MAKING THE GESTURE: GRADUATE STUDENT SUBMISSIONS AND THE EXPECTATION OF JOURNAL REFEREES

In “Present Perfect and Future Imperfect,” Scott Miller, Benda Jo Brueggeman, Dennis Blue, and Deneen Shepherd conclude from their national survey of graduate students in rhetoric and composition that “by and large, students . . . are greatly worried—or, frequently, know very little—about the ‘future tense,’ about the broader professional realities to which they are endeavoring to adapt themselves” (393). Based on their findings, Miller et al. found that a discrepancy exists between the expectations associated with graduate school and the expectations associated with the professoriate. As most students commented, what they learned in the classroom—both as students and as teachers—did not adequately prepare them for their duties as professionals. As a result, the authors argue for the need to reconceive professionalization within departments, stating that professional development issues, such as writing program administration and job market difficulties, “ought to be at the center of rhetoric and composition programs” (397).

Despite the significance of their findings, one of the professional realities the authors do not discuss is the future tense of the graduate student’s life as a publishing scholar. This reality, however, is a crucial element of any professional development program. Publication is one of the means by which merit is evaluated by the field; it is essential for professional advancement (see Boyer; Vandenberg; Goggin, “Shaping”). Graduate students, however, seem to have little knowledge of the publishing system. Despite their success at writing seminar papers, they have not always learned the discursive conventions governing the ways of arguing and evaluating well enough to turn these papers into publishable articles. In “Writing in the Graduate Curriculum: Literary Studies,” Patricia Sullivan argues similarly, stating that graduate students may

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know how to read and interpret texts, but they have not always mastered “the arts of discourse well enough to produce” articles or other professional documents (294). Without such knowledge, graduate students will remain outside of the publishing community. Understanding the conventions of published discourse is therefore vital to their success as scholars.

As a former associate editor of a rhetoric journal, I learned first hand how gesturing functions as a discursive convention within rhetoric and composition studies. One cannot merely make statements that have the status of knowledge in rhetoric and composition studies. As Edward Said put it, “you must first pass through certain rules of accreditation, you must learn the rules, you must speak the language, you must master the idioms, and you must accept the authorities of the field . . . to which you want to contribute” (7-8). Along with Maureen Daly Goggin (“Shaping”) and Peter Vandenbergh, I find that these rules and regulations are both generated and maintained in the pages of the field’s journals. Through their editorial practices, journals put forth the theoretical frameworks and the conceptual instruments and techniques writers must utilize if their arguments are to become accredited through publication. In this essay I argue for the importance of gesturing to the field’s discursive conventions when writing for publication. Using graduate student submissions to Rhetoric Review (RR), I discuss two forms of gesturing. I am limiting my data (in both time and place) to Rhetoric Review since it has a known track record for publishing and encouraging graduate student work. I conclude by showing how recognizing these gestures leads to important discoveries about how knowledge is constructed in the field and how emerging scholars can participate in that construction.

A Gesture of Definition

The term gesture, as I am using it, is based on William Epstein’s notion of the word. As he defines it, gesture is the critical tactic of “shift[ing] interpretive authority out of the context of everyday human and social activity [our professional practices] and into an independent, already constituted and structured realm of subjects, works, ideas, and linguistic patterns” (“Counter-Intelligence” 65). Gesturing authorizes an argument; it attributes an argument to a disciplinary matrix in order to authorize the argument’s use. As a result, gesturing shifts disciplinary authority out of the realm of the material and into the realm of the ideological.
Gesturing is something we cannot avoid whenever we practice our profession. In rhetoric and composition studies, scholars gesture to the conventions institutionalized in journals. Publishing in rhetoric and composition journals requires one to shift authority away from everyday professional practices, that is, the material sites of one’s activities—classrooms, department hallways, conferences—and into a structured realm of epistemological and methodological frameworks. Scholars construct arguments around other arguments already authorized by the field and institutionalized by its journals—be it a rhetorical structure, canonized author, or generic convention.

Recognizing the importance of gesturing, scholars in rhetoric and composition have recently examined the parameters of how claims can be made in disciplinary discourses. In Shaping Written Discourse, Charles Bazerman demonstrates historically how the objects of study, the authorized questions, the kinds of evidence—all of which contribute to the discursive conventions of the field—are adjudicated within the disciplines. Through his analysis of experimental articles in the sciences, he illustrates how such conventions are a “textual means of consolidating the scattered productions of [scholars] into a stable and progressive knowledge structure” (5). By defining the range of objects, conceptual instruments, and rhetorical structures of the discipline, the field is able to consolidate professional interests, indoctrinate novices, and direct future lines of inquiry (6). Put differently, by defining the field’s norms and values, disciplines restrict what counts as knowledge; they establish rules and procedures that classify the objects of knowledge and determine who has the authority to speak about the objects in ways that do count as knowledge. Bazerman illustrates how understanding texts within a profession helps us understand how the profession constitutes itself and carries out its work.

Building on Bazerman’s research, Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin—in a chapter of Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication to which John Ackerman contributes—focus on ways novice writers learn the discourse conventions of a field. They argue that “for writers to make things happen (i.e., to publish, to exert an influence on the field, to be cited), they must know how to strategically utilize their understanding of the genre” (e.g., articles, conference proposals) in which they are writing (3). Tracking a graduate student through the professionalization process at Carnegie Mellon, they found that novices must be able to use the appropriate written conventions to be able to participate and communicate.
in disciplinary forums. Graduate students must “negotiate their claims within the context of the field’s accepted knowledge and methodology” to publish work in professional journals (Genre 118). Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman’s study further indicates the importance of gesturing when writing for publication—that is, the need to shift one’s interpretive authority away from the material and into an established disciplinary matrix. As I illustrate in my analysis below, when scholars do not make the appropriate gestures their arguments are denied publication.

**Gestures to a Rhetorical Mode**

From 1990 to 1998 thirty-seven percent of *RR*’s submissions were from graduate students (identified either through self-admission in a cover letter or through a telephone survey). These graduate students submitted manuscripts from rhetoric and composition programs throughout the country—representing sixty-seven percent of all such doctoral programs. An analysis of the submissions suggests that the advanced literacy of gesturing is missing from many of the graduate student submissions. In my survey of the submissions, I found that two of the more common mistakes students made when constructing their arguments were the failure to gesture to an appropriate rhetorical mode and the failure to gesture to an appropriate problem presentation.

The first of the two gestures concerns the mode that the article takes. In examining all the submitted manuscripts from 1990 through 1998, I found that the scholarly articles reflected six dominant modes of discourse described by Goggin: description, testimony, history, theory, rhetorical analysis, and research reports. What separates these classifications from one another is their locus of authority and their methodology—the way of selecting and evaluating the subject matter under discussion. Although these modes are not mutually exclusive, the majority of articles published in *RR* and other journals in rhetoric and composition during this period were recognizable in one of these modes.

Despite all the theory and history graduate students digest in their seminar classes, the most common rhetorical mode of articles that they submit—sixty-two percent—is what Goggin labels as *testimony*. A testimonial article is one that is based “solely on the author’s own experiences and generally takes the form of a ‘what I did and how I did it’ article” (“Shaping” 45). In this rhetorical mode, writers authorize their arguments on the basis of their personal professional practices and experiences. In the epistemological orientation of the author, knowledge emerges from experience as opposed to disciplined inquiry. Consistent
with Robert Merton’s depiction of emerging disciplines, graduate students seem to first explore the field’s domain of knowledge through descriptive means. Before they engage in theoretical or historical arguments about the field, they first explore and define its content, aims, and methods (see Goggin, “Shaping”). One of the outcomes of this approach to studying the field is that they tend to see the source of their authority as stemming from their knowledge of the classroom. As Thomas Newkirk points out, new composition teachers tend to recognize the source of authority as coming from “intimate knowledge of the classroom and students, from . . . making thousands of judgements and observations of student work” (133). This accounts for the high percentage of testimonial articles submitted to RR for publication. This rhetorical mode, however, is generally excluded from publication, the submissions often stigmatized as graduate student papers by reviewers. Although Newkirk argues that the authority of writers is derived ultimately from experience as writing teachers, the top journals in the field limit their space to those articles that are more theoretical or historical in nature, that is, articles in which the writer shifts personal authority to an established disciplinary matrix.

The dominance of theoretical and historical articles can be traced back to the field’s attempt to assert itself as a discipline in the academy. As has been well documented, between the mid-1960s and early 1980s, rhetoric and composition was struggling to define itself as a discipline (see Goggin, “Shaping”; Berlin; Miller). In the move to solidify its position in the academy, composition studies began to organize itself according to the criteria of the hard sciences. Dating back to the influence of the German system of education on American institutions in the nineteenth century, the new goal of the academy became one of knowledge production. In order to gain equal footing with scholars of other disciplines within English studies, particularly literary studies, scholars of composition needed to shed their traditional image as “the disseminators of ‘practical’ knowledge rather than the creators of theory” (Vandenberg 55). The field, therefore, began “to shift [its] attention away from practical and pedagogical issues in writing instruction toward . . . a more rigorous understanding of . . . the ways writers and readers construct texts and the ways these processes are learned” (Goggin, “Shaping” 96-97).

During this period, rhetoric and composition journals began calling for more research-oriented articles, both empirical and theoretical. The practical and pedagogical, rooted in specific courses and at local programs, lost out to more theoretical and historical practices. More and more members of the field began to adopt Maxine Hairston’s view that
writing teachers who are not “doing controlled and directed research on writing . . . [are] doing more harm than good” (Hairston 79). As this view became a commonly held belief, those submitting articles exploring the field’s content and methods based solely on their own experiences and knowledge became less respected, and their body of knowledge was reduced to lore. Even though the subject matter of testimonial articles shifted to more abstract notions of discourse, this rhetorical mode continued to find limited access to publication. As Goggin has illustrated, long-running journals such as College Composition and Communication, Rhetoric Society Quarterly, College English, and JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory have throughout their history published a combined average of three percent testimonial articles as compared to fifty-two percent theoretical articles and sixteen percent historical ones (“Shaping” 159).

In my tenure at RR, this notion of gesturing to a particular rhetorical mode was first made evident to me in the spring of 1994 by a then current graduate student colleague of mine who submitted for consideration a manuscript on the Gorgias. In the article, the writer used her reaction to the Gorgias as a framework for a personal argument privileging rhetorical discourse (what she appropriated as autobiographical) over philosophical discourse (what she labeled as academic) in the pursuit of “truth”—a debate similar to the one that takes place between Gorgias and Socrates in the dialogue. She began by critiquing academic prose, followed by the need to move away from the limiting aspects of such discourse by authorizing another kind, namely the autobiographical. Given the personal nature of the article, the writer used her own experiences in the field as evidence and support. Furthermore, the author employed the kind of discourse she was advocating to present her argument; she used autobiographical discourse, discourse otherwise considered inappropriate for a “scholarly” article, to argue for the authorization of it.

When the reviews of the article came back, the referees had rejected the manuscript, objecting to both the line of reasoning and the conversational, i.e., autobiographical, style in which the piece was written. All three reviewers wanted the author to take a more scholarly approach and style. One reviewer, a well-known feminist scholar, focused more on the nature of autobiographical discourse, asking the author to incorporate more feminist research on this subject into her argument. The second reviewer, a well-known male classical historian, wanted more explication of the Gorgias. Furthermore, he was overt in his objection to the personal narrative style of writing, claiming that it was not
“appropriate as an article.” The third reviewer, another male classical historian, praised “the nontraditional aspects of the essay and the self-reflexive mode of writing” but nonetheless asked for a more scholarly approach.

As I examined the reviewers’ comments more closely, I realized they were not as concerned with the value of her reading as with the grounding of her reading in personal experience. In other words, they were not willing to accept her testimony alone. Instead, they wanted her to speak their language, that is, academic prose—prose firmly grounded in the exiting scholarship. Put differently, the reviews of the Gorgias submission were essentially asking the author to shift her authority from the context of her everyday professional activity, what she referred to as the personal and autobiographical, to the timeless, independent realm of academic discourse. However, because she believed these discursive practices exact as their price for authorization the repression of feelings or of the personal, she was not willing to reproduce the dominant discourse. As a result, the reviewers prevented her argument from entering the field through publication.

A second more recently submitted manuscript on Native Americans further illustrates the importance of making the right gestures. In this article the author used description and testimony in presenting a way to use Kenneth Burke’s notion of identification to explore Native American culture and literature. Because the author was Latina, she explained that a way for her culture to state an argument was through story telling, i.e., testimony about “what I did and how I did it.” As she explained it, a particular genre of Latino discourse—which also correlates to age and gender—involves presenting claims and supporting them with life experiences. I believe that one’s life experiences are valid sources of knowledge, and I wanted to use my life’s work with Burke and Native American students to support my argument. Unfortunately, I learned the hard way that this—although interesting and perhaps useful—does not cut it in academic publishing. As one of my referees pointed out, academic discourse does not allow for this kind of evidence alone. (Personal interview)

As the author pointed out, although the referee found the manuscript to be “well written,” “well organized,” and “interesting,” he objected to the rhetorical mode of the manuscript and rejected it. As one reviewer commented, “There has been a fair amount of scholarly work done on the concept of ‘identification,’ but the author cites none of it—and that
perplexes me. Not only could the author have profited by reading and referring to earlier studies... How does this analysis depart... add to the ongoing conversation?"

In other words, this reviewer was not convinced of the argument through the author’s own testimony of how to teach identification through Native American rhetorics. Instead, he wanted the author to “show the fruit of still more scholarship.” He wanted the author’s life experiences subsumed within academic research. It is clear that if she had made the appropriate gestures—gestures of theory—her testimony might not have been excluded from publication. If she had shifted her authority away from her work with Native American students, to the authorized scholarship on Burke, her argument might have taken on the appearance of a truth stated with authority—authority that transcends the urging of an author (see Bazerman 14).

These two manuscripts illustrate a trend that exists among the new initiates of the field to submit testimonial articles. In “Toward a Sociocognitive Model of Literacy,” Cheryl Geisler found similar conclusions in the social sciences, discovering that “instead of an argument structure that eliminates other authors’ approaches on the way to validating [their] own, novices simply present other approaches, structuring their argument as ‘here is what others believe: here is what I believe’” (181). This approach resonates with the rest of the reviewer comments in the RR archives: The majority of graduate student authors were required to strengthen their appropriation of the discourse in question. Each author was prompted by a reviewer to revise an argument based on a convention that the author had overlooked or underdeveloped. With the Gorgias manuscript, it was a more scholarly tone and a more detailed review of the literature. With others it was the methodology—the way of selecting and evaluating the subject matter. Whatever the case, referees and the editors who uphold their decisions require authors to reinvent the conventions of the field, conventions that give an article a more theoretical or historical structure.

Steve Nimis makes a similar case, arguing that within disciplines “relatively greater attention tends to be focussed on the form of scholarly practice, on establishing and reproducing a certain kind of discourse on one’s subject matter, and the reproduction of a certain kind of discourse demands, among other things, the situation of one’s argument in an authorized tradition of inquiry” (106). As Nimis suggests, the validity of an idea is not determined solely by its pertinence within a given disciplinary conceptual framework but rather by the success of its
appropriation of the right conventions. What this means for us authors is that one of the merits by which our arguments are judged is on our ability to appropriate the conventions that allow us to authorize our arguments. As the two writers learned all too well, authorization seems to come at a price, namely at the loss of control over their argument and discourse.

**Gestures to a Problem Presentation**

Whereas the first gesture focuses on general patterns of discourse, the second gesture characteristic of graduate student manuscripts centers on the way an argument is introduced in a published source. In *Professional Academic Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Susan Peck MacDonald identified certain epistemic and nonepistemic variations in the way writers present their arguments in introductory paragraphs. Using her taxonomy to identify gestures in rhetoric and composition, I found that regardless of the rhetorical mode—history, theory, rhetorical analysis, or testimony—most of the articles published in the field reflect epistemic presentations. As MacDonald defines it, “In epistemic presentations, academic articles draw attention explicitly and immediately to the epistemology involved in the [argument’s] genesis—to some of the premises, processes, warrants, or methods involved in research and to the community of researchers” (121). By epistemic MacDonald is not referring to a writer’s attempt to generate new knowledge in the field, but rather a writer’s attempt to show the knowledge-making processes of the field. This is opposed to nonepistemic presentations where writers do not define their claims immediately but start with historical or narrative anecdotes, immersing the reader “in particulars and defer point making. . . . [T]hey include little or no representation of current professional thinking on their problems—only including citations to current critics late in their articles—there is nothing like the introductory review of criticism” (126). Although their locus of authority may come from a disciplinary matrix, they fail to gesture to this matrix in the introduction.

After focusing on the knowledge-making processes of the field, the writer then carves out a space for his/her own argument. Epistemic presentations foreground the writer’s negotiations of the research community not to just build on previous knowledge but to create a space for the writer’s original argument. As John Swales and Hazem Najjar point out in “The Writing of Research Article Introductions,” “writing an introduction to a research article is not simply a wrestling with words to fit the facts” (175). Rather, it is a sequence of rhetorical moves containing a

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**Making the Gesture** 17
well-crafted schema through which the writer creates a space for an argument (176-77; see also Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman 196). A typical epistemic introduction thus focuses on how the disciplinary community makes claims, develops its research questions, defines its problems, or appraises its results with the goal of carving out a space for an original argument.

Like MacDonald’s findings in disciplines of the humanities, I found that an overwhelming majority of articles published in *RR* exhibit epistemic introductory patterns. For example, between the years 1990 and 1998, seventy-three percent of the articles published in *RR* presented their arguments epistemically. Kevin Brooks’ article “Reviewing and Redescribing ‘The Politics of Historiography’: Octalog I, 1998” typifies this format:

Most historians of rhetoric should be able to locate their historiography, their views on the nature and composition of history, somewhere within the spectrum of views represented in “The Politics of Historiography,” an eight-person panel or “octalog” from the 1988 CCCHS. The octalog . . . included some of the more prominent historians of rhetoric as participants: James Berlin, Robert Connors, Sharon Crowley, Richard Leo Enos, Victor Vitanza, Nan Johnson, Susan Jarratt, and Jan Swearingen. . . .

“The Politics of Historiography” continues to serve an important role for historians of rhetoric because of the diverse views represented by its participants. . . . By looking at the acts of interpretation, representation, and authorization rather than categories of historiography, I will suggest ways in which writing history is intersubjective rather than dialectical, the mode of thought most often associated with historical work in “The Politics of Historiography.” Such a redescription can (1) avoid the problem of interpretive relativism raised by the assumption that interpretations are largely determined by terministic screens; (2) identify and emphasize political dimensions of representation more clearly than a generalized concept of politics at work in the octalog; and (3) account for the process of authorization that has privileged certain voices over others, yet also provide hope that the field of historical representation will be open to interested players. I focus on redescribing historiography as presented in the *RhetoricReview* octalog because it offers a wide range of important views on
historical methodology relevant to historians of rhetoric. . . . (6-7)

After several more introductory paragraphs further contextualizing "The Politics of Historiography," Brooks reaffirms his objection a second time: My objection to these various descriptions of writing history is that none of them go far enough toward describing the writing of history as an act of communicative interaction. . . . While most participants of the octalog might readily agree that writing histories is much like a conversation, few actually talk about it in those terms, preferring instead the dialectical and archaeological metaphors. Redescribing the work historians of rhetoric do will not radically alter the nature of that work, but it will . . . suggest some solutions to problems of interpretation, representation, and authorization. (8-9)

I quote at length to illustrate how Brooks negotiates the established research to validate his argument. He begins by positioning his topic, historiography, using "The Politics of Historiography" as a framework. Having established the topic, Brooks characterizes current conversations on the writing of history in rhetoric and composition, drawing on Berlin, Connors, Crowley, Enos, Vitanza, Johnson, Jarratt, and Swearingen. After briefly reviewing their viewpoints, Brooks then joins the conversation by creating a space for his present argument—"My objection to these various descriptions of writing history is that none of them go far enough toward describing the writing of history as an act of communicative interaction." What Brooks does, therefore, is carefully position other scholars to create a need for his position. The gesture here is not simply citing or summarizing (without which an article has only testimonial authority), but positioning the works of others in such a way that one's work seems not only appropriate but perhaps even overdue. Sustained attention to previous research and to claims of new knowledge can build a thread of continuity, making the genesis of an argument seem natural, logical, and more persuasive. This allows Brooks' readers to follow the genesis of his position, seeing how it evolved and what is at stake. Although there are variations to this approach among the articles published in RR, introductions like Brooks' account for nearly three-fourths of them.

The epistemic patterns of introductions in articles in rhetoric and composition can be traced to the field's effort to establish a body of knowledge whose findings could be acknowledged by the wider profession. As I noted earlier, Robert Merton suggests that emerging
disciplines initially establish their domain of knowledge through descriptive means, exploring and defining their objects of study. This would account for the high percentage of articles in rhetoric and composition journals prior to 1975 that show nonepistemic patterns in the introductions. These are articles that do not present communally defined problems and typically begin with a narrative or an historical anecdote. In the effort to move away from this kind of inquiry to more established ways of making knowledge for solving disciplinary problems, epistemic introductions become increasingly important. Using such a presentation, as MacDonald points out, lets academics “efficiently review the literature in the field, foreground the connections between previous and current work, warrant inferences, and rely on conventionalized tools (methods and concepts) that can be understood quickly and similarly within the discourse community” (189-90).

This epistemic presentation thus becomes a crucial gesture for authorization. When authors submit a manuscript for publication, editors and reviewers require the authors to position their argument within existing conversations. This positioning, however, is more than just showing you are part of ongoing conversation; it is the act of craving out an original space for one’s argument. As Gary Olson, former editor of JAC points out, it is essential that an author establish “the context within which one is writing and from which one is making one’s main point” (“Discipline” 59). Christina Murphy, former editor of Composition Studies, agrees with Olson. She states that “Lots of submissions are from people unaware of the conversation. They think they are finding something for the first time that’s been around for a million years or [they inadvertently] put a new spin on something that’s been dead” (qtd. in Vandenberg 80). Requiring authors to position their topic and thesis ensures that knowledge making in the field is continually being furthered. This is why epistemic patterns of presentation are characteristic of articles accepted for publication.

This gesture of an epistemic presentation, however, is frequently missing in graduate student submissions. Although testimonial articles typically exhibit nonepistemic patterns, fifty-nine percent of the other rhetorical modes that graduate students use in their submissions also display nonepistemic patterns. For example, an appropriately theoretical manuscript that arrived at RR for consideration looked at how Isocrates’ rhetoric provided a way to resolve issues of foundationalism and antifoundationalism. But this manuscript displayed typical nonepistemic
patterns in the sense that the author began with an historical narrative about Isocrates and his legacy to postmodern composition theories. As one reviewer commented, the author’s argument did not emerge out of the research. Addressing the author directly, the reviewer stated that in the first two pages,

you need to assimilate more of the recent work on the Sophists. While you helpfully mention Crowley in *Rhetoric Review*, you leave out many other… essays on the Sophists: Jarratt, Welch, Vitanza, and others. In addition, I would take a look at Swearingen’s *Rhetoric and Irony*. Takis Poulakos’s essays in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* and *Pre/Text* are very important postmodern readings of Isocrates and need to be taken into account. Your early argument about the placement of Isocrates vis-à-vis Plato is treated by Welch in *The Contemporary Reception of Classical Rhetoric*. John Poulakos’s new book should be incorporated as well.

The second reviewer likewise directed the author to a “body of scholarship that would . . . enrich [the] work.” Although the writer draws upon an authorized body of knowledge throughout the article, the referees were essentially asking the author to “draw attention explicitly and immediately to the epistemology involved in the [argument’s] genesis—to some of the premises, processes, warrants, and methods involved in research and to the community of researchers” (MacDonald 121). In this particular case, the reviewers were very specific about which sources the author’s argument should draw upon.

Another manuscript *RR* received was an historical article on the process of scientific inquiry. As in the manuscript described above, the author began with an anecdote about the process of scientific discovery in atomic experiments. This anecdote served as a “metaphor for the present state of discussions about the epistemic status of rhetoric.” Although the author did provide some context, she did not adequately position her argument against the community of researchers on this subject matter. Her two reviewers were quick to point this out:

Currently, you seem too much to be trying to adjudicate between two sides in the rhetoric as epistemic debate. I would say parenthetically that there are more than these two, despite your efforts to reduce them to two, and that more familiarity [with] the rhetoric [of] epistemic literature might help you to formalize a more careful review of the literature.
I would begin with a very brief review of the epistemic debate (with more attention to more of the literature and thus to a wider range of stances within the debate). Don’t take sides, but do reflect a sense that the debate is not going anywhere. Then go directly to the material that now begins on p. 16, to shift the focus entirely. Lay out directly and simply and clearly the idea that practice, or how language is used, is where the focus of analysis should be.

The reviewer goes on to construct one potential outline for presenting her argument. In a further revision the author does redirect the presentation of the article by first incorporating the sources suggested by the reviewers and then showing how her argument—the idea that practice, or how language is used, is where the focus of the rhetoric as epistemic debate should be—is a logical position. By the author’s gesture to this problem presentation, she got her article published. It is important to note that the argument remained consistent; how it was presented and framed is what changed. At the urging of the referees, the end product, although a stronger article, had a completely different feel to it than the author’s original approach. Writers, therefore, must use epistemic presentations to introduce their arguments no matter the rhetorical mode to which the writer gesture presents. But this gesture requires writers to shift their authority away from their own sense of writing and to an authorized disciplinary convention. In order to authorize an interpretation, a writer must be fully cognizant of the discursive conventions of the field.

**Conclusion**

The typical graduate manuscripts I saw as an associate editor suggest that the success of one’s argument depends on the appropriation of the correct gestures, that is, the discursive conventions that govern the ways of arguing and evaluating that define the language of the field. As I have tried to illustrate, writing for publication goes beyond producing a coherent, effective, well-supported argument; a writer has to be able to negotiate the publishing system by making the right gestures. I have identified two such gestures present in the scholarship. I believe it is important to continue recognizing the gestures that authorize scholarly work, for this process leads to important discoveries about how knowledge is constructed in the field and how new scholars can participate in the process.

I believe it is particularly appropriate to reveal to such new members
of the profession how knowledge is constructed in the field. And it is important for students to identify the gestures required by the discipline to authorize an argument, for only then can they learn how to manipulate these gestures to create new knowledge. As Theresa Enos states, “we can do much to help demystify the publication process for our graduate students . . . [by] foreground[ing] the policies of publication” (70). Students need to become immersed in the disciplinary knowledge to know what there is to cite—that is, what the disciplinary conversations are and have been and whom they should cite—the work that resonates with their own theoretical frames, and how they should incorporate the citations. Teaching this advanced literacy, then, requires assignments that ask students not only to grasp the rhetorical conventions of the field but also to recognize the field’s accepted knowledge and methodologies. Without such knowledge, graduate students will remain locked outside of the community’s discourse.

It is important to note, however, that in teaching students to identify a field’s gestures we need to provide students with more than the formal discursive conventions of the field. As Charles Bazerman comments in his study of genres in scientific discourse, by teaching students the “formal trappings of the genres they need to work in, we offer them nothing more than unreflecting slavery to current practices and no means to ride the change that will inevitably come” in a discipline (320). That is to say, teaching the gestures of a field cannot mean teaching a set of universally prescribed procedures, for this would deny the function of these rhetorical gestures and perhaps the rhetorical nature of writing in general. The goal, therefore, is to teach students to identify and locate a field’s gestures within the range and meaning of current disciplinary practices. Students should understand how the acquisition of this advanced literacy is the result of both cognitive processes and sociocultural ones. Upon helping graduate students to understand how these gestures are embodied in certain practices, we can then suggest ways of using them appropriately and thus persuasively within specific contexts. Furthermore, we can teach students how to use these gestures to validate alternative forms of argumentation—forms like testimony and description.4

Recognizing these gestures is important for more seasoned members of the field as well. Identifying what authorizes our knowledge will not only allow us to assert our arguments with authority, but will also enable us to construct alternative methods of authorization.

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Notes

1 I wish to thank Dr. Theresa Enos, editor of *Rhetoric Review*, for access to the journal’s archives and permission to use my findings. I also thank the two graduate student authors for their permission to use their essays.

2 Percentages are based on those programs listed in the 1994 special issue of *Rhetoric Review*, “Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition.”

3 These categories are an appropriation of those determined by Maureen Daly Goggin’s seminal study “The Shaping of a Discipline: An Historical Study of the Authorizing Role of Journals in Rhetoric and Composition, 1950-1990.” In this survey, Goggin found that scholarly articles published during this time frame reflected nine different rhetorical modes: description, testimony, argument, history, rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, literary analysis, literature review, and book review (45). Because my survey extends from 1990 to 1998, I appropriated those modes that reflect current rhetorical practices in *RR* while relabeling others to accurately reflect new modes. Quoting from Goggin’s categories, I define the terms as follows:

- **Description**: A descriptive essay “asks no more of an audience then to accept what they are told” (45).
- **Testimony**: A testimonial essay is “similar to a descriptive essay, except that its description is based solely on the author’s own experience and generally takes the form of a ‘what I did and how I did it’ article” (45).
- **History**: An historical essay “has a s its main purpose to provide an historical account of events, people, or processes” (45).
- **Theory**: A theoretical essay puts forth an abstract or general principle within a body of knowledge that presents a clear and systematic view of some of its subject matter.
- **Rhetorical Analysis**: A rhetorical analysis essay “generally analyzes oral or written discourse, is generally concerned with the whole discourse, and draws primarily on rhetorical theories and methodologies” (45).
- **Research Reports**: A research essay is a study that reports empirical findings (47).

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Works Cited


