DIGITAL LITERACY AND COMPOSING PRACTICES OF SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS: A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE ON WRITING, TECHNOLOGY, AND PRIVILEGE

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ABSTRACT

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Although a substantial body of research exists with respect to the digital literacy practices of the “traditional” American college student, research relevant to the English Language Learner (ELL) population in American institutions of higher education has not developed as extensive a corpus. Some, like Aisha Walker and Goodith White, advocate for greater integration of digital tools in ELL instruction, but only look to convince instructors to consider new methods. Others, Bruce Horner, Cynthia L. Selfe, and Tim Lockridge, call for more acceptance of non-standard communication practices, but focus more on institutional pushback to change. Still others, like Dana R. Ferris, take a more traditional approach and advocate for strict adherence to grammar instruction. Those researchers who advocate for greater use of digital instruction and communication often do not consider the student perspectives on digital literacy, multimodal composing practices, or the technological preferences of ELLs. This study aims to address this gap by seeking to better understand how ELLs use and interact with technology to help them write, and to explore how the digital literacy preferences of ELLs influence their understanding and use of multimodal composing practices. The ultimate goal of this project is to help those instructors who work with ELLs better understand the needs of this student population. I attempt to address this goal by introducing student voices into the conversation surrounding their digital literacy practices through the collection and analysis of survey and interview data.
To Absent Friends
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL LITERACY AND ESOL COMPOSITION

**Introduction** .......................... 1  
**Project Goals** .......................... 1  
**Inspirations** ............................ 1  
**Terminology** ............................ 6  
**English Language Learners** .......... 6  
**Multimodal Composing and Digital Literacy** .......................... 8  
**Literature Review** ...................... 10  
**Instructor Expectations and Institutional Politics** ................. 10  
**Considering Student Needs** .......... 14  
**Multilingual and Multimodal Tension** .................. 17  
**Extracting Meaning** ................... 20  
**Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)** ............... 21  
**Chapter Breakdowns** .................. 26  
**Conclusion** ............................. 28

## CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND METHODS

**Introduction** .......................... 30  
**Methodology** ........................... 32  
**Grounded Theory** ........................ 32  
**Feminist Inspirations** ................. 35  
**Methods** ................................. 37
CHAPTER III: IDENTITY PERCEPTION, ALPHABETIC ATTITUDES, AND PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES

Identity Perception........................................................................................................ 56
What’s in a Name?........................................................................................................... 56
Self-Identity and Outside Perceptions........................................................................... 64
A Writer’s Voice............................................................................................................. 69

Alphabetic Attitudes.................................................................................................... 75
Instructor Attitudes.................................................................................................... 75
“Why Do You Want to Study This?”........................................................................... 82
What Constitutes “Writing?”....................................................................................... 87
“What Writing” versus “Composing”.......................................................................... 91

Student/Instructor Hierarchy..................................................................................... 97
Conclusion.................................................................................................................. 102
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Scan of handwritten notes, based on analysis of interview transcripts</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Screenshot of Survey Question 15 results taken from Qualtrics</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Screenshot of Survey Question 11 results taken from Qualtrics</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Screenshot of Survey Question 17 results taken from Qualtrics</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Screenshot of Survey Question 13 results taken from Qualtrics</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL LITERACY AND ESOL COMPOSITION

Introduction

Project Goals

Although a substantial body of research exists with respect to the digital literacy practices of the “traditional” American college student, research relevant to the English Language Learner (ELL) population in America has not developed as extensive a corpus. The purpose of this project is to address this lack of research by seeking to better understand how ELLs use and interact with technology to help them write. Although I will discuss my research questions in greater length in Chapter 2, the overall goal of the project is to explore the digital literacy practices of ELLs. The ultimate goal of this project is to help those instructors who work with ELLs – regardless of whether their work focuses on language acquisition or takes place within the context of first year writing, a writing center, or during any other student-teacher interactions – better understand the needs of this student population. This goal will be addressed by attempting to introduce student voices into the conversation surrounding their digital literacy practices through the collection and analysis of survey and interview data.

Inspirations

I have heard it said that inspiration comes from the most unlikely places. “Unlikely” is perhaps not the best word to describe the genesis of this project; “serendipitous” may be more to the point. Nonetheless, the initial moments of inspiration that grew into this project came about at two different times, with the help of two different people. Whether either individual had any idea that their interactions with me would blossom into a project like the one at hand is subject to
debate, but I feel it is worth taking a few moments to give the background of each of these moments of inspiration in order to fully understand how this project came to fruition.

The first moment was during the spring of 2013. At the time, I was employed as a full-time teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instructor at a private, mid-sized university in southwestern Ohio, a position I held from July, 2009, to May, 2013. In this position, I taught a number of courses designed to aid in the acquisition and development of English language proficiency and fluency. Although I typically planned and taught courses on my own, that semester a colleague and I had been asked to teach a course for ELLs who were finishing their ESOL instruction, and were expected to declare themselves as international business majors at the end of the spring semester. Rather than focusing on English language usage or acquisition, as is typical in an ESOL course, this course was meant to serve as an introduction to the students’ expected field of study by discussing business concepts. Because neither of us had any formal education in business practice or theory, we consulted with the students’ advisors to find out what types of assignments the students would be asked to perform in their major courses, and tried to tailor our course to help prepare them for these types of exercises. Using this information as a guide, my colleague and I designed and executed a final course project that asked the students to work in small groups to write, film, and present to their peers a mock advertisement for a product of their choosing. The catch was that the students had to use the mobile devices already in their possession to create the advertisements. The experience of designing and working with students on such a project gave me an opportunity to further a pre-existing research interest – the needs and perspectives of non-native English speaking students – and gave me my first experience thinking about digital literacy and computer mediated composition, and what classroom applications these concepts had.
The second moment of importance to this project came almost a year later, in February, 2014, when I happened to be enjoying an informal coffee break with one of my professors. The semester beforehand, I had the pleasure of taking a course in digital composition and computer mediated writing practices with this professor. I entered this course with a great deal of trepidation, since at the time I did not consider myself terribly proficient in code writing, audio/video editing software usage, online instruction, or other forms of computer-enhanced instruction. This is not to say I am a master at these skills now, but the course helped me become familiar with a cache of digital tools I had never encountered, and gave me the confidence to start finding ways to incorporate more digital composing practices into my own course instruction. I do not remember the exact conversation that led to it, but at one point during our coffee break the professor asked me what a book about multimodal composing practices for ELLs would look like, and I sheepishly admitted I did not have a good answer. This was partially because I had not read as widely on the topic at the time – a point that, in hindsight, likely contributed to the creation of the advertisement project described above, for better or worse – and because the resources I had read did not address issues related to multimodality, digital composing, and ELLs in a way that I was satisfied with.

For weeks after the meeting, I found myself returning to this conversation, and more questions began to arise. What do concepts of multimodality and digital composing mean in a multilingual environment? What kind of text on multimodal and multilingual practices would satisfy me? What kinds of conversations would need to take place around the creation of such a text? How would my previous teaching experiences have been different if I had access to such a text? And what about the students, what did they think of the assignment? If the students could have a more direct part in planning these class assignments, what changes would they suggest?
No matter what other projects I found myself working on, these questions continued to swirl in my mind. I simply could not let go of this notion, and before long it occurred to me that what I was thinking about was not simply a set of questions related to personal interests, but a topic that I felt was not being adequately addressed by rhetoric and composition scholars. In particular, I found myself drawn more and more to the student element of these questions; that is, what did the students themselves see as the value of digital composing practices, and in what ways could that information be used to create more meaningful classroom experiences?

It is from these wellsprings of inspiration that I realized two things. First, my experiences as an ESOL instructor instilled in me a desire to continue working with the ELL student population, and to help ease their transition from language acquisition to the kind of language mastery and usage expected of students at the university or college level. Second, my burgeoning confidence with and interest in digital composing practices led me to consider what level of digital composing instruction ELLs received, and how this might differ from the instruction more “traditional” American students receive in institutions of higher education. With the seeds of inspiration sown, my ideas grew into the project that forms the basis of this dissertation.

My initial curiosity led me to seek out scholars and sources that would help me better understand what ELLs saw as the advantages and disadvantages of digital composing, what tools and techniques they privileged, and why certain tools and techniques were favored over others. To my surprise, the materials I found largely left the student perspective untouched, focusing instead on making a case for how or why technophobic instructors could incorporate different kinds of technologies into their pedagogical practices. This may be because, as Aisha Walker and Goodith White point out, there is “a dearth of reflection on how particular uses of technology relate to… language learning, how [technology] change[s] contexts for learning, and how
technology] affect[s] language use” (xiii). Walker and White’s observation is paradoxical considering Martha C. Pennington’s rather blunt call to action: “The modern [ESOL] writing teacher needs to understand the nature of electronic writing media, the kinds of impacts these media have on students’ writing, and the ways they can best be employed in the teaching of writing” (303). Using Pennington’s observation as a launching pad, the project aims to address this scarcity of information available on the digital literacy practices of ELLs by looking not the individuals tasked with instructing ELLs, but to the students themselves.

I return to the aforementioned questions, and explain their impact on my methods and methodology in greater detail in Chapter 2. For now, I will say this dissertation represents my attempt to better understand and address the needs of ELLs regarding digital composing and composition practices in a way that fully satisfies my intellectual curiosity, and attempts to focus on student perceptions and predilections in a way that, in my opinion, has not yet happened in the published literature. In the remainder of this chapter, I will offer an explanation of and reasoning for my use of certain terms in this dissertation, and why I think ELL and terms like “multimodal composition” and “digital literacy” are more closely aligned to what I am studying than other terms. This will be followed by a literature review, in which I will explore the theoretical underpinnings of my research, and highlight the relevant academic conversations surrounding multimodality, digital composing practices, and ELLs, and what I think is missing from these conversations. Next, I will discuss the remaining chapters of this dissertation, and what information those chapters will cover. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by briefly touching upon the implications of my research on the fields of rhetoric and composition, and ESOL instruction.
Terminology

*English Language Learners*

One of my goals with this project is to be as student-focused as possible, so it only makes sense to begin by exploring the term used to describe the student population with which I am working. I have chosen to refer to my research participants as English Language Learners, ELLs for short. I chose this term as I felt it was the most accurate way to describe the student population from which my research participants were drawn. Selecting some term to describe this student population is both necessary and tricky: necessary, in that I need some short-hand method of describing this group of students; tricky, because this population is extremely diverse, and no one term adequately addresses them. In a footnote to the “Introduction to Part One” of *Second Language Writing in the Composition Classroom: A Critical Sourcebook*, Paul Kei Matsuda et al. discuss some of the pitfalls of trying to label this student population:

> In the fields of second language studies, a number of terms are used to refer to multilingual writers. We often see “English as a Second Language” (ESL), “bilingual students,” “multilingual students,” and “second language” (L2) students. Each of these terms comes with its own history, some more contended than others. In recent years, “English Language Learners” (ELLs) has been the term used by educational policy makers at the national level, but many scholars ask, when does a person stop being an English language learner? What is the bar-level of expertise? Furthermore, “ESL” and “ESOL” are often seen as negative markers that stay with students long after they have exited from formal programs… [I] also acknowledge the limitations of those terms, since many
second-language writers are indeed third and fourth language speakers and writers. (4)

Although this is certainly true for any student population, the point raised here is that trying to assign a common label to a student population as diverse and divergent as ELLs is a nearly impossible task, and any label will fall short of covering the educational and lived experiences of the individuals involved. That said, for the sake of practicality I had to arrive at some term or phrase to describe the student population from which my research participants were drawn, and while I can understand and appreciate the potential negative connotations the term may carry, I felt ELL was the most accurate description of my research participants. This is because all my research participants were enrolled in ESOL courses at the time the data for this project were collected. In an institutional sense, at least, they were all English language learners, even if the particulars of their experiences and proficiency levels were not uniform.

At times, it will be necessary to compare the experiences and expectations of ELLs with their academic peers, primarily American mono-lingual English communicators. In considering what to call this population, the first term that came to mind was “traditional” students, by which I mean the population I imagine most people think of when they think of students at American institutions of higher education: students aged 18-24 who were born, raised, and educated in the United States; who attended and graduated from an American high school; who transitioned into their college careers within a year of completing high school; and have used English as their primary, or only, means of verbal and written communication their entire lives. When I discuss how ELLs may have different needs than traditional students, this is the definition from which I am working. As with ELL, however, using the term “traditional” is fraught with problems. If we talk about “traditional” students of American higher education, we are likely talking about
middle- or upper-class white males, as this population has historically been most represented in higher education. The term neglects to account for the experiences of under-represented student populations such as non-traditional students, women, racial minorities, members of the LGBTQ community, and many others. Truth be told, I think ELLs have many similarities with these groups, and as I will discuss when I address future implications for this project in Chapter 5, my findings may be applicable to other student populations as well. It is not my intention to alienate or privilege anyone by the use of this term, or to imply anything other than the demographics mentioned above by using this term. Here again, some kind of verbal shorthand is needed to make clear who I am talking about when I compare ELLs to other student populations, and while it is not ideal, I have chosen to use the aforementioned definition of traditional students to differentiate ELLs from the majority student population in America.

**Multimodal Composing and Digital Literacy**

The next term to consider relates to what, exactly, I am studying. Put another way, what is the best term for the topic to which I am inquiring? I have already used several terms somewhat interchangeably in this chapter – digital composing, computer-mediated writing, multimodality – and could probably include several others if I chose to do so. As with attempting to assign a shorthand term to describe the student population from which my research participants came, this is also no easy feat. Here, I drew inspiration from Cynthia L. Selfe’s definition of what she calls technological literacy, which she describes as “a complex set of socially and culturally situated values, practices, and skills involved in operating linguistically within the contexts of electronic environments, including reading, writing, and communicating,” along with her assertion about the connection between English studies and technology, suggests that to be fully literate in any language in the twenty-first century, a student must know not only
how to use the language in its most basic form, but also how to move within and between literate practices in digital environments (*Technology and Literacy*, 11). Although the definition speaks to the very concepts of representation I look to discuss, I find the use of the word “technological” troublesome as it does not seem to fully address an issue that some of my research participants raised in their interviews: digital representation. That is, “technological literacy,” to me, speaks to the need to understand how to physically manipulate a keyboard, how to arrange words and sentences in a word-processed document, or what software programs to use in order to best communicate the necessary message. What this term does not cover is the manner in which individuals and their ability to compose and communicate is represented in digital spaces – social media, emails, and text messages being the most prominent examples – and how different people perceive and evaluate the person communicating the message.

Ultimately, I settled on two terms that I think cover different parts of the composing and learning process: multimodal composing and digital literacy. The term “multimodal composing” allows me to discuss numerous preferences for or against communicative means, and how those related to perceptions about what constitutes “writing” – a concept to which I will pay greater attention in a later chapter. This term, in my usage, presupposes a relationship between the conception and organization of ideas into a means by which those ideas can be communication to people other than the composer. “Digital literacy” will be used to refer to the process of learning new means of technology-enhanced communication, or enhancing already existing knowledge about how to communicate across digital spaces, and how to translate skills acquired or used in a physical, hard-copy space into a digital space. This term will also be used as a continuation of Selfe’s definition of technological literacy by covering digital representation in a way that is more accurate to the experiences, needs, and concerns of the research participants. I believe these
two terms cover the spectrum of understanding and concepts discussed during the data collection phase of this project, and can best summarize the differences of opinion and though the research participants have regarding my topic areas.

**Literature Review**

**Instructor Expectations and Institutional Policies**

As the number of international students enrolled in institutions of higher education in America has risen over time. As of November, 2016, there were approximately 1.4 million international students studying at institutions of higher education in the United States (*Student and Exchange Visitor Information System*). The trend has been for the international student population to increase over time, a trend that, minor variances in numbers notwithstanding, is unlikely to reverse course in the foreseeable future (*Meeting the Needs*). With this trend towards increased numbers of students comes the need to “question and reorient fieldwide assessments of the relations among diverse English users and how those relations undergird standards by which successful communication is judged” (Jordan, 7). ELLs have pedagogical needs that are unique when compared to traditional students, and as the number of ELLs has increased, the needs these students present have become more pressing. The most common of these is the needs for ESOL instruction. Unlike their native English speaking and writing counterparts, English Language Learners ELLs often draw from multiple perspectives and sets of educational norms to find a voice and style that is uniquely their own. A traditional American university student may only be familiar with a certain way of communicating ideas through writing, likely in the form of

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1 As of this writing (January, 2017), these are the most current figures available from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the government body that oversees the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). This number includes students studying in degree-granting academic programs, non-academic vocational programs (not including language training programs), and foreign nationals participating in exchange visitor programs overseen by the Department of State. Although the latter group saw a decrease of 1.8% compared to the year-over-year figures in November, 2015, the first two groups increased during the same period by 2.9%.
structured essay with an identifiable introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Unlike these traditional American university students, ELLs often draw from multiple perspectives and sets of educational norms to find a voice and style that is uniquely their own, and an instructor working with this student population may have to navigate numerous sets of expectations and perspectives even among a small group of students.

The problem, as A. Suresh Canagarajah points out, is that composition instructors who are unaccustomed to this kind of language shifting and appropriation are too often tempted to treat the writer as being influenced so strongly and so persistently by their first language and culture that no matter how the student communicates, or on what topic, “those influences are supposed to manifest themselves in the new text,” which is based on the assumption that “each language has an invariable discourse that will express itself in texts written by any author in any genre or context” (“Towards a Writing Pedagogy,” 589-590). Composition instructors often approach class assignments with the mindset that alphabetic texts organized along a particular pattern are both the norm and the expectation, relying on the notion that all students will be familiar with the pattern the instructor expects. Because of differences in procedures and expectations regarding composition and the form it should take, an ELL may produce a text that often deviates wildly from the accepted academic standards of the American university, upon which the instructor evaluates the work. This is because, with very few exceptions, “the ‘norm’… is a monolingual native-English speaking writer writing only in English” (Horner, 569). Put another way, institutions, from writing programs to university departments and colleges, favor an English-only approach that degrades or disregards anything that does not fit within the accepted norm. The end result is that any ideas being expressed by the student are overlooked, regardless of their merit, in an attempt to read the document according to an
expectation that strictly adheres to organizational or technical structures that may be unknown to ELLs. When the norm is not met, the document is treated as incorrect at best and inferior at worst.

Contributing to instructor perceptions are institutional policies that push Standard American English (SAE) as not just the premier, but the only acceptable form of communication in English. English-only policies can also be present in a number of less obvious ways, such as physical separation between composition programs and ESL programs into separate buildings or classroom spaces within an institution, which makes collaboration between faculty members difficult; the adoption of separate composition courses for international students that marginalize ELLs from their monolingual native-English peers; or the use of composition textbooks and classroom resources that put a premium on “composing in, and only in, an English that has a fixed standard that students are told they must learn to produce” to be full members of the academic community (Horner, 570). English only policies highlight two issues of concern when attempting to address the needs of ELLs: first, institutions take for granted that all students will have the same level of English language proficiency when they begin classes; second, institutions do not account for the fact that not all students are able to effectively communicate their needs to their instructors. This second point is especially noteworthy for ELL populations as instructor-student interactions may be a skill some students lack due to still-developing English language fluency, or because of differences in attitudes regarding student-teacher interactions between American culture and the students’ home cultures.

A number of double standards and unrealistic expectations exist where ELL writing is concerned that do not have direct parallels for monolingual English students. Min-Zhan Lu identifies one such double standard when instructors “take up nonstandard student discursive
choices as instances of ignorance or neglect” while writing off similar choices made by monolingual English students as a mark of creativity and risk-taking (Lu, 28). Matsuda attempts to address this problem through what calls “the myth of linguistic homogeneity”: the assumption that all students – regardless of their cultural or educational background – arrive at institutions of higher education fully fluent in spoken and written English, which in turn leads to all students being treated as native English speakers in all contexts (“Myth,” 637-638). This attitude has two consequences for ELLs, the first being that it causes many students who are not yet prepared to work in English as their primary form of communication to be placed in classes they do not have the skills to complete. This also has implications for composition instructors, as it forces them into a position of having to scramble to help students quickly acquire a base-line skill set in an unreasonably short amount of time lest the students fail to complete the course. The second consequence is institutional, and deals with what Anis Bawarshi calls the “covert, remembered assumptions that manage, execute, and maintain the dominance” of SAE, the type that is often promoted exclusively in composition classes at American institutions of higher education (653). Regardless of the apparent or assumed needs of ELLs, Matsuda and Bawarshi point out a general belief they believe exists, which holds that all students land in first year composition courses ready to compete at the same level and using the same tools across the board. In their view, any attempt to deviate from this assumption is met with resistance from administrators or instructors who may not be prepared to work with students with different communication skills or needs, often leading to pedagogical or administrative practices that can have a detrimental effect on the students
**Considering Student Needs**

Terese Thonus discusses the foundations of these differences in attitudes by pointing out five skills writers need to be successful in an American academic environment, skills that ELLs may lack: the ability to “(a) verbalize what they [ELLs] want to write, (b) express themselves clearly and correctly in English, (c) reply to questions about writing, (d) perceive what sounds right on paper, and (e) focus on and value organization and development more than sentence-level correctness” (17). Thonus’ theories were written specifically based on her experience with “Generation 1.5,” students who are long term residents of the United States, and as such have achieved fluent or near-fluent use of spoken English, but not necessarily written English (17). Nonetheless, as Horner and Thonus point out, American institutions of higher education are structured in such a way that those who are still acquiring the skills needed to communicate effectively at American institutions of higher education are at a perennial disadvantage to those for whom English is their first and only form of communication. These skills include not only the ability to comprehend the meaning of words, or how to transcribe these words onto the page, but also how to work within an academic structure that expects a certain level of openness between students and instructors. A traditional student, having worked with SAE throughout their previous educational experiences, will have a much easier time drafting a class assignment and conferencing with a writing instructor than a student for whom the very idea of speaking to an instructor is culturally taboo.

One of the goals of this project is to better understand how technology and digital composing practices help or hinder ELLs in their ability to master these five skills compared to traditional college students. This is important because ELLs represent a relatively small percentage of the overall student population in higher education, and I feel, as I imagine most
other instructors who work with ELLs would agree, it is important to work towards greater understanding of the needs of this student population compared to their traditional American peers. As David Crystal notes, the United States has a higher concentration of monolingual English-only speakers relative to total population than any other country, a fact that has not changed despite increased numbers of ELLs in recent years (128-129). Among non-native English populations, this leads to “a conflict between the demands of intelligibility and identity” that may put ELLs in a position of disadvantage when compared traditional American students (128). As English communication skills becomes more valuable or desirable among non-native English speakers across the globe, the demands on those who learn English as a second, third, or even fourth language to display “native competence” grows, even though research indicates language use and interactions are “constructed in each specific context of interaction,” and while a person may not be proficient in their use of English, this is not to say they are not competent (Canagarajah, “Lingua Franca English,” 925).

As both Crystal (30-31) and Canagarajah (“Lingua Franca English,” 926) point out, English has always been a language in transition, moving from one location to another, picking up new words and grammar as it goes. Paradoxically, in the twenty-first century English has become something of a global language to the point that “no one owns it anymore” (Crystal, 2), yet the “pressure to adopt a single lingua franca” – a common language – “is considerable” and leads many to buy into a system that promotes English as the one and only valued system of communication (12). This push towards native-like fluency in English, and the promotion of English as a lingua franca may lead to the adoption of pedagogical practical or theories that have no relationship to the actual needs of students, particularly where rapidly shifting technologies may be concerned, all for the sake of promoting language fluency. It may also present problems
that can manifest themselves outside the academy. Crystal identifies a few these problems, such as discriminatory hiring practices and even language death, issues that could influence the literacy habits and preferences of students, which he attributes to “monolingual bias” (18). One of the things this study hopes to do is draw student voiced into this discussion and see in what ways they agree or disagree with the idea of English as a moving, viable communication method, and how digital composition practices either contribute to or distract from their ability to write in English, and in what ways students see this skill being useful or necessary to them in their academic careers and beyond.

This pressure, and the English-only attitude it fosters, becomes a problem when instructors or institutions attempt to isolate ELLs, or find themselves in a situation where they are so focused on helping ELLs acquire English language proficiency and fluency that otherwise well-intentioned instructors or institutions neglect to provide the same level of instruction or attention to ELLs that would be afforded monolingual English-only students. The line of reasoning seems to be that if a student is still working on acquiring enough English knowledge and fluency to be able to communicate at a proficiency level suitable for daily language interactions, there may be no reason to help them learn all the available means of communicating. Thus, students may not be given access to multimodal composing tools, or be asked to create multimodal assignments, out of a belief this would somehow misrepresent students’ skill levels. This comes despite the admonishment of Selfe, that English studies are inexorably tied to technology, which necessitates a rethinking of how instructors and researchers approach the concept of what it means to teach English (Technology and Literacy, 4-5). As Selfe also points out, denying access to all available means of communication also impacts people with different learning styles:
[W]hen we focus on print alone, as the communicative venue for our assignments and students’ responses to those assignments, we ensure that instruction is less accessible to a wide range of learners, and we constrain students’ ability to succeed by offering them an unnecessarily narrow choice of semiotic and rhetorical resources. By broadening the choice of composing modalities… we expand the field of play for students with different styles and different ways of reflecting on the world; we provide the opportunity for them to study, think critically about, and work with new communicative modes. Such a move not only offers us a chance to make instruction increasingly effective for those students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but it also provides an opportunity to make our work increasingly relevant to a changing set of communicative needs in a globalized world. (“Movement of Air,” 644)

Seeing how well ELLs can accept and adept to new means of communications, and what areas they identify as deficient in their level of instruction, will help students improve their literate practices. With composition, this will ensure that all students are receiving equal instruction and access regardless of their language background or proficiency.

**Multilingual and Multimodal Tension**

Horner and Thonus’ work suggests a need for mutual understanding between students and instructors, or at the very least an increased understanding of differences regarding the role of writing, student-instructor interactions, and student needs when working with ELL populations. One way to address this need would be to eliminate rigidly structured alphabetic texts composed in SAE in favor of multimodal composing practices. The adoption of multimodal composition is that such composition practices can lead to reduced anxiety and greater
engagement with texts and course assignments (Pennington, 305). Rather than forcing students to adhere to a set of standards that are new to them, or with which they may be completely unfamiliar given the students’ background, multimodal composing practices theoretically give students the opportunity to develop their existing skillset while working to acquire new composition techniques in a way that shifts focus to the message, rather than the means of delivery. Composing practices could still be utilized and/or developed, depending on the exact proficiencies of the student or students in question, and more standard concepts of essay organization could slowly be worked into class assignments to give students a chance to learn at a more appropriate pace. The view that multimodal composing practices could be beneficial to ELLs and instructors, or that replacing alphabetic text production with multimodal composing practices will lead to the achievement of the same goals as teaching students to produce alphabetic texts is not, however, universally held.

Some, such as Dana R. Ferris, argue in favor of stricter rules and instruction in “proper” academic grammar and writing, and focus more on providing tips for those instructors looking to correct errors rather than create a sense of diversity of communication (1). Ferris advocates greater adherence to alphabetic text production, and the use of alphabetic texts as a means of learning SAE. Ferris puts an emphasis on strict error identification by the instructor and correction by the student, rather than a looser, more experimental approach that may be possible through multimodal composing practices. Ferris argues that any “possible harm to student motivation and confidence… may far outweigh any possible damage that could come to them from providing feedback” is overstated and that “most teachers at least implicitly believe in the importance of error feedback” (12-13). The apparent disconnect between the Horner/Thonus camp and the Ferris camp, and those who would count themselves among the faithful on one side
or the other, highlights a tension in how to best serve students in the field. Balancing the competing ideologies of those who wish to honor the “complex self-identifications” and the “varieties of language in writing” (Horner, 571) apparent in student work with those who believe ELLs will be unable “to achieve the high levels of accuracy demanded and expected” (Ferris 197) without strict attention to error correction, often leaves students and the programs that serve them at an uncomfortable intersection of competing priorities in which the students are often left wondering what is the correct way forward.

The tension this tug of war between camps causes likely contributes to the resistance some instructors or institutions may feel towards introducing multimodal composing practices, regardless of the influence Walker and White previous established. But to refer back to Selfe’s definition of technological literacy, and the role of technology in twenty-first century English studies, to refuse to even consider what role technology and digital composing practices can play in the ESOL classroom is to do a disservice to students in a technology-dependent world. This does not mean that any one instructor needs to be an expert in all available means of technological instruction, or feel at home with every digital composing tool they can find; to paraphrase an oft-heard saying, technology changes too fast to keep up with everything that is available all at once. Looking to students to help guide instructors and researchers in the field makes sense not only because students may know their own needs better than others, but also because scholars in the field can adapt their pedagogical practices to find a balance between student needs and course objectives. Asking students to lend their voices, as this project does, is one way to begin working towards this balance, rather than fighting the pull of opposing theoretical camps.
Extracting Meaning

The typewritten, printed, alphabetic text has long been the standard for English composition and communication. Perhaps nowhere is this alphabetic bias more prevalent than in academia, but there is a growing understanding that composition is no longer a strictly ink-and-paper-based endeavor, and that composing practices increasingly look towards multimodality to communicate in ways that are similar or perhaps more finely tuned to an audience than alphabetic texts. Despite the growing acceptance of multimodal texts and digital composition practices, ELLs have largely been left out of this discussion. Canagarajah suggests this is due, in part, to a reluctance on the part of instructors to extract meaning from texts, both alphabetic and multimodal, focusing instead on the “effort to analyze and control meaning” by isolating grammar from context (*Translingual Practice*, 129). By making this point, Canagarajah is directly addressing one of the primary tenets of Ferris’ position, that an emphasis on standardized grammar is the only way for ELLs to adapt to the expectations of American universities, and therefore succeed in the academy. Canagarajah also provides a contextual background for this project by establishing, through published research, a student need which this project hopes to address. Rather than focusing strictly on language acquisition through grammar correction, as Ferris suggests, the data collected for this project and its subsequent analysis will help suggest ways in which scholars can be more mindful of content where digital composition is concerned, which, in turn, will shift focus away from perceived deficiencies in English.

Despite Ferris’ view, Canagarajah tells us that “[m]eaning doesn’t reside solely in language but in all the recourses of the text and context” (*Translingual Practice*, 129). The message, not simply the means of delivering that message, should receive equal consideration.
when addressing ELLs and their ability to compose; information can be conveyed in multiple modes, and to be so focused on the mode as to lose sight of the information is a disservice to the students. Dong-shin Shin and Tony Cimasko summarize the situation more bluntly: “non-linguistic modes enable writers to present and communicate knowledge in different ways and to convey meanings… more powerfully and ‘naturally’ than the linguistic mode” (376-377). Shin and Cimasko suggest that multimodal and digital composition can be used to highlight composition practices and authorial voice if or when the ability to use SAE may be considered by some to be lacking, which, in turn, allows for an easier flow of information without the necessity of a lingua franca, or an established set of rules through which all authors must filter their ideas. Multimodal and digital composing practices, if adopted as Shin and Cimasko suggest, become a kind of technological equalizer, providing for a level field for all students to receive comparable levels of instruction and through which they can express their ideas without fear of perceived language difficulties clouding their work.

**Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)**

Despite evidence suggesting multimodal composition practices can be beneficial to ELLs, the amount of research pertaining to how this student population uses or feels about multimodal composition practices is scarce. There seems to be a persistent idea among instructors who work with ELLs that because these students are so focused on acquiring the basics of the English language and learning to use English correctly, at least at some point in their academic careers, that attempting to introduce any additional communicative methods would be too difficult for the students, or might somehow compromise their ability to effective communicate in SAE.
One approach that attempts to reconcile language learning and communicative methods is Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). CALL originated in the 1960s and 1970s as a way to integrate emerging computer technologies into language learning, owing to the ability of computers to store and process large quantities of information (Jarvis and Krashen, 2; Barani, 57-58). As computers continued to become cheaper, more powerful, and more ubiquitous in daily life throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, computers took on an increased role in education. Ghasem Barani characterizes this trend as being driven by several factors:

[Advances in technology and the ability of language teach to exploit existing technology to the very fullest… CALL can increase information access to the learner, provide flexibility to instruction and thereby better serve the individual’s learning pace, cognitive style and learning strategies. CALL allows learners to control their own learning process and progress… In the future, with the advances of computer technology, it is expected that CALL will be able to absorb some teaching functions. (64)

This view of CALL, almost as an “end-all, be-all, one-size-fits-all” pedagogical tool is that it assumes a number of constants, such as a liner advancement and acceptance of new technologies, and the willingness of students to accept such advances. Barani’s line of reasoning also relies heavily on advances in software development and accessibility, without giving the same level of consideration to the impact of changes in hardware developments and preferences.

The problem with this view is that when CALL was first being developed “the language learning profession knew only about language learning,” and the rapidly changing nature of computer technology was such that “[ESOL instructors] assumed the computer’s primary contribution to second language acquisition were programs based on traditional language
learning,” and not necessarily communicative or composing practices, or how advances in technology might change the ways in which people interact with technology (Jarvis and Krashen, 1). This change bears striking similarities to the expanded use of computers in composition studies as a whole, and the shift from product to process in composition (Hawisher et al., 22-23) is analogous in the shift from language learning to a more rounded, fluid concept of language acquisition.

Despite its rise in prominence within language studies, some, such as Huw Jarvis and Stephen Krashen to state that CALL, or at least the typical understanding of the term, is outdated because it focuses strictly on computers and computer software (5). Jarvis and Krashen trace the obsolescence of the term CALL to the rise of the internet, and the possibilities it presents:

Thanks to the Internet, computers do a lot more than they used to do, supplying an astonishing variety of kinds of visual, aural, and written input, providing a means of social interaction, as well as “information.” In addition, the computers now appear in many more mobile forms than the original desktop or even laptop – as smartphones, tablets, etc. These changes have led to the computer being used for language acquisition, not just learning, and as a major source of comprehensible input. (1-2)

In a manner similar to my previous discussion of why I chose to use certain terms, Jarvis and Krashen see a need for a new understanding of how technology plays into language learning and acquisition, and admit that no one term covers all aspects of multilingualism, multimodality, or digital literacy. Walker and White suggest the use of the term Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) as a means of addressing this problem, but their approach focuses largely on
discovering the available resources for ESOL instruction, rather than explaining how or why these tools are useful to students (8-9).

Jarvis and Krashen’s questioning of the relevance of CALL is an interesting one because it suggests the way ELLs use technology to communicate is changing. Their approach, however, does not attempt to account for why this change occurs, or how the change impacts students; the aim of their study is simply to confirm that “[ELLs] use the Internet a great deal, and much of this use is in English” through survey data, without expanding on what possible pedagogical implications this change may have (2). This lack of focus is something I find troublesome, as it causes me to question what purpose is served simply by confirming preferences without understanding how those preferences came to be. I find myself, again, returning to my previous set of questions to figure out what can be done to make digital literacy and multimodal composing more relevant and helpful for ELLs. It is with this student perspective – or lack thereof – in mind that I designed this project.

In spite of these ongoing conversations, the fact remains that “discussions of modality have remained largely separated from discussions of translinguality\(^2\), to the impoverishment of both” (Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge, “Introduction”). The idea seems to be that because ELLs are so focused on acquiring the basics or English and learning to use them correctly that any additional communicative methods would be too difficult for the students. This also ignores issues related to changes in communicative practices across the academic spectrum brought about by digital and multimodal communication methods, which, if ignored, may put ELLs at a distinct disadvantage compared to monolingual English students (“Introduction”). Another

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\(^2\) Linguistically, the term “translingual” refers to words or other phenomena that are present in multiple languages. Increasingly, translinguality or translingualism also refers to the ability of individuals fluent in multiple methods of communication – be they different languages, alphabetic writing, video composition, photography, etc. – to move between and borrow from different conventions and genres within a single work. This latter definition has direct implications for ELLs and, I believe, is closer to Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge’s intended meaning in this quote.
potential pitfall may be “skeptical” instructors who are not as familiar or comfortable with technology in the classroom, privileging “face-to-face interactions students need” (Hayward and Tuzi, 3). Although, as Nancy M. Hayward and Frank Tuzi acknowledge, by incorporating technology into their classrooms instructors not only lose their apprehensions about digital and multimodal composition but find that “student writing [becomes] an avenue for increased collaboration, learning and bonding,” motivating students to “write drafts early, post them in a timely manner, and revise more thoroughly” (6). Pennington devotes an entire chapter to convincing scholars of the benefits of technology in the composition classroom in Second-Language Writing in the Composition Classroom: A Critical Sourcebook, and while she admits the “value of the computer for [ELLs] is considerable,” most of the chapter deals with telling instructors which tools are the most beneficial and the easiest to use, rather than giving the results of a student-centered study focusing on how ELLs use and adapt to new methods of composition (318). The first-hand experiences of Hayward and Tuzi tell us there is more than can be said or done to explore this area of composition studies. Malini Ganapathy and Sarjit Kaur’s research supports the findings of Haywood and Tuzi: “the weaving of technology into the activities of a writing classroom can help effectively integrate new literacies into the current educational system” (561).

What remains to be seen, however, is in what ways the digital literacy practices ELLs privilege contributes to their writing process, and what we, as composition scholars, can learn about these writing practices. Moving forward, it is important to study the interactions of ELLs with digital and multimodal practices with an eye towards telling their stories in their voices, as much as is possible given the nature and conventions of academic publishing. Few of the researchers mentioned in this essay directly address the digital literacy needs or desires of ELLs
themselves, focusing instead on making the case for adopting digital instruction rather than explaining how digital instruction impacts students. A thorough examination of the digital literacy habits of ELLs would benefit students and instructors alike by illuminating the wants, needs, and perceptions of students who communicate across languages and communicative techniques by showing how students approach, say, video composition compared to alphabetic composition, the pros and cons of both methods of communication, the strengths and weaknesses of both, and theorizing on how these insights can translate into classroom practice. It is with this aim in mind that I begin the dissertation process.

**Chapter Breakdowns**

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the ongoing discussions surrounding multimodal composing and digital literacy for ELLs. Chapter 2 details the methods and methodology through which this project came to fruition. Chapter 2 goes into detail about how the research data was collected and coded, how contact was made with potential research participants, how the research data is stored, and why I chose to approach the data from the perspective of grounded theory. Included in this chapter is a discussion of why I selected Qualtrics as a survey tool, and how I crafted my interview questions. Of particular interest to me in this chapter is the discussion of grounded theory, the primary theoretical lens through which I coded and analyzed the data, and feminist methodology, which influenced how I approached my research participants and informed my understanding of how to make this a student-focused project. Chapter 2 also acknowledges and discusses the limitations of the project, and the personal biases I bring to the project.

Chapter 3 identifies and explores significant patterns in the data, and provides an in-depth discussion of those patterns: how or why these patterns emerged, what these patterns might mean,
how these patterns are or are not representative of other findings in published research, and how these patterns may speak to any gaps in knowledge or research in the field at large. This chapter draws on information culled from all phases of data collection, and from the ongoing process of reading and theorizing about published research in the field. Among the topics discussed are ideas about what constitutes “writing” compared to “composing” – whether one is considered more formal or academic than the other, and why – and whether personal digital spaces like social media constitute composition.

Chapter 4 presents case studies of two of my research participants, whom I respectfully refer to as “Edward” and “Harold.” I selected these two individuals for case studies for two reasons. First, the level of complexity and detail with which they answered the interview questions is greater than what I observed in the other research participants. Second, each research participant represents a different native country demographic, with one being among one of the most common ELL demographics represented at my research site (Edward, who is Saudi Arabian), and one whose home country is not as widely represented at the institution (Harold, who is Turkish). This contrast of common and uncommon demographics provides interesting perspectives about the role of composition and digital composition practices among ELLs by highlighting contrasts and comparisons both to published research and with the other research participants.

Finally, Chapter 5 draws conclusions about the research data presented throughout the document, and discuss what these conclusions mean for rhetoric and composition, and ESOL. This chapter gives specific implications for the research project in terms of how instructors and students can benefit from the project, and how this project can inspire or form the basis of future research in the field. This chapter also speaks to the similarities and differences between the
teaching and researching of multimodal composing practices among ELLs and traditional students, what implications and inspirations this project may have for individuals working with other non-traditional student populations, and advocate for a greater level of collaboration between rhetoric and composition and ESOL.

Conclusion

A growing corpus of research exists that addresses traditional students and their relationships with and understandings of multimodal composing practices. A similar body of work does not yet seem to exist when studying the attitudes of ELLs regarding multimodal composing practices. Much of the existing literature seems to focus on convincing instructors and/or researchers to adopt multimodal composing practices, but there is little information that takes into account student attitudes, needs and perceptions. I do not believe ESOL and instruction for traditional student populations need to be mutually exclusive, any more than I believe multimodal composition practices need to be segregated from more familiar alphabetic composing techniques.

There is much the subfields of digital literacy, composition studies, and second language instruction can and should learn from each other. More research needs to be done to address the ways in which the above-mentioned subfields interact with and play off each other, and this project addresses this research gap. An examination of the digital literacy habits of ELLs, such as the one I have conducted, would benefit students and instructors alike by illuminating the wants, needs, and perceptions of students who communicate across languages and communicative techniques. This would be accomplished by showing how students approach, say, video composition compared to alphabetic composition, the pros and cons of both methods of
communication, the strengths and weaknesses of both, and theorizing on how these insights can translate into classroom practice.
CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND METHODS

Introduction

During my high school years, I knew someone who made their own fishing lures. Lures are a type of artificial bait that attracts the attention of fish, and many fishermen swear by them. My friend would spend hours each weekend, especially during the summer and early fall, crafting lures from wood and metal. I remember one weekend in June, when he found an old church being demolished and was somehow able to get the demolition team to give him the copper plates used as roofing materials to make a collection of shiny metal lures, and the joy this prospect brought him. There are numerous different types of fishing lures, and they are commonly available in almost any sporting goods store, so not being much of a fisherman myself, the idea of making lures at home always seemed strange to me. One day I asked my friend why he went through all the trouble to make lures when he could easily select from a wide range of commercially produced options. I suppose I expected a short, simple answer, but what I got was a long discussion about the different types of lures, the materials that go into making them, how each lure works to attract different fish in different environments, and how skill at fishing helped determine whether someone would be successful at using a certain lure. As my friend explained, anyone could catch a fish given enough time, but if you really wanted to understand how someone landed the big catch you had to understand what gear they used, and how and why someone’s process develops over time.

In this chapter, I discuss the methodologies and the methods through which my research data were collected and analyzed. I am reminded of my friend and his fishing lures because methodology and methods seem to me to have a lot in common with what my friend told me. I could launch into a discussion of findings and results, analyzing data and making connections,
but I do not see what good that would do without knowing the steps I took to arrive at my conclusions. Peter Smagorinsky sums up the reason why it is important to understand methodologies and methods better than anyone else I know: “If I don’t know pretty clearly how the researcher is conducting the study, then it doesn’t matter much to me what the results are because I have no idea how they were produced… As a reader, I simply need to know how data become results in order to trust the author’s claims” (393-394). For my study to be of benefit to teachers and researchers, it is important to understand how and why my project developed. There are numerous methodological approaches that could have been taken, and perhaps they would have yielded similar results, but my approach and the subsequent findings came about because of the decisions and approaches I took along the way. If the data are my fish, then the methodologies and methods used to collect them are my lures.

The primary theoretical lenses through which I view the creation and execution of this project are inspired by feminist and grounded theory methodology, so the chapter begins with a discussion of the impact both lenses have on my approach to this project and the crafting of survey and interview questions. This is followed by an explanation of how the data were collected, stored, and coded. Included with this section is a brief discussion on the limitations of the project. I conclude this chapter with an acknowledgement of personal biases, and the measures I have taken to mitigate the impact of these biases on the project.

In considering what would be the most appropriate methodological approach or approaches to this project, I was reminded of Tony Silva’s “On the Ethical Treatment of ESL Writers,” a chapter from Second-Language Writing in the Composition Classroom: A Critical Sourcebook. Silva states what, to me, has always seemed like a truism in my instructional interactions with ELLs, but I think it bears repeating here: “It is important to note that [ELLs]
may also be very different from one another; that is, [ELLs] comprise a very heterogeneous population… Recognizing these differences and understanding their nature and implications for writing instructions is, in my view, the basis for the ethical treatment of [ELLs]” (161). Silva’s point is that the ELL population at any institution is likely to contain numerous differences – differences in cultures, differences in first (or second, or third) languages, differences in academic backgrounds, differences in fluency and proficiency, and the list goes on. ELLs can present instructors and researchers with a challenge if those scholars attempt to categorize all ELLs as the same, or approach working with and within an ELL population as if all member of the population are uniform in their experiences. As I wrote the survey and interview questions, and as I considered how to present myself to potential research participants across all stages of the project, I knew I needed to take an approach that would help me avoid the kinds of generalizations Silva is speaking of by allowing the data to speak for itself rather than giving me license to try reading certain expectations into the data.

**Methodology**

**Grounded Theory**

The primary theoretical approach that has influenced my methodology is grounded theory. Grounded theory was used to code the research data, and find patterns between the survey date and the interview data, and between the two rounds of interviews. Despite certain biases I bring to the project, which I acknowledge later in this chapter, it has been my goal to remain as open as possible to going where the data leads me. I draw inspiration for my understanding of grounded theory from Kathy Charmaz’s *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Charmaz notes that grounded theory is not a theory in the traditional, rigid way most scholars think of a theory. Rather than a lens through
which to read data, grounded theory acts more “as a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions and packages” (9). Charmaz emphasizes flexibility in approaching data, which often results in pursuing multiple avenues of analysis for the researcher to explore (9-10). What I find both striking and liberating about grounded theory is that it assumes the information provided by my research participants is worthy of consideration and exploration, regardless of whether that information fits any preconceived notions about what the data will reveal. I need not look for specific patterns or work within rigid parameters from the beginning with grounded theory, and I can add to or rework my understanding of the data even as I am collecting and coding it (14). A grounded theory approach gives me the opportunity to get a better handle on how different students who fit within the ELL umbrella think about and conceptualize composing practices, technology, their needs as writers, or whatever other issues may arise. To paraphrase Charmaz, grounded theory will provide the flexibility to change and refine my understanding of the data as I continue to work with it, without putting me into a position of having to force an opinion into the data (177-178).

I am especially thankful for Charmaz’s discussion on the importance of memo writing, which she stresses, is “a pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing” (72):

Memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystalize questions and directions for you to pursue. Through conversing with yourself while memo-writing, new ideas and insights arise during the act of writing. Putting things down on paper makes the work more concrete and manageable – and exciting… Through writing memos, you construct analytic notes to explicate and fill out categories…Memos give you a space and place for making comparisons between data and date, data and codes, codes of data and
other codes, codes and categories, and category and concept and for articulating conjectures about these comparisons. (72-73)

Memo writing has been especially helpful for me as a way to slow down and “see” the data more clearly. As I began the process of analyzing my data, I worried that I would be tempted to start taking information out of context and trying to force it to fit a certain idea or perspective because a quote or a statistic sounded good. As discussed in Chapter 3, some of the issues and concerned
raised by my research participants included digital representation and identity, what qualifies as composing, and the ways in which different composing practices lend themselves to personal expression. Had I chosen another path for my research journey, I may have been tempted to twist these concerns to fit a predetermined agenda. Memo writing became a way to force myself to slow down and understand what was said, why it was said, and what those utterances are telling me. I am not sure how many people would consider slowing down to be practical advice for the dissertation writing process, but I found this process absolutely invaluable.

Feminist Inspirations

Ethical treatment of research participants at all stages of data collection, and authentic representation of their viewpoints in this study, are issues of great importance to me. I strive to be ethical and authentic because, as Shirley Brice Heath points out, ELLs and other minority groups “will be at a disadvantage in classrooms and on certain types of tasks that expect their [academic performance] to bear certain characteristics” (qtd. in Ramanathan and Atkinson, 165). These characteristics may be based on language proficiency and fluency, cultural differences, or social attitudes, and students who do not display these characteristics may be marginalized because of it. This disadvantage often takes the form of exclusion from courses, clubs, social gatherings, or other institutional prejudices. As a researcher, I acknowledge that I have certain biases, which are addressed later in this chapter, but I also try to mitigate the effects of those biases as much as possible. In considering how to execute this study in a way that is ethically appropriate, I have drawn inspiration from feminist methodology.

In the introduction to Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues, Sandra Harding suggests that rather than adhering to a strict definition of feminism, feminist methodology should follow three guidelines: it should value the experiences of women, explore a social phenomenon
in a way that benefits the research participants, and strive to put the researcher and the research participants on equal footing (6-9). Stephanie Vandrick offers a more simplified stance on feminism, one influenced by her work with ELL populations: researchers and instructors influenced by feminist methodology should strive “to provide equal opportunities to all people, regardless of gender, class, race, ethnic origin, wealth, etc.” (“Feminist Pedagogy,” 78).

Although my research participants are not all women, I believe Hardin and Vandrick’s suggestions provide a foundation for how to work with and for the benefit of ELLs. As mentioned in Chapter 1, ELLs have several similarities with other under-represented groups in American higher education, in that they have not historically received the same access to or benefit of education as their white, male, American-born counterparts. One of the goals of this project is to give a voice to a group that has not had its opinions heard, which I believe aligns with Harding’s call to explore a phenomenon that is of benefit to the research participants. In doing so, I strive to give ELLs the same level of theoretical and pedagogical support traditional students have received regarding multimodal composing and digital literacy.

One concept here that I believe deserve some additional attention is the call to put researchers and research participants on equal footing. To that end, throughout the data collection phases and after, I have worked to make myself available to discuss the progress and findings of my research to my research participants. All communications with research participants included my contact email and telephone number. Research participants all received follow-up emails from me the day after their interviews thanking them for their time and encouraging them to keep in contact so I could update them on the progress of my project. In December, 2015, and February and March, 2016, I sent additional follow up emails to research participants letting them know how I was progressing with the project, and asking if they had
any questions or concerns for me regarding the study. From the beginning, I wanted my research participants to feel as if they had a stake in this project, rather than giving the impression that this was my research, conducted for my benefit and for reasons only accessible to me. At all stages of data collection, I made sure research participants knew how to be in touch with me, and to ask questions about what I am doing, what conclusions I am finding, and why I think those conclusions are important. Although it is important, it can be difficult to break down these barriers between researcher and research participant, as there is an implied divide between the person conducting the study and the person or persons being studied. Only two of my research participants ever took up my offer to discuss the project further, a point on which I elaborate in Chapter 3.

**Methods**

**Research Questions**

From the initial curiosity and self-reflective questions discussed in Chapter 1, I developed the following research questions:

- What digital composing and digital literacy practices do ELLs privilege, and why?
- What do these privileges tell instructors and scholars about the ways in which ELLs communicate?
- What needs to ELLs have in relationship to writing, composing practices, composing technologies, and communicative practices?
- How can practitioners in the field of rhetoric and composition, and ESOL better understand the needs of ELLs in regards to digital composing practices, in order to translate these needs into composing pedagogy?
With these questions in mind, I set out to design a data collection method that would allow me to approach these questions using a range of research data, from quantitative data related to the types of technologies used by ELLs and the frequency at which these technologies are used, to qualitative data addressing attitudes about multimodal composing practices, the types of devices and services students prefer to use, the mediums of communication ELLs privilege, and why some mediums of communication are valued above others. After reflecting on how to best approach the project, and after consulting with my dissertation chair, I designed my project in three phases: a survey phase, and two interview phases. All relevant documents pertaining to the collection of data for this project, including survey and interview questions, recruitment email scripts, and informed consent documents, are attached to this dissertation as appendices. These documents were submitted for approval to the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at my research site, Midwestern University (MU), on March 6, 2015. Approval of the documents was granted on March 13, 2015.

*Methodological Pluralism*

As Gesa Kirsch points out, all methods derive in some way from a sense of opportunism, as “researchers choose the methodology that will best address their questions” (252). I selected a mixed methodological approach both as a means of finding willing research participants and as a way to collect data in an environment I thought would be open and unthreatening. I also felt I could get a broader sense of how my research participants viewed digital composing and literacy practices, and that I could build “cumulative knowledge” by coding and analyzing the data (254). Kirsch elaborates on this idea by discussing the benefits of mixing qualitative methodological approaches, what she refers to as methodological pluralism:
[Methodological pluralism] means opening up the research agenda to subjects, listening to their stories, and allowing them to actively participate, as much as possible, in the design, development, and reporting of research… Qualitative methods become an important part of research… because they acknowledge the diversity of composing activities and writers’ histories as shaped by elements of gender, race, class, and ethnicity, among other factors. Qualitative research methods also have the advantage of situating themselves as methods that need interpretation and thereby problematize the interpretive stance of the researcher (rather than disguising it) … Qualitative methods, too, reflect researcher’s agendas and the social, cultural, and political contexts of research communities.

Kirsch’s thoughts on methodological pluralism accurately describe my views on using multiple data collection methods. In addition to creating cumulative knowledge, mixed methods give me a better sense of the backgrounds and stories my research participants have to tell. My belief in the importance of these stories is the foundation upon which the project is built, so using mixed methodological methods as a way of gaining insights on the ELL population was a natural choice. This approach is also in keeping with my own commitments to treating research participants fairly, analyzing the data for patterns rather than trying to read preconceived notions into the data, and acknowledging the various social and cultural contexts from which the research participants come and in which they find themselves at in America.

**Phase One: Online Survey**

The first phase of data collection for this project was online survey. From a practical perspective, the online survey gave me an opportunity to recruit research participants without
having any direct contact with or foreknowledge of the participants, which I felt would allow for more open, honest responses across all phases of data collection. In addition, survey asked research participants to consider the kinds of technologies they use to write, and what types of technological activities they engage in on a regular basis. This includes things like social media usage, questions about whether participants know what terms like “Web 2.0” mean, and how often they engage in writing tasks like sending and checking emails. My reason for including these types of questions was to get a sense of the range of knowledge research participants have about digital composing and digital literacy, and to use that information to inform the findings from the interview phases. The survey was created using the Qualtrics online survey creation platform. I selected Qualtrics for a few reasons, the first of which being that it allowed me to create a survey that did not need research participants to provide any personally identifiable information, such as names or student identifications numbers, nor does it attempt collect personally identifiable information without the knowledge of the research participant. Second, MU has an institutional subscription with Qualtrics, which meant I could use the full range of services available through the Qualtrics online platform without having to pay any additional fees. This also meant my survey would automatically come with the university logo built into the interface. I felt having the university logo on the surveys was important for establishing a sense of credibility and professionalism with any potential research participants. Third, Qualtrics provides different options for storing, exporting, and sorting the data. I felt these options would be of benefit when I began to code the results because they would allow me to see patterns emerging in a way that simply looking at raw numbers would not allow. Qualtrics give the option to “drill down” and look for mean, variance, and standard deviation; and provides for
cross tabulation, giving me the option to see how people responded to questions in relationship to each other.

The survey was constructed in Qualtrics in early August, 2015, and distributed via a link emailed to potential research participants on Wednesday, August 26, 2015. The email with the link to the online survey was sent by the MU ESOL Program Office, under prior arrangement with the MU ESOL Program Director, “Dr. Jones,” who sent the emails from the Program’s official email address on my behalf. This was done to secure a level of separation between myself and any potential research participants, which I felt was necessary to prevent any possibility or accusations of tampering with or misuse of student information on my part. This was also done to add an additional level of credibility to the survey. Because the potential research participants had not had any prior contact with me, I did not think an email link from an unknown party – i.e., myself – would be viewed as credible. By sending this first communication about the project through a communication channel potential research participants recognized, I hoped to alleviate any concerns participants may have about the legitimacy of the study. For each phase of data collection, I had a target enrollment of research participants in mind that I felt would give me enough data to work with. The target enrollment for the survey was fifty research participants, and fifty-five research participants completed the survey.\(^4\)

**Phase Two: Initial Interviews**

The second phase of data collection was a series of face-to-face interviews with research participants. The final question of the online survey asked research participants to provide their email address if they would be willing to be contacted by me to participate in an interview, and

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\(^3\) The name of the ESOL Program Director has been changed to help preserve confidentiality. A copy of the permission letter I received from Dr. Jones can be found in Appendix A.

\(^4\) For the record, it should be noted that sixty-six people began the survey, but only fifty-five completed it. Some survey questions will give data that includes responses from individuals who did not complete the survey.
of the fifty-three completed surveys, twenty-five research participants chose to give their email address. Interview recruitment emails were sent to these twenty-five students on Wednesday, September 9, 2015, from my university-issued email account. The target enrollment for this phase of data collection was between ten and fifteen research participants. Eleven people initially agreed to be interviewed but one participant later canceled their interview and chose not to reschedule, giving me ten research participants for the second phase of data collection. Moving from a survey to a series of interviews for the second and third phases of data collection allows me to ask more open ended questions, and explore student opinions and perceptions more closely than I can accomplish by asking students to check radio boxes on a survey. Included in this phase of interviews were questions that directly address what kinds of compositions the research participants feel more directly address who they are as digital composers, and what kinds of compositions they are most comfortable allowing others to see. This round of interviews also asked the role of technology in the classroom, as research participants were asked to discuss the ways in which their instructors use technology to help them write, or teach them how to use new technologies to aid in the writing process. In this phase, I wanted to get a clearer picture of how research participants see technology and digital literacy play a role in classroom instruction, and what benefits and drawbacks these tools have.

The ten interviews took place in my campus office, and were scheduled from Monday, September 14, to Friday, September 25, 2015. My campus office was a natural choice for an interview location, as it is a space to which I have continuous access and it is a quiet place to conduct and record audio. Although I share the space with another graduate student, I had spoken with my office mate and learned he was not planning to make use of the office during the period in which the interviews were scheduled, so I did not have to worry about outside parties
interfering with the interviews. Unlike the survey link, these emails were sent to research participants from my own MU-issued email address. Owing to the necessity of scheduling interviews, addressing any issues the research participants had about me or this project, and answering questions about where to find my office, it was not practical to send these emails through an intermediary as I had with the survey link. Additionally, as the pool of research participants involved in this phase of data collection had to “opt in” by providing an email address at the end of the online survey, I did not believe using my email address would cause accusations of tampering with or coercing participants into scheduling interviews in which they did not wish to participate.

**Phase Three: Follow-Up Interviews**

The third phase of data collection was a series of follow-up interviews. The interview questions in this phase focused more on what specific activities qualify as “writing” and why, if the research participants would consider creating multimodal texts in place of alphabetic texts, reasons why research participants may or may not be willing to create multimodal texts, how collaboration and voice contribute to the creation of a text, and whether “writing” is somehow different from “composing,” and if so, how. This round of interviews delved deeper into the concept of composing as both a creative and communicative act, and my goal in crafting these questions was to get research participants to think about how and why alphabetic and digital literacies function from a pedagogical standpoint. Recruitment emails for this round of interviews were sent to the ten people who participated in the previous round of interviews on Monday, September 28, 2015. My initial target enrollment for this phase of data collection was three research participants, but five people agreed to participate in a second interview. Since the
total number of people willing to participate in the third phase of data collection was not far off my target enrollment number, I decided to conduct interviews with all five of these individuals.

The phase three interviews took place in my campus office from Wednesday, September 30, to Monday, October 5, 2015. My goal in conducting these interviews was not only to collect more data and hopefully gain insights into specific issues raised by research participants upon which to theorize, but also to identify research participants upon which to build case studies, which will form the basis of Chapter 4. Because one of the goals of this project is to accurately represent student voices and perspectives, case studies allow me the opportunity to focus on unique student perspectives. By drawing comparisons between published research and the experiences, expectations, and privileged practices of my research participants, I can make inferences about how ELLs view technology and digital composing practices. From this, I can theorize what scholars in rhetoric and composition can do to help engage ELLs in digital composing practices in a way that is beneficial to the students, and how instructors can make technology a foundation of their pedagogy.

Data Coding

Once the data had been collected, I had to decide what the best way to code it was. The survey data was easier to approach, as Qualtrics already had tools integrated into its system to allow me to compare and examine the data. I settled on QDA Miner as a coding tool. In some respects, my decision to use QDA Miner not unlike my decision to use Qualtrics. Like Qualtrics, I found the interface easy to use and aesthetically pleasing. The point about aesthetics may seem like a trivial one, but it was important to me because I have a form of red-green color deficiency that makes differentiating between shades of those colors difficult. Since many coding tools use color to mark or highlight sections of text, I had to find one whose color gradation would be easy
for me to tell apart. The software has a variety of search functions that allow me to find the frequency of certain terms in the interview transcripts, such as “social media” or “composition,” as well as options to combine search terms and search by relative proximity – that is, how frequently two terms appear and how close together they appear in an interview – which helped when writing memos or analyzing the data for patterns. I was also able to secure a free license to use the “lite” version of the software. The free software did restrict my usage of certain features, such as the ability to create certain kinds of visual aids and graphs based on the data, but I am actually happy to have a limited range of services. By using a more streamlined version of the product, I could rely more on my own analysis and understanding of the data, rather than relying too heavily on the software to work for me.

**A Note on Audio File Storage**

For the interview phases of data collection, I used the voice recorder option on my personal laptop, which is password-protected and is kept locked in my campus office or home at all times. When the interviews were completed, I created a transcript of the interviews in Microsoft Word, and deleted the audio recordings. The transcripts were completed in mid-December, 2015. One of the things that was important to me from the beginning, and should be important to anyone collecting research data, is the manner in which that data are stored and handled. Once the survey phase of data collection was completed, a data report was generated through Qualtrics, and downloaded to my personal laptop computer. As listed in my informed consent documents, the interview phases were initially recorded using the audio recording function on my laptop. After the interviews had been completed, I made alphabetic transcripts of them with a word processing program, which were also saved on my laptop. The audio files were then deleted. It may seem odd that I am writing a dissertation dealing with digital literacy
practices and multimodal composing, yet I would choose to delete digital records of my interviews, but I have a specific reason for doing so. It has to do with the final project of the business English course discussed in Chapter 1, and the negative reaction of the students to one notable aspect of the final project.

The original assignment parameters stated that the students would upload their final videos to YouTube, Vimeo, or a similar web 2.0 video sharing site. My colleague and I sought to give students an opportunity to practice moving between texts – by first writing a script using a word processing program, and then translating that script into an audio/video composition – to learn from and with each other. Rather than just asking the students to memorize words or definition, we wanted to give students a chance to use language in a more authentic way, and to work with concepts that we thought would be relevant to them in the field of business. Asking the students to do something they might be called upon to do in a real-world business setting gave us a way to do that. Even if the student did not find themselves working in advertising or television production, at least this would give them a chance to experiment with different modes of composing, perhaps giving them an advantage compared to other students who might join them in later classes. In a more practical sense, we also thought this would give us an easy way to view and evaluate the projects outside class meetings.

By and large, the students had fun participating in the assignment. None of the students had ever been given an opportunity to compose in this way, so the novelty of the assignment gave it a level of excitement. The feedback we received from students also indicated they found this assignment to be more low-stress than studying for an exam, or writing an alphabetic essay, which had the added benefit of helping to alleviate any end-of-term pressure they were feeling. Even those who may otherwise be cautious about being photographed or filmed due to cultural
or religious restrictions on photography found ways to work within the group to contribute to the composing process, such as narrating the action from off camera. But the idea of sharing the final product, we quickly learned, was unacceptable to the students. Almost unanimously, the students asked not to have their final products put online, and the one student who was initially open to the idea of putting their work online was eventually talked out of it by the other students. The reason took my colleague and me by surprise. The issue was the permanence of the digital compositions. The students did not want to have their projects placed online because they felt the results would follow them beyond the scope of the course and would undermine any future improvements they made to communicate fluently in English, locking them into a position of having to constantly defend their work and their proficiency in a way traditional students are never asked to do. After four or more years of study at an American university, these students were confident their English would improve and that they could use their language skill in whatever social, educational, or professional contexts they found themselves in, but they worried the videos, left online for anyone to find and view without the proper context, would cause people at the institution and beyond to see them in a negative light, as having a language deficiency they could not overcome despite any and all evidence to the contrary. Privacy settings, deletions after the fact, or any other work-around my colleague and I could come up with were irrelevant here as the students could not be persuaded otherwise, and we ultimately decided to keep the videos off the internet and have them shown only in the classroom and then promptly deleted to prevent the possibility of a leak.

I have never used the word “terrified” in a context related to education, but I think this may be the most accurate way to describe the concerns my students raised regarding the online video projects. Min-Zhan Lu advises that instructors
need to unravel several residual fears… the fear that “linguistic imperfection” will cause a “communication” breakdown; the fear that critical engagement with the language one needs to survive and thrive is incompatible with one’s efforts to acquire it; a fear arising from the assumption that (socially or self-identified) Native-Speaking, White, and/or Middle Class users of English are monolingual; the fear that issues of dissonance are irrelevant are irrelevant to their learning and discursive process. (19)

The idea of digital permanence and its aftereffects was one my colleague and I had not considered, but it clearly weighed heavily on the minds of our students. Their fears of communication breakdowns influenced their desire to self-censor their work, and despite our best intentions, neither my colleague nor I had considered the ways in which digital permanence might impact their future communicative practice. Referring to the feminist inspirations for this project, Ann Blakeslee et al. reminds me that one of the duties of an ethical researcher is to treat research participants and students “in a manner that is responsible to those [individuals] as well as to our readers and to ourselves” in the ways we “portray situations, events, and ideas,” something my colleague and I had not done (148). Faced with this information, we knew we had to act in a way that was considerate and compassionate towards the students in our charge. Whether our decision to delete the video projects was the correct one is perhaps subject to debate, but this experience had a tremendous impact on me as I planned the data collection phases of this project, so much so that I made the decision to delete the audio files to help maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants.
Biases

Cheri L. Williams points out, correctly in my opinion, that each of us brings our own theoretical, pedagogical, and ethnographic lenses, among others, to any study, and as researchers we “must continually ask ourselves, and each other, what it means to ‘do the right thing’ and what it means to act ethically” (51-53). One way this can be accomplished is by acknowledging the biases we bring to our work, and recognize the ways in which those biases may affect our findings. As a researcher, particularly one who works with a population that has typically been under represented in American institutions of higher education, it is important to me to acknowledge biases that may have had an undue influence on my work, and what I have done to try to counteract these biases. The basic premise of this project — that ELL voices are not heard or adequately represented in discussions of digital literacy and multimodal composing practices — is itself a bias. I approached this project with the belief that a gap in research existed, which I intended to address. As a result, it would be easy for me to approach this project from a defensive position, jockeying for attention and recognition, but I do not see how this would benefit ELLs or the field at large. Grounded theory has helped temper any desires to be defensive of my work, while feminist perspectives have helped me stay focused on doing work that benefits ELLs, not myself.

As mentioned in the “A Note on Audio File Storage” section, my previous teaching experiences have led me to suspect ELLs are concerned about digital representation and permanence in ways traditional students may not, and some of the questions in both interview phases deal with this issue. My purpose in asking those questions was to determine how privacy concerns affected the digital literacy practices and preferences of ELLs, if at all, but it is possible that without my previous experiences I would not have addressed this point in the manner I did.
Identity and perception are concepts that are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, but it must be noted that my previous experiences had a lasting influence on how I approach these topics. Aside from contextual information mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, I have worked to keep my focus on the data collected in this study and to use my previous experiences only as a means of helping me understand my desire to work with and advocate for ELL students.

Finally, to connect back to the section on “Feminist Inspirations,” I must state here that while I strove to treat my research participants in as equitable a fashion as possible, I more closely represent the traditional student – heterosexual, white, male, middle class – than I do my research participants. There are things about the life experiences and backgrounds of my research participants that I will never fully understand or appreciate because of the social, cultural, political, and religious differences between us. Furthermore, unlike my participants, I have never spent a significant period of my life living and studying abroad, completely immersing myself in a culture and language that was different from my own. I have never found myself in a situation where I have been viewed as an outsider, nor have I ever had real or perceived problems with communication or social integration, issues that may affect my research participants. I have also never been in a situation where I felt my contributions to an academic community were not valued or appreciated, or where I could not engage with professors in classroom and personal interactions, which, as I discuss in Chapter 3, I learned was not always the case for my research participants. Questions about whether students felt they were more or less competent in digital composition than their instructors, their level of comfort with having people listen to audio recordings of themselves speak, and what is or is not considered composition arise, at least in part, from a position of social privilege where my value as a student and scholar are not questioned. I have attempted, as much as possible, to divorce myself from the social biases of my
background and upbringing and see my research participants as equals, as active and engaged in their communities as they wish to be, but the influence of my social standing undoubtedly shape the ways in which I approached the creation of the study and my interpretation of the results.

**Limitations**

Although I think this project has a lot of interesting implications for the fields of rhetoric and composition and ESOL, and I have done my best to use appropriate and ethical data collection methods, the project is not without limitations. One limitation to which I have already alluded is the fact that none of the research participants had met or worked with me prior to the second phase of data collection. It could be that my data pool would have been wider and more diverse if I was working with a pool of potential participants that had some prior experience with me, or it may be that the information received would have been biased in some way. Nevertheless, the project relied on those individuals who were willing to participate on a promise of goodwill on my part.

The nature of the data collection process may have influenced students who felt their fluency level was not as high as they would like it to be to avoid participation in the survey. As someone who has worked with ELLs in different types of courses – writing, grammar, reading, listening/speaking – and across different proficiency levels, I have reason to suspect the project attracted only those potential participants who felt their English language fluency was at or above average. In my experience, those students who believe their English language fluency was below average, regardless of their performance in ESOL courses or on language tests, tended to shy away from any outside activities or interactions that might reveal their perceived language deficiency. I would certainly rate any of the research participants who worked with me as highly fluent in terms of verbal communication; there were hardly any instances of a research
participant being unable to understand my questions, and I had no trouble understanding the answers they provided. I think it would be interesting to see how this project or a similar one would turn out if students from lower proficiency levels, defined either by institutional standards, by self-assessment, or through proficiency testing, were guaranteed to be included in the research participant pool. This, however, could present ethical dilemmas about the nature of informed consent, as research participants in that kind of study may feel they have not been adequately informed of their rights as a research participant, making this suggestion too impractical to be feasible.

Given that I have drawn inspiration from feminist research methodology, I should also note that female research participants were outnumbered by male research participants in this study thirteen to two. Beginning a discussion of feminist methodology and ESOL, however, is not an easy proposition. As Vandrick points out, feminism and feminist methodology have not been frequent topics of discussion or methodological approach among articles or conference presentations in the field of ESOL (“Teaching and Practicing Feminism,” 4). Further complicating matters, cultural or religious sensitivities among ESOL students – either real or perceived – about the role of women in society and education have tended to limit discussions of feminism “to wage and legal issues” because these are seen as “relatively safe issues… albeit with many conditions attached” (4). P. L. Hartman and E. L. Judd also point out that for many years, instructional materials used for ESOL instruction tended to mention men more frequently than women, with women often being the focus of sexist jokes (qtd. in Vandrick, 4). A 2010 study of ESOL materials used in Iranian high schools confirmed this gender bias, finding that male referencing terms (i.e. he, him, man, men, and male) outnumbered female referencing terms (she, her, woman, women, and female) by a margin of 79.5% to 20% (Bahman and Rahimi,
Because I relied on potential research participants to opt-in to the study at all phases of data collection, I had no way of knowing or influencing what the gender of my participants would be. I think it would be interesting and important to conduct a similar study in the future seeking to find the viewpoints of female ELLs, and see whether those viewpoints speak to any kind of gender bias. Based on these gender dynamics, I need to acknowledge that my results may be skewed one way or another because of the gender and gendered social attitudes of the research participants.

A final limitation that I feel is worth mentioning relates to the list of social media websites and apps listed in one of the questions for the survey phase of data collection. When I was constructing the survey questions in January and February, 2015, I conducted a quick poll of friends and colleagues to find out what kinds of websites and apps I should use. I also did a Google search to find the most popular social media services at the time the survey was constructed. Some, like Facebook and Google+, were things I was personally familiar with. Others, like Vine and Instagram, were services I had heard of but had never used before. As I was interviewing research participants, I realized that my knowledge of social media websites and apps was more western-focused than I knew, and I began to wonder if this would result in a skewing of the data. Some of my research participants mentioned services like Bebo and Gaia Online, both of which are popular social networking services in their home countries, but that I had never heard of before. In my attempt to understand the preferences of this population, I

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5 Bahman and Rahimi’s study used quantitative research methods to study three ESOL textbooks commonly assigned to Iranian students to determine “frequency counts of female and male referring terms, and frequency of first-place occurrences of words attributed to females and males,” as well as qualitative research methods to analyze illustrations and pictures in the textbooks for evidence of gendered attitudes (275). They also asked students enrolled in ESOL courses to complete a survey on whether they felt women and men were represented equally in the textbooks. In addition to finding that instances of male referencing terms vastly outnumbering instances of female referencing terms, the survey data revealed that students rated sentences containing male referencing terms higher and thought they sounded “more natural” – i.e., more accurate – than those containing female referencing terms by a three to one margin, even when the sentences described animals (276-277).
should have done more to research communicative platforms outside the western world, and I hope to correct – or at least further address – this oversight in future research.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the methodological lenses and inspirations through which I approached this project, in addition to discussing the various stages of data collection, how I stored my data, and the tools used to collect and code data. My methodological goal in approaching the collection and analysis of data was to treat my research participants in as ethical and authentic manner as can be expected in a single-authored dissertation. I have also given what I feel are my inherent biases and the limitations of the project, because again, it is important to me to be as upfront and honest in my work as I can be. The research methods described in this chapter, as well as the methodologies used to analyze the data collected, provide a means to understand the needs and perceptions of ELLs, and which can only serve to improve the understanding of ELL digital literacy and multimodal composing practices.
CHAPTER III: IDENTITY PERCEPTION, ALPHABETIC ATTITUDES, AND PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES

Introduction

Chapter 3 is the first of two chapters where I offer analysis of some of the issues that arose from analyzing the survey and interview data collected for my dissertation project. Whereas Chapter 4 presents two case studies as a means of examining issues relevant to the digital literacy and multimodal composing practices of individuals as a way of making connections and providing explanation of important concepts, this chapter focuses on a series of topics that arose across the two interview phases of data collection with my research participants, augmented with statistical information collected during the survey phase of data collection. At the risk of sounding overly attached to the people who helped make this project a reality, and therefore compromising my objectivity, I must say how amazed I am by how generous my research participants were with their time, and their willingness and openness to speaking with me about their communicative habits and needs. Although the dissertation and subsequent publications based upon it are often thought of as the work of a single person, it must be said that this project could not exist without the fifty-five people who took my initial survey, and the ten individuals who agreed to sit down with me for interviews.

Although there is some blending of ideas across sections, for the sake of structure and ease of reading I have organized this chapter into two main sections: Identity Perception, and Alphabetic Attitudes. Within each of these sections are a number of sub-sections that explore issues including the native/non-native dichotomies that influence how ELLs see themselves and their place in their academic communities, the importance of language fluency, how ELLs view the relevance of digital literacy and multimodal composing practices, ELL perceptions of
instructor competence, and the ways in which student relationships with their instructors influence the attitudes ELLs have about their digital literacy practices. Throughout this chapter, I also discuss what I see as the implications for these findings and their impact on the larger field.

**Identity Perception**

*What’s in a Name?*

Before I begin my formal analysis, I want to take a moment to introduce the students who participated in this study as well as list some demographic information for each person: their home countries, their ages, their gender, and the languages they consider their first or home language. As mentioned in Chapter 2, I interviewed a total of ten people during the initial interview phase of this study, all of whom had previously participated in the survey phase of the study:

- Aaron, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 23, male, Arabic
- Betty, People’s Republic of China, 18, female, Chinese
- Cameron, Malaysia, 23, male, Malayalam
- Danny, Republic of India, 21, male, Tamil
- Edward, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 24, male, Arabic
- Fran, People’s Republic of China, 20, female, Chinese

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6 I think it is interesting that both Betty and Fran identified “Chinese” as their native language, rather than a distinct language or dialect, like Mandarin, Cantonese, or Mongolian. I assume when they say “Chinese” they are referring to Standard Chinese, a variety of Mandarin that is the state-sanctioned national language of the People’s Republic of China. It would be interesting to see whether students like Betty and Fran speak other dialects or languages, and whether this kind of language self-identification influences their communicative practices. Because my interview questions did not focus on this issue, however, such a study will need to wait for another day.

7 Although he initially identified Malay as his “native” language, Cameron later clarified that this is the official language of his country, and is not the language he, his family, or his friends at home typically speak in day-to-day conversation. Cameron then told me that people from his region of Malaysia primarily speak Malayalam, and that he considers this his “mother tongue.” He also said that he had received some English language instruction in school growing up, and that because he had spent time in China during his youth he was fluent in conversational Mandarin.
• Greg, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 21, male, Sinhalese
• Harold, Republic of Turkey, 30, male, Turkish
• Irene, Republic of India, 20, female, Telugu
• Janet, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, 23, female, Nepali

All my research participants reported having received at least six years of English instruction in their home countries before coming to the United States and enrolling in classes at MU, and when asked how frequently they wrote in English each research participant reported writing between two and four hours a day, at a minimum of four days per week, primarily to complete class assignments or correspondence with course instructors or other students in their classes. From this initial pool of ten research participants Aaron, Betty, Cameron, Edward, and Harold agreed to participate in a second phase of interviews. The excerpts from my interview transcripts quoted in this and the next chapter are presented as accurately as I could. Referring to my discussion of ethical treatment of ELLs in Chapter 2, it was important to me that I make every attempt to represent the voices of my research participants in as authentic a way as possible. To that end, I made no attempt to edit the grammar, sentence structure, or word usage for clarity or “correctness” in transcribing the interviews, and I have been careful to use punctuation in a way that tries to replicate the cadence and speech patterns of the research participants without fundamentally altering or misrepresent the ways in which they answered my questions. Because Edward and Harold are the subjects of the case studies presented in Chapter 4, this chapter mostly focuses on data collected during interviews with the other research participants and the survey phase of the project.

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8 Like Cameron, Harold made a point to tell me that he was multilingual. In addition to his native language, Turkish, Harold also speaks fluent German. Unlike Betty and Fran, both Cameron and Harold offered up this information freely during our interviews, rather than because I asked for it.
Although it should go without saying, please note that the names used to identify the research participants in this study are not the real names of the people I interviewed. Considering the importance of equitable treatment of ELLs to my research process, and the care with which I have attempted to authentically reproduce their answers in an alphabetic form, it may seem unusual to assign anglicized names to my research participants rather than names that are more indicative of their home cultures. My original plan, in fact, was to assign pseudonyms to the research participants that were common in their home cultures in the hope of representing the research participants more authentically. I had not yet decided on names when I was conducting interviews, since I did not yet have a full range of demographic information available for my research participants. Instead, I used numeric codes to differentiate the recordings and transcripts of the research participants; Aaron was the first person to be interviewed so I identified him as Research Participant 1 (RP1), Betty was identified as RP2, Cameron as RP3, etc. The first time the issue of names came up was during my second interview with Betty. As with the first interview, I began by going over the informed consent document with her, and when I came to the part of the document that described how I would try to maintain the confidentiality of my research participants, Betty asked:

**BETTY** What are you going to name me?

**JEFFREY S. MOORE (JSM):** I (pause) um, I’m sorry, what do you mean?

**BETTY:** When you write. What are you going to name me?

**JSM:** Oh (pause) well, uh, to be honest, I haven’t really thought about it yet.

**BETTY:** Are you going to use my name?
**JSM:** Uh, no, not your real name, no. I will use a different name to talk about you, but I don’t know what that name will be yet. So please, while we are talking and I am recording the interview, please do not use your real name.

**BETTY:** I want you to use an American name.

I had not expected any of my research participants to be concerned about the assumed names I would assign them. This is an instance where I think my own familiarity and biases for the research process came into play, as the specific names were almost an afterthought to me at this point. I pressed Betty a little further to see if I could determine why this was of particular concern to her, and she told me, “You cannot use a name from China. That is so (pause) that is so much like the truth. People will see (pause) people will see what you are writing and they will know it is me.” Even though confidentiality measures had been built into the project from the beginning, it was clear that identity and the way I presented her through my writing was a concern to Betty, so much so that even the idea of using an assumed name drawn from her home culture was unacceptable to her.

In my previous experiences working with and teaching courses for international students, it was not uncommon to have students who would identify themselves by anglicized names. Sometimes these were nicknames like Ace or Lefty. Around the time of his death, a few students asked to be called Jobs as a tribute to Steve Jobs. More often than not, students who assumed anglicized names picked common American-sounding names like Sally, Joe, Suzie, or Mike. To the best of my recollection, neither my colleagues nor I ever asked students why, but the assumption was that these students thought their real name would be too difficult for American instructors to pronounce, and wanted to spare the instructor the hassle of trying to learn a difficult name. In hindsight, I suspect this assumption came from the way this information was
typically offered up by the student on the first day of class: “Hello, my name is (student’s real
name), but you can call me (nickname).”

What is at play in these interactions is a kind of language identity assessment that causes
students to continually negotiate and renegotiation who they are and how they interact with their
instructors and their peers based on the context of a given situation (Shuck, 117). As Gail Shuck
points out, “institutional practices often impose identities on multilingual students, placing only
international students into ESL courses, for example, or determining curricula based on
simplistic native-speaker/nonnative-speaker distinctions, and therefore do not always take this
complexity into account” (118). This idea of an institutionally forced identity is similar to the
kind of instructional second language bias identified by Canagarajah (“Towards a Writing
Pedagogy,” 589-590), in that both Shuck and Canagarajah recognize that forces from the
institution, be they the traditional students or instructors students see on a daily basis, or unseen
administrators handing down directives from above, or even the larger institutional culture, insist
that ELLs change to fit whatever preconceived notions of them exist. Over time, students
become more aware of these forces and their strength within the institution and begin to
internalize the native/nonnative dichotomy, and actively attempt to change their identity to fit the
norm, symbolized by the adoption of anglicized nicknames (Shuck 133-134). Shuck elaborates:

The relatively new focus on the complexity of learner identities stems from a
recognition among scholars of composition, applied linguistics, sociology, and
other fields that identities are not fixed and objective but, rather, dynamic and
constructed. Applied linguistics have become particularly concerned with
challenging the pervasive distinction between “L1” (first language) and “L2)
(second language), a distinction that often implies that an individual’s first
language (thought to be singular) is fully developed before the individual
develops L2 proficiency… This dichotomy, along with the native/nonnative
dichotomy it entails, is rooted in the assumption that the world is fundamentally
monolingual, with every language being associated primarily with one country,
and every country with one language… Such language identities… are a
significant component of the larger contexts that shape speakers’ and writers’
experiences. (120-121).

Canagarajah and Shuck both acknowledge the role instructor and institutional attitudes about
ELLs play in shaping perceptions of these students, and how those perceptions change the ways
in which students are able to interact with and build identity. An instructor who is unaccustomed
to working with ELLs may be unable to see past the perceived influences of the first language on
the student’s written and oral communication skills, and may attempt to influence the student’s
work and identity through the imposition of the kind of native/nonnative dichotomy Shuck
speaks of. Even instructors who frequently or exclusively work with ELLs, as I previously have,
can reinforce this dichotomy through seemingly innocuous actions like accepting an anglicized
nickname rather than accepting a student’s true name. Although an individual student like Betty
may not view the world as fundamentally monolingual, the people who have a direct influence
on her daily identity negotiations might, even if they do not consciously recognize their
worldview as such. As a result, a student like Betty adopts an identifier that allows her to blend
more easily into her surroundings and interact with instructors and her traditional peers more
easily.

Betty’s insistence on being given an anglicized pseudonym for this study suggests she at
least views her current surroundings, the academic culture of MU, the surrounding community,
and the traditional students around her as monolingual, and has made a conscious decision to alter her identity to more closely fit with the cultural norms she observes. Reflecting on my former students and their decisions to pick nicknames, and the way my colleagues and I dismissed this as a courtesy to us as instructors rather than as an act of identity negotiation, I realize this phenomenon has almost nothing to do with instructor courtesy, and everything to do with students recognizing they are marked as different from their traditional counterparts, and looking to find a way to remove whatever stigma comes with this marking. This phenomenon is not limited to Betty or my own previous experiences. The third chapter of the web text Transnational Literate Lives in Digital Times features a case study of a South Korean student named Yu-Kyung Kang, who has also been given a nickname, but one that has been forced upon her by her peers and professors:

Yu-Kyung – or Yuki, as her university friends affectionately call her – is aware of often occupying different subject positions, depending on her cultural options at the moment. In some ways, her willingness to accept the American nickname Yuki rather than insisting on being called Yu-Kyung symbolizes the conflicting positions in which she often finds herself. She would probably prefer to be called Yu-Kyung, since “Yuki” sounds similar to “snow” in Japanese and seems to neglect her Korean heritage. Her friends and professors, however, are understandably less sensitive to the issue. (Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe)

The assumption of an anglicized nickname, or a nickname derived from the student’s given name that is easier for Americans to pronounce, is not just an effort to make an instructor more comfortable working with a student who has an unfamiliar or difficult to pronounce name, or help them make American friends more easily. It is an attempt to have some influence over an
aspect of identity in a context that is largely out of the student’s control, an effort to “go along to get along” in a community that expects students like Betty and Yu-Kyung to act and communicate according to a set standard. To dismiss such identity influences as “affectionate” or “understandable” devalues the experiences and self-perceptions of the students, and the struggle they may feel to fit into the larger culture they find themselves a part of. This forces students into the uncomfortable position of having to define who they are, and who they are allowed to be, in ways not required of traditional students. This has an impact on ELLs communicative practices by putting them into a position of having to assume an identity, rather than allowing them to write and interact as themselves.

Although the numbers of ELLs studying in the United States has grown in recent years, the native/non-native dichotomy, and its impact on communicative practices, is nothing new. “Students’ Rights to Their Own Language” (SRTOL), a resolution adopted in 1974 by the Conference on College Composition and Communication argues that students should have the right to use their own language variety as a means of communication and finding identity within the academy. David Bartholomae’s 1985 essay, “Inventing the University,” one of the most widely-read and cited in English studies, makes the case that students can only be successful by learning and becoming proficient at the proper style of academic discourse, which comes through understanding the context of the academy. Bartholomae’s essay, and the importance it holds in English studies, seems to fly in the face of the notion of language rights SRTOL advocates for. Some, like Allen N. Smith and Jeff Zorn, have raised legitimate concerns about the purpose, content, and effectiveness of SRTOL, suggesting that the document raises false hopes and does nothing to advocate for the benefit of students. Nonetheless, decades after the publication of SRTOL, standard American English (SAE) continues to be the norm, the watermark by which all
students – traditional students and ELLs – are judged. These concerns, and the continued focus on SAE, suggest a tension within English studies about what to teach students about their identity and communicative practices, one that the rise of digital literacy and multimodal composing hopes to alleviate, in part, through exposure to different language traditions and modes of communication, mitigating the effects of institutional pressures such as those identified by Shuck and Canagarajah.

**Self-Identity and Outside Perceptions**

Betty’s concerns about the name by which she would be identified appeared to be rooted in real world concerns that her confidentiality would be compromised; she wanted nothing of herself or her home culture to be represented here for fear this would lead people to understand who she was. Presumably, this understanding would lead to some sort of negative attention or treatment, which she felt she could avoid by adopting an anglicized nickname and seeming more like her traditional student peers. Betty did not elaborate on what her specific fears were, and my questions did not explicitly address this idea, but her concerns have an interesting overlap with a series of statements made by Aaron during his interviews. During my first interview with him, I had the following exchange with Aaron:

**JSM:** Do you think it is important for university students to learn about technology in order to get good grades in their classes, or to help them get a better job after they graduate?

**AARON:** Yeah, I think so, yeah.

**JSM:** Okay, can you say to me then, why do you think learning about different types of technology is important?
AARON: Yeah, because some technology helps us, actually, how to write, you know?

JSM: Okay.

AARON: You know? Correctly. I’m studying now, with native speakers, and they have also some mistakes in their grammars and their sentence structures, but I have a lot of mistakes in my sentence structures (laugh). And we can use technology like websites, like COCA, C-O-C-A, so we can use it to, like, better understand how (pause) the best way to use this word in a sentence.

I followed this up by asking Aaron whether he thought technology made him a better writer. Other questions during the interview asked the research participants to think about specific types of technologies in relationship to writing or digital literacy, but I specifically left the definition of “technology” in this question open so as not to influence Aaron, or anyone else’s, line of thinking. I wanted the answers provided to be as original and meaningful to the research participants as possible. Aaron’s answer echoed a lot of the same sentiments of Shuck, Canagarajah, and Betty, in that his answer focused on error correction and his personal perception, rather than any particulars of his digital literacy skill:

AARON: Because when we use technology, like (pause) for example, the text messaging, I have some problems expressing something. And I want to the other person to understand. This person, like, native speaker, usually they reply to me, like, with the messages or to correct my messages. So now I know, so now I use the technology to be a better writer. Now I know this is a mistake and I will not, like, do it again.
Similarly, when asked about if posts to social media websites like Facebook or Twitter count as an act of writing, or if he defines these types of communication in some other way, Aaron agreed that these are types of writing but returned to the idea of correction:

**AARON:** Because I usually write in my Facebook, like, in English, and there are many teachers, my American friends, so they sometimes, like, if they send me a private message, like, this is, like, wrong, you shouldn’t say it like this. You shouldn’t say it like, blah-blah-blah, you have to say something else. So this is improve writing, and this is good for writing or writers in second language. (pause) Also, in the YouTube, you may, you make comments, like, and somebody will reply to you, so those are (pause) interactive communication (pause) and they help you.

Several things stand out to me about Aaron’s answers to these questions. The first being that his answers suggest he views technology not necessarily as an additional mode of communication, separate but related to alphabetic communication in some way, but as a means of improving alphabetic written communication. The website Aaron refers to in his answer is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), an online database of texts created and maintained by linguists at Brigham Young University. COCA claims to be the largest corpus of American English in the world, and is used by linguistics to test the frequency of usage of words in American English, and to help track changes in language use and word meaning over time (“Search”). Aaron’s use of this corpus is not for experimental or hypothetical purposes, as it might be for a professional linguist, but to better understand when and how to use words in his everyday interactions with language. On one hand, this is an appropriate if perhaps uncommon use of this resource, as COCA provides texts from a variety of contexts examples (non-fiction,
fiction, spoken, etc.) for hundreds of millions of words. Given enough time, and assuming they have already acquired enough English language proficiency to navigate COCA’s search function and read the available texts, students can certainly come to a better understanding of how a word is used in real-world examples by reading the selections available on COCA. On the other hand, the fact that Aaron sought out and uses a resource designed primarily as an academic tool rather than, say, an online dictionary like Merriam Webster’s website, indicates to me that it is not enough for him to use a word in a single instance. Aaron is not looking for a one-time use word to bolster a written assignment for one of his courses; rather, he wants to achieve a level of fluency on par with the native English speakers he interacts with in his class settings. Aaron does not see multimodal composing or communicative practices as valuable to him separate from alphabetic communication. Instead, he sees technology as a means of improving what he recognizes as one of the primary forms of communication MU expects him to be able to use, and one that he must master to fully participate in the culture of the institution. In the same way that Betty asks to assume an anglicized nickname to more closely approximate the culture of MU, so, too, does Aaron use a fairly advanced digital tool to improve the alphabetic writing essential to his success and student identity.

The second thing of interest about Aaron’s answers to these questions is that, while technology can provide a means of social interaction, and through this interaction language skill can develop, this kind of interaction appears to be a strictly one-way exercise. Referring to Aaron’s answer to the question about whether technology made him a better writer, I find it telling that Aaron made a point to say the traditional students and instructors with which he communicates via text message or Facebook often send him responses that correct his grammar and sentence structure. It should be noted, however, that Aaron did not make any mention of
either asking for this kind of help or offering to give similar help to others, even though he said he found errors in the grammar and sentence structures of his traditional student colleagues. When Aaron says “I have problem expressing something,” his message here is twofold: he may have sentence-level problems expressing the ideas he wants to convey, and he may have problems expressing the student identity he is trying to put forward. Aaron engages in multiple literate practices via text messaging and Facebook, namely attempts to communicate effectively on a case-by-case basis and to become a more fluent user of English overall, but his audience reads these interactions in a critical light, forcing Aaron into accepting a role in the native/non-native dichotomy regardless of his efforts. Granted, Aaron did not say what the contexts of his Facebook posts or text messages were, but the fact that he says his traditional peers “usually” reply to him with corrective notes, and that he gets private messages telling him what he should say and how, indicates that even in a more informal, personal setting Aaron’s communicative practices are subject to scrutiny and identity negotiation.

In their case study of a Thai doctoral student, Kevin Eric DePew and Susan Miller-Cochran observe a phenomenon that both Aaron seems to be living out, that audiences read ELL identities differently than the way ELLs may intend, and that ELLs may have little or no agency over this process (275-276, 281). Rather than fighting against this perception or being more forceful in the way his identity is perceived by others, Aaron chooses to accept the identity perception put upon him because he sees it as more advantageous to him. Although Betty directly asks for an assumed identity, this action can be read as an extension of this same phenomenon because she does not resist having her identity recategorized, and in fact embraces the recategorization. These identity perceptions are important to consider here because of the influence they have over the communicative practices of ELLs, and their willingness to accept
multimodal composing as equally valid as alphabetic composing. Even when talking about compositions in an online environment where additional modes of communication such as pictures, audio files, and video footage can be used to convey information beyond what alphabetic text is capable of, both Betty and Aaron circle back to the importance of alphabetic writing and how it is used to help them establish an acceptable identity. It is important for instructors who work with ELLs to understand and acknowledge this sense of importance, particularly as multimodal communication and digital literacy continue to take a more prominent role in academic discourse. ELLs have to be shown the ways in which multimodal composing can contribute to their sense of student identity, and that the putting a premium on alphabetic texts may not be the most effective way to break out of the native/non-native dichotomy.

A Writer’s Voice

Identity may seem like a strange topic for a study examining digital literacy and multimodal composing practices, but I believe, and the data collected from my research participants strongly suggests, that ELLs see themselves as being limited in their options as writers, in terms of their ability to express themselves. At this point, I would like to draw your mind back to the story of the business English class I discussed in Chapter 1, and the unexpected reaction the students in the course had to the idea of an online video project in lieu of a final essay or exam. Though neither I nor the colleague with which I taught the course understood this at the time, what finally occurred to us after much reflection is that the reason the students in that course did not want to be perceived as less than, or as “the other,” when compared to their traditional peers. Multimodal composition allows for students to compose in a way that exposes much more of themselves than alphabetic compositions ever could. In some ways, this would seem to be a benefit for ELLs because multimodal compositions would allow for additional
means of communicating information – body language, tone of voice, imagery, web design, etc. – all of which could be beneficial to a population that may be stigmatized or marginalized for perceived language difficulties. What multimodal compositions carry with them, however, that a typical alphabetic composition does not is an expanded lifespan. An alphabetic, word-processed composition created for a course assignment is ephemeral, temporary, a snapshot of what a student knows and is capable of at a given moment in time. Few, if any, who came across that composition ten or twenty years after its composition would expect the person who produced it to have the same skill set or knowledge base as they did when the alphabetic composition was created. Multimodal compositions, because of the nature of how these compositions can be shared and consumed, live on well past their intended use and can have disastrous consequences. We are always told that nothing online ever goes away, and ELLs understand this all too well. This is a student population that is already designated as something different than their traditional peers, and like my business English students, they understand that a multimodal composition created today, when their skills are not as fully developed as they someday will be, can have consequences down the line when people see their compositions and believe they are still limited in their ability to communicate. Whether intentional or not, attitudes that privilege alphabetic composition at the expense of multimodal compositions, or the belief that alphabetic compositions are privileged over all other forms of communication, impact the ability of students to self-identify, and to communicate. As Selfe explains, these perceptions limit the rights and responsibilities students have to identify their own communicative needs and represent their own identities, to select the right tools for the communicative contexts within which they operate, and to think critically and carefully about the meaning that they and others compose. When we insist on
print as the primary, and most formally acceptable, modality for composing knowledge, we usurp these rights and responsibilities on several important intellectual and social dimensions, and, unwittingly, limit students’ sense of rhetorical agency to the bandwidth of our own interests and imaginations.

(“Movement of Air,” 618)

It is this limitation that links identity to multimodal composing, and why I think the idea of identity and perception came across so strongly in the interview data. ELLs develop an understanding of the institution and culture into which they are placed, and as a result find themselves having to adapt to the preferred method of communication and presentation because the individuals that make up their institutions do not value “the multiple ways in which students compose and communicate meaning… to meet their own needs in a challenging world” (642).

The impact these limits on communicative practice have on ELLs’ identities as writers came up during the second interview phase of data collection. Here, the research participants were asked about their writer’s voice. Cameron said he did not have a writer’s voice because all his writing was based on assignments given to him from course instructors, and therefore, his writing was filled with second-hand ideas instead of his own original thoughts. For him, identity is tied in with originality and the desire to write, rather than writing on a topic you may not be personally invested in because it has been assigned to you. “Maybe if I was working on my own things I would have a writer’s voice, but it has been a very long time since I have (pause) I guess, inflicted that on myself,” Cameron told me with a laugh. Aaron said that he sometimes had a writer’s voice, but identified his voice more closely with his spoken English. When asked what he meant, he said that he often confused prepositions like “in” and “on” when speaking but that

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9 When this line of questioning arose, the research participants were first asked if they knew what a writer’s voice was, or if they knew what I meant when I talked about a writer’s voice. If they said they did not, the research participants were given a brief explanation of the term. See Appendix I, Question 10B
he did a better job keeping them straight when he wrote, and so he sounded more like himself, but less like a fluent English speaker, when he talked. Aaron’s sense of writer’s voice is more contextual, but in such a way that privileges the written communication he sees as being more valuable to him in his student career. Like Aaron, Betty also defined a writer’s voice based on context:

**JSM:** So, having said that, do you think that you have a writer’s voice?

**BETTY:** No. Umm, it depends on what work I do.

**JSM:** Okay, can you, uh, can you explain that to me, please?

**BETTY:** Yeah, umm, just like, for example, the admission for, for university. The admission form is more formal.

**JSM:** Okay, so the admission form, let’s say? How would that be different than something else?

**BETTY:** Because it is, umm, it (pause) because I am just a student and I want to do more formal. I, umm (pause) I’d like to, uh, I’d like to write something more formal and not so, just (pause) how do you say it?

**JSM:** Is it sort of, like (pause) how do I want to say this? Is it that you want to sound more formal and more professional in certain circumstances, and more informal in some cases?

**BETTY:** Yeah, mostly I think I should be informal, but for the university I have to be more formal, to change my words and sentence.

I will return to the topic of formality and the need to be formal later in the chapter, but here again the idea of having to change the way in which you present yourself in your communicative practices is vital to fitting in, and to some degree, your academic success. I think it is telling that
Betty singled out the admissions form, which is filled out entirely online at MU, as an instance where she finds a sense of writer’s voice. Even in a strictly digital environment where there is no direct contact with another person, Betty still felt she had to change her communicative practices in order to be accepted. The idea that digital literacy would benefit a student like Betty by breaking down language barriers has not sunk in because she still makes a conscious effort to alter the way she writes to look more appealing to whoever reviews her online admissions form.

Cameron dismissed the idea of having a writer’s voice because his writing tasks are all based on other peoples’ directives. Although he did not say it, it seems he is working from the idea that writing must be personal, and that he cannot have a voice because he does not see his writing tasks as originating from his own ideas or work. Again, the students are going along to get along.

The information provided by my research participants would seem to contradict scholarship that demonstrates writer’s voice and identity is always in flux, and that ELLs can change and recontextualize their identities as writers depending on the situation (Lu and Horner, 26-27). Indeed, one of the biggest selling points of multimodal composing has been the potential for all students, regardless of age, cultural background, or economic status… of being a great equalizer in educational settings, including writing classes. Shy students can express their ideas freely; ‘foreign’ accents disappear, as do physical characteristics and even gender if the users wish; and students from all parts of the world can communicate instantly. Identities become blurred, created, and negotiated as participants… transcend obstacles that silence many students in traditional classrooms. (Casanave, 212).

I, however, do not see the concerns of my research participants as fundamentally divergent from the research. Rather, it seems the people I interviewed see the “context” of their communicative
practice differently than others. When discussing writer’s voice and identity among ELLs, scholars often frame their arguments in the context of the composition classroom (Casanave, Lu and Horner, Shuck, DePew and Miller-Cochran). Instead, the data from my research participants point towards a larger context than just an individual course, or even a series of courses, and an attempt to negotiate a safe, acceptable identity and writer’s voice within the context of MU. Rather than focus on a specific writing course – whether under the auspices of the MU ESOL Program or the First-Year Composition Program – or even the idea of “composing” as it applies to their entire course load, the research participants see themselves functioning in a context that has already marked them as outsiders, or “others,” and to make the most of their time as MU students they must assume an identity where they most closely resemble the norm of the institution. This identity may fluctuate somewhere from one course to the next, with a student feeling less restricted in, say, a chemistry class than in a writing class, but the overall context of the university is the one where the research participants see themselves operating.

It may seem unusual to talk about student identity and identity perceptions in a dissertation about multimodal composing and digital literacy – at least it did to me when I began examining my research data – but the more time I spent with the data the more I began to see these two areas as being linked. What became clear to me in talking to my research participants is that they are very concerned with the way they are seen and perceived by others – their peers, their instructors, and the world at large.

Alphabetic Attitudes

Instructor Attitudes

The fluctuations in identity, and the “go along to get along” attitude from which it stems comes, or is at least perpetuated, in part from the professional challenges that can arise from
working with ELLs. To be clear, when I say “professional challenges,” I am not suggesting that instructors or scholars who work with ELLs are not highly trained or fully competent, nor am I saying that multimodal composing practices are a lost cause in ESOL instruction. I am also not suggesting that ESOL instructors feel differently about their students of their responsibilities to those students than instructors who only ever work with traditional students. Rather, the challenges I have in mind come from helping students see and understand how digital literacy and multimodal composing practices are important to their academic careers, and how these tools can help unlock new avenues of communication for them. For this to happen, professionals working with ELL populations must buy into the notion that developing digital literacy and multimodal composing skills is a worthy pursuit.

As an example of what I mean, I once found myself having a conversation with a colleague from another department about the relevance of digital composing practices for ELLs. Like me, this person regularly worked with ELLs and was always on the lookout for new ways to help students succeed at the institution. Unlike me, this person was not completely convinced digital compositions were necessarily a good thing for ELLs because, while we agreed that it was good to have a variety of communicative tools at your disposal, she felt instructors might be doing a disservice to students if they are not focused on teaching ELLs more typical language fluency and competency skills. My colleague’s thoughts on ELL instruction were similar to the arguments of Ferris, and her focus on grammar and error correction, as discussed in Chapter 1. My colleague framed her concern around the idea that ELLs will only be judged successful by their ability to adopt SAE and use it at a level comparable to traditional students, so as an instructor it was imperative for her to do whatever she could to support the acquisition of SAE. She believed ELLs would be more successful on the job market or when applying for an
advanced degree program if they had received more rigorous instruction in grammar and syntax, as one might expect in a more standard ESOL course curriculum, and worried if she was somehow being derelict in their responsibilities by focusing on skills that may be useful in a university setting but may not have as immediate an impact on the daily lives of her students. Continuing to build on Shuck and Canagarajah’s points about ELLs and institutional roles, it is worth revising Matsuda’s myth of linguistic homogeneity (“Myth,” 637-638), and recognize that the native/non-native dichotomy owes much of its influence to forces from individual instructors. This is not to say that my colleague or others in a comparable position do not have the best interests of their students in mind. I have no doubt that my colleague was genuinely, deeply concerned about the well-being of her students, and the tension she felt between wanting to introduce a means of communicating that could help students overcome language barriers and the desire to help them succeed using a standard by which she and the students know ELLs will be judged is very real.

Nonetheless, students like Betty and Aaron internalize attitudes about language and correctness from the people around them, even though the attitude itself seems contradictory to movements in the field. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), leading professional organizations for English instructors and scholars, have issued position statements such as “Resolution on the Student’s Right to Incorporate Heritage and Home Languages in Writing,” “NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs),” and “Students’ Right to their Own Language,” all of which advocate for a greater level of equality for and understanding of the needs of ELLs, and the challenges of teaching to this student population. And yet, as Shuck, Canagarajah, and Matsuda attest to, the day-to-day acts of
instruction and interaction enforce structures on students at the detriment of identity and originality. Christine Pearson Casanave identifies the tension instructors may feel when faced with the desire to do what is right by their students and what is expected of them by the institution:

[T]eachers must concern themselves with kinds of language and writing that students need to succeed, must avoid imposing particular political agendas in classrooms, and must work to maintain neutrality and objectivity to the extent possible in how and what they teach… [Another] view is that writing teachers should be aware of imposing aspects of a dominant (usually English-language) Western culture such as notions of individual voice or critical thinking on L2 students, particularly on those from non-Western cultures. (197-198)

The tension between wanting to do what is right for the students’ identity and wanting to give students the tools to succeed at the institution sends mixed signals to students that can be difficult to navigate: stick with the prescribed order and succeed, though it may cost you a sense of personal or academic identity, or try to stretch out and represent your native culture and language traditions in your work to an audience that may be unable or unwilling to accept it. This leads to questions about what role technology should play in helping to alleviate these concerns, given that multimodal compositions have the potential to mitigate language barriers and remove stumbling blocks of comprehension. Problems may arise from this tension because some ELLs may not see technology as serving this role, or they may not have confidence in their instructors’ ability to help them access technology to this end.

When asked about whether their American instructors use technology in the classroom, particularly if they use technology more or less frequently in classes with ELLs compared to
classes with traditional students, the general attitude of my research participants was that while instructors may turn on a computer terminal, or use PowerPoint slides for a lecture, or display images in some other capacity, all too often technology is more of a background concern than a major pedagogical tool. For example, Danny’s answer to the question was that “she (the ESOL class instructor) never uses the technology, she just opens the computer for, only to show us the assignment and where we should submit it, but more than that she refers the book, she tells us what to do from the book.” Greg could only think of one instance where an American instructor used technology, and like Danny, the level of technological interaction was limited to when and where to submit an assignment. The issue here is not that ELLs are unwilling or unable to use technology, as the data collected from the online survey shows this student population has a high level of digital literacy, defined here as both the ability to use digital technology hardware and software, but also the ability to use those technologies to effectively complete a given task. ELLs do not need the what, in terms of digital literacy as much as they need the why and the how; that is, why digital literacy is important and how it can help them improve their overall communicative, literacy, and academic success. Question 15 (see Image 1) in the online survey asked research participants to list the types of technologies they regularly use specifically to help them write, and 98% of participants said they use a laptop computer to write, with online dictionaries (64%), cellphones (61%), and desktop computers (39%) also popular choices.
Additionally, when asked to rate the number of times per day they used certain websites or mobile apps (see Image 3), several options were selected as being used more than five times per day, the highest possible value in this question, or three to four times per day: 87% of research participants reported using email at least three times a day, with Facebook logging 48% usage, Watsapp (a mobile app that operates similar to text messaging) logging 45% usage, and YouTube logging 43% usage. And while only 37% of research participants knew what the term “Web 2.0” meant, 98% understood what the term “social media” meant, and their technology
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<th>3-4 times every day</th>
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<td>7.27% 4</td>
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</table>

Figure 3: Screenshot of Survey Question 11 results taken from Qualtrics.
usage suggests ELLs use tools and websites that fall under the categories of Web 2.0 and social whether they understand the meaning of these terms or not.

Despite my data showing that ELLs have a high rate of digital literacy, there does not seem to be a push to translate this usage into digital composing pedagogy. Question 17 (see Image 4) of the online survey asked research participants how often their American instructors taught them how to use new technologies, and only about 7% responded “My instructors teach me how to use new technology all the time.” The most frequently selected answer, at 41.82%, was “My instructors teach me how to use new technology only if I need to know how to use that technology for the class.” These answers support the uncommon technology usage experiences reported by Danny and Greg, and combined with questions about technology usage show that ELLs are as receptive to using technology as anyone else, but the instructors working with this
student population have not yet found a way to incorporate these tools into their classroom practices in a way that is meaningful for students. As a result, the relevance of digital literacy, multimodal composing, and the tools that allow for both, may be lost on ELLs. On one hand, it should be noted that compared to alphabetic, hard copy compositions, multimodal composing still occupies a smaller range of overall compositions at MU, and I suspect at other institutions as well. But it is also worth noting that MU is fairly technology rich: there are computer terminals, projectors, and Wi-Fi access in all classrooms; and laptops, tablets, video cameras, and audio equipment is available for all students to check out through the campus library. Despite the presence and availability of these resources, digital literacy and multimodal composing seems to be almost an afterthought in ELL instruction, an attitude which is reflected, to some extent, among my research participants themselves.

“Why Do You Want to Study This?”

As I did with the section about student identity and composition, I turn here to an off-the-cuff question from one of my research participants, this time Janet. After going over the informed consent form with her, I gave her a moment to ask me any questions that may have come to mind about her rights as a research participant, my efforts to keep her identity confidential, or any other questions about the interview to come:

**JSM:** Do you have any questions for me before I begin the interview?

**Janet:** Yes, umm, what are you studying?

**JSM:** Well, I’m looking at the ways students write. I’m looking at how English language learners use technology to help them write, or if it changes how they write. I want to know what instructors like me can do to help students write better with technology.
Janet: (pause) Uh, why do you want to study this?

JSM: Umm (pause) well, I think there are benefits to this kind of study. You know, there are a lot of international students in America now, and a lot of instructors are starting to use things like websites and blogs and Twitter to help with class assignments. I want to understand if these are good things to use, or to better understand how students use those things.

Janet: I think you should study something that will help us, like how to write better English and how to sound more like native speakers. I think that would help us more with our major courses and help us be better students.

Janet’s questioning of the relevance of my study about digital literacy and multimodal composing practices came as a surprise, and in the moment, I had a little trouble answering her question. Throughout the study, I have been open to discussing my research and what I felt were its merits with my research participants, but the directness of Janet’s question caught me off guard. My reaction, though isolated to a single conversation outside a classroom environment with someone I have never worked with in an instructional capacity, is nonetheless indicative of the problems instructors may encounter when trying to introduce multimodal composing practices to ELLs. Janet’s skepticism of my work is not a singular belief. In fact, the data suggests a more wide-spread distrust of digital composing practices among ELLs when compared with alphabetic, word-processed, hard-copy documents. During the initial phase of interviews, Question 30 asks the research participants to choose between a set of options regarding how they would like to have their compositions consumed by others:

a. I would rather let someone read an essay I wrote and printed from my computer.
b. I would rather let someone listen to an audio recording of me reading an essay I wrote and look at the printed essay at the same time.

c. I would rather let someone listen to an audio recording of me reading an essay I wrote without being able to see the printed essay.

d. I would rather let someone watch a video of me reading an essay I wrote without being able to see the printed essay.

e. I would rather let someone watch a video of me talking about a topic without anything for me to read from.

Given this list, eight of the ten research participants picked the first option, having someone read an alphabetic, hard-copy text. Cameron was the only one to pick the second option, to have someone listen to him read a text he produced while also having access to the printed hard-copy of said text, while Fran was the only one to pick the final option, having someone watch a video recording of her talking about a topic. In both cases, however, there is a caveat. Cameron liked the idea of an audio recording as a more personal way of communicating, but his reason for selecting the audio recording with the printed essay was because he feared others would not understand him if he got nervous and made a mistake while reading, creating a snowball effect that would impact the entire composition. He wanted to avoid this problem by giving the audience a script to follow along with his work. Cameron singled out the final option as particularly troublesome to him, calling the video option (option “e”) “a distraction to whatever might be the message I’m trying to say;” that is, people would be more focused on his body language, his accent, his manner of dress, or other audio and visual cues, and not pay attention to whatever larger point he was trying to get across. Fran’s selection was related to the fact that she was enrolled in a public speaking course at the time my interview with her took place, and felt
she needed more practice at impromptu presentations to be successful in the class. When asked whether or not her answer would change if her course enrollment were different, or if she could make another selection based on the courses in which she expected to enroll the following semester, Fran said she would pick the alphabetic essay. Taking the answers into consideration, and factoring in Cameron and Fran’s reasons for selecting other options, in all ten cases the alphabetic text is privileged. As Cameron’s answer demonstrates, even though some of the other options may allow additional means of communicating information, such as tone of voice or body language, which may help minimize any negative perceptions of language difficulty, standard alphabetic text continues to be favored as the prevailing mode of academic discourse.

When asked a follow-up question about why they selected the option they did, some research participants even singled out these alternative modes as being somehow inferior to the words on the page, similar to the mistrust of video that Cameron talked about:

**BETTY:** So, when I want to show my essay to others, you know, uh, (pause) read the essay is more (pause) you can show, maybe the voice with the essay is with some emotions. And maybe somebody hear that and miss something that you, that she can’t with the paper. It’s like, uh, (pause) the essay is more (pause) I think more direct.

…

**DANNY:** When I do the video they can see the body language, and when I talk to someone, you know, if they have, if I have some corrections, they might see it, and maybe they think the wrong thing.

…
GREG: Because speaking is the weakest aspect of English for me, and I can write far more better than I can talking.

IRENE: It’s just a piece of work, there’s no need for your friend to look at your emotions and what you are, ah, what you think when you are reading.

Alphabetic writing is seen as a purer form of communication, less likely to be complicated or influenced by outside factors like emotion or audience misperceptions. The discussion about student identity and perception earlier in this chapter is an important one given the answers provided by Betty, Danny, Greg, and Irene, because both points relate to how students are perceived. The emotions of the audience; how the audience perceives body language, accents, or other speech irregularities; and misheard or misunderstood statements can influence how the compositions created by ELLs are understood in a way that would be absent in written discourse. This is not to say that alphabetic compositions would be free of errors, since, as Aaron pointed out earlier in the chapter, his compositions have errors with grammar and sentence structure. As with Betty’s request to be given an anglicized nickname in an effort to better fit into her surroundings, when it comes to the way they are understood and perceived in a communicative act, the research participants did not want to leave anything to chance. Alphabetic writing is privileged because it cuts out the distractions, for lack of a better term, and gives ELLs a sense of control over how their communicative practices are received and perceived that multimodal compositions do not have, or more accurately, that ELLs have not yet been convinced of. An alphabetic text may be identified as belonging to an ELL in other ways, but there is no way to escape accent, body language, tone of voice, etc., in a video or audio composition, and given the choice students who struggle to find identity and acquire language proficiency may be unwilling
to engage in a communicative practice they see as having a greater risk of miscommunication and/or marking them as something other than a traditional student.

**What Constitutes “Writing?”**

Given my own experiences working with ELLs, and the fallout from the video project from my business English course mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, the view that multimodal composing is not as pure or relevant as alphabetic composing was one that I felt needed to be explored in more detail. Thus, questions were worked into the survey and the second phase of interviews asking research participants about multimodal compositions – specifically photographs, audio recordings, video recordings, and posts to social media websites and apps – and whether these types of compositions were considered “writing,” or used the same skills someone would use when composing an alphabetic text. Despite the apparent preference for alphabetic compositions that came up in the first phase of interviews, the data from collected across all three phases of the project were mixed. Turning first to the survey data, in response to a question that asked respondents to identify all acts from a list of ten options they considered to be a form of writing (see Image 5), 70.91% of research participants identified “creating and writing on a weblog, or blog,” and 61.82% identified “posting a status update on Facebook” as a type of writing. “Sending a tweet on Twitter,” “posting something on a message board (such as Reddit, 4Chan, or Gaia),” “Posting comments or status updates on other social media apps or websites (such as Google+, Flickr, Pinterest, or LinkedIn),” and “commenting on a video on YouTube” were also among the more highly selected answers on the survey, with each of these options being selected within the low 40% range. These numbers indicate the research participants believe digital composing qualifies as an act of writing, at least in some form, but it should be noted that all of these options involve alphabetic composition of some sort. The
options that did not involve any direct use of alphabetic composition scored the lowest: “making an audio recording” (1.82%), “making a video recording” (3.64%), and “taking pictures and posting them on Instagram” (20.00%). The last option for this question was left open, allowing research participants to write their own answers for other acts that qualify as writing. Sixteen people submitted wrote in their own response, and each of these answers were some variation of “writing academic papers.” These findings support the previously discussed question about which composing methods the research participants would choose from the list of five options, where alphabetic composition is favored almost across the board.
The picture of what constitutes writing is complicated by responses from the two interview phases. Questions 12 and 13 in the first interview phase asked research participants to give a definition of writing, and to explain what “writing” means to them personally. In terms of definition, Fran’s answer was closest to the definition I would give if asked the same question – “To use language to express your thoughts.” – but most of the research participants all gave very similar answers. For example, Greg’s definition of writing – “Recording our ideas in a physical manner so that others can see what we think, so that if someone else wants to see what we think.” – and Irene’s definition of writing – “Putting your thoughts on paper. That is it, whatever you think, just put it on paper.” – are both very much in line with the definitions given by the other research participants. Notice, too, that both Greg and Irene make mention of a physical process or item like paper, in their definitions. When asked what writing means to them, I again saw similarity between the answers. Greg said simply that writing was “one of my methods of communication.” Fran said that writing to her meant panic, her answer punctuated by nervous laughter. She later explained that writing was a “hobby,” something she had used in the past to express her thoughts “in a way that has meaning for me,” but that she found the more structured writing assignments in her courses to be stressful. Irene’s answer was somewhat longer, but like Greg, it also stressed communication: “My thoughts, my expressions, my views, my opinions, everything I can write down in formal language and share with others.” Initially, these answers suggest ELLs see some blending of formality and informality in writing, and view it as both an official function and an emotional one. These questions were followed up by discussions of what specific actions count as writing, namely if writing as an alphabetic exercise carried the same weight as other types of compositions, namely video, audio, and photographs.
Previous answers by Betty and Aaron point towards writing as a very rigid, formal exercise, a means of communication that must be mastered in a specific form and for a specific purpose to be useful in the university environment. As previously discussed, when asked why they would choose alphabetic texts over audio essays or video recordings, the research participants often pointed to emotion, or the perception and misunderstanding of emotion, as a reason for avoiding non-alphabetic, multimodal compositions. And yet, answers by Fran, Greg, and Irene hint at the interplay between the formality of university-level writing assignments and more informal means of expressing ideas, emotions, and opinions. Because of this, one might expect a level of openness to multimodal composing practices, or at least to the idea that creating something a video or audio essay that would have some of the same properties as alphabetic texts, but did not have the kind of rigid structural expectations of the kinds of academic assignments students are asked to produce, but this did not prove to be the case. For instance, none of the research participants agreed that video or audio constituted a kind of writing, or that it had similar compositional qualities to alphabetic writing. In trying to understand the apparent disconnect between the research participants’ viewpoints on alphabetic versus multimodal composing practices, I found myself going back and looking at the language my research participants used to talk about alphabetic writing and multimodal composing, and a trend began to emerge. Again and again, when talking about alphabetic compositions like the essay assignments or tests they are asked to complete for their courses at MU, the research participants used words like “formal,” “correct,” and “improve,” typically in a way that indicated a positive connotation. Alphabetic writing, like the kind done for a course assignment, should be formal, and it is good to work to improve your written English skill were sentiments that came up in several of the interviews. The specific phrase “I want to be correct” was used by both Fran and
Irene multiple times during their interviews, and it was clear the idea of becoming “correct” was a goal to which they aspired. In a way, this was not entirely surprising to me. As Terry Myers Zawacki and Anna Sophia Habib point out, ELLs often struggle with the kinds of structured academic assignments their American professors expect them to write because many ELLs come from academic cultures where learning to be original and develop a writer’s voice, and to think critically about the works and topics being assigned to them, is not as highly valued as rote memorization or deference to established research (55-58). Developing an individual writer’s voice and learning to think critically about topics and texts, traits that are largely indicative of and vitally important to western academia, are “taken for granted as an analytical skill that people develop as they are socialized and educated in particular cultures, such as Anglophone Western cultures,” and therefore may be new and difficult for ELLs to acquire (Casanave, 206).

“Writing” versus “Composing”

When it came to discussing multimodal compositions like videos, audio essays, or even posts to social media websites, the words “emotion” and “emotions” were repeatedly used, as were “not understand me” and “misunderstand,” “personal,” “opinion,” and “informal.” While I anticipated the preference for “correctness” in academic writing, I did not expect to see such a difference of opinions on this topic. I suspect this is owing, at least in part, to my personal bias for multimodal composing and digital literacy practices, as I sometimes forget that other students, instructors, or researchers may not be as invested in multimodal composing practices as I am. Answers that came up during the second phase of interviews shed some light on this difference, and point to an important distinction regarding the composing practices and preferences of ELLs. Near the end of the interviews I asked research participants about what they saw as the difference between “writing” and “composing,” and whether or not these were the
same action since some instructors and researchers may use these terms to speak about the same actions.\textsuperscript{10} When asked, “Do you think writing can be multimodal?” I received the following answers from Aaron and Cameron:

**AARON:** Because sometime, uh, like Facebook, you have to chat with some other person in English, for example, and at the same time we can write messages, we can use videos, we can record ourself in the same moment, we can use audio to do recording.

**JSM:** Okay, so in those cases writing can be multimodal?

**AARON:** Yeah, sometimes, I wrote something and the person didn’t understand it, so I record my sentence and when I write it I try to correct it. So in this case this is like the, multiple way of writing.

... 

**CAMERON:** If it was written at some point, then I guess I – the audio would not be a writing.

**JSM:** Okay.

**CAMERON:** Like, what I am saying now is not a writing, in my opinion.

**JSM:** Okay, even though I’m recording you speaking right now?

**CAMERON:** There is always a written form of things, like picking up a pencil and paper. There is also the stance that, like, you are speaking to a computer and letting the computer do the writing for you. That’s what I had in mind when I said, uh, when I said it can be multi (pause) that’s what I was talking about.

\textsuperscript{10} As with the question about “a writer’s voice,” research participants were asked during the second phase of interviews if they understood what the terms “multimodal” and “composing” meant. If they said they did not know what those terms mean, I provided definitions. See Appendix I, Questions 3B and 19B.
As before, the idea of alphabetic communication being privileged comes up, as both Aaron and Cameron only give validity to multimodal composing through its relationship to alphabetic composing. For her part, Betty did not think writing could be multimodal, saying simply, “I think what you write down is what you write down.” I then asked if “writing” and “composing” mean the same thing, or if these words represent something different from each other, to which I received the following responses:

**AARON:** In the term, I think (pause) in the term writing, I think they mean the same, but not in the composing.

**JSM:** Okay, what do you mean?

**AARON:** I think when you are writing and you put things together, and you make it accurate. But when you compose, maybe, sometimes when I talk to native speakers, I notice they have some problems with their grammar, so maybe the way they say it is not, like, it is too personal and they don’t know what to say about it, so it comes out different.

…

**BETTY:** No, I think it is more complicated. Composing (pause) you have to (pause) writing is something more difficult, like you have to read some article or something. Composing is what we do in our life, or something. It is more like who we are.

**JSM:** Okay, so, so, (pause) so composing is something you do every day, but writing is something more complicated, that takes more time?

**BETTY:** Yeah, I think (pause) I think it is more (pause) it is more about your emotion and what you think and not about what is correct.
CAMERON: When I hear the two words and I think about the two words, I think about (pause) I think about, composing is putting a little more of yourself behind it, whereas writing would be more straightforward and less thinking.

JSM: Okay. (pause) I’m not sure I understand what you mean when you say “less thinking.” Can you explain this to me a little bit more, please?

CAMERON: Right, like you’re not thinking about your own thoughts or your own emotions with writing. Like, to compose a message or to write a message, if I write it I would think a little more about it, who I was sending it to, what was my relationship with that person, and how did I want to express myself to them.

Composing, I would just do it and send it off.

JSM: So then, are there certain tasks that you would consider writing but not composing?

CAMERON: (pause) I think the whole part about thinking, thinking about what you’re going to say and how you would say it to a specific person, that is not composing. There is too much, that is too personal.

JANET: For clarity, I like to write on paper, with a pen and paper. When I was at home in my office I used to write on (pause) I had two monitors on my desk and I would use those, but I like to write on paper, and I use my laptop a lot now. But I can’t use a phone to write with, and I hate to use tablets. I see some of my classmates use them and I hate it.

JSM: (laughs) Okay.
**JANET:** You know, hate is a strong word, but that’s accurate.

In these passages, my research participants are making a clear delineation between writing and composing as something formal, and accepted by the academic community at MU (writing), and something more personal or routine, something with the potential to convey more emotion but with less intellectual power (composing). Their viewpoints are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, but both Harold and Edward also made this distinction, comparing “composing” to something more along the lines of artistic works like music and painting, which align with the distinctions made by Aaron, Betty, Cameron, and Janet.

For my research participants, writing is at once practical function, something done every day for a variety of purposes, but at the same time those purposes always have a pragmatic slant to them. The act of writing may be done to fulfill course requirements, or to create a grocery list, or to email a professor, but not to express personal emotions or opinions in the same way that composing would. Furthermore, these daily functions have some root in alphabetic texts. To paraphrase Cameron, it is only writing if the information is physically transcribed somewhere, as with a pen and paper. In some ways, this may simply be a problem of definitions. I could assign any label to the day-to-day tasks my research participants label as “writing,” or any label to the more personal, expressionistic communicative practices labeled as “composing.” What all of this tells me is that as instructors working with ELLs, we have not done enough to help this student population understand how the skills used to compose an alphabetic, word-processed essay translate into other forms of communication, or made full use of tools such as blogs, web texts, audio and video essays, online lectures, etc., to help this study population communicate. Given that those instructors who work with ELLs may have a tendency to focus on grammar and syntax at the expense of the ideas being expressed by students, this definitional disconnect, for lack of a
better term, can present a significant problem for ELLs who are already struggling to communicate when compared to their traditional peers. The value, efficiency, and practicality of multimodal compositions seems to be lost on my research participants, but not for a lack of access or familiarity to technology. This suggests to me that the level of instruction given to ELLs is too limited in scope, and that in order for ELLs to be able to participate fully in the communicative practices necessary for success in an academic environment like MU, instructors should be integrating more of these resources into their curriculum.

One significant caveat that I think is important to note here deals with the majors of my research participants. I did not directly question them on the kinds of courses they were taking, aside from inquiring about their ESOL requirements, but in the course of speaking to them some of my research participants mentioned being computer science, engineering, chemical engineering, and business students. In studying their responses to my questions, it occurred to me that it was possible none of my research participants had majors that fell within the typical purview of the humanities, liberal arts, or social sciences. This would not be uncommon given the international student population at MU,¹¹ but it did give me reason to think my research participants may have a different relationship with language and literacy than students whose academic pursuits are similar to my own. Owing to their academic programs and career interests,

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¹¹ For the record, I do not have any statistical or demographic data to back this up. This observation is based solely on anecdotal evidence. From January, 2014, to August, 2015, I worked as a graduate student administrator for the ESOL Program at MU. In that capacity, I regularly worked with international student enrollment and demographic information, and from this work I came to see that many of the international students at MU were enrolled in degree programs in math, science, and engineering fields. Those students who did enroll in humanities, liberal arts, or social sciences programs generally did not require ESOL courses as part of their academic programs, either because they had received high scores on the MU-administered language placement test, or had taken and received high scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) standardized test, both of which would exempt those students from ESOL coursework at MU. Based on this information, it is possible that the initial recruitment email sent from the ESOL Program did not reach many humanities or liberal arts students. This may skew the results of my project, but given what I know about the ELL student population at MU, and considering that the demographics of the ELL student population at MU may be similar to the demographics of ELL student populations at other institutions, I believe the data I collected is still valuable.
my research participants may have a different view of language and literacy, and the roles they play in daily life as both students and future professionals, compared to students in language arts, history, literature, communications, or similar degree programs.

**Student/Instructor Hierarchy**

If Canagarajah and Shuck are correct and the way ELLs are taught how to write is somehow different than other student populations because of perceived language differences or deficiencies, and if this difference in pedagogical practices applies to multimodal composing and digital literacy, the question then becomes how do practitioners working to education and studying the composing practices of ELLs work to erase this difference? Put another way, how do we, as instructors and researchers, close the technological composition gap between ELLs and traditional students, even if the gap only exists because of a kind of definitional misunderstanding of what “writing” and “composing” mean? One way, undoubtedly, is by showing students that we understand the technologies we expect them to use. As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the challenges is that a number of resources designed to help instructors better understand how to teach with Web 2.0 or other technologies spend more time working to convince people to use these tools than discussing how they can directly benefit students or help them overcome communication problems (Pennington, Walker and White). Whether this technological gap is an intentional move by instructors to limit student access to different pedagogical tools – and to be clear, I do not think it is – is irrelevant, as both ELLs and traditional students form opinions of their instructors’ competency based on what they see in the classroom. The rise of multimodal composing in some ways parallels the rise of English as a global language, and ELLs understand both of these things to be skills necessary both as a way to “effectively express their ideas in various academic fields,” but also as an “amalgamation of
education, personal experience and skills that contribute to the impact of the workforce” (Ganapathy and Kaur, 549). Despite this understanding, the willingness of ELLs to part ways with alphabetic composition in an academic setting depends on the willingness of instructors to adopt these communications methods, and to impart the importance of these methods on the students. The impressions instructors give their students, whether they realize it or not, can have as much influence on the ways in which ELLs choose to communicate, or their impression of how important digital literacy and multimodal communication is to their development as students, particularly as student writers, as the larger need to identify as a fully functional member of the MU community. The apparent preference for alphabetic composition demonstrated by my research participants may have a strong connection to their sense of student identity, but to some extent it is also the result of years of student/instructor interactions in which multimodal composing and digital literacy are absent from the classroom.

When I wrote the interview questions for this study, I included a question about technology usage for traditional students compared to ELLs in the first interview because I thought students might perceive their access to certain resources as limited due to their status within the MU community. As I began to code the data, I returned to this question because I thought might provide insights into when and how ELLs use technology or how their digital literacy has developed over time. But as is often the case with a grounded theory approach, what I found and what I expected to find were two different things. What I found had less to do with usage or literacy, the development of student writing, or perceptions about whether instructors were any more or less likely to use technology with one group or the other. Instead, the answers had more to do with what I can only think to describe as a student/instructor hierarchy. An unexpected attitude emerged from this question regarding whether instructors used technology
more or less with ELLs than with traditional students, or even if instructors knew more or less about the technological resources available to them than the students did. The answers the research participants provided had more to do with their status as students, and what they say as their relationship to their instructors. Time and again, even if research participants seemed unhappy about the use of or access to technology in their classes, the idea of questioning the competency of the instructor, or even considering that they as students might know more about technology than their instructors, was almost unheard of:

**JSM:** Do you think you know more about using technology to write than your instructors?

**DANNY:** No, I don’t think so.

**JSM:** Okay, why do you say no?

**DANNY:** She’s been in (pause) I think she has been (pause) she is a professor, she is a doctorate. She knows more than me. That’s why she is teaching me, you know? I’m that, I’m here to learn from her. I think that’s the main thing.

…

**JSM:** Do you think you know more about using technology to write than your instructors?

**GREG:** Oh no, no-no-no!

**JSM:** (laughs) Oh wow, okay (pause) um, so why do you say that?

**GREG:** Because we don’t use much of technology in that way in our country.

**JSM:** Oh, okay, so is that because it’s just not available, or it’s just not used as widely?
GREG: Because it’s expensive, and why would you use it when you can do the same thing with a book or with paper?

JSM: Okay, but what about here in the United States? You’ve been taking classes here at MU for a few weeks now, what do you think about your American instructors?

GREG: No, they are the instructor, so of course they know more than me.

…

JSM: Do you think you know more about using technology to write than your instructors?

IRENE: Absolutely not!

JSM: Okay, why do you say that?

IRENE: They are more experienced than me, I am the one who should go and get advice from them.

JSM: Okay, so it’s kind of like an expectation, is that right? You’re the one who has to go and get the knowledge from them?

IRENE: Yes, I can go (pause) I mean, you compared me to the instructors, so obviously their knowledge and their expertise would be greater than mine. No one would come into a class where I was a student and think I know more than the instructor. Absolutely not.

Expense notwithstanding, the general impression here is that regardless of whether the instructors make use of technology or digital resources to help ELLs communicate, the instructor is still seen to be the expert from which the student draws information. Even if the subject being taught is not strictly technological in nature, this idea of the instructor as the expert remains, as
Janet stated in her answer: “I think it might be different from one major to another, but no, the instructor is always going to be more knowledgeable than the student.” This belief that instructors are unquestioned experts regardless of the topic or the lesson plan is important to understanding the digital literacy and willingness to adopt multimodal composing practices because it shows the influence instructors can have with ELLs. If instructors are unwilling to allow multimodal composing practices to any degree, or if they dissuade students from using their digital literacy skills to aid in communication, or if someone is openly hostile towards anything other than word-processed alphabetic texts, students will take these attitudes as a natural extension of the student/instructor hierarchy and be less likely to seek out or accept multimodal composing practices. If this is the case, those students will be more likely to internalize potentially harmful ideas about their identity, their voice, and their role as students, perpetuating a cycle of otherness the data provided by my research participants suggests is already firmly established. Based on these findings, I would suggest instructors working with ELLs work to craft lessons and course designs in such a way that are at least open to the possibility of multimodal composing and digital literacy, even if the preference is still on alphabetic writing. In this way, students can explore their communicative practices, find their voice, and learn more about how their identities contribute to their writing process.

Although I have been critical of works written about ELL multimodal practices that spend more time trying to convince instructors to use technology in their classroom than explaining how or why technology benefits ELLs, this data suggests instructors need to take a more hands-on role in helping ELLs understand the ways multimodal composing can benefit them, and how to maximize their existing digital literacy for this purpose. ELLs do not need the what, in terms of digital literacy as much as they need the why and the how; that is, why digital
literacy is important and how it can help them improve their overall communicative, literacy, and academic success. It is not enough to say that multimodal composing is becoming more commonplace in academe, or that such skills have real world applications in the work force, or even that these skills can help minimize or erase the kinds of language barriers that may otherwise hold ELLs back from full participation in the university environment. What ELLs need is a hands-on approach and encouragement that can help them break down their internalized preferences for western alphabetic traditions, which, in turn, can help them reshape their identities as students and the contexts in which they communicate. This is not to say that caution should not be taken. If ELLs see themselves as part of an educational hierarchy where they are below their instructors in terms of knowledge and experience, it could be easy to manipulate these students even with the best of intentions; my experiences working with students to create video projects could be seen as an example of this, albeit one where I hope I can say calmer heads and student interests eventually prevailed. But if instructors believe as I do, that multimodal composing practices and digital literacy skills are essential for 21st century communication within and without the academy, it is imperative that they make this belief known to their students. The data collected for this project suggests that ELLs as digitally literate as their traditional counterparts, and open to the idea of multimodal composing, but that an information gap exists where the merits of multimodal tools has not been made completely clear to this population.

Conclusion

At the risk of overstating the obvious, the topics and corresponding data discussed in this chapter were not what I had initially expected to find. This is not to say I had a set agenda in mind; one of the great things about a grounded theory approach is letting that data speak for
itself, rather than you. The importance of identity, the persistence of alphabetic compositions, and student/instructor relationships on the writing process of ELLs, and how often these points came up across the data, are especially noteworthy to me. If I had to distill this chapter into a single, significant takeaway, it would be the need to push for continued understanding – understanding of the needs of ELLs, understanding of how our attitudes and actions as instructors can instill both useful and harmful implications in the students we try to serve, and how instructors can work to help ELLs better understand the importance of and value of multimodal compositions as a communicative tool that can serve them as students and beyond. In this chapter I have explored several issues that presented themselves through my study of the research data collected as part of my dissertation project, and tried to position those discoveries within the context of works by other scholars with whom I agree and disagree. Aside from the dictates of the degree program for which this dissertation is the final requirement, my goal in undertaking this project so was to better understand how to serve the ELL student population, not only at MU, but across the spectrum of American higher education, and what instructors and scholars could do to be of more service to a student population that is often overlooked when compared to their traditional peers. I feel as if this information only begins to scratch the surface of what can be said about these topics, and hope to be able to expand on these and other issues in later publications. Chapter 4 will continue to explore some of these same issues by presenting case studies of two of my research participants, Edward and Harold, who, because of their front-and-center role in that chapter have largely been put on the backburner here. The case studies will inform the discussions presented in this chapter, as well as provide additional insights into how ELLs view multimodal composing and digital literacy, and explore how the individual
attitudes and opinions of these two individuals provide additional insights into the digital literacy habits of the larger ELL population.
CHAPTER IV: CASE STUDIES: “EDWARD” AND “HAROLD”

Introduction

From the beginning of this project, I knew I wanted to include at least a case study of one of my research participants in this dissertation. Trying to narrow down which research participant to feature was no easy task. Although I always planned to focus on one of the research participants who participated in two interviews, deciding which one was more challenging than I expected. I suppose having an abundance of information from which to choose is not a bad problem to face, but all my research participants had been so forthcoming and generous in their answers that finding just one person was never going to be easy. While discussing my proposed project and the form I saw it taking during an early planning meeting, I expressed my concerns about this process to a member of my dissertation committee and suggested that two research participants had begun to stand out for a variety of reasons, which I will describe in more detail shortly. This member of my committee was the first person to suggest I should consider providing a brief case study for both individuals as a way to further explore the digital literacy and multimodal composing habits of ELLs, and how perceptions about digital literacy and computer mediated writing could help instructors better understand the needs of this student population.

From the five research participants who agreed to be interviewed twice, I finally settled on “Edward” and “Harold” as my case study subjects. As I began transcribing the interviews, coding, and taking notes on the information provided by all the research participants, several factors helped these two individuals begin to stand out to me as the most likely candidates for case studies. The first thing that caught my attention is that they each represent a different side of the international student spectrum at MU. As mentioned in Chapter 2, I previously spent time
working for the ESOL Program Office at MU, and from this experience I learned that while MU attracts students from all over the world, as evidenced by the different home countries of my research participants, most of the international students at MU come from either the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or the People’s Republic of China. Edward, as a Saudi Arabian student, represents a very common demographic background for ELLs in America, so it made sense to select him as an example of a “typical” ELL. Harold, hailing from the Republic of Turkey, falls into a more nebulous catch-all category at MU, as his nationality is not widely represented on campus. In reviewing the information provided by these two individuals, it occurred to me that having two students representing both common and uncommon cultural backgrounds on campus might help me better understand the needs of ELLs in a broader sense, which, after all, is one of the primary goals of my study.

In addition to cultural difference, several other factors contributed to my selection of Edward and Harold. One such factor was a difference in age, which, again, seemed to me a good way to get a broad sense of how to best serve a student population as diverse as ELLs. Edward falls more closely in line with the definition of a “traditional” student, being 24 years of age at the time my interviews with him were conducted. Harold, at 30 years old, would likely be seen by many scholars as a “non-traditional” student, and for reasons I will explain in greater detail later in this chapter, he had a greater sense of how his status as an international student and an ELL contributed to success outside the academy. Finally, there seemed to be an additional quality to my interviews with Edward and Harold, an attitude that is difficult to describe. More than the other research participants, both men seemed at ease when speaking to me, and seemed to view our interviews more like a conversation between friends than as some sterile activity in which they were only passive participants. Even though the questions did not directly ask for
them, both men seemed more willing to expand on their answers by drawing examples from their own lived experiences, which helped me understand who they were as individuals more fully than with any of the other research participants. For these reasons, it was clear to me that Edward and Harold were the most appropriate choices for these case studies.

This chapter presents the case studies of Edward and Harold, and uses the data provided by them to further explore issues of identity, technological preference, instructor attitudes, and the challenges of working with ELL student populations. As with previous chapters, each case study has been divided into several subheadings to assist in reading. Owing to space limitations inherent in the dissertation process, I have had to be selective in terms of what materials are presented in this chapter. I plan to expand on these case studies in the future, and possibly add more case studies to these two in preparation for publication. That said, I did not have to deliberate over the data for long, as I feel the information presented here represents the most frequent points of concern and attention that presented themselves as I coded and notated my interview transcripts.

Case Study #1: “Edward”

A “Typical” Choice

In addition to the aforementioned country and age demographics, another factor that makes Edward a more “typical” choice is his attempts to prove language proficiency. Like many of the international students that arrive at MU, Edward took the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) – a standardized test that measures the English reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiency levels of non-native English speakers, and is frequently used as either a condition of admission and/or a marker for placement into ESOL courses for international
students applying to American colleges and universities\textsuperscript{12} – prior to enrolling in classes, and like many students, his TOEFL scores were not high enough to exempt him from taking ESOL courses at MU. Edward attempted to retake the TOEFL to get a higher score, thus exempting himself from ESOL courses, but was ultimately unable to do so, and as a result did not start his ESOL courses until later in his program of study. This, too, is not uncommon among ELLs at MU.

One thing that is, perhaps, not as typical when compared to other ELLs at MU is that Edward reported having been an English writer for well over a decade, largely engaging in academic exercises:

\textbf{JSM:} For how long have you been writing in English? This can be how long you’ve been writing for school, outside of school, for work, or in other settings.

\textbf{EDWARD:} I think (pause) I would say fifteen (pause) fifteen to eighteen years.

\textbf{JSM:} Fifteen to eighteen years?

\textbf{EDWARD:} Yes.

\textbf{JSM:} Okay, good. So, what kinds of things do you write? This can include anything from class assignments, to emails, to text messages, to letters.

\textbf{EDWARD:} Yeah, okay, uh, nowadays I mostly write for class –

\textbf{JSM:} Yeah.

\textsuperscript{12} A quick note about institutional protocol may be helpful at this point. MU uses TOEFL scores to either exempt from coursework, or place international students into ESOL courses, based on how the scores compare to a placement matrix developed by the MU ESOL Program Office (these scores are not used as a condition for admission to the university). Students without TOEFL scores, or whose scores are more than two years old, are required to either retake the TOEFL or take a placement examination designed in-house by the MU ESOL Program Office. The in-house placement examination consists of a written test, which is scored for grammatical/syntactical accuracy, essay structure, and reading comprehension; and a listening/speaking test in the form of a one-on-one interview with a member of the MU ESOL faculty, in which students are evaluated based on their speaking fluency, vocabulary complexity and usage, and listening comprehension. This testing/placement protocol is nearly identical to the testing/placement protocol at the institution where I taught ESL prior to coming to MU, and in talking with colleagues over the years, seems very similar to the protocols used at a number of other institutions.
EDWARD: – and other academic purpose, like writing a paper for a class, or a
final exam. I used to write a blog, but now I just write for academic purpose, I
don’t have any time to do anything else.

JSM: Okay, that’s understandable, but those were not academic things you were
writing for, on your blog?

EDWARD: No.

Confirming findings discussed in Chapter 3 suggest, Edward has no problem accessing or using
technology, as his previous experiences with a blog suggest; again, it is not the what students like
Edward need, but the how and the why. Interestingly, although Edward has been writing in
English for a long time, he was still required to take an ESOL writing course before he could
take the undergraduate writing course sequence required of him:

JSM: Did you find the building okay?

EDWARD: Yes, actually, uh, I have a class in this building. I have my ESOL
class with “Ms. Jackson”13 right down there.

JSM: Oh, okay, so you were already familiar with the building?

EDWARD: Yes, I have been here before, and I think (pause) yeah, I have been
here before to talk to Dr. Jones,14 so I know where it was, but I have never been
down this hallway before.

JSM: Oh, why did you come to talk to Dr. Jones?

EDWARD: Well, I, ah, I came to see her when I arrived because I didn’t think I
should have to take the ESOL courses, because I had TOEFL scores that were

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13 As with Dr. Jones, the name of Edward’s ESOL course instructor has been changed to help preserve confidentiality.
good, and I was accepted to the university, but I had to take some writing class before I could take the first year writing class that I must take.

... 

**EDWARD:** I have been writing in English for a long time, and I feel very comfortable writing in English, and actually, it would be more difficult for me to write in my native language and translate it into English than it would for me to write something in English.

**JSM:** Are you talking about for your classes, or...

**EDWARD:** Yeah, just, anything. 

... 

**JSM:** How many days a week would you say you write in English?

**EDWARD:** Uh, if you mean all kinds of writing, if you look at, I would say every day.

**JSM:** Okay.

**EDWARD:** And, I mean, I think about all kinds of writing, the emails, online –

**JSM:** And I do, I want you to include all kinds of writing when you answer this question, okay? So, so you would say every day?

**EDWARD:** Every day.

**JSM:** Okay, so how many hours a day would you say you write in English?

**EDWARD:** (pause) I would say, right now (pause) I would say, maybe half an hour a day, so that would be, like, three and a half hours a week.

This information in these exchanges, and the information about his previous blogging experience, is important to understanding who Edward is as a student writer and an ELL because
it shows that Edward is someone who takes his literacy skills seriously, but is nonetheless marked as an outsider in the MU community because his English is not perceived to be of the same fluency level as his traditional peers. This, despite many years of study and work, and an insistence that writing in his native Arabic would now be more difficult to him than writing in English.

**Defining Writing**

It would seem, then, that Edward might be someone who would embrace multimodal composing as a way of overcoming some of these perceptions, or at least as another tool to help him practice his English fluency skills. But like the other research participants, Edward does not frame his opinions on what constitutes an act of writing in a way that includes or values multimodal composition. As many of his peers in this study did when answering similar questions, Edward views writing as a strictly alphabetic exercise, specifically one where you are “putting down on paper any kind, like, the thoughts that you have,” again referencing the belief that writing is an always alphabetic, but also that it involves a physical, tactile action to qualify as a written act. And yet, when pressed to explain what writing means to him personally, Edward says that the definition of writing can, and for him has, changed over time, and makes a point to include his former blog and social media posts:

**EDWARD:** It [writing] has meant different things at different times. Like, when I (pause) when I used to write a blog, that was a way to express myself, you know? And, I, uh, I decided to say certain things, not so-and-so, someone else, I just wanted to get certain things out there. Now it’s more of, it’s, it’s more of a communicating tool, like, I have ideas about mostly academic things that I want to communicate, so now it’s more into that sort of thing… Nowadays, most of the
non-academic writing I do is on social media, so I (pause) I’m either just talking
to friends, or we are discussing something, like, somebody shares an article or
something., about something that happens are we are sharing opinions, so that’s
me (pause) that’s the main way that I write non-academic.

Edward makes a distinction between academic and non-academic, and the idea that academic
writing originates with someone else, a “so-and-so,” presumably a course instructor, who makes
decisions about appropriate topics, style conventions, and genres without the input of the writer.
While he can understand writing to take place in a digital format like his blog or social media
accounts, this distinction is linked to his belief that writing is a primarily an alphabetic exercise,
especially when it comes to academic writing. In reviewing Edwards interview data, I realized
that at no point does he mention multimodal compositions or digital literacy when speaking
about his course assignments unless I ask him to, and even then, the topic always seems to circle
back to alphabetic communications. For instance, when I asked him what other types of
communicative practices he engages in that might be considered writing, he mentions emailing a
professor to ask questions because he cannot make office hours. Even when I asked him directly
if writing can include pictures and sound, he quickly moves to dismiss even the suggestion that
writing could be something non-alphabetic: “For me, as far as I’m concerned, I mostly, I almost
entirely use words. I never use pictures, even though they are available to me, and I know they’re
there, I’m not (pause) opposed to them being there, it’s just that I don’t use them.”

Edward’s relationship to digital literacy, and his acceptance or rejection of it as
something important to his communicative practices, presents a complex picture that is difficult
to classify. On one hand, to paraphrase Stuart A. Selber, literacy and communicative practices,
broadly defined, seem to have been beaten into Edward with a “blunt too,” a strict, heavy-handed
approach to literacy that privileges specific acts of composing, and thus writing only happens when it serves an academic function and meets a set of defined characteristics dictated from above (33). Edward’s literacy practices at times leave little room for nuance or development, preferring the type of “‘corporate’ understanding” that Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes discuss (emphasis added):

In the constant onslaught of the new, we should not overlook the sheer rhetorical effectiveness of repetition, the comfort of the repeated, the persuasive force of stating again and again something believed to be true… [T]he proliferation of individual voices might at times give way to a safe sameness, the desire for “corporate” expression, as opposed to individual agency. (174)

Harold’s English literacy practices are rooted in the Ferris-style adherence to grammar and syntax instruction common in ESOL or English as a foreign language (EFL) courses of instruction, a type of corporate expression that values adherence to prescribed rules and order over expression, and seeks to enforce a standardized means of communicating. His definition of writing as both alphabetic and tactile, relying on hard-copy productions, being a product of his educational background, is a manifestation of this as it most closely matches the corporate expression he has been taught to value. When asked whether he thinks technology helps him to be a better writer, he said he thought it did, but named spellcheck programs and online thesauruses as examples of helpful technologies, framing his use of technology by its relationship to grammar and syntax. As I stated in Chapter 1, I am not against grammar, syntax, spelling, or punctuation instruction strictly speaking, and in my experiences working with ELLs I have often found these students to be better grammarians than I or their traditional student peers because they have practiced and repeated grammar rules so many times. Useful though they may
be in helping to acquire language fluency, this “correct grammar at all cost” attitude, for lack of a better term, can hamper ELLs’ abilities to acquire or accept additional literacy or communicative skills. As shown in Chapter 3, Edward’s reliance on alphabetic communication, and his rejection of other tools to communicate even when he knows they are available to him, is one of the end results of repeatedly pushing correct grammar and syntax on ELLs without consideration of other modes.

The Job Market and “Need”

On the other hand, Edward that understands digital literacy, and the technologies that make it possible, are powerful forces for change, and that these forces are important for future success outside MU. Like many of the other research participants I spoke with, Edward takes a pragmatic approach to his studies and literacy practices, seeing them at least in part as a foundation of future career aspirations rather than as something to pursue for purely academic interest. When discussing whether learning about new technologies should be an important part of the education process, his answer was strikingly similar to my own: “Because access to technology opens up so many ways of getting knowledge, so it is important (pause) it is important to know what all, what all is available to you. Especially the university gives you a kind of setting now, opportunity to take advantage of that.” This opinion about the university as a place to take advantage of new information and opportunities would seem contradictory to his statements elsewhere about the nature of writing and his literacy practices, which are much more rigidly defined, until it is viewed in context with the following exchange about the relationship between digital literacy, the job market, and getting good grades:

**JSM:** So I mentioned two things, specifically: getting good grades and getting a job. Of those two things, which do you think is more (pause) I mean, why is it
more important to learn about technology and how to communicate, to get good grades or to get a good job after you graduate?

**EDWARD:** Because getting a grade (pause) I mean, people have been getting good grades for years. (laughs) You know what I mean?

**JSM:** (laughs) Sure.

**EDWARD:** So (laughs) so you don’t really need to be aware of all technology to get good grades. Maybe in some classes this is different, but most of the time you can just read a book and get a good grade, you know?

**JSM:** Okay.

**EDWARD:** But the market keeps changing when technology changes. You need to be aware of technology to get a good job.

**JSM:** Okay, that makes sense.

**EDWARD:** You *need* to be aware of technology to get a good job.

As an instructor and researcher, my sense of priorities when it comes to technology are completely different from someone like Edward. Where I might advocate for technology as a way to help make coursework at MU easier to approach and more engaging, or to breakdown communication barriers, Edward sees technology as a means to a very specific end, one he must master in order to achieve the goal of getting a good job. As he said, he *needs* to learn about technology to be competitive on the job market.

I find Edward’s use of and emphasis on the word “need” here especially worthy of consideration because it tells me something about the way ELLs like Edward approach digital literacy. This idea of “need” is not something that was prominent in any other interviews I conducted. Edward was the only person I spoke to as part of this project who talked about
technology as something he needed, and that this need had a specific real-world application. People trying to get their hands on the latest, flashiest technology is nothing new, but this need to have the most up-to-date gizmo often appears to have an almost jealous, “keeping up with the Jones’” feeling to it, a sense that you need the newest, latest gadget to be hip, young, and relevant. Edward is not trying to be flashy or hip, or to impress in a conventional way. Edward simply wants what many students want: to finish his degree program and to have access to the best career prospects, and while he may privilege alphabetic writing above multimodal composing, he will adopt whatever tools he thinks will help him achieve these goals. His use of “need” also came up when discussing the learning of new technologies. For instance, when asked during his first interview whether he would like it if his instructors would teach him more about how to use technology to improve his writing, he said no because “I already know what I need to know about technology.” There is a kind of blunt pragmatism to his approach that is, in its own way, quite refreshing. Whenever something goes wrong with my computer, or my cellphone drops a call, or some other technological tool fails to function as I expect, I can often be heard to say, “Technology is great, when it works.” Edward’s attitude takes this somewhat sarcastic quip to its most logical, practical conclusion. Yes, technology is great, but if it does not work for me, or Edward, or anyone else, what purpose does it serve? This, it seems, is the challenge of incorporating multimodal composing and digital literacy into coursework with ELLs. As Pamela Takayoshi and Cynthia L. Selfe note in the first chapter of Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers, rhetoric and composition as a discipline runs the risk of becoming irrelevant if it does not adapt to changes in technology and adopt the composing practices these changes bring with them (3). Similarly, if instructors working with ELLs cannot make greater strides to help ELLs accept digital literacy and multimodal composing as valid communicative practices, these
students run the risk of moving farther outside the mainstream of American higher education. The student population is receptive, but the conversation needs to be framed in a way that they can see multimodal tools as filling some need beyond just fulfilling a course assignment.

Edward’s need for technology puts into words the sentiments of many ELLs I have met, both while bringing this project to fruition and beyond. This need to make the *how* and the *why* of multimodal composing is where Edward needs help understanding how these tools can work for him.

The idea of need came up several other times in my interviews with Edward, often with an added emphasis on the need to prove one’s own skillset, or to help differentiate oneself from a group. During the second interview, when questions came up about whether collaborative writing had the same level of importance as individual writing, Edward again spoke of the things he needs to accomplish, or rather, the need to show that he has accomplished something:

**EDWARD:** It’s different. In my case, I would prefer to write by myself, and then go back to the group and show them what I have done.

**JSM:** Okay.

**EDWARD:** And then you can get instant feedback from your friends and they can tell you what you did. And then if the professor asks me, you know, “What did you do?” I can show him my work, but I need to be able to show him what I have done so I can get a good grade. Because it’s different when you write with other people because you get instant feedback, and you can change what you have done, but, I don’t know, maybe what you did is not right, and then you give it to the professor and he doesn’t like it. So (pause) so I think I need to be able to show what I have done, and that way the professor, he can see for himself what I have
done and if it is right. I just (pause) you know, you can’t just let other people do things for you all the time. I need to show what I can do, what I am capable of.

**JSM:** Okay. (pause) So, so just (pause) think about the kind of writing you were just talking about, where you are working with a group of people –

**EDWARD:** Yeah.

**JSM:** – would you say that is more or less important than the kind of writing you do on your own?

**EDWARD:** I don’t know that one is, maybe, better than the other. I think, maybe, sometimes that can be good because you can get different (pause) different perspectives on things, and maybe that can help you be better, because you get different ideas and you see things differently. But for me, I need to be able to show what *I* am capable of on my own, what *I* can do. You have to be able to flesh out *your* point of view, *your* standpoint on something.

**JSM:** Okay (pause) so, try to imagine now, from the perspective of a class instructor, okay? The class instructor is trying to grade assignments that you have written by yourself, and assignments you have written with one or more persons.

Do you think the class instructor would grade an essay that you wrote with another person differently than an essay you wrote by yourself?

**EDWARD:** I think (pause) I think the instructor would grade it the same way (pause) because, the processes is pretty much the same. I mean, I don’t know about this, but I think, I don’t know how the instructor can differentiate between something you do on your own and some of the other people, and just seeing what I do on my own.
JSM: And that’s, that’s kind of what this question is getting towards, is, you know, how would the instructor – so let’s say you’re working on something with two other people, right?

EDWARD: Okay.

JSM: How would the instructor know what was your writing, the things that you brought, compared to the other two people? How would they would be able – the instructor, now – how do you think they would be able to tell the difference?

EDWARD: Tell the difference, yeah. (pause) I don’t know, I don’t know how they would tell the difference between them. Because the thing is, it’s a group assignment, so he is looking for something that reflects the ideas of the group, so it should be something that arrives, that is a combination of the different opinions, and so, umm, I’m not sure how you can pull out, this is from that person and this is from that person. But I think you have to do that for grading purposes, but I’m not really sure how, when, how confidently you can do that. That’s why I like to do my own work, you know? (laughs) Then I don’t have to worry about it.

JSM: (laughs) Sure, I can understand that.

EDWARD: (laughs) That’s too much stress.

Later in the interview, when I pressed for more details about writing as a collaborative process through services like Google Docs, or writing on multiple devices in the same or in remote locations, Edward seemed to struggle with the idea that this type of writing could fulfill his need to showcase his writing skill:
JSM: Have you ever used a system like Google Docs, which allows more than one person to work on writing something at the same time, while on different computers or in different places?

EDWARD: Oh, yeah, I know what that is.

JSM: Okay, what is your opinion of those types of systems?

EDWARD: Those can be helpful for, really, any, collaborative project you might work on, but like I said before, I think (pause) in my experience it has never stopped me from writing. It definitely makes you think more about whether you should put something down, because maybe someone else will be working with you and they will forget to say something, so you need to put it down.

JSM: Okay, sure.

EDWARD: But I don’t (pause) if I need to go back to the professor and show him, you know, I was writing with these people and these people did this and this and this, and this was why you gave the group a bad grade, and I did this other thing here, I don’t know if he is going to believe me. So maybe you don’t want to, maybe you’re not going to try to experiment with writing because you think you will not do well, and your classmates will not do well, and this will make you to get a bad grade. And this is why I don’t like to use these systems. I have to be able to do my own work and get my own grades and not depend on what everyone else does.

Taken together with Edward’s previous thoughts about composing as a strictly alphabetic, inherently physical act, the need to prove himself as a writer presents a picture of Edward and other students like him as someone who struggles to find their identity in an academic and career
focused world where the literacy skillset increasingly needed to be successful contrasts with a more traditional view of literacy.

Edward’s thoughts on composing can be viewed as emblematic of the tension between the Horner-Ferris camps discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1: the struggle between self-actualization and changing composing and literacy habits versus faithfulness to the more traditional grammar, syntax, and writing instruction and practice generally taught in ESOL courses. Although drawing a broad generalization can be dangerous, my experience teaching ELLs tells me this tension in Edward’s thinking is not an isolated incident. For instructors like myself who take both an interest in digital literacy and an actively work to expand the use of multimodal composing practices in our courses, the view that composing is and must be both alphabetic and physical is a significant stumbling block. What this tells me is that composition instructors must be advocates for broadened communicative methods that include multimodal composition. Instructors must take a writing across the curriculum-type approach and push for greater acceptance of multimodal composing and digital literacy, and encourage those students they work with to pursue these practices beyond their composition classes. If multimodal composing is ever going to be an effective tool for breaking, overcoming, or otherwise minimizing communicative difficulties, real or otherwise, then the push to bring multimodal composing into widespread practice cannot be limited to composing classrooms filled only with traditional students. Multimodal composing must be seen as something more than just a one-time use object, but as a valid, fluid, and fully functional method of communication. Edward’s opinions on the matter suggest digital/multimodal compositionists still have a long way to go towards overcoming the idea that multimodal composition is not *real* composition, to be valued and trusted just as fully as alphabetic and/or hard-copy composition. This will not be a simple
task, as this suggests a complete overhaul not only of how academic composition is taught in American institutions of higher education, but also how students like Edward receive English language instruction in their home countries, a proposition that would take an almost unheard of level of academic reworking. But I would suggest that to help students like Edward succeed moving forward, this level of change, or as much as can be reasonably expected, is exactly what is needed.

**Another View of “Writing” versus “Composing”**

As it often seemed to be for other research participants, Edward made a clear distinction between writing and composing, and his distinction harkens back both to his ideas about writing as a physical, tactile practice, and to the idea of technology filling a need. Early in his second interview, I asked Edward what he considered to be acts of writing, and his answer covered a lot of the practices I would expect from this question: ‘Writing fiction, writing essays, academic essays, emails (pause) I think the social media, like the Facebook, status updates and Twitter. I think you would have to consider those writing because so many people do them, you know? You would be missing out on something.” On the surface, this seems like a promising approach to the topic digital literacy and multimodal composing, as I would count things like email composition and social media posts to be a type of digital literacy. If I were teaching a composition class and Edward was one of my students, I would try to use these “alternative” writing options like Facebook and Twitter to help him open up his composing practices and translate the basics of academic writing – argumentation, essay structure, synthesis, etc. – into these mediums. However, when pressed for a little more information on the topic, he again fell back to a position of alphabetic supremacy:
JSM: So, given that definition\(^{15}\), do you think that writing can be multimodal?

EDWARD: Umm, I’m not sure about that, because (pause) the two modes I can think of are writing by hand and typing on a computer. In my personal experience, I haven’t felt a different between – and this is just me!

JSM: Okay, sure, of course.

EDWARD: I never felt a difference between writing on the computer and writing by hand.

JSM: Okay, so what (pause) what about a book, or something that has, you know, alphabetic writing and photographs in it.

EDWARD: Okay.

JSM: Two different ways of communicating information.

EDWARD: Yeah.

JSM: But they’re both being used together. Would you consider that to be a kind of multimodal writing, or is that something completely different?

EDWARD: (pause) I think it’s different in the sense that, uh, it’s not the same. It’s word on a page and it’s an image on a page.

JSM: Okay.

EDWARD: In that sense it’s different, but as far as, uh, the reader is concerned, you might be using the same ana- (pause) analyze the same tools, the same analytical tools to understand both of them. So in that sense, I would say they are the same.

JSM: Okay (pause) so for the reader they would be the same, but maybe not for the person who produced the book? Is that…?

\(^{15}\) See Footnote 9, Chapter 3, page 70.
EDWARD: Yeah, that’s right.

Edward seemed to have a line in the sand, with “writing” falling on one side and “composition” falling on the other, with no overlap between the two. This was another instance where my own predilections came to the forefront, and I found myself struggling to understand the difference between these two concepts. I could appreciate the idea of writing as a physical action, such as putting pen or pencil to paper. Since most people, I assume, learn to write by hand before they learn to type, there is a certain primal understanding of physical alphabetic communication and “writing” as producing something tangible. Introducing the idea that writing or composing was something impermanent, or not physical in a way recognizable to the naked eye can be difficult to comprehend, even for digital natives.

Although I have not always had the language needed to articulate this desire, I suppose a great deal of my desire to understand how ELLs interact with and benefit from technology – or not, as the case may be – comes from a desire to understand the sorts of lines of demarcation like the one Edward draws between “writing” and “composing.” As mentioned above, Edward previously listed writing fiction as an act he considered writing, and when I talked to him about his distinction between “writing” and “composing,” so it might be expected that this act somehow plays a role, and sure enough, Edward returned to this topic later in the second interview:

JSM: Writing instructors and researchers like myself sometimes use the words “writing” and “composing” to talk about the same action. Do you think that the words “writing” and “composing” mean the same thing, or do they mean something different?

EDWARD: Uh, no, I do think they are different.
JSM: Okay.

EDWARD: Composing (pause) uh, that to me kind of has this added element of, I think, creativity to it. It has that sort of, I don’t know (pause) baggage, if you will. (laughs)

JSM: (laughs) Okay, okay.

EDWARD: If you want to use that.

JSM: Okay.

EDWARD: I mean, there is this added, uh, notion that you are creating something, and you say you are composing, in the same way that you are, uh, compose music, you compose a piece. Whereas writing is, writing (pause) writing kind of describes the act itself, of putting pen to paper, of typing on the computer, and it also describes when you have ideas and you put them together, but the ideas come from somewhere else. Like, you read them in a book, or you learn something in class. I’m not creating anything new, you know? I’m writing about things I already know, that someone else has already, uh, discovered about.

JSM: Okay, so then, are there actions you could consider composing but not writing? You mentioned one, composing music, and I think about, oh, where is it? (papers shuffling) Okay, I can’t find it right now, but a few minutes ago I had a question and you mentioned fiction writing as an act of writing, but it sounds like maybe that’s something you might call composing instead?

EDWARD: Yeah, right.

JSM: And are there some actions you would consider writing but not composing? Are there any others you can think of?
EDWARD: Yeah, if you, if you’re writing a summary of something, like a book you just read, uh, I’m not sure how much that is composing. Especially, uh, if you’re not, you’re not giving any opinions or judgments on the book, you’re just writing what it’s about. So I would say that’s definitely writing, not composing, but if you’re making up something new, a new story, a new (pause) new music, you know? That is composing.

For Edward and other ELLs like him, and perhaps for other student groups as well, the trick to getting them on board with multimodal composing techniques and digital literacy initiatives is in convincing them these communicative practices are as helpful and valuable as the alphabetic composing they are more familiar with. For Edward, especially, working to break out of the mold of hard-copy or physical compositions provides an additional stumbling block that must be overcome. The challenge for composition instructors working with these students is to move beyond the perception that multimodal composing is, to borrow an old expression, just playing on the computer. Even if something like a video or audio essay has many of the same structural and argumentative features of an alphabetic, word-processed, hard-copy essay, the presentation is viewed as too flashy, too over-produced as it were, to be valuable. When Edward talks about composing as something creative and artistic, like music, I believe this is exactly the kind of demarcation he is referring to. Just as he could not see a book with alphabetic text and pictures as a kind of multimodal composing, neither could he see a multimodal composition as a being on par with his preferred method of communication.

This, then, is what I see as the challenge in working with ELLs while also advocating for multimodal composing and digital literacy. The issue is not about getting students to accept new forms of technology, or about faculty being experts on every digital tool to be found. The
challenge is working counter to decades of pedagogical practices that privilege word-processed, alphabetic writing as the end-all-be-all of academic composing. Given that this type of instruction has been the norm for as long as it has, one can hardly blame Edward or anyone else for being hesitant to take on new methods, and yet Edward himself knows that his competitive edge is dependent on being able to adapt with the changing times. Recognizing this hesitation, and understanding where it comes from, can go a long way towards helping ELLs overcome language, cultural, and identity barriers and achieving the kind of job market success Edward values. These methods can help a student like Edward be seen and appreciated for his contributions to an academic setting, rather than as a student whose spelling and punctuation need to be corrected. The challenge is in getting the students as invested in the process as the instructor, or the institution, or even the field of rhetoric and composition itself.

Case Study #2: “Harold”

Unique Demographics

If Edward represents many typical demographic characteristics of the ELL population at MU, then Harold is anything but typical. A 30-year-old student from Turkey, Harold is both a non-traditional undergraduate and a citizen of a country that represents only a small percentage of the ELLs on campus. Like many of the research participants I interviewed, Harold decided to study in the United States because he felt he would have more and better career prospects with

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16 A majority of the international students at MU, regardless of their enrollment in ESOL courses, are either from China or Saudi Arabia. These two demographic groups account for about 75% of the overall international student population at MU. A number of other nationalities are represented on campus, as evidenced by the diversity of the backgrounds of my research participants, and while together they represent a sizable chunk of the international student population, no one demographic along makes up a large percentage of the overall international student population. Harold’s native Turkey makes up a particularly small percentage of the student population. At one point in our initial interview, Harold told me he had spoken to a representative from the MU Office of International Student Services and was told there were only three Turkish students enrolled at MU the previous academic year. Neither Harold nor I had enrollment figures for Turkish students for the academic year during which our interviews took place, but given what I know about the international student population on campus I suspect the numbers were equally low.
a degree from an American university, but unlike anyone else I interviewed he had already tried to establish himself in the workforce as a computer technician, but found the job prospects in his home country to be lacking. Harold spent some time living and working in Germany with no more luck than he found in Turkey before deciding to switch careers and further his education in the United States by studying communications, possibly to become a journalist. Like Edward, Harold’s TOEFL scores were not quite high enough to exempt him from having to take an ESOL writing course at MU, but he seemed to take this in stride: “I like writing. Everything I do revolves around writing: work, school, studying. So I don’t mind taking another class if it helps me get better.” Right away I found myself drawn to Harold’s story, because it was so unlike anything else my other research participants had told me about themselves. It occurred to me that stories like Harold’s are probably not frequently shared when discussing the role of ELLs or their place in American academics, and given my desire to treat my research participants fairly and equitably, I felt almost compelled to include Harold’s information here.

Technology Usage and Digital Literacy

One of the first things that struck me about Harold is that, like Edward, he is open and able to use new technologies, but often falls back on more traditional, “tried and true” methods of composing. As a case in point, consider the following exchange in which I asked him to list the kinds of technologies he uses to write:

**JSM:** When you write, what kinds of technology do you use to help you write? And what I mean by that is, do you use a desktop computer? A laptop computer? A mobile device, like a tablet? Something else?

**HAROLD:** Now, that is diverse. I use all of them. A desktop, a laptop, a tablet. Actually, I don’t have a desktop. I have a laptop and a tablet, and I use those most
of the time, but I do occasionally use a desktop on campus, in the labs. Mostly, uh, in terms of academic stuff, I type on my laptop, or I actually write, with a special stylus on my tablet, because I like the act of writing with my hand.

**JSM:** That, that kind of physical act of writing.

**HAROLD:** Yes, that’s it. I like typing, too, but it depends on what I’m writing at the moment. But there are, you know, so, sometimes I switch to old school notebooks, pens and papers, because I love them, too, but it’s so heavy to carry all of that around with me and dig through it all to find what I need. So I have a ton of notebooks at home, but with the tablet I have it right there, and I can sit in the student union or ride the bus and do what I need to do without any hassle. In fact, I even use, umm, newer style electric typewriters.

**JSM:** Oh, really?

**HAROLD:** Yeah.

**JSM:** Wow! (laughs) I have to say, I did not expect anybody to say that. (laughs)

**HAROLD:** (laughs) Yeah, not very often, they’re hard to find, but I do use all kinds of technology in that sense.

Like Edward, Harold finds himself returning to physical writing actions at times, even if this is via an electronic medium like his tablet. The symbolism of Harold’s stylus writing stands out to me, as it represents the most direct clash between multimodal composing and digital composing I found in my data, a literal meeting of alphabetic text and high technology that replicates a familiar physical action in a way that is both new and different. Even when given different options, options that he regularly takes advantage of like his laptop, he continues to fall back to physical and alphabetic means of communicating. The prevailing attitude here would seem to
suggest that more options do not necessarily lead to greater interaction with or benefit to the composer. Harold claims that he mostly uses his laptop or his tablet to compose, but at least in the case of the tablet he still relies on a type of handwriting. His admission that he occasionally uses electronic typewriters is another case where a more “old school” technology like a typewriter suggests to me a dividing line between older, more traditional, and somehow more acceptable means of communicating, and newer, less familiar, less academically tested – at least to some – means.

Despite his level of access, Harold does not see himself as either adept at or having been greatly influenced by digital literacy. At one point, in an effort to better understand this divide, I asked Harold directly if he thought technology made him a better writer:

**HAROLD:** (pause) No, not really.

**JSM:** Okay, could you tell me why, please?

**HAROLD:** (pause) Not technology that is related to writing itself, but other aspects of technology.

**JSM:** Okay, can you tell me a little more about that?

**HAROLD:** (pause) I think, especially the internet, it, uh, causes a lot of distraction. That’s one thing. So if I was, for instance, if I was somewhere and there was internet and a computer, and I had to stay in a room, I would mostly (pause) what I mean by that is, because of technology, the time I would spend or that I could spend on writing is less than if I had been born a hundred years ago. So what I’m mostly talking about is things like summarizing a book, or looking for information, and I can type faster than I can write by hand, even though I enjoy writing by hand. But if I think about the way that I write, or how I think
about what I am writing, or how I express myself; no, I don’t think that has made my writing any better.

Harold views technology and its impact on composing practices as means to an end, rather than as a valuable technology. This is a puzzling opinion, especially given that, like Edward, future career prospects play a large part of Harold’s understanding of composing practices: “Maybe this is because I’m older, and I’ve been in the workforce before, but I know that you have to be able to adapt. You have to be flexible and take on new ideas and new ways of doing things, so even though I enjoy actual writing, I find myself going back to technology and trying new things so I can be more competitive.” As with Edward, the need to be a competitive is a driving force, but Harold’s motivations are geared more towards showing what he can do and not the kind of need that Edward expressed. I do not doubt that Harold feels this same need; I expect he would have to, given his career choices. Nonetheless, Harold’s attitude about technology is more measured in this way, and is suggestive of a confidence bred from experience that other research participants appeared to lack.

What I hear from Harold is that while he is open to digital literacy and multimodal composing practices, he is not yet fully sold on their usefulness when compared to more traditional modes of composing. Put another way, digital literacy has made him a more effective writer, in so much as it has allowed his output to be increased because of the speed at which he can find information and produce compositions, but this does not necessarily mean his ability to write has improved because of the digital tools at his disposal. For Harold, writing instruction has, to an extent, become irrelevant in much the way Takayoshi and Selfe warned about. Because his instructors have failed to give him multimodal composing options, or presented those options in a way that gives them value as a student or in the context of future career success, Harold has
largely written off the effectiveness of these tools compared to alphabetic and/or word-processed composition. I find this to be noteworthy not only because of the implications this viewpoint has on composition studies, but also because Harold is in a program where technology and digital literacy is the backbone of his studies. My own preference for digital composition may be coming through here, but if any of my research participants would reach out and embrace digital composing practices as a means of effective and efficient communication, it would seem to be Harold. By his own admission, he is what I would call a digital native, freely able to move between devices and modes of communication, be they a laptop, a tablet with a stylus writing function, pen-and-paper composition, and even a typewriter. At one point in our interviews he even says with confidence, “Sometimes I think I know more about these things than my professors do. I don’t want to tell them this, of course (laughs) that would make me look bad, but I wonder if I’m getting the most out of my classes.” But like my other research participants, he is reluctant to classify online, non-alphabetic, or other forms of communication as “writing” or “composing.”

To provide context for these points, consider the following exchanges:

**JSM:** Are you familiar with the term “multimodal composing?”

**HAROLD:** What? (pause) How do you spell the first word?

**JSM:** M-U-L-T-I-M-O-D-A-L.

**HAROLD:** Multimodal? (pause) No.

**JSM:** Okay, so, multimodal is a word that has to do with using more than one way of communicating. So, a “mode,” in this case, is one way of communicating. So, for example, typing an essay on a computer is one way to communicate, and taking pictures is another way to communicate. Recording my voice as I talk or
read is another way to communicate. Uh, recording a video and posting it on YouTube is another way to communicate. If I use more than one of these ways of communicating, I would say that I am using multimodal composing methods.

**HAROLD:** Oh, okay, that’s interesting. I guess I wouldn’t think of communicating that way.

**JSM:** Oh?

**HAROLD:** To me, those seem like completely different things.

**JSM:** So then, would you consider writing to be multimodal?

**HAROLD:** (pause) I’m trying to think of examples. (pause) I don’t know. Like, if a teacher is writing on the board and students see that, maybe that is a kind of (pause) because the students are watching the way you write it, they don’t just pick up the piece of writing after it has been produced, so you can see how the person writes and (pause) like, the way they write it…

**JSM:** Do you mean, like, their body language?

**HAROLD:** Yes.

**JSM:** Okay.

**HAROLD:** Their body language can give you information about what they are writing. So that can be multimodal. (pause) If I think about, you know, if I’m writing an article (pause) if I’m writing an article for a newspaper, and there is a picture to go along with the piece, I think that would be multimodal in the way you define it, because I have text and I have an image. But the reporter doesn’t normally take the pictures that appear in the newspaper, so I can’t say that is
multimodal writing because you have different people contributing different elements.

**JSM:** Okay, so would it be multimodal if one person did both of those things? Like, if I created something for a class, let’s say, and I had text and images together, is that multimodal writing?

**HAROLD:** No, I don’t think so, because writing is (pause) I think I would be communicating information, but is that the same thing as writing?

**JSM:** That’s a good question. What do you think?

**HAROLD:** I don’t know. Maybe?

**JSM:** Okay, umm, well, let me put it another way, and this actually leads me into the next question. Let’s say you had a class and the instructor asked you to make a multimodal assignment, or gave you the option to pick a multimodal assignment or a more typical, typewritten, alphabetic text to fulfill a course assignment. Would you be comfortable picking a multimodal communication method?

**HAROLD:** (sigh) I think for me, no. The multimodal communication would be drastically different than what I think of when I think of writing. I would do if it I had to do it, you know, if it was a required aspect of the course, but I wouldn’t choose to do that myself, no.

Along with this, there is Harold’s answer to a question from the initial interview about whether he would prefer to have someone read an alphabetic, word-processed essay or have someone consume a multimodal presentation:
HAROLD: I could see how that option [having someone watch a video of him speaking on a topic of his choosing without anything to read from]¹⁷ might be helpful to some people, but I don’t think I would choose it. I think I would be too nervous for that, even though there are no people in the room with me. Given a choice, and knowing that I would not be penalized for doing it, I would rather pick something I was more comfortable with.

JSM: So which option would you pick?

HAROLD: Again, if there is no penalty to me, and if it is not required, I would prefer to type the assignment on my computer and give a printed copy to the class professor.

JSM: Why is that?

HAROLD: That is the kind of writing I enjoy, and that I am more comfortable with. Maybe that will change someday, but today, for this question, I would not pick a video or an audio file.

As with the admission that he regularly uses an electric typewriter, the fact that Harold framed his answer in terms of his comfort as a composer struck me as unusual. First, because in reviewing the interview data I could find no other instances where comfort of any kind – physical, emotional, psychological, linguistic – was discussed in significant detail. The closest analogous concept I could find was the “go along to get along” attitude I detected in Betty’s interviews, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Second, because unlike Betty, whose preferences were based more around student identity and acceptance in the MU community, Harold’s comfort level seems to be at odds with his self-professed digital literacy. This is an individual who is clearly adept at a number of communicative methods, who can use various

¹⁷ See Appendix F, Question 30.
technologies to his advantage, and who knows that change and flexibility are valuable traits, and yet he continues to rely on what he knows and trusts. Harold’s focus on comfort has parallels with Mina Shaughnessy’s discussion of vocabulary usage among developing writers, and how those writers tend to stick with simple, more familiar vocabulary rather than risk taking risks or making errors (189-198). The best way I can think of to describe this attitude is to borrow an old cliché: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Harold could branch out more and use his digital literacy skills to greater effect, but he sees no reason to do this when his current practices get the job done. And to reference Selber’s image of the blunt tool again, Harold has almost been conditioned to privilege alphabetic and physical forms of writing, further evidence of which can also be seen in the way he uses a tablet with a stylus to replicate physical handwriting in a digital environment.

This conditioning makes it difficult for students like Harold to break from their habits, and I believe explains part of the reason why my research participants were so reluctant to consider multimodal composing as a valid communicative method, and is a contributing factor to why ELLs have not received the same research attention as their traditional peers. As both an instructor and someone who works to be empathetic of the struggles ELLs may face in American institutions, I cannot say I completely blame him. The fifth and sixth chapters of Ferris’ *The Treatment of Error in Second Language Student Writing*, with support from parts of chapters three, deals at great length with how students can acquire the proper “academic language” over time, and how to learn to edit one’s language to sound more appropriate and grammatically correct. Not unlike Bartholomae’s article *Inventing the University*, the idea is that successful communication means talking and writing “like us,” like academics, and learning how to use the systems we academics value. Harold has learned this language and these systems, he is
comfortable with them, and his commitment to success in a new career field are such that an abrupt change of course seems either too difficult or dangerous or both, and his is not alone. As discussed in the previous chapter, student identity and writer’s voice play a significant part in the ways in which students integrate into and see themselves as fully engaged members of a university community. I firmly believe multimodal composing can help ease these identity issues, and bring about greater engagement, but only if everyone is equally committed to the endeavor.

The problem is that not everyone is so committed, as Harold himself pointed out. For the final question of the second interview, I asked Harold if he had another other questions, comments, or concerns he wanted to express about our interview or the questions I asked him, and this was his response: “You know, I like writing, and I think it’s important, but I don’t always think people are as interested in (pause) not interested, but I don’t think people use technology as much in the classroom. I don’t know if that’s good or bad, but that’s just how it is. I think if more people used technology, and maybe they will someday, maybe it would be more beneficial to people.” Because of this, there is a need for the field to continue to work to incorporate and advocate for multimodal composing practices. And at the risk of beating the proverbial dead horse, Harold seems as willing and competent as anyone, if not more so, to adopt these practices. I mention this again and again not to belabor the point, but as a way of demonstrating that composition instructions, particularly those working with ELLs, still have a lot of work to do to make multimodal composing and digital literacy viable options for students. If Harold and students like him cannot be won over, then the question becomes, who can? I see this as not only an issue of helping students meet with success, even though that may be the driving issue behind my advocacy for digital literacy practices, but as a means of helping the
field arrive at a point where all students can be treated equally, and their intellectual output judged for its own merits without being too caught up in the particulars of the communicative practices themselves.

**Instructor Knowledge and Deference**

One area that I explored in Chapter 3, and that came up again in my interviews with Harold, was the relationship between students and instructors, and the influence it has on student writers. One of my interview questions dealt with whether the research participants felt they knew more about technology than their American instructors. As previously noted, almost all the research participants I interviewed said their instructors knew more than them, even if technology was not a focus of their courses or a specialty of the instructor. Harold was the exception. Given Harold’s background as a computer technician, I was not entirely surprised when, in answer to a question about whether or not he knew more about technology than his American instructors, Harold parted from his fellow research participants and said that he did: “Yes, I’m sure of that. Especially the older teachers. I don’t mean to be disrespectful to them when I say that, because they know a lot of things that I don’t. I think that I’m older and I have more experience working with technology, and so I know more because of that.” As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3, many texts that purport to talk about the use of digital literacy and multimodal composing with ELLs fall into a habit of trying to demonstrate the effectiveness and value of multimodal composing to instructors without going into a lot of details about why these practices should be put into use. When asked during the first interview about how often his American instructors help him learn new technologies to help him communicate, Harold said he could not remember a time when this happened, but admitted that since he had only been taking classes for a few weeks at MU at the time of our conversation. During our second interview, I
decided to follow up with him and ask if this was still the case, and his reporting was unchanged:

“No, I can’t remember any classes where we had that, but I think (pause) maybe if there is some special software I need to learn I will have that kind of presentation, but not yet.”

Given this information, I couldn’t help but ask whether Harold would like to see more of this kind of instruction in this classes:

**HAROLD:** Yes, and no. I don’t think (pause) I think I’m already pretty aware of technology and how to use them, and, uh, yeah, so I don’t know what else I would need at this point. No, wait (pause) I think maybe I have a couple of instructors who know more because they know how to write programming languages that I don’t know, so they can be more competent, but I think I know what I need (pause) I would suggest I know more than probably ninety percent of the professors in my department.

What I find interesting here is that, even though Harold sees himself as more knowledgeable than his instructors, he still adheres in some way to the student/instructor hierarchy discussed in Chapter 3. Harold did not have to tell me that there are people who know more about computer programming than himself, nor did he have to make a point of telling me he did not wish to be disrespectful to his younger instructors. Nonetheless, Harold’s answers here present a dilemma when it comes to advocating for increased digital literacy. Deferring to the knowledge of his instructors suggests that Harold also sees himself as part of a student/instructor hierarchy, and regardless of whether he actually knows more than his instructors, this hierarchy does not allow him to ask for or receive instruction in addition to what he already gets. His “yes, and no” answer to this question opens the door for Harold to acquire more knowledge if he were in a position to
ask for it. Perhaps Harold would benefit from learning the other programming languages, or other Web 2.0 tools, or even other types of hardware he is not currently acquainted with.

Perhaps because I am also a little older than other students in my position, or because I am a graduate student as opposed to an undergraduate, or even because I come from an educational culture where interactions with course instructors and department administrators is not frowned upon, I feel a little more comfortable asking questions or taking a more active role in my education. I found it odd that Harold would not push for more use of technology or multimodal composing, given his penchant for digital literacy and his decision to change careers.

One possible explanation occurred to me during a chance encounter with Harold in a non-academic setting. I have on several occasions run into Harold around town, which is not entirely surprising given that MU is located in a small “college town.” During these interactions Harold has asked me how my project is going, if I have completed interviews, if I am writing the dissertation, etc., but at no time has he asked for or expressed interest in hearing about my results. After bumping into each other in a coffee shop in late spring, 2016, I asked Harold if he would like to meet with me at a later time to talk about my findings, or if I could email a summary of my results to him. Although I have tried to make myself available to all my research participants, and give them opportunities to email or talk to me about my study and the progress of my project after the interviews were completed, most of my research participants did not take me up on these offers. Harold told me he was happy to have been a research participant, and he was happy to know my project was progressing, but because he knows the project is not likely to have any direct impact on him as a student he did not think it was necessary for him to know the intricate details of my work.
Attitudes about the primacy of alphabetic composition persist even among someone like Harold, who is fairly invested in digital literacy practices as it is, because he does not see any indication that he has other options open to him. Like all the other research participants I interviewed for this project, he sees his literacy and future career success as tied to alphabetic composition; the fact that he left a career field dealing directly with technology for one traditionally built on a foundation of alphabetic writing may be a happy coincidence, but it is telling nonetheless. Regardless of what improvements may come about because of my research, Harold knows is not likely to see the results manifest in such a way that would be of immediate benefit, a point that was even written into the informed consent documents he signed before participating in interviews with me, and therefore the underlying conceit behind the research— that digital literacy and multimodal composing are beneficial to ELLs for a host of reasons—is invalidated. Harold is perfectly fine with the level of digital literacy and the composing practices he currently employs, and like many of my other research participants, dismisses multimodal composing as being too closely linked with artistic expressions or compositions like fiction or music, and therefore of no use to him. As someone who sees their role in academe, at least in part, as an advocate for student equality and access, the implication that students must continue to confirm to old ideas about the roles they should play and the resources available to them is

18 Near the end of the second interview, I asked Harold whether or not he thought the words “writing” and “composing” can or could describe the same action, in the way that many English instructors use them to mean essentially the same thing. As was shown in discussing how this question was answered by other research participants in Chapter 3, Harold rejected the idea that “writing” and “composing” should be used to describe the same action because “composing” implies an artistic and/or creative element that “writing” does not. The one conceit that Harold gave was that certain kinds of compositions, like music or fiction—specifically novels—have a certain structure and arrangement of information, which is similar to the way essay and argumentative structures are used in academic writing. In this sense “writing” and “composing” are similar concepts, in that they share a common trait, but are not otherwise related. On further reflection, I find it curious that Harold would include novels in this answer, but that this was apparently not deemed an act of writing/composing in the same way as an academic essay. This is an area that I should have explored further with him, but as it was not in my approved line of questioning, and the thought did not occur to me at the time of the interview, I cannot say why Harold makes this distinction except to refer back to the aforementioned creative element.
troubling to me. Harold’s attitudes about his digital literacy and the role of multimodal composing, or lack thereof, in his education tells me that instructors and scholars need to be more focused on advocating for these communicative practices, and push for ways to make these practices more applicable to the long-term goals of students.

“Better to Make Them Understand”

I spent quite a bit of time in the previous chapter discussing student identity and writer’s voice, and how those things contribute to the writing process and preferences of the research participants I interviewed. One of the reasons I was drawn to Harold’s story was to see how, if at all, these issues manifested differently given that Harold does not fit many of the typical demographic markers of the ELL population, or the wider international student population, on the MU campus. This information is not lost on Harold himself, as I learned during our second interview. One of the questions asked Harold to consider what would provide for a better expression and understanding of his ideas: a word-processed, hard-copy, alphabetic document, or a multimodal recording of any kind – audio recording, video recording, narration over photographs, etc.:

**HAROLD:** I think that, from my own perception, writing would be better to understand what I’m saying because I would have to, I maybe (pause) I may write something and, and it maybe, it maybe make me think of another aspect and kind of reflecting on it, and maybe writing some other stuff. And because I can delete and write again I can give a more, uh, what’s the word (pause) extensive explanation. That is still better. Writing or typing is still better.

When I pressed him for additional details, Harold said he could see himself picking a multimodal composition only if he was under a time constraint and could not devote the kind of attention to
his writing that he normally would. In an effort to reframe the question, I asked him to consider a
situation where he had as much time as he wanted, and had whatever technological resources he
would need to complete the multimodal composition of his choice at his disposal. Under these
circumstances, I asked him to think about whether he could make the same choice. After a
moment’s reflection, he said he would:

**HAROLD:** I think for my own reflection I could make both of them work, but I
think for the other person, I think writing would be better to make them
understand what I am saying, and I don’t know if you want this kind of
explanation –

**JSM:** Sure!

**HAROLD:** – because (pause) for instance, if I’m recording myself, I may
constantly go back and talk about some other thing and reflect on it, and that can
make, uh, may cause me to talk about something else, stuff like that. So writing
would make it more organized, and also for the other person it would make it
more efficient because, I know you don’t have time or space limits, but still,
recording or reading, or listening or reading, you may not (pause) listening to an
audio recording or something, going back and forth is not as easy to do as it is if
you are reading something. So because of that, I would say writing.

Even when all other barriers are seemingly removed, alphabetic writing continues to be
the dominant form of expression for Harold. Given his self-professed comfort with and extensive
use of various technologies to communicate, Harold’s answer to these questions seems
paradoxical. That is, until another question came up in which I asked Harold about how he thinks
he would be perceived if others were to consume his digital compositions:
JSM: Okay, so just for the sake of argument, just to ask, okay? Let’s say someone took a recording of you, either an audio or a video recording, and they posted that to the internet for some reason, and it was posted in a way that was open and available for anyone to see. Or hear, see or hear. Would you be concerned about people seeing or hearing this recording, and getting an idea of what your English ability was like before they had met you?

HAROLD: Yes.

JSM: Okay, and so then, why would you be concerned about that?

HAROLD: Because I don’t know who is going to see me, but whoever it is it’s not like following how my English, uh, how my English is going, so (pause) so for instance, if someone makes fun of me because of whatever, whatever it is, that moment is there.

JSM: Okay.

HAROLD: Maybe that will change later, and that person may admire me two years after that, but that doesn’t change how that event, where he or she made fun of me, and people will remember that.

JSM: Yeah, okay, and that’s kind of what I wanted to know, if the recording is more permanent than if you were to type out an essay on your computer and give it to someone.

HAROLD: Yes, and I think that’s not only for people learning English, but especially someone like me who is older, and now I’m here in America and I’m around people who are native speakers, I have to be more careful than someone
who is younger. A younger student who had a recording, I don’t think they would need to be worried as much as I would.

Notice that in this answer, and in his statements about why he would pick alphabetic writing over multimodal composition, Harold is concerned about how others will see, hear, read, and understand him. His own English skills are hardly discussed except in contrast to how other people will perceive him through his writing. Viewed in this light, Harold’s embrace of alphabetic composition at the expense of his apparent love of multimodal composing and digital literacy is less paradoxical than it initially seemed. This, along with his previous statements about the importance of comfort in writing, combine to show someone very worried about how he is perceived and what that perception means to his future. Given his age and previous working experiences, it can be argued that Harold has more on the line by coming to the United States to earn a degree than any of my other research participants, and the fact that he clings to safer, more comfortable, more academically acceptable forms of communication reflect this. When Harold says that younger students may not be as worried about how they are perceived, what he is saying is that he has to work to present himself in a different light so his age and perceived language deficiencies do not prove to be a hindrance to his future success. The way Harold presents his identity must be more carefully cultivated and protected than someone like Edward whose demographics more closely match those of the traditional American student. At least this is how Harold sees the situation; Edward’s discussion of the job market and his need to acquire certain skills stand in contrast to this idea. Nonetheless, like many of my other research participants, Harold makes conscious choices regarding his literacy and communicative practices in part because of how he wants to be perceived, how he thinks others will perceive him, and how those perceptions will impact him in the future.
Harold’s concern for how others will perceive him is consistent with other data collected during this project, and lends additional weight to the idea that identity, both personally defined and as perceived by others, plays a significant role in how willing ELLs are to embrace multimodal composing and digital literacy. From this, it can be said that multimodal composing and digital literacy among ELLs is not just an issue of access, or understanding how to use specific tools, or even an issue of instructor acceptance and usage, though all of these are contributing factors. A key component is helping to make space for ELLs and to strive for greater acceptance of language usage that differs from SAE.

**Conclusion**

Dispute their demographic differences, many of the opinions Edward and Harold expressed in their interviews aligned with each other and the eight other research participants interviewed for this study. This is not to say the reasons why they came to their opinions are the same, as both people have rather different lived experiences, but the fact that so many of their ideas about the function of multimodal composition in their education, the differences between “writing” and “composing,” and whether technology can help lead to short- and long-term success, says something about the way ELLs contextualize and adapt to the education they receive in the United States. Although the field of rhetoric and composition may be pushing for more inclusive composing practices and the use of non-standard Englishes, institutions may not be moving to include or recognize these practices at the same rate. Thus, ELLs continue to situate their success as students in alphabetic composing practices, even as digital literacy becomes more common outside American higher education. What I see in the experiences and opinions of students like Edward and Harold is a need to continue pushing for acceptance of communicative practices and methods, and to help students find ways to carry these practices
outside the academic environment so it can be helpful to them in their future endeavors. The final chapter of my dissertation will explore what form this push should take by discussing future publication opportunities for my research, additional research that could complement and expand on these findings, and discuss future research options that would explore similar themes.
CHAPTER V: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOLARSHIP, CURRICULUM DESIGN, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

Having reached the concluding chapter of my dissertation, I find myself reflecting on Janet’s questions about what my project was studying, and why it was important. Janet’s skepticism was based in the thought that studying digital literacy and multimodal composing was not as beneficial to her or students like her, because it did not help them acquire the fluency and native-like English skills they have been taught to see as valuable. Even if this idea was not expressed as directly as it was by Janet, this notion that anything except alphabetic, word-processed composing practices were of no use to them ran throughout the interviews with my research participants. It was important for me to keep this information in mind as I considered the implications of my project, both to help keep me grounded in the needs of ELLs and to help me understand what implications this project has for researchers and instructors moving forward.

In thinking about where to go next with my research, I think it makes sense to revisit the research questions that formed the foundation of my data collection process, and attempting to answer them based on the findings presented herein:

- What digital composing and digital literacy practices do ELLs privilege, and why?
- What do these privileges tell instructors and scholars about the ways in which ELLs communicate?
- What needs to ELLs have in relationship to writing, composing practices, composing technologies, and communicative practices?
• How can practitioners in the field of rhetoric and composition, and ESOL better understand the needs of ELLs in regards to digital composing practices, in order to translate these needs into composing pedagogy?

In reflecting on how to answer these questions, it occurs to me that the first two questions, and the last two questions, are asking the same things but in slightly different ways. Because of this, I will answer them in tandem. As for the first two questions, the data from my research participants presents an initially cloudy picture. The ELLs I spoke to have a high rate of digital literacy based on their usage of different hardware, websites, and mobile apps, yet they are apprehensive when it comes to adopting digital literacy practices in place of the alphabetic communicative practices they are more familiar with. This preference stems, in part, from acts of identity negotiation and renegotiation, and attempts by ELLs to control the ways in which their language usage and fluency mark them as being members of, or being excluded from the culture of the institution and the surrounding community. The push for standard American English, and the focus on sentence-level corrections to grammar and syntax – the types of corrections Ferris argues for – continue to be a major component of the writing instruction and assessment ELLs receive, and as in the case of students like Aaron, the types of corrective advice they receive from friends and instructors. This observation is not meant to demonize Ferris or her work, or to suggest there is no value in this type of prescriptive writing assessment. Instead, ELLs take up alphabetic composition because they recognize it is the accepted, preferred communicative practice of their instructors and administrators, and barring changes to the way they are taught this does not seem likely to change in a long-term, wide-spread way. The question of what needs ELLs have regarding composing and its relationship to technology and digital literacy is more difficult to pin down. I suspect that several of my research participants, if asked to describe their
digital literacy needs in specific terms, would tell me they do not have any needs because, as the answers to Question 17 of my online survey says, technology is only a major component in their writing classrooms when it is necessary to complete a given assignment. It is hard to talk about what your literacy needs are when you are not given choices to use literacy skills on a regular basis. Because of this, the burden falls to instructors to make space for additional means of composing and communicating.

Keeping these questions in mind, the remainder of this chapter serves as a reflection on where to go from here. Having examined the data and the concerns raised by my research participants, how well did the project answer these questions, and what does this project mean for the field? In contemplating how to write this chapter, it occurs to me that the answer to this question depends somewhat on your perspective. That said, I have organized this chapter into three sections, representing what I see as the three perspectives that are most pertinent to the project: implications for the field, implications for students, and implications for me as an emerging scholar.

**Implications for the Field**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the data presented herein seems to contradict other published works, namely works by Lu and Horner, and Casanave, that demonstrate the changing nature of student identity and the ability for multimodal composing practices to be used as an equalizing force in composition studies. There also appears to be some divergence with movements in the field, typified by position statements and resolutions by professional organizations representing composition instructors. This may suggest to some that the implications for the field are mixed, but as previously stated, I see this apparent difference as evidence of the importance of
contextualizing the specific instances where composition and student identity intersect. I believe my research participants were fully engaged in the survey and interview processes, and gave honest answers to the questions they were presented. But it is important to understand that a group of first-year, first-semester research participants at MU may give a very different set of answers to these questions than, say, more experienced students taking classes on a larger campus in an urban setting. I suspect graduate students may also give different answers, as would a pool of research participants that drew more from the humanities or social sciences, or research participants who have more similar demographics. All of this points towards a larger implication: while they may often be treated as such from an administrative viewpoint, ELLs are not a monolithic population. ELLs have tremendous difference in backgrounds, educational experiences, and language fluencies to name a few, and to treat them as a uniform population is a mistake. Highlighting the differences in the findings between scholars like Lu and Horner, and Casanave, in comparison to mine does not diminish the work of anyone. I feel the more viewpoints that are represented in scholarship, the more researchers and instructors try to understand the needs of their students, the more effective we are in these roles, and the more the students ultimately benefit.

For the field at large, this suggests additional research into the digital literacy practices of ELLs, and the intersection of composition and student identity. An interesting glimpse at one way this intersection plays out against literate practices is Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe’s webtext *Transnational Literate Lives in Digital Times*, Yu-Kyung Kang, a Korean graduate student profiled by the authors, discusses how she is often mistaken for Korean American because of the perceived Americanized inflection of her spoken communication. Later, in thinking about her
written communication practices, Yu-Kyung reflects on the toll her studies in America have had on her writing:

My writing process is continually in the process of changing with the more experience I accumulate. And at this point, it is difficult to pinpoint what was influenced by the Korean culture because now the Korean and the American culture coexist in my system… I, too, feel that I am losing some part of my already existing language. Actually, to be more precise, I wouldn’t describe it as “losing,” but rather “forgetting,” in some aspect, how to use my native language for such academic purposes. But come to think of it, what is the difference in “losing” and “forgetting” if I’m reluctant to use my native language because I don’t know how to anymore?

Yu-Kyung’s forgetting of her native language, and her reflection elsewhere in the piece that she may be forcing her own students to give up their identity to learn the rules of American academic writing, is troublesome to her. By contrast, I would dare say most if not all of my research participants would not object as voraciously to losing their native language practices in favor of a more “Americanized” means of communication. The difference here is context. As a graduate student who works as an instructor of record, Yu-Kyung is able to take a more nuanced view of her language use and literacy than, say, Betty or Edward, because her context is different. Understanding contexts across national, institutional, and interpersonal levels will help the field better understand the ways in which ELL populations see their literacy practices influencing and being influenced by their sense of identity. If digital literacy and multimodal composing is to be a true equalizing force in the academy, the field of rhetoric and composition must be willing to view instruction not as a single, flat playing field but a series of smaller areas fraught with
obstacles that, while challenging in the moment, can nonetheless be overcome with effort and empathy.

On some level, this means advocating for greater inclusion of digital literacy and multimodal composing. Some instructors and institutions have been quick to take up digital literacy practices, ours is still a field that is largely tied to ink-and-paper practices. Additional research showing concrete examples of the ways in which multimodal composition practices can benefit ELLs, how those composition practices improve the way ELLs are perceived in their given academic communities, and what impact those practices have on long-term success and movement beyond the institution (i.e., job placement or graduate school acceptance). Longitudinal studies that explore how students compose, what they compose, why they compose, and how those compositions help students or hold them back would be one way to demonstrate these benefits. Another would be collaborative research between scholars in rhetoric and composition and other fields to bring to light how students outside in fields like business, STEM, and the arts use digital compositions to communicate more effectively and establish themselves as members of the institutional community.

Implications for Curriculum Design

When thinking of the implications this project has for curriculum design, the easy answer would seem to be to incorporate more multimodal composing into courses for ELLs, both in the language acquisition/fluency courses many of them take upon arriving at American institutions, and in the first- and second-year composition courses they take. This is a good start, but if the only exposure to multimodal composition and/or digital literacy practices is in these courses, what purpose does this instruction serve? I am reminded of the story I shared in Chapter 3 about
the colleague who worried a focus on multimodal composing and digital literacy might have negative ramifications for her students because it takes time away from more practical lessons. A broader approach is necessary to ensure that ELLs are not only given access to these communicative practices, but also that these practices are shown to be useful outside of the composition curriculum, something more like a writing across the curriculum approach where writing instructors and writing program administrators continue to advocate for the inclusion of multimodal composing as a valid way of communicating and learning. The creation of a sustained multimodal community that begins small and works outward can achieve these goals, if instructors work to find colleagues across their institutions with which to form relationships:

[T]eachers who are only beginning to experiment with multimodal composition in their class may need to start slow and think small as they grow comfortable with such practices. Teachers in this situation, for instance, may find it sufficient to form a relationship with one technician, one knowledgeable student, or one other colleague… Begin with observing students as they are responding to multimodal assignments. Recruit those students who work well with audio and video recorders or editing software, and then identify those individuals who possess the personality traits of patience, a willingness to share knowledge, and dependability… Teachers might also want to talk to other colleagues about the multimodal assignments they are trying – within their home department, the writing center, and within other departments as well… Forming small communities of practice that involve one or more of the people just listed can provide English composition teachers the opportunity to understand how other
people perceive digital communication, teaching and learning experiences, and the role of institutions in preparing literate citizens. (R. Selfe, 169-170)

These types of connections, and the community building they lead to, take time but can lead to changes in administrative practice and community standards, which can make a difference for ELLs or other student populations struggling with language fluency and standards, literacy, and composition standards.

Although this approach might lead to the kind of technologically-inclusive environment I am advocating for, it is not practical to ask instructors and intuitions to change course mid-stream. Instead, my first recommendation would be for writing instructors to recognize, as Lorimer Leonard and Rebecca Nowacek’s point out, that “writing in standard English is never neutral” and to ask “how a more tolerant attitude toward language variety… might affect a writer’s sense of options and actual choices” (260). This approach also challenges instructors to value linguistic diversity “as a source of meaning,” rather than seeing it as something to be corrected and standardized (261). Encourage or require students, both ELLs and traditional students, to work in digital environments to compose and submit assignments can have the effect of helping instructors focus on meaning making by eliminating spaces for typical grammatical or syntactic assessment. Encouraging students to use blogs, or social media posts as a way of completing assignments would be a good start, as these methods blend alphabetic composing and digital environments. These composing practices allow for the use of imagery, video and audio embedding, and links to other multimodal texts to build a network of information. Once students become more accustomed to these methods, instructors can move to more fully digital compositions like audio essays, web design, videos, or other projects as time and access to resources allow. Having traditional students take part in these assignments is critical because it
will help give credence to these practices. It is also important to understand that, as a recent article on the *Chronicle Vitae* points out, attempts to incorporate digital literacy and multimodal composing practices into a space where they have not been used or valued will lead to failure (Reese). But from these failures a greater understanding of student proficiency, access, and need can arise, as will pedagogical creativity (Reese).

One of the foundational ideas that led to the researching and writing of my dissertation is the notion that ELLs receive a different level of instruction than their traditional peers, either purposely in the case of ESOL courses, or indirectly, such as the type of assessment and error correction they receive from writing instructors and writing center tutors. A key component to consider when planning a curriculum design that makes space for ELL digital literacy is to help make students aware of the options they have beyond alphabetic compositions, and to help them see these options as equally valuable and important to their success as the alphabetic compositions to which they are more accustomed. As Rebecca Lorimer Leonard says,

> In classrooms, teachers might aim to build students’ meta-awareness of the full range of their literate practice. Such meta-awareness occurs when teachers facilitate all writers’ – whether monolingual or multilingual – purposeful movement among language varieties. If students have the chance to observe nonstandard language use… then they might learn how to understand the effects or intentionality of nonstandard forms: “If you substitute standard English here, what is lost?” “What past experience might have led the writer to choose this organization?” Such observations might then evolve into self-conscious articulations. (32)
Nonstandard English can be – and I think should be – interpreted here as making room not just for linguistic choices outside SAE, but communicative practices that make room for different ways of expressing ideas and making arguments. Lorimer Leonard challenges instructions to make space for different communication practices so that, as scholars like Cynthia Selfe, Richard Selfe, Bruce Horner, Dong-shin Shin and Tony Cimasko, and others have suggested, multimodal composing can truly be an equalizing force for ELL instruction. For this to happen, instructions must be willing and able to make students aware of their choices, and to advocate for the acceptability and validity of those choices.

In considering how to incorporate more multimodal composing and digital literacy practices into curriculum design for ELLs, I think it is important to consider Janet Bean et al.’s list of variables about “when and under what conditions it might make sense” to incorporate native languages into the composition classroom (26). As the author’s point out, non-standard Englishes may lend themselves better to certain types of writing than others, such as exploratory pieces or reading reflections, as these compositions allow students to begin to organize ideas and consider audiences and expectations in a way that is less formalized than, say, a fully developed and revised research essay (29). Because of this, these types of compositions could easily shift into digital spaces and take multiple forms – blog posts, audio or video reflections, social media posts, online discussion threads, or other options more suited to the time and resources available. This is not to say these options are safe, or that they will be seen as safe options by the students, given the culture of a given community or the pressure to adopt SAE by instructors or administrators. The goal of multimodal composing and digital literacy for instructors of ELLs should be the creation of “a context of respect – within a larger context of disrespect;” that is, a place where instructors work with students to make their communication choices, whatever they
may be, feel safe, valued, and meaningful regardless of other factors that may suggest they are not (32).

There is also the consideration of whether digital spaces remove too much of the student from their own compositions, nullifying their voices in the process. As Casanave points out, one possible advantage of digital compositions for ELLs is it allows them to mask their identities and assume new ones, and in doing so they have the potential to avoid any stigmatism or prejudice they may face in an alphabetic composition (164). I must admit, I am of two minds on this topic. On the one hand, I think this kind of identity negotiation might be welcomed by some of my research participants, and could be a way to provide a foot in the door to a wider array of multimodal compositions. Allowing students to pick their own identities, or negotiate the ways in which their identities are revealed online, can create a low-stress environment where students can experiment with tools and composition methods they have never used before. On the other hand, the idea that instructors should encourage, or even go out of their way to make spaces for students to assume false identities as a way of normalizing their communicative practices seems antithetical to my desire to treat my research participants, and ELLs more broadly, in a respectful, dignified manner. I worry that telling students the key to understanding how to compose in digital spaces is to repress their identities and voices could set a dangerous precedent and reinforce existing expectations about standardized English that many ELLs have already internalized. I have always had a lot of faith in the ability of individual instructors to do what is right for their students, and given the freedom to experiment, I think instructors working with ELLs will make the correct decisions for their students, their institutions, and their communities.

Instructors who want to help ELLs better understand and become more comfortable with multimodal composing should remember that the more commonplace digital literacy practices
become, the more ELLs see instructors giving multimodal composing assignments and see their traditional student peers completing them as a matter of course, the more quickly the primacy of alphabetic compositions will be reduced. This reduction will lead – slowly, perhaps – to an academic environment where the grammar, punctuation, spelling, and other sentence-level errors that instructors and writing center tutors might be tempted to focus on will have less relevance. This, in turn, will have the benefit of giving ELLs a stronger impression that their ideas and critical thinking skills are valued, which I believe is more important in the long run than memorizing grammar rules. This will have an impact on how ELLs see themselves in terms of their place in the institution, and give an increased sense that they are valued members of the community. All of this will help ELLs achieve greater academic success. Along with this, instructors and administrators must push for greater inclusion of these communication practices across their institutions. The most important thing to remember in terms of integrating digital literacy and/or multimodal composing practices into curriculum design is that students’ ideas should not be overlooked at the expense of grammatical or syntactical errors. As the “go along to get along” attitudes of students like Betty, or the social media experiences of students like Aaron show, the desire to achieve a flawless, native-like use of English can be internalized and lead to harmful ideas about identity perception. These, coupled with the attitudes of their instructors about digital literacy and multimodal composition, undermine the legitimacy of these practices and lead to the preference for alphabetic composition seen in my research participants. What I am suggesting is likely not something that could be done by a single instructor, but if enough people invest in working to change the culture of ELL instruction a more equitable system can come about.
Implications for Future Research

As I noted at several points in earlier chapters, the answers my research assistants provided, and the conversational contexts for those answers, raised questions that are worth researching in the future. One such example is the footnote in Chapter 3 about my interviews with Betty and Fran, and whether language identification, dialects, and language usage influences communicative practices. Given the opportunity, I would also like to further explore the role of creativity in the composing process, what creativity means in terms of the definitions of “writing” and “composing” students bring with them to American institutions of higher education, and how those definitions change or remain static over time. I would also love to conduct a longitudinal study that follows one or a small group of ELLs throughout their academic careers to see how their attitudes change regarding digital literacy and multimodal composing. A study like this could get to the heart of how instructor attitudes about multimodal composing practices influence the attitudes and preferences of students.

I was recently asked what affect I wanted my project to have, and what kinds of ripples I wanted it to make. One area where I hope this project has an impact is on the kinds of education and professional training graduate students receive in terms of ESOL instruction, and the needs of the ELLs they will serve as professional academics. As mentioned in the literature review in Chapter 1, the number of ELLs, and the overall international student population in America, have been on an upward trend that does not show signs of stopping. Despite this, graduate students in rhetoric and composition programs rarely receive instruction or mentoring on how to work with ELLs, with students from other disciplines who may be asked to teaching composition courses even less likely to receive any guidance. I would like to see the publications based on this project be part of a larger conversation about how to work with ELLs as they transition into
first- and second-year composition programs and beyond, and how to use multimodal composing to make the kinds of larger curriculum changes I advocate for. I also think other underserved student populations – non-traditional students, student veterans, first-generation college students, to name a few – could benefit from similar research, as so often studies of composing practices leave out these populations owing to the proportionally larger population of traditional students at most institutions. I would be interested to see how ELL experiences with digital spaces compares to student veterans, or non-traditional students, for example, and what can be learned about curricular design by comparing these experiences to those of traditional students.

Given the importance of identity and identity perception among my research participants, another area where I think ESOL scholars and composition theorists can focus future research is the role of multimodal texts play in the politicization of the classroom and the institution. Christian W. Chun raises a fear common to many who work with ELLs, and international student populations in general: “teachers who do not wish to get mired in the politics of the everyday, who avoid what they may see as social controversies that involve complex cultural histories which may not be readily available or accessible to either the teacher of the students, or both” (156). Identity, how individuals work to shape it, and how those identities are received and accepted by others are inherently political acts. Working with students from across the globe, with a variety of languages, cultural traditions, and political viewpoints in a way that is respectful and inclusive, particularly if these variables appear at odds with each other, is challenging. Although my research participants did not directly address these challenges in their interviews, it would be interesting to see the ways in which the political climates of their respective institutions and communities influences their communicative practices. Given the apparent preference for alphabetic composition my research participants showed throughout this
study, and the current state of global and domestic politics regarding immigration and immigrants, I think there is value in trying to better understand how these forces shape student writers and ELL composing practices and preferences.

A Final Thought

In reflecting on how to draw this dissertation to a close, I see this project less as a milestone, or a marker or a specific accomplishment, and more as an invitation to future work. In discussing the progress of my project with a colleague recently, I said that I hoped my dissertation would serve not as an end-all-be-all answer to a question, but an acknowledgement that changes in student needs and composing practices require more: more research, more understanding between students and instructors, more interactions with digital spaces and multimodal composing methods, and more doors that need to be opened to allow more students access. Seen in this light, the end goal of this dissertation is not completion for its own sake, but an introductory step into what I hope will be a series of conversations with practitioners in the field, with people across disciplines institutions, and within communities to better understand how to help the ELL population succeed.
REFERENCES

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“Cameron.” Personal interview. 24 September, 2015.


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“Edward.” Personal interview. 21 September, 2015.

“Edward.” Personal interview. 1 October, 2015.

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“Greg.” Personal interview. 22 September, 2015.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER

To: HSRB Committee Members

From: “Dr. Jones”

Re: Jeffrey S. Moore’s Dissertation Research Proposal

Date: 3 March 2015

Dear HSRB Committee,

I have reviewed Jeffrey S. Moore's dissertation research proposal and discussed the project with him. As Director of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program I am pleased to allow him to recruit subjects from the students in the ESOL Program.

When Jeffrey’s initial survey has been created he will send the survey to me and I will distribute it by email to students in the ESOL Program. This way Jeffrey will not have any direct contact with any possible subjects.

“Dr. Jones”

ESOL Program Director

Midwestern University
APPENDIX B: SURVEY RECRUITMENT EMAIL SCRIPT

Dear student,

My name is Jeffrey S. Moore. I am a Ph.D. student in the English Department. I am working under the guidance of Dr. Kris Blair. I am conducting a research study. I am studying the writing habits of English Language Learners (ELLs) and I would like your help. I have created a survey that I would like you to take. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. You must be at least 18 years old to take the survey. To take the survey, please click on the link at the bottom of this email.

The survey will ask you a series of questions about your writing, and how you use technology – things like computers, cell phones, iPads, and more – to help you write. My goal is to use the answers to this survey to help me better understand the way ELLs write, and how to teach ELLs to write better. Your experience as a writer is valuable to me, and I hope you will consider taking this survey.

I am also looking for people to talk to in an in-person interview. The last question in the survey will ask you to give your email address. If you would like to talk to me in an in-person interview, please provide your email address at the end of the survey. The interviews will take place during the 2015 fall semester or the 2016 spring semester. If you do not want to give an interview, you do not have to give your email address. If you do provide your email address, it will not be attached to your answers. This means I will not be able to match anyone’s email address to the answers they give to the survey questions.

This survey is confidential. There is no risk of harm to you by taking this survey. The answers you give to the survey questions will not have any personally identifiable information attached to them. All answers to the survey questions will be put onto a spreadsheet. This spreadsheet will be kept on a password-protected laptop computer that only I will have access to. This computer will be locked in a secure location in my home or office at all times. No personally identifiable information will be put on this spreadsheet. You are not required to take this survey, and you can decide not to take this survey at any time. Deciding not to participate in this research study will not impact your relationship with Bowling Green State University (BGSU). This survey is not part of your class assignments – you will not pass or fail a class by taking this survey. By taking and completing the survey you give consent to participate in this research study, and you give consent for me to use your answers in any future reports or publications based on this research study.

You can contact me or my research advisor, Dr. Kris Blair, regarding questions about this research study. You can contact me by email at jsmoore@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-0337. You can contact the research advisor, Dr. Kris Blair, by email at kblair@bgsu.edu or by
telephone at 419-372-8033. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) by email at hsrb@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-7716.

To take the survey, please click on this link:

https://bgsu.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_0we6zdIiaaedKf

Thank you!

Jeffrey S. Moore
APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTIONS

My name is Jeffrey S. Moore. I am a Ph.D. student in the English Department. I am working under the guidance of Dr. Kris Blair. I am conducting a research study. I am studying the writing habits of English Language Learners (ELLs) and I would like your help. I would like you to take an online survey I have created. This survey will ask you a series of questions about your writing, and how you use technology – things like computers, cell phones, iPads, and more – to help you write. My goal is to use the answers to this survey to help me better understand the way ELLs write, and how to teach ELLs to write better. This survey will not benefit you directly. Your experience as a writer is valuable to me, and I hope you will consider taking this survey.

This survey is confidential. You do not need to give your name or any other identifying information. There is no risk of harm to you by taking this survey. All answers to the survey questions will be put onto a spreadsheet. This spreadsheet will be kept on a password-protected laptop computer that only I will have access to. This computer will be locked in a secure location in my home or office at all times. No personally identifiable information will be put on this spreadsheet. You are not required to take this survey, and you can decide not to take this survey at any time. Deciding not to participate in this research study will not impact your relationship with Bowling Green State University (BGSU). This survey is not part of your class assignments – you will not pass or fail a class by taking this survey. The service used to create this survey is called Qualtrics. Qualtrics does not attach any personally identifiable information to your answers.

You can contact me or my research advisor, Dr. Kris Blair, regarding questions about this research study. You can contact me by email at jsmoore@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-0337. You can contact the research advisor, Dr. Kris Blair, by email at kblair@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-8033. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) by email at hsrb@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-7716.

By taking and completing this survey you give consent to participate in this research survey, and you give the researcher consent to use your answers in any future reports or publications based on this research study. To begin the survey, please click the NEXT button.

(NEXT button)
Please read the following questions carefully and answer each question as best as you can. This survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this survey. You will be asked to answer about 20 questions, depending on the answers you provide.

1. How old are you?
   a. I am 18-20 years old.
   b. I am 21-23 years old.
   c. I am 24-26 years old.
   d. I am 27 years old or older.

2. What is your home country? __________________________

3. What is your first language? __________________________

4. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other
   d. I do not want to answer this question.

5. How long have you been writing in English?
   a. Less than 1 year
   b. 1-2 years
   c. 3-5 years
   d. 6-8 years
   e. More than 8 years

6. How many hours each week do you write in English?
   a. Less than 1 hour a week
   b. 1-2 hours a week
   c. 3-5 hours a week
   d. 6-8 hours a week
   e. More than 8 hours a week

7. When you are working on assignments for your classes, do you always write in English, or do you write in your native language first and then translate what you wrote into English?
   a. I always write in English.
   b. Sometimes I write in English, and sometimes I write in my native language.
   c. I always write in my native language first and then translate what I wrote into English.

8. Do you think it is important for university students to learn about different kinds of technology in order to get good grades in their courses, and to help them get a job after graduation?
   a. Yes, I think learning about technology is very important for students to learn.
   b. I think learning about technology is important, but it is not the most important thing for students to learn.
c. I do not think knowing about technology will help or hurt students.
d. I think learning about technology is a good idea, but there are a lot of other things that are more important.
e. Learning about technology is not important for students.

9. Do you know what the term “web 2.0” means?
   a. Yes
   b. No
      i. If you answered yes to the last question, can you please give a definition of the term “web 2.0”?

10. Do you know what the term “social media” means?
   a. Yes
   b. No
      i. If you answered yes to the last question, can you please give a definition of the term “social media”?

11. Look at this list of websites and mobile device applications (apps). How often you visit these websites or apps every day? This can include visiting these website online on a computer, or using an app for these websites on your cellphone or tablet computer, or both. Please click the button that says how often you do or do not visit these websites:
   a. Email
      i. 5 times or more every day
      ii. 3 to 4 times every day
      iii. 1 or 2 times every day
      iv. 1 time a day
      v. I do not visit this website or use this app
   b. Facebook
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      ii. 3 to 4 times every day
      iii. 1 or 2 times every day
      iv. 1 time a day
      v. I do not visit this website or use this app
   c. Twitter
      i. 5 times or more every day
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      iii. 1 or 2 times every day
      iv. 1 time a day
      v. I do not visit this website or use this app
   d. YouTube
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iii. 1 or 2 times every day  
iv. 1 time a day  
v. I do visit this website or this app  
r. Myspace  
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ii. 3 to 4 times every day  
iii. 1 or 2 times every day  
iv. 1 time a day  
v. I do not visit these websites or this app  

12. What kinds of technology do you use to help you write? Click all that apply:  
   a. Laptop computer  
   b. Desktop computer  
   c. Tablet Computer (iPad, Android tablet, Samsung tablet, etc.)  
   d. Cell phone  
   e. Online dictionaries  
   f. Translation websites  
   g. Dictionary apps on a cellphone or tablet computer  
   h. Translation apps on a cellphone or tablet computer  
   i. Other (please say what other technologies you use)  

13. Which of these options do you consider to be “writing”? Click all that apply:  
   a. Creating a website  
   b. Posting something on a message board (such as Reddit, 4Chan, or Gaia Online)  
   c. Commenting on a video on YouTube
d. Sending a tweet on Twitter
e. Posting a status update on Facebook
f. Taking pictures with Instagram
g. Posting comments or status updates on other social media apps and websites (such as Google+, Flickr, Pinterest, or LinkedIn)
h. Creating and writing on a weblog, or blog
i. Making an audio recording
j. Creating a video recording
k. Other (please say what other technologies you use)

14. How often do your American class instructors teach you how to use different kinds of technology in your classes?
   a. My instructors teach me how to use new technology all the time
   b. My instructors will teach me how to use new technology if I need to know how to use technology for the class
   c. My instructors sometimes teach me how to use new technology
   d. My instructors never teach me how to use new technology

15. Do your American instructors allow you to use technology, like computers and cellphones, in class?
   a. Yes, they always allow me to use technology in class.
   b. My instructors allow me to use technology for most activities, but not during tests.
   c. I am not sure if I am allowed to use technology or not.
   d. My instructors only allow me to use technology for very specific activities.
   e. My instructors do not allow me to use technology in class.

16. Have you ever created a digital assignment for a class? This means an assignment that was not a typewritten and printed essay, or a handwritten assignment. This could be something like a class website, a video project, or an audio recording project.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I am not sure

17. In your classes, are you allowed to create digital assignments as well as typewritten and printed assignments, or are you only allowed to created typewritten and printed assignments?
   a. My instructors allow me to create digital assignments if I want to
   b. Some of my instructors allow me to create digital assignments, and some of them do not
   c. Sometimes I can create digital assignments, but it depends on the assignment
   d. None of my instructors allow me to create digital assignments

18. Do you worry that native English speakers will not understand what you post updates and comments on websites like Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube?
   a. Yes, I worry about this all the time.
   b. I worry about this sometimes.
   c. I do not have any opinion about this topic.
   d. I worry about this only a little bit.
   e. I do not worry about this at all.
19. Do you think you sound more like yourself when you write a class assignment or when you post updates and comments on websites?
   a. I sound like myself all the time.
   b. I sound more like myself when I write a class assignment.
   c. I sound my like myself when I post updates and comments to websites.
   d. I do not think I sound like anything.
   e. I do not understand the question.

20. Do you think more about what you write in posts on websites, or what you will write about for your class assignments?
   a. I think more about what I will write for class assignments.
   b. I think more about what I will write for posts on websites.
   c. I spend the same amount of time thinking about both things.
   d. I do not spend very much time thinking about either thing.
   e. I do not understand the questions.

21. Thank you for taking this survey. Your answers are very important. The researcher would like to talk to some students at a later time to ask them more about how they write. Would you be willing to talk to the researcher in an interview? If so, please type your email address into the box below. This is optional, and you are not required to give your email address if you do not want to. The service used to create this survey, Qualtrics, does not attach email addresses to answers. This means the researcher will not know who gave which answers or which email addresses.

   (box for research participants to provide their email address if they want to be interviewed)

Thank you, you are finished taking the survey! In order to protect your privacy please clear your internet browser and page history, and close this browser window.
Hello,

My name is Jeffrey S. Moore. I am a Ph.D. student in the English Department. You recently took a survey I created about writing habits of English Language Learners (ELLs). At the end of the survey you gave your email address to indicate you were interested in participating in an interview to talk about this topic in more detail. I am writing today to schedule an interview with you on (insert date/time available) in my office, 315B East Hall. This interview will take about one hour. If you are available to have an interview, please respond to this email and let me know.

This interview will focus even more on what kinds of technologies you use to write, and what you know about technology. My goal is to use the answers you give in the interview to help me better understand the way ELLs write, and how to teach ELLs to write better. Your experience as a writer is valuable to me, and I hope you will consider having an interview with me. This interview is confidential. There is no risk of harm to you by having this interview. You are not required to have an interview with me, and you can decide not to have the interview at any time. This interview is not part of your class assignments – you will not pass or fail a class by taking this survey.

By taking the interview you give me permission to use your answers in any future reports or publications. If you have any questions, you can email me at jsmoore@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-0337. You can also contact the research advisor, Dr. Kris Blair, by email at kblair@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-8033. In addition, you can contact the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) by email at hsrb@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-7716.
Thank you!

Jeffrey S. Moore
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW 1 INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Introduction: My name is Jeffrey S. Moore. I am a Ph.D. student in the English Department at Bowling Green State University. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Kris Blair. I am doing a research study about writing and technology. I am looking at how English Language Learners (ELLs) use and interact with technology. I would like to ask you some questions about these topics. I have contacted you for an interview because you took a survey I created, and provided your email address so I could contact you. For the purpose of this interview, I will be called “the researcher,” and you will be called “the participant.” Dr. Kris Blair will be called “the research advisor.”

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand how ELLs use technology to help them write. The researcher also wants to understand how instructors can be more helpful in teaching non-native English speakers how to use technology to help them improve their writing. This research will not have any direct benefits to you, but it will provide benefit to writing instructors and their students by giving those instructors more information about how ELLs write.

Procedure: Today, the researcher will be conducting an interview with you. This means the researcher will be asking you a series of questions. This interview will be conducted in person between you and the researcher. The interview is made up of thirty-two (32) questions. The researcher may also ask you to provide more details or ask you a follow-up question if the researcher does not understand your answer. The interview should take about one (1) hour to complete. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this interview. The researcher will ask you questions, and use the electronic voice recorder on his laptop computer to record the interview. These questions will ask you about how you use technology to help you write, whether or not you think technology has helped to make you a better writer, and what your instructors could do to help you write better. After the interview, the researcher will listen to your answers, type them out into a Word document on a password-protected laptop computer, and then delete the electronic recording of the interview. This document will be called a “transcript.”

Voluntary nature: Your participation in this research interview is completely voluntary. This means you are not required to speak to the researcher if you do not want to. You are free to stop at any time. You may decide to skip interview questions or end the interview at any time without any penalty. Deciding to participate or not to participate will not affect your grades, your class standing, your relationship with Bowling Green State University, your relationship with your instructors, or your ability to graduate from Bowling Green State University if you are a degree seeking student.

Confidentiality Protection: The information collected in this interview will be recorded using the electronic voice recorder on the researcher’s laptop computer. The audio file will then be typed out into a Microsoft Word document, called a transcript. Any personally identifying information on the audio file, like your name, will be changed or removed from the transcript. However, your answers may be directly quoted in any future reports or publications based on this study. This transcription will be stored on a password-protected laptop computer, which only the researcher will have access to. Once the transcript has been completed, the audio recording of the interview will be deleted. Your signed Informed Consent Document will be kept in a secure location at the researcher’s home. Only the researcher will have access to the Informed Consent Document. The researcher will not use your real name or any identifying information when the study results are reported or published.
Risks: There is a very small chance that your confidentiality may be at risk. However, this risk is not any greater than the risks we encounter in everyday life.

Contact information: You can contact the researcher or the research advisor regarding any questions about this research study. You can contact the research by email at jsmoore@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-0337. You can contact the research advisor by email at kblair@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-8033. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) by email at hsrb@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-7716.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered satisfactorily, and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. By signing this form I agree to participate in this research and to have my answers used in any future reports or publications based on this research study.

________________________________________
Participant Name

________________________________________
Participant Signature
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW 1 QUESTIONS

My name is Jeffrey S. Moore. I am a Ph.D. student in the English Department. Today, I am going to conduct a research interview with you. Before I begin, I would like to go over the Informed Consent Form with you. This is a form that you must sign before I can begin the interview. (Go over Informed Consent Form for Interview 1 with participant, answer any questions they may have, and ask participant to sign the Form). As you can see, I have my laptop computer open. This is because I am going to record our interview today. I will be asking you questions about the way you write, and about what kinds of technologies you use to write. Please answer these questions as completely and as honestly as you can. Do you have any questions? (Answer any questions the participant has) This interview has thirty-two questions. The interview should take about one hour to complete. I want this interview to be confidential, so please do not say your real name at any time during the interview. I will now begin the interview.

2. Can you please tell me what your home country is?

3. Can you please tell me what your first language is?

4. Can you please tell me how old you are?

5. Can you please tell me if are male or female?

6. For how long have you been writing in English? This can be how long you have been writing in school, outside of school, for work, or for any other setting.


8. When you write for your English classes, do you write in your native language and then translate what you have written into English, or do you write in English from start to finish?
   a. If you write in your native language then translate into English, why do you do this instead of writing in English all the time?
   b. If you write in English, why do you do this instead of writing in your native language?

9. When you write in English, what kind of technology do you use to write with? In other words, do you use a desktop computer, a laptop computer, or a tablet computer like an iPad, to finish writing assignments?
10. What other pieces of technology do you use to help you write? This can include things like online dictionaries, translation devices or apps, the internet, voice recorders, or any other machines or programs.
   a. If you use any other technologies to help you write, why do you use those things?
   b. If you do not use any other technologies to help you write, why not?

11. How many days a week do you write in English?

12. How many hours each week do you write in English?

13. Can you please give me a definition of writing?

14. What does the word “writing” mean to you personally?

15. Does writing only happen when you are working on class assignments?

16. Does writing only happen with words, or can it involve pictures and sound?

17. What are some other times when writing happens?

18. Do you think it is important for college or university students to learn about different kinds of technology in order for them to get good grades in their courses, and to help them get a job after graduation?
   a. If you answered yes, why do you think learning about different kinds of technology is important for students? Are there any other reasons in addition to the ones listed in the questions?
   b. If you answered no, why do you think it is not important to learn different kinds of technology as a student?

19. Do you think technology makes you a better English writer?
   a. If you answered yes, why do you think technology makes you a better English writer?
   b. If you answered no, why do you think technology does not make you a better English writer?

20. Think of any English classes you have taken in the United States. In those classes, how often have your instructors taught you how to use different kinds of technology (computer programs, internet websites, tablets, cell phones, or any other kind of technology)?

21. Do you wish your instructors would talk more about how to use technology to write better?
a. If you answered yes, why do you wish your instructors would talk more about how to use technology to write better?
b. If you answered no, why do you not want your instructors to talk more about how to use technology to write better?

22. Has your understanding or usage of English gotten better from using technologies like spellchecker, translation devices, or autocorrect software?
   a. If you answered yes, why do you think your understanding or usage of English has gotten better from using these technologies?
   b. If you answered no, why do you think your understanding or usage of English has not gotten better from using these technologies?

23. What kinds of technologies do you think would make you a better English writer? This can include things like websites, mobile devices, or software programs.

24. Do you think you know more about using technology to write than your instructors?
   a. If you answered yes, why do you think you know more about using technology to write than your instructors?
   b. If you answered no, why do you think you do not know more about using technology to write than your instructors?

25. Think about any classes you have taken in the past, or any classes you are taking right now. Do you think your instructors have been afraid to talk to you about technology?
   a. If you answered yes, why do you think your English instructors have been afraid to talk to you about technology?
   b. If you answered no, why do you think your instructors have not been afraid to talk to you about technology?

26. Do you think your instructor here in America use technology more often in classes where all the students are second language learners than they do in classes where all the students speak English as their first language?
   a. If you said yes, why do you think this is?
   b. If you said no, why do you think this is?

27. Do you think posting comments or status updates on websites like Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube is the same thing as writing?
   a. If yes, why do you think these things are writing?
   b. If no, why are these things not writing?

28. Is taking a photograph or recording a video the same things as writing?
   a. If yes, why are these things the same as writing?
   b. If no, why are these things not the same as writing?
29. If I asked you to show me an essay you wrote for a class, and a comment you posted to a website like Facebook, which one do you think would tell me more about who you are?

30. Pretend you are taking a class and the instructor asked you to create a website, or post comments to a website, instead of writing essays. Do you think that would be a good assignment for you?
   a. If yes, why do you think that would be a good assignment for you?
   b. If no, why do you think that would not be a good assignment for you?

31. I am going to give you a list of five options. Please tell me which one of these five things you would rather have someone be able to see, read, or hear:
   a. I would rather let someone read an essay I wrote and printed from my computer.
   b. I would rather let someone listen to an audio recording of me reading an essay I wrote and look at the printed essay at the same time.
   c. I would rather let someone listen to an audio recording of me reading an essay I wrote without being able to see the printed essay.
   d. I would rather let someone watch a video of me reading an essay I wrote without being able to see the printed essay.
   e. I would rather let someone watch a video of me talking about a topic without anything for me to read from.

32. For that last question, can you please tell me why you gave the answer you did?

33. One more question. Is there anything else you would like to say about writing, or about technology right now?

This is the end of the interview. Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed by me today. I appreciate your time.
Hello,

This is Jeffreyy S. Moore. You recently had an interview with me about the writing habits of English Language Learners (ELLs). At the end of the interview you said you were interested in having another interview to talk about this topic in more detail. I am writing today to schedule another interview with you (insert available time and day) in my office, 315B East Hall. This interview will take about one hour. If you are available to have an interview, please respond to this email and let me know.

This interview will focus more on what kinds of technologies you use to help you write. My goal is to use the answers you give in the interview to help me better understand the way ELLs write, and how to teach ELLs to write better. Your experience as a writer is valuable to me, and I hope you will consider having an interview with me. This interview is confidential. There is no risk of harm to you by having this interview. You are not required to have an interview with me, and you can decide not to have the interview at any time. This interview is not part of your class assignments – you will not pass or fail a class by taking this survey.

By taking the interview you give me permission to use your answers in any future reports or publications. If you have any questions, you can email me at jsmoore@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-0337. You can also contact the research advisor, Dr. Kris Blair, by email at kblair@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-8033. In addition, you can contact the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) by email at hsrb@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-7716.

Thank you!

Jeffrey S. Moore
Introduction: My name is Jeffrey S. Moore. I am a Ph.D. student in the English Department. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Kris Blair. I am doing research about technology and writing. I am looking at how non-native English writers use and interact with technology. For the purpose of this interview, I will be called “the researcher,” and you will be called “the participant.” Dr. Kris Blair will be called “the research advisor.”

Purpose: You have already spoken with the researcher once before, and taken a survey created by the researcher. The purpose of this second interview is to get more information about how English Language Learner (ELL) writers use technology. The researcher also wants to understand how instructors can be more helpful in teaching ELLs how to use technology to help them improve their writing. This research will not have any direct benefits to you, but it will provide benefit to writing instructors and their students by giving those instructors more information about ELLs write.

Procedure: Today, the researcher will be conducting a second interview with you. This means the researcher will be asking you different questions to get more information about how you use technology to help you write. This interview will be conducted in person between you and the researcher. The interview will be made up of twenty-eight (28) questions, but the researcher may ask you to provide more details or ask you a follow-up question if the researcher does not understand your answer. The interview should take about one (1) hour to complete. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this survey. The researcher will ask you questions, and use the electronic voice recorder on his laptop computer to record your answers to the questions. After the interview, the researcher will listen to your answers, type them out into a Word document on a password-protected laptop computer, and then delete the electronic recording of the interview. This document will be called a “transcript.”

Voluntary nature: Your participation in this second interview is completely voluntary. This means you are not required to speak to the researcher if you do not want to. You are free to stop at any time. You may decide to skip interview questions or end the interview at any time without any penalty. Deciding to participate or not to participate will not affect your grades, your class standing, your relationship with Bowling Green State University, your relationship with your instructors, or your ability to graduate from Bowling Green State University if you are a degree seeking student.

Confidentiality Protection: The information collected in this survey, will be recorded using the electronic voice recorder on the researcher’s laptop computer. The audio file will then be typed out into a Microsoft Word document, called a transcript. Any personally identifying information on the audio file, like your name, will be changed or removed from the transcript. However, your answers may be directly quoted in any future reports or publications based on this study. This transcript will be stored on a password-protected laptop computer, which only the researcher will have access to. Once the transcript has been completed, the audio recording of the interview will be deleted. Your signed Informed Consent Document will be kept in a secure location at the researcher’s home. Only the researcher will have access to the Informed Consent Document. The researcher will not use your real name or any identifying information when the study results are reported or published.

Risks: There is a very small risk that your confidentiality may be at risk. However, this risk is not any greater than the risks we encounter in everyday life.
Contact information: You can contact the researcher or the research advisor regarding any questions about this research study. You can contact the research by email at jsmoore@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-0337. You can contact the research advisor by email at kblair@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-8033. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) by email at hsrb@bgsu.edu or by telephone at 419-372-7716.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered satisfactorily, and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. By signing this form I agree to participate in this research and to have my answers used in any future reports or publications based on this research study.

________________________________________
Participant Name

________________________________________
Participant Signature
APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW 2 QUESTIONS

Hello again, I am Jeffrey S. Moore. As you may remember, I am a Ph.D. student in the English Department. Today I am going to interview you again about your writing habits. This interview will focus more on the way you use technology to write. I will also ask you questions about whether some kinds of technology practices are considered writing. Before we begin, I need to talk to you about the Informed Consent Form for this interview. (Go over Informed Consent Form for Interview 2 with participant, answer any questions they have, and ask them to sign the form if they agree to be interviewed).

Before I begin the interview, I want to thank you again for agreeing to talk to me. Your answers to these questions are very helpful, and I want you to know that I appreciate your time and attention today. Just like before, I am using my laptop computer to record our interview. This interview has twenty-eight questions and will take about one hour to complete. When the interview is finished I will type out your answers into a Word document on my laptop computer, and then I will delete the audio recording. Please answer these questions as completely and as honestly as you can. I want this recording to be confidential, so please do not say your real name at any time. I will now begin asking you the interview questions.

1. Please list all the things for me that you consider writing. Is a Facebook status writing? Is a Tweet writing? Is sending a text message writing? Is creating a YouTube video writing?

2. Please think about the answers you gave to my last question. Why do you consider (participant’s answers) to be writing? Why do you not consider (options not given by participant) to be writing?

3. Have you heard of the term “multimodal” before?
   a. If yes, move to the next question.
   b. If no, give explanation: Multimodal is a word that has to do with using more than one way of communicating. For example, typing an essay on a computer is one way to communicate. Taking pictures is another way to communicate. Recording my voice as I talk or read is yet another way to communicate. Recording a video and posting it on YouTube is another way to communicate. If I use more than one of these ways of communicating, I would say that I am using multimodal communication.

4. Do you think writing can be multimodal?
   a. If yes, why do you think so?
   b. If no, why do you think it cannot?

5. If an instructor for a class asked you to complete an assignment, would you ask the instructor if you could do a multimodal assignment?

6. Do you think you could express your ideas better in a video or an audio recording than you could in a typewritten essay?
   a. If yes, why do you think this way?
   b. If no, why not?
7. Imagine showing a typewritten essay you wrote to a native English speaker. Now, imagine showing a video or audio recording of yourself talking to a native English speaker. Which one do you think the native English speaker would understand better? Why do you think they would understand (participant’s answer) better?

8. Would you be worried about showing a video of yourself to native English speakers?
   a. If yes, why?
   b. If no, why not?

9. When you are writing, do you usually complete what you are trying to say and then look back to make changes, or do you make changes as you write?

10. Do you know what the phrase “a writer’s voice” means?
    a. If yes, move to the next question.
    b. If no, explain the meaning of the term: A writer’s voice has to do with the way a person writes. Some people might say it is the style that a person writes in. In other words, it has to do with the kinds of words you use, the kinds of punctuation you use, or the way you explain your ideas. Another way to say this is to say, when you write something, does what you have written sound like you.

11. Do you think you have a writer’s voice?
    a. If yes, please describe your writer’s voice to me.
    b. If no, why do you think you do not have a writer’s voice?

12. Do you ever write things with a pen or pencil on a sheet of paper, or do you only write on a computer?
    a. Why do you write only with a computer? Or, why do you write with a pen or pencil and paper? (question asked will depend on participant’s answer)

13. Do you usually write by yourself or with other people?

14. What about if you are working on an assignment with another person in a class. Is that writing? Is that the same as the kind of writing you do by yourself?

15. Is writing that you do with other people more important than writing you do by yourself?

16. Do you think your class instructors would grade an essay that you wrote with another student in the same way they graded an essay you wrote by yourself?

17. Have you ever asked another person to help you write something? This can be a teacher, a friend, a family member, a tutor, or anyone else.
    a. If yes, who would you say was the writer? Were you the writer or was the person who helped you the writer? Why do you think one person is the writer and not the other person
    b. If no, why not? Do you think you would not be doing enough of your own writing if you asked someone else for help?
18. If you use a technology like a dictionary website, or a translation app on your cellphone, are you still writing or is the website or app doing the writing?
   a. Why do you think that? (ask this regardless of the participant’s answer)

19. Do you know what the word “composing” means?
   a. If yes, move to the next question.
   b. If not, explain what composing means: Composing means to put something together, or to make something. Sometimes writing is called composing, because when you write you put a lot of small ideas together to make bigger ideas. Then, you write those bigger ideas into an essay, or an email, or a text message.

20. I sometimes use the words “writing” and “composing” to talk about the same action. Do you think the words “writing” and “composing” mean the same thing, or do they mean something different for you?

21. When you send a text message to a friend or a family member, do you think you are writing?
   a. If yes, why?
   b. If no, why not?

22. What about if you send an email to a class instructor? Does that count as writing?

23. Would you use different language in a text message compared to an email to a class instructor? In other words, would you use more formal language in a text message to a friend? Would you use more informal language in an email to an instructor?
   a. Can you please explain to me why you would use more formal language for (participant’s answer) and more informal language for (participants answer)?

24. Do you ever use something like Google Docs, where more than one person can work on writing something at the same time on different computers and in different places?

25. Do you think being able to work on writing with other people who are on different computers and in different places is a good thing?
   a. If yes, why?
   b. If no, why not?

26. Would you like the chance to work on more of your essays and assignments with other students in your classes, or would you rather work on essays and assignments alone?

27. Are there any other writing habits you have that you have not told me about in our two interviews?
   a. If yes, what are they?

28. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the way you write, or how often you write?
This is the end of our interview. I want to thank you again for agreeing to talk to me. I really appreciate the amount of time you took to speak to me and to answer my questions. I have enjoyed getting the chance to speak to you, and I hope you have enjoyed helping me with my research.