book’s title, Butler succeeds in taking the first steps toward reanimating the conversation concerning stylistics and the teaching of style—topics to further investigate theoretically, rhetorically, and pedagogically. Since Butler’s stated focus and interest is clearly on the operations of style at the sentence level, this work opens the door for further research concerning the ways that style ripples outward from the sentence to larger sections of discourse.

Similarly, in offering analyses and critiques of the way several “public intellectuals” have portrayed composition in the larger public sphere, Out of Style prompts additional attention to the ways in which composition scholars and others related to—or interested in—style might be productively identified, owned, and persuaded to act as public intellectuals. Butler argues convincingly that we can no longer afford to be left out: we must increase our credibility by confronting and responding to discussions of style in the public sphere, offering our expertise as a valuable corrective, and establishing our field as central to the debates about writing that continue to interest the public. By reclaiming stylistic study and clearly articulating its value to audiences both within and outside the field, we will not only help writers—we will also construct our own greater voice in the dialogues and debates in which we are most implicated and invested.

San Francisco, California


Reviewed by D. Alexis Hart, Virginia Military Institute

From service learning and public writing to new media and composition as a “happening,” resistance is not new to traditional methods of teaching “the research paper” and/or introducing students to “academic discourse.” In Teaching Multiwriting: Researching and Composing with Multiple Genres, Media, Disciplines, and Cultures, Robert L. Davis and Mark F. Shadle strike a particularly hopeful note in their call for a radically open and flexible writing pedagogy. Davis and Shadle describe “multiwriting” as a type of alternative composition in which “authors may use any means to compose effectively” (14; emphasis added). According to Davis and Shadle, this spirit of expansiveness and creativity distinguishes multiwriting from other types of multi-genre writing that more rigidly emphasize formulas for composing. By comparison, their inquiry-based method of writing, they claim, not only
“lights students up” and improves their work, but also “rejuvenates” teachers who may actually find themselves eager to evaluate student work.

Davis and Shadle refer to their pedagogical approach as “practical utopianism,” a useful oxymoron; while some of the student projects the authors describe may seem removed from student “writing” per se (e.g. a tree built of boxes filled with old letters and photographs; a PowerPoint presentation containing maps and satellite images; a triangular stack of corked glass bottles, each with an imaginary story rolled up inside), the authors explain that they have intentionally retained “writing” as part of the description of their pedagogy in order “to suggest [that] this kind of work remains tied to traditions of composition, rhetoric, and discourse studies” (14). So, while they would happily do away with grading, course schedules, and due dates, they recognize that writing instruction takes place within institutional structures that require such practical considerations, and that most of their readers also work within such institutional structures. They recognize, too, the value of teaching their students to assess rhetorical situations and to create unity and meaning within their projects to achieve their desired goals.

Chapter 1 (“A Crossroads in Space and Time”) introduces the first of several metaphors in the text: the crossroads as a place at which one arrives during one’s travels and at which one becomes acutely aware of multiple paths upon which to pursue one’s goals. The various choices available at the crossroads serve to represent the “interconnected inquiry” of multiwriting: that is, the pedagogy’s method of linking public and academic writing (e.g., an official signpost) with private and personal writing (e.g., the writer’s/traveler’s choice). This openness to the personal, to each writer’s motivating curiosity, is the key to engaging students in the multiwriting process. The authors hope that the broad landscape of composing possibilities as viewed from “the crossroads” obviates the “false purity of definition” presented to student writers in traditional composition classes, which tend to offer students only one possible “path,” or way of writing at a time (31). Unlike a traditional student writer, a multiwriter can “wander” and change directions at will; in other words, he or she can compose in any number of styles, languages, and media at any given moment depending upon his or her personal choices and rhetorical goals.

The metaphor of writing as a journey is further developed in chapter 2 (“Research Writing as a Key to the Highway”). This loose, wandering mode of research writing focuses on students’ questions and their exploration, rather than arriving at definitive answers. Multiwriting research projects focus more on the journey than the destination by shifting the aims of research away from “presenting evidence to support or force conclusions” and instead encouraging students to engage in the “spirit of inquiry” (62-63). By shifting the aims of student writing away from “definitive” conclusions or premature “expertise” and toward the ambiguity of open questions and
emerging patterns, Davis and Shadle hope to move argumentation from a “state-and-defend” mode to more of a loose conversation between interlocutors — a conversation that is nonetheless informed by research and the writer’s assessment of the rhetorical situation. Thus, they do not intend to flout academic conventions, but to revise them radically.

Chapter 3 (“The Loose Talk of Persuasion”) and chapter 4 (“The Essay as Cabinet of Wonder”) consider other ways to design multiwriting projects to help student writers resist the certainty and fixedness characterized by traditional research essays and to help them pursue instead a discourse of open questioning and erudite reflection. Unlike essays that follow a thesis/support form, multiwriting projects “trace trails of understanding, where final knowledge is never achieved” and the forms of these projects “emerge in relation to their messages” (141). Images of model projects appear in the Photo Gallery (situated between chapter 3 and chapter 4), which also includes photos of places and structures that might inspire student inquiry and creativity. Not surprisingly, the authors highlight successful student projects: those projects fueled by genuine curiosity and resulting in writerly satisfaction, those that led to conference presentations or gallery exhibitions, those that contributed to the “enrichment” of local communities. They do admit, however, that multiwriting does not inspire every student and some students still do only enough to get by. The descriptions of successful projects are thorough and help readers understand how multiwriting can engage students in problem solving, analysis, collaboration, the ability to adapt to changing conditions — skills that the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has declared necessary for 21st-century literacies (13). So while multiwriting projects are certainly unconventional and eclectic, Davis and Shadle make a reasonable case for the practical skills that students can develop while producing them.

The authors use chapter 5 (“Multiwriting Blues”) to reassure skeptics that their multiwriting pedagogy, while resistant to static templates and predetermined forms, is disciplined. They explain, “As is the case for a blues musician, the writer must also match content and message to form” (175), and must develop “a habit of making meaning . . . worth considering” (173). While the students’ interests drive their open-ended inquiries, Davis and Shadle do: provide students with models; offer exercises to help students focus their questions; discuss the rhetorical considerations of purpose, audience, and occasion; and ask students to compose an end-of-course reflection. As for assessment, Davis and Shadle admit that evaluating multiwriting projects is challenging. They meet this challenge by asking students to collaborate with them on assessment criteria and expectations for the “deadline project” (179).

While the authors do not provide further guidance on assessment, throughout the book they do consider their teacher audiences by includ-
ing references to specific assignments and by providing, at the end of each chapter, some writing exercises and heuristics as well as additional readings and films underscoring each chapter’s theme. They are also aware that not all teachers have the resources or institutional support to open up their own writing pedagogies so drastically, so they occasionally suggest how to adapt their models to fit existing, more structured assignments. These end-of-chapter “Musings” are the most practical and useful sections of the text for those interested in applying multiwriting pedagogies in their own classes.

Yet, in an era of increasing oversight and assessment in higher education, the authors’ over-the-top enthusiasm and boundless optimism for how multiwriting can lead to a utopian learning environment “where there is no need for courses, credits, or lists or expected outcomes” was sometimes wearisome (183). The authors’ digressive writing style was occasionally exasperating as well. Reading *Teaching Multiwriting*, I often felt as if I were listening to the blues. The authors have a habit of “riffing” off of each other and key themes, which frequently leads to digressions. For example, a discussion of formulaic style and content might lead the authors to recall the plot of a Monty Python parody; an explanation of a writing assignment on persuasion might lead to an examination of characters in a local theater production. These wanderings away from the main topic, while sometimes frustrating to me as a teacher of writing looking for practical applications, were generally engaging, and the digressions worked together with the central metaphors to model the open-ended “writing as inquiry” that Davis and Shadle describe throughout the text. In this way, the form of the text follows its function.

While not all readers of *Teaching Multiwriting* may be able to embrace fully the expansive and innovative approach to writing pedagogy Davis and Shadle advocate, the text does provide a range of options for those seeking to incorporate fresh ideas and try some alternative assignments. *Teaching Multiwriting* also provides a useful overview of other challenges to current understandings of writing instruction and other alternative practices in composition. In fact, current research on multimodal learning supports Davis’s and Shadle’s theory that working in multiple genres benefits learning. For example, a 2008 study on multimodal learning sponsored by Cisco systems found that “students engaged in learning that incorporates multimodal designs, on average, outperform students who learn using traditional approaches with single modes” (13). So if readers can get over—or settle into—the eclectic mix of narratives; the numerous references to musicians, authors, and performers; and the improvisations and discordant riffs; *Teaching Multiwriting* can provide them with some intriguing options to reinvigorate their teaching and expand their visions of “writing” assignments.

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Reviewed by Alexis E. Ramsey, Eckerd College

Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition seeks to “provide a diverse set of narratives, narratives that [are] thematically and historically connected” in order to “encourage a reexamination of prevailing ideas about disciplinary formation, development, and transmission” (221). Specifically, the text works to “extend, challenge, complicate, and thereby enrich the narrative” (3) of composition history within the American college and university system.

Patricia Donahue’s “Disciplinary Histories: A Meditation on Beginnings,” which acts as a kind of extended reflection on the reification of the Harvard narrative and the role of Albert Kitzhaber’s Rhetoric in American Colleges in expounding this narrative, also works to create another kind of beginning: a pedagogical beginning. The perspective this beginning enables “could ‘disturb’ discrete institutional narratives without having to wrestle with the unwieldy distinction drawn between rhetoric/composition” (234). In other words, a pedagogical perspective can help us speak of composition history not in terms of a decline, but in terms of mismatch between an “emerging subject with a preexisting methodology” (235). This perspective allows for a more positive approach to composition histories. Further, this perspective lets historians look at difficulties not as failures, but as moments to explore, question, and ultimately contend with amidst the multitude of expectations for those involved with composition—faculty, students, colleges and universities, and the larger community. While this chapter is the second to last chapter in the volume, it actually provides a lens through which to read the other chapters.

The ten chapters within the volume respond to the prevailing narrative that situates Harvard’s composition program as the starting place for the development of composition at colleges and universities throughout the United States, challenging the primacy of this narrative in light of normal