Infusing Dysfluency into Rhetoric and Composition:

Overcoming the Stutter

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This dissertation titled
Infusing Dysfluency into Rhetoric and Composition:
Overcoming the Stutter

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Abstract

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Infusing Dysfluency into Rhetoric and Composition: Overcoming the Stutter

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This dissertation considers verbal dysfluencies, such as stuttering, as generative to writing and its complex process through the various techniques and strategies that derive from verbal dysfluency. Very little work in the field of Rhetoric and Composition has been undertaken to further understand what might occur, and how writing teachers can help, during moments of writing dysfluency or moments in the process that are not necessarily generating text. Writing dysfluencies include a range of things from a hyper-attention to the generalized rules of writing to various avoidance behaviors that inhibit the composition of prose, all of which slow or disrupt the process of writing. I argue that techniques such as circumlocution offer a new way to conceptualize the dysfluencies that student writers may encounter and offer possibilities to better manage or adapt to these dysfluencies.

I also argue that the field has too long neglected Demosthenes, famed stutterer, and I suggest that his fabled dysfluency created some of the rhetorical strategies we now rely on. This work posits that Demosthenes’s life story may also be considered one of the first “overcoming narratives,” a narrative form common in Disability literature.

While Disability Studies has recently quite firmly disavowed the overcoming narrative, I suggest that the “overcoming narrative” may provide an avenue for dysfluent speakers and student writers to voice their apprehensions, moments of uncertainty, and
misunderstandings about the writing process. Moreover, I assert that dysfluency and its related narratives have been neglected in Disability Studies and suggest that their inclusion would strengthen the field’s awareness of other lesser known (dis)abilities.

Finally, I argue that an infusion of dysfluency into Composition theory and pedagogy would provide student writers and writing teachers with new, unexplored techniques and strategies for overcoming the moments when students find themselves unable to compose in the ways they may wish. Thus, dysfluency offers a unique way to study writing processes that could better provide guidance to student writers when they may need writing instructors the most—in times of dysfluency.
Preface

At the 2012 MLA Convention in Seattle, I gave a presentation entitled, “Writing Strategy and Stutterers: What Composition Can Learn from Dysfluent Speakers.” The panel I was on was led by Josh Lukin, who approved my proposal and submitted the panel. A few days after the presentation, Josh asked me if he could send a copy of my presentation along to Jay Dolmage, a well-known disability scholar and rhetorician. I agreed, mostly because I had heard about Jay and read some of his work.

During this time, early 2012, I had passed my comprehensive exams and was working toward a dissertation focused on service-learning and political discourse. While having a strong passion for service-learning (as I still do), I went to the 2012 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) to present another paper titled, “The Gateway to Political Discourse: Explaining the Rhetorical Waves of Fear” and to attend as many sessions on service-learning and political rhetoric as possible. Save for one.

That one session was one at which Jay was presenting. Because of his request to read my earlier presentation and a few cordial e-mail exchanges, I thought it would be a good idea to meet him and put a face to the name. As usual, I arrived early to the session and took a seat. After checking the program, I realized how quickly and how full the room was getting. Seat after seat filled as even more continued to enter the room that sat roughly two hundred and fifty. So many squeezed into that room that the aisles and any space in the front and back was occupied. I sat silent and stunned. Compared to the
service-learning panels that had about the same fifteen to twenty people, of which I was one of them, this “disability” panel was packed with all kinds of people, all different levels of experience and education, students and professors, young and old, “disabled” and abled. The energy amazed me.

It was in that moment that I realized my disability, my stuttering was what I should focus on in my dissertation. As I continue to learn about my own dysfluency, I feel I can offer humble insight to others, and this work is part of that charge.
Dedication

For my family, both of them.

Most of all, for my Lovely.
Acknowledgments

Any piece of work a writer has written is not his or her work alone; we work in concert with every teacher, colleague, friend, and loved one we have. This work is no different, and I have many to thank. My journey really began with a conversation with James S. Baumlin, a tremendous scholar, true friend, and devoted mentor (and recent Distinguished Professor at Missouri State University). His faith in my ability and determination have carried me through many a troubled time. His guidance cannot be underestimated. Likewise, also at Missouri State, Margaret Weaver, Professor of English, caring friend, and courageous colleague, started me on this journey of my dysfluency. I owe her many times over.

At Ohio University, Sherrie Gradin directed this work and provided careful guidance in moments of doubt. I have found her insight and grace to be extraordinary. Without her, this work would never have come to completion; of this, I have no doubt. The remainder of my committee also deserve their due. Mara Holt stayed true and offered positive reinforcement. In my ongoing moments of fluster, by some serendipity, an e-mail would arrive from her with just the right words. I have always valued her perspective and always will. Eric LeMay was active and engaged throughout this process. His suggestions were very insightful and helpful and are evident throughout this work. His humor and encouragement proved invaluable. Janis Holm is a mentor with a heart of gold and one of my strongest supporters. David Holben, who began as the outside member but had to step away because of other duties, demonstrated the value of another discipline’s insight. When Professor Holben was unable to attend the defense, David
Descutner, a gentleman I have come to respect and learn from at every opportunity, stepped in to provide wisdom and insight. I am humbled and honored by all of my committee members.

Certainly, I offer my humble thanks to my family. My Mother has always had my best interests at heart, even when I did not realize them at the time. Everything I have ever completed is partly due to her force of will (a two-time cancer survivor and mother of two boys), her incredible and doubtless character, and her careful, constructive wisdom. There is probably no person I have learned more from about what it means to be a human than her. I am also thankful for other members of my family and their support—it has not gone unnoticed.

Finally, I must acknowledge, my Lovely, Jacqui, who continues to be a positive force in my life. Her caring, love, extreme intelligence, and striking beauty have proven to me that she is The One. Our discussions are manifest throughout this work, and this work has benefitted highly from her input. I have never known someone who helps me be a better man, more than Jacqui. She is simply lovely. This work is devoted to her, as am I.
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Chapter 1: Initiation of an Infusion: Rhetoric and Composition and Dysfluency

*Speak then without fear.* ~Plato (“Phaedrus” 147)

I have always spoken with fear. Fear based on my own speech dysfluency of stuttering. I cannot remember a time of consistent fluency in my speaking, never. Because of my stuttering, I have always been different. I have no concept of speaking without occasionally sputtering along or stopping mid-word to replace the word for another or the direction I’m going for another.

I have always been dysfluent. My earliest memories of speaking include stuttering. My earliest memories of being ridiculed and made fun of in grade school are because of my stuttering. In fact, in third grade the teacher told me, in no uncertain terms, that I was stupid. I like to think I had an understanding that I was not stupid and she did not understand what she was really talking about. Regardless, I learned—meaning I was conditioned—not to speak often in class because there was little need for additional laughter at my expense. Yet, I also learned how to see my “disability” in ways no one, I thought, could understand.

I learned to rephrase sentences and to replace words and to reconsider if speaking up would be worth the potential stares and uncomfortable moments because of my dysfluency. I learned these early, but I do not precisely know when or how. I do remember going to speech therapy in grade school and attempting to roll the letter “r” with limited success. I remember this time fondly because I saw it as a way to get out of
class and avoid the work others were doing. My teachers rarely requested I make up any of this work, and if they did, I never did actually complete it. Finally, in 5th grade, best as I can recall, the therapy stopped and I was never told why. Not that I minded, but I did miss the time out of class. I liked walking the barren halls to the therapist; there was a silence, even a serenity in walking there alone with permission, a serenity in being different, unlike the others that were not like me. That difference made me—makes me—able to write here, now, about this topic. This exigency—being a person who stutters, a writer (who believes there are dysfluencies in writing), and a teacher of writing—provides for the genesis of this project, a dissertation that balances moments of dysfluency and moments of fluency as a way to generate understanding between abilities and differences as ways to make knowledge and to be more compassionate, more human.

Past to Present

At some point in human history, we learned to communicate beyond grunts, motions, and drawings. This was the beginning of spoken language, and the beginning of storytelling. Part of our human nature is to tell stories. From events in the past to hopeful events in the future, we speak to one another about our interpretations and our dreams. We all tell stories. These stories have been passed down through time from the old to the young, because they tell us who we are as humans. They teach us values, morals, and offer us experience beyond our own. We acknowledge oral history as a way to understand our collective past. And at some point, we had the idea to construct a way to
remember these stories better by creating a system of symbols that collectively represent written language.

From the ancient Greeks, we have come to understand words coupled with oratory could become heroic and could be reinforced by deeds. Now, it is those words that we remember. The Sophists, using oratory, mythos, and nomos as persuasive argument, helped expand the use of oratory by composing speeches and arguments. Their works show us the powerful effect of words and how change comes from mere words spoken (or written). It was Plato, though, who attempted to write as if his words were the only words needed:

Plato [. . . attempts] the greatest theft of all time, the theft of writing. Rather than using writing, he tries to use it up, leaving nothing for those who follow. Plato uses the [. . .] system of writing, to steal the most powerful voice of Western civilization, the voice of Socrates, and then he tries to negate the system itself, leaving himself with both the voice of authority and absolute control of a system that after him will be corrupted, unable to regain a position of authority, unable to begin the search for truth. (Neel 6)

Jasper Neel, author of *Plato, Derrida, and Writing*, demonstrates that Plato attempts to explain that writing is unworthy partly because we cannot have a dialogue with a text. For Plato, we recall, this dialectic is how those like Plato can provide truth to those less privileged. Neel further explains Plato hopes “to condemn writing,” but to do so “he [Plato] uses writing to make his case” against it (5). It is here with Plato through his “Phaedrus” that some see room to separate speech, oratory, or dialectic from the written
word. Nevertheless, Plato’s student Aristotle bursts forth with his own theories of rhetoric, politics, and poetics that challenge Plato’s (“transcendent”) forms that are based on intuition and reasoning. Aristotle’s theories are “empirical” or based on experience and observation (Bizzell and Herzberg 170). Plato distanced himself from others by creating a class structure in society: “Rulers (legislative and deliberative [philosopher kings, like Plato himself], Auxiliaries (executive) [also considered to be “Guardians] and Craftsmen (productive) [the laborers]” (Plato The Republic of Plato 102). Plato, of course, positions himself at the governing or what many refer to as the “Philosopher King” position. Aristotle sought to position himself with others through a classification system of living organisms. Aristotle scholar, Werner Jaeger writes of Aristotle’s thinking: “There is nothing in nature, even the most worthless and contemptible, that does not contain something wonderful within itself” (341). Perhaps Aristotle’s thoughts came about because he had been bitten by the otherness of disability: “An ancient biographical source suggests that Aristotle had a speech impediment” (Bizzell and Herzberg 169). We can hypothesize that if he had a speech impediment, he avoided speaking to some degree, and writing for him became the main way to convey knowledge. And he did write. His writings are voluminous and cover topics such as rhetoric, politics, poetry, drama, biology, science, and ethics. With Aristotle, writing becomes the modern way to transfer information across space and time.
Writing to Speech

Walter J. Ong, author of well-known *Orality and Literacy*, reminds us that writing is a technology (80). More importantly, writing is a tool that we use “to understand it in relation to its past, to orality” (Ong 82). Through his work Ong establishes writing with the term “script,” which he equates to “true writing” (82). True writing, then, “is a representation of an utterance, of words that someone says or is imagined to say” (Ong 83). Ong confirms the connection between writing and verbal discourse and illustrates that writing is derived from orality. More clearly, speaking or orality is a natural instrument; writing is an artificial instrument. To extend Ong’s thinking, writing supports oral discourse, allowing it to transcend time, place, culture, and to some degree, ability. Through oral discourse, we derive written discourse; however, we never lose verbal discourse, and the relationship between the two continues to be a source of scholarship. For this dissertation, more importantly, the problems of one transfer to the other.

French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, in his essay “He Stuttered,” suggests that the unintentional omissions in writing might be considered to be stutters or dysfluencies (108). Stuttering is a dysfluency of speaking. However, dysfluency can also be seen in writing. Princeton’s *WordNet* defines\(^1\) “disfluency” as “lack of skillfulness in speaking or writing.” Therefore, dysfluency\(^2\) is a broader concept related to verbal and written communication. For my purposes here, dysfluency goes beyond a *lack of fluency* and is

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1 The Oxford English Dictionary does not recognize “disfluency” or “dysfluency” as English words. Nor does Merriam-Webster: when I recently asked a Merriam-Webster representative, he politely told me he would “get back to me.” At present, he has not.

2 I have decided to use d\(\text{Y}\)sfluency and not d\(\text{s}\)/fluency, because I am attempting to distance this work from the disabling nature of “dis.”
suggestive of the different types of moments where the writing process is interrupted in some fashion, which might include hyper-attention to grammar or punctuation rules, avoidance behaviors (e.g. procrastination and the feelings behind it), moments of writer’s block, or other disruptions in writing that could be caused by lack of confidence or uncertainty related to the expectations of the discourse.

There are different types of verbal dysfluency, and here, I provide a foundational understanding of stuttering and some adaptations for compensating for it. But first, what is stuttering? Franklin H. Silverman, fellow stutterer and author of *Stuttering and Other Fluency Disorders*, explains, “There is disagreement about how the term *stuttering* should be defined,” but he offers some insight in that “Almost all definitions mention repetitions of sounds and syllables and prolongations of speech sounds, and almost all mention difficulty in beginning to say words” (9). Many might be able to draw from their personal experience. Most of us have at some time had difficulty pronouncing or getting out a particular word. Others might have repeated a few syllables or included filler words to maintain a sense of flow in our discourse. These, I think, are something most speakers (and writers) share. The most obvious kind of stuttering is a repetition of either a word (e.g. One—one time), a phrase (e.g. I went to—I went to the park), a monosyllabic word (I—I—I—I went to), or a part-word repetition (e.g. C—C—C—Can you). People Who Stutter (PWS) may also revise statements when a dysfluency occurs such as, “I can meet you at four o—o—o—p.m.” Here, the speaker was stuck on “o’clock” and switched to “p.m.” to work through the dysfluency. Most PWS can anticipate what words, sounds, or phrases will be difficult, and sometimes they chose a strategy to avoid dysfluency.
Another form of dysfluency is a prolongation (e.g. The ssssound of the sssstream). Prolongations are when PWS attempt to modify a dysfluency by lengthening a sound or become seized in a posture. Similarly, a block occurs when a speaker is stuck on a sound and no sound occurs (e.g. I th--------ink that). Both a prolongation and a block freeze a speaker so either a consistent sound is coming out or no sound is coming out. In speech therapy jargon, there are two types of blocks: tonic and clonic. Clonic blocks are kinetic blocks where a sound continues. We might consider these to be similar to the recursive writing process. We recognize this in writing that continually returns to a particular point without developing beyond that point. It lacks development and keeps defending, for example, a vague thesis. By seeing clonic through this repetitious nature, we understand the rhythm of a writing. In other words, we can recognize the pattern—the drumbeat, if you will—and entertain options to reconceptualize, relax, or reconfigure to get us out of this pattern that has stalled. If we consider tonic, these blocks are moments of complete cessation of sound, and we quickly relate this to writer’s block. That is, where a writer reaches a point where the chain of words comes to an abrupt end or the idea is un retrievable in the mind, and more importantly, like tonic blocks, the writer is frozen and unable to continue.

Some adaptations PWS perform to compensate for a dysfluency may relate to helping the writing process and its dysfluencies. While I return to strategies in more depth in Chapter 4, here, I briefly discuss three: circumlocution, word choice, and pace. Circumlocution offers a way for writers to approach a difficult or complex phrase or concept from a new direction. For example, instead of using a term, one might explain or
define the term, which in turn provides the audience with an understanding of the concept behind it. There are many ways to get from Detroit to Chicago, and circumlocution takes a more scenic tour. A related strategy is word substitution or word choice. As a teacher, I explain the idea of taking conscious time to consider the use of any given term. To illustrate a simple example, one might avoid the more-complex term “microwave,” as in the action of heating food up and decide to use the term “nuke it” in its place. Obviously, the latter term offers a different level of formality and has a different rhetorical effect, but it also offers PWS another way to avoid dysfluency. Another strategy is the pace of a writing allows for readers to absorb the material and aids in comprehension. The use of pacing does have a healthy history in oratory. There are many ways to adjust pace in a writing environment, perhaps the most obvious is punctuation. Since there is no completely effective treatment or therapy that is effective for all PWS, many have discovered strategies to disguise or assist dysfluent episodes. Thus, there are strategies that can be applied for use in scribal dysfluency, too.

This dissertation works to explore the relationship between verbal and written dysfluency. Further it seeks to consider how dysfluency is not a “disability” but merely an ability misunderstood—while suggesting that disabilities in general should be reconsidered as differences, or more precisely, I suggest we can “reable” so-called disabilities to be elements in creating learning opportunities. As a dysfluent speaker, I reable my speech to better communicate with others. But when someone first encounters my stutter, there is a momentary flash across the person’s face—a direct look into my
eyes, almost like a confused query. This look lets me know I’m different, and to them, I’m disabled in some way. It is this way that dysfluency—all disability—gets attention.

A Moment of Disability

Disability begins with difference(s) being seen. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes,

The history of disabled people in the Western world is in part the history of being on display, of being visually conspicuous while politically and socially erased. [. . .] From antiquity through modernity, the bodies of disabled people considered to be freaks and monsters have been displayed by the likes of medieval kings and P. T. Barnum for entertainment and profit in courts, street fairs, dime museums, and sideshows. [. . .] Disabled people have variously been objects of awe, scorn, terror, delight, inspiration, pity, laughter, or fascination—but they have always been stared at. (56)

Those that are socially constructed as “disabled” are stared and pointed at whether the perceived disability is from a physical, mental, emotional, or another difference. But how different are “they”? Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson assert that “if we live long enough” many, if not all, of us will become disabled in some fashion (2). This seems obvious, but disability remains “an alien condition” (Snyder, Brueggemann, and Garland-Thomson 2). Disability, as a condition or set of conditions, may still be taboo in casual conversation. Perhaps this is due to the complexity of defining what disability is. In many disability resources, most authors
exercise a level of, what I consider, to be trepidation in defining disability or provide so many options that everyone might very well be disabled as Snyder, Brueggemann and Garland-Thompson suggest.

In his opening essay to the collection, *Disability and the Teaching of Writing: A Critical Sourcebook*, Jay Dolmage, compositionist, rhetorician and Disability scholar, considers aspects of space related to disability, access, and our university systems. He reasons that the “physical structures [restricting access to the disabled] equate with ideological structures” (“Mapping” 15). Dolmage believes that composition is one of the workhorses in regards to challenging the status quo and finding ways to increase diversity. Through his essay, he argues that Rhetoric and Composition should provide a seat at the discussion table for disability studies because, as he demonstrates, the structures in place have rarely allowed for the non-normal. Perhaps more importantly, he reasons that the composition classroom “must include disability” so students can claim disability and learn from the differences related to disability (“Mapping” 23). Dolmage envisions classrooms that accept differences “without fear or discrimination” (“Mapping” 22-23). In other words, Dolmage is arguing for the acknowledgement that “disability [is] an embodied fact, an identity” (“Mapping” 22), and students have a right to “re-map, re-create, and re-write the world in which they learn” (“Mapping” 23).

Dolmage alludes to the concept of Universal Design, but I consider his insight suggestive of universal *disability*. That is to say, we should demonstrate some level of understanding disability for students so they can learn from different perspectives. Further in “Metis, *Metis, Mestiza*, Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical
Traditions,” Dolmage argues that through the use of “metis [. . . we] recognize that all rhetoric is embodied. If so, one may conclude that there cannot be a perfect specimen—a perfect rhetoric, and more importantly, this might suggest we are all disabled because we are imperfect (“Metis” 6). However, in “Composing Bodies; or, De-Composition: Queer Theory, Disability Studies, and Alternative Corporealities,” Robert McRuer cautions us about suggesting that everyone is disabled (58). His defense of not making such a claim contends that by doing so one “can diffuse or universalize” queer and disabled, which, as he explains, endorses the hetero or abled to not recognize or not take such work “seriously” (McRuer 58). Instead, he argues the idea that “there are moments when we are all queer/disabled, and that those disabled/queer moments are desirable” (McRuer 59). Beyond his suggestion of making queer and disability studies a centerpiece of composition theory, McRuer argues for “a loss of composure” that allows for non-normative alternatives can be imagined (50). In similar fashion, David T. Mitchell explains, “Disabled bodies prove undisciplined because they refuse to conform” (16). One can clearly take a disabled moment, a loss of composure, or a refusal to conform to be strongly correlated to a dysfluent moment, a moment of stuttering.

Dysfluency in Rhetoric and Composition

Discussion about dysfluency or stuttering is rarely found in Rhetoric and Composition publications. Part of the reason for this, we can hypothesize, is the way they are discussed by those who have written about it, which generally has been by those who are classified as “normal.” Normalcy is not real; it is constructed by privileged experience
and perceived standards of society and culture. Moreover, I believe dysfluent speakers have been overlooked because the “normals” of Rhetoric and Composition have accepted the narrative of disability as it relates to dysfluency.\textsuperscript{3} That is, it has been assumed that if you cannot speak fluently, you probably have similar (dis)ability in writing. Of course, few if any would ever overtly state this, but shortly I review the journals and how they have discussed stutterers as evidence of this.

In the following select chronological review, I examine the mentions of dysfluent speech and stuttering. As I began reviewing material, I searched for several terms relative to speech dysfluency such as stuttering, stammering, dysfluent, dyslalia, etc. Some references to these terms I’ve omitted because they refer to an action, such as Emerson Grant Sutcliffe’s 1942 \textit{College English} article, wherein he describes the action of responding, by not responding “but stutter and turn away” (641). Sutcliffe uses stutter as uncertainty and being unsure of how to respond to a given circumstance. In a similar usage in \textit{College English}, H. L. Anshutz uses stutter to suggest a digression or as a word for “filler”: “there is time to think without allowing thought to stutter or clutter our sentences” (961). Well-known writing teacher and teacher of writing teachers, Nancy Sommers, too, uses the term “stutter” to reference a student being caught off guard, nervous, or embarrassed, but she is not equating the term to dysfluent (“I Stand” 426). Additionally in \textit{College English}, Katie Meadow, in describing students discomfort with Freud, explains their “[t]witching and stuttering” (282). (See also Stoehr 159.) Or like David F. Ash, Professor of English, who mentions stuttering as “stuttering repetition,” the

\textsuperscript{3} I will use stuttering and dysfluency interchangeably.
action of repeating something, not related to a dysfluent person or writing (104).

Moreover, disability scholar Tobin Siebers uses stuttering to refer to inanimate objects:

“Paintings are speaking pictures, but their speech is stuttering and defective when compared with the graceful tongue of poetry” (“Words” 1316). In my search, I focused on articles discussing students with dysfluency, connections between stuttering and writing, and dysfluency in writing.

Prior to 1917, I found no material in journals specific to my research. After 1917, many sources reference the dysfluent person as deficient in some way. This is important to help establish the trajectory of how PWS have been characterized in our respective journals, and I also think it’s important to help later demonstrate how Demosthenes was overlooked. That is, Demosthenes may have been overlooked because of his storied dysfluency and disabilities.4

Between 1917 and the 1960s, people who stutter occasionally show up in our major journals, but they are described as diseased (Mones 20), egoists (Mones 21), nervously deranged (Mones 23), defective (Martin 23), weak hearted (Poley 491), basket cases (Mauk 291), grotesque (Fielder 4), and independent scholar, Miriam Brody (165) suggests that even Fred Newton Scott refers to those, like me, who speak with occasional dysfluency, as possibly “of primitive races” (2).5 And it gets worse; Clarence Stratton admits that it is a “terrible affliction to make stutterers speak” but he doesn’t end there; he writes, it’s “especially terrible to the listeners” (466). Perhaps the most damning is speech

4 I cover this more thoroughly in Chapter Two.
5 Here, I include the citation for Brody and Scott, because both scholars have interesting points going in divergent directions; I leave it for the reader to decide the most useful.
educator Clarence T. Simon’s suggestion that “The most intelligent comments made by students lose their value when they are uttered with a painful stutter [emphasis added]” (142). He explains, “the content of their recitations is obscured in our amusement, annoyance, or shock at the manner of their speaking [emphasis added]” (142). Simon views comments made with dysfluency as invalid because he and other students cannot overcome the dysfluency of the speaker. Simon continues and contends that the goal of speech training should be to make those that are dysfluent “normal individuals” (143). However, Simon broadens his logic to claim that other pupils that are disabled are not forced into positions for which they are not suited, such as a deaf student playing in the orchestra (144). And still, Simon perpetuates the familiar theme that those with speech problems simply “must have a desire” to overcome the speech dysfluency. Simon disengages and explains, that speech disorders such as stuttering are “one of the baffling problems in all human history” (146). These comments make stuttering seem unworthy of scholarly attention.

In 1919, Ernest Tompkins, author of “The Revolution in the Field of Stammering” in The English Journal, presents himself as an authority of speech dysfluency due to his speech problems and dysfluency and refers to his “cure” (532). Nevertheless, as a “graduate of many stammering institutions,” he provides discourse that a cure is quite simple. The solution, then, is don’t speak—as he proposes, “stammerers [should] get exemption from required oral work” (534). In fact, much of his reasoning points to stuttering as an “infection” that can be caught by non-stutterers (Tompkins 534). However, Tompkins does seem to notice some aspects of dysfluent speech previously
overlooked. He discusses a stutterer who chooses “easy” words in place of more difficult ones (to pronounce) or what one might call circumlocution (532). That is, using words that a dysfluent speaker feels or believes he or she will be able to say to avoid words that may be problematic. Also, Tompkins suggests that a stutterer should speak only “when he feels able to do so” (532). In some ways, this effectively silences a dysfluent speaker, because he or she may not ever feel able to speak without a dysfluent moment. All the same, Tompkins seems to be in concert with others (see also Mones, Simon, Poley) in the belief that dysfluent speakers should just overcome the stuttering.

A couple of years later, Frederick Martin begins his article, “The Prevention and Correction of Speech Defects,” with a sense of understanding that, until now, previous work in speech defects has been shortsighted and ignorant, and he plans on setting the record straight. After providing a list of speech defects—stammering and stuttering, lisping, lalling and cognate defects, defective phonation, and foreign accent—he sets out much as previous authors discussed do: finding a solution, a cure (23). Martin believes that stuttering is caused by inharmony in a person’s body, and to correct this, before “timidity and mental retardation” take hold, the body must be brought into harmony with itself (24). To correct stuttering, a series of exercises must be performed such as silent reading.

Students with dysfluency in English classrooms have been represented in our scholarship to this point as simply unable or unwilling to advance themselves and force themselves to stop stuttering. And their teachers, for the most part, seem aware of the visible distress of these students, but either don’t know how to address the stuttering or
fail to find ways to assist these students other than telling them to work harder or ignoring it or laughing along with the class. In 1955, Grant Mauk describes one female student who had a quivering lip, a gaping soundless mouth, and according to Mauk, “She was shaking, stuttering—what is sometimes referred to as a real basket case” (291). His “basket case” reference demonstrates the impression of Mauk and her classmates to her potential dysfluency, and also to the societal and cultural norms of fluency. Although the speech dysfluency here may be nervousness that some students experience when speaking in front of a class of their peers, Mauk does utilize stereotypical stuttering behaviors to detail his narrative such as being stuck on a word and being voiceless, unable to speak, frozen.

A few years later (1962), Leslie A. Fiedler, literary critic, in a remembrance entitled, “On Remembering Freshman Comp,” describes his experience in freshman composition. In his narrative, the most compelling details are of a fellow student that stuttered. He comments how “grotesquely” the student’s mouth was and how “terrifying audible” his breathe was as he tried to speak (Fiedler 4). There is no mention of his words or what they might have meant. Fiedler’s observation points to the general consensus of the field; those that are dysfluent are too different, too difficult, too ugly to even try to comprehend. But even in sifting through these, there are some moments that show promise.

It is not until 1967 that Vivian Buchan, author and writing teacher, makes a connection between stuttering and writing; she gains this insight from a student who stutters. The student explains, when asked why he wrote so little, “Well, I stutter when I
write, too” (110). She explains her response: “Inwardly, I was amused by this rationalization, but outwardly I conceded that he might have a point though I wasn’t quite sure that I saw it” (110). Buchan initial reaction is amusement to this student’s belief that his stuttering affected his writing. She concedes that this “remedial” student may have a point, but she does not probe further to understand it (109). Rather, she dismisses it and reports, “his speech problem had clearly impeded the flow of ideas or at least the expression of them [emphasis added]” (Buchan 110). Buchan not only dismisses this student’s experience, but his entire thought process and ability to communicate. Although she is unable (or unwilling) to dig deeper to further understand any connections between stuttering and writing, she talks with the student and she finds that he has decided to limit his language use because of his stuttering. Buchan asks a series of “why” questions probing the student for the “becauses” and through this cycle, with her guidance, he formulates a basic outline of a paper (110). Buchan triumphantly reports that at the end of the semester, with her guidance, this student “could make simple outlines and connect 450 words together into an acceptable theme” (110). Moreover, she concludes that although he still has a “somewhat limited ability to think [. . . .] he had learned [. . .] to write connected prose without stuttering” (110).

We must applaud Buchan for attempting to assist this student with his writing, as any writing teacher should. However, we can learn something important ourselves if we look closely, through a dysfluency lens, at the help she afforded him. Beyond her dismissal and initial thought of humor, Buchan takes the student’s dysfluency and claims to correct it in a semester. Above all, Buchan positions this student as needing her
guidance to succeed, and even then, she still considers him mostly incapable because of the dysfluency. If it were only his ability as a writer, she would not have any need to reference the stuttering. Thus, she argues that the student’s dysfluency is the compelling factor in her claim of his limited writing and thinking ability. Here, I am reminded of disability scholar Susan Wendall, who writes, “[There is] so little recognition of the potential and value of disabled people’s actual lives” and as such, she adds, “The widespread message [is] that they are not good enough” (83). Perhaps more aptly, we should ask, “Why do we start with ‘disability’ and not with what someone’s abilities are?”

In 1969, Robert Zoellner recognized some potential in dysfluent speech in his controversial “Talk-Write: A Behavioral Pedagogy for Composition.” Zoellner’s piece is about his new pedagogy that basically asks students to explain what their writing means—that is, transfer them from written to oral discourse in explaining a particular passage or sentence. Perhaps as a momentary digression, or by mere chance, he writes, “the vocal non-fluencies which comprise stuttering may […] conceivably have some functional, diagnostic, or remedial connection to the scribal non-fluencies that the English teacher encounters in the classroom” (290). This short phrase of a buried sentence in a more than fifty-page article is the first time that stuttering is considered to be a potential avenue of exploration. Albeit briefly, Zoellner proposes stuttering may be a way to better understand the writing process of our students.

Zoellner, though, ends up being equally dismissive of dysfluency, because he fails to return to it. More interestingly, this momentary, but dropped, insight of his could be
considered what Deleuze considered a stutter. In other words, this interruption, uncertainty, or digression, that verbal dysfluency and its related strategies may be applicable to writing, could be itself a dysfluency. In still other words, Zoellner breaks the rhythm or the fluency of his piece by including a snippet about stuttering. If this moment is a dysfluency (which we can recognize as useful), we, too, might see potential in seeking ways to better understand, utilize, and explore this interruption and other dysfluencies—and it is these avenues that drive this dissertation.

Dysfluency as Functional

Although many do not have verbal dysfluency in the clinical sense or at a significantly measurable rate, some of the knowledge derived from working with verbal dysfluency may be useful in writing dysfluency and the writing process. To be sure, by not considering verbal dysfluency as being related to written dysfluency, we are not allowing other ways of understanding writing and its processes. This “cognitive reductionism,” then, would suggest we know all there is to know about writing (Rose “Narrowing” 267). Well-known education scholar, Mike Rose also considers this reductionism similar to making a concept, a practice, or an understanding “textbook-neat,” which oversimplifies the complexity of the advanced act (one might say art) of writing (“Narrowing” 268). Seeking to avoid this reductionism, I have come to believe that speech dysfluency is strongly related to written dysfluency and the composing process.
When people speak they make their thoughts known and they do the same when they write. They make the internal public; the verbal is easier because we practice it more often, but we are also more forgiving of error when it’s made verbally. In writing, we often assume the text is revised, that is, corrected text; whereas with the verbal, we recognize it is in process, extemporaneous, or less planned, so listeners are willing to overlook a misused word, a filler word, or a complete loss of thought (e.g. “I forgot what I was going to say!”).

What happens in those moments we are writing and for some reason we get stuck, stop to think, backtrack to correct an error, or just lose our train of thought? Let’s assume these are dysfluencies of writing. These dysfluencies seem like spaces that we can explore and question. Dysfluency may be halting and slow one down, but it also provides time to reconsider, explore, and revise. Most scholars recognize this, but do not label it as dysfluency; it may be called putting something on the back burner, letting it simmer, or stepping away to clear one’s head. Nevertheless, they are dysfluencies. From the pedagogical standpoint, like all students, we learn by making mistakes—that is, by being dysfluent. To be blunt, we learn by being disabled. This belief stems from my own experience, my dysfluency (in both speaking and writing), and having taught writing for several years now. It is in this way that this work has come about—not from a theory—from praxis. I hope to articulate this praxis here in these pages and, in the end, come to argue toward a theory of dysfluency. In other words, through my experience I explain an area that seems to have been overlooked where I do a bit of wondering and wandering to better understand the ways to comprehend the composing process. Through this
exploration, I come to realize that the differences I see may be useful to others. Perhaps more importantly, I hope that this process of sharing teaches me, so I can become a more complete scholar and teacher.

In this dissertation, I focus on the brief history of disability studies in relation to Rhetoric and Composition, how speech disorders fit into such discourse, and how Rhetoric and Composition can be enhanced by studying speech dysfluency. In this chapter, I have reviewed dysfluency and some strategies PWS utilize and made some suggestions to how they relate to writing. I also provide a brief gloss of Disability Studies and then of the marginalized and very limited history of dysfluency in Rhetoric and Composition scholarship, which provides insight into what I perceive as the ongoing misunderstanding, not only of PWS, but all those labeled as disabled. In Chapter Two, I argue for the inclusion of Demosthenes as one of the founding fathers of the Western Rhetorical Tradition, and I posit that his fabled dysfluency created some of the rhetorical strategies we now rely on. Chapter Three tackles the problematic nature of the personal narrative, specifically the “overcoming” narrative as it relates to Disability Studies and dysfluency. I argue that the overcoming narrative should be reconsidered a valuable tool for personal growth—not a challenge to others with disabilities. In Chapter Four, I make further connections between dysfluency narratives through the understanding of verbal dysfluency techniques and how they may aid the writing process. In Chapter Five, I argue for an infusion of dysfluency scholarship into Rhetoric and Composition to better guide our student writers through their moments of writing dysfluency.
So, there is a space now that I’ve articulated. A void derived from a complex set of positions and ideologies and theories where positions are staked and ideologies are defended and theories are created—all in hopes of conversion. But what if we could step back for a moment and see these interactions differently? What if we could recognize that through these formations, there are dysfluencies: segments that require us to ask further questions, reconsider all our own positions, and adapt new knowledge about our processes? How might we go about this knowledge building? In this dissertation, I suggest we explore these voids and consider how they may have developed long ago through disability, and a reasonable place to begin is with Demosthenes. The next chapter discusses Demosthenes and how he adapted and reabled his “disabilities” and became one of the greatest orators in history.
Chapter 2: A Grandfather of Rhetoric: Considering Demosthenes through a Dysfluent Lens

Demosthenes (385?-322 BCE) was an orator in ancient Greece and was by most accounts disabled and physically weak. He possibly had some kind of speech dysfunction, likely stuttering or a lisp. Only recently has he been reconsidered through a lens of disability (see Dolmage, Message). In Jay Dolmage’s forthcoming text, Demosthenes is shown to be “soft and lame” because of his dysfluency and his “overly feminine demeanor” (Dolmage, Message). In short, Dolmage is working from a gendered disability lens to offer a deeper discussion of the “body” to make meaning; part of his focus is on Demosthenes, his disabilities, and the theme of overcoming to establish his argument. My project, however, differs somewhat in that I consider Demosthenes through a lens of speech dysfluency—that is, a distinct and unexplored disabled lens in relation to Demosthenes. This lens is important for several reasons. First, few have considered Demosthenes’s disabilities as being worthy of study, but they are almost always mentioned. Second and in preparation of what I argue in Chapter 3, Demosthenes’s “overcoming” of his so-called disabilities needs further examination. Third, by re-reading Demosthenes and his rhetorical style, we can better understand how and why those with differing abilities can so easily be dismissed. For example, through a particular reading of Demosthenes, we come to realize that some of the foundation of

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6 Demosthenes is not known to have written about himself, so any report about him must be understood as supposition and possibility not as truth nor as how he would have described himself.
rhetoric and oratory may have come about because of a weak, dysfluent person—a “disabled” person. If we do not overlook him and his (dis)ability, we can learn from it. Moreover if Demosthenes is made accessible to composition, writing teachers may be able to utilize Demosthenes’s adaptatio ns to demonstrate to students the flexibility of composing processes. These insights provide writing instructors deeper insight into how many students who claim that they “can’t write” can learn techniques so they can, in fact, write.

Like some students that “fall through the cracks,” Demosthenes, too, has fallen between the cracks of history. If Demosthenes was by many accounts the greatest orator of the period and labored at his craft in not only writing his speeches but also delivering them, why has he been overlooked in much of the rhetorical scholarship? Could it be because of his reported disability? These questions are important, because I wish to focuses on his abilities and not his disabilities as a way to make knowledge. As such, this chapter considers and imagines Demosthenes to be one of the grandfathers of the Western tradition of Rhetoric—a tradition that generally is dismissive of many minorities, other cultures, and, most importantly for my project, (dis)abilities.

In this chapter, I begin my reconsideration of Demosthenes starting with how he was perceived by his peers in ancient Greece. Then I highlight more modern perceptions of him and point out how he, for the most part, has been overlooked in modern scholarship. Perhaps based on the perceptions of Demosthenes’s disability or disabilities relative to his speech, I report what those so-called disabilities were and present evidence in support of his adjustment to them through his style and experience. I conclude by
demonstrating how Demosthenes’s reabled his disabilities. Consequently, his style of preparation and oratory suggest that his legendary speech problems could be minimized by the styles he used, and they become a useful guide, perhaps, for student writers who can reconceptualize the writing and composing process by reabling their abilities. By discussing aspects of his style, this chapter establishes how he overcame his speech obstacles to become, according to Cicero, “the supreme orator” (Adams 111). First, though, some context about Demosthenes.

Demosthenes’s Cultural Background

The ancient Greeks largely communicated publically through addresses to a crowd or the Assembly. Orators were the ones who spoke on public policy and often at trials. They were the voice of sometimes a single person and sometimes an entire populous, and some had specialized areas of expertise such as jurisprudence. Others became more generalized and could speak on many topics. For Demosthenes, there must have been a diverse lot of speakers to learn from and emulate. Nevertheless to be considered, as Classics Professor George Kennedy notes of Demosthenes, “the great model,” an orator must have been superb in rhetoric and public speaking (615). Many names come to modern scholars from the (Western) rhetorical tradition such as Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle. Many of these are well researched and even non-scholars have likely heard their respective names.

Aristotle is perhaps the best known for his many works, areas of study, and even for his teaching. Yet, there is little evidence of him speaking publically and there is some
conjecture as to why—Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, editors of *The Rhetorical Tradition*, speculate that some sources suggest he “had a speech impediment” (169). If he did, it seems quite obvious why he would much prefer to write than to speak (counter to Plato, his teacher’s, philosophy against writing). For some, it seems to go without saying (no pun intended) that one with a speech impediment would prefer other forms of communication over speaking, especially speaking publically. Demosthenes, however, has passed through history with minimal attention, and he did have a legendary speech problem. Although many of Demosthenes’s speeches survive, there is inadequate scholarship or discussion about his work, style, and historical contribution. In his 2003 *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* article, “Reading and the ‘Written Style’ in Aristotle’s ‘Rhetoric’,” Richard Graff confirms this by informing us that Demosthenes “provided many examples of effective oratory prose [. . . and is] virtually ignored” (36).

We do have some information, however, especially comments about his greatness as an orator. Oddly, many scholars only mention this in passing or introducing him to present another such as Cicero or Quintilian—two figures of rhetoric who are far more popular. For example, how is it that, as Kennedy endorses, “the greatest of the Greek orators known to us” (280) is not in volumes such as *The Rhetorical Tradition*? How is it that the one Cicero considers the “ideal orator” (Murphy et al. 180) fails to appear in most oratory texts? How can one be considered, by Hermogenes, the “commanding orator; indeed, speak[ing] of him simply as ‘The Orator’,” without making several appearances at Rhetoric and Composition conferences or communication conferences (Adams 123)? Even in tangential fields such as communication, Demosthenes is
sparingly mentioned and generally in one of two ways. First, Richard L. Johannesen, a professor in Speech and a debate coach, asserts Demosthenes “fosters conceptions of persuasive greatness—of the mighty orator jousting successfully with evil foes” (236). This highlights Demosthenes’s overcoming ability, which in the Western model is championed. And, second, Demosthenes is seen as a pseudo-heroic figure that seems to be more of a reference point that others mention in order to discuss another. Perhaps it is that his work only survives in transcription and translation; that is, not by his own hand. While it is true that many scholars mention his fabled greatness, they neglect to make deeper connections to modern rhetoric, and some note his weaknesses. In partial defense of this judgment, some claim Demosthenes was not a true orator, because, as Johannesen explains (with a little assistance from Will Durant), he was an actor (237). The implication being that Demosthenes was not real, but rather an imitation, a phony. The irony of, on the one hand, demonstrating Demosthenes’s abilities and showing support for his overcoming of his disabilities, and on the other hand, discrediting him for those same (dis)abilities seems suspect. To be more pointed, why has he been acknowledged and bolstered just to be dismissed and overlooked?

Demosthenes, Dismissed and Disabled

Frankly, there seems to be no reason for his dismissal. He is mentioned in the ancient texts for his greatness, variety of style, patriotism, force of character, moral fortitude, and even his overcoming of various disabilities. Beyond the plethora of stories and legends of him overcoming his disabilities, Demosthenes lost his father at an early
age, and his father’s death “must have been an upsetting event for a boy” (MacDowell 19). This observation suggests a potential cause for Demosthenes’s often-discussed stutter, but also provides a potential genesis for his storied life. His father left Demosthenes, what we would consider, an inheritance, and this money left for him was entrusted to some of his family’s friends. When Demosthenes became of age, most of the money had been mismanaged and thought to be lost. However, Demosthenes researched and discovered where it went and argued before the Assembly to get at least some of it back. This is probably where his initial experience in oratory came from and was the driving factor that led to his overcoming or adapting to any physical or speech disabilities. Over time, we know now, through numerous reports and his (transcribed and translated) speeches, he became one of the great orators of the day. So much so that others paid him to compose speeches. Since he had been successful in reacquiring much of his lost inheritance through multiple trials, they likely figured he might be able to help them too. Here, too, we see his superiority; Kennedy argues, “In deliberative and judicial oratory the best model is said to be Demosthenes” (632).

These experiences and challenges combined would seem to make Demosthenes an ideal person to discuss in the Western and American traditions. A person that is, by all accounts, an idyllic orator, a dedicated statesman, and one who overcame seemingly insurmountable odds would appear to be cut of the same cloth as the Western civilizations that claim to have overcome the challenges within themselves and those of

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7 A study by Alexander K. C. Leung and Lane M. Robson reports “when a child is under pressure or emotional stress” speech dysfluency increases (500). Another study by Jane E. Prasse and George E. Kikano suggests that stuttering can develop “following a psychological event or emotional trauma” (1272).
others. Perhaps, such adulation does not come easy. Yet, it does not end there. Kennedy continues to explain, “if only one model is taken he ought to be the greatest and most varied, Demosthenes” (251-252). This ongoing high regard for the overlooked Demosthenes carries on through the ages (just not in our modern textbooks, conference papers, or anthologies): “Demosthenes is in Hermogenes’ opinion the one great artist who exemplifies all styles and all mixtures of styles” (Kennedy 630). And yet still more, Reverend W. J. Brodribb writes, “As an orator he [Demosthenes] has, almost without question, been unrivaled” (157). Unrivaled, and mostly forgotten.

 Mostly forgotten, but not completely. Perhaps our greatest reporter of Demosthenes’s (dis)ability is Plutarch. Plutarch reports Demosthenes had “a certain weakness of voice and indistinctness of speech and shortness of breath which disturbed the sense of what he said by disjoining his sentences” (15). This indistinctness of speech and a disjointed sentence style seems to be where, beyond legend and tall tale, scholars contend Demosthenes’s stuttering is confirmed. To demonstrate this, Brodribb writes that Demosthenes “had an unlucky infirmity; he, who was to be the greatest orator of all time, stammered [emphasis added]” (24). Even Brodribb, a reverend in the late 1800s, considers Demosthenes, and all people with dysfluency, to be unlucky. His comments provide some of the cultural context around not only speech disorders but disability in general. Cicero also confirms Demosthenes’s speech problems when he writes that Demosthenes “stutter[ed] so badly as to be unable to pronounce the initial R. of the name of the art of his devotion” (320). His trouble pronouncing Rhetoric reflects that people who stutter have a difficult time pronouncing or rolling the letter “r” and my experience
proves this. Growing up, I had a difficult time pronouncing the letter “r.” Much like the stereotypical child who talks by saying words such as “weady” for “ready” or “bwoom” for “broom,” part of my early speech therapy focused on pronouncing the letter “r” and attempting to roll it, which proved difficult to master as I recall.

Plutarch also mentions Demosthenes’s “indistinctness and lisping” that Demosthenes would attempt to correct through “taking pebbles in his mouth and then reciting speeches” (27). Demosthenes had more infirmities beyond a stutter. Charles Darwin Adams, Greek literature and Language Professor, writes, “Demosthenes was a weakly youth, and the biographers agree in the story of his many physical handicaps—his stammering utterance, his short breath, his awkward movement” (4). Along with Demosthenes’s somewhat disputed disabilities, how he overcame them and to what degree are also a cause for speculation. Brodribb reasons, “[Demosthenes had] to surmount the actual physical difficulties of a feeble constitution and of some defect in his organs of speech” (26). Although Brodribb doesn’t discuss what those “organs” were, he does acknowledge that Demosthenes’s “success” was due to his “force of character” (26). In part, Demosthenes’s fortitude helped embellish the legends. Brodribb also reflects on and confirms the legend when he writes of Demosthenes using “pebbles in his mouth” and “reciting as he ran up hill” and “declaimed on the seashore amid the noise of waves and storms” (26). We see some of these “therapies” used in the modern era. For example, in the film *The King’s Speech*, an early scene shows the soon-to-be king, Bertie, taking sterilized marbles (similar to pebbles) into the mouth and attempting to speak under the

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8 I will take up this film more fully in Chapter 3.
supervision and encouragement of a royal speech therapist. Although in the scene, Bertie spits out the marbles in disgusted frustration at trying to speak with a mouth full of them, this demonstrates that until recently (circa 1930s) this method was probably used to treat dysfluency. In a later scene, once Bertie is being treated by Lionel Logue, his speech therapist, we see Bertie shouting vowels out a window into a busy alleyway, which reminds us of Demosthenes shouting over crashing waves on the shore. *The King’s Speech* illustrates the difficulty in treating dysfluency. As such, Demosthenes’s intuitive self-therapy reveals a willingness to change and the will to do so.

Plutarch describes Demosthenes as one who had “a certain intense seriousness and this look of thoughtfulness and anxiety he did not easily lay aside” (213). The intensity of his look and disposition could have been due to his dysfluency. One possibility is that when someone stutters, they are more cautious in what they say and how they say it, mostly because they want to avoid any dysfluency. The anxiety that Plutarch confirms may also come from the realization that stuttering is sometimes unavoidable and the potential to be ridiculed is ever-present. Indeed, Demosthenes clearly had been in front of the people; Plutarch writes, “when he first addressed the people he was interrupted by their clamors and laughed at for his inexperience, since his discourse seemed to them confused by long periods and too harshly and immoderately tortured by formal arguments” (15). These long periods may have been due to nerves, remembering the next point to make, or they might have been moments of blocked fluency. The blocks may have only exacerbated his dysfluency, because with each block—and ridicule—the pressure to produce fluent speech would increase. Indeed, it
must have become a viciously cruel cycle. We can see a relation to how Demosthenes attempted to fit into the discourse of the assembly and to how our students have a level of uncertainty of the standards and conventions of scholarly discourse. Moreover, Demosthenes’s harsh and immoderate formal argument seems similar to what David Bartholomae, well-known compositionist, refers to as “inventing the university” (623). Bartholomae argues that students must “appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse [. . . the student] has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language [. . .] and the requirements of convention” of academic discourse (624). Thus, due to his inexperience, Demosthenes attempted to act and speak as he thought he should act and speak before the Assembly, the people, and perhaps most notably other orators. Indeed, echoing Plutarch, Pearson comments, “[Demosthenes] had great difficulty in making his first political speech” (95). Even if no one has any intent of ridiculing a dysfluent person, People Who Stutter (PWS) remember times when they were stumbling along, which only incites additional anxiety beyond the typical anxiety associated with public speaking. With this in mind, a certain intensity is needed to overcome this uneasiness, and it is this intensity that can be used to help concentrate. Demosthenes’s concentration probably partially derived from his negative experiences.

The Beginning of the Orator

Plutarch discusses a time when Demosthenes left the Assembly dejected after a poor performance. As he was returning home, he was stopped by Satyrus, a man known for his dramatic performances. Having seen Satyrus perform, Demosthenes confided in
him about his own performance. Demosthenes said of himself to Satyrus that “he was the most laborious of all the orators and had almost used up the vigour of his body in this calling [. . . and] was ignored” (Plutarch 17). Here, there is an aspect to this segment that requires some interjection. As someone that stutters, I can attest to the fact that stuttering can be a demanding and even exhausting drain on the body and the mind.9 The musculature contractions of the vocalization system can be tensed and frozen in position—which we recall is often referred to as being blocked. Blocked, again, refers to the tense position of mid-sound and the inability to produce sound. Such an event can be compared to running into a concrete wall and then sticking to the wall as if glued, unable to move, but still hoping motion occurs or trying to will oneself through it. As such, it can be, at the least, frustrating and, at the most, draining. So from a dysfluent perspective, the idea that Demosthenes became fatigued by his oratory seems logical and reasonable. To return to the meeting of the actor and the dejected speaker, Satyrus readily agreed with his assessment and asked Demosthenes to provide some well-known oration “from Euripides or Sophocles,” which he did (Plutarch 17). Satyrus then repeated the same oration and “gave it such a form and recited it with such appropriate sentiment and disposition that it appeared to Demosthenes to be quite another” (Plutarch 17). This “ornament and grace” of the narration proved to Demosthenes the importance of delivery, which he would later consider to be the most important aspect of speaking (Plutarch 17). By the example of Satyrus, Demosthenes likely began to learn something about pace,

9 See also Preston 26; Reitzes 101; Rabalais 79.
timing, tone, and perhaps even body movement. All strong instruments to avoid, disguise, and contend with dysfluency.

Occasionally, dysfluency is peppered with moments of pause, which may be considered blocks. Plutarch points out that Demosthenes’s oratory was “confused by long periods” (15). How Plutarch is using the term periods, I think, is in dispute. There are two options. On one hand and perhaps the most obvious, Demosthenes took more-than-the-normal time between words, phrases, sentences, and/or paragraphs, so the period between ending and restarting speech is what is being referred to. On the other hand, a period in rhetorical circles refers to a type of discourse where “subordinate elements precede the main clause of the sentence” (Bushman 502). Moreover, Donald E. Bushman, contributor to the Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition, describes periodic style as using “repetition, parallelism, balance, and antithesis” (503). These aspects of periodic style seem useful for a dysfluency speaker, because they add a sense of momentum building and explanation to words that may be dysfluently spoken later. Since Demosthenes has been characterized as an orator that used this style, his speech might have been aided by a style that did repeat and come back onto itself—a recursive style. For instance, MacDowell translates several passages of Demosthenes in which he repeats a set of words, such as “There is, there is peace that is just” and “And I fear, I fear” (401). Many might contend this is increasing emphasis or helping to direct the audience. Of course, these are plausible, but with Demosthenes’s speech dysfluency and stuttering, he might very well have recognized a dysfluent moment and instead of forcing through (and potentially stuttering or blocking), he repeated the previous words to reset his breathing,
gain momentum to get through difficult sounds, or realized his set up to the potentially
dysfluent word(s) was not quite right. This pause would allow him to attempt again.

Thus, instead of forcing his way through, he learned to adapt the technique, and over time
it became a rhetorical device that others would later use without understanding the
reasoning behind it. The point, then, is a recursive style of composition may have its roots
in a weak, stammering orator who found a way to overcome a disability. Indeed, it seems
prudent for Rhetoric and Composition to investigate non-traditional ways of
conceptualizing its historiography, because if Demosthenes, a person with a speech
dysfluency, developed a style that worked back upon itself, like revision, that others
picked up on and used to good effect (again, without fully understanding the origins of
it), then the discipline would certainly owe more scholarship, understanding, and theory
to Demosthenes and his style. And, perhaps, even more attention to others that have been
labeled as disabled to see how they have influenced other aspects of the academy.

The Style of Demosthenes

How do we characterize Demosthenes’s style? It could be summed up in one
word: risk. To someone with a speech impediment, any public discourse would be a risk.
The risk of being dismissed, ridiculed, or unable to convey information or one’s
perspective—to simply communicate—must have been omnipresent in his orations to any
audience. As previously mentioned, Demosthenes endured a few rounds of ridicule in his
early orations. There is no doubt that going back after his poor performances
demonstrated a level of fortitude and maturity. In fact, Kennedy reasons, “The true orator
must venture to rise above pedestrian discourse and be willing to risk a fall to attain what is great, as Demosthenes did” (547). As with any undertaking of risk, there are ways to increase one’s odds of achievement. And being prepared is one of the best.

If Demosthenes, as legends report, worked at night under the glow of lamplights, one can extrapolate that he worked and practiced on his speeches to such a degree that he toiled over them into the early hours of the morning. To help show this, Adams reports that Demosthenes was “indefatigable in the laborious preparation of his speeches” (46). Quintilian also notes Demosthenes devotion to his speeches (349). However to merely know the words is simple. The true test would come when the eyes of others took hold and their ears strained to hear. To be prepared, Quintilian notes that Demosthenes practiced his speeches “against the crash of waves, to accustom himself not to be frightened by the roar of the assembly” (351). From this observation, I suggest two potential reasons beyond Quintilian’s observation as to why Demosthenes practiced with a background cacophony. First, the crash of waves would have acted as an auditory feedback device that affected the brain in such a way that reduced his stuttering by a significant amount and was comparable to the roar from the Assembly.¹⁰ This effect would act as a way to block out the sound of his own voice; thereby, allowing him to speak without the distraction of his own voice. An illustration of this occurs in the movie *The King’s Speech* in the initial meeting between Lionel Logue (the therapist) and Bertie;

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¹⁰ There is strong speculation that the sound of stutterers’ own speech somehow gets misunderstood by their brain, and a feedback device disrupts that misunderstanding allowing for more fluent speech. For example, a modern feedback device, called SpeechEasy, has shown that “[m]ean stuttering frequencies were reduced by 79% and 61% [...] on reading [out loud] and monologue tasks” (Armson and Kiefte 120).
Bertie is asked to read aloud from a text while wearing headphones that are playing music loud enough to be heard from several feet away. Later after Bertie returns home, he plays a recording (yet unheard by viewers) of his oration, and we discover his oratory while having the auditory feedback of music through the headphones completely removed his dysfluency. We can only speculate, but perhaps Demosthenes discovered this while exercising to improve his lung function, talking to someone while at a loud location (e.g. a beach with crashing waves), or by some other chance. Regardless, this leads to the second possibility. By practicing in a loud and chaotic environment, it may have eased his dysfluency, and thus, increased his confidence. It seems to reason that stuttering can injure one’s confidence to speak in front of others, but if having practiced in an environment that may also be as loud or louder (such as Quintilian suggests “the roar of the Assembly”), confidence and ability would logically increase (351). Perhaps just as notable, any stuttering or dysfluent moment would partially be masked by such a noisy environment. If a person became stuck on a sound, any restart or adjustment would be understandable because of the interruptions from crowd members or an opponent. To be comfortable in front of an audience, one must come to have some understanding of them.

Adams demonstrates that Demosthenes “knew his audience,” because he treated some aspects “superficially and with an entire lack of candor,” which demonstrates his understanding of the cultural and societal contexts of those he was addressing (54). Through this knowledge, he recognized how the Assembly tended to support jabs, insults, and strong criticisms, and he readily offered the audience the proverbial red-meat attack
of his oratory opponent. In fact, Adams adds, his arguments were actually “made up of a succession of short harangues” each with similar characteristics (58). Undoubtedly, Demosthenes used the audience’s emotion to his benefit and to maim his opponent; as a result, the attacks on his opponents would strengthen him, because they would weaken his opponent. We can speculate that the audience, the Assembly, the people, or the chorus would rouse themselves toward the apparent winner even before the final discourse was spoken. By attacking an adversary, the attention is taken off of Demosthenes and put upon the attacked. The audience turns to the slandered and wants to see how he or she reacts, which creates some time for Demosthenes to gather his breath and consider his next rhetorical move. So in drawing blood, Demosthenes would be able to garner support and direct the attention of the audience away from him, his speech, and toward his opponent’s apparent fatal flaw(s). His education of these effects may well have derived from his early experience where he was similarly ridiculed and laughed at.

The history lessons he endured were also reinforced by his own studies. Brodribb reports that Demosthenes “copied” the History of Thucydides and by doing so, “almost knew it by heart” (25). Such dedication to one’s craft or discipline might be seen as simply a young person wanting to absorb as much as possible about a orator that one wants to emulate. However from a dysfluent perspective, it can be seen again in two ways. First, Demosthenes clearly had a willingness not to repeat his earlier weak performances. This is evidenced by his work ethic in studying other orators and his tireless preparation. Second, by rehearsing a set of words, a speech, and the combinations of sounds over and over to such a degree that they become effortless (when before they
caused dysfluency), he increased his fluency and confidence. We should consider it similar to muscle memory, physical training, or practice. When one repeats a given exercise, it becomes easier, requires less effort, and less mental demand. For people that stutter, this allows them to focus on other aspects of the oration such as delivery, tone, pace, or preparation. In effect, he sought to avoid the shame of dysfluency.

As further example, Plutarch writes that Demosthenes, while preparing for an argument, would “go over [. . .] the arguments used in defence of each course” (19). Plutarch also reports that Demosthenes would take other speeches, break them down, and rewrite them in a style more suited to him (19). This process of Demosthenes’s suggested to Plutarch that his greatness in oration was not by natural gifts, but by “the product of toil” (19). Once more, this seems a reasonable conclusion, because people that are dysfluent generally prefer to have a reading well ahead of time to make adjustments or to have had opportunity to practice before delivery, so they can figure out how to work around any potential dysfluency. Echoing Plutarch’s reports of Demosthenes’s impairments and this present evidence of his preparation, Fredal points out Demosthenes “was primarily known not for his natural grace in speaking but for his studied perfection” (163). Consequently, Plutarch points out on a few occasions that Demosthenes preferred time to prepare his remarks rather than speak extemporaneously (19, 23). However, Alfred P. Dorjahn in a series of articles in the 1940 and 50s made, some say, a compelling case demonstrating that Demosthenes must have spoken extemporaneously. Dorjahn, in partial defense of his assertion of Demosthenes’s off-the-cuff oratory, illustrates one example from Demosthenes’s speeches: “The young son of Telestus—I am
unable to relate his name” (292). Dorjahn’s argument is that if Demosthenes had written this, he would have found out who the son was and named him. Although Dorjahn’s observation should be noted, we should also remember that Demosthenes usually did his homework and came prepared. And while this is certainly a possible extemporaneous moment, it can be seen as a rhetorical device and a way to build ethos. One that enhances the flow of a speaker’s language, most notably if they are dysfluent. For example, my dysfluency has taught me that I have a difficult time with harder mid-word transitions like the words, oddly enough, English or disability. Both words have a shift in sound that can be difficult for me to manage. As such, if I were speaking to someone and sense a hard shift word forthcoming, one way to avoid it would be to appear to forget, speak off-the-cuff or extemporaneously. Perhaps, Demosthenes, to avoid a dysfluency, moved away from the difficult name and simply stated, “I am unable to relate his name.” Such a technique would be and is often spoken in a lower tone, with a quick pace, and perhaps with a hand gesture to suggest the insignificance of it and to also provide a level of distraction. Combined, these tools create ease within an audience and, likewise, for the speaker.

Nonetheless, Demosthenes must have spoken without preparation on occasion, and Plutarch reports that many believed, “those orations which were spoken off-hand by him had more courage and boldness than those which he wrote out” (23). The reasoning behind the impression of more courage and more boldness is certainly objective. Nevertheless, like any practiced orator, Demosthenes was well prepared for such extemporaneous opportunities. In his revision and composing process, like most writers
and speakers, he likely had several variations of an argument or oratory. Each variation could be brought to bear depending on the challenge from another. And the opportunity to use once discarded elements—and their respective familiarity—would engender a certain audaciousness. Pulling again from my own experience, I often talk to myself about potential conversations and consider various ways to say words and how to pronounce them. This practice builds my confidence when I actually speak to others—and allows me to speak with conviction. Over time, this practice translates into a level of confidence, certainly for me, and perhaps we can assume, too, for Demosthenes. According to Plutarch, Demosthenes noted that his expertise in speaking was due to “experience” and depended “greatly upon the goodwill of his hearers” (215). This may be a humble phrase, but it may also have an element of truth. When Demosthenes did have dysfluent moments, audience members would have certainly noticed, and, depending on their reaction, it would have affected his oration. These events might be referred to as handling dysfluent moments and realizing they are sometimes unavoidable and just dealing with them. Thus, his response to a dysfluency would dictate the audience’s response.

Still through careful preparation, Demosthenes had several alternatives to draw from. Brodribb points out, “[Demosthenes] was continually revising his words and phrases. All his speeches […] were the result of careful preparation. His speaking exhibited great varieties” (157). This observation further casts doubt on Dorjahn’s argument and further confirms that Demosthenes was prepared for numerous scenarios. Likewise, Adams reports Demosthenes’s style would approach the main argument “from
every side” and would create an “intermingling at each stage” (57). Both Brodribb and Adams confirm that Demosthenes utilized different techniques and methods of oratory. One such technique is simplicity. Adams argues that Demosthenes’s style of speech was “simple and clear” in such a way that the language was not complex or above the common vernacular (66). This simplicity, which often is characterized by less complex and less-syllabated words, aided Demosthenes in such a way that he could avoid most dysfluency. Cicero, comparing Lysias and Demosthenes, explains: “Demosthenes’ eloquence is characterized by a simple diction, compression, and a direct style” (Murphy et al. 182). Simple diction is a way to avoid complex word and sentence structures as well as an effective rhetorical device to keep an audience invigorated, following the discourse, and not confused by complex or unfamiliar words and sentence patterns. Depending on how one understands compression, it could be a rapid style (which is clearly noted in several sources) and as a style not noted for its flowery language. Demosthenes preparation would have also allowed for him to “rapid fire” out a response, perhaps to catch an opponent off guard or because it was practiced ad nauseam. Directness, of course, minimizes the amount of words into the smallest reasonable number to carry the point, which also allows the speaker to speak less, with more control, and also demonstrate the already-evidenced practice. In writing vernacular, this would be known as conciseness. As further illustration, Adams states, Demosthenes’s style was “to make a point by brief and rapid argument and then to reinforce it by emotional appeal” (58). Here, Demosthenes’s pattern and style begins to emerge—a practiced oratory, aware of any relevant historical details, ready to attack, playing to the crowd, while still being
simple, concise, and direct. These latter components highlight a dysfluent speaker’s major tools of their proverbial toolbox. Moreover, R. D. Milns, Professor of Classics and Ancient History, describes Demosthenes’s style as “a combination of swiftness and brevity and fullness or abundance. The advantages of this style are that it makes the thought clear and emphatic by saying the same thing over and over” (210). So Demosthenes’s method remains fairly constant—it’s only the words that change. Many writing instructors may recognize this as relative to a formulaic kind of writing, such as the five-paragraph theme; that is, tell them what you are going to tell them (paragraph one), tell them (three body paragraphs of stuff), then tell them what you told them (paragraph five). By seeing this repetitive structure through a dysfluent lens, one can understand that a person who stutters would be more comfortable enunciating words that have already been tried and tested, compared to unfamiliar words that might cause a dysfluency.

Other Qualities of Demosthenes’s Oratory

Demosthenes seems to have also used quantity and quality of syllables, stress points, pitch and pace, in his oratories perhaps to avoid dysfluent moments. One of the many techniques of speech pathologists is to have people with dysfluency adjust their stress points and fluctuate pitch and pace to what one might understand as throwing the mind off to avoid stuttering. (As such, one speaks differently when making these adjustments.) I can recollect my own experience of being in a graduate class or teaching and utilizing pace. By adjusting my pace, I was able to maintain a level of fluency—in
effect, I changed my speech pattern to compensate for my dysfluency. Demosthenes also utilized pace in that his argument was always moving, he didn’t give the audience a chance to start thinking or to disagree with him. This style might be another strategy to not get flustered and stutter. Moreover, he spoke in small chunks that worked in support of his main point. To illustrate, I provide a quoted passage from Demosthenes’s *On the Crown*, minus punctuation, but I’ve included slashes (/) to indicate, what I consider, a drumbeat of chunks:

> After this/ they invited your help/ and summoned you/ You marched out/ you came to their aid/ and to omit/ the intervening steps/ they received you/ in such a friendly manner/ that with their own cavalry/ and infantry/ outside the walls/ they took/ your army/ into the city/ and into/ their homes/ among their wives/ and children/ and most valuable/ possessions. (101)

While certainly a translation, the breaks I have included have a dramatic effect and yet do not allow listeners to dwell on any one aspect of his oration. This movement increases audience attention and provides a conversational effect similar to how one might tell a story to a friend.

Another stylistic move he used was amplification, that is, using two words to strengthen the point when one would work. Some examples from Demosthenes’s *On the Crown* include, “friends and benefactors” (78); “fame and good will” (77); “just and deserved” (64); “unreasonable nor unfair” (63); “traitors and hirelings” (70). To further illustrate, instead of just saying to a jury “see this example,” he might say, “see and examine this example” or “We are forced to acknowledge and admit.” Rhetorically, I see
two things happening. First, Demosthenes is asking more of his audience. Instead of just looking at an example, he’s asking them to examine it as well. More effectively in the second example, he provides the answer, one of admission, to his point. One cannot just acknowledge when they are asked to admit too. In other words, he’s leading them to the answer he wants. Second, this could be a way of avoiding dysfluency by (pseudo-) circumlocuting, pacing, or momentum building. Because dysfluency is haphazard, PWS may include additional words that highlight and retrace previous words.

Along with amplification, there is also further evidence of Demosthenes’s repetitive style through the use of “epanadiplosis,” which is “the repetition of a phrase to emphasize and drive home a point” (Wooten Cicero’s 26). This is often coupled with vocal stress increases with each use. Pearson, likewise, refers to Demosthenes’s repetitious nature, and he uncovers that Demosthenes used “almost exactly the same vocabulary and phraseology” in the First Philippic and On the Syrmories (103). Here, too, we see consistency in his style. When Demosthenes reuses a similar phrasing or sound, it suggests that the particular word choices were ones he had practiced and knew would present minimal problems in fluency. Repetition of a phrase certainly can be a powerful rhetorical device. For example, Demosthenes used repetition to build up to a certain argument with such phrasing as *by the fact* in his famous oration On the Crown (76). Then he would insert a fact, and again repeat, *by the fact*, and so on, which is related to stuttering and repeating words so they can say them without dysfluency. A specific set of words, when spoken consistently for a dysfluent speaker, builds confidence. Many recall Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech, “I Have a Dream.” Aptly titled because the phrase
“I have a dream” repeats itself throughout the latter part of the speech and its intensity helps build the oratory and adds gravitas. This modern example only highlights the power of repetition. But if we consider the possibility that someone who stuttered realized the effect it could have on an audience, we can see that such a powerful rhetorical device came about because of a so-called disability.

Repetition of one’s argument lets the audience make connections and leads them to the conclusion before its announced, which rhetorically gave them power and garnered support for one’s argument. For Demosthenes and King, it makes their oratory become less important the more they spoke, because the audience could almost speak along with him. Moreover, the audience would reach the conclusion and the orator would only have to mention it because the audience would have already made the conclusion they had been leading the audience to all along. Wooten confirms this: “D[emosthenes] thus plants in the minds of the audience the conclusion to be derived from the facts he will narrate” (A Commentary 161). Further, in building up his oratory and occasionally attacking his opponent, “Demosthenes,” as editor of one volume of Demosthenes’s speeches, Harvey Yunis notes, “aim[ed] [. . .] at compelling the audience to draw strong moral inferences” not only about his adversary but about the topic being discussed (18). By pulling on the morality of his audience, Demosthenes created a dialogue with his audience. This aspect of Demosthenes’s style was to create a relationship with his audience by crafting it like a typical everyday discussion with a friend. Wooten believes, “Demosthenes is very fond of the direct style,” which as he also notes, “has the appearance of conversation” with “short and concise clauses,” generally simple sentences, “no uncommon words,” and
“loose rhythms” (Cicero’s 23). But what “really holds his speeches together,” Wooten contends, “is the repetition” (Cicero’s 23-24).

Now we understand these repetitive aspects include using the same words or similar phrasings, and as we have seen, if practiced by a dysfluent person, would appear to be nondysfluent. Yet, these also refer to circumlocution. Circumlocution, as we recall from Chapter 1, is one of a few techniques that allows dysfluent speakers to avoid potentially dysfluent moments. In circumlocution, speakers utilize various methods to avoid saying a particular word that may be problematic. For example, instead of saying mattress, one might say bed, which is not exactly a mattress, but based on the context most listeners would make the connection. Another example would be the popular American game show Jeopardy! In this game show, contestants are provided an answer and to score they must provide the question. So if the answer provided were “the only President of the United States of African American heritage,” the question would be “Who is Barack Obama?” In effect, by explaining a word, rather than actually saying the word, circumlocution takes place. Demosthenes, I like to imagine, used circumlocution in his oratory.11 To be more pointed, Dionysius explains Demosthenes’s “idiosyncrasy,” which he describes as, “his occasional use of several words to describe a single thing” (453). Indeed, circumlocution can be described in precisely the same way. Such a style might also be considered a “periodic style,” which is a way of oratory that builds upon itself and is suggestive that more is to follow (Adams 76). Adams demonstrates

11 Circumlocution is nearly impossible to decipher from a transcript because of the context of the period, the speaker, and the audience. As a result, for me to try to provide clear examples would be unreliable.
Demosthenes used a form of circumlocution by describing *amplification*, which is partially described as a way of “holding the attention to a simple idea by expressing it in repeated synonyms” (79). By having synonyms at one’s disposal and the foresight to know when such terms may be needed, this allows for a more relaxed presentation, which again creates a level of comfort and eases any dysfluency. In Demosthenes’s case, this might allow for a stronger focus on argument.

According to James Fredal, in his text *Rhetorical Action in Ancient Athens*, “Demosthenes persuaded [...] only through his relentless and self-erasing self-refashioning” (163). Part of Demosthenes’s argument derived from his tireless preparation, but in this preparation he was effectively erasing the Demosthenes that was dysfluent, had a weak voice, a weak body, and secondary symptoms. Demosthenes changed who he was by the exercises, and the therapies he subjected himself to: pebbles in his mouth, shaving half his head in efforts to force himself to study, running up hills while speaking, and shouting unto the ocean. In his time, those that acted or seemed unrealistic, or, in common parlance, were “fake” were considered to be phony (as Johannesen suggested of Demosthenes earlier). Although we might ask if his disabilities were overlooked because of his hard work and dedication (a theme I will return to in Chapter Three), we must also recognize that he probably needed a certain level of endurance to perform lengthy orations or engage in combative trials.

Let us not forget, these orations and trials were physically demanding endeavors, and if Demosthenes were already of weak constitution, speaking would only show him to be even weaker before a rowdy, jeering crowd. In other words, if he *did not* physically
prepare, any dysfluency would not matter because he would be drained by the activity of speaking. Author of *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Maud W. Gleason describes rhetoric as “a calisthenics of manhood,” and if Demosthenes was already considered “effeminate,” some form of training seems required (xxii). Further, Gleason suggests that this preparation for oratory was comparable to boys becoming men (xxii). Fredal describes rhetors as having a similar general requirement to be physically and psychologically fit—to give notification of the ability to do battle, if only verbally (164).

Regardless, this “self-refashioning” also sounds like he found ways around, to circumlocute, defining himself and how he spoke. In essence, by this facet of revision, one could conclude that he had taken his experience with dysfluency and adapted it to become a more versatile speaker. Further, circumlocution could be used as a distractionary technique. Well known in the art of magic, distraction is a way to disrupt one’s attention and redirect it toward something else. Demosthenes seems to have used some of this “magic” to redirect attention away from his oratory. As Adams explains, “Scattered all through the speech *On the Crown* are opprobrious epithets, sudden flings, bitter side remarks, often the more effective because inserted in some piece of elevated appeal or solid argumentation” (65). In Demosthenes’s *On the Crown*, there are many examples: “This man is to blame, who has spewed at me the garbage of his own villainy” (70); “do you hear Aeschines?” (81); “But, for heaven’s sake, Aeschines, are you so imperceptive and so stupid that you cannot grasp the fact” (83); “People who have missed out on education, like you [Aeschines]” (84); or (a favorite of mine) “What do you and
yours have to do with ‘Virtue,’ you scum?” (84). These distractions that Demosthenes would insert could have been moments of dysfluency that he avoids by the misdirection, attacking, gaining confidence, and a breath, then continuing with his argument. This misdirection could be considered a form of circumlocution. But perhaps more importantly, misdirection can be a way for a speaker to deflect attention from their own oratory onto something else, such as another speaker, an object, or their own movements, which is related to delivery.

Delivery, Delivery, Delivery

As mentioned earlier, when Demosthenes was asked about the requirements of perfect oratory, his response, as the legend goes (and likely influenced by Satryus), was “Delivery, delivery, delivery” (Rowe 175). Of course any orator would confirm that the delivery is a critical component of the performance. Part of any delivery is being able to play the role of the deliverer—in other words, one must act like a fluent speaker. Dysfluent speakers may take on a character and, by doing so, this allows them to become another person who is, for all intents and purposes, fluent while speaking. If Demosthenes realized this and “acted” his orations, it seems logical that he understood the connection between being “onstage” and speaking in public—one that many present-day orators, presenters, and even teachers understand and utilize as well. Having this awareness would create a shell around a speaker and shield them from scorn, since it

12 There are a number of famous actors that stutter: James Earl Jones, Bruce Willis, Nicole Kidman, Jimmy Stewart, Sam Neill, Emily Blunt, Anthony Quinn, Marilyn Monroe, Bill Withers, Tom Sizemore, Mike Rowe, Tim Gunn, Samuel L. Jackson, Wayne Brady.
might seem as if the character takes the blame for any dysfluency, because as Fredal reminds us, “A stutter or a mumbled phrase, a nervous pause, or a misstatement in the heat of the moment could invite all manner of audience mockery and criticism” (127). Something Demosthenes experienced in his early orations. To counter any mockery, Adams reports, Demosthenes “attained mastery of voice, [and] his whole body reinforced his words” (91). Moreover, MacDowell acknowledges Demosthenes’s use of gestures as part of his delivery technique (“as well as variations in speed and tone of speaking”) (407). Some dysfluent speakers use body movement to aid or work through their dysfluent moments. In Speech Therapy circles, these additional movements are referred to as “secondary symptoms” and can be anything from closing the eyes, clenching a fist, or waving an arm (Silverman 27). With my dysfluency, I have concealed or removed many of my secondaries because most of them were actions I picked up from others, not ones that provided any real aid—in other words, they made me feel more fluent; they were a placebo. More specifically, these can be seen as a technique to distract an audience from the auditory and/or be used to distract the mind just enough to get the word out and/or used to force the air from the body forcefully in such a way that the dysfluent speaker can formulate the words enough to offset the dysfluency—this last technique may also be seen by the audience as the movement causing the dysfluency, not the disability of the orator. Assuming Demosthenes discovered the ways secondary symptoms could affect his discourse, he learned to control or generate movements that would enhance his oratory, which highlights the impression of him as an actor.
Actors must sell their performance to the audience, which is not only vocal, but also physical. Thus, we return to the idea that body movement can assist in not being dysfluent. In *The King’s Speech* film, we see Bertie swaying his arms around and swirling around the room in ballroom fashion—all in hopes that it allows him to be, I assume, less tense in speaking and more comfortable when speaking and moving. For some people that stutter, body movement is limited, because so much effort is put into the act of speaking and because their body tenses up in efforts to control or handle the dysfluency, which may only exacerbate the potential dysfluency. This again references the physical exertion of being blocked. If indeed Demosthenes was dysfluent at times, and if he suffered blocks, he would have needed to make some unexpected adjustments. Aeschines, according to Dionysius, refers to Demosthenes as using “harsh and laboured words” (447). If we consider the use of labored words in relation to dysfluency and stuttering, we understand that such labor may be a dysfluent episode that may have a harsh effect on one’s ear: a hard-sounding consonant or exaggerated vowel. Certainly, we can relate being blocked on a sound to that of a strenuous event, because one must bust or push through it to overcome it. If we consider this through a dysfluent lens, we acknowledge that this exertion may be the act of stuttering and the repetition of sounds. Although body movement and being able to take on a fluent role may be important, Demosthenes surely realized that simple delivery and body motion may not be enough to persuade an astute audience for very long. To expand his abilities beyond some of what might have been learned by Satyrus, who according to Charles Van Riper, a well-known
dysfluent speaker and speech researcher, was Demosthenes’s “therapist,” Demosthenes became a student of various styles (Nature 3).

From Many Styles, Comes One

Demosthenes handled many varieties of discourse and rhetorical methods. He did so out of necessity, because his speech, based on the cultural context of public discourse, was broken. Dionysius offers some insight:

[Demosthenes] found himself following in the footsteps of some illustrious men, but refused to make any single orator or any single style his model, for he considered every one to be incomplete and imperfect. Instead he selected the best and most useful elements from all of them, weaving them together to make a single, perfect, composite style embracing the opposite qualities of grandeur and simplicity, the elaborate and the plain, the strange and the familiar, the ceremonial and the practical, the serious and the light-hearted, the intense and the relaxed, the sweet and the bitter, the sober and the emotional. [. . .] This, then, is my opinion of Demosthenes’s diction, and I ascribe to him a style which is a mixture of every form. (267)

Demosthenes recognized he needed to adapt other methods to serve his specific needs and purposes. In other words, in taking elements from many other styles, Demosthenes created his own. Since no singular method would work for all occasions, some of Demosthenes’s techniques are, roughly, “clarity, greatness, beauty, brevity, character, truth, and force” (Kennedy 631). At times, he had to be more pointed, more aggressive,
and Longinus reports on Demosthenes’s acerbic style: “Demosthenes burns and ravages; he has violence, rapidity, strength, and force, and shows them in everything; he can be compared to a thunderbolt or a flash of lightning” (354). These descriptive words can certainly be seen as related to a person who stutters, forcing out words, spitting them out, jamming them into the audience. In discussing many of these aspects of Demosthenes’s speech, I have suggested he learned from his experiences to develop something unique. Any orators, writers, or rhetoricians that combine several styles as Kennedy and Longinus point out are, in fact, creating their own style. Demosthenes needed to adjust and adapt all previous styles to create his own that would work with his abilities and (dis)abilities. Wooten explains, “Demosthenes abandoned the traditional rhetorical schema,” and one reason could easily have been because of his unique needs in order to speak (Cicero’s 43). Adams explains that Demosthenes “followed none of the set rules of the rhetoricians,” but we have come to understand that he did learn from them (49). And this seems logical given the nature of someone that stutters. If a stutterer has a difficult time following traditional or a given agenda, it becomes quite logical that he or she would change the delivery, the oration, and the rules.

Musical Qualities

Dionysius discusses the more decorative styles of oratory that have more “musical” qualities, which again references Demosthenes’s combining each style to suit his particular need, or ability. Because of his studious nature, Demosthenes learned various rhetorical methods and what effect they would have on an audience and his
fluency. Perhaps because of Demosthenes’s balancing act of the styles he had encountered and adapted, Dionysius explains he believes Demosthenes practiced the intermediate style—a style able to sing as needed or able to be simple, plain as needed. (405).

There are a number of anecdotes in popular culture that reference stuttering and singing. Specifically, when a stutterer sings they do not (typically) stutter, so the words come out without dysfluency. The reality of dysfluency being eased by singing has been proven anecdotally and through various research studies (see Silverman 196; Van Riper Treatment 77-78; Wingate 65-66). There is potential that Demosthenes’s experience with stuttering taught him that a faster pace of speaking, in which his voice became more lyrical—like song, would enhance his ability to control his prose. Conceivably, Demosthenes through reabling other styles to suit his own, created a way of singing that wasn’t singing at all. The German psychologist A. Moll describes a singing therapy where PWS are “provided with a hierarchy of transitional utterances of the same sentence, first sung with a pronounced melody, and then modified into nonsinging speech” (Van Riper Treatment 78). This therapy starts with a PWS singing words and phrases and over time slowing the rate of singing down to be similar to normal rate speech. Demosthenes could have identified this self-therapy through his tireless preparation and training. Further, Dionysius references Aeschines’s discussion of how Demosthenes is such like the Sirens that his oratory “may cast a spell over” his listeners (377). Assuming Demosthenes did have a lyrical quality to his oratory, the use of song or song-like oratory would disguise his stuttering and make the comparison to Sirens all the more interesting.
Regardless of any musical connection, according to Plutarch, Eratosthenes considered Demosthenes to be “frenzied” during his speeches (23). Once again, this suggests how a dysfluent person might be perceived during a dysfluent moment. While avoiding a dysfluent moment, their discourse or mannerisms may be haphazard or sporadic. Moreover, since they may be circumlocuting or pushing through a block or sensing a difficult moment coming, they may rush to get it out and hopefully avoid the dysfluency. These could all be referred to as frenzied—because they are. One singular thought came to mind as I read Demosthenes’s On the Crown related to this charge of being frenzied. Demosthenes, whose very career and perhaps very life were at stake, spoke with passion! Passion is easily confused with frenzy, especially when the stakes are so very high. However, maybe Demosthenes was just a terrible singer and it hurt Eratosthenes’s ears. But another possibility for Demosthenes’s frenzied pace returns us to music, his singing could be that he utilized the lyrical qualities of sound and words so combinations of sounds were “in no way objectionable to the ear” (Adams 88). The lyrical aspects of speaking (and writing) continue to be important in the composition of a writing or of a speech. This is not lost in Demosthenes. “Undoubtedly,” Adams writes, “there is also in the speeches of Demosthenes a very definite effect of rhythm, varying with the changing movement of the thought” (90). Dionysius also mentions Demosthenes’s “rhythmic schemes” (385). Perhaps, in addition to the change in thought, it was also the change in fluency. As we have learned, it is well known that people who stutter do not stutter when they sing. Demosthenes likely knows this facet of fluency and wrote speeches that allowed him to have a similar lyrical and musical quality to his
oratory. Adams continues, “Syllabic quantity, stress, and pitch all must have contributed to this prose rhythm [of Demosthenes]” (90).

In fact, Dionysius comments that Demosthenes took “into account the tones and the quantities of his words and clauses, tried to arrange them in such a way that they should appear melodious and rhythmical” (423). This observation reflects on Demosthenes’s preparation for his oratory and hints at his understanding of his own dysfluency and how it could be disguised. Having recognized this, Dionysius confirms that when “[u]sed at the right time and in the right proportion, they [melody, rhythm, and variation] go unnoticed by our senses” (425). We must also include the use of these devices are also ways to disguise dysfluency and that by doing so, dysfluency, also, may go unnoticed.

Echoes of Demosthenes

Roland Barthes explains, in his essay “The Grain of the Voice,” that the “grain is the body in the voice as it sings” (188). If, as Zali Gurevitch, Professor of Social Sciences, does, we extend that to “speech” and oratory, we can also conclude that there “are moments of break, stumbling and falling, choking, stuttering” (528). These moments return us to a dysfluent perspective that is one of imperfect perfection, but realizes the potential of difference and one’s own unique abilities. To return to Jay Dolmage’s insight with which I open this chapter, we come to realize that such stutters not only come from the vocal system but from the body as well. Gurevitch links back to the body, too, as does Barthes. The distinction between the two, though, is that Gurevitch includes the speaker
as becoming aware of his or her own “voice” (528). And it is this voice that brings a “presence” of that voice to the speaker, which can be “moments of rest—points, periods, pauses, breaths” or, as earlier noted, moments of inconsistency (528). In essence, these moments of realizing one’s own voice, according to Gurevitch, have one of two effects: moments of rest or moments of break. These moments are basically a distraction from the discourse one is providing that disrupt the flow of language and create a brief hiccup. A dysfluent view, however, does not see these as hiccups or disruptions; what they are, then, are moments of learning and growth—moments to expand ourselves, take in the moment, explore, stutter, be dysfluent. These moments are the moments that are overlooked and misunderstood to be mistakes, errors, disabilities—but they are moments of clarity and expansion that must be explored and adapted to.

Demosthenes had many challenges in his life. From the loss of his father to his speculated physical and speech-related difficulties, Demosthenes discovered ways to adapt and to overcome his challenges. Pearson explains the evolution of Demosthenes oratory: “Anyone who first reads one of the early political speeches and then turns to one from later years is immediately conscious of a greater directness of argument, a greater speed in the flow of language, and the absence of any appearance of hesitation” (96). Moreover, we have seen how his style created a recursive approach and several other rhetorical skills that others later emulated. Demosthenes realized he must adapt to the characteristics available. In short, his needs were different because his abilities were different. These differences made him into one of the greatest orators of all time. One that could adapt to changing circumstances and demands. One way Demosthenes adapted is,
as Wooten confirms, Demosthenes utilized metaphors (*Cicero’s* 27), which are a way of explaining a concept with other language. Wooten further points out that Demosthenes tended toward metaphorical themes of overcoming, and these seem comparable and understandable based on his own overcoming legends (*Cicero’s* 27). Although there is no record of his discussing his personal challenges, the reports of them could be considered the first overcoming narrative, and such narratives are the topic of the next chapter.
Chapter 3: The Dysfluency Narrative: Voicing an Old Disability

When I first heard about the movie *The King’s Speech* I was intrigued enough to learn more about King George VI, who is referred to as Bertie in the film. Bertie spoke with a stutter and he struggled with it his entire life. After Bertie’s father passed away, Bertie’s older brother took the throne but soon abdicated it to marry a woman not approved by the Church, which left Bertie to take on the role as the King of England. The film focuses on the years before Bertie takes the throne, up through his coronation, and concludes with an important speech he must give about England and its entrance into World War II.

The opening scene shows Bertie walking into a full stadium of some sporting event, perhaps horse racing. His footsteps fall heavy as he climbs up the steps into the stadium. The people rise up, showing respect for royalty. Bertie has been told that a red light will flash three times, as a warning that the microphone will go live. After three flashes, the red light will stay lit, alive, staring at him reminding him that the entire world is listening to his voice. One flash. Two flashes. And finally, the third and final flash. The glaring red eye stays lit, and Bertie looks down at his speech. His mouth opens, then closes, his lips tremble. No sound comes from his mouth. A horse neighs on the field breaking the silent void of Bertie’s blocked words. Moments tick by, and Bertie struggles to produce sound, the red eye stares at him, his audience looks away from him, and the scene ends with Bertie blocked, dysfluently stuck on a word, and his loving wife looks down, too, in sadness. In this moment of the film, I realized my kinship with Bertie. I
wished this scene had been extended so that the frustration, the embarrassment, and the audience reaction experienced by People Who Stutter (PWS) could be better felt by the film’s audience. This opening scene made me realize that the makers of the film got it regarding speech dysfluency. Stuttering is frustrating. It is embarrassing. It does evoke disheartening reactions from listeners that affect PWS.

The film centers around the relationship between Bertie and Lionel, a speech therapist. Though not a doctor, Lionel has experience in acting, elocution, and helping veterans who returned from The Great War (World War I) with what was then called shellshock, but now is recognized as PTSD. An important scene shows Bertie in a discussion with his brother. The scene shows Bertie blocked on a word, frozen in speech, unable to speak. His brother, noting Bertie’s block and discomfort, mocks him, teases him, which only furthers the trench of the block as well as Bertie’s frustration with his dysfluency. This scene, painfully, forces me to relive the many times where I was teased. My words failed me; my words left me; I was left defenseless and I was alone.

Bertie and Me

As a dysfluent speaker, I have been in Bertie’s position. A later scene reminds me of why I still attempt to speak. Lionel is accused by Bertie’s associates of not being a “doctor” and having limited credentials to treat Bertie. A confrontation between Lionel and Bertie erupts and Lionel challenges Bertie’s authority, not only as a person, but as a soon-to-be coronated king. Lionel, having learned through experience with soldiers who had shell shock, discovered that by building confidence in dysfluent speakers—by
showing them they were not alone—PWS could become more fluent. Unwilling to listen to Lionel’s explanation, Bertie strides away in anger. In the meantime, Lionel disrespectfully sits in Saint Edward’s Chair, a chair only meant for royalty. Bertie turns back toward Lionel, and shocked, he protests; Lionel flippantly mocks the chair and those that have sat on it. Finally, Bertie yells, “Listen to me!” Lionel pushes him further and says, “Listen to you? By what right?” Bertie, having been resistant to the thought of being a king—a stuttering king at that—responds, “By divine right if you must.” Lionel reminds him of his resistance to the throne and challenges him again, “Why should I waste my time listening…” Bertie interrupts him by yelling, “Because I have a voice!” After a thoughtful pause, Lionel responds, “Yes, you do.”

My voice, while haphazard and fleeting, is my voice. This scene reminded me of the power of my voice. The power of using words to influence others, to inspire them, and as Bertie would have to do with his speech about his country entering war for the second time in as many decades. The build-up of the film and its namesake is Bertie’s speech about Britain entering into WWII, where he uses his voice, at times irregular and breathy, to speak to his subjects, to build their confidence, and to project royal confidence. After the speech, Bertie’s dysfluency can be considered cured or fixed because of his hard work and Lionel’s guidance. On one hand, this is terrifically inspiring. On the other, however, it raises the some particularly problematic issues. For instance, disability scholars might consider this heroic ending one identified as an “overcoming” narrative. The overcoming narrative has been negatively critiqued for suggesting that a disability can simply be overcome with hard work and perseverance,
while ignoring the social and cultural conditions that affect those with disabilities. I would like to look more closely at dysfluency within the framework of overcoming.

Dysfluency or Disability?

Since dysfluency narratives have been neglected in Disability Studies and its related scholarship, in this chapter, I argue for dysfluency to become part of disability studies and that dysfluency and its narratives need the much-critiqued overcoming narrative, because those with dysfluency have been bullied, avoided, and ignored for too long. The overcoming narrative can be used to better realize the dysfluency narrative and its value to Disability Studies and culture. Although many in Disability Studies have discounted the overcoming narrative, I believe it should be reconsidered as a gateway to cultural and societal awareness and as an avenue for “less-spectacular” disabilities to gain recognition, like dysfluency. After my discussion of the overcoming narrative, I demonstrate how dysfluency is often interpreted, treated, and misunderstood in our culture. This demonstration shows how PWS are treated as if they are stupid, othered, and less than those that claim “abled” (and sometimes “disabled”) status. This highlights the importance of the overcoming dysfluency narrative which I suggest relates to G. Thomas Couser’s progressive model for disability narratives. I conclude by relating these feelings of inadequacy and being dysfluent to how students might feel in our writing classrooms.

Before one can define the overcoming narrative, we must consider the impression provided by the term “disability” in our culture. Editors of Embodied Rhetorics:
Disability in Language and Culture, James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson write, “when Americans think, talk, and write about disability, they usually consider it as a tragedy, illness, or defect that an individual body ‘has’” (2). With this insight, we can impart some type of obstacle or challenge that must be overcome. Julie Miele Rodas, author of “Overcome and Overcoming” in the Encyclopedia of American Disability History, provides some insight into the term “overcoming,” which she traces back to the Civil Rights era (e.g. “We shall overcome”). This created a positive impression of the overall term and its usage, but now it has fallen out of favor. In Disability Studies, moreover, there seems to be a bandwagon rejection of the “overcoming narrative.” In general terms, the overcoming narrative is a narrative about or from someone who has “overcome” his or her disability. One argument about the overcoming narrative is that it is a stereotypical version of narrative within Disability Studies that presents a person with one or more disabilities as doing something or living a life that seems extraordinary in some fashion. Well-known disability scholar and activist, Simi Linton explains, “The ideas imbedded in the overcoming rhetoric are of personal triumph over a personal condition” (18). G. Thomas Couser, Professor of English and life writing scholar, also helps clarify the problematic nature of accepting the overcoming narrative:

Disability is presented primarily as a “problem” that individuals must overcome; overcoming it is a matter of individual will and determination, rather than of social and cultural accommodation. The reader is conscripted as an appreciative, admiring witness of this victory but is not encouraged to question the status quo. (Signifying 34)
Many such examples are available in our popular culture, such as the Olympic runner who has no legs or the blind climber who ascends Everest.

In spite of its shortcomings, the overcoming narrative becomes an important genre to consider regarding dysfluency narratives. Dysfluency is a disability, but its narratives and the people who are courageous enough to write them are virtually ignored, even within the welcoming field of Disability Studies. Indeed, narratives about verbal dysfluency are not recognized in the Disability Studies community. For instance, a recent bibliography (May 2013) about disability memoirs and autobiographies sent out over the DS-HUM (Disability Studies in the Humanities) listserv did not have one memoir, narrative, biography, or even an anecdote about dysfluency (Kerschbaum).

Dysfluency Narratives 101

Dysfluency narratives are narratives by PWS where they discuss their speech. The genre of “dysfluency narratives” has not been elsewhere defined, so let me elaborate on how I’m defining it here. Dysfluency narratives are written by PWS or by someone who has other speech dysfluencies, and their authors discuss their dysfluency, its influence on them, or how it has affected their life, which may include being othered and how cultural or societal norms have affected them. But, what might a dysfluent overcoming narrative look like? A PWS who gives the commencement address at graduation? A PWS who is a news anchor on the evening news? One reason why stuttering seems to have been overlooked is the subtle nature of it as a disability. Since dysfluency is not visible, happens only on occasion, and can be partially concealed by those affected by it, it is
easy to neglect or ignore. Moreover, speaking in our society is taken for granted by those
that are fluent, and so those with dysfluency are left to defend and explain it. As such,
dysfluency narratives sometimes fall into a defensive posture of trying to explain what
stuttering is and what it is not. Even Katherine Preston, a journalist from England and
stutterer, in her recent dysfluency narrative, responds to the misinformed aspects of the
film *The King’s Speech*, such as the suggestion the King’s stuttering was partially
brought about because of his father’s demanding nature. Another struggle for dysfluency
narratives is the perception that they are not disability narratives and the ongoing stigma
that stuttering is a condition that can simply be overcome. Sometimes it is overcome—
temporarily. While moments of “overcoming” for Bertie are evident in *The King’s
Speech*, and in my own life, stuttering is a disability that remains with PWS their entire
life; yet, the severity of any given disability seems to suggest people’s reaction to it.
Perhaps the more visible or grotesque disabilities garner different attention, which leaves
the less sensational disabilities like speech dysfluency lacking it.

Dysfluency narratives are still rare on the market and only a handful are
available. Some of these narratives fall into the trap and confinement of the
stereotypical overcoming narrative; they merely report on the personal disability without
paying any attention to the societal conditions and norms that affected the author’s

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13 See James Malcolm Rymer’s *The Unspeakable; or, The Life and Adventures of a
Stammerer* (1855), Ida W. Whitten’s “*The Face of All the World Is Changed*”: *An
Autobiographical Study with the Focus on Stuttering* (1990); Marty Jezer’s *Stuttering: A
Life Bound Up in Words* (1997); Marc Shell’s *Stutter* (2005); J. W. Rabalais’s *Speaking
Freely: My Triumph Over Stuttering*; Stuttertalk’s *Stuttering: Inspiring Stories and
Professional Wisdom* (2012); and the most recent addition, Katherine Preston’s *Out with
disability. Such narratives lack depth and seem to merely champion the “You can do it too!” rhetoric. One example of this is J. W. Rabalais, a person who stutters and professor emeritus in the University of Houston’s Chemistry Department. Rabalais’s text is a whirlwind of contradiction. For example, on one page he writes, “The object is [note the present tense] to conceal my stutter at all costs so that I can shield myself from the pain and humiliation it brings me” (Rabalais 24) and on another, literally three pages away, he writes, “There is no shame and no stigma attached to being a stutterer. There are ways to deal with and even triumph over stuttering. You can minimize your stutter and maximize your chance for a happy, successful life and career. I did it. So can you!” (Rabalais 27). Rabalais, on one hand, informs readers of the “pain and humiliation” of his dysfluency and his willingness to conceal it “at all costs.” In doing so, he avoids his disability completely by finding ways to avoid being discovered as a dysfluent speaker. He accepts the role of silence that Bertie fought against. On the other hand, Rabalais encourages his readers to “minimize your stutter” and suggests that in doing so, you can “maximize your chance for a happy, successful life and career.” By writing this, he makes clear that the dysfluency is the one thing holding others that are dysfluent back from success. Therefore, Rabalais tells everyone that being fluent makes one successful, and if you are not fluent, you cannot be. We realize in Rabalais’s contradiction that any narrative that functions only as encouragement would present a number of concerns for scholar activists, such as suggesting that one’s perseverance and sheer will are the only qualities to pass on to readers, instead of, for example, the cultural and societal conditions that hinder those with disabilities.
Overcoming Narratives and Dysfluency Meet

Overcoming narratives, Couser explains, “misrepresent the experience of most people with disabilities” and creates a “Supercrip, who is by definition atypical” of most others with disabilities (“Conflicting” 80) (see also, Joseph P. Shapiro’s No Pity, pages 16-17). Although Couser readily realizes the problem of the overcoming narrative in that it puts the onus of responsibility of disability on the individual and his or her respective “will and determination,” he demonstrates that he believes it is only a “social and cultural [problem of] accommodation” (“Conflicting” 80). It is not.

There are also pressures put on those with disabilities to conform, to fit in. There is also the effect the norms of a culture impart to us all. These norms shape our (re)actions and our thoughts, even if they work against a disability we have. Sara MacIntyre, a stutterer, writes, “Although it made me feel ashamed, I could not get over my discomfort at hearing other people stutter” (34). MacIntyre’s discomfort demonstrates how influential society and culture can be even when it acts against oneself. Society and culture taught MacIntyre that dysfluency was supposed to make her uncomfortable, even though she herself was a dysfluent speaker. MacIntyre recognized the culture influenced her thinking about the disability she has; instead of her informing the culture about it. In the most recent dysfluency narrative published this year, we see this influence, too: Preston writes expressively about her dysfluency: “Stuttering was my ‘thing,’ it exposed me and marked me as different. I dreamed of being ‘normal’ and relentlessly worried about my ‘abnormality’” (11).
Disability scholars David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder claim that once abled readers read disability narratives, it reinforces their position in the ableist community, which only further distances them from the perspective they just read about and may have claimed to understand or sympathize with (Introduction 15). This puts a spotlight on disability. Mitchell and Snyder explain, “that to introduce one’s disability into discourse (social or academic) is to suddenly have that single aspect subsume all others” (Narrative xi). By presenting a “disability” to an audience, they will make judgments based upon the societal norms they have been conditioned to enact, even if they have a disability themselves. This negative preconception can be seen in many places. I would also add that it distances someone with disability from others that have the same disability. As an example, one participant in a survey of PWS responds, “When I met a person who stutters – I felt uncomfortable – it was quite a shock to me” (qtd. in Klompas and Ross 284). Even though the person responding was dysfluent—like MacIntyre—he felt uncomfortable with another’s dysfluency. The societal norms and impressions about stuttering, as we clearly see here, also impact those that stutter.

Another disability scholar, Tanya Titchkosky argues, “All of us are subject to and deploy the sensibility that disability ought to be overcome” (178). Titchkosky exploits one of the aspects of our human condition in that we do want to overcome what others might consider (justly or unjustly) our “disabilities,” so we can be seen as “normal.” This want to feel normal, which is the root of all overcoming, is also a weakness in the critique of the overcoming narrative, because those with disabilities have been singled out as different, defective, inferior for as long as they have been labeled as disabled, which
creates in them the need to bridge this difference, and in doing so, align themselves with those that have highlighted this perceived difference. The weakness has it’s mainspring in the disabled person’s underlying feeling of being subordinate, othered, and that people with disability feel compelled to change their station, improve, adapt, or whatnot to be seen as similar enough as to not draw attention, and consequently, take their place in the normal society having “overcome” the perceived inadequacy. If society as a whole does not accept disabled individuals as they are, then it would be exceedingly difficult for them to accept themselves. Thus, the overcoming narrative’s general weakness is that it derives from the socialized human, which in itself, I believe, is exclusionary and prejudice. We recognize this in the grouping concepts we see daily in our lives. From children “picking teams” in the schoolyard kickball game to various postures of political parties, people lean towards the groups where they think they will be most readily accepted and the ones they believe they are most like (or want to be like). Yet, when we don’t feel like we will be accepted we are left in an “othered” position, and regardless of disability or not, we are effectively disabled.

The Need for Dysfluency Narratives

Many PWS believe as Preston does: “I saw my speech as something to be ashamed of, something only I did, something born out of laziness” (12). Yet, the old maxim of “trying harder” is superfluous to the stutterer. Joe Klein explains: “[Stuttering] violates a rule, an especially American rule, that hard work and effort leads to success. In stuttering and breathing, we [PWS] know that extra effort leads only to more stuttering”
As such, overcoming narratives that argue that people with disabilities should work harder are turned on their noggin when confronted with speech dysfluency.

Disability narratives are influenced by what the authors of disability narratives encounter. And if that person stutters, they may have encountered a lot from being teased and bullied to being unable to complete the punch line of a joke or make a timely comment. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, independent scholar, Miriam Brody suggests that Fred Newton Scott, the champion of the early Rhetoric program at the University of Michigan, believed that those with speech disorders were an immature segment of the human species (165). This has not been an uncommon belief. Although I remarked on these earlier, they bear repeating; PWS do occasionally show up as subjects in Rhetoric and Composition journals, but they are described as diseased (Mones 20), egoists (Mones 21), nervously deranged (Mones 23), defective (Martin 23), weak hearted (Poley 491), basket cases (Mauk 291), and grotesque (Fielder 4). And it gets worse; one author admits that it is a “terrible affliction to make stutterers speak” but he doesn’t end there, he writes, it’s “especially terrible to the listeners” (Stratton 466). Perhaps the most damning is Clarence T. Simon’s suggestion that “The most intelligent comments made by students lose their value when they are uttered with a painful stutter” (142, my emphasis). But more importantly, there is still a stigma about stuttering. Many people still have the impression that speech dysfluency equals lack of intelligence or that you must speak well to be educated or that PWS are just too lazy to do something about it. Upon hearing these descriptions of my disability, it seems clear, those like me have some overcoming to do!
In her narrative, Preston writes, “I want to sound like everyone else. I don’t want to worry about picking up the phone. I don’t want to be scared of meeting strangers. I don’t want to feel handicapped and weak. I want to be witty and eloquent. I want to be fluent” (128). In her desire to be fluent, Preston makes difficult decisions to hide what she truly is, a person with dysfluency. She provides an example; Preston reports an instance of deciding not to speak during a moment when a potential romantic interest is drawn to her: “I want to preserve whatever image he has of me at that moment. I want to maintain the illusion that I am confident, alluring, easily flirtatious. Fluent. I want to preserve his fantasy of me” (96). Preston decided not to speak because she knows she stutters on her first name, Katherine. She concedes to an illusion of herself to keep up with the norms she believes she must engender to be accepted, that of being fluent. In other words, she seeks to create an illusion of herself she knows to be false. But she can fake it for a few more minutes in hopes her attraction will fall in love and never see her dysfluency. This fantasy of fluency is shared with many PWS. Because speech dysfluency is partially concealed, until we speak, it floats in a liminal space between ability and disability, comfort and discomfort.

David Mitchell, an award-winning novelist and stutterer, compares speech dysfluency to other disabilities and provides some of the painful experience of being dysfluent: Mitchell writes with passion:

I detect a taboo. All disabilities are disabling, but the degree of discomfort they inflict upon the non-disabled varies, depending on no small part on the condition’s “assistability.” Helping a blind person navigate King’s Cross gives the
decent-minded Samaritan a certain glow, and inviting a special needs classmate to our child’s birthday party makes us feel civilised. But watching a stammerer suffer a mauling? That’s agony. What can you do, apart from inwardly (or outwardly) wince, and thank God you don’t suffer that mortification every time you’re called upon to read in class, answer the phone or buy a ticket? (78)

Mitchell provides a look at what every dysfluent person knows all too well—when we encounter a dysfluency, people have a reaction where a confused look crosses their face and they are not sure if they should keep looking at you, look away, or say the word for us. What Mitchell calls a mauling is the word getting the better of its speaker.

Treatment for Stuttering

Stuttering doesn’t fit neatly into a category, because it continues to be so perplexing for those who are dysfluent and for those that seek to treat it. Even with archaic treatments (e.g. burning the mouth) or more modern ones (e.g. an auditory feedback device), many people that do not endure stuttering have a general perception of it. MacIntyre references her experience with Speech Therapists, those that should understand and help manage dysfluency. MacIntyre’s mother was told, “to just ignore [her] stuttering and never draw attention to it. [The speech researcher] told her that if she did this, [her] stuttering would eventually go away” (26). Beyond the reality that stuttering rarely, if ever, simply goes away, it cannot be ignored, unless PWS never speak.
Even the attempts to treat stuttering often prove more an endeavor of solving a puzzle than treating a condition. Preston asserts, "We still do not know exactly why stuttering occurs, and thus every attempt at speech therapy is an exercise in trial and error [. . . .] Maybe stuttering encompasses a slew of differing conditions" (144). This inability to pin down dysfluency only exacerbates the mystery and dismissal of it. While many honest attempts have been made and some treatments or products show promise, few last very long because of the condition’s complexity. Some PWS have severe blocks that force them into contorted facial positions where their words are frozen somewhere between their brain and the mechanical structures of speech production. Other PWS repeat consonants so many times where they are unable to break free until they run out of breathe, and sometimes the process repeats itself. And others realize that a word they want to say will cause any of the above, or something else just as perplexing, and decide to say nothing. Saying nothing is often a concession and response. Concession because, for me, I know that trying to say what I want to say will result in dysfluency, and I decide what I have to say is not all that important anyway compared to the effort, energy, and embarrassment of trying to say it. Not speaking is also a response to the reminders of how others have reacted to dysfluency in the past. The most common is teasing. Sometimes being teased is meant to be playful, sometimes not. Even when it’s meant to be playful (or understanding and endearing), it’s a reminder that as a PWS, I cannot speak like what is considered normal, as if PWS didn’t know that. You see, dysfluent speakers need the overcoming narrative to believe in their voices, because oftentimes, our voices have been stolen by our experiences. And many of us want them back.
It Is My Voice

Preston crossed an ocean, at least in part, for a cure for her stuttering, but also in hopes of starting anew. Preston has the newest addition to the dysfluency narrative genre with her April 2013 publication of her memoir. Preston’s initial idea of the book was to conduct interviews of one hundred dysfluent speakers and publish them as a collection, she decided to change her mind because, as she explains, “I needed to exorcise my own demons, that I need to write my own story” (209). She needed to write her narrative for herself. Brett Smith and Andrew C. Sparkes recognize that overcoming narratives are an early step in coming to terms with disability, because they provide an outlet for the emotions that derive from an injury or from new understanding or even societal and cultural norms being imposed upon an author (1103). In a study of men with spinal cord injury, Smith and Sparkes believe “hope” helps those with spinal cord injury “understand and impose order on their experiences” (1102). If we can extend this to disability in general, and dysfluency narratives in particular, we recognize that these narratives are not solely for the audience, but perhaps are more important for the authors, their life experiences, and growth as people. More plainly, they suggest that narratives that develop through and because of disability appear to be useful, so what may be construed as limited or confined into the genre of an “overcoming” narrative may actually provide a level of comfort and development for an author.

Through this comfort, these narratives could also do more than help the author, and as such Couser seeks to encourage what he calls “progressive disability narratives”
“Signifying” 161), “new disability memoir” (Signifying 164), or “disability studies memoirs” (Signifying 165), which are narratives where the writers have a “sharp awareness of how disability is socially and culturally constructed” (Signifying 165). Dysfluency narratives seem to engender this awareness based on the examples I have read and provided examples of here. Author of “Disability and Narrative: New Directions for Medicine and the Medical Humanities,” Rebecca Garden, too, suggests the overcoming narrative “provide[s] a critical resource by representing the point of view of people with disabilities” while increasing awareness of the social constructions and concerns related to disability (70). Couser and Garden provide two important insights to these narratives. On one hand, there are aspects of disability that can only be constructed through the cultural and societal norms of a given disability, such as those with dysfluency not being the brightest bulbs in the box. Couser argues progressive narratives can demonstrate this construction. On the other hand, people who have disabilities can detail their disability and their experiences better than any doctor or other person, so their perspective helps create an awareness and hopefully an understanding of what the experience is like with a given disability, which is what Garden makes clear. Further, Couser also believes his new narrative is, as he explains, “performs advocacy and education” (Signifying 189). Although I’ve demonstrated some of the impressions of dysfluency from Rhetoric and Composition and from popular culture, Dysfluency narratives are critical in correcting the misperceptions of PWS and acting as advocate for the dysfluent experience.
Need to Overcome

In related fashion, Couser argues, “Disability memoir should be seen, therefore, not as spontaneous self-expression but as a response—indeed a retort—to the traditional misrepresentation of disability in Western culture” (Signifying 6-7). These retorts, then, react to what has been said or the already-ongoing narrative or understanding about those with disabilities; they seek to write/right was has been written. Through these narratives, those with disabilities are attempting to counter the ignorance about their respective conditions. They are trying to show the daily life, the successes and the failures, and the unjust and unfair treatment they experience more than any narrative could possibly provide. Through these apparent weaknesses or “disabilities,” those who write dysfluency narratives demonstrate a level of courage, ability, adaptation, and willingness to simply be seen as important and productive members of society.

The courage, ability, and energy that is devoted to writing disability narratives can prove difficult for some. Others are able to craft them and inspire others to do the same. Even if those with disabilities are able to write them, the experience of being disabled is not easy to explain. Disability scholar Wendy L. Chrisman writes, “Disability Studies needs inspirational personal narratives to articulate experiences that are difficult to articulate” (183). Any disability narrative, I think, needs this element of inspiration for other so recognize themselves in another’s pages; some people need to know they are not alone. In short, hope is what the overcoming narrative does; it gives a glimpse that someone else has done it. They, in a moment of victory over whatever condition they have, have done it; they did what they were told they could not—and that is power!
Author of *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, Arthur W. Frank agrees, “Humans need exemplars who inspire” (133). This much-ridiculed theme of inspiration or hope fails to corrupt the overcoming narrative for one main reason that Frank points out; we need people to inspire us! Even though the discussion about the concerns of such inspiration or overcoming has been discussed in Disability Studies, the reality remains that inspiring texts still sell and people still read them, because they have a need to be inspired by people they perceive are like them, or could be. The basis, I think, of being inspired comes from making an emotional and personal connection to the model one seeks to emulate, the person one seeks to become more like, so they too may inspire. And perhaps more notably, these narratives are written by people who may seek to understand, work through, or even be inspired by themselves.

Being inspired by yourself seems like a tall order to fulfill. However, if one is in a select or small group, one that is othered per se, a narrative seems like the most likely way to learn about oneself and others like yourself. Couser writes, “To members of marginalized groups, autobiography may be the most accessible of literary genres” (*Signifying* 31). Because of marginalization, some people are often left unheard and as a result seek ways to be heard in an atypical fashion, which may include the written word. “[A]utobiography,” Couser explains, “has considerable potential to counter stigmatizing or patronizing portrayals of disability because it is a medium in which disabled people may have a high degree of control over their own images” (*Signifying* 31). There is no other medium, save for perhaps video or personal contact, that provides a way to offset the imposed norms of a disability and their relation to being so-called normal. Sara
Newman, author of *Writing Disability*, discusses this connection and adds, “the choices authors make in representing their experiences reflect individual responses to various cultural expectations, in so doing, offer insight into the interplay between disability and normality” (11). Newman argues that narratives, regardless of how they may be perceived, provide certain information that we can learn from and gain understanding to better understand the individual conditions of the authors. There is a relationship and connection between abilities that provides space to learn from and grow. One of these narratives that occupy this space is the dysfluency narrative.

**Dysfluency’s Need for Overcoming**

The importance of the dysfluency narrative as an overcoming narrative demonstrates that even today, with such focus on minority segments of the population such as those with disabilities, there may still be disabilities that are neglected or ignored. Dysfluency narratives are important to demonstrate how influential society and culture can be, even to those who have dysfluency. If disability studies is going to truly become the study of disability, it must study all disabilities regardless of the population affected by them. Dysfluency narratives need the overcoming narrative to be accepted into Disability Studies, because they will draw attention if nothing else. Then through this acknowledgement, dysfluency can be recognized as being part of the disability continuum and our narratives can be accepted as disability narratives. However, narratives can still do more.
Aristotle, according to Jane Robinette, implies “narrative imitates experience for the express purpose of clearing away from the story the clutter and trivia of everyday living to reveal deeper meaning of lived experience” (292). The impression of narrative is more important than what the narrative is actually discussing. This deeper meaning Aristotle refers to goes beyond words and reveals the more complex connections between us as people. So while narrative tells a story, the meaning, the depth beyond the story helps us to better understand the mutual condition(s). Thus, as we contemplate overcoming narratives, there are various aspects we should remember. First, these stories are stories driven by people’s lives, experiences, and beliefs. We must assume, then, that they are as real as possible to them. Of course we can agree or disagree, but we must acknowledge it is not our story to tell; it is theirs. Second, many are “gritty accounts of their pain and daily humiliations” and become, to some degree, who they are as people (Siebers “Disability” 747). Regardless of the various impressions regarding overcoming narratives, I believe more objective and understanding work, that is not influenced by culture and mindful of empathy, needs to take place, so these narratives can be seen as illuminative to Disability Studies, instead of limiting. And dysfluency narratives seem like a good place to start. Certainly, authors of any dysfluency narrative would likely take issue with some of the scholarship swirling around overcoming narratives when these authors they are simply trying to understand and deepen their relationship with their specific circumstance. These efforts should be applauded and not condemned. In fact, Chrisman argues, “that not all experiences of inspiration are infused by this reductive notion of overcoming” (173).
Throughout this chapter, I have suggested two types of overcoming narratives. The first is the questionable narrative that exemplifies too much "You can too!" discourse, which understandably causes concerns for many scholars due to its neglect to the materiality and reality of those with disabilities. The second is the narrative that takes elements of Couser's progressive overcoming narrative and incorporates discourse that allows authors to explain the ongoing challenges relative to a given "disability," which provide for some of the inspirational aspects aluded to earlier with Frank's suggestion that we need exemplars. By balancing the two, I see a neo-overcoming narrative developing that provides some inspirational elements while still doing the heavy lifting of advocacy and education about the various issues and concerns related to the given disability.

While I have focused on the dysfluency narrative in this chapter, I will take up shortly that I believe that thinking through verbal dysfluency offers a generative lens with which to think about written dysfluencies and the sometimes “disabling” circumstances of the student writer. In our writing classrooms, I believe we can still inspire our students through narratives and also our stories, our experiences, our triumphs and failures. Some students have these same feelings of inadequacy in regards to their writing. So perhaps the dysfluency narrative relates to how student writers may see themselves in a writing class; that is, students may feel disabled by what they perceive is their inability to write or maybe they have accepted the confining societal discourse that they “can’t write” or “hate writing” when their experiences may have been negative. Dysfluency narratives provide an opportunity for students to recognize their own dysfluencies in writing and learn to cope with them.
To further this discussion, the next chapter focuses on narratives of dysfluency and techniques used to manage dysfluency, including my own, which mirrors some of the discussion in this chapter because there are common themes related to one’s perception by others, exclusion, suffering, and, of course, overcoming. I focus on how PWS adapt to and manage their respective dysfluency. And finally, I suggest that through verbal dysfluency strategies, we can gain a greater understanding of written dysfluencies.
Chapter 4: Scribal Dysfluencies: Learning by Error

[T]he vocal non-fluencies which comprise stuttering may [...] conceivably have some functional, diagnostic, or remedial connection to the scribal non-fluencies that the English teacher encounters in the classroom. ~Robert Zoellner (290).

In grade school I thought I was unique because I got to leave my classmates stuck in class as I went to talk with Mrs. Donovan (not her real name). One other student, Mike, also came along. We would joke around about how special we were. Then, one day, maybe the fourth grade, it dawned on me that I am different, and not in a good way. Mike was told he no longer “needed” to go see Mrs. Donovan. In fact, I listened to her tell him that; she then turned to me and told me I still did. The exclusiveness and seeming importance of leaving the classroom fell like an anvil on my comfortable world. I started wondering what was wrong with me in that I did need to see her. I knew I was in speech therapy, but I never understood or considered that something was really wrong with the way I spoke—I just spoke. I also knew that I stuttered, and I knew I was made fun of because of it—but not just because of it. I knew my parents were only slightly concerned about it, and they never made a big deal out of it. I knew there were words I avoided because I could not say them. I still talked though, maybe too much; in fact, my family called me “motor mouth.” I also knew that I didn’t like talking on the phone to strangers or reading out loud in class, because I could envision having trouble with my speech. It was like a premonition, I knew when I would stutter, so I avoided situations where the
potential was there. In retrospect, I also presented myself as being quiet and I even acted
dumb around people knowing full well that I was not. My reading comprehension was
one of the highest in grade school, but I failed to do homework, which led most teachers
to label me as smart but unmotivated. Not all teachers, however, felt that I was smart.
One openly called me stupid. For a long time, stupid stuck.

Stupid stuck for so long that after grade school and when I no longer was in
speech therapy, I acknowledged my speech was different but refused to address it. Finally
while working on two master’s degrees at Missouri State, an incredibly gifted professor,
mentor, and friend suggested I look into the speech therapy program and what
opportunities it may offer. I did, and it was then where I learned more about my own
speech, my own dysfluencies. Since then, I’ve come to realize how my speaking and
writing influence each other.

There are two different papers before you right now. One is simply the text I’ve
written, which you could just as easily read. The other is basically the same, but there
would be adjustments made if I were to read it aloud to you. You may ask, “What does
that mean?” As someone with a speech dysfunction, I have learned certain techniques to
aid me while speaking, and it is these techniques that partly compose this chapter. Thus,
this chapter centers on how those with assumed disabilities like stuttering, or perhaps
more appropriately, different communication methods, have strategies and techniques
that can benefit other writers and composition instruction. I have transferred these tools
from my speaking toolbox, to my writing toolbox and even my pedagogical toolbox,
because they have benefited me, and I believe they can benefit others. In this chapter, I
discuss some techniques from dysfluent speakers and provide insight into how they may be useful in a writing classroom. I focus on dysfluency as a generative aspect of non-normative composition studies, not as something to ignore or overcome, but something to learn from and explore. This chapter functions as a bridge between so-called disabilities and utilizing abilities. Also, I suggest ways that verbal dysfluency and written dysfluency may be similar or connected, and I present ways speech dysfluency techniques may be utilized in learning about and understanding written dysfluencies.

Dysfluencies of Writing

Some starting questions might be: What happens in those moments we are writing and for some reason we get stuck, stop to think, backtrack to edit, or just lose our train of thought? What happens when we avoid a writing task because of insecurities or feelings of inadequacy? What happens when we look at a colon mark and try to remember how exactly to use it correctly? These moments and others might be considered dysfluencies of writing. These dysfluencies, I believe, are spaces that we can explore, where we can ask questions, and potentially learn. By doing so, we might be able to reconceptualize our writing processes\(^\text{14}\) to broaden our understanding of them and possibly find other ways to manage dysfluency. I think it’s safe to assume that most writers have different methods

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\(^{14}\) I recognize the complexity of using the term “writing process” to describe any process of writing. However, I do so with a belief that there is no singular writing process, per se. Rather that there are loose generalizations that can be grouped into the following areas, *prewriting, drafting, revising,* and *editing.* In this chapter, I do not theorize about writing process or processes but treat whatever process one uses to write as a writing process. To better articulate my view, I defer to Lester Faigley, who writes, “The problem, of course, is that conceptions of writing as a process vary from theorist to theorist” (149).
of composing. We all have learned little tips and tricks and methods along our educational journey that allow us to compose and read others’ work. Yet, we are left with those pesky moments of being stuck, losing that moment of focus, and trying to reignite the fire of our fingers.

As writers, we may pause, ponder, get distracted, or change direction. Whatever a dysfluent moment is comprised of, it ain’t fluent! Something happens, and it’s different for each one of us. Even the simplicity of leaving the room is a strategy to delay or avoid something—it is this something that could be a dysfluency. As I reflect upon student writers in writing classrooms, I began to realize the skills and techniques they use to address writing dysfluencies such as writer’s block.

Writer’s block is commonly referred to as a writer’s inability to produce writing for whatever reason. This block refers mostly to the mental aspects of text production. Educational scholar, Mike Rose, who has done extensive work on writer’s block, believes that when writer’s become blocked, the cause is an over-application of rules that have “impeded” the writing process (“Rigid” 149, see also, Rose’s Writer’s Block). More precisely, he posits that those that do not experience blocks understood “rules” as “less rigid” and for them, “more functional, more flexible, more open to information from the outside” (Rose “Rigid” 150). For some writers, writer’s block is an unexperienced myth; for other writers, it is as real as the sun rising. Whether you believe it is real or not, the myth is there—and myth makes many a believer. Our students generally believe in writer’s block—it’s part of popular lore that writer’s have writer’s block. As such, writing teachers must deal with it. People Who Stutter (PWS) deal with blocks, too.
Blocked, in speech therapist jargon, refers to a moment when a speaker is obstructed. There are two types of blockage: clonic, which is the stereotypical repetition of sound; and tonic, a block where the sound or the physical structures are frozen, unable to continue. Both of these bear some relation to the composing process.

Clonic blocks are similar to recursive writing processes. Recursive writing is non-linear writing that continually develops by returning to various aspects of itself. So even when a draft seems complete, new research may be followed up on and incorporated. However, it’s more likely we recognize this in writing that continually returns to a particular point without developing beyond that point. In other words, it lacks development and keeps repeating, for example, a vague thesis that does not grow or change. By seeing clonic blocks through this repetitious nature, we understand it as a rhythm of a writing and sometimes as repeating a similar word or set of words over and over, like a feedback loop. As a result, we can recognize a pattern and consider options to reconceptualize, relax, or reconfigure to get us out of an unfruitful pattern. Tonic blocks are like writer’s block, in that a writer goes blank, simply can’t move forward with a piece, or, as Rose suggested, give too much attention to the rules. Some may relate this to losing a train of thought, having the words on the tip of the tongue, or being frozen with inaction due to a willingness *not* to do anything *wrong*. When a speaker is in a tonic block, though, no sound is produced and the person’s vocal structures (e.g. the mouth) are physically paralyzed in the attempt to make sound. Tonic blocks effectively cease the progression of the communication regardless if it is verbal or written. Fictional characters, such as Porky Pig or Elmer Fudd, often mimic one or both of these blocks. It
is, further, through the imitation of these blocks that PWS are teased, mostly as children.

While some students have writer’s block, other students exhibit avoidance behaviors when tasked with a writing project. These behaviors vary among students, but the strategy is the same; they attempt to delay or not complete the work because they believe it to be easier than actually doing the work. Far too often, I encounter students, especially in First-Year Composition, that conclude that either they “hate writing” or that they “can’t write.” Even taken as hyperbole, these students have taken on some of the discourse of the culture. Students hear from their peers and from society in general that writing is not an easy process, and this assessment can easily be accepted by students as they work their way through the academy. Yet, students may also make an extension judgment based on their own experience with writing. If, for instance, they rarely have received high marks on writing assignments, they may simply conclude they dislike or are unable to write. A lower-than expected grade could severely affect students' self-esteem and cause them to generate coping strategies to explain or mitigate the reasoning behind the score. These reasons could range from having too difficult a teacher to not having enough time.

While excuses like not having enough time may be common, avoidance behaviors might also be a way to manage, and they might include students giving up when challenged by a task of writing. Some students might just ignore the entire assignment. Other students might offer excuses when questioned (e.g. I thought I did it right). Some students give up too easily on a writing task for any number of reasons which might include time constraints, family matters, social “obligations” (such as attending a party),
unwillingness to follow through knowing the level of work required to perform well, or perhaps a lack of knowledge of how to correct or improve. Occasionally, these manifest themselves during class. For instance, some students, when given an in-class writing task, start texting or see this moment as an opportune time to visit the restroom. These moments, too, could be considered dysfluencies of a sort.

Connections to Verbal Dysfluency

PWS also avoid certain situations where they will be required to speak. Using the phone is one example. Growing up, I would ask my Mom to make a call for me to find out some bit of information. There were times she would make the call, but as I got older, she would refuse and inform me that if I wanted to know, I should call. Most times, I didn’t call. The telephone is a terrible device to dysfluent speakers, because the person on the other end of the line cannot see that you are trying to communicate with them even though there may be no sound. Even today, I resist calling to order a pizza, because I might be asked a question I will be unable to answer without blocking or stumbling. I go so far as to avoid drive-thrus for this same reason, but I cloak my reasoning when questioned and joke that I want the workers to see whose order they might mess up. I say this with a false bravado. I consider my avoidance of speaking into these devices as similar to my students finding ways to avoid the process of writing. My discomfort or embarrassment with being dysfluent sometimes causes me to avoid the entire ordeal. If students felt they would make mistakes or be dysfluent, they, too, might seek ways to avoid the impression of embarrassment. Much like the extra attention to writing “rules”
in writer’s block, a potential strategy would be to avoid situations where one might encounter writing. We can look more broadly at what students might do to avoid writing by recognizing that those avoidance behaviors are writing dysfluencies.

PWS will sometimes substitute words for other words or a set of words in order to avoid dysfluency. Student writers perform similar tasks for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons include the sound of a word in the lyrical aspects of the sentence. Another might be the student only has a vague understanding of the word he or she thinks is correct, so instead of taking a risk, they substitute another term. One form of substitution can get students in some trouble: plagiarism. Most writing teachers teach how to avoid plagiarism with reviewing proper citation and source incorporation techniques. Some students, however, forget or disregard this teaching and decide to substitute another’s work as their own. If we look at this through dysfluency, we can understand this as a coping strategy as well as an avoidance strategy. Perhaps, for example, a student took on too many activities and an English paper will not help them in their non-English related major. Or, not uncommon, plagiarism can be the result of students’ feelings of inadequacy. There are many wrinkles to the issue of plagiarism, of course, and I do not mean to suggest that it is always an act of coping, but when I consider plagiarism through a lens of dysfluency, it provides me with certain understandings of motivation.

Connecting Verbal to Written

When students believe they lack the ability to write a good paper, they may prepare a paper with dysfluencies. Perhaps the most superficial dysfluencies would be
punctuation errors and grammatical errors. Many composition scholars suggest (and research demonstrates) that writing teachers should not teach prescriptive punctuation and grammar because of diminishing returns (Hartwell 205, see also Harris 417). However, there is still the reality that students will need to learn how to properly use punctuation and grammar, and giving students “a more rhetorical understanding of grammar” seems the most productive (Blauuw-Hara 169; see also, Kolln and Gray’s *Rhetorical Grammar*, now in its seventh edition). The misuse or lack of various punctuation marks, tense shifts, and even formatting and design oversights might also be recognized as dysfluent moments (to the reader). While these might be the most obvious to recognize in writing, they remain contradictory in the sense that many well-known published authors routinely “break the rules” in relation to commas, semi-colons, and other what-might-be-called stylistic choices. Still many teachers of writing remind students that they “must know the rules before they can break them” and this creates, quite understandably, a misunderstanding in approaching some of the more perceivable dysfluencies such as comma splices. This contradiction between experience, reading authors who routinely neglect the “rules,” and what many see as standards of proper English, such as proper punctuation, spelling, and grammar, creates a similar contradiction for our students. Do they follow the rules and not use language how they might want? Or do they go against teachings and embrace their creativity?

These moments of indecision could be considered dysfluent; students’ perceived correctness, rigidity of the rules, or (mis)understanding(s) of the writing process can seize them and the response is a self-created block or other dysfluency. Many students seek to
produce a first draft that is good enough for the grade they believe they deserve from the teacher. For example, if a student believes that they must get the attention of the reader in the beginning of his or her work (i.e. the hook), he or she may rewrite and rewrite the opening searching for the right hook, instead of coming back to it later, possibly after more writing has been done. A student can create a dysfluency by a misunderstanding or misapplication of a given so-called rule. This willingness to produce a good enough first draft, which is also a perception of what it should be, in turn, may force students to self-edit while writing their initial draft (Blaauw-Hara 171). This effectively ends the recursive process and encourages dysfluencies such as blocks, avoidance, coping strategies, or even plagiarism. Perhaps if we considered aspects of students’ perceived errors, expectations, and processes as dysfluencies instead of laziness, inability, or ignorance, we could better help them write.

Comparing Fluency to Dysfluency

Generally speaking, language, according to David Mitchell, a novelist and dysfluent speaker, can be better understood through dysfluency; he explains how language usage informs others, and ourselves, about who we are (82). Assuming Mitchell is right, and I believe he is, we can take dysfluencies and consider them as constructive to the production of language, verbal and written. His acceptance of his dysfluency may provide student writers insight into accepting the idea that they will not be able to produce the cherished, perfect, first and final draft and to understand writing takes time and effort. Dysfluency, then, may provide an opportunity for student writers to better
understand themselves and how their rhetorical decisions affect, not only their writing, but how they present themselves to the world. This realization could help students better recognize writing teachers as going through similar processes, which include dysfluent moments. Marty Jezer, a well-known biographer and dysfluent speaker, writes in his autobiography how he understands verbal fluency from a dysfluent perspective:

[Fluent people] may have to think about what they are going to say, and they may end up saying something silly or stupid, but they never have to think about how they are going to speak, how they are going to create first this and then that particular sound. They decide to speak and they do it. The very fact that stutterers have to agonize over the mechanics of speech make us self-conscious about being different, and this feeling feeds our anxiety about speaking and heightens the stress that causes our speaking mechanism to break down. (98)

To help demonstrate the importance of this large quotation, I’m going to rewrite it with some minor adjustments to show how student writers may perceive academic writers and writing:

*Our professors* may have to think about what they are going to *write*, and they may end up *writing* something silly or stupid, but they never have to think about how they are going to *write*, how they are going to create first this and then that particular *paragraph*. They decide to *write* and they do it. The very fact that we *student writers* have to agonize over the mechanics of *writing* make us self-conscious about being different, and this feeling feeds our anxiety about *writing*
and heightens the stress that causes our *writing process* mechanism to break down. (my adjustments are in italic)

This revision reflects some of the comments I receive from student writers about the differences they perceive between their writing and my writing. With this adjustments, we should recognize that student writers also may ask themselves about the processes of writing such as the *what* their instructors are going to write, *how* instructors are going to construct their sentences and paragraphs, and *what decisions* instructors make during the composing process. If students ask such questions, I would argue they rarely get functional answers. Student writers typically only see the final products of another’s writing, unless they see other *student* writing. Instead of seeing another student’s writing, which they equate to be one of their peers, they rarely, if ever, see a more advanced or experienced writer’s drafts. These drafts, if they are anything like mine, are a mess. There are marks, revisions, arrows, cross outs, comments, symbols, and whatever else that will help me remember what I was thinking when I return to revise at a computer. Students do not often see the stages of revision more experienced writers go through. Students tend to read authors’ final draft without an awareness of any dysfluencies that may have been encountered. More importantly, students rarely see our—the teacher’s—dysfluencies in writing, because if the student sees our writing it is usually the final polished product, often in an over-priced textbook. However, some scholars in Rhetoric and Composition have discussed writing with students or showing them the messiness of drafts. For example, Howard B. Tinberg, Professor of English, believes writing teachers should be “writing with their students” in order to demonstrate the process of writing, just like we
ask our students to do (40; see also, Corder, and much of Murray’s work). This practice of sharing work with students, in my experience, is a rare practice, because like students, writing teachers may also be apprehensive about sharing their unfinished work. For example, Lezlie Laws Couch starts her article, “Old Voices/New Conversations: Sharing Drafts with Students,” by stating that she includes a “draft” in her article (30). Perhaps cautious of being judged overly critical by her peers, Couch states as a reminder, “As you read, remember that this is an essay in an incipient stage, not to be judged according to anything other than ‘draft’ standards [emphasis added]” (30). Couch’s vigilance, to me, seems somewhat protective of her draft; students may, too, be protective of their respective work. My point, then, is that most students very rarely see the actual process, number of revisions, and types of revisions, and so they may interpret writing to be an easy process. A process they should be able to sit down the night before and “whip out” within a few hours.

Is It Experience?

Well-known scholar and teacher of writing and writing teachers, Nancy Sommers, describes the differences between adult experienced writers and student writers as being the commonly held distinction between editing and revising. Her research indicates that to student writers revision hinges on simply word choice and substitution (Sommers “Revision” 46). Experienced writers, however, consider larger concerns such as argument cohesion and “restructuring” an entire work (Sommers “Revision” 49). Experienced writers are able to see the global or higher-order concerns as part of the revision process,
but student writers recognize local or lower-order concerns as what revision entails. So when a teacher directs students to “revise the paper,” students could understand this as simply fix some punctuation or change a few words. In addition, experienced writers seek to decipher “the anticipation of a reader’s judgment,” (“Revision” 50) and in doing so, find ways to articulate the argument to “influence their reader” (“Revision” 51). With more experience, writers develop an internal “dissonance” that helps them revise based on the outcomes they want readers to discover (Sommers “Revision” 50-53). Through this understanding of Sommers work, we can better articulate the misunderstanding that some students have about writing for an audience.

Still, student writers take on a mighty role as writers in the liberal arts university. David Bartholomae, a well-known compositionist, explains the task we ask students to accept: “It is very hard for [students] to take on the role—the voice, the persona—of an authority whose authority is rooted in scholarship, analysis, or research” (625). Further, the model for that authority is, not only the person grading their writing, but the person who is attempting to teach them that scholarship, analysis, and research. As such, Bartholomae suggests that students must “invent the university” to write their papers in the language we, the academy, will understand and accept as colleagues (623). This forces students “to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse” in such a way that they are fluent, understandable, and cohesive (Bartholomae 628). Bartholomae reasons, “students need to learn to extend themselves, by successive approximations, in the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections [. . .] within our academic community”
All these approximations, rituals, and tricks certainly must create some kind of dysfluency in student (and experienced!) writers trying to get one grade on one paper for one class in one of many classes in one year of coursework. More clearly, we are tasking students to find a voice in an unfamiliar setting, with an unfamiliar discourse, and grading them as to how well they succeed at the attempt. I can understand how students can perceive teachers of writing to be perfectionate when they are trying to partake in a world where they only have limited experience.

**Learning by Dysfluency**

The more I ponder the question, How do dysfluent moments help composing?, the more I come to understand the writing and learning process. My first college English class, in retrospect, was an opportunity to learn, but I was not ready, so I dropped English 101—twice. The third time, I passed, but with a D+. My lack of readiness, I see now, may have been a dysfluency because I had probably needed more attention to help me work through whatever internal struggles I was having with using language. Maybe it was a conflict with the words I had in my head and my inability to speak them, which may have translated into my inability to write them. Maybe it was my uneasiness with verbal discourse that transferred to my written discourse. Or perhaps, my self-created dysfluency, in dropping the class two times, enabled me to avoid engaging the language I grew so afraid of because of my stuttering.

My hope in sharing this anecdote is that the field of Rhetoric and Composition considers the potential learning opportunities provided within writing dysfluencies. Could
it be that student writers exhibit dysfluencies because they are not done processing, marinating, simmering, cooking with their words? Maybe they are building up momentum to go through the long haul of constructing a piece of writing—like breaking through a block. Some composition scholars have considered such ideas, though not necessarily through the lens of dysfluency. Peter Elbow and Donald M. Murray come to mind. Murray, for example, claims, “Instead of teaching finished writing, we should teach unfinished writing, and glory in its unfinishedness” (4). Elbow offers the concept of “cooking,” which he explains, “is the interaction of contrasting or conflicting material” (49). Elbow believes part of the writing process is similar to a chemical reaction where one element affects another. But specifically applying the lens of dysfluency is powerful here, because writing is generative and “a process of making meaning” until a dysfluency is encountered (Berthoff v). Once dysfluency is recognized, various dysfluency strategies may be applied as catalysts. Ann E. Berthoff, in my (dysfluent) reading of her The Making of Meaning text, is trying to demonstrate that by writing we are constructing knowledge and meaning, and sometimes that knowledge and those meanings do not coincide with what we think (or thought) we knew. Berthoff argues that we make these meanings “out of a chaos of images, half-truths, syntactic fragments, from the mysterious and unformed” (70). This “chaos” Berthoff refers to derives from our language, and, as such, we “can find ways out of [this] chaos” (70). Through this glory of unfinishedness, the various catalysts we can impart, and the chaotic, partial understandings and beginnings of our students’ writings, writing teachers can then let students “tolerate ambiguity,” as Berthoff argues (71). What Berthoff gets to is that the meanings we want
students to develop are “hypothesized, identified, developed, modified, discarded, or stabilized,” which are in turn part of a dialogue that is derived from “chaos” (72). What I understand from Murray, Elbow, and Berthoff is that we partly discover by the stutters, and the dysfluencies we encounter, even in what we create.

In essence, I see these arguments suggesting we learn by being dysfluent.

Techniques for (Dys)Fluency

As students struggle and face dysfluencies, many valuable (and unexplored) techniques used by PWS are available that can be used to counter such dysfluencies. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss several techniques that have aided me in my speaking and my writing. Through my research with dysfluency narratives and speech therapy techniques and strategies, I realized that many PWS have slightly different techniques to manage or adapt to their respective form of dysfluency. So while verbal dysfluencies may be (clinically) identical, the techniques available or used to manage or adapt to them may not be. It is possible that writing dysfluencies may, too, be similar and even extended to be universal or able to be categorized but have differing methods or techniques to adapt to or manage them. We, then, can contemplate that various techniques from verbal dysfluency may be transferrable to scribal dysfluency. In my own moments of realization about dysfluency, I have managed my dysfluency with various skills, much like Bertie in The King's Speech, and authors with dysfluency, David Mitchell and Katherine Preston. Thus, like them, I am able to apply those skills to my
speaking and to my writing. In what follows, I discuss several techniques that may transfer to written dysfluencies.

Let me begin with “bouncing.” Bouncing is a common way to work through a dysfluent moment where the speaker bounces onto a difficult sound. In the film, *The King’s Speech*, Bertie, the dysfluent king, has trouble with the letter “P” in the beginning of the word “peoples.” Lionel, his speech therapist, suggests using another, easier vocalization to get to it, such as “ah-peoples,” which creates momentum to get through the problematic word “peoples.” This technique can be used in writing dysfluencies as well. If a writer is stuck on a certain section, he or she can bounce ahead to an area of the work he or she feels capable of writing. Sometimes this springing ahead to another part of the work may spark a memory about the part bounced over, and the writer can make or note or return to work on it. Bouncing provides an internal reset of the thinking process and provides an opportunity for the writer to get out of a possible block. For example, while writing this dissertation, many times I would be drafting a section and get stuck. Instead of wasting time and attempting to force myself through it or just sit waiting for insight, I would move on and continue working on another section sometimes in the same chapter and sometimes in another. On more than one occasion, I realized the work I had bounced to gave me more insight (and inspiration) for the section I originally left.

As bouncing provides a new start in a new section, blocks sometimes force speakers (and writers) to begin again, too. Sometimes when I’m dysfluent, I realize I simply need to start over. If that means scrap everything and start at square one, then that’s what needs to happen. Verbal tonic blocks, as we recall, are when nothing is
happening, no movement (or little) and no sound. The speaker is frozen, stuck. If we consider writing blocks through an understanding of tonic blocks, we can realize these are moments in which we can make something happen. Change direction—make it unexpected. In my fluency, if I’m blocked, I realize I need to stop and restart, but restart from a different position and go in a different direction. And a different direction offers us a new environment in which to explore and see potential.

While dwelling on “foundational basics” has fallen out of favor in most composition theory, I have come to understand the basics somewhat differently through my dysfluent lens. Again, turning to The King’s Speech is useful here. Lionel taught Bertie a foundational understanding of dysfluency and techniques to get through and manage a dysfluent moment. If we liken these tools and the confidence they gave Bertie to the foundational basics of punctuation and grammar, we can understand that one way to build this confidence in student writers is to give them a foundation of the basics, such as grammar and punctuation, so students can feel more comfortable and gain more confidence with their use and functionality. Through a more nuanced approach to teaching the rhetorical nature of punctuation and grammar (i.e. not skill and drill exercises), students may be more likely to take more ownership of their writing, which can make their prose more lively, dynamic, and fluid. This sense of ownership might free them from the bonds of doubling back to self-edit or a hesitancy at using a comma. In other words, we should teach students that dysfluency is a component of the writing process and knowing the rules may help ease their minds (but doesn’t necessarily make a piece of writing better). By managing dysfluencies better, writers increase the likelihood
of producing better prose. More precisely, the confidence gained by having a stronger working knowledge of the rules of punctuation and grammar, that many students believe (based on Nancy Sommers’s research) is revision, allows student writers to devote more focus to concerns such as organization and other higher order concerns that we have in mind when we speak of revision.

When I was learning more about my dysfluency in speech therapy in graduate school, I became more dysfluent in my speech, for a short time, because I was distracted by what was happening during the onset of my stuttering. As I was learning more about my speech, I consciously and subconsciously (and maybe, unconsciously) reflected on and analyzed my speech to better understand myself through it. This created a deeper dysfluency until I could, with less effort, understand what was happening at a given dysfluent moment. Part of my dysfluency may be related to a mild form of apraxia, which is a difficulty synchronizing the movements of speech to produce sounds. In one therapy session, I could not say the word, hierarchical. Even with repeated efforts, the movements to produce the word correctly, or the commonly pronounced way, proved difficult for several possible reasons, such as my therapist’s inability to pronounce the word consistently and my not hearing the word repeatedly in order to be able to reproduce the sounds. So, what I ended up doing was taking a full hour with a popular online dictionary that provided, because it was recorded, a consistent pronunciation of the word, which I then used as a template to generate my own synthesis of the word. This exercise with the word “hierarchical” taught me that by understanding how to say the
word, I could focus more on the concepts I was attempting to convey rather than the dysfluencies I was trying to avoid.

Another of the things I recognized as I went through speech therapy as a grad student was the control I could engender over my dysfluency through pace. After about three to four weeks of twice-a-week therapy sessions, I was sitting in a Teaching Assistant pedagogy class where the class was discussing some point with vigor. I remained silent, listening to the various perspectives and arguments. After several minutes of this cacophony, I spoke. The entire class turned to me and became quiet as I offered my humble opinion, without dysfluency and without hesitation, under control and paced to provide—for lack of a better term—dramatic effect. In other words, I spoke with a pacing that portrayed a thoughtful and reflective voice that was not forcing my words over another’s or excitedly rushing to make a point. I remember this moment, because I mentally paused and recognized I had the entire class listening to my words, my perspective, because I was a voice of reason, thoughtful, and most importantly, controlled and fluent. This brief moment of fluent speech is memorable because I feel as if I have had so few—I wonder if student writers feel the same.

In that class, I surveyed the speaking landscape and decided when I should speak. Katherine Preston, a journalist and fellow stutterer, explains her skill at finding a similar opportune time to speak. Preston learned “how to time the end of someone’s speech” and how to pick up where he or she left off, even to the point of slightly cutting them off to use their trailing-off words to build up to her words (80). In rhetorical circles, we might consider this kairos, or finding the perfect moment to communicate. Preston realized that
she was often more dysfluent when another was speaking, so she learned to time her interjections when a person was about out of breath or when a sentence was coming to a close, since there is a pause. It is this pause that Preston would then speak. Being a dysfluent speaker can help one to have a working knowledge of kairos or the opportune moment to speak. This understanding of timing includes the study of intonation and inflection that provides insight into how a particular person speaks, and more precisely, how and when the dysfluent speaker should say something to add to the conversation. Similarly, Preston’s accounts remind me of speaking in graduate classes, timing my responses, and even interrupting others, because if I didn’t make those moves at that moment, the ability to speak at all about that topic would be gone. In other words, my stuttering forced me to interject at times I knew would be seen as potentially rude, but because I thought my input was important enough, I risked the rudeness. The other alternative was not being heard at all, to self-silence my own voice, and I have determined that I have done that far too often.

There are many ways one could suggest to teach pace in a writing environment, such as word complexity, sentence length and variety, paragraph length, but perhaps the most obvious is punctuation. Many writers utilize punctuation to give signals to readers such as a comma to slow down or a semi-colon to show close connections. Likewise, lack of punctuation can speed up the pace. The speed of a text can be sped up or slowed down. The use of short words, sentences, and paragraphs can speed up the feel of a piece of writing as well. To help illustrate, here are two similar passages that are markedly different:
August in Georgia. Slow. Languid. Oppressive. The air is a blanket. Suffocating moisture. Perfumed with wisteria, draped on fences, trees.

This example creates a certain effect through sentence length and punctuation. Now, consider almost an identical passage:

August in Georgia, it is a slow, languid, oppressive time. The air is a blanket of suffocating moisture, perfumed with wisteria that drapes the fences and trees.

This passage demonstrates a different pace with more connected sentences and less restrictive punctuation. Coupled with punctuation and pacing, the lyrical aspects of words are important, because they help dictate the flow of the writing.

Lyrical features of writing can be most often observed in poetry. Alliteration is one way to enhance the lyrical quality. For example, many company names or common phrases exhibit this: PayPay; Bed, Bath, and Beyond; dead as a doornail; pretty as a peach. The most simple kind of alliteration is repeating the initial sound, such as the letter “p” in PayPal. Other more complex uses include tongue twisters, which are still used in speech therapy. In prose, we see how alliteration can function in a more sophisticated way. Thomas Paine’s opening to “The Crisis, No. 1” serves as a good example: “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crises, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman” (712). In this example, the hard “t” sound of the opening sentence has particular gravitas as it slides into the latter part of the sentence into the second sentence, where the “s” sound slithers across a reader’s tongue suggesting for some readers an ominous, slippery, snake-like tone of deserters and, at the end of the
second sentence, gives the impression that the men that are not cowards (and stay and fight) will be heroes. These sounds, thus, can create a mood that affects the audience, and with the Paine example, we can almost impart the inflections of a voice and pitch.

Another way to influence the audience is by one’s tone of voice, one’s pitch, and enunciation of words. Many writing teachers suggest to students to read their work out loud. However, I’ve learned that most students do so quickly and without paying much attention to the dramatic or lyrical aspects. Therefore, I suggest connections to students between the pace and the lyrical quality solely by reading a few lines to them in different ways. On one hand, I might read a section quickly, monotone, without pausing at punctuation, etc. This type of reading lacks feeling and helps disengage the listener. On the other hand, I read a section with inflections in pitch, various tone changes, pronunciation variations, and added pauses to help demonstrate emphasis. Essentially, I encourage students to change up the pace, word choice, word order, and even the sounding of words. For example, either or *either*, tomato or *tomato*, and so on. Reading aloud sometimes sounds silly to our students, but oftentimes when they try it, they realize its usefulness. As many compositionists have discovered, punctuation, misspellings, and other minor oversights can be detected through reading a piece out loud; Mark Blaauw-Hara, an English teacher and writing program coordinator, notes, “One of the most common strategies writing teachers (including me) seem to use to get students to slow down and pay attention to what is actually on the page is to have them read their papers aloud (174). However, when asked to read out loud, students in my experience simply rattle off the words before them without any feeling or emotion. In other terms, they do
not provide any dramatic energy to their reading. Their reading is more based on how much breath they have rather than generating any emotion, drama, or reactions from listeners. One way to help writers see problems in their writing is to utilize a dysfluent strategy. In dysfluency circles, some PWS modify their speaking to impart more feeling or even create a character or accent to increase their fluency. To explain this reasoning, Preston writes, “I didn’t stutter if I spoke in an accent. Few stutterers do” (80). I too have come to learn that when speaking in an accent, my fluency increases.

Preston explains how using a fake accent would ease dysfluency for a short amount of time, which many PWS report as being useful. Somehow an accent distracts the brain so that stuttering is minimized, perhaps because it uses more of the right brain or the creative aspects of the brain. Regardless, many PWS create accents to call upon when needed. Preston writes about her “comedy Indian, a gimmicky posh British, and a slew of other made-up tonal variations” (81). Like Preston, I also used accents. My accents were British, Russian, Mexican, a hip-hop rapper, and a geek. In writing, the kinds of “accents” I am describing may be related to changing one’s perspective. For example, if a student becomes blocked while writing a persuasive essay about climate change and its damaging effects, a writing teacher might suggest taking another viewpoint, another perspective, an accent of another character. A student might take the perspective of a businessperson with financial stakes in something like the Keystone Pipeline currently being proposed. Or perhaps, using the Keystone example again, a

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15 For me, I discovered that although I might be fluent for a short time, I would have to eventually return to my dysfluency, because I was only being untrue to my own voice, and I was not willing to carry on the charade. I was not fluent; I never will be.
Native American whose land the pipeline would cut right through. Perspective changes offer a number of potentials for writers to explore and construct an argument, and they also offer insight on how to defend various positions. The business person might counter the Native American with the idea that many Native Americans will be able to gain work with the pipeline’s construction, while the Native American could counter that the pipeline would be destroying ancestral burial grounds or other important cultural sites.

Another important aspect to writing, as many of us recognize, is word choice, which is a rhetorical decision that we try to instill into our students. As an illustration, Preston playfully explains how she would take a common word such as “car” and, if sensing a dysfluency, make it into, “the auto” or even the make or model of the automobile (81). When I teach, I try to demonstrate this for students. For example, if students are writing about a topic where they use the word “politician,” I might question them about that word—dig deeper to better understand how they are using that word. My dysfluency forces me to have several related words at my disposal in order to replace a potentially dysfluent word. Many PWS also report that having a larger vocabulary offers more options when they sense a problematic word coming (Jezer 10). In examining the example, what rhetorical effect does a “politician” engender? Most often it is negative. In my experience, most students are not often taught to think about (or do not consider) a word’s rhetorical effect(s). With this in mind, I ask students what other words might also be used. With some mental stretching, one word we come up with is the “public servant.” The rhetorical effects of related terms can influence what word one might choose. However, word choice can either create or avoid a dysfluency.
If a word functions but does not fully articulate a particular deeper meaning, a dysfluency may occur. Word choice can provide writers with ideas and momentum to generate more comprehensive text, show more nuance, or give readers a new way to think something common. For example, in my writing, a word and its meaning can advance writing and give a writer more avenues to include more information. In my last example, politician may slow down the composing process, because the term carries with it the baggage of politicians, and most readers may automatically put up a screen of distrust when discussion about a “politician” comes up. This baggage tends to reference negative aspects about politicians—dishonesty, making shady deals, saying different things to different audiences simply to garner votes, and so on. However, the term “public servant” suggests more positive attributes, which readers might not connect with the term politician, such as a voluntary position that exhibits a more modest attitude and one thoughtful of the needs of the constituency. Using public servant, I think, may augment one’s ideas or directions for writing, because, for example, it sets up serving the public and carries less rhetorical luggage. In other words, the negative aspects of politician might overshadow a writer’s argument and could even influence how the writer perceives his or her own discourse. Word choice is also related to finding another word or phrase to avoid or to get to certain language, which is similar to circumlocution.

One can also discover new ways to explore writing by circumlocuting. As I have explained, circumlocution is like taking the scenic tour. There are many ways to get from one point to another point. To be a bit more precise, dysfluent speakers may avoid a problematic word or concept by defining it or describing it in such a way that the
audience can understand it. A simplistic example might be if someone said, “I’m going to get that round thing,” instead of saying, “I’m going to get the ball.” Another, more complex way, of using circumlocution might be saying, “The body in space that was once considered a planet, but is now a dwarf planet,” which in this case would be partly defining Pluto. Circumlocution provides for a level of exploration to increase understanding by letting writers clarify how they understand a term or a concept. Teachers could use this to better clarify a difficult theory by using laymen terms. Many times in scholarly writing, an author will define a given concept for an audience, so they understand how the author is using or understands the particular term. Writing teachers might further see it similar to an expansive form of revision that creates extensive space to work with language, understand how words work together, how they function in concert or cacophony, and contemplate what else could be included to expand or clarify.

Speech therapists I have had suggest I’m an “expert” at circumlocution, which makes it appear my dysfluency is less than what it actually is. When I sense a dysfluency, I can decide to proceed (and potentially be dysfluent), or I can circumlocute, or manage the dysfluency by another technique. Interestingly, I have utilized this in my writing in two different ways. One from the writer’s perspective and one from the teacher’s perspective. As a writer (and speaker), I constantly make decisions based on several factors such as word choice and sentence structure in my head; these are driven by my dysfluency; it is how I think. I’m always considering other words and testing them to see how the meaning changes or what the rhetorical effect may be. As a writing teacher, I believe this technique to be useful, because students seem concretized or overly focused
on a specific way of explaining something when writing instead of being fluid, kinetic, and adaptive. Oftentimes, I notice students become too attached to their prose and unwilling to adjust it. Sometimes a simple rearrangement of a sentence will be more effective, but students do not consider this as an option, because they typically are not trained to. Circumlocution can be exercised by having students freewrite (or other low-stakes writing) where they might take on another person’s perspective or even an object’s perspective. Part of the goal in utilizing this technique is getting students to think in unique and creative ways that enhance their future ability to problem solve in their writing creatively.

In this chapter, I have shown some of the connections between verbal and written dysfluencies and the techniques I have learned through my experience in speech therapy and how I’ve adapted them to writing. Because speech and writing are interconnected, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, I believe that speech dysfluencies, mine and others, provide insight into writing dysfluencies, and through understanding the techniques of dysfluent speakers, I have suggested writing teachers can learn more about writing dysfluencies and how to avoid, adopt, or manage them. Perhaps more importantly, I attempted to demonstrate how some student writing actions and behaviors could be seen through a dysfluent lens, such as avoidance and lack of confidence. In what follows, the final chapter, I build on these observations and provide a brief summary of this entire work. Then I begin to lay out a framework for why dysfluency is important to Rhetoric and Composition, and why the field should theorize and generate scholarship about writing
and dysfluency to better understand those moments that occur in our writing to find what ways they may (and may not) empower the processes of composing.
Chapter 5: Infusing Dysfluency: A Consideration for Rhetoric and Composition

Education systems need to move away from more traditional pedagogies and adopt more learner-centred approaches which recognize that each individual has an ability to learn and a specific way of learning. ~World Health Organization (220)

I felt there was a gap in Composition pedagogy, a crack through which a small but significant number of college students were falling. ~Patricia Dunn (Learning 4)

We need [...] to throw whatever light we can on the motoric elements of the scribal act, determining whether scribal non-fluencies are in any way analogous to vocal non-fluencies and possibly open to the same sort of therapeutic attack: is there, in short, such a thing as a scribal stutter? ~Robert Zoellner (319)

As this dissertation suggests an affirmative answer to Zoellner’s question above, this and previous chapters have sought to encourage writing teachers to consider the idea of dysfluency in writing and how it might hinder as well as benefit the writing process. In this final chapter, I argue that dysfluency is a component of the writing process and writing teachers should study it further to better understand student writers and the various dysfluencies they encounter as they compose or make attempts to do so. I partly make this argument through a discussion of one aspect of pedagogy known as “process descriptions.”
The field of Rhetoric and Composition continues to churn out ideas about writing processes, and any other number of ideas related to the history and trajectory of the field. But as I have pointed out, few have made any connection to verbal (or written) dysfluency since Robert Zoellner in 1969. In the previous chapters of this dissertation, I suggest that dysfluencies are a part of our writing process and students are forced to confront them, so we, as their teachers, are always seeking ways to guide them through these dysfluencies or around them. I argue for a framework centered on dysfluency to do so.

My opening chapter discussed the connections between speech and writing, and I sketched out a provisional understanding of verbal dysfluency. While legally recognized as a disability, I argued in Chapters 1 and 3 that verbal dysfluency is often misunderstood, even in the field of Disability Studies. I also suggested that there is very limited scholarship related to stuttering and dysfluency in Rhetoric and Composition, and that which does exist disregards the dysfluent speaker or tends to recognize his or her comments in the composition classroom as having less merit because of the hesitancy or disruption of a stutter. However, Vivian Buchan and Robert Zoellner recognize at least some potential in better understanding stuttering and verbal dysfluency and what impact an understanding of it could have on writing. In essence, the first chapter argued for more nuanced and comprehensive studies of dysfluency in Rhetoric and Composition, and I see that as a first move toward creating an opportunity for exploring dysfluency within Rhetoric and Composition studies and the teaching of writing.
In the second chapter, I point out the neglect of Demosthenes in the field of Rhetoric and Composition and argue for a greater awareness of his work. While Demosthenes famously had a stutter and was of weak constitution, he became the greatest of orators according to many, in his time and in ours, despite his disabilities. Further, I argue that Demosthenes should be reconsidered as one of the founding grandfathers of Rhetoric, because the rhetorical moves that he seems to have invented derived from his dysfluency. I also provide more insight into verbal dysfluency and Demosthenes’s rhetorical moves through my own dysfluent experience and understanding. These rhetorical moves, which many still teach today, reveal how dysfluency may have influenced the rhetorical tradition and our writing classrooms. Through Demosthenes’s careful study and preparation, he recognized and utilized the styles and methods of other orators, and because of this, he most certainly created his own style suited to his abilities. In light of this understanding of his work, writing teachers may consider other ways of understanding the art of rhetoric through the so-called disabilities of others in rhetorical history.

In Chapter 3, I took up the “overcoming” narrative and presented some concerns associated with it, such as the idea that others with similar disabilities may feel compelled to “overcome” as well. I also argued for a reconsideration of overcoming narratives as a whole and dysfluency narratives in particular. The various, and often erroneous, stereotypes of dysfluent speakers have only reinforced, I believe, the need for overcoming narratives of dysfluency. With more dysfluency narratives, some of the misunderstandings about dysfluency could be alleviated, and these would also reveal
some of the pain and humiliation felt by those that stutter. I suggested that more published dysfluency narratives might provide a greater awareness of stuttering and its complexities and complications that, in turn, would provide People Who Stutter (PWS) more confidence to tell their narratives. This increased confidence would allow those who may be ashamed or closeted by this disability, and others, to gain insight and inspiration to share their experience with others. The discussion of Chapter 3 suggests to writing teachers that dysfluency narratives might provide student writers with another avenue to explore what students might consider inadequacies in such a way that they can better understand and begin to manage them.

In Chapter 4, I discussed some verbal and written dysfluencies and suggested various techniques that could be used to help manage moments of writing dysfluency. I established a connection between how writing dysfluencies may be encapsulated and understood through how student writers might respond to various writing situations, such as exhibiting avoidance behaviors or being overly influenced by the self editor as they are in the composing process. Further, I continued to illustrate how dysfluent speakers are in many ways similar to dysfluent writers, and the various strategies and techniques that are typically associated with verbal dysfluency can be readily transferred to written dysfluency. This discussion offers starting points for teachers of writing to begin to incorporate dysfluency strategies into their pedagogy.

One of the remaining concerns about this work that I hope to address in this final chapter, is what might be gained by teachers acknowledging dysfluencies in writing?
Toward that end, I begin with an assignment I utilize to show students how firmly the “rules” of writing have been engrained into them and how even when they attempt to break free from certain rules, they cannot. I use this assignment to exemplify how many of our students come into our classrooms with preconceived notions about what they know and do not know about writing and the processes related to the production of text. Moreover, I seek to point out that we as writing teachers may also have preconceived notions about student writing, their processes, and students’ understanding of our pedagogy. After I discuss the assignment, I investigate how students may perceive our classes through their lens of exchange; that is, their work for our grade. After discussing another assignment rooted in reflection called “process descriptions,” I conclude this chapter with the suggestion to include dysfluency and its methods and strategies into our writing classrooms. While merely a beginning into this interesting and provocative area of research and study, I believe this work sets up a crucial foundation to infuse Rhetoric and Composition with a more nuanced and balanced understanding of our students’ process of writing that includes the blocks, hiccups, and distractions they undoubtedly encounter along the way to the final draft that is what we as writing teachers must eventually grade.

Starting Class

I get excited the first day of class. I look forward to meeting the students I will be working with, learning about them, and their stories. I love the stories. The first day rarely gives a fair estimate of my students, perhaps because I am too wrapped up in my
own emotions about what will transpire in the coming weeks. Beginning in 2011, during the first day of class, I show roughly half of the film *The King’s Speech* (about an hour). During the second-class period, I show the remainder of the film. While some students have noticed I am sometimes dysfluent, many others have not.\(^{16}\) After the film, I inform students that I stutter and discuss my understanding of the film as someone that stutters. Since they have seen the movie about a man who becomes a King who also happens to stutter, they sometimes have questions about the accuracy of the film as it relates to my experience as a dysfluent speaker. This conversation with students empowers them to ask questions of their flawed instructor. It also gives me a chance to let them know that I am the type of teacher that sees himself as imperfect, and my speech is merely the opening salvo.

I have several reasons for telling them that I stutter. First, I want students to know that I know that I stutter. As silly as that sounds, by explaining it, encouraging questions about it, and having the film as partial evidence of the dysfluent experience, I think students get an early sense of who I am as a person, which I think is important. Second, I think it saves time. I tell students that while most People Who Stutter (PWS) do not want to be interrupted when they hit a dysfluent moment, I do. If I’m stuck on a word, and if one of them knows the word, I ask them to say the word, so I can move on. I see this as a strategy I use to avoid dysfluencies. Third, I have come to understand that students write (or rather, do not write) while being influenced by what I have chosen to call writing

\(^{16}\) My ability to use circumlocution, word choice, and other strategies and techniques, I think, helps disguise my dysfluency for a short time. Moreover, since many students rarely encounter a dysfluent speaker, they likely only have limited experience picking up on verbal dysfluencies.
dysfluencies. Writing dysfluencies, I believe, are part of all writing, and I think students and their teachers need a stronger understanding of what they are and how to handle them.

Showing *The King’s Speech*, then, and highlighting my own stutter sets the stage for my theoretical use of dysfluency as a pedagogical tool. Many of our incoming freshmen are coming from what typically equates to a formulaic form of writing, which, while certainly easy to grade and perhaps construct, their writing muscle has only been allowed to move in a very limited range of motion. While some students come from high schools where they have exercised their writing muscles, many more come from a tradition of product-based pedagogy driven, too often I am afraid, by the five-paragraph essay. Such an essay is generally seen as counterproductive in the college environment, where more advanced forms of composition are needed. Formulaic styles have also, again perhaps too often, driven students like cattle down a path of grammar guides and punctuation and grammar exercise sheets—all with the purpose of preparing them to write at the collegiate level—a level that largely rejects such methods of teaching the so-called rules these students have been force fed.

The “Rules 101” Assignment

While I exhibit some aversion to the formulaic practices of writing, I try to provide student writers with a working knowledge of the “rules of writing.” I also seek to partly free them from the dysfluencies that may be exacerbated by an over-attention to the “rules of writing” and their feelings about a perceived need to demonstrate a clear
understanding of them to their teacher. One of the early exercises I do in class is called “Rules 101.” I ask students to take a few moments and think about all the “rules of writing” they have been taught in their-now-more-than-a-decade of schooling and if needed, make note of them. Then, I ask them to form groups of three to four with their classmates and “compose” a short story while breaking every “rule” they possibly can. Inevitably, some students ask questions, such as, “Do I have to have a period?” or “Can we have no punctuation—at all?” These questions, which show how dutifully they have been trained, are typical, and I repeat the direction, “Break all the rules you have been taught.” After a few more volleys of questions, I tell them that one person from their group will be putting the group’s story on the blackboard and “reading” it out loud to the class. This brief assignment forces them to engage with what they “know” are the so-called rules and what they “believe” are the so-called rules of writing. Yet, it also gives them an opportunity to poke fun at the institutionalization that has imposed such rules by simply breaking them.

Once accepting this level of freedom, students get excited about the exercise and come up with some interesting, but expected, ways of breaking the “rules” of writing. In the thirty or so times I have done this exercise, every group has followed some basic rules, even though the directions were to break as many “rules” as they could remember. Every group has produced at least one sentence in subject, verb, object form (but, on display, Yoda-esque discourse frequently is; that is, object, subject, then verb order). Every group has used punctuation, many correctly. Every group has made the story understandable, meaning it clearly has a beginning, middle, and conclusion.
has written in English, written along a straight line as if on lined paper, and not inserted anything but material related directly to the story (i.e. no words *not* related to their story). Every group has used letters and words to convey the story. Every group was able to report the story to the class (i.e. they could “read” it to the class). No group has drawn a picture; no group has used a foreign language; no group has put text in any type of design (such as a circle or square) onto the board. There is a myriad of ways that students *could* have broken the rules. My point, however, is that even when students are given explicit instructions to *break the rules* they have a hard time doing so. In other words, they have been conditioned to do as they are told instead of learning to be more critical and creative. (There is much discussion to be had on the possibilities for critical and creative, but that is currently outside the scope of my discussion here.) I tell this story to demonstrate how students are taught to rely heavily on past instruction and instructors, and to suggest that student writers have become very adept at adapting to various teaching methods and the expectations of their teachers. More importantly, writing teachers have become just as rigid in understanding the processes of writing and the potential problems that many writers encounter. I believe this observation might suggest caution that we as teachers do not rely too heavily on past pedagogical methods and models—just like our students, we should not become too rigid.
Generating Dysfluencies

On the surface, dysfluencies\(^{17}\) may seem counterproductive to the writing process, causing errors, disorganizations, etc. While this potential is there, I argue that they can also be generative to our processes of writing and that they also allow for a deeper understanding of the writing process as a whole. Even as the groups of students I noted above struggle with breaking the rules of writing, many of those rules are so embedded in their writing techniques and strategies that many writers become bound by their understanding of them, which can, I believe, stall their writing process. This understanding of the so-called rules of writing, in essence, has conditioned them to not explore their writing techniques and ways of constructing language for fear of being considered wrong, or dysfluent. More precisely, I think they avoid the stutter. If by chance they do encounter what I am calling dysfluency, student writers, as Ingrid G. Daemmrich, a composition teacher, explains, “are reluctant to reveal their anxieties and inadequacies to a representative of the academic establishment” (163). Students do not want to expose their perceived shortcomings to the university or to the teacher who will be grading their papers. I might guess that students do not want their teacher to be thinking, “this student said something about not organizing his paper well, so maybe I’ll focus on that.” I think sometimes students want to avoid drawing attention to themselves, because that attention might lead to a lower grade or more work.

\(^{17}\) Remember, for my purposes here, dysfluency goes beyond a lack of fluency and is suggestive of the different types of moments where the writing process is interrupted in some fashion, which might include hyper-attention to grammar or punctuation rules, avoidance behaviors (e.g. procrastination and the feelings behind it), moments of writer’s block, or other disruptions in writing that could be caused by lack of confidence or uncertainty related to the expectations of the discourse.
But what if we could encourage students to work with their writing dysfluencies?

To approach them with what Kevin Davis, a writing teacher, calls a “beginner’s mind” (398). This beginner’s mind would allow students to approach the act of composing with a sense of discovery\textsuperscript{18} and acceptance of mistakes, misinterpretations, and even dysfluencies. The first time we ride a bike, we do not expect to be racing in the Tour de France, but we might expect to get a few scrapes along the learning process. One could hypothesize, I think quite easily, that if we could help students approach writing from this learner’s perspective, provide them the opportunity to try on new sentence constructions and points of view and allow them to better understand their personal style, voice in writing, and the various dysfluencies that may occur, that students would enjoy the process of learning to write a bit better. Patrick Sullivan, in his TETYC article titled, “‘A Lifelong Aversion to Writing’: What If Writing Courses Emphasized Motivation,” considers how intrinsic motivation is an important factor in the learning process. By utilizing motivational techniques, writing teachers may be able to disrupt our students’ “aversion to writing,” which I recognize when students say phrases like I hate writing or I can’t write (Sullivan 118). If these feelings of hate and perception of inability could be better understood, not in what they seek to avoid (i.e. the draft of the assignment), but in the feelings and inadequacies it derives from or produces (e.g. avoidance behaviors, lack of commitment) in relation to the assignment or piece of writing, then such dysfluencies

\textsuperscript{18} Discovery through writing does remind me of Writing to Learn, which as I understand it, is inclined to focus on low stakes writing. In what I mean by dysfluency, however, I am actually trying, in part to get outside of writing to those moments where writing is not taking place, where perhaps writers have gone blank or are avoiding it through whatever means they can contrive.
could be made useful for student writers. What if we could add some benefit to their moments of writing that really are not producing any writing? The moments of writer’s block or lack of motivation that I have argued here might be dysfluencies of writing—these moments in their process.

Process Descriptions

*This inquiry can begin, however—and this is key—only when writing teachers acknowledge that we still have much to learn about how real students write.* ~Julie Jung

(644)

In a recent *College English*, Julie Jung, author of “Reflective Writing’s Synecdochic Imperative: Process Descriptions Redescribed,” discusses “process descriptions” that student writers compose where they “make visible the invisible processes of what happened during their production of a single text and why” (629). I would like to consider Jung’s work as a representative example of what can happen when we infuse dysfluency into one potential assignment. Jung reviews the idea of process descriptions and the hopeful usefulness such an exercise may be for students and teachers. In her article, Jung provides portions of students’ process descriptions to help illustrate her points. One such example is the writing of Maria. Using Maria, Jung points out one of the common flaws in some pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition is that students sometimes pick up on the pedagogical train of thought of their teachers and compose what they think the teacher wants to read. Through this understanding by
students, Jung argues, student writers provide a “synecdochic explanation” that reports on one aspect of their actual process, but the students represent it as representative of their entire paper (637). Once students have produced a piece of writing, process descriptions are written that detail what the students learned from others about their writing. For example, Maria claims that one of her peer reviewers “hinted that [her] thesis was too broad,” which eventually led Maria to adjust that part of her essay (qtd. in Jung 629). Maria further claims that after some additional research, she realized that the other student was correct about an additional issue, and, of course, Maria dutifully revised her paper to “work better” (qtd. in Jung 629). In working better, Jung argues that reports from students like Maria’s may fall under the category of “good” process descriptions, which Jung elaborates on:

> descriptions wherein student-writers satisfactorily describe their purposes, their experiences participating in activities designed to help them better understand how they were being understood (for example, peer review), and the insights and revisions those activities motivated, tend to legitimate writing teachers’ assumptions regarding how “real” writers write. (634)

In other words, taking the advice of their peers, most often, students reported how they revised, adjusted, or changed their work, which as the last phrase in the quote suggests, reinforce the teacher’s view of the writing process and ideology. This pedagogical stance of the teacher is a particularly important aspect to explore, because students, in my experience, are quite savvy in figuring out and acting upon a teacher’s pedagogical beliefs and leanings. The concern, I believe, is that the students focus on fulfilling the
perceived goals of the instructor in such a way that may not provide for an actual improvement or evolution of their writing process(es). In such cases, this may be more of a “skill and drill” exercise than a learning exercise. I think students have learned to do this analysis for one significant reason: they want to ensure they get a certain grade, which means they need to “do what the teacher tells them,” in the way they are told.

Writing teachers, too, are probably being influenced by these narratives because such “good” narratives are precisely what we want to read; our students are doing what we want and how we want them to do it. They are following the formulaic path of responding and acting upon their observations of us, their teachers. Fortunately, Jung recognizes this potential and follows up by suggesting, “we find alternate methods of making sense and use of descriptions of process, methods that resist a too-easy conversion whereby only certain descriptions of writing emerge” (635). Jung is arguing for writing teachers to be more cautious in considering process descriptions, because they may be too convenient as to what the student writers are actually experiencing during their process of writing. Through this understanding, Jung endorses finding ways to avoid these predictable process descriptions by exploring beyond the expectations of the “process descriptions” that students create to be generally linear (that is, submit for peer review, then revise based on the peer review), but such description is in step with what the teacher/reader expects to read. Like Jung, I believe there is value in these process descriptions if we can find a way to resist the easy-to-craft versions students might prefer and encourage them to generate examples and evidence of finding their writing dysfluencies and finding ways to manage or to adapt to them.
As part of doing so, writing teachers must tend to what the students are actually doing and some of the reasoning for doing it. Jung notes, “Maria describes what happened during the production of a single text in such a way that her explanation of why it happened as it did aligns with what most writing teachers believe should have happened” (637). Maria is following the path of breadcrumbs that her instructor may have provided for her and is dutifully following the ideological foundation of her instructor by doing, perhaps too perfectly, what she has been tasked with doing. More precisely, Maria understands what the teacher wants her to “learn” so Maria demonstrates that learning through her process description, which in this case is revising certain elements of her paper. In response to Maria’s near perfect reporting, Jung writes, “Maria’s process description is persuasive because her explanation legitimates the pedagogical assumptions of the reader who required her to write it” (637). Pedagogical assumptions tell students—overly or covertly—what we value as teachers of writing.

Our assumptions about students learning in our classes surely gets traction when students report to us that they are learning (this can also be demonstrated in how we also value student evaluations highly, perhaps too highly). When teachers are informed that they are doing a good job, it is easy to agree when the reports coincide with teachers’ pedagogy. In other words, when students provide the evidence writing teachers think they need to learn the process(es) of writing, such as revision, it becomes a circular argument for the pedagogical exercise. Jung astutely realizes this as well. Jung argues, for instance, that “we fail to see what some of those other ways [of synecdochic modes of explanation] of understanding the phenomenon of writing might be” (638). So while students may
very well be telling us that their writing is getting better, Jung suggests we must be cautious to better figure out what *aspects* of their writing are actually improving in their process descriptions, because, more than likely, students are not evenly improving all aspects of their writing.

Nevertheless, Jung realizes the usefulness of process descriptions and some of their limits, but there is a greater glitch with Jung’s discussion of process descriptions. In reading her article, I recognize all the student examples of “process” descriptions as descriptions of the products that students have produced. That is, the descriptions come well after the students’ actual composing of the paper and, further, discuss aspects of suggestions by *others* to improve their writing. The students are not learning more about *their* process but about a process of writing. Instead, they seem to be revising because they are being told that something needs revision. To be more clear, students are not finding those elements that need revision on their own, which I think is part of the goal most writing teachers strive for. In effect, without discussing the reasoning behind the suggestions, and perhaps the dysfluencies that led up to them as the student was composing, process descriptions may not help them and could introduce dysfluencies, such as what I referred to earlier as a hyper-attention to the rules. In considering Jung’s report of the students’ process descriptions, they seem like a description of the *product* (i.e. the paper) derived after the composing and offers a comfortable, and perhaps fictionalized, accounting of how carefully students revised and worked through “the process” like we as writing teachers would hope they do. To be precise, one cannot accurately describe the process unless you are *in the process*, working through and
discussing the problems, obstacles, and challenges that one encounters during such processes. Thus, my concern is that students are writing process descriptions in such a way that only *reviews* the aspects of the process that were followed up on in the revising process or the ones they can remember. For example, if a student revises a paragraph or two, then decides to keep it the way it was and converts it back, this aspect of the process is probably not be reported, but it is still part of the process. Perhaps even if such revision is reported, the rationale for it is likely left out of the process description.

What I am leading up to is suggesting the lens of dysfluency applied to the idea of process descriptions offers an opportunity to infuse Rhetoric and Composition with a greater understanding and appreciation for the multiple dysfluencies of writing that I have suggested that all writers must grapple with at one point or another. Specifically, writing teachers may be able to utilize the strategies and techniques discussed earlier to increase student learning through a greater understanding of dysfluent moments, such as procrastination and plagiarism, and then report them within the process description exercise. By not considering a deeper understanding of dysfluency in writing, writing teachers are not fully accounting for and teaching for the *entire* process of writing—such as when writing is not taking place. In the review of Jung’s analysis, students do not report any problems with their writing process; they, instead, report on their completed product, turning it over for inspection by someone else like a peer reviewer, rewriting based on those comments, and reporting that learning has taken place based on those comments. It’s just too neat, too perfect.

Writing isn’t neat and tidy. Writing is messy, dogged, and plain hard work.
Infusing Dysfluency

I agree that the idea of process descriptions shows promise even through the limits Jung explains. Moreover by applying a dysfluency lens to process descriptions, I think we gain a deeper understanding of the writing process if we articulate more clearly how to compose process descriptions and suggest to our students to focus on their writing successes, where they actually composed something, as well as the moments where they wanted or sought to compose but did not or could not and those moments where they made adjustments based on their own judgment, not those of others. I believe we should champion those moments where students report their successes with writing, such as finding a good source to include, composing a strong string of sentences, or making a strong point in support of their thesis. I am, of course, not the first to suggest such a move, as many writing teachers ask students to make similar kinds of meta-reflective moves. Setting these ideas within the larger framework of dysfluency does, however, also tie such practices directly to an understanding of the moments that could be considered writer’s block, avoidance behaviors, interruptions, or the momentary inability to articulate one’s thoughts into words on the page at all. These are part of the process of writing, and if we can help students to better understand, manage, and adapt to them, we will likely have more engaged writers who produce stronger works. Moreover, these student writers will find ways to recognize their dysfluencies are necessary to their process and suggest they are cognitively working through and towards some of the more complex behaviors of the writing process.
By infusing an understanding of writing dysfluencies into our pedagogies, we provide students (and Rhetoric and Composition scholars) with a virtually unexplored opportunity to better comprehend and appreciate the unique methods and processes of writing. In doing so, we add value to our teaching and, more importantly, to their writing. This inclusion of dysfluency into our pedagogical methods and theories can inform students that dysfluency is *part of the writing process*, because it is. And I think we need to recognize it.

From the examples from earlier chapters of stutterers being those considered by writing teachers to be egoists, neurotic, or stupid—like I was called by my teacher in third grade—to Demosthenes, who we owe a far greater debt than many in Rhetoric and Composition may realize, dysfluency is a part of our vocal *and* writing life. By finding ways to adapt, to manage, to comprehend any and all of our dysfluencies, we can better aid our students when they encounter such dysfluencies in their writing, because they will. We must be ready.
Epilogue

During one of the later discussions Dr. Sherrie Gradin and I had about this dissertation, she realized some of the language and thinking differences we exhibited. In this conversation, I noted how I wanted to “work around” a various dilemma in a chapter. She stopped and said, “No, I want you to go through it!” Then, about the same time, we realized the implications of what we had both just said. In my case, my dysfluency and my experience with it has taught me to work around or circumlocute obstacles. As you recall, while in speech therapy, my therapists believed I was an “expert” in using this strategy in dealing with my dysfluency, which also aided me in avoiding many verbal dysfluencies. Conversely, Sherrie’s instinct was to have me go through the obstacle. Let us think back to tonic blocks and how People Who Stutter (PWS) sometimes have the urge to attempt to force their way through them. As I also noted earlier, PWS often find this a natural (I dare say, an American) technique in going through a blocked moment. For many PWS, forcing oneself through such moments only strengthens the grip of the dysfluency, which I have found to be true.

This grip of dysfluency has at times disabled my thinking and influenced my writing. Yet at other times, it has enhanced my thinking and perhaps my writing. While some aspects of my prose are notable, others continue to need guidance. Through this dissertation, I have learned or been reminded of many things, and perhaps the most important is that I still have much to learn.
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