Maybe you associate being literate with knowing Standard English or with having read the novels that are required reading in high school literature courses, like *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, or *Pride and Prejudice*. Traditional ideas about what it means to be literate are reflected in grammar handbooks and in composition textbooks that provide universal rules for good writing and in books such as E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, which makes the argument for a single, standard English language and a set of texts that all educated Americans should read.

These traditional ideas about literacy have been challenged by rapid transformations in America and around the world. You've probably heard terms like *multimedia*, *multiple intelligences*, *multiculturalism*, and *multilingual*. The traditional idea that there should be one standard way of writing and speaking in America is being questioned by educators who think of literacy as "multiple." Because of the increasing ethnic diversity of America and the variety of global Englishes being used around the world, a literate person needs to know how to cross linguistic boundaries and how to respect language and cultural diversity. In his book *Critical Literacy*, Eugene Provenzo argues that being literate means having knowledge of "complexity and diver-

sity." Educators such as Provenzo, Paulo Freire, and Ira Shor argue that one aspect of this complexity and diversity is political and cultural conflict. Critical literacy educators argue that an important part of being literate is being aware of the relationship between language and power, and they ask who is left out and why one group gets to decide what the rules of communication are and who gets to speak. Being literate means being able to evaluate what you read and being able to reflect critically on your own reading and writing processes. This means being able to understand how economic, social, and political factors have shaped your own literacy history.

Writers such as Cynthia Selfe, James Paul Gee, and John Seely Brown argue that because of the explosion of digital communications, a literate person needs to be skilled in more than just print literacy. Many new types of communications—blogs, graphic novels, streaming video, PowerPoint, text messaging, e-mail, virtual reality—require skills that are different than the skills needed to compose in traditional print literacies. These new media literacies often combine print literacy with digital, visual, and oral literacies. These channels of communication—print, digital, visual, and oral—are what communication theorists call *modes*. The term *multimodal* is used to refer to literacies that combine these different channels of communication. Traditional print literacies like books, magazines, and newspapers are still important forms of literacy, but the ability to read and compose in digital, visual, and oral modes is also critical to being a literate person in the twenty-first century. It's just as important that you learn to "read" a photo, song, or television show as it is to learn to read words on the page or the screen.

One of the kinds of literacies we'll focus on throughout this book is *academic literacies*. But academic literacy is only one kind of literacy, and even academic literacy is not a universal standard or a unified set of rules. What we value in academic writing in America is not necessarily what is valued in academic writing in other countries. Even in your own college, each field (the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities) will present you with a different version of what it means to be literate. You might find conflicts and connections with the writing you do in school and the writing you do for yourself, or the kinds of literacies that are valued by your family or your community.

You will encounter many kinds of literacies in your public life outside of school, whether they are political speeches, newspaper editorials, or pop culture magazines. Academic literacies, personal literacies, pop culture literacies, and civic literacies are all contexts for literacy that will present you with different purposes, audiences, and forms of writing that will shape your reading and writing processes. All acts of literacy are *situated*—they are constructed by the specific situation you find yourself in as a reader or composer. This literacy situation includes the role you play as the composer

of a message, the form you compose in, your audience, and the social and cultural contexts for you and your audience. Rather than talking about a single, unified concept of literacy or the writing process, this book talks about multiple and situated literacies and composing processes. We use the term *compose* instead of *write* because literacy involves the creation of not just printed words but also photos, speeches, songs, artwork, videos, and so forth.

To help us think about this concept of multiple literacies, consider these literacy examples:

> The Mexican music group Molotov combines heavy metal and hip-hop, English and Spanish, and rap beats and traditional Mexican music to create a new "hybrid" form of rap music that has an audience in Mexico, the United States, and around the world.

> A student in a history class at San Antonio Community College creates an informative Internet resource site about the feminist movement that includes JPEG images, an essay about feminism, links to other Web sites, audio clips of an interview with a professor on campus who was part of the feminist movements of the 1970s, and a link to a video about the feminist Betty Friedan.

> In 1998, Joan Blades and Wes Boyd, two Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, start an online petition to "Censure President Clinton and Move On to Pressing Issues Facing the Nation." Within days, hundreds of thousands sign the petition, and Blades and Boyd form a Political Action Committee, MoveOn.org, with ad campaigns, marches, civic events, petitions, book publishing, and a Web site.

> Magic Bean Café in Michigan creates a page on *Facebook* to share photos and advertise their menu, music events, poetry readings, and newsletter. The page has 295 friends. The *Facebook* page is linked from Magic Bean Café's Web site.

In the four examples above, composers work in oral modes (creating music or clips of interviews), in digital modes (creating Web sites and online petitions), in visual modes (adding JPEG images and photo galleries to a Web site), and in multimodal literacies (creating a *Facebook* site that includes print text, images, and hyperlinks). In order to be literate, the composers in our examples needed the agility to compose for multiple purposes and audiences. The composers in our examples gathered information about feminism for a college class and for a global audience on the Internet, started a petition in order to affect political change, and advertised a business while creating a sense of community among the people who frequented the business.

New audiences and contexts mean new forms of writing that evolve to meet the demands of new literacy situations—new *genres*. Genres such as the

online petition or the social networking Web site (such as *Facebook*) are new forms that have evolved as useful ways of communicating—new genres of communicating. The composers in our examples work in multiple genres.

MoveOn.org communicates through books, news articles, press releases, ads, letters, e-mails, petitions, and so forth. Some of these genres have been around for a long time (such as the press release), and others have evolved with new technologies (such as e-mails or online petitions). In addition to being able to communicate in a variety of genres, the ability to combine genres to create hybrid forms is a valuable skill for twenty-first-century literacy.

Molotov combines hip-hop, heavy metal, and traditional Mexican music genres to create a new genre of hip-hop. Molotov also combines Spanish and English, adding even more language variety to a genre—hip-hop—that constantly adds new expressions to the English language. As the United States becomes more diverse and global communications become faster and easier, composers who can speak and write in multiple languages and dialects will have an advantage over those who are monolingual and can use only the standardized version of English found in grammar handbooks.

Freewrite Your Literacy Experiences

In this freewrite, you will see just how many different literacies you read and compose. Make a list of everything you read and composed in the last week. How many different modes did you compose in (print, visual, digital, oral)? How many different types of compositions (genres) did you read and compose? How many different audiences did you compose for?

At this point you might be thinking that all of this talk about literacies doesn't connect to you, a student in college. But consider what a student in one of our first-year writing courses read and composed in a single week.

Composed:

- A research paper for a history class
- E-mails to friends and family
- An Evite invitation to a party
- Lyrics for a song for her band
- A blog entry about her literacy history for her composition class
- A job application

- Text messages to friends
- A PowerPoint presentation in a marketing class
- Reading responses posted to an electronic discussion board for a sociology class

Read:

- Articles from an academic journal for the history research paper
- *Spin* magazine
- Other students' blog entries from her composition class
- Strips of the Webcomic *Achewood*
- The student newspaper
- Textbook chapters for her sociology and chemistry classes
- The TV show *The Office*
- Mail from her bank about an account she just opened up
- Songs on her iPod
- A yoga video on *YouTube*

Each of these composing and reading situations presented our student with different audiences, different purposes for reading and composing, and different kinds of texts (including digital, visual, and oral texts). The purposes, audiences, and texts shaped her reading and composing processes, and she needed the flexibility to adjust her approach for each new literacy situation she encountered. Each act of reading and composing was situated in a specific purpose, genre, audience, and context. When you stop and think about all of the different kinds of texts you compose and read, in school and out of school, it's clear that the way we define literacy—and what it means to be a literate person—is multiple.

When we use the term *multiple literacies*, then, we mean that a literate person in the twenty-first century needs to be able to:

- Compose in multiple modes (print, oral, visual, digital)
- Compose for multiple purposes and audiences, including audiences with diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds
- Compose in multiple contexts, including school, home, work, and civic contexts
- Compose in multiple genres, including new media genres such as blogs or text messages
- Read multiple kinds of texts, including visual texts such as ads, billboards, films, and so forth.

Even though a key word you will see throughout this book is *multiple*, there are features of any literacy situation that composers need to be aware of in order to communicate effectively. We've already touched on some of these features, such as purpose and audience and genre. In this next section, we'll look at some of these factors in any literacy situation.

Situating Literacy

Even though there is no single definition of literacy or of the composing process, there are factors that a reader or composer needs to consider in any literacy situation, whether it's writing an essay for a sociology class, viewing a video on *YouTube*, or putting together a PowerPoint presentation. In the rest of this chapter, we'll look at some of the major factors you'll need to consider in any literacy situation: purpose, audience, persona, medium, genre, and context. Even though twenty-first-century literacies are complex and demanding, being aware of these different rhetorical factors in literacy situations can help you analyze any kind of text and compose in any kind of literacy situation.

ewrite Defining the Factors in Literacy Situations

The goal of this freewrite is to find out what you already know about some of the key factors in any literacy situation that we're going to discuss in the rest of this chapter. Write for a total of ten minutes about how you would define each of the key terms below. If you're not sure of a definition, write down words you associate with the term. Be prepared to share your thoughts with the class.

purpose	persona	genre
audience	medium	context

Literacy Purposes

Everything we compose has a purpose: to persuade someone to buy a product, to make someone laugh or cry, to get an "A" on a test, to remind yourself what you need at the grocery store, to brainstorm a topic for a research paper. The composing we do both in and out of school calls on us to read and write for multiple purposes, and the literacy situation will play a role in constructing our purposes. For example, if you're taking an essay exam for a college class, your purposes will be shaped by the exam questions, the teacher as your audience, the genre of the essay exam, and even the amount of time you have to complete the exam.

To talk in more detail about composing purposes, let's look at a letter written by former President Bill Clinton. This letter of apology was sent to Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II, and it was part of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which gave reparation checks of $20,000 to Japanese Americans who were forced to live in prison camps when the United States went to war with Japan.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 1, 1993

Over fifty years ago, the United States Government unjustly interned, evacuated, or relocated you and many other Japanese Americans. Today, on behalf of your fellow Americans, I offer a sincere apology to you for the actions that unfairly denied Japanese Americans and their families fundamental liberties during World War II.

In passing the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, we acknowledged the wrongs of the past and offered redress to those who endured such grave injustice. In retrospect, we understand that the nation's actions were rooted deeply in racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a lack of political leadership. We must learn from the past and dedicate ourselves as a nation to renewing the spirit of equality and our love of freedom. Together, we can guarantee a future with liberty and justice for all. You and your family have my best wishes for the future.

Bill Clinton

Let's take a close look at former President Bill Clinton's letter of apology to Japanese American victims of internment camps to think about the way composers' purposes affect what they compose. The first paragraph reveals that one purpose of the letter is to admit that the United States had acted unjustly. President Clinton's primary audience, the Japanese Americans who were held in internment camps, is fully aware of the injustice of the government's behavior during World War II, but up until this point the government had not officially acknowledged that it was wrong. One purpose of Clinton's letter, then, is to finally acknowledge that the U.S. government had seriously wronged Japanese Americans. Because this is such an important purpose, it's the focus of the first paragraph. To clearly signal this intent, President Clinton uses words such as *unjustly, sincere apology*, and *unfairly denied*.

Another purpose for writing the letter is to outline why the United States acted unjustly and how we can learn from past mistakes. President Clinton argues that "the nation's actions were rooted deeply in racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a lack of political leadership," and he says that we must learn from these mistakes. Clinton ends his letter with words such as *equality, freedom*, and *liberty and justice for all*. These words could be aimed at both the primary audience (Japanese Americans) and a broader secondary audience (Americans in general).

Even though President Clinton states that this is a letter of apology, a close look at the language he uses could reveal other purposes. For example, notice that he begins the letter with the phrase "Over fifty years ago." This phrase gives readers a sense of distant events—the first sentence might have had a different effect on readers if he would have written, "It was only fifty years ago . . . ." The language he uses to describe the internment is much different from the language that a Japanese American who was interned might use to describe his or her experiences. Words such as *evacuated* or *relocated* can have positive connotations, as when people in danger are evacuated by the government to a safer location, or when people relocate for a better job. Even the word *interned* has fewer negative meanings than the word *imprisoned*.

Ending with familiar patriotic words and phrases such as "liberty and justice for all," President Clinton further distances himself and the current government from past injustices and ends his apology on an optimistic note rather than a note of regret. You could argue that even though his primary purpose was to acknowledge and apologize for past injustices, his language reveals that he is also distancing himself and the current government from these injustices, and trying to put a positive spin on his apology by aligning his own values with patriotism. As you read the texts in this book and analyze composers' purposes, think about both what composers state as their purposes and what other, unstated purposes their language might reveal.

Freewrite Literacy Purposes

Read President Barack Obama's inaugural address on page 152. As you read President Obama's address, think about the ways that his purposes affect his voice and style, the tone he takes, the way he organizes his address, the kind of arguments he makes, and the type of evidence he uses. In small groups, discuss your analysis of President Obama's address.

Take notes on the group's analysis of the composer's stated and unstated purposes, and how his purpose (or purposes) affected his voice, style, tone, word choice, organization, arguments, evidence, and so forth. Be prepared to report out to the class.

Literacy Audiences

Composers always have both a purpose for composing and an audience or audiences to receive their message. Sometimes the primary audience for what you compose is you—for example, when you're writing in your diary or making a to–do list. In school the teacher is often the primary audience, but teachers can play different roles. A teacher might play the audience of an "examiner," testing you to see whether you've understood ideas from a class text or a lecture. A teacher might play the role of representative of her academic field, asking you to learn to write like a chemist, a historian, or an anthropologist in order to initiate you to her field. A teacher could simply play the role of an interested reader, asking you to tell her about your literacy history or your personal opinions on a subject.

Beyond school, the audiences we compose for become even more diverse: friends, family, Web surfers, government officials, companies—the list is endless. Often we compose for both primary and secondary audiences: We send an e-mail to a friend and "cc" other friends, we create an electronic portfolio of our work for a capstone course that will also be used when we enter the job market, and we write a poem to a loved one but then decide to publish it in a school journal, and so forth. Some writing situations ask us to create an audience through the words we use—to invoke an audience. Other writing situations present us with a very real audience that we need to address directly to be persuasive—for example, a speech at a public event. Every time someone sits down to compose, he or she imagines audiences they're writing to, and they're shaped by the audience they're imagining.

Freewrite Audience Contexts

The purpose of this freewrite is to give you some context for the three speeches by Malcolm X that we'll discuss in the section below. If you're in a computer classroom with Internet access, choose a search engine and enter the term *Malcolm X*. Browse a few Web sites to find out more about Malcolm X, the Civil Rights movement, and the Nation of Islam. If you're not in a computer classroom, form small groups and have the group compose a list of facts they already know about Malcolm X, the Civil Rights movement, and the Nation of Islam, and then share their list with the class.

Let's look at a concrete example to see how an audience shapes a composer's message. The speeches of the Civil Rights leader Malcolm X reveal how composer's adjust their arguments, tone, style, and evidence for different audiences. Read the passages that follow from three speeches by Malcolm X, each given to a different audience. The first speech was to a Civil Rights group in Detroit, the second speech was given to the Harvard Law School, and the third speech was given to the Nation of Islam. As you read the speeches, think about the different voice and style that Malcolm X takes on for each audience and the different kinds of examples that he uses to make his arguments.

Excerpt from a Malcolm X speech to a Detroit Civil Rights group:

Just as the slavemaster of that day used Tom, the house Negro, to keep the field Negroes in check, the same old slavemaster today has Negroes who are nothing but modern Uncle Toms, 20th century Uncle Toms, to keep you and me in check, keep us under control, keep us passive and peaceful and nonviolent. That's Tom making you nonviolent. It's like when you go to the dentist, and the man's going to take your tooth. You're going to fight him when he starts pulling. So he squirts some stuff in your jaw called novocaine, to make you think they're not doing anything to you. So you sit there and 'cause you've got all of that novocaine in your jaw, you suffer peacefully. Blood running all down your jaw, and you don't know what's happening. 'Cause someone has taught you to suffer—peacefully.

Excerpt from a Malcolm X speech to Harvard Law School:

There was another man back in history whom I read about once, an old friend of mine whose name was Hamlet, who confronted, in a sense, the same thing our people are confronting here in America. Hamlet was debating whether

"To be or not to be"—that was the question. He was trying to decide whether it was "nobler in the mind to suffer (peacefully) the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" or whether it was nobler "to take up arms" and oppose them. I think his little soliloquy answers itself. As long as you sit around suffering the slings and arrows and are afraid to use some slings and arrows yourself, you'll continue to suffer.

Excerpt from a Malcolm X speech to the Nation of Islam:

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that as it was divine will in the case of the destruction of the slave empires of the ancient and modern past, America's judgement and destruction will also be brought about by divine will and divine power. Just as ancient nations paid for their sins against humanity, White America must now pay for her sins against twenty-two million "Negroes." White America's worst crimes are her hypocrisy and her deceit. White America pretends to ask herself: "What do these Negroes want?" White America knows that four hundred years of cruel bondage has made these twenty-two million ex-slaves too (mentally) blind to see what they really want.

White America should be asking herself: "What does God want for these twenty-two million ex-slaves?" Who will make White America know what God wants? Who will present God's plan to White America? What is God's solution to the problem caused by the presence of twenty-two million unwanted slaves here in America? And who will present God's solution? We, the Muslims who follow The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, believe wholeheartedly in the God of justice.

When Malcolm X spoke to the Civil Rights group in the blue-collar town of Detroit, he used informal, conversational language, with words such as *stuff* and *cause* and sentences such as *Blood running all down your jaw*. Malcolm X also used images that were effective for persuading his audience who was not sure whether to follow Martin Luther King's nonviolent approach or Malcolm X's more militant approach. The African American Civil Rights group in Detroit would have had a strong negative reaction to the image of an "Uncle Tom," and none of them would have wanted to be associated with that image.

Notice that Malcolm X adjusted his language when he addressed the Harvard Law School audience, which at that time was made up almost exclusively of upper-class Caucasian males. For the Harvard audience, Malcolm X used a formal dialect of English, with words such as *whom* and quotes from Shakespeare. The example of Shakespeare not only struck a chord with the audience, but also caused them to perceive Malcolm X as being aware of white European cultural traditions and able to draw on those traditions. Making a parallel between Hamlet and the suffering of African Americans at the hands of those in power in America helped Malcolm X persuade a skeptical audience to sympathize with his cause.

Malcolm X delivering a speech

When Malcolm X spoke before the Nation of Islam, his language, tone, and delivery was in the style of a preacher speaking a sermon, with techniques such as repetition (for example, repeating the phrase *White America*) and asking the audience a series of questions. He used images and ways of thinking that appealed to his religious audience, such as the idea of sin and divine will. Because his audience was receptive to his message, Malcolm X was more forceful in his language and stance. He talked about White America paying for its sins, hypocrisy, and deceit—language he wouldn't have used in front of the Harvard audience.

The ability to move effectively between different audiences and adjust your language and delivery is what linguists call *code switching*. In a sense we're all code-switchers, whether we're moving between the language of our school and our home or the different composing expectations of our biology class and our English class.

When you compose in college and beyond, your audience will always influence the way you compose and what you say. Sometimes you'll have an immediate and very "real" audience, such as when you give a speech or conduct a phone interview. Sometimes you'll be able to imagine your audience but they will be more distant, such as when you write an editorial for the campus newspaper or post a video to *YouTube*. At other times you will shape the audience you want to receive your message: for example, if you were to create a political blog to attract College Republicans or Democrats. Often we

write only for ourselves as an audience, whether it's a to-do list in a PDA or an entry in a diary. Audiences can be encouraging or hostile, diverse or monolithic, inspiring or debilitating. As you analyze and respond to the readings in this book, think carefully about how the composers' audiences have shaped their texts.

Freewrite Analyzing Audience

The goal of this freewrite is to practice analyzing the ways an audience shapes a composition. Find a magazine ad that does an effective job of appealing to its target audience. Write about whom you think the target audience is, how the target audience shapes the ad, and why you think the ad is effective in appealing to the target audience. Be prepared to share your ads in small groups and discuss the ads with the class.

Literacy Personas

A composer's persona includes the stance she takes, her tone, the vocabulary she uses, her voice and style—everything that makes up the image she portrays in her text. A composer's persona is influenced by the previous texts she has read, the audience she's composing for, and the purpose, medium, and genre of what she's composing. Writing teachers such as David Bartholomae and Patricia Bizzell argue that a writer's persona is *socially constructed*, which means that the literacy situation shapes the composer's persona. For example, when you write an essay for a college class, your persona will be influenced by what you think is the appropriate style for academic writing, and that may or may not conflict with the persona you take on when you're writing for yourself or to friends and family. Your idea of what the appropriate persona is for a particular academic essay will also be shaped by what your high school teachers told you about college writing, the writing expectations of the teacher who assigned the essay, the academic field of the class, the genre of the essay, and so forth.

Let's look at an example of the way a composer's persona is shaped by the writing situation. In Chapter 8, which focuses on academic literacies, there is a case study of a student writing in a sociology class. Greg Calabrese was a junior at Albion College when he wrote a research report for Social Psychology, a course for sociology majors. Greg's persona in his research report was

shaped by the writing assignment, Greg's prior experiences writing in his major of sociology, the expectations of the teacher, and the genre of the sociology research report. Below is an excerpt from the part of Greg's report that describes his research methods. As you read it, think about the persona that comes across in Greg's text.

> For the purpose of this essay, I decided that my research would be two-fold. First, I felt that I would gain a better insight to men's views of how they interact with each other and by themselves if I conducted some form of semi-structured interviews. I chose to interview three college aged men (Alex, David, and Jim), all from a small Midwest college and all who grew up in middle-class families. I asked them a series of questions about their experiences in bathrooms as well as their feelings about certain common occurrences in bathrooms throughout their lives. I also will be discussing what observations I have made in my countless experiences in male bathrooms over the past twenty-one years. These observations are intended to supplement my interviews with the three participants as well as add to the discussion of how men interact with each other and by themselves in a restroom or locker-room setting. I feel that it will be interesting to consider not only what interactions are like in a normal bathroom or locker-room, but also to examine these events through a gendered lens to a certain extent.

Greg is composing in the genre of the sociology research report, which is often published in sociology journals and is read and reviewed by other sociologists. Although Greg is not planning to publish his report, he knows that his teacher is going to play the role of an expert sociologist helping Greg gain access to the field of sociology by learning how to write, think, and talk like a sociologist.

Typically sociologists don't use informal language in research reports, and some of Greg's choices of words (for example, *two-fold* or *certain common occurrences* or *supplement*) would sound overly formal in a casual conversation about men's behavior in bathrooms or a stand-up comedy performance about men and bathrooms. Greg is taking on a persona that will be effective for the literacy situation. Part of the persona that Greg establishes through his writing involves the use of specific jargon terms that sociologists use, such as *semi-structured interviews* or *gendered lens*. Greg is consciously creating his persona to sound like a sociologist, but that persona is constructed by the genre of the sociological research report and the conventions of sociology as a field (the ways of researching and writing that are considered acceptable by the community of sociologists). As you read and analyze the selections in this book, think about the ways that authors' personas are shaped by their purpose, audience, and genre.

Freewrite Changing Personas

The goal of this freewrite is to get you to reflect on how your persona changes depending on the context of what you're composing. First, think of something interesting that happened to you since you've started college. Pretend you're writing an e-mail to a friend and describe the experience. Then, pretend you're writing an e-mail to a parent or grandparent and describe the same experience. Finally, describe the same experience in an e-mail to a former high school teacher. Read your three e-mails to a writing partner and discuss the ways that your persona changed depending on your audience and purpose.

Literacy Mediums

Mediums and modes are closely related. If a mode is a channel of communication—oral, visual, digital, print—then a medium is the tool that the composer uses within that channel to deliver his or her message. For example, composers working in a visual mode might use mediums such as photographs, painting, or billboards. Composers working in a print mode might use mediums such as books, magazines, newsletters, or fliers. Understanding the way that the medium of a composition affects its content can help you understand and analyze any type of text, whether the medium is a sculpture, Web site, or poster. The medium that a composer uses to deliver her message affects every aspect of the content of a message. For a concrete example of how medium affects composing, let's look at a composition in different mediums. Read the following passage from the third book in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series, *The Return of the King*, and then read the version from the script of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. As you read these two excerpts, think about how the different mediums affect the composition.

Excerpt from J. R. R. Tolkien's novel *The Return of the King*:

The light sprang up again, and there on the brink of the chasm, at the very Crack of Doom, stood Frodo, black against the glare, tense, erect, but still as if he had been turned to stone.

"Master!" cried Sam.

Then Frodo stirred and spoke with a clear voice, indeed with a voice clearer and more powerful than Sam had ever heard him use, and it rose above the throb and turmoil of Mount Doom, ringing in the roof and walls.

"I have come," he said. "But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" And suddenly, as he set it on his finger, he vanished from Sam's sight. Sam gasped, but he had no chance to cry out, for at that moment many things happened.

Something struck Sam violently in the back, his legs were knocked out from under him and he was flung aside, striking his head against the stony floor, as a dark shape sprang over him. He lay still and for a moment all went black.

Excerpt from the script for *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*:

INT. CRACK OF DOOM - DAY

The HEAT is almost UNBEARABLE . . . SAM sees FRODO in the DISTANCE . . .

> FRODO
> I'm here, Sam.

ANGLE ON: FRODO is standing on the EDGE of the CRACK OF DOOM . . . a deep LAVA FILLED CHASM, in the very heart of ancient SAURON'S FORGES, the greatest in Middle-earth.

The RAGING ORANGE GLARE from the CHASM turns FRODO into a BLACK SILHOUETTE . . . standing TENSE and STILL.

FRODO holds the RING in his HAND . . . he RAISES IT, holding it over the BUBBLING LAVA far below.

> SAM
> (yelling)
> Destroy it — go on! Throw it in the
> fire!

CLOSE ON: FRODO . . . a STRANGE EXPRESSION on his face . . .

> SAM
> What are you waiting for? Just let
> it go!

ON THE SOUNDTRACK: The HUM of the RING grows louder and louder! FRODO PULLS the RING close to his body as he turns to SAM.

FRODO looks at SAM, the RING has finally taken him.

> FRODO
> The Ring is mine.

SAM SCREAMS as . . .

. . . FRODO PUTS THE RING ON! He VANISHES!

> SAM
> No!

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK GATES OF MORDOR - DAY

With a storm of wings, the NAZGUL wheel around and hurtle towards MOUNT DOOM!

In the midst of the BATTLE — GANDALF . . . realising FRODO has been seen . . .

<div align="right">INTERCUT WITH:</div>

INT. CRACK OF DOOM - DAY

CLOSE ON: SAM is SCREAMING for FRODO . . .

ANGLE ON: FOOTPRINTS moving across the ASH COVERED CAVERN FLOOR!

SUDDENLY! GOLLUM smashes a ROCK down on SAM'S HEAD, knocking him to the GROUND!

GOLLUM LEAPS on to the INVISIBLE FRODO!

CLOSE ON: FRODO'S FOOTPRINTS . . . staggering about under GOLLUM'S WEIGHT!

ANGLE ON: GOLLUM clawing FRANTICALLY, riding on the BACK of the INVISIBLE FRODO . . .

<div align="right">INTERCUT WITH:</div>

EXT. BLACK GATES OF MORDOR - DAY

ARAGORN turns and is confronted by an ARMOURED TROLL, wielding an ENORMOUS MALLET . . .

Composing in the medium of the book, Tolkien relies on vivid and detailed description to create the scene. The words he chooses, the length and tone of his sentences, his character descriptions—all of these matters of language and style are critical to the composition, and each sentence and paragraph must be carefully shaped.

The visual medium of film relies much more heavily on visual motion and camera angles to tell a story, with brief directions for close-ups, sound, and specific camera angles. The medium of film lends itself to "intercuts," and the script breaks away from one scene and goes to another (the gates of Mordor) and then returns to the scene with Sam and Frodo and Gollum. If Tolkien had gone back and forth between scenes in such a short span, the passage would have felt choppy, but in the medium of film intercuts can be an effective way to build tension and interest. The conventions of what makes for an effective composition vary from medium to medium, and awareness of the conventions associated with the different mediums that you'll encounter in 21st century literacies will make you a more effective reader and composer.

Freewrite Changing Mediums

The purpose of this freewrite is to consider how a change in mediums affects a composition. Think of a text that you've read in two different mediums: a book that was made into a film, a comic strip that was made into a video game, a play that was made into a film, a book that was made into a television show, and so forth. How did the change in medium affect the content of the composition (think about composing features we've been discussing like purpose, audience, and persona)?

Literacy Genres

If a mode is a channel of communication, and a medium is a tool for delivering a message within that channel of communication, then a genre is a form of that tool that is appropriate for specific literacy situations. For example, within the oral mode of communication, there is the medium of the speech, and within the medium of the speech, there are genres such as wedding toasts, political acceptance speeches, graduation speeches, and so forth. Each genre of a speech is appropriate in a specific kind of situation (a political rally, a graduation, a wedding, and so forth). In the example from the freewrite below, the mode is oral and the medium is music. Genres of music include country, hiphop, reggae, jazz, and so forth. Within each genre there may be subgenres as well. For example, within the genre of jazz, there are swing, Dixieland, bop, acid jazz, and so forth.

Freewrite Music Genres

The purpose of this freewrite is to help you understand the concept of genre by thinking about genres you're familiar with: music genres. As a class, come up with a list of genres of music. Then choose a genre from the list and write for five minutes, exploring the following questions:

- What kinds of personas do musicians tend to take on in their songs in the genre?
- Who are the primary audiences for the genre, and how do those audiences affect the subject of the music and persona of the composers?
- What social contexts influence artists in the genre (for example, race, class, gender, politics)?
- If you're familiar with the history of the genre, how has the genre changed and evolved over time?

A genre is much more than a format. Genres—such as the scientific experimental report, the newspaper editorial, the poetry slam, the baseball box score—all have evolved as useful responses to literacy situations. Genres shape and are shaped by composers' purposes, audiences, mediums, and contexts. Genres are complex; a genre such as comedy in film can have many subgenres (romantic comedy, parody, dark comedy, slapstick, and so forth).

To get a better sense of this idea of genres as complex responses to literacy situations, let's look at a genre of music you might be familiar with: hip-hop. Hip-hop developed out of communities of urban MCs sampling records and rapping over the beats during parties. The genre of hip-hop developed from social action—a community of composers with similar purposes and interests, all trying to communicate in similar ways. Hip-hop has many subgenres, such as trip-hop, gangsta rap, alternative, and so forth.

Following is an example of one subgenre of hip-hop, message rap. We'll look at the rapper Mos Def's "Dollar Day," which is a response to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. As you look at Mos Def's song, think about the form, style, and social context for message rap as a genre. You can also watch the video of this song by doing a Google video search of "Mos Def Dollar Day."

Excerpt from Mos Def's "Dollar Day":

Listen, homie, it's Dollar Day in New Orleans
It's water water everywhere and people dead in the streets
And Mr. President he bout that cash
He got a policy for handlin the niggaz and trash
And if you poor you black
I laugh a laugh they won't give when you ask
You better off on crack
Dead or in jail, or with a gun in Iraq
And it's as simple as that
No opinion my man it's mathematical fact
Listen, a million poor since 2004
And they got-illions and killions to waste on the war
And make you question what the taxes is for
Or the cost to reinforce, the broke levee wall
Tell the boss, he shouldn't be the boss anymore
Y'all pray amen

God save these streets
One dollar per every human being
Feel that Katrina clap
See that Katrina clap
God save these streets
Quit bein' cheap nigga freedom ain't free
Feel that Katrina clap
See that Katrina clap

Lord have mercy
Lord God God save our soul
A God save our soul, a God
A God save our souls
Lord God God save our soul
A God save our soul soul soul
Soul survivor

If a genre is a response to a recurring literacy situation, then one way to analyze a genre such as message rap is to think about some of the factors in literacy situations that we've been discussing: purpose, audience, persona, medium, and context.

The purpose of some genres of hip-hop is focused on getting people to dance and relax and have fun, but message rap has a more serious purpose. The primary purposes of songs in the subgenre of message rap are to make a political statement by exposing injustices and to persuade the audience to take action. Mos Def's purpose is to make a strong political message about then-President Bush and the war in Iraq, and his language reflects his purpose ("Mr. President he bout that cash" and "killions to waste on the war"). Mos Def is aware of his primary audience (teenagers and young adults, primarily from urban areas), and he is trying to get his audience to understand the injustice he perceives and take action against it. At the end of the video of "Dollar Day," Mos Def says to his audience, "Don't talk about it be about it."

Purpose and audience affect the personas that artists take on when they compose message rap. In his performance Mos Def gradually takes on an angrier and louder tone, and by the end of the song he's shouting—and because he's working in an oral medium, his tone of voice is an important way to establish his persona. In message rap, this persona of anger is shaped by the social context. Most message rap is composed by people who grew up poor and who experienced firsthand racism and inequality. Message rap is a good example of genre as social action—a useful and repeated response to events such as Katrina and the Iraq war that expose inequalities of class and race in America.

ewrite College Writing Genres

The purpose of this freewrite is to help you make a connection between the discussion of genre in this section of Chapter 1 and the kinds of genres you're going to be writing in your college classes. Review the syllabi and any assignment descriptions your college teachers have given you this semester. Make a list of the genres of writing you're going to be asked to compose in. Then, choose one writing assignment and analyze it as a genre. What is the purpose and audience of the genre? What are the conventions of the genre, including conventions of form and style? What is the social context of the genre?

Literacy Contexts

Every factor of a literacy situation that we've been discussing—purpose, audience, persona, medium, genre—is influenced by social contexts. An audience's ethnicity, social class, political beliefs, and so forth influences its response to a text, and a composer's persona is shaped by her personal history and values and the language communities she belongs to. Consider the ways these advertising campaigns failed because the advertisers didn't consider the social context of their situation:

> When Gerber started selling baby food in Africa, they used the same packaging as in the U.S., with the baby on the label. Later they learned that in Africa, companies often put pictures on the label of what's inside, because many African consumers can't read English.

> In a joint advertising campaign with Hummer, McDonald's gave away toy plastic Hummers in Happy Meals. Environmental groups raised an outcry, and McDonald's ended the promotion because of the negative response from the environmental groups and from consumers concerned about the message McDonald's was giving kids.

> A British brewery had to cancel a multimillion-dollar TV advertising campaign for an alcoholic fruit drink after protests from the New Zealand government. The ad featured eight British women in bikinis on a beach performing a version of the haka, a ceremony performed by the indigenous New Zealand Maori. The haka is a revered ceremony, and the Maori were offended that it is was being performed by British women in a commercial selling alcohol.

In each of these literacy situations, the composers' message failed to be persuasive because the composers were insensitive to cultural and social contexts.

Freewrite Composing Contexts

The purpose of this freewrite is to help you think about the importance of context for literacy situations by analyzing the context of a recent literacy situation you responded to. Choose something you've composed recently, and write for five minutes about the ways the broader social context of the situation influenced your composing processes and the final product. This might include your own social contexts as a composer (your literacy history, your gender, your ethnicity, and so forth), the values and attitudes of the audience you were composing for, or the social context of the genre you were composing in.

Every composition is situated in a social context. For example, take a close look at the following advertisements from Coca-Cola, each one from a different social/historical context.
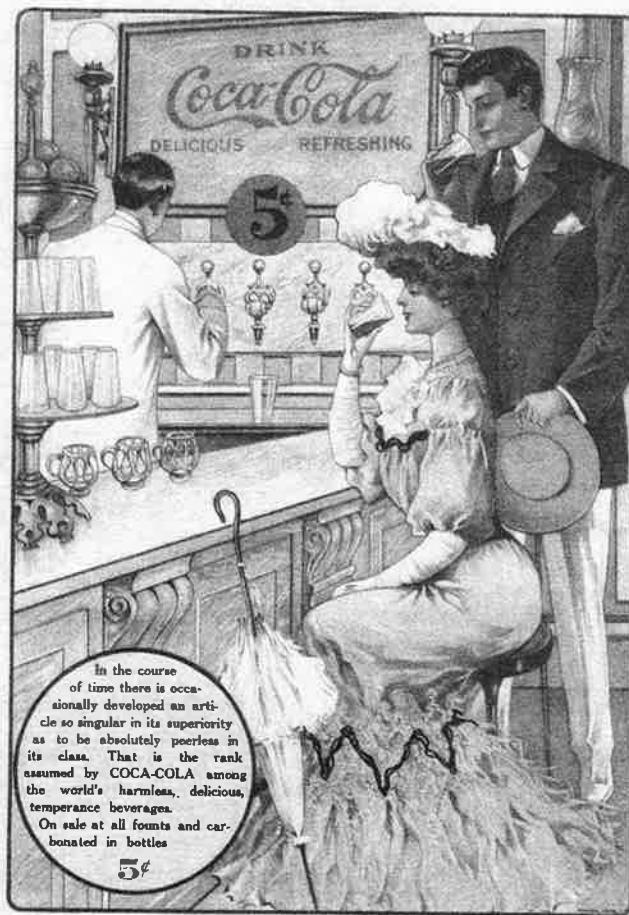

Coca-Cola advertisement from 1905

This ad is a reflection of—and is shaped by—its social context. The way the woman is portrayed in the ad, from her elaborate clothing to the delicate way she is posed, reveals the social context of gender roles in the early 1900s.

The following Coca-Cola ad from the 1950s is also shaped by the context of women's strict gender roles at the time.

Coca-Cola advertisement from 1950s

Coca-Cola advertisement from 1980s

To understand why this ad was effective at reaching its target audience, you need to understand the social context of women's roles in the 1950s, with the husband going off to work and the wife focused on serving her husband. Compare the ad from the 1950s to a Coca-Cola ad from the 1980s on the following page:
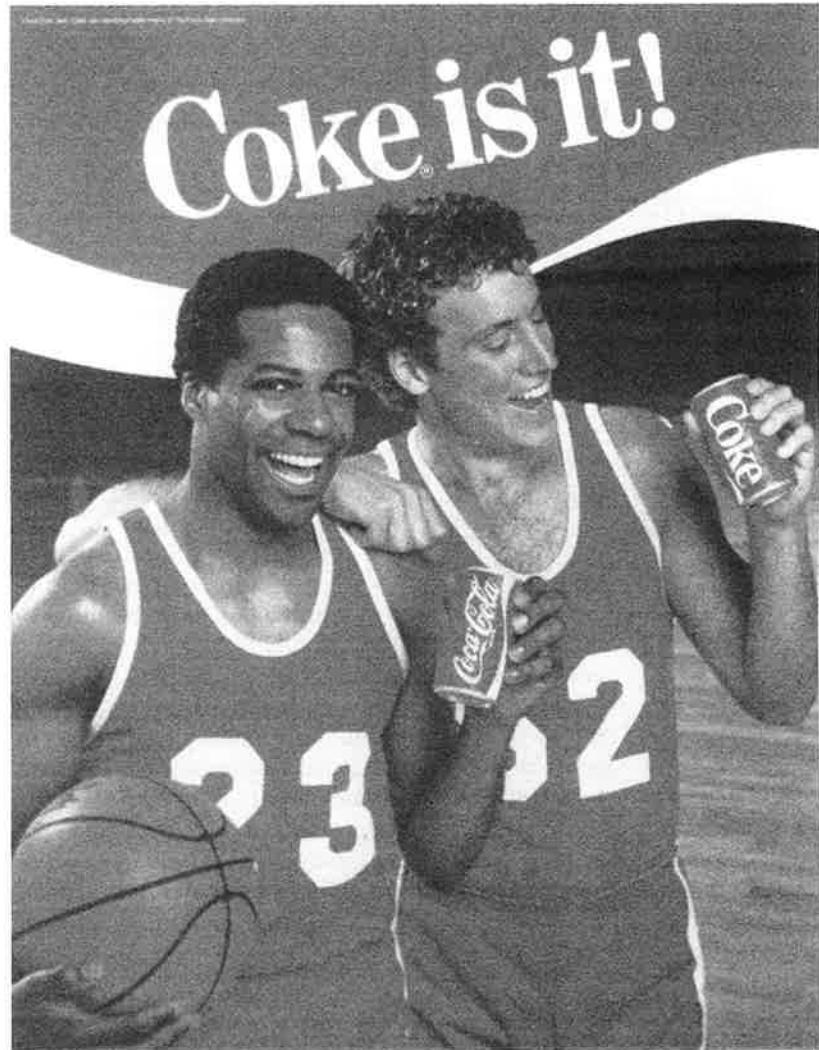
Analyzing this ad would require some consideration of race relations in the 1980s, which would also require a knowledge of the history of race relations between African Americans and whites in America.

As you analyze and respond to the selections in this book, think about the composers' purposes, the audiences they are writing for, the way purposes and audiences affect the persona they take on, the mode and genre of the texts

they're composing, and the social context. Throughout your college career, you will explore a variety of modes and genres of texts, written in a variety of social contexts, but these factors of any literacy situation can be a tool for you no matter what kind of text you read or compose.

●**ewrite** Reflecting on Literacy

The purpose of this freewrite is to get you to reflect on what you learned about literacy in this chapter. How did your definition of literacy change after reading this chapter?

2

Reading and Composing Processes

In Chapter 1, we focused on the ways in which literacy is multiple, with multiple mediums and genres, multiple audiences and purposes for composers, and multiple social and cultural contexts for literacy situations. Today, just as there's no single kind of literacy, there's no single process for reading or for composing. Each medium, genre, and context you encounter, in school and out of school, will require a different set of reading strategies. Each literacy situation you respond to will ask you to engage in different composing processes. In this chapter, we're not going to present you with one standard reading process or one universal composing process. Rather, we'll talk about multiple reading and composing processes for multiple purposes, mediums, genres, and contexts.

●**Freewrite** Your Multiple Reading and Composing Processes

The purpose of this freewrite is to connect your own experiences as a reader and composer with the reading and composing processes we're going to talk about in this chapter. Think of two things you've read recently in two different mediums and describe your reading processes for each medium. How did your reading processes differ in the two mediums? Next, choose two things that you composed recently in two different genres and describe your composing processes for each genre. How did your composing processes differ for each genre?