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## “Finding a Balance”: User, Reader, and Learner Functions in First-Year Composition Textbook Engagement

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**“FINDING A BALANCE”: USER, READER, AND LEARNER FUNCTIONS IN FIRST-  
YEAR COMPOSITION TEXTBOOK ENGAGEMENT**

by

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## ABSTRACT

### “FINDING A BALANCE”: USER, READER, AND LEARNER FUNCTIONS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION TEXTBOOK ENGAGEMENT

Travis Vincent Holt  
Old Dominion University, 2022  
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This qualitative, multiple participant case study investigates the phenomenon of student textbook engagement in a First-Year Composition course at a private, evangelical four-year university. Shifting away from a dominant history where textbooks served as the primary object of study (Besser et al., 1999; Carr, Carr, & Schultz, 2005; Colby, 2013; Connors, 1987; Edwards, 1984; Faigley, 1992; Gale & Gale, 1999; Hawhee, 1999; Issitt, 2004; Miles, 2000; Ohmann, 1979; Rendleman, 2009, 2011; Welch, 1987), I answered calls (Colby, 2013; Harris, 2012; Rendleman, 2009, 2011) to examine engagement with textbooks in context. Additionally, scholars have dominated discussions of textbooks; thus, the student voice should be recognized and investigated further. By drawing on Technical Writing, Composition and Rhetoric, and Education scholarship, I identified three potential operations describing how students engage with textbooks: user, reader, and learner. Following a three-cycle interview structure with individual students during the Spring 2021 semester, I collected data on their prior experience with and expectations of textbooks, current engagement practices within the FYC course, and reflections on their engagement during the study. The study's results identified six thematic categories describing different parts of participant engagement. Chapter V traces three individuals' engagement with the textbook to illustrate the uniqueness of engagement that the cross-participant discussion could not capture. The analysis reveals all three operations present, but user was most prevalent when engaging the textbook. It also revealed students phased in and

out of these roles according to changing contextual factors and individual motivations. The final chapter reflects on these findings and the implications for Composition Studies, FYC, and the need for additional case studies.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my family: Jenna, Tristan, Elyse, and Emmett.

Fear is a false ceiling to our potential. You never know what is possible until you try.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
BACKGROUND: COURSE DESIGN AND PILOT STUDY .....	4
STUDY FOCUS .....	5
STUDY SIGNIFICANCE .....	7
DISSERTATION OVERVIEW .....	8
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	10
TEXTBOOK .....	10
COMPOSITION TEXTBOOK: A HISTORY OF CRITIQUES .....	11
TEXTBOOK AS TOOL .....	15
THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTION .....	17
USER, READER, AND LEARNER .....	20
USER .....	21
UNIVERSE OF USERS .....	23
USER OR READER? .....	25
READER .....	28
LEARNER .....	31
PRIOR KNOWLEDGE .....	32
GENRE KNOWLEDGE .....	34
LEARNER DIAGRAMS .....	35
PRECEDENT TEXTBOOK STUDIES .....	38
LIMITATIONS OF PREVIOUS STUDIES .....	42
CALLS FOR THIS STUDY .....	43
CONCLUSION .....	45
III. METHODOLOGY .....	46
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	47
CASE STUDY .....	47
CONTEXT .....	50
RESEARCH SITE .....	50
RESEARCH DESIGN .....	55
IRB APPROVAL .....	58
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT .....	58
PARTICIPANTS .....	60

Chapter	Page
DATA COLLECTION .....	61
INTERVIEWS .....	62
RESEARCH NOTES.....	64
RESEARCH MEMOS .....	64
RECORDINGS .....	65
DATA ANALYSIS.....	65
RESEARCHER POSITIONING .....	66
LIMITATIONS.....	68
IV. RESULTS .....	71
PARTICIPANT DATA .....	71
CODING.....	71
CODES TO CATEGORIES .....	73
PRIORITIZED PURPOSE .....	73
ASSESSMENT ANSWERS.....	75
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.....	77
FINDING A LEVEL OF COMFORT .....	80
GENERIC RECOGNITION.....	81
GENERIC FEATURES OF TEXTBOOKS .....	81
TEXTBOOK AESTHETICS .....	85
TEXTBOOK PERCEPTIONS .....	86
TEXTBOOK DEFINITION .....	86
TEXTBOOK IS SUPPLEMENTAL .....	88
TEXTBOOK AS ARBITRATOR .....	89
TEXTBOOK-CLASS INTERTWINE.....	90
CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCE .....	91
TIME.....	92
TEACHER PATTERN .....	93
CONTENT NAVIGATION.....	96
SKIM .....	96
SEEK EXTERNAL RESOURCES .....	98
UNIQUE OPERATIONS .....	99
ADAPTATION.....	102
ADAPT .....	102
SUFFICIENT NEED .....	104
CONCLUSION.....	105
V. TRACING INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT WITH TEXTBOOKS .....	106
FOCAL PARTICIPANTS .....	107
CADENCE.....	107
INITIAL EXPECTATIONS .....	107
TEXTBOOK ENGAGEMENT .....	109
PERCEPTION, PURPOSE, AND ADAPTATION .....	109
CONTENT NAVIGATION AND GENERIC	

Chapter	Page
	RECOGNITION .....112
	KELLY .....115
	INITIAL EXPECTATIONS .....115
	TEXTBOOK ENGAGEMENT .....116
	PERCEPTION, PURPOSE, AND ADAPTATION .....116
	CONTENT NAVIGATION AND GENERIC RECOGNITION .....120
	CALEB .....123
	INITIAL EXPECTATIONS .....123
	TEXTBOOK ENGAGEMENT .....124
	PERCEPTION, PURPOSE, AND ADAPTATION .....124
	CONTENT NAVIGATION AND GENERIC RECOGNITION .....126
	CONCLUSION.....129
VI.	DISCUSSION.....130
	USER .....130
	READER.....135
	LEARNER .....136
	PHASING OF USER, READER, LEARNER .....137
	TEXTBOOK PERCEPTION.....139
	SOCIO-DIDACTICAL TETRAHEDRON .....142
	EMERGING THEMES .....146
	INTERPRETING COURSES AS GENRES .....146
	AGENCY (ADAPTATION) .....148
	LIMITATIONS.....149
	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY .....152
	TEXTBOOK DESIGN .....152
	TEXTBOOK PERCEPTION ORIGIN AND INFLUENCE.....153
	DYNAMICS OF STUDENT-TEXT-TEACHER.....155
	FUTURE CASE STUDIES .....155
	CONCLUSION.....156
VII.	CONCLUSION.....157
	FINAL THOUGHT .....161
	REFERENCES .....163
	APPENDICES
	A. BASELINE SURVEY .....176
	B. INTERVIEW 1 QUESTIONS .....179
	C. INTERVIEW 2 QUESTIONS .....181
	D. INTERVIEW 3 QUESTIONS .....183
	E. LICENSE AGREEMENT: SOCIO-DIDACTICAL TETRAHEDRON .....185

VITA.....187

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table	Page
1. Case Study timeline and overview.....	57
2. Pre-Course Recruitment Survey Results.....	60
3. Participants' demographic and background information.....	72
4. Thematic Categories, corresponding in vivo codes, and category description.....	74

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Luckin’s (2010) Ecology of Resources.....	36
2. Rezat and Sträber’s (2012) socio-didactical tetrahedron .....	37
3. Illustration of Cadence’s skimming by utilizing global and local features .....	114
4. Illustration of Cadence’s avoidance of “gray boxes” or accompanying explanation .....	114
5. Illustration of local features Kelly described as making the text difficult to engage .....	122
6. Illustration of accompanying explanation Kelly engaged and viewed as a “break”.....	122
7. Illustration of Caleb’s engagement with global and local features.....	128
8. Illustration of Caleb’s content navigation uses repeated terms .....	128
9. Rezat and Sträber’s (2012) socio-didactical tetrahedron model.....	143

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I never claimed to be “English-y” or a fan of writing. In fact, English was my least favorite high school subject, a distaste I attributed to less than stellar grades. At the time I could not rationalize why other subjects such as Math and Science felt easier, but time and further reflection created a window where I realized having a strong memory benefitted me in those subjects. I could memorize class notes and textbook chapters, particularly section headings, bold terms, and definitions, and confidently complete objective-based tests and quizzes. Still, this practice did not serve me well in English. What was there to memorize from the textbook or class notes that would transfer to essay writing? I could not memorize terms, definitions, or formulas to write an essay. Formulaic essay models were simple in theory yet applying them to my own ideas proved difficult. Consequently, these experiences influenced my valuation of and engagement with English textbooks. I might read what was assigned, but that wasn’t always a given. Ironically, English’s inherent complexities—the infinite themes, critical theory, autonomy of the writer, unique characteristics of notable works—that bewildered me later sparked my curiosity. The content remained compelling even when difficult, and the satisfaction of celebrating uniqueness through great effort eventually led me to become a college English instructor.

After earning my MA in English in 2009 from Liberty University, I served as an adjunct instructor for two years at the same institution and primarily taught first-year writing courses ranging from Basic Writing to Composition and Literature. It was not until 2011 that I was offered and accepted a full-time position with the College of General Studies overseeing all residential Basic Writing (BW) courses. Soon after I began noticing and contemplating the



student-textbook interaction and how it shaped students' course experience and writer development. Although I now assumed the role of subject matter expert, I began comparing my previous textbook engagement as a student with what I observed from my students. Before, I was privy to just my experience, but teaching provided a diverse conglomerate of student engagement strategies: some brought it every day, annotated the pages, and claimed to read it whenever assigned; others perused it like an encyclopedia, searching for key terms, brief definitions or summaries, and moving on just as quickly; some just did not read. I wondered what prompted their strategies and if each student's practice was consistent across all courses or just English? How did they perceive the textbook's value in relation to writing and their academic performance? Also, what authority—if any—did the textbook hold in relation to the instructor? This line of questioning continued until it all coalesced as my research focus.

This qualitative case study explores student engagement with the First-Year Composition (FYC) textbook through the lenses of user, reader, and learner. Connecting strands of technical writing, composition and rhetoric, and education scholarship, I define the potential operations and how they manifest in student engagement practices. Additionally, this study considers how their engagement communicates perceptions of the FYC textbook, including its role, purpose, and value. In Spring 2021, ten Liberty University FYC students participated in three sets of interviews and detailed their initial expectations and prior history with textbooks, ongoing engagement with the FYC textbook, and their end-of-study reflections. This dissertation explains the process, results, and implications of the collected data.

The intended audience includes writing program administrators (WPAs), composition scholars, and FYC instructors. The insights into how students approach textbooks, perceive its value, and apply, utilize, and/or ignore its content would benefit WPAs and FYC instructors

designing curricula and adopting textbooks. Additionally, whether students understand the textbook contributing to their development as a writer is notable for all three audiences, especially composition scholars focused on writing instruction. There is potential for future studies in other areas following this study as well. For example, technical writing scholars would benefit from any data on whether students perceive textbook elements as difficult to follow or visually unappealing. Finally, education scholars in general would benefit from insight to the role of textbooks in higher education and skills-based courses. Though I cannot fully account who would find this dissertation valuable, I expect it extends beyond these groups.

Though there is established value in this study, I must clarify it does not explore the incredibly complex histories of individual students beyond high school textbook experience. It does not follow an ethnographic methodology exploring the individual student's unique long-term influences in addition to those immediately present. However, it does account for the immediate contextual factors present in the case study such as the instructor, spring semester, specific textbook, and course design. Readers should not interpret this limited scope as a detractor from this dissertation's potential value because the case study model still projects the importance of understanding this phenomenon in context. We develop FYC courses according to institutional exigencies, theoretical underpinnings, and student demographics, all under an umbrella of how we define and understand writing.

Additionally, I maintain a neutral stance regarding the textbook's value during this study. Granted, I serve as both researcher and instructor—a complexity I address at several points in the dissertation—but I allow participant voices to speak to its role and value. The results are not a defense for nor an argument against FYC textbooks; rather, the collected data are an unveiling of the student experience that scholarship has often overlooked.

### **Background: Course Design and Pilot Study**

Though my initial interest in this topic originated in my Basic Writing (BW) classroom, it was not the most fitting site for the study. BW courses are arguably more diverse in structure, not as common across higher education institutions, and not required for all students. Thus, the standard that defines “basic writer” can be markedly different. Additionally, many BW textbooks focus on basic sentence structure, grammar, and formatting in addition to modes of discourse. They include more exercises emphasizing this content and primarily prompting a task-driven engagement. Due to these factors, I decided ENGL 101 Composition and Rhetoric would be the better case study context.

ENGL 101 is a required FYC, three-credit hour course and part of the general education curriculum at Liberty University. Prior to the Fall 2020 semester, the course followed more of a current-traditional model mostly focusing on formal correctness, style, and argumentation.<sup>1</sup> After my appointment to oversee all FYC residential sections and graduate students facilitating it, I revised the curriculum to follow the rhetorical genre-theory model, emphasizing audience, generic conventions, and genre awareness in composition. This aligned more with the course description that stressed a foundation in “rhetorical theory” to develop “careful readers, critical thinkers, and skilled writers” by “engaging a variety of texts” (Liberty University). Part of this redesign included adopting a new textbook, Cheryl Glenn’s (2017) *The New Harbrace Guide: Genres for Composing*, that fit such a pedagogical focus.

During the Fall 2020 semester, I conducted a pilot study to collect preliminary data and refine my interview questions and technique. Even with just four participants, this process

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this is the closest fitting model and does not suggest it perfectly aligns with all facets of current-traditional pedagogy. The course discussed ideas of audience and rhetoric, but these were not focal points of the curriculum.

confirmed my initial observations that students varied in their engagement strategies and further study was necessary. Some gravitated to certain chapter sections such as the review section detailing specific generic features of an assignment as most helpful to their ability to write papers in the course; some only engaged paragraphs containing bold terms; another chose not to engage at all following the first week. One participant described the textbook not being as central to their learning experience, which differed from their homeschool experience. During the second interview conducted midway through the course, another participant admitted they completely forgot there was a textbook and had trouble accessing the content when asked to illustrate their engagement. At the same time, this student also moved quickly through the textbook chapter, distinguishing what they perceived as important versus extra detail they likely would not engage. Despite not engaging the textbook outside of two example essays,<sup>2</sup> they had an established strategy to decipher importance, meaning, and relevance, which suggested prior experience with the genre as a potentially important factor. Additionally, students in this study measured whether their strategy was justified and effective based on not encountering “problems” in the course.<sup>3</sup>

### **Study Focus**

Though this study’s timeframe coincided with my revision of the course, it is not meant to determine the efficacy of ENGL 101, the instructor, or Glenn’s specific text. Instead, the study seeks to understand student engagement as the object of study rather than the textbook itself. As previously noted, engagement is diverse and not universal; however, I identified three defined operations recognized in prior scholarship as ways students interact with texts: user, reader, and learner.

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<sup>2</sup> The participant recalled these essays had corresponding questions with them and expected to discuss them in the next class.

<sup>3</sup> Based on participant descriptions, “problems” related to course performance and assignment grades.

Each operation includes considerations of the student's primary objective for engaging, their navigation of the content, and their recognition of text features. However, these are not static nor clearly distinguishable at all times; they occasionally overlap, and students operate differently according to shifting objectives, motivations, and contextual influences including perceptions of the textbook's value in that course. For instance, a student could initially operate as a reader by following the designer's prescribed navigation of material but later shift to user operation, navigating the text to complete a task when corresponding assessments are more frequent. They could also potentially skip chapter sections as a user yet still internalize new knowledge from the sections they do engage, suggesting a learner role.

Due to the indistinctness of operations, there is an inherent difficulty to this study. Researching the single phenomenon of engagement presents numerous possibilities and combinations, and due to the dearth of prior data in composition and rhetoric studying such a phenomenon, a preestablished body of data to identify specific threads for further investigation is absent. The expected data diversity coupled with minimal scholarship warrants a single, broad research question as opposed to several distinct questions. Hence, my research question for this study is as follows:

- How do Liberty University students engage with the required composition textbook as readers, users, and learners?

This study draws on prior scholarship in technical writing, composition and rhetoric, and education embodying an interdisciplinary focus that is best situated in Composition Studies, a "dappled discipline" (Lauer, 1984) representing multiple arenas under the unifying theme of writing. This body of interdisciplinary scholarship seeks to not only understand writing as a phenomenon, but how people learn this skill and what contributes to this development.

## Study Significance

This study carries interdisciplinary significance as textbooks remain a common academic genre, but it is likely most significant for FYC instructors and composition scholars. The ensuing results and discussion will not only establish baseline data for future studies on textbook engagement, but they will also provide critical information regarding how students perceive them in relation to their personal objectives or those of the course. Potentially, there could be certain textbook elements deemed more helpful, prompting future inquiry as to why they are more valuable; alternatively, similar investigations into avoided sections would be warranted as well.

This study also addresses a significant void in textbook research. Previous scholarship has focused primarily on the textbook whether it be authoritative tone (Bleich, 1999; Kleine, 1999), oversimplification of writing and its process (Janangelo, 1999; Jamieson, 1997; Rose, 1981, 1983), or production influencing its construction (Miles, 2000; Mortenson, 1999; Zebroski, 1990). However, Colby (2013) and Rendleman (2009; 2011) noted the dominant theme has been the textbook itself rather than its use in context. Colby (2013) added that “very little data exists from specific studies” (“In the internet age”). Shifting our focus to what students do with the textbook, how it informs their understanding and practice of writing, provides a nuance not yet fully understood.

Textbooks embody the invaluable yet overlooked academic convergence. It is where an author’s voice, disciplinary knowledge, instructor design, and the student interact. Issitt (2004) identified it as the point where “the agencies of teacher and learner act” (p.689). Despite the construction of the course and its intention, choices are made by both instructor and student, and

these must be understood as socio-contextually informed. The case study model honors this and validates the exigency for future studies and data.

### **Dissertation Overview**

This initial chapter clarifies how the dissertation topic emanated from the intersection of my personal experience as both student and instructor. I described my desire to understand what I perceive as a common yet incredibly complex phenomenon, which my initial pilot study also confirmed. I then narrowed this interest to a single, focused research question guiding the entire study and followed it with the perceived significance it holds for the field.

Chapter II presents the literature review where multiple threads converge and altogether serve as the foundation for this study. I first present the field's long history of textbook scholarship but point out the shortcoming of primarily examining the textbook and its theoretical underpinnings as the object of study rather than student engagement. I then pull from technical writing, education, and composition scholarship to establish definitions of user, reader, and learner according to how each operates with a particular objective. The final section includes previous studies investigating student engagement with textbooks, yet I note the limitations present with each, which leads to calls for this study.

Chapter III details and justifies the single case study, multiple participant methodology defined by Yin (2018) as investigating a "contemporary phenomenon" enmeshed in a "real-world context" (p.15). The following section presents this context including institutional site and unique course structure. I discussed the research design and stages of compiling, disassembling, and reassembling, including three interview cycles and multiple coding cycles. This chapter concludes with personal reflections on my researcher position as well as perceived limitations.

The initial findings found in Chapter IV reveal the common threads—presented as six categories—across multiple participants. These categories represent facets of student engagement yet individually are an incomplete picture of it. Additionally, this chapter explains how student responses connected to focused code naming within each category.

Because the complexities inherent in the phenomenon of engagement and the limitations of isolating data into common categories, I added Chapter V as an in-depth, focused tracing of three participants. These tracings not only connect a single participant's preestablished perceptions and expectations of textbooks in interview one and follows their engagement practices and rationale for doing so over the course of the study, they also combine individual categories from Chapter IV to show correlations between them. Unique to this chapter are the figures illustrating each student's engagement practices, adding further depth not possible in the previous chapter.

Chapter VI—discussion and limitations—applies lenses of user, reader, and learner to the data and explains how students' engagement practices embodied one or more of these roles. I expand the discussion further to note emerging themes interpreting the course as a genre and student adaptation, limitations of this dissertation, and recommendations for future study. The chapter ends with a final reflection on the study's aim and what future scholarship lies ahead.

Chapter VII serves as the dissertation conclusion where I recap the initial experiences leading to the topic and the emerging threads following it. I then return to the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Position Statements to again ask what role textbooks play in the development of student writing. The final section includes a few final thoughts reflecting on this body of work.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Although textbooks have been a consistent topic in composition scholarship to date, there has been a predominant focus on them as the objects of study rather than the phenomenon of use and ensuing implications. This chapter discusses that history before shifting to user, reader, and learner scholarship to identify clear conceptions of those roles. The final section presents multi-disciplinary research on textbook use, documenting how scholars have examined the phenomenon yet might be limited due to their methods or conflation of terms (user, reader, learner).

#### **Textbook**

Despite the ubiquity of textbooks as both an educational term and pedagogical artifact, often our perception of its role and function remain subjective to its context (Issitt, 2004; Lee et al., 2013). An educational scholar of textbooks, Issitt (2004) claimed variations of textbooks, “in terms of their literary or pedagogic styles, their contextual use, their cultural and historical specificities or any of the wide variety of assumptions and agendas that inform their construction, are submerged in an over-arching general category—textbooks” (p.684). He later added that design, use, and authorial intention—common features of any textbook—do not define it (p.685). Such complexity is not without an ironic danger though: their simplicity. In his College on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) paper, Bruce Edwards (1984) cautioned this inviting yet misleading characteristic in composition textbooks reduce “an art, skill, or craft, to the mechanical manipulation of certain abstractions. . . they purport to be the thing itself when they are but faint echoes, dim reflections of it” (p.4-5). Yet, how did we arrive

at such a paradoxical genre, one that is both convoluted and reductive? One potential explanation for composition textbooks lies with their history.

### **Composition Textbook: A History of Critiques**

Scholarship within and outside the field recognize textbooks as both traditional, authoritative texts and fluid genres. Dating back to its earliest iterations, textbooks, in general, convey a sense of authority and validation. Friesen (2017), a scholar in educational technology, explains that “. . . the physical book--a media form whose dominance was once unquestioned but is gradually and indisputably eroding--has long shaped how we think about knowledge, its validation, acquisition, and circulation” (p.75). Often used in classrooms of all disciplines and following familiar and “deliberately defined structures” (Friesen, 2017, p.94) and “principles of arrangement that are never simply transparent” (Carr, Carr, and Schultz, 2005, p.205) (e.g., chapter sequencing and topic order), the textbook served as a text to be recited, memorized, utilized, followed, and respected. As technology transformed printing and production, the textbook replaced the classical model of delivering content through only lecture in early educational settings (Friesen, 2017). Its presence indicated validation of disciplinary knowledge, especially paired with the instructor’s authority as expert in the classroom.

Similarly, composition textbooks changed as a result of technological advancements and outside contributors. In his book *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, Robert Connors (1987) described the composition textbook’s evolution. Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, books in rhetoric were treatises, or storehouses of “complex information that cannot be easily committed to memory” (p.70), yet they changed as a result of conditional factors such as the publishing market, technological advancements, and novice instructors (p.78). This led to the more contemporary texts that included supplemental pedagogical elements like practice

activities, questions, and summaries, ultimately shifting the textbook toward a more central role in the classroom as opposed to the instructor who traditionally delivered the content via lecture. Another effect of their evolution is current texts deployed in composition classrooms are not necessarily “textbooks” simply because of their inclusion: “Even books that are specifically rhetorical are not always texts, since not every rhetorical book was especially written to structure a pedagogy in writing” (Connors, 1987, p.70). This is evidenced by the myriad of text options overflowing publisher tables at national conferences like CCCC. Though so many complicating factors exist in how we understand and perceive the textbook, there are some shared characteristics among them.

The textbook’s form is also a consistent feature regardless of discipline, primarily for readability and usability. One common characteristic is “orienting material” including introductions, visuals/illustrations, and headings (Carter, 1985). These pedagogical supplements, which Anderson and Armbruster (1985) considered part of the textbook’s “global” coherence, direct and guide the reader through the content. “Local” factors remain at the sentence level, often providing explicit direction on the content’s purpose or signaling a particular order or transition of ideas, and with all other structural features, create the “clean” design that is easier for students to navigate than just prose-filled pages (Armbruster & Anderson, 1985). In their study of mass communication students’ perceptions of textbooks, Besser, Stone, and Nan (1999) observed directives, signals, typographical cues, and visual stimuli as common structural components that students found helpful.

Nevertheless, even the common structural characteristics synonymous with textbooks are subject to the inherent complexities of their use. Carter (1985) cautioned, “[T]he failings of publishers to produce effective and usable texts have resulted from a confusion of purposes”

(p.148), adding that universalizing a text's purpose does not equal successful use *in situ*. Though Anderson and Armbruster (1985) deemed a single aim or purpose within a section, chapter, or text as "unity," they similarly concluded such unique contexts means there is not a universal approach to studying either (p.160). Students encounter textbooks across disciplines, yet the respective disciplinary knowledge, the instructor's utilization of and reference to the text, the instructor's content knowledge, and the course assessments are influencing—though not exhaustive—factors in the text's purpose and use. The inherent complexity of such a traditional pedagogical genre and the additional difficulty of unique contextual factors warrant further investigation, particularly for the benefit of all who are involved with this production, use, and reception.

Historically, most composition textbook scholarship included critiques of their ideological underpinnings or weak theoretical scope. Based on their analysis of writing textbooks, both Ohmann (1979) and Faigley (1992) criticized the textbooks' simple methods to writing that lured students into a passive view of writing and serving a dominant social hierarchy. Faigley (1992) said textbooks also presented contradictory directives even though the simple structure—as Armbruster and Anderson (1985) and Carter (1985) pointed out—often appeared noncontradictory. Similarly, Welch (1987) argued an oversimplified approach restricted composition theory and instituted writing theory as more of an ideology, a "shared system of belief, an interconnecting set of values that informs attitude and behavior" (p.271). The critique of textbooks' reductive theory was not a new stance either. Previous scholars such as Stewart (1978; 1984) argued many textbooks depended on the current-traditional model despite the recent development of other composition theories, and Edwards (1984) similarly lamented the closeness of New Criticism to the current-traditional practices. A significant

amount of scholarly discussion documenting these issues are presented by Gale and Gale's (1999) *(Re)Visioning Composition Textbooks: Conflicts of Culture, Ideology, and Pedagogy*. In that collection, Bleich (1999) and Kleine (1999) argued the authoritative tone is a typical textbook characteristic that potentially misleads and confuses students since it portrays writing as objective and restricts it to a set of principles. Kleine (1999) theorized such a tone evokes more narcissistic tendencies in student writing since they seek to please the source of the instructional tone, which they presume is the teacher.

Continuing the thread of textbook expedience over theoretical development are the outside factors influencing textbook production, distribution, and utilization. Janangelo (1999) termed this as “containment”—a majority agreement on what writing is and how it should be taught—and “contentment”—providing the necessary results and data to indicate success to stakeholders. Writing, then, loses its inherent complexity for the sake of control and uniformity in the curriculum, resulting in an oversimplified approach meant to convey steps to success. Part of this oversimplification is the decontextualized essays that serve as models or examples for success in writing. The model essays reinforce the technical aspects of writing and might be easy to read, but they do very little for the connection to the thought students attempt to convey (Liu Gale, 1999; Spellmeyer, 1999). Others noted the publisher influence in the discipline's production (Zebroski, 1990; Mortensen, 1990), with Miles (2000) later claiming multiple parties including teachers, writers, publishers, and administrators are responsible for the textbooks' current trends in production. Hence, textbooks become a point of convergence and compromise where institutional demands for measurable outcomes and publisher-driven mass production processes subordinate the intricacies of writing instruction and disciplinary knowledge. The common (re)production of writing instruction via a simplified, linear model—what Rendleman

(2009) called the “textbook phenomenon”—is what Mike Rose (1981;1983) and Bleich (1999) blame for misrepresentations of the writing process for students. This is a similar conclusion drawn by Jamieson (1997), who noted the simple presentation made it easier for students to follow rather than critique.

These scholars’ criticisms all merit consideration, particularly for anyone teaching composition or conducting general textbook research; even so, this body’s significant constraint is the lack of student voice, considered the primary audience along with teachers, within the discussion. For instance, Gale and Gale’s (1999) collection was a significant contribution to textbook scholarship, yet the discussion is theoretical and abstract rather than grounded in empirical studies examining their use. And even though Issitt (2004) and Rendleman (2011) both acknowledged scholarship towards the end of the twentieth century focused on ideological and cultural underpinnings of the textbook, they still positioned the textbook itself as the object of study rather than its use. Such positioning follows a literary tradition of textual analysis rather than recognizing the full scope of its use in context.

### **Textbook as Tool**

Because of textbooks’ incredibly complex nature, we must give more consideration to the possibilities they present within any research, and this includes the terms used to describe them. Recognizing the textbooks’ medium (the printed book) as a complex construction, Friesen (2017) called the textbook an “interface between a range of systems, organizations, and oppositions that we understand as structuring our everyday world” (p.81). The term “interface” positions textbooks as objects still, but now it implicates a phenomenon of use also. Other scholars have created similar implications by shifting terminology describing textbooks. Couper (2018) labeled them a “technology of reproduction of the discipline,” similar to the phrase

“disciplinary technologies” used by Welch (1987) and Faigley (1992), and Carr, Carr, and Schultz’s (2005) “technology of writing.” Hawhee (1999) identified them as “tools,” a term Besser et al. (1999) and Connors (1987) utilized as well. To consider text as technology or tool is not innovative or revolutionary; however, viewing textbooks this way allows scholars to interpret not just how they function in the hands of their intended audience but how they create and shape knowledge.

Though not fully examining textbook use in context, some scholars have initiated conversations about positioning them as tools. Rendleman (2009; 2011) applied Martin Heidegger’s theory of valuation to develop a methodology for WPAs to evaluate textbooks as pedagogical tools. In “Balancing Act: Student Valuation and Cultural Studies Composition Textbooks,” he claimed, “no one has explored the idea of textbook qua tool, the unintended effects related to the fundamental nature of this tool, and the pedagogical implications of textbooks’ ‘tool-ness’” (2011). Rendleman (2009; 2011) suggested taking a critical approach to textbooks in the classroom to build students’ awareness of its presence and performance in the classroom while also developing their cognitive skills as well.

Although new terminology for textbooks presents an expansion of possibilities, that potential has not been fully realized since scholarship has overlooked student views and uses of textbooks, relying predominantly on scholarly interpretations of the textbook as the object of study. Colby (2013) asserted, “There is no comprehensive study on how textbooks are used in composition classrooms, and very little data exists from specific studies” (“In the internet age”). He also questioned why the abundance of scholarship focused on the textbook as an object of study rather than its “use by the intended audience,” (“In the internet age”), which he suggested should be the student rather than solely the teacher. Though Rendleman’s (2009; 2011) study is

significant, he only reasoned how the textbook invited student participation and aligned with critical pedagogy through his own analysis of textbooks.

Some studies have considered the audience as an important factor in future scholarship. Edwards (1984) and Bleich (1999) both perceived teachers as the primary textbook audience, warning that they are often misled by the instructional genre's simplified view of composition theory. Micciche (2000) also stressed the importance of examining teacher use and implementation of the textbook. Still, apart from a few publications, the conversation of textbooks and their use remains predominantly in the hands of scholars and instructors rather than students. In his CCCC paper, Clines (1995) remarked, "They might be able to process the information sufficiently to demonstrate competence or even mastery of it, but few students internalize the information in a way that allows for a permanent restructuring of their knowledge base" (p.4). Clines—though speaking from anecdotal experience—brought attention to what he calls a potential conflict present between textbook content and student knowledge, yet what is significant is his focus on student experience *using* the textbook. Nevertheless, these are simply calls *for* empirical data rather than actually *providing* it.

### **The Importance of Action**

The aforementioned scholarship has largely presented textbooks as the object of study, yet if textbooks are a tool (Besser et al., 1999; Connors, 1987; Hawhee, 1999; Rendleman, 2009; 2011) or technology (Carr, Carr, & Schultz, 2005; Faigley, 1992; Welch, 1987), then examining its use in context remains a significant need. The textbook as object of study perpetuates an idea of a passive pedagogical model where the textbook contains objective storehouse of knowledge for students to "receive" information. Ironically, it is this model that many previous critiques wanted to avoid as they sought increased awareness of the textbook's impact on all who engage



with it. Issitt (2004) claimed a passive pedagogy inscribed three different “political relationships”:

- the text and the learner are positioned such that the learner has a subordinate epistemological status;
- what counts as knowledge is clearly circumscribed by the text and, by default, alternative claims on the same knowledge arena or alternative lines of exploration are cast as irrelevant;
- the purpose of reading the text is end-directed towards an exam or outcome reflecting a goal-carrying social value. (p.689)

Issitt’s (2004) remarks on the limitations of a passive pedagogy parallel concerns about the textbook as object-of-study model. Below, I have adapted the three relationships to better understand the effects of such a model in composition scholarship:

- the text’s central position assumes a universal engagement by those who interact with it;
- expected engagement with the text is defined by scholars’ interpretation of it rather than any alternate potentials presented by its implementation within context and diverse audience experience;
- The purpose of such studies seeks revision and improvement of the textbook without full acknowledgement of student engagement with it.

When so many scholars have cautioned—with valid concerns—the ideologies within textbook content and structure (Bleich, 1999; Faigley, 1992; Gale & Gale, 1999; Kleine, 1999; Ohmann, 1979; Welch, 1987) and their influence on students and teachers alike, there remains a question as to whether students truly internalize those structures in a meaningful way (Clines, 1995).

What we have missed is exactly *how* students engage with textbooks, the meaning constructed during that process, and recognition of the student's agency present. Because a text presents material in a prescribed and structured manner does not mean students truly follow that path. Also, sociocontextual factors such as instructor direction, previous student experience, and individual motivation likely influence this engagement but has mostly been ignored. Thus, we must consider the textbook *in action* rather than static object. Issitt (2004) confirmed such an exigency in textbook scholarship:

Textbook analysis cannot remain with the object and its intellectual construction; it has to move to the context of use because it is there that the agencies of teacher and learner act. It is there that knowledge is engaged with and there where the conscious mind accepts, rejects, uses and experiences the ideas it is presented with (p.689).

“It has to move” has double meaning here, suggesting both the shift in the scholarly discussion but also the fluid nature of engagement practices. The interaction between student and textbook is an experience—an incredibly unique one—that is not static nor universal. In his highly intuitive and philosophical monologue *Thinking through technology: The Path between engineering and philosophy*, Carl Mitcham (1994) stated, “Technology as activity is that pivotal event in which knowledge and volition unite to bring artifacts into existence or to use them; it is likewise the occasion for artifacts themselves to influence the mind and will” (p.209). A textbook in action is markedly different from a static textbook; assuming its use parallels its design or intended use is a limitation our scholarship has struggled to move beyond. Issitt argued, “[Textbook analysis] has to trace the movement of ideas and the signals by which the reader is intended to navigate the text. It has to work out the model of appropriate learning being used by the authors and designers” (p.690). Composition studies has predominantly researched the latter

and rarely considered the former, and even then, Issitt's (2004) statement leans too heavily on *designed* rather than *actual* use.

### **User, Reader, and Learner**

Studying engagement with the textbook must also include diverse motives and identities each student operationalizes with that activity. Whether Issitt (2004) fully realized the nuances of his statements regarding textbook research, he identified three lenses to interpret this phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> First, he emphasized recognizing the “context of use” where “the agencies of teacher and learner act” (p.689). The term “agency” is essential since it means Issitt (2004) perceives freedom of choice during this process, “where the conscious mind accepts, rejects, uses and experiences the ideas it is presented with” (p.689), thus allowing for a range of possibilities not constructed by the *design* of the text but by the *action* of the person involved with it. Second, he also included the term “learner” followed by the term “uses,” yet this assumes that both learner and user operate with identical motives and actions. “Learner” implies internalizing something from the text in conjunction with possible instructional influence whereas “use” is more goal-directed and selective. The final nuance Issitt (2004) introduced is within the same section when he stated researchers analyzing textbooks needed to better understand how a “reader navigates the text” (p.690). “Reader” also suggests a different experience than user or learner, one that is more of an end in itself, an experience following the linear design of the text. Thus, we have three terms Issitt (2004) identified within the scope of future textbook scholarship: user, learner, and reader. Though his use of the terms did not suggest a clear distinction between their meanings in action, what is important is that there are semantical

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<sup>4</sup> I cannot conclude whether Issitt (2004) did or did not realize the lenses he presented; however, he, like many other scholars, conflated the terms “use[r], reader, and learner” when describing engagement, which presents questions regarding how he and others interpret and employ those terms.

differences present in the terms. The following sections investigate each term, further exploring the experience of engagement.

## User

Use has deep rhetorical roots dating back to ancient Greece and the term *techne*. The ancient Greeks considered *techne* as art or craft. Mitcham (1994) explains *techne* “comes to be conceived not only as an activity of some particular sort or character, but as a kind of knowledge” (p.118). Identifying *techne* as both activity and knowledge distinguishes the term as more than mere technique or process serving as a means to an end. Use is embedded in practical knowledge, an understanding of technology for particular means whether intended or not. Johnson (1998) acknowledged that the ancient Greeks view “technology as an *art* whose *end* was in the *use* of the product, not in the design or making of the product itself” (p.13; emphasis original). *Techne*, thus, extended beyond mere considerations of technique or skill; it not only centered on “use,” but there is a distinct knowledge embedded in practice.

Though grounded in classical rhetoric, contemporary descriptions of “user” exist across disciplinary scholarship yet are more common in technical communication. Brady (2004) noted “use” is that which is “embedded in practice and def[ies] formalization” (pp.66-7), aligning it with Aristotle’s view of rhetoric: if the audience implements the speaker’s rhetoric, it reflects their perception and valuation of it (p.59). Therefore, use becomes part of the interaction of audience and text. Saying it is “embedded practice” emphasizes use in context, which others have also conveyed in user-experience (UX) scholarship (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006; Miller-Cochran & Rodrigo, 2009; Wagler, 2019). Also, Brady’s (2004) remark that use “defies formalization” remains consistent with classical notions of *techne* being more than just technique; it is a craft *involving* knowledge. Scholars of psychology and information technology,

Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2006) commented that considerations of user should include an “internal state (predispositions, expectations, needs, motivation, mood, etc.)”, all within the unique contextual factors where use exists and is consequently influenced, including “the characteristics of the designed system (e.g. complexity, purpose, usability, functionality, etc.)” (p.95). The complexities introduced by the numerous possibilities identify use as contextually bound yet unique and disparate. As described, those factors can include individual user experience and history, user intention and expectations, as well as the system, tool, and technology being used all bound within context.

Robert Johnson’s (1998) *User-centered technology: A rhetorical theory for computers and other mundane artifacts* presented a considerable exploration of this term in relation to concepts of rhetoric. Similar to Issitt’s (2004) claim about textbooks and their prescribed purposes set by the author, Johnson (1998) noted “user experience” has “become nearly voiceless: a colonized knowledge ruled by the technology and the ‘experts’ who have developed the technologies” (p.5). Thus, Johnson (1998) pursued experience as complex rather than simple and routinized, pointing to three different views of user knowledge:

Users as producers have the knowledge to play an important role in the making of technologies; users as practitioners actually use the technologies and thus have a knowledge of the technologies in action; users as citizens carry user knowledge into an arena of sociotechnological decision making: the arena of the polis, or, if you prefer *politics* (p.64).

He cautioned that reducing user to merely practitioner establishes a hierarchy where technology is a storehouse of knowledge where the user is portrayed as an “idiot,” only “rote learners” or “awestruck spectators” in the use of technology (p.47). Rendleman (2009; 2011) also warned

against technological determinism and its consequences. However, while Rendleman (2009;2011) investigated textbooks from a Heideggerian view of technology as tools and did not include student voice as user, the study is limited in assuming students' use of textbooks would be identical. Consequently, it positioned students as user-practitioners but not user-citizens or user-producers.

### **Universe of Users**

Reducing the term “user” to a universal representation prioritizes more of a system-centered view, which loses the complexities present in the process of use (Bowie, 2009; Johnson, 1998; Skeen, 2009; Swarts & Satterly, 2009). Johnson (1998) explained any perception of “user” through the lens of intended technology use is an expectation that does not fully account for the actual user in the process. He claimed, “Users do not care about systems that reflect a designer’s perspective: they want a system that is familiar and sensitive to their own perspective of the technology and its ends” (1998, p.30). This is consistent with views that the user may create their own path to task completion according to individual “motives, predilections, biases, and backgrounds” (Swarts & Satterly, 2009) despite the intended steps expected by the designer. Skeen (2009) agreed that users’ held unique autonomy when utilizing technology and added that “users and developers are partially subject to definitions of the identities that they construct for themselves and each other” and are bound within the “cultural contexts in which they are situated” (p.93). Of particular note is that the user-designer interaction remains socioculturally influenced; thus, we cannot consider FYC broadly as the context for all users even though publishers and authors design the composition textbook for potential use in FYC courses across university settings. Since writing is a technology, Eyman (2009) propounded FYC is both a “technology system” and a “pedagogical system” formed from the instructor’s own

understanding and experience with writing (p.222). He argued recognizing students as users is important in these layered systems as a more accurate way of understanding their decisions in writing rather than universalizing that experience and “merely assess[ing] their understandings of their needs and goals” (p.224). Yet even with so many factors differentiating experience, Swarts and Satterly (2009) contended generic conventions of texts and technologies can create consistency for use, pointing to Miller’s (1984) and Swales’ (1990) genre study theories as evidence for such practices (p.201). Scholarship presents a complicated tension between a disparate “universe of users” (Bowie, 2009) with unique impetuses (Swarts & Satterly, 2009), texts or technologies they engage with, the designer/creator of those texts, all embedded within particular contexts that influence this engagement (Eyman, 2009) and create a constellation of possibilities.

Accounting for the diversity of users inherently acknowledges their prior knowledge and experience as part of the user activity as well. Carroll and Rosson (1987) noted paradoxes within the experience of a user, one of which is a “cognitive paradox” leading to an “assimilation bias” where users approach new contexts using previous experience to inform their decisions, even when this potentially creates “erroneous comparisons and conclusions” (p.1). Johnson (1998) also concluded previous experiences coupled with the amount of time given for a process inform users’ engagement with technologies. He added that genres “have a great deal to do with how they are used and how they should be designed” (pp.139-40). Again, viewing any technology engagement from a system-centered view positions the user as a “blank slate,” not giving credit for the history of user experience already present (Carroll & Rosson, 1987). Yet Carnegie and Fells (2002) critiqued Johnson’s (1998) user-centered model that positioned culture and history to the outermost rings, saying this was too “prescriptive” and “reductive” when portraying those

elements in relation to use (p.214). For Carnegie and Fells (2002), use is much more dynamic than such an illustration conveys: “If we are to bring a rhetorical perspective to the development of technology (as Johnson suggests we should), we must first understand the use of technology as a rhetorical phenomenon” (p.215). Through use, technology becomes mundane; consequently, use is dialogically entwined with technological developments.

Use then is a complicated phenomenon, yet there are some points which can help identify the phenomenon. First, we must assume use is unique to the individual according to their preconceived notions of the text, its role within the course, and the individual’s aims. The alignment of the user’s purpose with the potential of the text may fulfill or redefine the intended use of the text set by the author or designer. Additionally, a user does not have to internalize the prescribed function or content of the text for use; rather, the text or technology internalizes<sup>5</sup> the user’s aim or purpose through use.

### **User or Reader?**

A notable challenge to this study is the nuance of when a person’s activity represents that of a user or a reader. Several scholars conflate the terms such as Wright (1989), who suggested reading is a part of using when she identified four different reading styles: browsing, searching, studying, and reading (pp.320-1). Though all are identified as a style, the final concept of “reading” follows the “more conventional and mainly linear style from the start of the text” (p.321). For others, the distinction between user and reader lies in the way a person proceeds through the text. Johnson (1998) concluded readers move through the text “in a linear fashion,” consequently following the design of the text as created by the author or publisher, yet the user

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<sup>5</sup> “Internalize” here does not suggest the text physically changes or “learns” any content in this process; rather, it suggests the prescribed goals are secondary to the user’s. Upon use, the text or technology may or may not fulfill its own aims.



engages sans linearity and moves through the text according to purpose-defined action (p.128). Nevertheless, this reasoning does not address when a person reads a section of a text linearly but not the entirety of that chapter. They might skip certain sections according to their prior knowledge or for the aim of completing a task, but they proceed line-by-line in the sections they do choose to engage. Are they then both user and reader, or is one identity emphasized more in the process? Swarts & Satterly (2019) noted a distinct challenge facing scholars of usability, particularly within contexts of a writing classroom:

Novice:expert is a classification that works well for industry and not so well for writing. It is hardly a leap to say that most writers do not consider their audience solely in terms of their ability to learn to use a document. Readers have their own complicated motives, predilections, biases, and backgrounds that influence their perception of a document's usability. The more fundamental problem may reside in treating *readers* as *users*. (p.199, emphasis in original)

In its most basic form, we can consider a reader to be a user by their engagement with the text, yet the purpose, motivation, and outcome of this practice largely influence not only the steps of engagement but the meaning constructed by it. The above interpretations are problematic because “reading” is simply defined according to process.

Some of the same factors influencing considerations of use also influence ideas of “reading,” one of which is textual structure. Some scholars noted that text structure signals to the reader the level of importance for corresponding passages (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; Meyer, 1975). This might inform how a reader approaches a passage or even evaluates it; however, users can utilize the same cues to determine what parts to engage with for their goal-driven processes. Goldman and Rakestraw (2000) partially reconcile this as they stressed prior knowledge of the

reader as helping interpret the meaning of such structural cues according to generic conventions of the text, thus assigning particular emphasis for text in the meaning-making process (“Structural Aspects”). The idea of genre recognition contributing to the reader’s understanding and interpretation of a text is not new (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Goldman, 1997; Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000). In fact, this is a possible bridge between user and reader in scholarship. Both use conventions as points of navigation: user towards the end goal, reader towards the constructed meaning.<sup>6</sup> Alexander and Jetton (2000) stated, “In short, knowledge of text genres and structures allows readers to access information more readily and accurately, as they construct their personal interpretations of the text” (p.252). Structure recognition may assist in reading, but it is not exclusive to the process of reading. Both using and reading processes are informed by structure and contributes to our understanding of a person’s engagement with the text, but the difference between those terms still lies in how the person engages with the text.

Sullivan and Flower’s (1986) discussion clarified the distinction between user and reader by explaining the operations of a “functional reader.” Contrasting what they identified as non-fictional writing theory and its focus on linear prose reading, Sullivan and Flower (1986) explained the functional reader does not read linearly, but operates according to their own pattern, often “skipping orienting material” searching for what is needed to accomplish goals, “to do,” or to “answer questions” (p.173). The functional reader is goal-oriented with another end that extends beyond merely ascertaining the meaning of the text; thus, they operate as more of a user even though the sections they read may generate “meaning” as reading provides.

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<sup>6</sup> Yet, they later asserted that headings and subheadings provide “a potential retrieval plan” for the reader, which again illustrates the complexity of distinguishing between the terms reader and user.

Additionally, agency is evident for both operating as a reader and a user no matter the intention of the text for a person to “use” or “read” it (or both).

## **Reader**

To understand engagement with the textbook as a reader, we must refer to reading theory, particularly that which recognizes the direct, non-fictional prose of a textbook. In her text *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, Rosenblatt’s (1978) “aesthetic” and “efferent” reader established a clear division of how readers approach texts in relation to the expectations they have for particular genres. The “aesthetic” reader seeks the emotional connection with a text, reading for the sake of a “lived through experience” whereas an “efferent” approach is largely information-driven, seeking particular details or knowledge from the text. Brent (1992) called the latter an “updating a system of beliefs” (p.21). Key to Rosenblatt’s (1978) theory is the concept of “transaction” as it communicates an interplay between reader and text in the construction of meaning. It moves away from a hierarchical view of either text as storehouse of knowledge for the reader to receive or the reader providing meaning to the text without consideration of the text’s construction and knowledge it provides.

Rosenblatt’s (1978) theory also addressed concerns of structure as it informs reading practices. For Rosenblatt (1978), structure does not define the text despite its generic conventions and how an author or publisher might objectively classify it. The reader, within the transaction of reading, negotiates a text’s meaning and identity. For example, a reader may read a poem for the experience (aesthetic), which is likely the author’s intended effect; however, reading a poem for information (efferent) may take place when embedding the text within a pedagogical context. Assessments such as tests or quizzes may prompt the student to supplant the reading experience with an attempt to “update knowledge.” Thus, her theory accounts not

only for the reader's intentions that define the experience, but it also considers sociocontextual factors that potentially inform how the person approaches a text regardless of the structural features present.

Brent (1992) agreed with Rosenblatt's (1978) distinction of efferent and aesthetic reader, and he incorporated her distinction into his view of the "rhetorical reader." Brent (1992) explored her notion of the efferent reader as particularly important:

Even if we cannot reliably distinguish between literary and non-literary texts, it is clear that there are different types of reading acts, and it is, in fact, what Rosenblatt calls the 'efferent' reading act that rhetoric is most concerned with. The rhetorical reader is reading primarily, not just incidentally, for the purpose of updating a system of beliefs, and will typically (though not exclusively) be doing so by reading the sort of texts that are conventionally labeled 'non-literature': newspaper accounts, polemics, research articles, books of history and science. (p.21)

The emphasis on reading "acts" illustrated the lack of a universal experience, which recognizes the diversity present within the reader via motivations, expectations, intentions, and mood.

Additionally, Brent (1992) recognized the other factors influencing rhetorical reading as well. First, he noted the nuances between speech and writing, with the latter often separating the reader from speaker, creating the "illusion that she is simply absorbing information from a text rather than conversing with, and being persuaded by, another human being" (p.12).

Misinterpreting what written texts represent shapes the process of reading. The reader can still operate with an efferent approach, but the choices a reader makes regarding what is true is often skewed, particularly if the person views the text as ultimately objective, not persuasive. He later added, "[A] text never contributes to a belief system in isolation. It will be considered in

conjunction with other texts making some similar and some different claims for belief. In some cases, the claims will be incompatible, forcing the reader to decide which texts to believe”

(p.14). This is incredibly important within the context of education and for this study. Students likely have a history encountering textbooks, engaging them according to instructional influences like teacher direction, genres of assessment, and disciplinary practices. Though Brent (1992) is referring to content knowledge in the passage above, the engagement process and the ensuing results (i.e. performance on assessments or confidence with content knowledge) inform their future reading choices. Similarities across texts and their experiences create an intertextual relationship, but not all texts are course adopted textbooks.

As seen in several studies, students interpreted other texts as part of the intertextual experience. Though Bouwhuis (1989) aligned more with a user perspective, he described situations where students utilized alternate texts to accomplish their goals when the initial text did not provide sufficient information. Moje (1996) also found students adapted to their pedagogical contexts and considered the alternate texts for the course such as lectures, presentations, and notes provided sufficient knowledge to acquire the content knowledge they deemed sufficient. These texts influence how the student reads (or not) the textbook, but it does suggest they are reading the course texts as interrelated, an assemblage where individual parts potentially overlap or duplicate content, prompting reader choice on which to engage with.

Considering the potential factors influencing the act of reading within the FYC course, this study follows Brent’s (1992) definition of reader to identify this process. His definition still aligned with Rosenblatt’s (1978) efferent reader while also recognizing the individual choices a reader makes:

Thus, reading is an active attempt to find in discourse that which one can be persuaded is at least provisionally true, that which contains elements worth adding to one's own worldview. A rhetoric of reading must therefore account not just for the way a reader decodes meanings from texts, but also how she decides what meanings to accept, what meanings to be persuaded by. (p.3)

This view of reader recognizes the individual experience and base content knowledge, individual choices made according to present knowledge on the subject, and how this process seeks understanding as the primary objective.

### **Learner**

Distinguishing between reader and learner lies within the aim and result of textbook engagement. For the reader, engaging with the text *is* the end goal, the process of deciphering meanings and accessing information. An important part of the distinction is that the learner “internalizes” what is deciphered (Vygotsky, 1978), assimilating this information as part of their active participation within the social context because of its relevance and importance to the domain subject, especially in real-world contexts. In Luckin's (2010) discussion of technology's role in learner-centered contexts, she defines “competent and proficient” learners as those who “. . .tend to create their own opportunities for autonomy, as when they reframe a given task in terms of their own internal goals or seek knowledge beyond that required of them” (p.18). A learner, then, does not engage for experience or for a particular task-driven or grade-oriented goal; the learner seeks intellectual development as the primary purpose for activity.

As previously mentioned, the ubiquitous textbook has been a traditional classroom artifact, and some scholars have discussed its place within Vygotsky's theory. First, Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) extended Vygotsky's (1978) discussion of assisting learners'

development and coined the term “scaffolding” (p.90). We can interpret the textbook as a scaffold in that the teacher or institution selected the text, which inherently includes what the authors and publishers—in this case the more knowledgeable persons and guides—perceive as essential knowledge of the subject. Vygotsky (1997) clarified two types of tools—technological and psychological—where the “the psychological tool changes nothing in the object” (The instrumental method).<sup>7</sup> The textbook would serve as the psychological tool in the composition classroom and “scaffold” the learner’s development. Yet these artifacts, just like the learners, need to be considered as bounded within its socio-context: “Artifacts remain the focal point of the whole system in the sense that artifact use is culturally, institutionally, and historically situated and therefore the societal and cultural domain is always included” (Rezat & Sträber, 2012, p.649). Jetton and Alexander (2000) explained scaffolding in relation to utilizing textbooks still depends on the student’s approach though: “Until students begin to see the value in the domain or its content, their sights may be set more on doing the reading rather than mastering the content in the text” (Learning from text). Thus, for the context of this study, a learner is one who adds to their existing knowledge, shaping their understanding of the subject whether they utilize the textbook or other methods, to develop intellectually within their socio-contexts. A learner does not have to be a reader of the textbook nor does a reader automatically become a learner either.

### **Prior Knowledge**

Cognitive scholarship also reveals prior knowledge as an important factor shaping the learner’s process. Robert Glaser (1984) clarified domain knowledge as that which is relevant to a particular field of study. Alexander and Judy (1988) added that this includes “. . . the declarative,

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<sup>7</sup> “Object” here would refer to the subject matter and not the student.

procedural, or conditional knowledge” (p.376). Essentially, domain knowledge is an assemblage of knowledge groups coordinating with each other: declarative represents the descriptive content of the discipline; procedural knowledge represents the process or methods related to the context; conditional knowledge represents the kairoic nature of enacting procedural knowledge (Alexander & Judy, 1988). This body of previous knowledge informs or “guides” (Alexander & Jetton, 2000) the present and future learning process of students; thus, those who encounter ideas and strategies within textbooks will respond according to their domain knowledge.

Also, the proximity of new information to prior knowledge (i.e. how much it agrees or challenges what is previously held to be true) influences learning. Proximity here includes notions of perceived accuracy and overall familiarity. Clines (1995) concluded that the student is less likely to believe and internalize the information given by textbooks if they are too similar or too different in content knowledge compared to what the student already believes or knows. Granted, the nature of “too similar” and “too different” is not universally measurable nor does Clines (1995) suggest what this might be; however, it does support the idea that individual students have unique prior knowledge that shapes their engagement with textbooks. Clines claimed, “We use our initial beliefs (and knowledge) as a filter to reinforce what we already know rather than to examine and possibly rethink our positions” (p.3). Prior knowledge as a “filter” is a key component to the learning process and is a possible explanation for varied responses to textbook content and the level of engagement students have (Clines, 1995; Alexander and Jetton, 2000), particularly if we include not only declarative or content knowledge, but procedural and conditional knowledge as well.



## Genre Knowledge

Procedural and conditional knowledge need to be further complicated with respect to genre knowledge since the primary artifact this study includes is the textbook, a common educational genre at nearly all levels. When encountering disciplinary content within a recognizable genre, we must consider a student's prior engagement with it as an influential factor to current learning processes. Jamieson (1975) described "antecedent genres" that are previously experienced genres that aide students in current contexts, yet they can also create problems when students misread those situations as similar when they are not. Antecedent genres prevent the possibility of an altogether "new" genre; it is always connected to some prior genre(s) that have relevance to the current context that constitutes the formation of another genre. Somewhat similar is Freedman's (1987) "dimly felt-sense." While she did not examine genres as constructed from antecedents, Freedman clarified a student's "sense" of genre when engaging in a new one informs both the writing and text as they create it. In this case, "dimly felt-sense" connects prior knowledge with current action, suggesting a rhetorical response to text and situation.

More fitting for this study and for how students constitute a new system according to their textbook use is Anne Freadman's (2002) term "uptake," which she pulled from speech-act theory. For Freadman, "Uptake is first the taking of an object; it is not the causation of a response by an intention. This is the hidden dimension of the long, ramified, intertextual memory of uptake: the object is taken from a set of possibles" (p.142). Instead of tracing a cause and effect line of generation for the genre, "uptake" suggests "selection" from past experience—an idea of "sign" she borrows from Charles Peirce—as it fits the perceived context. This allows for

both genre awareness<sup>8</sup> and potential confusion to exist while also emphasizing memory and experience as part of the context rather than solely the immediate social context of a classroom. This fits with Goldman's (1997) discussion of how people learn from texts. Among several conditions she identified, awareness of genre structures assist in the learning process. Yet she commented this is more accurate for narrative texts with clearly defined structures aiding in reading comprehension and memory. Expository texts, which we would include textbooks, do not always have clearly defined linear structures; thus, awareness on how to adapt engagement with these structures is important (pp.367-8). Theoretically, students, then, "select" from their prior learning experiences—whether with textbooks or not—to navigate current engagement with the text.

### **Learner Diagrams**

Two studies present helpful diagrams understanding the learner's experience with technology (textbooks) in context. First, Luckin (2010) introduced the Ecology of Resources, positioning learner as the focus and center of the phenomenon taking place. The representative learner also includes their "individual history of experience" further defining the interaction taking place (p.95). By not universalizing the learner, the model, depicted in figure 1, accounts for interactions according to the sociocontextual factors present, including "environment," prior learner history, and filters that influence such engagement, including the instructor's direction and curriculum design among others. Luckin (2010) elaborated, "The subject matter to be learnt is usually filtered through some kind of organization, such as curriculum, that has been the subject of a process of validation by other members of the learner's society" (p.94). Though it is an effective model illustrating the individuality of the learner and their "filtered" experience that

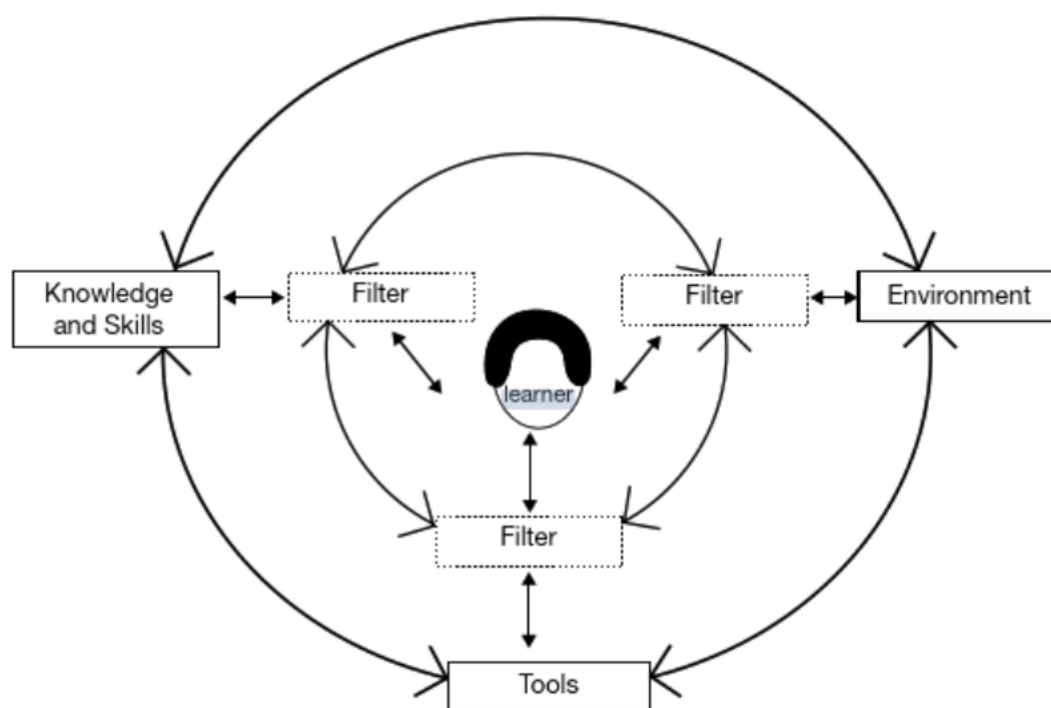
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<sup>8</sup> Pulling from Amy Devitt's (2004) definition and Irene Clark's (2011) explanation, I define "genre awareness" as a student's ability to interpret the text (genre) as it is constituted by the context (social).

accounts for unique sociocontextual factors, a primary limitation of Luckin’s model is its simplicity of “environment,” “tools,” and “filters.” Granted, though these are generalized headings that can be supplanted with more exact terms (i.e. textbooks for “tools,” FYC for “environment”), it also suggests a balanced positioning of these factors in the learning experience. Can it account for a student’s bypassing of tools to acquire knowledge and skills? Does it consider the filter of a student’s perceived identity within the institutional setting shaping

**Figure 1**

*Luckin’s (2010) Ecology of Resources*



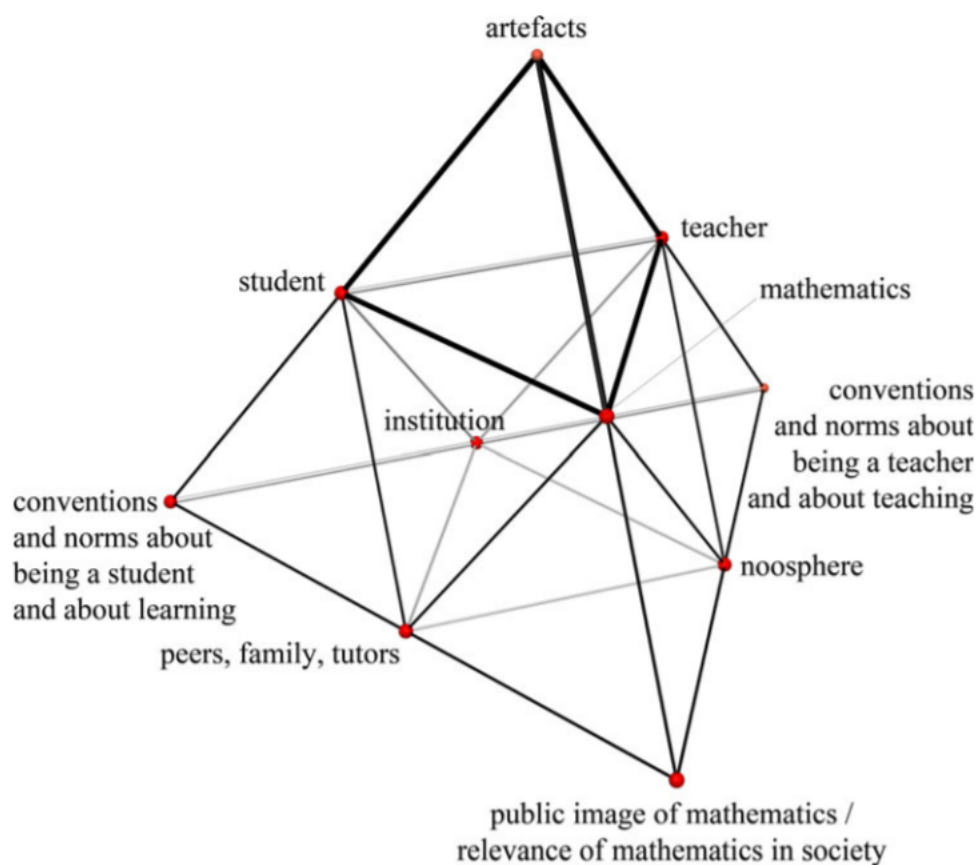
their experience as separate from the teacher’s interpretation of what that identity should be?

Building on Vygotsky’s original triangle of semiotic mediation and expanding Engeström’s model of activity system, educational scholars Rezat and Sträber (2012) developed

the socio-didactical tetrahedron, depicted in figure 2, to account for the complexities present in a learner's interaction with artifacts. Perceiving the previous models as too narrow or simplistic, particularly not accounting for an artifact's situatedness, Rezat and Sträber (2012) explained, "[A]rtifacts remain the focal point of the whole system in the sense that artifact use is culturally, institutionally, and historically situated and therefore the societal and cultural domain is always included" (p.649). Of particular importance in this model are the bottom points of conventions and norms about being a student, being a teacher, and public image of subject matter. While

## Figure 2

*Rezat and Sträber's (2012) socio-didactical tetrahedron*



these certainly influence engagement with the artifact, those points are not directly connected with each other and are filtered through individual presence of student, teacher, and subject. This model respects the uniqueness those entities incorporate as they interact, and it also includes the “institution” as a point of convergence where conventions and norms of teacher and student potentially intersect. By accounting for the uniqueness of all contextual factors, we have a better model for the present case study.<sup>9</sup>

### **Precedent Textbook Studies**

Issitt (2004) argued defining textbooks is an endless endeavor due to variables including design, use, and authorial intention; thus, they remain “rich resources for study” for that very reason (p.685). Still, even though there is a significant history of composition’s emphasis on textbooks, their design, and their presence in the writing classroom, there is an alarming dearth of research about student engagement with them outside of anecdotal evidence. The literature review above presents critiques of oversimplification (Jamieson, 1997; Janangelo, 1999; Liu Gale, 1999; Rose, 1981;1983; Spellmeyer, 1999) and ideological underpinnings (Ohman, 1972; Faigley, 1992; Gale & Gale, 1999; Welch, 1987), yet such investigations have not accounted for student engagement with them. Issitt (2004) questioned whether the field’s focus on textbook analysis “. . . with the aim of obtaining some kind of definition can be of any use at all if it is removed from the context of the learning environment and of actual users using them” (p.685). Textbooks should be understood according to how students engage with them and not by their design, intended use, or scholarly interpretation.

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<sup>9</sup> To fully explore this model would extend well beyond the size of this dissertation; thus, not all vertices and relationships will be discussed. The primary vertex will be student and their engagement with the artifact (textbook), considering all potential factors influencing this presented in the data.

Some related fields have studied engagement with textbooks such as Sullivan and Flower (1986) in technical communication and Besser et al. (1999) in journalism and mass communication. Sullivan and Flower (1986) examined textbook engagement according to how the “functional reader” engages with it, suggesting they do not move linearly through texts as much of the previous reading scholarship assumed. Their results indicated students were more user-oriented, operating with an aim to accomplish a goal rather than understanding the manner in which the guide or system worked. Yet, they often conflated the terms “user” and “reader,” suggesting these are interchangeable terms without consideration of what they mean.<sup>10</sup> Besser et al. (1999) focused on the students’ perceptions of their communications textbooks by using survey data. Though this revealed initial indications of how students position textbooks in their educational experience, the results do not illustrate how the students engaged with them. Additionally, their study included upper-level communication students, which means they have likely acclimated to the higher education setting and potentially the content area (domain knowledge).

Other disciplinary fields have included more studies on student engagement with texts though. Aagard, Connor, and Skidmore’s (2014) study used surveys focusing on reading across disciplines and found assessment practices (instructional influences) prompted students to engage with the textbooks more often. Also using surveys as the primary method, Jones (2011) and Juban and Lopez (2013), business education scholars, examined student engagement with textbooks. Jones (2011) claimed students valued the textbook but for the purpose of completing assignments, suggesting their roles as “users.” Juban and Lopez (2013) investigated how students “used” the textbook, yet they also conflated terms “using” and “reading,” not distinguishing

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<sup>10</sup> They presented the terms as reader/user as a section heading discussing this relationship, highlighting their view of interchangeability.

between the two actions. Describing the textbook as a tool, Fitzpatrick and McConnell (2008) examined textbook use by accounting and economics students using student-completed reading journals. The journals prompted students to describe their setting, distractions, mood, time spent reading the textbook as well as how many times they engaged with it for each unit. The results of their study indicated external factors such as mood and distractions do impact content retention, which suggests notions of “learning,” yet the “. . . the average time per chapter, the timing of the reading, and the times the textbook was used varied greatly between the courses” (2008). They speculated other factors such as “disciplines, instructor expectations and communications, and course design” (2008) could have contributed to the variance, yet they also acknowledge their results indicated higher levels of reading in a sophomore-level class compared to other studies focused on general education, first-year courses. Compared to the aforementioned studies’ use of upper classmen or those likely embedded in their disciplinary fields, Phillips and Phillips’ (2007) study focused on first-year reading in introductory accounting courses. Students completed reading journals to document their experience with assigned reading throughout the course, and results showed individual motivation influenced engagement with the textbook and reading patterns changed as the semester progressed.

Engineering and math have also presented initial research on this phenomenon of textbook engagement. Lee, McNeill, Douglas, Koro-Ljungberg, and Therriault (2013) is one of the few previous studies explicitly taking a phenomenological approach. Using think-aloud protocols with follow-up interviews, the investigators observed student engagement with textbooks while solving engineering problems. They identified three themes in the student experience: the search, working backwards, and constraint listing. The search described students seeking relevant information to assist their completion of the problem; however, the process of

searching was not identical for all. Some students utilized organizational cues such as table of contents or appendixes whereas others took more time to flip through chapters (Lee et al., 2013, p.278). Working backwards described students' use of example problems as guides for their own similar problem structures. Students appeared to scrap their own initial processes in favor of the textbook's (p.280). Finally, constraint listing included students' awareness of the textbook as "static" and lacking other resources' benefits of efficiency such as online searches (p.281). A notable result is that all ten participants utilized the textbook as a reference for finding answers and examples. This could be a potential influence of the tasks at hand (problem-solving), or it could indicate a broader student-engagement practice.

Weinberg, Wiesner, Benesh, and Boester (2012) studied how first-year mathematics students perceived and valued mathematics textbooks with prescribed paths to learning. By examining the textbook's aims and structure and gathering student data via an anonymous survey, they determined students valued certain parts of the textbook that they viewed as more helpful in completing tasks assigned (i.e. homework) (Weinberg, Wiesner, Benesh, and Boester, 2012, p.162). They noted two intriguing results of the study: 1) "many students report using the text in ways that are not consistent with the intended goals conveyed by the text structure," (p.166) and 2) "students claim that they read the textbook to gain understanding of the mathematics, but then neglect to use the text in the ways compatible with the author's attempts to develop that understanding," which the authors suggested might be ". . . a result of students' beliefs about mathematics" (p.167). Though their data could not definitively conclude what other factors contributed to how students use their textbooks, Weinberg et al. (2012) mentioned instructor framing, curricular framing, and assessment methods as possible influences. Rezat (2013), like Lee et al. (2013), examined the phenomenon of students using textbooks; however,



his methods included having students write a diary explaining when and why they engaged the textbook, qualitative interviews, and classroom observations (p.662). The results revealed students utilized textbooks based on teacher-mediated examples within class, focused on rules within visual markers (boxes), and visual similarities of teacher-mediated examples with those in the textbook (p.665). Rezat concluded, “[T]his study reveals that the use of the textbook as an instrument for learning mathematics is a complex learning process itself. The mathematics textbook is a complex artifact, which affords particular ways of being used and constrains others” (p.669). Rezat’s (2013) remarks can easily apply to other disciplinary textbooks, including those of composition.

### **Limitations of Previous Studies**

Previous scholarship indicates a general interest in not only textbook positioning in education, but what their utilization means; however, there are some notable limitations. First, several of the studies indicate students are the primary users, yet their methods do not fully reflect this. Studies including only surveys for data collection have already inscribed potential responses via the questions asked and potential responses given (Aagard, Connor, and Skidmore’s, 2014; Besser, 1999; Jones, 2011; Juban and Lopez, 2013; Weinberg, Wiesner, Benesh, and Boester, 2012). If student engagement with textbooks is the focus, then student voice should not be relegated to statistical representations categorized within prescribed, researcher-created terminology.

Though some studies included other data collection methods, there is also the potential for skewed data as a result of those methods. The use of reading journals or diaries provided valuable data regarding student perceptions and use of textbooks, but the mere activity of writing on this engagement potentially prompts the engagement itself. In studies where such diaries and

journals are part of the curriculum (Fitzpatrick & McConell, 2008; Phillips & Phillips, 2007), the assessment of their work increased student engagement that might not have been present initially.

A primary limitation of composition scholarship is the focus on textbooks as the object of study rather than the phenomenon of textbook engagement. So much of the discipline's focus has presented textual or comparative analysis of textbooks, noting their ideological and cultural characteristics (Ohman, 1972; Faigley, 1992; Gale & Gale, 1999; Welch, 1987), how this might manifest in composition classrooms, or the imbalance of a highly complicated practice of writing portrayed within the efficient simplicity of textbook-speak (Jamieson, 1997; Janangelo, 1999; Liu Gale, 1999; Rose, 1981;1983; Spellmeyer, 1999). Issitt (2004) similarly observed this limitation as significant oversight in current scholarship:

Textbook analysis cannot remain with the object and its intellectual construction; it has to move to the context of use because it is there that the agencies of teacher and learner act. It is there that knowledge is engaged with and there where the conscious mind accepts, rejects, uses and experiences the ideas it is presented with. (p.689)

Relegating our focus to textbooks as the object of study has also relegated students to a fringe status in research (Harris, 2012).

### **Calls for This Study**

The paradox of textbooks' commonality across subjects yet murky definitions presents the potential for extended research (Issitt, 2004, p.684). Though the traditional genre of textbooks are less prevalent today than a decade ago due to open educational resources (OERs) and other online content, their use within this digital age only increases the value of this research, particularly compared to prior studies and the generations represented within them. Both Harris

(2012) and Colby (2013) called for a shift away from examinations of textbook and instructor-created content towards the phenomenon of student use of those artifacts. Juban and Lopez (2013) called attention to potential differences that exist across disciplines: “An interesting question for future research would be whether student behaviors toward the elements of the text would vary for more qualitative versus more quantitative courses,” particularly how some might focus on specific chapter sections compared to others (p.329). Even the most extensive investigations into the textbook decontextualizes it from the actors involved in its use. Such approaches sterilize the dynamic interrelationships that occur.

Pointing specifically to composition scholarship, Rendleman (2009) called for “[a] comprehensive understanding and future research of the textbook technological system would include the reactions of students and teachers to their own textbook-tools,” utilizing more qualitative methods such as “surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews” (p.359). Though Rendleman’s (2009) work examined textbooks as the objects of study, his research laid the foundation to viewing textbooks as tools and the implications of such positioning. His call here is to extend the discussion and determine whether actual use truly reflects that positioning as defined by scholars. Of the final questions he posited, Rendleman asked for further investigations into the interaction between student and textbook:

What type or types of thinker-writer do students perceive themselves becoming and at what moments when they engage with the textbook tools? What textbook components do students perceive reinforce their conception of thinker-writer identity? When and how do students accept, modify, and challenge the thinking writing the heuristics and [instructional apparatus] promote? These questions would lead to an inquiry into the effects of the genre conventions that encourage and discourage thinker-writer identities, despite what the textbook-tools

encourage. And from there, future research would consider how rhetorical effects and grades reinforce and resist the advancement of identity possibility and the restriction of normative violence” (p.361).

Textbooks inhabit not just genre and educational systems, they exist in a system of use. Despite what previous scholarship presents, that system is defined not by instructors or scholars, but by students.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed precedent scholarship regarding textbooks within composition scholarship, exhibiting the primary focus on textbooks rather than the dynamic activity of how students engage with them. I also surveyed scholarly discussions for reader, learner, and user definitions to define how those roles might manifest in this study. Finally, I presented previous scholarship on textbook engagement across disciplines, documenting not only the general interest in the topic, but also the limitations of those studies as well.

As this chapter illustrated, composition studies has not pursued the topic of student engagement as much as other disciplines. Additionally, some researchers noted the potential that other disciplinary contexts could present different patterns of engagement with textbooks (Fitzpatrick & McConnell, 2008; Rezat, 2013). Though there remains a significant history of textbook research, the reasons above call for this study. By focusing solely on individual student interviews, I not only examine their experience with the textbook, but I do so through their words.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

To explore and describe the phenomenon of FYC students' engagement with composition textbooks, I utilized a qualitative case study methodology. Though FYC's ubiquity suggests a common experience for university students, the contextual variables—institution, class curriculum, student experience, textbook, instructor—present unique and situated phenomena, thus warranting a case study model.

Now a common research methodology in composition studies since Janet Emig's (1971) *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, case study affords researchers the ability to examine phenomena within and shaped by unique contexts. Scholars have commonly employed qualitative methods such as interviews in their case studies to examine perceptions of curricula (Durst, 1999), experience (Cook, 2009), and writing (Anson, 2000; Greene & Orr, 2007; Schaffer, 2020; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006) all within their respective contexts. For example, Durst (1999) investigated student perceptions of a FYC critical literacy curriculum though they personally held a more pragmatic goal of efficiency. Cook (2009) conducted a phenomenological case study of first-year teachers at various institutions and their perceptions of that experience. Other scholars examined student self-perceptions as writers over time (Schaffer, 2020), perceptions of individual writing drafts (Anson, 2000), and student experience with common terms—"academic writing," "genre"—across various disciplines (Greene & Orr, 2007; Thaiss and Zawacki, 2006). Though some of these studies (Durst, 1999; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006) mentioned the textbook as a contextual variable potentially shaping perceptions, this artifact was not part of the primary phenomena being investigated. Technical communication scholarship includes studies on the usability design of textbooks and how this theoretically affects student

activity (Armbruster & Anderson, 1985; Carter, 1985) yet also lack qualitative data pertinent to understanding the phenomenon of student engagement in context.

Studying how students engage composition textbooks has largely been unexplored in composition and rhetoric. From student interview data collected at the beginning, middle, and end of a sixteen-week semester, this study examined student engagement practices with textbooks through lenses of user, reader, and learner. Though multiple methods were used in this study, the heavy emphasis on interview data required heightened awareness and reflexivity of my role as researcher-teacher-participant.

This chapter explains the case study design and how it addresses the study's research question and contexts. After this explanation, I then describe the context including research site, institutional profile, textbook, and classroom curriculum. Next it provides the Institutional Review Board process, justification for participant recruitment, participant profiles, and data collection and analysis procedures. The final section discusses my researcher positioning. One final note for this chapter is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as a contextual factor, which had a direct impact on interview processes but still permitted the case study design to remain predominantly standard.<sup>11</sup>

## **Research Methodology**

### **Case Study**

According to Birnbaum et al. (2005), qualitative research is better equipped for “complex, multidimensional characteristics of a phenomenon” (p.125). The social science methodology of case study works well for such investigations, yet varying implementations

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<sup>11</sup> This remark is in relation to the implementation of chosen methods and methodology only. Any possible influence on study results will be discussed in those respective chapters.

reflect its flexibility and subsequent need for a clear definition in this study.<sup>12</sup> Several social science scholars describe case study as a qualitative method that recognizes the relation of data to its unique contexts, seeking to develop a thorough description of the case (Cresswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014; Yin, 2014) . Yin (2014) added the study's enmeshed phenomenon is inextricable without consideration of the variables shaping it.

As previously mentioned, Emig's (1971) work justified case study as a valuable methodology to composition and rhetoric. Her use of think-aloud protocols and interviews not only challenged the traditional research approaches to writing as a set of stages, but she introduced humanistic data through participant voices.<sup>13</sup> Other early case studies investigating unique student participants within bounded systems followed (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Perl, 1978), establishing case study as a common methodology for investigating complex, situated phenomena in the field. Many case studies examined a single student and their response to curricula. Nancy Atwell's (1988) case study of Laura, a special education student Atwell invited into her English classroom, documented the student's progress as both reader and writer when assigned literature rather than isolated reading and writing exercises. Similarly, Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman (1988) focused on a student's entrance into a disciplinary community, acquiring specific literacies associated with the disciplinary texts. Still, case studies have not been limited to investigating a single student's experience. For example, Herrington and Curtis (2000) investigated four student writers' navigation of varied writing tasks across disciplines and how each defined "academic writing."

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<sup>12</sup> Yin (2018) noted some scholars do not position case study as unique and "apart" from qualitative methodologies at large. However, its plasticity affords both quantitative and qualitative methods use, which permits various positioning as a methodology.

<sup>13</sup> She focused on one student, Lynn, but also included a summative chapter on seven other students as part of the case study.

However, each of these aforementioned studies position the individual students as cases rather than the context such as the FYC course. Two examples of multiple-participant, single case study design with the FYC context include Martha Wilson Schaffer (2020) and Russell K. Durst (1999). Schaffer (2020), primarily utilizing qualitative interview methods, interviewed four participants within the same semester of FYC to investigate their reflective views and ensuing awareness of writer identity within that space and in future contexts (p.92). Durst (1999) used interview and other qualitative methods to examine often conflicting views of a FYC, pragmatic-minded student with the critical literacy enthusiast teacher. Though their approaches provide a framework to investigate a specific phenomenon, neither fully examined student engagement with textbooks.

For this study, I used a similar approach to Schaffer's (2020), using primarily qualitative interviews for data collection. I've adopted Yin's (2018) definition of case study as "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context" (p.15). Though the phenomenon of student engagement with composition textbooks exists across sites, this study focuses on students in FYC residential courses at Liberty University during Spring 2021. This is a single case study with each student participant representing a subset (Yin, 2018) of that case—similar to the methodological designs of Schaffer (2020) and Durst (1999)—thus providing in-depth discussion of the phenomenon. The variables at play shaping this context cannot be suppressed nor removed from the results and discussion in this study.

Ironically, the prevalence of FYC student engagement with composition textbooks does not equate to equally robust scholarship on the subject as depicted in Chapter II. Considering the discipline's long history of examining student writing, pedagogical strategies, and textbooks in general, understanding just how students interact with this pedagogical genre is invaluable. Thus,



due to the lack of previous scholarship on the topic and the design of this case study, this is considered an exploratory case study since a certain “degree of rationale and direction” is present, and it has the potential “to identif[y]. . . propositions to be examined in a later study” (Yin, 2018, p.28). The purpose is to “produce an invaluable and deep understanding” of the case, “. . . resulting in new learning about real-world behavior and its meaning” (Johanek, 2000, p.5).

## Context

### Research Site

Liberty University is a private, evangelical liberal-arts institution located in Lynchburg, VA with an undergraduate enrollment for Fall 2020 of roughly 48,000 and about 42,000 graduate enrollment (Liberty University, 2021).<sup>14</sup> Average SAT score data were unavailable since Liberty lifted this requirement as part of their COVID-19 response for the academic year. During the study in Spring 2021, 268 students were enrolled in the FYC course ENGL 101: Composition and Rhetoric.

ENGL 101 is a required, three-credit hour, single semester course for all students who have not received prior credit by transferring from another accredited institution, AP course credit, or passing a CLEP test. Typically, course sections are capped at twenty-five students, though sections in the Spring semester average closer to twenty students per section.<sup>15</sup> The aim of the course is to develop students’ rhetorical awareness as communicators, which the course description illustrates:

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<sup>14</sup> The SCHEV data reflect total enrollment of both residential and online programs. The residential student population is considerably less than the total number, usually between 13,000-15,000 undergraduate students. Because Liberty University is a private institution, it does not have to publish all demographic data via IPEDS. Any further specified data may be requested, but it must be specified in the IRB approval as relevant to the study.

<sup>15</sup> Some universities have two required semesters for FYC whereas others maintain the single semester course as Liberty does. Additionally, a twenty-five student cap for FYC does not align with the CCCC’s statement stating it should not exceed twenty, yet many institutions do not have such a twenty student cap.

Through the critical engagement of a variety of texts, including written, oral, and visual, this course prepares students to become careful readers, critical thinkers, and skilled writers. Drawing upon rhetorical theory, it emphasizes the practices of analytical reading, informed reasoning, effective writing, and sound argumentation. The course requires 4,000 words of writing in no fewer than five writing projects, three of which are argumentative essays incorporating external sources. (Liberty University)

The course's intention is to prepare students for various disciplinary and career contexts and the respective writing situations within them. This aim aligns with the course learning outcomes adopted by the College of General Studies and the English Department, which are as follows:

1. Understand and practice reading, writing, and rhetoric within the context of a biblical worldview
2. Apply methods of sound reasoning (induction and deduction) and argumentation in writing
3. Proceed independently through the various stages of research and to integrate sources accurately and effectively
4. Apply the process approach (especially writing effective thesis, outlining, drafting, revising, and editing) to write competent essays. (Holt)

A unique variable to this course is it follows a hybrid model with a large lecture (every Monday) led by a single faculty member and small breakout sections (every Wednesday and Friday) led by graduate students, adjunct, and/or full-time faculty.<sup>16</sup> Monday lectures introduce a project, topic, or idea with all breakout sessions gathered in attendance for that time slot. On Wednesday and Friday, breakout groups then go in more detail with the topic and typically apply what was

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<sup>16</sup> While this model is uncommon at other universities, it is implemented in other classes at Liberty, including COMS 101, and is thus part of the university context at large.

discussed. Despite the separation of Monday large lectures and breakout sections on the other two days, all content is connected between the two as a singular course.

In this case, I serve as the lead instructor for the course, designing the curriculum, selecting the textbook, assignments, and readings, leading all Monday large lectures, coordinating all breakout sections, and overseeing the graduate students and faculty teaching them. Thus, I served dual roles as both instructor and researcher, which I discuss later in this chapter. Originally, I planned to use students from independent courses taught by another faculty member in order to avoid the dual roles in the participants' view, which could possibly influence their answers; however, due to lower enrollment in the Spring and planning constraints brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, administrators decided those courses would not be implemented, leaving only those sections under my oversight to pull participants from.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, this model—lead instructor with facilitating GAs—is uncommon for many first-year writing classrooms at other universities. Whereas graduate students do lead FYC courses, those at Liberty do not have the freedom to select individual readings, alter course assignment descriptions or schedules, or select from an approved textbook list. Due to Liberty's robust online student population and corresponding number of FYC sections offered coupled with a considerable number of adjunct faculty facilitating those courses, administration prioritizes curriculum consistency across sections by appointing a Subject Matter Expert (SME) to oversee individual class curriculum design, including assignment descriptions, point values, and textbooks. They have instituted the same model for residential courses to prevent too much

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<sup>17</sup> During the Summer and Fall of 2021, I spoke with the Chair of the English Department and Associate Dean for College of Arts and Sciences about using independent course sections for my study in Spring 2021, to which they agreed would such sections would be available. Independent sections are not uncommon, but there are often fewer sections compared to those within the hybrid model. Projected enrollment numbers released in September indicated independent sections would not be feasible to help both graduate students and faculty meet their contractual obligations for the academic year; thus, no such residential sections took place during the study.

variance between course sections and corresponding students' experiences, which explains the model described above.<sup>18</sup>

Cheryl Glenn's (2017) third edition of *The New Harbrace Guide: Genres for Composing* was the required textbook used for this course, and she described it as a "richly flexible writing guide include[ing] a rhetoric, a research manual, and a reader" (p.xvi). Glenn's text follows North American Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) and Carolyn Miller's (1984) "Genre as Social Action," focusing on rhetorical situations and genres (i.e. Memoirs, Evaluations, Position Arguments) fitting of those contexts or communities rather than as static forms.<sup>19</sup> Glenn's preface described that the choice of genre ". . . is to identify the primary purpose and social context for your writing and your audience—especially since no single genre limits the rhetorical strategies you can employ in response to a rhetorical opportunity for change" (p.xix). She also clarified her textbook's emphasis on the "rhetorical situation" and the "authority for using language to make change" as notably unique compared to other textbooks (p.xv). Situating genre as a "response" or action to a "rhetorical opportunity" or social context further suggests that the writer recognizes how genre is not limited to just recognizing and understanding static characteristics or "limits," which would align with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) genre models.

The curriculum design reflected Glenn's view of genres and my intention for students to use the textbook as a resource of disciplinary knowledge. Ideally, the textbook introduced concepts and assignments, provided structure for composing, and presented examples of genres they are required to write, yet it was not *the* comprehensive resource for the class. It was

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<sup>18</sup> "Administration" refers to the Provost office and affiliated decision-makers. The SME model exists for all schools at the university and is not limited to any one entity or department; however, it is primarily for courses with high student populations and sections such as those considered general education.

<sup>19</sup> This is the same theoretical premise adopted for the ENGL 101 course curriculum.

supplemented by in-class instruction, assignment descriptions, and the publisher software, all tailored with awareness of the university context. Class lectures, exercises, and discussions often correlated to the textbook's content—in some cases it served as the primary object of study when students analyzed and discussed the example essays—yet some class meetings provided instruction, material, or terminology not explicitly mentioned in the book. The course schedule did not include assigned readings every class period, but they were more common when introducing a new concept, genre, or practice. Class meetings covering research, evaluating sources, and MLA documentation also included corresponding chapters. Workshop or drafting days did not have assigned readings though students could utilize the textbook during drafting stages. I assigned auto-graded activities from the publisher's software<sup>20</sup> that were associated with required readings and upcoming topics to emphasize that content, yet as the study revealed, students occasionally misinterpreted this software as the textbook itself. The unique curriculum tailored for this course, including how I incorporated and supplemented the textbook, reflected my prior teaching experience and research; thus, this context is not replicable at other institutions' FYC courses even when using the same textbook or publisher software.

Also, students had the choice to purchase a print copy through Liberty's bookstore or another third party, or they could use the eBook version through MindTap. Many participants chose the eBook version though a few still had access and/or used the print copy.<sup>21</sup> The textbook content was identical for both media, but the presentation—consistent print page lengths versus digital text with scroll bars—differed as some participants mentioned.

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<sup>20</sup> MindTap is Cengage's embedded digital platform purchased through a course fee model upon registration. It offers additional support via eBook, additional readings and activities, a database, and many others. Such software are common with many major educational publishers. Students using the eBook in this study accessed it via this software.

<sup>21</sup> Although this variable warrants further research on textbook medium and its impact on student engagement, this study examined the engagement with the textbook in either form.

While this course model allowed little flexibility for GAs or faculty to choose different textbooks, writing projects, or assigned readings, their facilitation of the course material (i.e. pedagogical performance) remains a unique variable. Some research participants mentioned the GA or my instruction as influencing how they engaged with the textbook.

### **Research Design**

Based on my prior experience as a student adapting to course contexts to succeed as well as my experience as an instructor witnessing students' various ways of engaging with textbooks, I designed this study to determine what propositions (Johanek, 2000; Yin, 2018) are present that could explain this phenomenon. Originally, I theorized students adapt their engagement with textbooks based on classroom contexts such as the level of textbook incorporation corresponding with assessed activities. I also theorized some students would not perceive the disciplinary classroom context as unique and would engage with textbooks based on prior experience in any discipline.

This single case study with multiple participants investigated student engagement with the composition textbook as the primary phenomenon. Initial participant recruitment took place prior to Spring 2021 residential class meetings, followed by a three-stage interview process during the semester. Table 1 presents the entire study timeline and corresponding descriptions. As a result of the single case, multiparticipant design, a likelihood of variance in the results existed, thus improving their external validity and also affording two stages of analysis for depth of understanding (Yin, 2018). The data provided by all cases will address my primary research question, which is as follows:

- How do Liberty University students engage with the required composition textbook as readers, users, and learners?

Limited data and scholarship on this phenomenon warrants using a single, broad research question, which is a similar approach employed by Diane Barone (1999). She also noted the limitations in previous scholarship and the uncertainty of what the results might reveal, and she justified the broad research question as it affords direction for the study and its data. Any information gathered through this approach will later serve as groundwork for subsequent studies.

**Table 1***Case Study timeline and overview*

Research Step	Method	Timeline	Description
Participant Recruitment  Compiling (Yin, 2011)	Baseline survey created and distributed using Microsoft Forms	January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant survey disseminated to all ENGL 101 students beginning January 18<sup>th</sup></li> <li>Survey data collected and potential participants contacted before January 27<sup>th</sup>, first day of residential class meetings</li> </ul>
Interviews  Compiling (Yin, 2011)	1 <sup>st</sup> Interview	Week 1 January 25 <sup>th</sup> -28 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semi-structured</li> <li>Focused on participants' prior experiences with textbooks and educational settings</li> <li>Gathered participants' expectations of textbooks prior to engagement with ENGL 101 textbook.</li> <li>Wrote research notes during interviews.</li> </ul>
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Interview	Week 7 March 8 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semi-structured</li> <li>Artifact-guided interview using ENGL 101 textbook</li> <li>Focused on participants' engagement with ENGL 101 textbook to that point.</li> <li>Compared to initial expectations from first interview.</li> <li>Wrote research notes during interviews.</li> </ul>
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Interview	Week 14 April 26 <sup>th</sup> -30 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semi-structured</li> <li>Artifact-guided interview using ENGL 101 textbook</li> <li>Focused on participants' engagement with ENGL 101 textbook during semester.</li> <li>Gathered participant reflection on their engagement with textbook.</li> <li>Wrote research notes during interviews.</li> </ul>
Disassembling and Reassembling (Yin, 2011)	Transcription, Coding, Research Notes, and Memos	January 2021-December 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Synthesized research notes.</li> <li>Transcribed all video recordings.</li> <li>Maintained research memo journal after each transcription and coding step.<sup>22</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>22</sup> I was intentional to write research memo journal entries following transcription rather than initial interviews, and this is explained further in the following sections.



## **IRB Approval**

Due to my identity as both student and instructor in relation to this study—I am a PhD student at Old Dominion University and an instructor at Liberty University—I applied for IRB approval from both institutions. I elected for ODU to be the institution of record because it is the impetus for this study, a culmination of many years of coursework, research, and experience. My chair, Dr. Dan Richards, is listed as the Principal Investigator (PI) for the study while I am listed as an investigator. Because Dr. Richards is the PI, student participants were notified and could elect to contact him in the event they had questions or concerns but did not want to contact me since I was their instructor. Once ODU approved my IRB application, I provided all associated forms to Liberty's IRB department and received approval to conduct the study.<sup>23</sup>

## **Participant Recruitment**

The unique semester schedule for Spring 2021 afforded me extra time recruiting students. Liberty's first day of class was January 18<sup>th</sup> where faculty and students met remotely via Microsoft Teams. This served as an introduction and a brief discussion of the course overview. Students then did not meet for class in any capacity until January 27<sup>th</sup>. Essentially, this atypical interruption served as a Spring Break, yet in this case it was an isolation period due to the ongoing pandemic. My initial in-class announcement and recruitment email went out to students on January 18<sup>th</sup>, giving me time to gather survey data and send out invitations to participate in the study and sign consent forms prior to the first interview, which I needed to conduct before the students' first assigned reading in the class.

The survey (see Appendix A) asked students for basic demographic information, previous educational setting, chosen textbook medium for the course (print or digital), whether they had

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<sup>23</sup> IRB Exemption: 007.010421

taken ENGL 100 at Liberty, ENGL 101 past the add/drop period during a prior semester, or ENGL 101 at another institution, and ultimately if they would like to participate in the study. Demographic information, previous educational setting, and textbook medium were not controlling variables during the selection process. However, students who had been in ENGL 100 or another ENGL 101 were not selected to be participants in the study. If they took ENGL 100 at Liberty, they had prior experience with the Cengage MindTap platform which likely would influence their engagement with the textbook in this study. Likewise, experience in ENGL 101 at Liberty or another institution could have influenced their expectations of what the textbook is/does and their engagement with it. It was important to identify any changes or shifts that might occur within a student's initial FYC experience. Including those who had ENGL 100 or 101 before would have presented an additional variable to consider in the results.

I knew it would be a challenge having first-year students commit to three interviews across an entire semester. As they are acclimating to the transition between high school and college, they are also taking an intense course load. Therefore, I incentivized participation by offering Amazon gift cards following their participation in each interview cycle. They received a five-dollar gift card following both the first and second interview and then a ten-dollar gift card following the third.<sup>24</sup>

Forty-two students completed the survey prior to January 27<sup>th</sup>. Table 2 includes survey results and the resulting number of participants signing a consent form. After excluding those who previously took ENGL 100 or ENGL 101 and those electing not to participate, twenty

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<sup>24</sup> To help with logistics and be more efficient with time, I did not send gift cards until all interviews were completed for that cycle. Students were aware their gift cards would be sent electronically to their email address once all interviews were done for that cycle.

**Table 2***Pre-Course Recruitment Survey Results*

Results Description	# of Students
Surveys Sent	268
Respondents	42
Willing to Participate	36 <sup>25</sup>
Took ENGL 100 or 101 previously	15
Selected and Asked to Participate	20
Signed Consent forms and Participated	10

prospective participants remained, all of whom were officially invited to participate in the study.

Ten signed the consent form prior to the first interview and thus became participants.

**Participants**

These ten participants read and signed the IRB consent form to participate in the study, and all but one completed each of the three interviews. The participant pool had a median age of 19 and included five females and five males with varying educational backgrounds and chosen textbook medium. Participants also had different GAs leading their breakout sections although a few participants had the same GA or were in the same section together.

Though textbook medium and previous educational background were not controlling or excluding variables during participant selection, they added more depth to the data and its analysis. Participant interviews revealed affordances and limitations of engagement with both print and digital textbooks, and while conclusions cannot be drawn from this study, there are possible investigative themes related to educational background and engagement strategies as well.

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<sup>25</sup> One respondent dropped ENGL 101 prior to being asked to participate in the study.

## Data Collection

Case study design permits various methods of data collection and analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013; Yin, 2018); however, because this study's research question focuses on student engagement with the textbook and not whether textbook content transfers to student writing, the primary data collection method was participant interviews. Course artifacts such as student writing, course syllabus and assignment descriptions were not relevant to determine student engagement, and textual analysis of these documents would not inform exactly how students engage with textbooks. While their exclusion simplifies data collection, some scholars might challenge that this prevents research triangulation with three data points, which "corroborat[e] a particular event, description, or fact being reported by a study" (Yin 2018, p.81). Still, using three sets of interviews during different weeks of the semester provided three data points and also tracked any changing student perceptions of the textbook as the semester progressed.

Each set of interviews examined student engagement with textbooks at different times: the first set asked about students' use of textbooks in high school; the second set queried what their current engagement with the composition textbook was; the final set prompted students to reflect on their overall engagement with the textbook and any changes that might have occurred. Cook (2009) used a similar three-interview process in her study of FYC teacher experiences with the first set asking what led them to teaching, the second set what that ongoing experience was like, and the third a reflection on previous responses and how they would define the experience (p. 276). Schaffer (2020) also included a three-interview process in her study of FYC students and how their self-perceptions of writer identity developed. Both Cook (2009) and Schaffer (2020) found the data collected from the three interviews as sufficient for their studies.

## Interviews

Because “my subject of inquiry can talk and think” (Seidman, 2013, p.8), qualitative interviewing served as the primary method for this study. It allows students to reconstruct their experience engaging with textbooks where other methods, such as analyzing student writing samples, places more emphasis on the researcher’s interpretation than the student’s. Seidman (2013) further noted, “If the researcher’s goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry” (p.10). Within the context of Composition studies, in-depth interviewing produces valuable data on reading and writing, particularly “reader behaviour and perceptions” (Griffin, 2013, pp. 183-4). Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher (2012) asserted the importance of interviewing to understand and “assemble more-direct information of personal literacy values” (p.45). Using semi-structured interviews afforded a consistent base yet also helped balance the role of researcher and participant in this meaning-making process compared to the traditional and rigid structured model. This conversational element allowed students to elaborate on their engagement in ways I may not have originally anticipated, adding more nuance to the study.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, ODU’s IRB office requested all interviews be conducted utilizing web-conferencing software. Liberty adopted Microsoft Teams<sup>26</sup> for remote teaching beginning Spring 2020 and throughout the pandemic; thus, students were likely familiar with the software prior to this study. I recorded each interview with the participant’s permission and downloaded it to my personal Microsoft OneDrive account with secure, password protected

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<sup>26</sup> Liberty University’s IT department confirmed there is no outside, public access to recorded Teams Meetings unless I were to alter settings and make the files public.

sign-in. Individual files were further downloaded to the case study database (Yin, 2014), on my personal laptop and Google Drive, both with secure, password protected sign-in.

I conducted the first semi-structured interview (See Appendix B) with each participant during the first week of residential, in-person class meetings (January 25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>) to determine what their current perceptions and overall expectations of textbooks were. Each question had potential sub-questions which sought data related to why participants had these expectations and where they originated. Additional questions focused on their previous educational setting and engagement with textbooks, followed by general questions about what their engagement might be like (i.e. annotating, highlighting, note-taking).

The second interview (See Appendix C) followed the semi-structured model but was artifact guided. Conducted during week 7 (March 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>), this interview began with participants reflecting on their engagement with the textbook thus far in the course, including what prompted engagement and when, whether it had changed at any point and why, and a comparison to their engagement with textbooks in their previous educational setting. Participants were then asked to reveal how they engaged with the textbook by sharing their screen (eBook) or showing their textbook (print). I then proceed to ask questions based on their specific methods of engagement for further explanation.

The third and final interview (See Appendix D), which was also artifact guided, took place during week 14 (April 26<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>) and prompted participants to reflect on their engagement with textbooks and whether their expectations or engagement had changed. Students who described a change in their engagement during the semester were also prompted to illustrate both their initial and final engagement practices. Following the first and second interviews, I observed students seemed to have different perceptions of what a textbook does; thus, I also asked them to

define textbook in this interview because of its potential to inform their overall engagement with it.

Upon completion of each interview set, I sent the aforementioned Amazon gift cards to the participants. In no way does the value of the gift cards equal the value of their responses nor the time they took to answer my questions; however, I wanted to offer them some form of a thank you beyond what I could express in words. These incentives were approved by both IRB offices at ODU and Liberty.

### **Research Notes**

During each interview, I wrote brief notes on participant responses using a printed copy of the interview questions as the template. Since these notes embody my thinking and what I found important *during* the interview, I intentionally separated them from my research memos. Conceptually, it is impossible to fully divide the two, yet by creating a note synthesis log during data collection and a research memo after, I could theoretically create distance between my initial ideas on what was happening and the participants' full statements existing in the transcript. The research notes reflect my initial "highlighting" and can then be used to help identify potential bias or researcher presence in the data later if there are important factors I have overlooked that coding and memoing reveal. I chose to do this with Yin's (2011, 2018) call for data triangulation and rigor (Yin, 2018) in mind.

### **Research Memos**

Rather than compiling a full research journal with entries throughout data collection and analysis, I elected to create research memos when transcribing and analyzing. I recorded my thoughts on concepts and themes following each interview transcription, but I did not return to my research notes or synthesis entries in an effort to preserve both the student voice and the

timeline of data interaction.<sup>27</sup> Corbin and Strauss (2008) distinguished memos as “more complex and analytical” compared to the more concise field notes (*Basics*). The memos bring my thoughts much closer to the student statements and reveal any possible themes or concepts missed during the initial notes and synthesis.

### **Recordings**

As indicated earlier, I conducted all interviews using Microsoft Teams, which also had a recording feature and automatically downloaded them to my OneDrive account. Microsoft Teams produced live transcriptions that were easily accessible following each interview, but when converted to a Word document, it stripped the text of any formatting, including distinguishing and identifying speakers. Thus, I utilized Sonix.com, an automated and password-protected transcription service, to generate transcripts identifying separate speakers, and then edited the entire transcript for accuracy.

### **Data Analysis**

Following transcription, I utilized the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) software NVivo provided by ODU to conduct multiple coding cycles.<sup>28</sup> I began weaving the data and my analysis through a constant back and forth between coding the data and continued memoing (Saldaña, 2016). The first cycle coding included in vivo and open coding. I elected to use them as opposed to other coding methods due to the lack of prior scholarship on this subject—and thus lack of codes—and to honor the student voices present in the data (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo codes honored the student voice through more original naming of codes

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<sup>27</sup> What I experienced during data transcription is different than the immediate experience of the interview itself when I took field notes. Theoretically, sitting with the data and examining it more closely could produce different results and represent two different data points.

<sup>28</sup> This software assisted with data management and retrieval for initiating analysis and not conducting the analysis itself.



that will benefit later studies whereas open coding permitted me to synthesize larger bodies of text into a more condensed yet still complete form. One challenge during this process was the amount of codes present following the first cycle. Though anticipated, it still far exceeded the number mentioned by Cresswell (2013), who preferred “25-30” in the first cycle (p.184).

Honoring the unique experiences of ten participants across three interviews warrants such a high number of codes, but it also prioritized efficient and effective second cycle coding to make the data more manageable.

I utilized focused coding during the second cycle, consolidating micro-level codes from the first cycle under an umbrella term or phrase. Decreasing the number of codes fostered for more salient categories and themes. Yin (2011) emphasized the importance of cross-case analysis for both similarities, “negative cases,” and “rival thinking” (p.196), and even though this is not a multiple case study, cross-participant analysis similarly revealed themes among participants whereas more unique codes honored the individual experience. This stitching process connected separate experiences together while still honoring the unique qualities that separated participants.

### **Researcher Positioning**

Throughout this study, I’ve embraced Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) concept of “sensitivity,” but I’ve also extended it beyond their definition as well. They positioned “sensitivity” as the proper term for a researcher’s presence in qualitative studies:

Sensitivity stands in contrast to objectivity. It requires that a researcher put him- or herself into the research. Sensitivity means having insight, being tuned in to, being able to pick up on relevant issues, events, and happenings in data. It means being able to present the view of participants and taking the role of the other through immersion in data. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)

Without prior scholarship and with one primary method (interviews), I must have a heightened awareness of my involvement in the study, to not speak for or over the student voices yet also not give a sense of complete objectivity as though I am not present in the analysis and discussion either. They further clarify, “What is relevant is the meaning given to this equipment by the participant and how those meanings are formed and transformed” while also realizing that the research has “. . . a comparative base from which to work” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). My awareness of a textbook’s history, its purpose, and overall design is that comparative base reflecting my professional knowledge and position, and any variants to this pre-existing knowledge should be identifiable as the participant voice. One caveat explored later in “Limitations” is my prior engagement with textbooks as a student, which further hybridizes my role in the study.

I inhabit a teacher-participant-prior user-researcher role. My role as the teacher extended Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) “sensitivity” to include moments where participants may be hesitant to divulge descriptions of their textbook engagement. There are several points where students apologize prior to or after a response, indicating their awareness of my instructor identity and a lack of “engagement” with the textbook might not be what I expect or desire. Alternatively, it is possible students recognized my role as teacher and thus engaged more often with the textbook than they would have had they not been participants. This is where the unique model of having a teacher lead the large lecture and GAs facilitate breakout sections is an affordance. Though I maintained the teacher role, students engaged more often with their GAs, who also evaluated their work and maintained attendance records; therefore, it is plausible students did not alter their

behaviors within this unique context.<sup>29</sup> Though this situation was unavoidable as I described earlier in the chapter, I understand my involvement with the data extends to multiple levels.

### **Limitations**

With my awareness of positioning in mind, I crafted the research question and chose my methods to avoid design-based ethical flaws such as measuring the efficacy of the course. Though the results of the study and ensuing analysis might impact how I incorporate the textbook for future semesters, interview questions did not intentionally solicit information on the course or the instructor's success nor was that considered in the data coding or analysis.

Another limitation is my use of in vivo coding when I am also the instrument gathering and analyzing the data. As Seidman (2013) argued, we cannot overlook the interviewer/researcher as the instrument gathering data, yet this person can be adaptive and flexible (p.26). I can address any concerns of validity related to my role as the instrument “. . . through the (internal and external) consistency of information across a participant's interviews (1,2, and 3) as well as with other participants (results from other interviews at the same time)” (Seidman, 2013, pp.28-29). Ideally, in vivo coding originates from student participants when gathered via interviews, yet there are instances where student responses indicated they were aware of my role as both researcher and instructor. However, as Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher (2013) contended, semi-structured interviews present a “loosely structured dialogic exchange” as the participant and researcher “engage in making and interpreting meaning” (p.45). Though students did not review the interview notes, study results, or discussion, the three sets of interviews for each participant as well as cross-participant analysis revealed patterns that directed my understanding of the data.

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<sup>29</sup> I elected not to have participants maintain reading journals because such activity could easily influence their engagement patterns, likely prompting them to engage more often because documenting what they had or had not done initiates reflection on their processes.

The multiple cycles of coding in conjunction with ongoing research memoing embodied the fluid inductive-deductive process described by Yin (2011)<sup>30</sup> and Merriam and Tisdell (2015), yet I still inhabit multiple roles in the study. Students were aware of my role in conjunction with the textbook: lack of engagement with it potentially reflected a resistance to my role as teacher. Whereas previously established codes in other studies would limit such potential influence by me, the lack of previous scholarship on this topic did not provide previous codes to work with. Nevertheless, David Gray (2014) cautioned of possible bias when using previous research classifications when naming codes. Utilizing any cues such as apologetic remarks helped me identify areas why my identity might be reflected in the data. The codes were valuable, but they might not have been as readily apparent if a third-party interviewer conducted the interviews. Still, I conducted analysis with this in mind and used the research memos as my knowledge and thought process repository, a discussion between the data and myself as well as a reflexive interaction between previous and current thoughts. The consistent back and forth between coding and memoing reflected an “intuitive process” of naming between researcher experience, research knowledge, and participant responses (Merriam & Tisdell, p.210). The entire process represented my “search for concepts” and meaning-making (Yin, 2011, p.93), but I acknowledge the limitation my role plays in this research.

Much of my pre-study “wrestling” was with making the study rigorous, especially with the idea of triangulating data (Yin, 2011; Yin, 2018) when interviews were my primary data source, which is why I divided research notes and memos to coordinate my presence in the data. A research journal typically spans an entire study, prior to or beginning with data collection on through data analysis, but I was concerned this could hide potential researcher bias or at least

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<sup>30</sup> Yin’s (2011) view of deductive focused more on concepts from prior scholarship rather than through the process of coding as Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described.

make it more difficult to trace. Thus, I divided the concept of the research journal into research note synthesis taken during data collection and research memos written during data analysis. They are chronologically divided at the point where data collection concludes to represent my initial, entangled thoughts during interviews (notes) with thoughts during transcription (memos) where I engage more fully and slowly with the student voice. This still embraces the idea of understanding the phenomenon, but by comparing notes with memos and identifying concepts not originally acknowledged in the notes, I can theoretically parse myself and the student voice more. Those themes that were present earlier would be points I identified as important yet were still encased by the limited experience of not yet finishing all the interviews.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Exploring student engagement with the FYC textbook presented a rich and diverse data pool, yet without preestablished codes from prior case studies, this study's purpose is twofold: to answer the research question—How do Liberty University students engage with the required composition textbook as readers, users, and learners?—and to establish potential codes for future studies. This chapter elucidates the relationship between participant data and researcher coding to fulfill the latter purpose. Ideally, the connection between how student voices represented by in vivo codes informed the focused coding I generated will be clear. The discussion and implications will then return to address the research question in full.

#### Participant Data

Ten students responded to the official invitation to participate and signed the IRB consent form. Of the participants—five female and five male—only one indicated their high school experience was primarily in a homeschool setting while the other nine were private or public. Six participants initially chose the digital textbook whereas four purchased a print copy. Table 1 presents each participant, their demographic data, chosen textbook medium, and previous educational background.

#### Coding

Conducting in vivo coding to honor participant voices proved beneficial but also challenging. It produced a real<sup>31</sup> naming of the data, and my initial rounds of coding proved quite fruitful in the form of 345 codes across 29 interview transcripts. This daunting sum reflected my

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<sup>31</sup> “Real” represents the authenticity stemming from participant voices.

**Table 3***Participants' demographic and background information*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Textbook Medium <sup>32</sup>	Previous Educational Background
Abigail	Female	18	Print	Public
Cadence	Female	18	Digital	Private
Caleb	Male	18	Print	Public
Delaney	Female	18	Digital	Private
Elijah	Male	19	Digital	Private
Jacob	Male	19	Digital	Private
James	Male	18	Digital	Public
Kasey	Female	19	Digital	Public
Kelly	Female	21	Print	Homeschool
Malachi	Male	30-39	Print	Public

limited experience with qualitative coding and embodied Richards and Morse's (2007) statement, "If it moves, code it" (p.146). I further immersed myself in the data through multiple rounds of coding until I could identify similarities and group them into 54 codes,<sup>33</sup> which is still more than Cresswell's (2013) recommended "25-30" (p.184) during the first round; however, this was manageable and could be further collapsed during subsequent rounds. I then moved to focused coding, during which I omitted the codes not addressing the research question and identified 28 although some redundancy still existed. Following the final round, I finished with 16 codes which I organized into six categories:

1. Prioritized Purpose
2. Generic Recognition

<sup>32</sup> Table 2 reflects the chosen medium as indicated at the time of the survey. Some participants revealed they used a different medium or a combination of both as the course progressed.

<sup>33</sup> I chose not to list all 54 codes in the dissertation since this was part of the process but not necessarily a final result; not all were relevant to the research question, and the space needed to list those codes would be significant.

3. Textbook Perception
4. Contextual Influence
5. Content Navigation
6. Adaptation

Each category is a partial explanation for the participants' described engagement with the composition textbook during this study. Examining just one would provide an isolated and incomplete understanding of engagement; thus, these should be interpreted in conjunction with one another to reflect the student experience, which will be addressed in the discussion and implications.

### **Codes to Categories**

The following section explains the emergence of the six categories and associated focused and participant-produced in vivo codes represented within each. Table 1 provides the category, corresponding focus codes, and description. Though this organization actually presents the category before the code and is reverse of this study's coding and categorization process—codes led to categories—this method is necessary to effectively present and understand the data.<sup>34</sup>

### **Prioritized Purpose**

I list “Prioritized Purpose” first because in many cases this element exists before actual engagement with the text—though it can easily fluctuate at any time—and thus shapes the student's approach. Though participants did not use the term “purpose,” their responses often revealed varied end-goal reasoning as to why and how they engaged with the textbook.

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<sup>34</sup> There are many instances where codes overlap, where student responses could fit multiple themes at once. The themes produced here should not be interpreted as distinct and defined borders where all data is static and separated; instead, the data, as is the case for all qualitative data, is messy and layered.



**Table 4**

*Thematic Categories, corresponding in vivo codes, and category description*

Category	Associated Focus Codes	Description
Prioritized Purpose	Assessment Answers; Academic Performance; Finding a Level of Comfort	The end-goal or primary reason the participant engaged with the textbook at a particular time.
Generic Recognition	Textbook Aesthetics; Generic Features of Textbooks	The specific textbook characteristics identified by the participant; these could be perceived as helpful or avoided as unnecessary.
Textbook Perception	Textbook Definition; Textbook is Supplemental; Textbook as Arbitrator; Textbook-Class Intertwine	The participant's interpretation of the textbook, including its value in relation to accomplishing goals in the FYC class.
Contextual Influence	Teacher Pattern; Time	The potential factors inherent to a participant's experience at Liberty and described as influencing their engagement with the textbook and/or perception of it.
Content Navigation	Skim; Seek External Resources; Unique Operations	The strategies and processes by which the participant engaged the textbook; how they "moved" through it.
Adaptation <sup>35</sup>	Adapt; Sufficient Need	The shifts or changes that occurred or were described by the participant, usually correlating with recognized "patterns."

Additionally, "prioritized" not only honors the terminology used by several participants, it embraces the essence of how students operated as user, learner, or reader at different times. In some cases, a participant might have multiple purposes such as to learn and

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<sup>35</sup> Adaptation is the most unique category as it correlates with other categories and describes changes in the participant's function during the study.

complete assignments, yet one might carry more importance according to their contextual factors.

### *Assessment Answers*

This focused code describes a participant's intention to gain information perceived as needed for an assessment and was most common when students referenced "tests," "quizzes," "assignments," and "assessments." The expectation of finding "answers" was more prevalent in the first interview before students acclimated to our composition course which does not have many objective-based assessments.<sup>36</sup> Though students mentioned engaging the textbook to earn high grades or improve course performance in subsequent interviews, the correlation of textbook content and assessment answers did not continue except for one participant mentioned at the end of this section.

As already noted, some students fully expected to use the textbook for assessment answers. In his first interview, Caleb detailed such an expectation:

The reason I say like the books and stuff help is like, like sometimes if the professors give open-note like books and quizzes and stuff like that—like they'll have it open book—like it's easy for me, like to refer back to the book and stuff on a question. I know that helps me with like quizzes, and I know like just looking over the book and stuff or sometimes things that the professors might miss during instruction which is good to like see and go over review.

Caleb grounded his expectations of the textbook in prior experience in other courses, and he also implied the textbook has broader coverage than the professor's in-class instruction; thus, he

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<sup>36</sup> Objective-based assessments in this course might include MindTap activities and the final exam, both of which provide multiple choice questions. The course does not include planned in-class quizzes or quizzes over readings, key terms and definitions, or other textbook content.

perceived the textbook content was the primary content assessed. James also mentioned this in his first interview, saying he didn't plan to engage with it much except to "get answers to quizzes and tests," and his third interview revealed he engaged it even less after the MindTaps<sup>37</sup> ended. Delaney expressed knowing there would be an associated grade was the primary drive for her engagement with the textbook:

If I knew I'd be quizzed on them. I'd definitely read the first couple of paragraphs. Maybe the first couple of pages. . . But if I am not going to be quizzed on it, like I know I'm not going to get a grade, but it might be used for paper, I'll highlight probably the thesis and maybe read the first couple paragraphs, read the last couple of paragraphs, then move on to other homework. Divide my time like that.

Unlike Caleb and James, Delaney mentioned the possible connection to writing papers, yet whether it was quizzes, tests, or papers, she appeared to use the assessment itself as a sort of filter in how she engaged the text.

Jacob is the only participant where this code appeared in all three interview cycles; therefore, his expectation of the textbook-assessment correlation never changed. In his first interview, Jacob said he would engage with the textbook for "safety purposes" because if he didn't read, he might "risk missing some information" that correlated to a potential quiz:

Maybe if I'm not understanding, maybe suggest that key information that I, I need to fully grasp the concept being taught, so I wouldn't want to miss out on that and, you know, that small information is holding me down or holding me away from, you know, fully grasping the concept or whatever is being taught 'cause I know, I know sometimes people

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<sup>37</sup> MindTap is the name of third-party, publisher software used in the course. This software houses the etextbook and some homework assignments related to style, grammar, and terminology and typically end just after midsemester.

may fail exams or may fail interviews or may fail questionnaires 'cause of [a] small detail.

Contrasting his peers, Jacob explicitly expressed a need to “grasp the concept[s]” for understanding even though his purpose still seemed to be passing assessments. During his second interview, Jacob mentioned that his engagement with the textbook was often in conjunction with completing MindTap activities the day before they were due, and in his final interview, Jacob mentioned impending finals as a reason for increased engagement with the textbook. He engaged the textbook “to kind of recall and collect that information.” Each participant response with this code expected their understanding or awareness of the textbook’s content to be assessed, relegating it to a primary purpose of delivering information. This positioned the text as a foundation for the class and assessments, yet it also ran contrary to its design which is to facilitate their development as a writer.

### *Academic Performance*

Most would logically conclude “assessment answers” and “academic performance” should be collapsed together; however, these naturally separated in the data because participants distinguished between receiving information for “tests” or “quizzes” versus performance as a whole. A primary difference between these two codes is the participants saw performance holistically across courses, not just the isolated FYC course, and in many cases this meant *less* interaction with textbook whereas “assessment answers” codes represented increased engagement.

Some participants viewed performance on assessments and textbook engagement as separate. Cadence explained in her first interview that she could “judge the best way to be successful in the class” according to what the professor assesses, but she “prioritized like getting

my assignments turned in and then like reading,” later adding “I don't want to waste all of my time like reading and then like procrastinate my assignments that are actually, like, I'm getting the grades on.” Cadence described this as finding a “balance,” which she clarified further in interview two:

Well number one, assignments are piling up and become more busy. And then you learn you have to prioritize what's important. And I think you also see the flow of the class and how the class is set up so that you see what's, uh, what's more necessary to you or what benefits you the most to do well because you've had some grades put in, you see how the flow of the class goes, and I think I saw I was like, I don't necessarily have to read this to do well.

Cadence described grade confirmation determined what was necessary for successful academic performance and concluded she did not need to engage the text to do well, thus she altered her approach.

Similarly, Malachi and Caleb described a separation of assessment performance and textbook engagement. Malachi would complete the assignment currently due and then return to the reading later for better understanding, which suggests the assigned reading did not directly correlate with current assignments as the semester progressed: “But when the time goes on, I understood writing is a priority so more<sup>38</sup> of the text. I'm focusing on my writing and checking my writing stuffs, yeah.” When writing research essays in the latter half of the class, Caleb said, “I don't have time to sit there and look through a book and stuff. I have to get like research and writing and stuff.” For each of these participants, the textbook-assignment relation was not direct, which afforded them space to alter their engagement and not hinder academic

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<sup>38</sup> I believe the student meant “moreso” here.

performance. Completing the assignments—papers—did not require increased engagement with their textbooks; they perceive both writing the paper and reading the textbook as tasks, but one takes priority over the other.

Kasey and Kelly both mentioned course performance as a primary reason they engaged with the textbook, yet they did see a connection between engagement and course success. In her second interview, Kasey deduced, “So if I engage in the textbooks and in class and know what we're talking about, I know I'll do better,” which she clarified soon after was “getting good grades” and “knowing what we're talking about.” When reflecting on her experience in the final interview and why she engaged with the textbook in the manner that she did, Kelly concluded it was the “easiest” path for success:

Because I wanted to succeed in the class. I thought that it was a really interesting, new thing to learn, and I wanted to learn it well. And I know that engaging with the book is one of the easiest ways to set myself up to understand what's going on in class and to understand what we're doing in our essays to succeed in them. And it's been working pretty well.

Kelly understood the textbook as helping her write papers and not a separate or additional task altogether. Both Kasey and Kelly viewed their textbook engagement as contributing to course performance whereas some of their peers did not necessarily see that direct correlation.

Compared to the previous code, “academic performance” revealed student perceptions of the text as separate from their assignments and tasks—a supplemental task, really—or assisting in the completion of that task.

### *Finding a Level of Comfort*

Some responses showed students desired feeling comfortable either with the content or with their role in the class as another purpose for engagement. Several participants described engaging the text to feel more confident with the material prior to each class. For example, Elijah would have felt “unprepared, just not good” had he not read before coming to class. He added, “I wouldn’t understand what was, what [the GA] would talk about in class or what you would talk about in the big lecture, so the textbook really lays down the foundation.” Kasey labeled it as feeling “clueless” and not “fun,” feeling “left out” in the class because she felt her high school hadn’t gone in-depth with the topic; thus, this was “a refresher for [her].” For Elijah and Kasey, the textbook grounded their confidence in the course material and class discussions.

Others, however, were more reactive in engaging the textbook. Caleb described engaging it when he was “struggling” in a course, and Jacob similarly remarked when he had “doubts or questions,” it would “prompt me to look towards the textbook for maybe an answer.” James filtered engagement with the text according to academic performance also, saying he expected to engage the textbook “very little,” and his “studying techniques go according to prioritization, so given wherever I feel like I am, based on how my performance is on tests in a specific class or discipline, will affect how I study for that.” Though this passage could easily be coded as “assessment answers” or “academic performance,” the essence of his response reflected comfort in his abilities to retain information and do well.

While confidence and comfort are clearer in the descriptions above, Kelly presented a unique explanation for engagement: integrity. She described a sort of unofficial contract between instructor and student as a driving force behind her actions:

I definitely would say that it's more of an integrity thing. Just that if I'm not if I'm not reading and doing what's expected of me, I feel like I'm not fulfilling my side of, like there's an unspoken agreement between teachers and students, right, that we, we assume that you will, you will put in the effort and put in the care to make sure that you teach us whatever you can. And on the other side, we will in good faith do the readings, do the assignments to the best of our ability

Of all the participants, Kelly was the only participant to explicitly mention honor as a reason for engaging the textbook, and I viewed this as a level of discomfort for her if she was not engaging the text as expected.

### **Generic Recognition**

The second category focused on participant recognition of the textbook's generic characteristics. At times the engagement followed what might be seen as the author's and/or publisher's intention, but in many cases, students navigated the textbook according to their own objectives, using or ignoring certain characteristics in the process. In some scenarios they associated these characteristics as common across most disciplinary textbooks, yet they also distinguished what might be more common for certain classes or disciplines compared to the FYC text. Though students did not explicitly use the term "genre" or "generic," their actions and descriptions exhibited genre awareness and informed their engagement with particular sections of the text.

### ***Generic Features of Textbooks***

Participant responses referenced both the global features of textbook design such as introductions, headings, and visuals as well as the local features of bolded terms and bullet points; however, students varied as to which they engaged with more often and why. The



headings and introductions were the most referenced global features by the participants. Caleb, Cadence, Delaney, and James engaged the headings to navigate the text, including filtering certain sections they were comfortable with—skipping or skimming them—and reading more intently those they felt were unfamiliar. Participants were split on the value of chapter introductions though. Kasey and Elijah both described the introductions as helpful, or in the case of Elijah, as a sort of primer that “gives [him] an understanding of what [he’s] going to read.”<sup>39</sup> However, Cadence, Jacob, and James usually avoided the introductions. Cadence described them as “long and vague, not actually giving you substance” whereas James labeled them “really weird prologues or unnecessary summaries.” Jacob did not see the need for them since class presentations and discussion gave enough context already.

Other orienting material participants recognized were chapter examples. Several perceived these as more concrete than the abstract descriptions given in the chapter’s instructional prose. In his second interview, Caleb said they were a “better delivery of the topic” and “more interesting to read.” Kelly held a similar view of examples as being “less about the theory of rhetoric and more about here’s what it looks like.” To her, it was more applicable to her own work, which Jacob also remarked in his interview.

The more local features such as bolded terms and bullet points helped students navigate the text, but not all viewed them that way. Cadence and Kasey engaged with both, with Kasey noting the lists and italicized words conveying a sense of importance to her. Kelly also perceived the bullet points, like chapter examples, as making the content less abstract, yet James said they “feel like a really boring conclusion, whether to cite references or give an assignment.” They all interpreted the bullet points fulfilling some purpose, but they didn’t agree on what that purpose

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<sup>39</sup> Later in the study, Elijah expressed he didn’t engage with the introductions as much because his GA often gave them an idea of what the next week would be about.

was or its overall value to their individual experience. As for the bolded terms, Elijah, Cadence, and Kasey perceived them as conveying importance and would thus engage those whenever possible.

An interesting note about this code is several students began to compare their ENGL 101 textbook with other classes. Three participants mentioned the narrative style of other texts as being more interesting. Based on the global and local features of the FYC textbook, Delaney presumed it was more informational and objective compared to her Global Studies text:<sup>40</sup>

Like in all my classes, they take very different textbooks, like I believe yours, even from just looking at a couple of pages of the works cited, like it's very, it's more just facts and facts and fact, and sometimes it does have an overview, like we talked about evaluations or like it does have an overview, but it does have the criteria that we talked about, like this kind of writing has this and this and this, whereas one of my global studies classes, it just, they basically just use a devotional and it's more of a narrative style and it's a little bit easier to read. It's really interesting and a new way of thinking where English, the English textbook and the author kind of goes at it as a . . . I don't know, it seems more like a list to me, if that makes sense.

Though both textbooks she mentioned are non-fiction in content, the genre of delivery influenced Delaney's interest. Glenn's textbook has example essays and stories that classify as narratives,

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<sup>40</sup> Each participant who discussed other disciplinary textbooks would bring up "other courses" or "other professors" or explicitly mention their textbooks, all of which were more organic parts of their responses; however, I prompted Delaney to discuss what she described as "the textbook's perspective." She was describing the FYC textbook when using that terminology, and in order to understand this further, my follow up questions asked whether she saw this in other disciplinary texts or just FYC.

but the text as a whole would not be considered that.<sup>41</sup> James made a similar comparison between the FYC textbook and one for his Apologetics course:

This is and often times like the assignment centered around them will be specific to the way the textbook is written and won't have a storyline more or less so, just like a bunch of topics written about under headings. The book we're reading in Apologetics definitely takes more of an academic approach. It feels like nonfiction research, but it has a storyline in each chapter surrounding each contemporary issue we're discussing in the past. . . and he'll just literally insert the article in there so it doesn't feel like a textbook.

As discussed above, James was more aware of generic features such as bullet points, color changes,<sup>42</sup> and other signaling features common for textbooks. He had also commented that he didn't consider his Apologetics book to be a textbook—it didn't fit his view of the textbook genre. Of particular note in his response though is how “the assignment centered around them will be specific to the way the textbook is written,” signifying he viewed the textbook shaping the course, a theme I'll explore later in discussion and implications. Abigail was also drawn to narrative style, and she encountered this in her leadership class where the book included “stories of this like retired army guy” but didn't have definitions with terms that are common to the textbook genre.<sup>43</sup>

While Delaney, James, and Abigail preferred more narrative style texts, Kelly conveyed what she perceived as the “three prongs of textbooks”:

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<sup>41</sup> Delaney did not indicate she engaged the narrative-style examples in the textbook. The only example she mentioned engaged was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” which was embedded in MindTap and not the textbook.

<sup>42</sup> In interview two, James said color changes in a chapter signals changing themes and an activity.

<sup>43</sup> In the first interview, Abigail stated she did not enjoy reading textbooks, but she liked reading dystopian fiction.

Because it's like I feel like when you usually talk about literature textbooks, they're like, here is what has already been like literature and history, like here's what has already been done. Study it. Math is like here's, here's what has been done will be done and can be done replicated where science is like here's what this is. This is what has been done. Here are the possibilities of what you can do.

Kelly concluded the nature of the FYC textbook was most like her high school science textbook. They were both “laid out with like, I don't know how to explain it, it just gives me science-expert vibes all over just the headings and the way that it's like bouncing between what's already been done versus what, what is possible.” Like her peers, Kelly recognized differences in her course texts, yet she classified them according to how they present knowledge, what their purpose is, and what that says about the discipline.

### ***Textbook Aesthetics***

An unexpected code that appeared for a few participants was “textbook aesthetics,” which described responses where students noted visuals in textbook chapters as either helpful or unnecessary. For Abigail, a self-described “visual learner,” “pictures stand out more than words.” She gravitated to diagrams or examples rather than the accompanying instructional text. She referenced Chapter 19—an overview of MLA formatting and cite entry construction—as one she remembered engaging with. As she discussed her engagement, she said she would look at the examples and model her work after those and only read the explanation if necessary.

Caleb and James, however, claimed visuals in an English textbook are often unnecessary or redundant. Caleb compared his health textbook diagrams that were informational and helped clarify the content to the “aesthetic” visuals in an English textbook, like “pictures of people reading books.” To him, the visuals were decorative and not meaningful, only associated with

the subject matter. James had a similar view of visuals as he claimed “they're like it's just a picture of whatever article you just read about. It's typically not something we talk about unless we're assessing like photos and things like that.” Both Caleb and James expressed the visuals lacked a pragmatic meaning for the work being done in the course, yet Caleb did not dismiss visuals for all disciplines either.

### **Textbook Perceptions**

“Textbook perception” surfaced in the first and second interviews as responses indicated variance in the text’s role. Though they were often detailing their engagement with it, participants would use terms or situations that suggested their definitions of textbook were different. Thus, I added the direct question, “How do you define textbook?” to the third cycle to generate more data on their unique views. This category collates codes where participants explicitly defined textbook in response to my question or implicitly described its role as they detailed their engagement with it. Ideally, this will add context to how they engaged with it in the final chapter of this study.

### ***Textbook Definition***

The simple code of “textbook definition” applies here as the data below includes any instances where a participant attempted to clarify its specific purpose. For example, most perceived the textbook as a beneficial tool for the course. Abigail called it a “resource you use for the class,” similar to Elijah and Kasey naming it a “reference.” When asked directly how they would define textbooks in the final interview, these participants remained consistent in their responses as Elijah, Kasey, and Abigail identified it as a “book that helps you.” “Resource” or “reference” suggested the textbook is available as a common text associated with the course material, but it may not be necessary either.

Caleb, Cadence, and Kelly had similar views but narrowed this definition to the specific course. In his second interview, Caleb said it was “an academic source for academic purposes” and “set in stone.” His final interview followed the same view of a solidified text as it “has factual material in it and goes over a curriculum.” Caleb’s take on the text positioned it as a static body of information. Cadence also saw it as a “book of the course material” and added it has “all the course information. . . with more detail.” In each of these student responses, there is not a clear acknowledgement of author or authors nor a specific relation to the teacher. The text is isolated, static, and objectified when prompted to define it.

Kelly’s explained a textbook was “for instruction or learning,” yet she expanded this notion through her classification of history, math, and science textbook purposes mentioned in the previous section. In her first interview, Kelly expected the FYC textbook to be more literature-based and not “talk at you” like an instructional text, yet by interview two she understood it to be more instructional like a science textbook. Though she did not explicitly mention the author or teacher in her response, how she engaged with it—described below—suggested she was aware of that relationship.

In other responses, students revealed an awareness of the textbook’s author and what it potentially embodied. James recognized textbooks as “really large catalogs of a bunch of academics that come together on a subject.” Not only did he acknowledge the text as created by others, his definition reflected a more consistent view of it as disciplinary knowledge, a collaboration of established ideas. Malachi had a similar take when he said it is “prepared by those people who have knowledge in that area” and is intended “for those who needs to get that knowledge.” Jacob also expected the textbook to be helpful “because it’s probably written by maybe someone . . . who is more advanced in the, in the study or in the topic.” James, Malachi,

and Jacob understood the text to represent a body of knowledge created by scholars within that particular field.

For some students, this relationship altered how they engaged with the textbook. For instance, Kelly typically did not annotate any of her textbooks because she viewed her voice “getting in the way or speaking over the text” as she “didn’t want to put words in the book’s mouth.” Malachi also didn’t write in his texts with the only exception being if he planned to keep it for a long time. He said the teacher “guides the ship” and the author is a “specialist who prepared the book.” For him, the text is the point of convergence for teacher, author, and student, each having a different role in relation to the book.

### ***Textbook is Supplemental***

Participant data often positioned the textbook serving a supplementary role, where the textbook is there if needed but success is not dependent on a student’s engagement with it. Prior to engaging the textbook for this class, Cadence claimed, “If you have an understanding [from presentations in the class], I don’t think the reading is always necessary or vital.” Her previous experience in nursing classes position the class PowerPoints as the primary source for pertinent information. Likewise, Caleb held a similar view where the textbook was there for a “quick glance” or “review,” meaning it was not the primary source for course content.

The second and third interview cycles continued this theme for more participants. Cadence explicitly called the textbook “supplementary” because she felt comfortable with what she took from class presentations and discussions:

I understand what I'm reading in the textbooks, but sometimes I think I understand from the MindTap and from during class, like the lectures and in the breakout sessions, I'll feel like I understand. So sometimes I'm like, I don't really need to read because I have all my

assignments done and I understand what to do for the essay like I did well in the MindTap, so sometimes I'm like, what's the point in reading?

She elaborated further and concluded that the class lectures provided the understanding she felt was sufficient and added, "So sometimes I feel as if everything is redundant or it's just extra."

When asked what she gained from the textbook in interview three, Cadence replied, "supplemental knowledge and further understanding of the concepts."

James, Caleb, Abigail, and Delaney also positioned the text as supplemental in their experience with James explaining the textbook "isn't always necessary or inherent to the lesson or the major assignments" and the "class explanations or the instructions of the Canvas modules are pretty sufficient." By interview three, Caleb concluded the textbook "doesn't have a lot of use to me" because the class itself covered the material in a "more simple fashion." Delaney would "get the gist" of the content from class discussions as well, and Abigail clarified "the assignment is based off of what we do in class." In most cases, the class provided sufficient introduction and coverage of the content that relegated the textbook to subsidiary status.

### ***Textbook as Arbitrator***

At times, participants described points where the class discussion conflicted with their previous knowledge, which prompted them to engage the textbook for clarification. This still maintained the textbook's status as supplemental, but it also served as a sort of arbitrator between the instructor and student's knowledge. Jacob would supplement his class experience by engaging the textbook after class because he prioritized the teacher's explanation over his own understanding of the text, yet class discussion could also create conflict and doubt about his understanding of the topic:



However, sometimes I feel like if I hear the teacher rather, if I read the textbook first, um and listen to the professor's thinking or the teacher's thinking, it could help, but I feel like sometimes I may already have a kind of idea about it and actually, like, if let's say the teacher says anything that conflicts, obviously that's rare I feel like sometimes it may just almost not really come up, but it might just put me off in the sense that I may have even more questions, so I feel like for me, I like to understand from the teacher first and then any questions that I have that the teacher didn't elaborate too much on, I can confirm them rather than create, create other questions, like any question that arises. So it's almost for me, it's more clarification, you know, more, more or you know, just answering the doubt.

Jacob's engagement with the text provided clarification when he might feel confused following class, but his comment about the teacher's discussion "conflicting" with his preestablished idea was also made by Delaney and James. Delaney described something her GA said about DOIs in work cite entries that "sounded different," so she consulted the textbook to verify the GA's instruction was accurate. James also mentioned class discussion on various signal tags being new to him, but he was "aggravated" when he couldn't find additional explanation in the textbook which "would've been extremely helpful." In this case, the class content introduced new material that was not covered explicitly in the textbook, but James expected they should align in this way. For all three students, the textbook served as a checks-and-balances, a way to validate prior or new knowledge.

### ***Textbook-Class Intertwine***

Some participants felt the textbook and class complimented each other well. They perceived them working together as one experience, often producing a better grasp of the

material. Elijah perceived the class building on the textbook's content rather than being simply interchangeable:

I've gained a better understanding of, I guess just rhetorical writing, and it's really, it really has done a good job of just laying everything out, giving good context. So that way the next day you guys explain [garble] farther, and I'll be able to understand and learn more. And I can use that information to write a better paper for the final exam. I'll be able to fly through that. And just because of just the textbook and then you in lecture, or [the GA] in lecture, just explain the, even farther and it makes a lot more sense all because of the textbook.

Rather than perceiving the class and textbook as redundant and making one somewhat expendable, Elijah's description combined them into one experience. Kelly gave a similar account of their relationship:

I think, I think it has been it's also been definitely in an intertwined way because if you take the textbook away, I still probably would have learned that from the class. And if you take the class, I still would have learned that from the textbook, but then put together has allowed it to be a deeper understanding and more applicable.

Kelly and Elijah position the textbook as essential for a deeper understanding of the content but not indispensable to the learning experience.

### **Contextual Influence**

Several contextual factors emerged from student responses as having a direct influence on their engagement with the textbook. These codes come directly from the participants and embody how they might respond to their immediate context, not just in FYC but as an individual.

Thus, “contextual influence” includes predominant elements that affect how a participant engages the textbook.

### *Time*

Unsurprisingly, nine of the ten participants mentioned time limitations influencing their engagement with the textbook. This is part of the individual’s context including multiple courses and associated assignments; however, this code’s salience suggests it could be a common theme for most university students. In several instances, students mentioned the size of the reading and the time necessary to engage it in detail might prompt them to alter their engagement strategies. Caleb detailed two different page lengths and how time considerations would alter his approach:

If it's like 40 to 50 pages, then like I'll probably just like swipe through and like try to glance as fast as possible. But if it's like maybe like 10 to 20 pages and like I'll be able to swipe through it at first and then go back in depth like, and plus it's also like the length, select time we have. It depends on how many pages I can go back and read like in depth and stuff.

In the final interview, Caleb explicitly stated, “The main reason I don’t engage with the textbook is time.” Elijah would similarly adapt his engagement with the text according to time and chapter size saying he’d “just skim through and see if there’s anything in bold” to piece it together.

Some students mentioned busy lives in relation to time constraints affecting their engagement. Malachi’s desire was for a deep knowledge in his courses, and he expressed the importance of engaging with this textbook and the class to accomplish this. However, he would also adjust his engagement according to external factors:

But sometimes not because of maybe my weakness, because of, I don't know, the emphasis of a, a external things, you just sometimes just do the assignments. You don't care too much the deep knowledge, just you finish the classes. That's good. But I don't like that part. But that sometimes happened because of my personal busy-ness or engaging in other stuff because my mind is distracted or something instead.

His account describes prioritization, and though he does not elaborate on what the specific “personal busy-ness” is, it likely extended beyond the FYC classroom. Kasey explained she “had too much going on” and would skim while Abigail and Cadence referenced other class assignments. Though not all students clarified exactly what “external things” might contribute to the time limitations, this plays a significant role in why the engaged as they did.

### ***Teacher Pattern***

As prevalent as “time” was across interview transcripts, “teacher pattern” was more salient and appeared at least once for every participant. This code embodied students responding to the instructor’s style<sup>44</sup> and how they incorporated the textbook into class and/or how they might emphasize reading prior to a class or assignment. Their responses explicitly mentioned the instructor or GA influencing when and/or how they might engage with the textbook. The other part of the code’s name, “pattern,” appeared in Cadence’s second interview:

I would say so in all my classes. I think once you get a few weeks and you start to see every class has a specific pattern typically, and you see how that class is ran by the

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<sup>44</sup> “Style” comes directly from Kelly’s response, but here I use the term to embody not just an instructor’s pedagogical techniques in class or communication strategies; the term includes all areas where teacher presence might exist, including the syllabus where the assigned textbook is listed, the LMS and the constructed course within it, and the types of assessments given within the class. Each component is part of the “teacher presence,” and responses indicated students responded to what they perceived was a pattern.

professor and what, what's most important to do in order to complete the assignment because typically they're all they all have their own flow.

Pattern is broad enough to include not just a teacher's style within the class and their interactions with the students, but it incorporates all components of the class structure that the teacher is responsible for and the student likely interacts with, including course syllabus, assignment instructions, and assignment evaluations. Furthermore, pattern infers structure, something stable enough for students to identify and respond to even if there are occasional fluctuations. For instance, Caleb associated pattern with how the teacher incorporated readings into the class and assessed them:

Just from like being able to see, like patterns that professors do and expect from other students and stuff like a lot of professors and stuff with the readings, they all have the same expectation and standards and stuff like what you need to do to keep up with your reading. And I know, like sometimes they'll assign like quizzes and tests on like what you have to read and stuff like. I know, like with theology, like we'll have to read a chapter each like every other day and take a ten-question quiz on it, so I know that keeps us up at the reading in the book.

Caleb discerned similar "expectations and patterns" across classes in relation to "readings," and this was his reason as to why he didn't necessarily need to evolve his engagement with the textbook much.

Other students also mentioned what could be interpreted as a "teacher pattern." In the first cycle of interviews, Abigail and Elijah both said their engagement with the textbook "depends on the teacher" with Abigail adding "and the class" too. Cadence clarified "some professors don't necessarily go by the textbook and they like to do their own PowerPoint

presentations,” and she engaged the textbook “based on how the professor is” and would find “what’s the best way to be successful in the class.” For each of these three, the instructor’s course design and assessment practices heavily influenced their textbook engagement. Yet, Kasey and Jacob said it was the teacher’s choice of textbook that prompted them to engage the textbook more as they trusted that it would be essential to their learning experience.

In the second cycle of interviews, Kelly mentioned her engagement had evolved based on the “teaching style” and “seeing that the other students are also not taking it to, like, not blowing it off, but not taking it so seriously that it's like, oh, I can't do anything because I haven't done my reading.” Kelly’s roommate was in another GA’s section, so she’d compare their experiences, even noting “it differs from class to class” and elaborating that “I’ll figure it out because the [GA]’s teaching style means that everything makes sense, even if you didn't do the reading.” In his second interview, Malachi also mentioned engaging differently than he did before. Initially, he would “just read and remember,” but he adjusted based on the class pattern:

When I, when I see the class instruction, the emphasis, you know, our teachers give when I see that I have to focus on more than reading just to have to practice more of writing. So I just read some. Then I start writing.

Both Kelly and Malachi adjusted to the pattern of the class but responded differently. Kelly engaged with the textbook less according to the GA’s teaching style and her roommate’s experience while Malachi engaged less according to the “class instruction” and felt the need to develop his writing.

Several participants mentioned the instructor’s direct communication about engaging the textbook as an influencing factor. This falls into the “teacher pattern” code because students did not recognize it as the pattern and thus engaged with the textbook. For example, Abigail recalled

engaging only chapter 19 during the study, and her reasoning was that the GA mentioned it in class as further explanation for an upcoming assignment. Elijah, Cadence, and James all described their GA stressing the importance of a particular reading prior to the next class, prompting them to engage the textbook at that time. When asked if the GA always stressed the readings for every class, they could not recall or just remembered the specific instances they described.

### **Content Navigation**

Content Navigation includes all codes reflecting the strategies or processes by which participants engaged the textbook; it describes their movement through it. Even those that may have indicated a particular practice such as “skimming” might not use the same generic features to navigate the text nor stop at the same material within the textbook. Often this correlated with what the participant found valuable for their objectives.

#### ***Skim***

“Skim” was a common code for this category as students used the term to describe an incomplete reading or “glancing” at the material. In the first cycle of interviews, Caleb and Delaney conveyed skimming was common practice for them. Caleb typically “glanced” through content he viewed as “filler pages” that “provide no detail” as opposed to sections with a “major topic” that he would read more intently. Delaney, on the other hand, didn’t distinguish between sections and “skimmed everything.” She added, “If there's a list of questions after the reading, I'll look at the questions and then skim over until I find an answer.” In fact, in her second interview, Delaney described slightly altering her engagement with the text if she knew she would be assessed or “quizzed” on the material:

I would read the titles first and then anything that had either like a weird title that I didn't quite understand or something that I straight up, I knew what the title was, but I knew what the title said but didn't understand the content. I would definitely read that chapter. I would definitely skim the intro. And if I still didn't understand, I would read more thoroughly. But if the intro gave me the answers enough to kind of get my way through a quiz and I didn't have a lot of time, I would just move on like chapter one. . . But analyzing the elements of rhetorical situation, I know that's probably going to have a list in my brain that just to me means a list is going to pop up with criteria, and that's something that's really easy to quiz on, and so I would definitely look at that first.

In both her initial and subsequent interview, Delaney described filtering her textbook engagement with both awareness of a quiz in conjunction with what material is easier to assess (such as lists) and her prior knowledge. If she felt comfortable with the subject matter described in the title, she was less likely to engage that section in detail.

Kasey also skimmed when she felt the topic was familiar or if she was limited on time as did Elijah who would focus on “whatever seems important, whatever’s bolded blue” to feel prepared enough for class. Cadence skimmed through chapters and focused on global and local features of the text like Delaney. She’d read the headers, bold terms and their definitions, and bullet points, but she’d often “skip boxes”<sup>45</sup> if limited on time.

James presented a different method of skimming chapters, which he said he did for the entire semester. Rather than focusing on the local features, James would read the headers to get an idea of what each section was about, look for articles within the chapter due to the expectation

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<sup>45</sup> “Boxes” refers to sections of text formatted separately from the instructional prose of the chapter. The boxes were typically set apart by both border, off-centering, and a different background color. They often contained examples, diagrams, figures and additional commentary.



it would be discussed in class, and engage any material that he deemed was interesting because he enjoyed “learning for the sake of learning:”

I quickly read through it and then tune into whatever we were talking about in class. If there were some things she asked us about related to the textbook itself, information I knew it had that I didn't already know, which most of the time isn't something that happens, then I would look through it really quickly for that. Sometimes when I'm skimming through, like I'll see something that interests me, like Aristotle, like I really like philosophy, so Aristotle would have interested me. I would not watch the video. I look at the heading and research it to figure out if it was something I knew about, if they assign different label to or if it's something I'd be interested in looking to later.

Like his peers, James would filter his engagement with the text based on expectations it would correlate to the class—in this case class discussion—and his prior knowledge, but he'd gravitate towards the examples more than the local features of the text. Though his method of skimming glossed over material on the page, what he found important was different from others.

### *Seek External Resources*

Though not as prevalent of a code compared to “skim,” “seek external resources” did exist in a few participant responses. The significance of this process is that students moved beyond the typical sources of textbook and teacher to acquire explanation or knowledge. Jacob, Elijah, and Kasey would utilize online content in situations where they needed further explanation, where the textbook or the class did not clarify a subject enough. Jacob said he would underline concepts he did not initially understand when reading and do some “extra research,” which might be “looking outside of the textbooks and maybe onto the Internet, or maybe in the library book offering the same kind of topic or, or subject being, being taught.”

Elijah would use Google searches when needing help with citations, but he did not mention any other content where he'd follow this practice. Malachi utilized online resources for further clarification when reviewing his class notes and did not have the physical book with him.

### ***Unique Operations***

Three participants' accounts challenged my previous expectations of student engagement with textbooks. Though I was unsure of what I would find prior to the study and even during data collection, Kelly, Kasey, and Caleb presented unique patterns in how they engaged and navigated the textbook.

Kelly relied on the etextbook's text-to-speech function, which she also utilized in high school as well, throughout the study. In her first interview, Kelly complained about dry writing styles she'd encountered with her history textbooks, saying sometimes the style would "kick me out" of the reading. She mentioned the textbook being a bit "dense" but "still interesting" and not just conveying the "foundation of the topic;" thus, she'd utilize "text-to-speech because that's when my mind is more likely to wander." She called this function a "reading babysitter," helping her "stay on top of it" "when you're really exhausted mentally," and it allowed her to multitask such as doing dishes while listening to the audio. However, she noted it also came with its limitations:

I've had a page that had a single sentence and just one like heading, and then I've had ones where the whole page took 30 minutes to read because it was so densely filled with text. So the book seems to, the digital book seems to divvy it up between the subheadings because that's what the, the physical book gave them. So I think the digital book, they didn't actually go through and divvy it up themselves or if they did, it doesn't seem

intuitive from the user's perspective because it's not actually broken up into semi equal chunks.

Kelly found it difficult to track her progress in the chapter because the pages were not “semi-equal,” and the progress bar only “measure[d] how many digital pages you have.” She would often skim the chapter prior to beginning text-to-speech because she found it would skip some sections formatted differently such as visuals or gray boxes, so this allowed her to prepare before listening and make sure “I don’t miss anything important.” Essentially, this digital function was the lens through which she engaged the text.

Kasey also had a unique process, but rather than relying on a “reading babysitter,” Kasey reconstructed the textbook in her words. Kasey typically read the chapter from start to finish except towards the end of the semester when more assignments were due. As she read, she would take extensive notes in her notebook, organizing her writing according to the same headings the book used but rewording definitions and concept explanations. She didn’t always take notes on examples, but she’d focus on the local features such as definitions, bullet points/lists, and new concepts. Another layer of organization is that she would color code<sup>46</sup> each part according to what type of information it was:

Ok, here, this external with this, just this topic is purple and then this topic is green. And so I always, like, I was taking an exam on this and I could not remember what it what it was, but I remember it was green and I remember what I wrote in green and I don't know why that's the way I am, but it's the way that helps you remember stuff, I guess.

Additionally, Kasey would remain consistent with the textbook chapter’s organization so that she could reference where in the textbook she might need to re-engage for further understanding if

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<sup>46</sup> Though she continued note-taking throughout the study, her final pages of notes were all in pencil/pen due to time constraints.

her notes did not provide sufficient explanation. When she needed further clarification, her process including returning to her personal notes, the textbook, and then online resources if she needed to dig deeper.

Caleb, like Kelly, took advantage of the digital functions afforded by the etextbook when navigating the text. In his first interview and during the first few weeks, Caleb would primarily skim the text, but he later recognized it was easier to “browse” the text using command+F.<sup>47</sup> When I asked him about this, he described navigating his health textbook where the recent topic had been “stress”.<sup>48</sup>

And instead of having to go through the entire chapter of stuff that's like kind of irrelevant to the subject, I'm able to go and just see, like stress, like look up different kinds of stress. And like another thing when I do command F is I'll go and I'll click during those. Show me like every instance of the word stress and I'm able to see like different kinds of stress and how each one's different and how they all relate to each other.

Whereas reading from start to finish and skimming typically progress in a linear fashion, Caleb's process was truly unique in that he didn't have to evaluate global or local features necessarily. He might use the chapter title and headings to identify key words, but then he would forge his own path through the chapter and construct a “new” version of the chapter text.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Cadence also mentioned using the command+F function, yet she used it to find something quickly rather than a way of navigating course content as Caleb described.

<sup>48</sup> In his third interview, Caleb detailed the same process in his FYC textbook using the search term “rhetoric.”

<sup>49</sup> This was a more common engagement in other classes because he felt “the professors don't cover the material as well.”

## **Adaptation**

The final category, “adaptation,” comprises all codes where participants may have adjusted or changed their engagement practices, particularly in connection with perceived patterns. Though some students provided hypothetical situations—a test being given in a class versus not having a corresponding assessment—and how that would impact their engagement practices, I did not include those within this category. Such responses are certainly relevant and likely based on prior experience; however, this category focuses on actual change that happened within the study to honor the unique context of the case study and the student experience at that time.

### *Adapt*

Six participants described engaging with the textbook less in FYC. After describing professor patterns, Caleb engaged with his theology textbook more often because “it’s quizzed more,” and as noted above, he moved to a more efficient navigation of the text by searching key words and reading the text around them. Cadence also referenced professor patterns when explaining the shift in her engagement. During the first weeks of the study, she read more intently “because I always find myself slacking off,” yet she skimmed more and then eventually progressed straight to the graded assignments, completely skipping the reading altogether. When I asked about why she engaged with texts the way she did and whether the genre had any impact, she said it “depends on the assignments” associated with the readings: “There’s a difference to me than if it’s something I think your brain naturally will see if you think it’s necessary to do well for the assignments or if it’s just extra information.” Unique to her response is the “brain’s natural” response to the situation and invites further exploration beyond this study.

Kelly made a similar inference in that she'd still be okay if she hadn't read for a class and later claimed, "The gap is not so big to bridge." The gap she referred to is between the student's current knowledge and what needs to be accomplished in the course with the textbook serving as a bridge. Without the textbook, she felt confident enough that she could still be successful.<sup>50</sup>

Elijah engaged less as he adjusted to the course as well:

I guess getting used to the class made me realize that I could just read, just skim through so that way I have an idea of what you're going to talk about on Monday, and then going more in depth with the Wednesday and Friday sessions.

After identifying a pattern in their courses, these students adapted their engagement to a level they felt would still accomplish their goals.

Some students mentioned the class pattern, and they either altered how they engaged or what they engaged with. Malachi also engaged with the textbook less and indicated he was "learning, you know, the school system, evaluation system," but he explained he engaged with the textbook less to practice writing more. He still desired to "get more knowledge," but he felt practicing his writing would be more beneficial long-term since "all courses related to writing." Due to time constraints, he would often read after class for further clarification but prioritized practicing his writing.

James also shifted his engagement during the semester. He had a clear operating procedure in his courses: "Honestly, I adapt the way I respond to classes according to their set up," and he began the semester primarily skimming the chapters and skipping passages, examples, and excerpts, a habit he said likely started in high school. Nevertheless, by the second interview, he said he now engaged with those "because we'd talk about them in class." When I

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<sup>50</sup> As noted earlier, Kelly's prioritized purpose of integrity explained her continued engagement with the text. However, it was not the close, intent reading she expected to do and was thus coded as "adapt."

asked if that was the primary reason for engaging them now, he said yes. He preferred to know the topic being discussed, particularly in smaller breakout groups on Wednesday and Friday when there would be awkward silence if no one did the reading. In the final interview, I questioned why he engaged the way that he did, and he responded, “It was what seemed most efficient to me, I suppose” to accomplish “whatever objective was in front of me at the moment, so it was class participation. . . [or] simple referencing for MindTap or a small assignment.” The term “efficient” connects with his peers’ adaptation above as they also adjusted to the patterns with enough engagement to accomplish their individual goals.

### ***Sufficient Need***

The final code emerging from student responses was “sufficient need,” which captures what the students perceived as the necessary drive to alter their engagement during the semester. This terminology originated from James’s response to the question of why he thought his engagement hadn’t evolved: “There hasn’t been like a, like a sufficient need for it to, I suppose. . . and it hasn’t become any more necessary than it was at the beginning of the semester.” James described his sufficient need as encountering new information that he wasn’t already “familiar with,” but he felt comfortable with the course content during the semester. Abigail stated she didn’t need the textbook for FYC because most of it was discussed in class, and she compared this to high school where “[she] would have assignments out of the textbook.” Her sufficient need would be the direct correlation of assessments and textbook content. Elijah could grasp the concepts and ideas “without having to read every single line.” Kelly did not feel the textbook was absolutely vital to understanding the course content either even though she consistently engaged with it:

The gap is not so big to bridge that it's like you're making life-breaking, Aha! moments from the chapter. It's slightly building on it, but it's not such a huge step that you couldn't reach those conclusions on your own just from what you're given from your [GA] or from your lectures. It might be harder to make those connections, but it is still possible without the text.

Kelly, prompted by integrity, engaged the textbook more than any other participant yet still acknowledged she likely did not have to in order to do well.

### **Conclusion**

The six categories presented in this chapter represent salient themes emerging from the collective body of student responses, and this chapter explains the correlation of my focused codes with actual student responses where in vivo codes originated. However, the cross-analysis of participant experience does not fully capture the unique textbook engagement tracing individual students might provide. The following chapter examines data collected across the three interviews from selected participants.



## CHAPTER V

### TRACING INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT WITH TEXTBOOKS

Though the cross-participant analysis presented in the previous chapter produced six thematic categories for further discussion, it remained somewhat limited portraying individual student engagement with the FYC textbook and any unique factors informing it. For instance, part of the preliminary survey asked students about their prior educational background, which the categories could not capture because of the diversity present. Also, the first interview gathered their established perceptions of textbooks, likely originating from prior experience and previous educational contexts. The previous chapter presented results across FYC experiences as common themes for most participants, but this chapter will “drill down” investigate the individual engagement.<sup>51</sup>

The primary benefit following the individual’s engagement as one thread within the study is capturing the nuances of their engagement, particularly points of adaptation that may have occurred and why. This chapter seeks to connect the thematic categories for each individual, understanding not just individually coded data but how those connections can represent engagement. Additionally, I have included visual representations of individual content navigation to capture particular generic features students engaged with according to their own strategies.

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<sup>51</sup> The “drill-down” or vertical exploration of individual experience further investigates unique factors including prior history and prioritized purpose informing student engagement, yet I do not proclaim this as an ethnographic approach because other variables likely informing the student’s engagement exist not captured by interview data and the study’s timeline is only one semester. Additional questions about participants’ high school experience, their specific GA’s facilitation of our FYC course, the student’s major and course load, and their understanding of education at large among other topics that would be necessary for ethnographic study.

## Focal Participants

The nature of each participant's engagement is unique to the individual and suggesting one might be representative of others is misleading. Nevertheless, I was still intentional with the three students chosen for this chapter as I considered two primary factors: varied educational backgrounds described in the first interview and varied textbook engagement within the study. These original educational contexts represent unique beginnings while additionally giving a common starting point for this discussion, and the different descriptions of engagement provide a broader depiction of such practices. The three individuals discussed below—Cadence, Kelly, and Caleb—fit these criteria, participated in all three interviews, and elaborated on their experiences when prompted; thus, I was confident using their data for this chapter.

### Cadence

#### *Initial Expectations*

Cadence is eighteen years old and attended “a small private school” with about “150 total students from Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade]” for most of her high school experience. During the first interview, she clarified textbooks were not common in high school; in fact, most classes relied on “handouts or PowerPoints” as well as “online” materials primarily because of limited funding. Many of the textbooks were outdated with the only exception being her AP courses, where students purchased new textbooks that were “updated” because they needed those for the “AP exams.” Another exception was her Chemistry and Pre-Calc teacher, whom she thought “used to be a college professor” and “would use like old college tests,” advising students to “read it before the lecture” and “read it after the lecture.” He'd also assign textbook “questions” for “homework.” Outside of these two exceptions, Cadence primarily engaged other materials for course content prior to college.

She also had prior experience in college classes during the Fall. She was previously a nursing major but now a double business major, and she noted similar experiences between high school and college thus far. She learned to “judge” what was required to be successful from high school, understanding “some professors don’t go by the textbook and do their own PowerPoint presentations” and noticed “similar pattern[s]” in college.

Cadence’s initial expectations of textbooks relegated them as subsidiary educational artifacts. As discussed in the previous chapter, she “prioritizes” graded assignments over reading and doesn’t want to “waste [her] time,” particularly if she has “enough knowledge.” Yet, there might be instances where she must find a “balance” between what’s needed and getting the assignments done. Her primary engagement with a textbook would be in instances where she needed clarification:

I think I'll just get extra information. Alongside the power points, typically most of the information that I learn and gain from classes are from the PowerPoints, and like during class and then like reading is more of a supplemental thing. Like if I don't understand, sometimes I'll read to help understand, but honestly I'm not that good at always reading. She added that her nursing classes during the fall semester often disseminated information via PowerPoints with professors suggesting the textbook is available but not essential for the course; however, she noted that she anticipated a greater need to engage the textbook in English. When asked if she typically reads every page assigned, she admitted, “I’m not a fan of reading” and “I get really bored and then I just give up.” Though she expected to engage with the English textbook more, she knew her interest in textbook-style prose was minimal at best.

### *Textbook Engagement*

**Perception, Purpose, and Adaptation.** Cadence's engagement with the FYC composition remained consistent with most of her expectations in the first interview. She initially took in-depth notes the first few weeks in order to start the semester strong, and it was something "she was supposed to do," but then her engagement decreased as she started skimming for concepts in the book because the semester became busier. She mentioned taking eighteen credit hours, which is a heavy load for a first-year student. Another explanation for her decreased engagement was she understood what she "needed to do to" to complete the assignments.

Despite decreased engagement, there were still a few assigned readings she recalled engaging with. One was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" because her GA stressed the importance of reading it. She also found Chapter 2: "Responding to the Rhetorical Situation" to be the most helpful since she hadn't really considered or thought about audience as much in her writing. It was new information to her. Nevertheless, this chapter was assigned in the second week of the semester, which was during a period where her textbook engagement was higher. The other prose she recalled engaging was the brief summary within MindTap activities, typically giving an overview of terms, meanings, and functions assessed in the activity. Her view of this summary was quite different than that of the textbook itself:

I see it as more vital to answer the questions. Like I think it's necessary and I like that it's concise. Like if I just see a paragraph and has the bolded terms, like I was like, oh, I can [do] that easy. Like I, you know what I mean. I see it. I view that as like easier to understand and more important than like pages and pages of her book.

Describing this as “vital” and “concise” suggested its importance in relation to the graded activity yet was opposite of her view of the textbook.<sup>52</sup> She didn’t mention any related assessment for Dr. King’s letter or Chapter 2, and this aligns with the term “task-oriented” she used to describe herself in the second interview. The value of the text is in relation to assessed activities or tasks. In her second interview, she claimed, “you see a pattern and you learn,” and that “every class has a pattern and how its run by the professor.” Assigning reading does not necessarily influence her engagement, but assessment does: “But I think if I know I’m being quizzed on it and I really, really need to know it and retain it, then I get more focused and am more inclined to really, really read it.” She explained she reads intently for her Apologetics course even though the assigned readings are “really long.” In FYC, students are not assessed on reading, and by the end of the semester, she had stopped engaging the textbook altogether. When I asked what she had gained from the textbook, she said “supplemental knowledge and further understanding of the concepts in class” as well as help with MindTaps, citations, paraphrases, and summaries.<sup>53</sup>

Cadence found a sufficiency in how she operated within the class. She previously commented, “I figure stuff out as I go,” and “if I don’t understand, then I’ll look in the textbook.” Her lack of engagement indicates a sufficient level of confidence with the course material already. However, Cadence did say she gained another perspective from the textbook in comparison to the PowerPoints and concepts in class. This still positioned the text as

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<sup>52</sup> A few participants mentioned “reading” or engaging the activity overviews, and their descriptions implied that this was part of the textbook and regularly assigned reading. This confusion likely stems from both the activities and the etextbook being housed in the same platform.

<sup>53</sup> The course includes a documentation quiz as well as a summary and paraphrase exercise, both of which are assessed and part of the course grade.

supplemental, but it also distanced it from in-class content as though they are two separate yet connected views, almost an either/or perception of the textbook-class relationship.

Though Cadence perceived the textbook as “a book of course material. . . with more detail,” it is apparent she utilized other course components to access a sufficient level of understanding without consistently engaging the text. Several times she mentioned class discussions as being the primary method for her to understand what she needed to do, but other instructor designed components contributed to her confidence:

Paying attention in class and following the instructions, like, I think I gain most of my knowledge on this stuff from just listening in class and taking notes on things and just paying attention to the instructions, like especially when the [GA] goes over, like, this is what we're looking for, and I read the rubric and the instructions for the assignment. And then I usually go from there with my understanding to make sure that I understand what I'm being asked to do so that I can complete that effectively.

Instructor-created documents such as the assignment instructions and rubrics provided Cadence with what she felt was “enough knowledge” to complete the graded assignments when coupled with class discussions.

Multiple thematic categories intersected in Cadence’s narrative and continued from her prior experience. Contextual factors such as time constraints and instructor implementation influenced the adjustments she made during the semester. Having a heavy workload across courses required Cadence to find the “balance” she mentioned in the first interview, knowing what is needed to accomplish her goals and what class patterns exist. Since FYC did not include additional tests or quizzes over the assigned readings apart from MindTap activities, Cadence relied on short overviews accompanying those assignments more. Cadence perceived MindTap

activities as having a primary connection to the reading even though they were assessing student comprehension of certain concepts and not always connected to the individual readings:

So once. . . that's the, that's the key thing. Once the MindTap activities stopped, I didn't click on this ever again. . . I would always do those because those are an assignment. And I was like, I'm getting graded, so I'd go in there. And then I would learn stuff and read the paragraphs related to the MindTap activities.

These benefitted not just her performance but required less time to complete, providing an efficient method that allowed more time for other assignments; however, the end of her textbook engagement corresponded to the end of MindTap activities just over halfway through the semester.

She “gained most of [her] knowledge” through class discussion, MindTap summaries, assignment instructions and rubrics, and skimming the textbook to achieve the grades she sought. Class discussions, instructions, rubrics, and assessment types and schedules are all components of teacher implementation that produced the “pattern” Cadence interpreted and responded to. The only instance where teacher implementation increased her engagement was when her GA stressed the importance of reading “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” Her prioritized purpose of graded assignments combined with a pattern of teacher implementation and limited time shaped her engagement.

**Content Navigation and Generic Recognition.** During the second and third interviews, Cadence described and illustrated how she engaged the textbook. Typically, she would engage bold terms and bullet points for each section, noting those “stand out” and “break things up.” She would also read all the headers of sections, but she wouldn’t engage the “boxes.”<sup>54</sup> When I asked

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<sup>54</sup> “Boxes” would often be shaded gray contain examples, diagrams, figures, excerpts, or other accompanying information.

why she would skip the boxes, she responded, “It looks irrelevant” and “not a part of the actual text,” “a sidepiece.” The “actual text” she referred to was the prose following section headings that usually contained instruction and explanation and included bold terms and bullet points. This was consistent in the third interview, later adding she skipped “apply”<sup>55</sup> sections of the text as well, which typically followed instructional prose but prompted students to complete a task. She also skipped introductions since they “lacked substance.” When demonstrating engagement, she said, “I start with the first section” yet clicked the item listed immediately after the introduction.

Cadence utilized the textbook’s generic features to navigate the content. She used the global features—headers—to orient herself with the text’s focus but then skimmed sections, gravitating to local features such as bold terms and bullet points to understand concepts. Figures 1 and 2 outline the engagement she described: green boxes indicate active engagement whereas the red “no symbol” represents active avoidance. She also mentioned focusing on the first and last sentences of a paragraph to infer what that section is about, a tactic she remembered from a Bible teacher in high school. Interestingly, she had adapted this strategy for her own purpose because she said the teacher would have them do this and then read the entire text with that idea in mind; however, she would only infer the idea and move on.

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<sup>55</sup> She used the term “apply,” but there aren’t sections with this terminology in the chapter. There are “activity” sections, which fit her description.



**Figure 3**

*Illustration of Cadence's skimming by utilizing global and local features*

### 13-2 Drafting a Response

After you have explored your topic, you will begin drafting. While some writers find the first draft the toughest part of the process, many others derive great pleasure from the two-step drafting process: drafting and evaluating. The joy of putting words together is exhilarating for many writers; in **drafting** they enjoy the freedom of combining an informal outline with a freewrite as they work to attend to all the elements of the rhetorical situation, including audience, purpose, genre, medium of delivery, and the opportunity for change that motivated you to write in the first place. A first draft is just that—words you will revisit again and again as you adjust your message to take into account all the elements in your rhetorical situation.

Some writers do not write the introduction and conclusion until they have drafted the body of the paper. Others use a loose introduction, body, conclusion structure to organize their draft. Most **introductions** will include your thesis. Simkanin also establishes her credentials for writing about this topic by introducing her experience. In the first draft that follows, she goes on to draft the **body** of her paper, where she links ideas about her topic that explore the implications of her thesis. In a first draft it is most important to get your words onto the page

**Figure 4**

*Illustration of Cadence's avoidance of "gray boxes" or accompanying explanation*

#### Common Transitional Words and Phrases



above all  
also  
as a result  
at any rate  
at first  
besides  
for example

for instance  
however  
in addition  
in contrast  
in fact  
in other words  
instead

in sum  
on the contrary  
on the one hand/other hand  
then  
therefore  
thus

When you are drafting, you will be considering your intended audience as well, particularly in terms of what you are hoping your audience can do to address (or help you address) the opportunity for change that sparked your writing in the first place. The following list may help you as you reconsider audience:

- Who can resolve the opportunity for change (or the problem) that you have identified?
- What exactly might that audience do to address, resolve, or help resolve it?

## **Kelly**

### ***Initial Expectations***

Kelly is twenty-one years old and the only homeschool student in the study. She clarified it was through an online format best described as semi-asynchronous with minimal teacher interaction.<sup>56</sup> She said there is a “teacher overseeing things” and “giv[ing] you assignments,” and though there were classmates, much of the interaction was “confined to discussion boards.” Students were required to meet with the teacher via Skype at least once per semester, but most of the engagement was via assignment feedback. She recalled meeting “four times” for her AP English class but didn’t have a reason as to why. What was unique to Kelly’s experience compared to any of the participants was the lack of “deadlines” outside of completing the work by the end of the semester, which she said was about “six months.” Her experience required significant autonomy because it “was mostly self-led.” Teachers created the courses, sometimes adding videos or notes and usually giving feedback on assignments, but the student would have to “work through this stuff.” There weren’t class meetings where a teacher might review the assigned reading, so “[she] engaged with [textbooks] way more than [she] would have.” Kelly added, “You could reach out if you had questions, but I usually didn’t so it was mostly just like me and my textbook trying to figure things out.” Assessments varied in frequency for different courses, but she did have assessments such as tests, midterms, and exams, typically two to four a semester if not more frequent in some cases.

With this educational context fostering more autonomy and prompting a high level of engagement with and respect for the textbook, Kelly exhibited greater awareness of textbooks across disciplines. She described differences between Math, English, and History textbooks. She

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<sup>56</sup> She said though it was classified as “private” by definition, it functioned as a home school and was set up for kids of State Department employees serving overseas.

viewed Math as having less prose and more diagrams, English including more subtext or footnotes but lacking the instructional tone, and history as prose heavy and a “stale” writing style. Her initial expectations seem to be that the FYC textbook will be more like an anthology or primary text. She also said she uses a text-to-speech function when encountering difficult to read or “painful” writing which she associated with the “stale” writing of history textbooks.

Her engagement positioned the text as highly authoritative and valued, and this is expected for a homeschool setting where the student doesn’t have as frequent synchronous engagement with the teacher. She typically reads all assigned pages because she’s worried it will be important later and she loves to learn. Interestingly, she felt “its blasphemous” to mark in the book and “want[ed] to be open to coming at it with a different perspective without being like blocked by what stood out to [her] the first time.” She recognized the text as speaking, and her desire not to interfere with her experience and the description of getting “in the zone or zen when reading” aligns with Rosenblatt’s (1978) aesthetic reader.

### ***Textbook Engagement***

**Perception, Purpose, and Adaptation.** Unlike Cadence, Kelly’s expectations of what the FYC textbook would be did not align with what it was. She originally believed the textbook would be similar to her high school English text that was literature centered. She also thought college would be significantly harder than high school based on what she heard others say; nevertheless, she said it felt “easier” or at least more of a “level step. . . which is not bad for, for a one-hundred level course.” She still did not mark the text as she read, which is consistent with her desire not to “speak over” it.

When I asked about her engagement at the beginning of the course, she said she completed each assigned reading and found they were helpful, and this informed her

expectations of college versus the reality of her past education. Like high school, she utilized the text-to-speech function when the text was too dense or not interesting, which she said the FYC composition textbook was about “forty percent dense, forty percent not interesting, and twenty percent just right.” When listening to the audio, she often multi-tasks by doing chores or other work. She felt less pressure to complete every reading—though she still did—because she saw fewer consequences for not reading and it likely would not impact what she’s learning in the class. She doesn’t feel she can stop reading altogether, “but for just like the jumps from one lesson to the next are not so big that without reading that [she] wouldn't be able to make them.” She noted this as a key difference between the two educational contexts as high school was “like a sink-or-swim kind of thing” and “no bridging the gap” whereas college kind of “guides” you through it. Compared to her high school engagement where she read intently for English as she self-led her engagement without constant checks on her reading progress, college presented a consistent teacher presence, which is a possible explanation for her less-focused, multitasking engagement now. However, she also mentioned she still reads close enough as though she will be tested on the material because “[students] get called on in the large lecture.” Kelly adapted her engagement to still fulfill her purpose and to maintain the “integrity” of fulfilling her obligations.

Though the educational context is different, she still pointed to the similar pattern recognition that Cadence and her peers saw as well, and both participants mentioned “balance” as part of their experience. For Kelly, fellow students were part of that pattern along with the class and teacher:

There's kind of a combination of seeing the teaching style to where what, what we're doing in class is laid out in such a way that it's easily understood and it's made to encourage us to ask questions and make mistakes and learn and seeing that the other

students are also not taking it to, like, not blowing it all, but not taking it so seriously that it's like, oh, I can't do anything because I haven't done my reading.

Kelly's inclusion of peer behavior reveals a "student norm" for the class context even though she might go beyond this since she still read. Peers, in this case, include Kelly's roommate who, according to Kelly, did not have the same positive experience with a different GA. These contextual factors produced a level of comfort in that she might not have to read as intently, that she could "afford to back off a little bit and still do good work," which she described as a "balance."

Ultimately, her prioritized purpose remained the same throughout the study: "[She] wanted to succeed in the class." Despite her perception of the book as "forty percent dense" and "forty percent uninteresting" as well as the class context "guiding" her through the material, she still engaged with the textbook for the entire course. She mentioned missing only one reading—"Letter from a Birmingham Jail"—because the link was broken at the time and would not open the document. Viewing the textbook as "intertwined" with the class is likely why she perceived it as helpful:

I thought that it was a really interesting, new thing to learn, and I wanted to learn it well, and I know that engaging with the book is one of the easiest ways to set myself up to understand what's going on in class and to understand what we're doing in our essays to succeed in them, and it's been working pretty well.

Both Kelly and Cadence mentioned finding a "balance" between the class pattern and knowing how to operate, and they both desired to be successful in the course; however, it's noteworthy that their engagement with the textbook is significantly different over the entire course. Cadence sought the most efficient method to do well within the time constraints, and Kelly similarly

sought an efficient way (text-to-speech) yet did not stress the time factor as much. They also described different high school contexts and engagement practices, and even their perceptions of the textbook differed.

As described in the previous chapter, Kelly perceived three categories of textbooks and stated the FYC textbook was most like the sciences, which “defined what has been found, defined the term and the parameters of the field of study, and then tell you what you can go do to discover.” This fits her earlier description of the textbook:

But in the textbook, it deals a lot with the, like, background information of seeing how like they give examples of how people can use it in their daily life or how it is already shown to you or how you can identify it.

She mentioned there being “rules” within the text, but it also prompted students to “play” within those parameters and explore. This pairs with her view of the class as more of a “hands-on” format building off the textbook’s background, sort of like a lab context: the textbook is the “what” and the class is the “how.” Whereas Cadence viewed the textbook as “supplemental” or “extra detail” and would only engage with it if she needed clarification, basically choosing the textbook or the class, Kelly saw the textbook and class overlapping, working together and building a “deeper understanding” of the content. When I followed up about her textbook classification and if she viewed the textbook as fitting the science category, she replied without hesitation: “It was the science of rhetoric.”

Through the study, Kelly remained consistent with her prioritized purpose, which she said was to succeed. She never explicitly defined what this entailed nor declared it was in relation to grade performance, but she did mention her desire to “learn” and “learn something new” more than once in our interviews. She also adapted to the pattern of the course and the

textbook's less interesting style, and though the textbook challenged her initial expectation of what it would be, she perceived it as working with the class as opposed to an either/or "supplemental" relationship.

**Content Navigation and Generic Recognition.**<sup>57</sup> Kelly's high engagement with the text meant she did not completely avoid too many sections. When illustrating her engagement, she clicked onto a chapter and mentioned being "dumped" into a landing page, which she pointed out later that the links take her directly to the chapter and "bypass" all of the front matter of the textbook. She also mentioned "skimming," but this was to get an idea of what was in the chapter prior to beginning the text-to-speech function. She did this to make sure it would not skip certain parts (i.e. accompanying explanations, visuals, gray boxes). She even referenced a study strategy she learned from high school where the teacher suggested skimming and then reading the text in full to get a better understanding, which she said she was less inclined to do because it "took twice as long," yet using text-to-speech "forced" her to use this practice.

Whereas Cadence typically avoided gray boxes, examples, and accompanying material, Kelly was more likely to engage them even though she'd have to highlight them for the text-to-speech to read it. She appreciated something interesting, "something that's a break" such as videos or separate sections that add explanation:

I really like, like this bit where it has logical fallacies and it explains something interesting. I like those bits where it's like you're still learning about rhetoric, but it almost feels like a break. Because you're talking about something related, but not necessarily the same as what you've been reading for the last twenty minutes.

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<sup>57</sup> Because Kelly utilized the text-to-speech function and engaged with nearly all of the assigned reads from beginning to end, this section will discuss what features she found most helpful and which she was most likely to avoid or pay little attention.

For her, the examples exemplified what they would be doing in the class and in life, thus they were more “applicable.” Yet, she was less motivated to engage an extended example such as an essay that was several pages in length. It was harder to focus when she felt a shorter example would suffice.

She also displayed keen awareness of generic features, noting color-coding, font changes, and sidenotes. When discussing the longer essays that were more “drab” and “dense,” she pointed to the typical color-coding and accompanying footnotes, the overall “skinny” look of the text and “tiny font,” all of which made it feel like she was “trying to read the like, the warnings on a prescription bottle.” She gravitated more towards sections that “looked like a visual break from what we’re reading,” which she pointed to a section on logical fallacies, something she viewed as connected to rhetoric but not what the entire section or chapter was about. Figure 3 outlines the engagement she described with the example essay and figure 4 the logical fallacies section. Green boxes indicate what she was drawn to whereas the red “no symbol” represents what she did not find visually inviting.



Figure 5

*Illustration of local features Kelly described as making the text difficult to engage*

Williams is no stranger to the Deaf community. She has a hearing impairment, and her sister is an interpreter. Educated in “bilingual” schools that approached ASL as a language just like Tagalog, Spanish, or Mandarin Chinese, she has personal experiences that have influenced her strong feelings on this subject. She is a graduate of Penn State University.

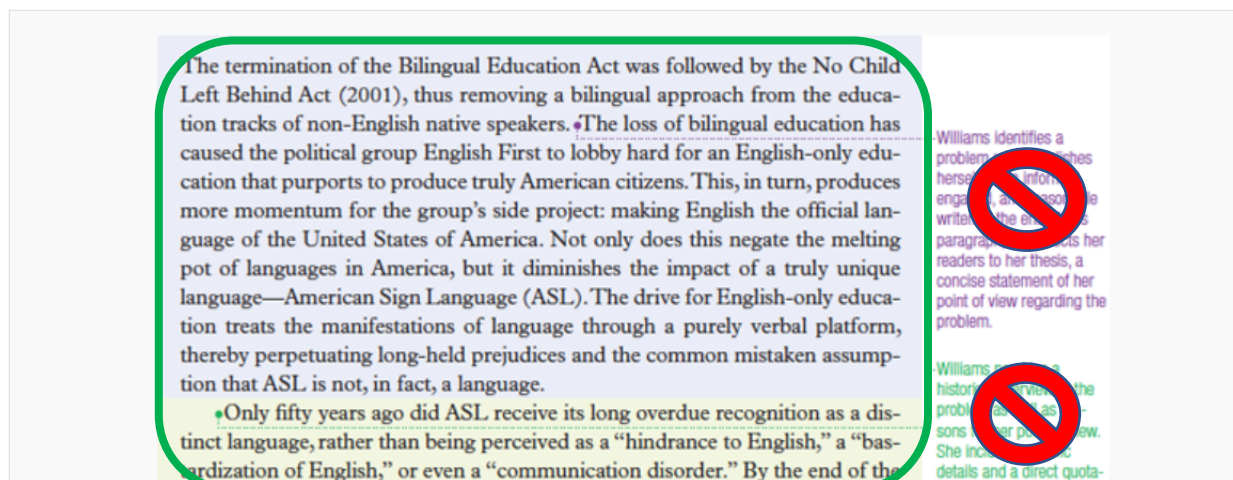


Figure 6

*Illustration of accompanying explanation Kelly engaged and viewed as a “break”*

inadvertently make these errors in arguments. Start your analysis by rereading the argument to detect flaws in reasoning. (See the box on [Logical Fallacies](#) on the next page.) Rereading the article with an eye toward detecting fallacies can also be helpful when analyzing an argument with which you readily agree, perhaps one in this chapter (Nunberg’s or Williams’s). As you read, note that in most cases, readers are persuaded to change by the writer’s or speaker’s trustworthiness and by a well-reasoned argument.

### Logical Fallacies

**Non sequitur** Latin for “it does not follow,” the *non sequitur* presents a faulty conclusion about consequences, such as “Helen loves the stars; she will major in astronomy.”

**Ad hominem** Latin for “toward the man himself,” an *ad hominem* attack draws attention away from the actual issue under consideration by attacking the character of the person rather than the opinion that person holds.

## **Caleb**

### ***Initial Expectations***

Caleb is eighteen years old and attended public high school.<sup>58</sup> He rarely engaged textbooks in that setting as they were used in class but rarely taken home. Often, he would read from the text in class, but that was the limit of his engagement. Teachers presented course content, and he relied heavily on his notes to complete any assignments. Some teachers provided fill-in-the-blank worksheets where students took notes and could utilize them for assignments and tests. Like Kelly, Caleb anticipated textbooks in college would be more essential to the class; thus, he planned to engage with it more. He already experienced this in his statistics (STATS) course in the Fall, saying he found engaging the text to be beneficial.

When discussing his expectations of the textbook, Caleb positioned it as a reference, something he could engage or “glance” at for “review” closer to assignments. In both the survey results and the first interview, he predicted the textbook would help with “tests and quizzes,” particularly “open-book” assessments or whenever test material wasn’t covered by the instructor. His concern about missed material contrasts what his high school experience was like since he said teachers delivered material through in-class presentations, thus requiring minimal textbook engagement from him. He perceived textbooks as “written by professors” and fostered a “self-paced” learning, especially when he was “struggling” with a topic. He stated engaging the textbook was a way to “get like my gears turning.” Outside of this, he predicted engaging the textbook once a week and possibly more near “big papers and projects.” Describing it as a reference and engaging it closer to assignments suggest it is secondary to what he’s getting from

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<sup>58</sup> Caleb did not elaborate further on the high school context such as number of students, graduating class, or atmosphere.

the class or other sources, which is similar to Cadence; however, he mentioned textbooks as “written by professors,” reflecting some awareness of the text’s autonomy as well.

Even in the first interview, Caleb’s responses indicated a cognizance of patterns. Speaking about his Fall semester experience, Caleb said “it took a lot of practice” to “determine, like, what’s important and what’s not.” Though he did not explicitly say what those patterns were in this initial interview, it was clear his experience in STATS informed his approach. He described skipping filler pages to focus on more important sections. He gave an example where he read a few pages, found a diagram of the Tai Chi table, read the explanation below it, and then stopped reading. He often referenced “pull[ing] out” information such as formulas and putting them on index cards or in a Word document in order to prepare for his assignments, and he stated he typically doesn’t read every page assigned, gleaning the content from section headings and other features. If the reading is lengthy (forty to fifty pages), he’s more likely to skim due to time, but if short (ten to twenty pages), then he’ll “swipe through it and go back and in depth.”

### ***Textbook Engagement***

**Perception, Purpose, and Adaptation.** Caleb’s engagement with the textbook partially matched his expectations as he still engaged it as a reference for the class, but this was primarily for MindTap activities. During the second interview, he said he read the assigned pages for the class; however, during the third interview, he said he engaged the least with it. The lack of quizzes and tests prompted him to engage more with other textbooks such as Theology and Health where assessments were more frequent. In fact, he engaged with the FYC textbook the least because he felt the focus of the course was on actual writing:

I don't like just glance like a book and stuff as often, especially if it has, like, it has like no, like I feel like it doesn't have a lot of use to me, especially in our course because, I

know our course was, like, most of our course involved, like writing and like being on your own creative and stuff.

He added that the instructor and GA covered the material well in class in a “more simple fashion.” For Caleb, the class itself was sufficient to accomplish his goals, which he identified as “understanding writing expectations and skills at a college level.” However, he did not feel the textbook helped him reach this goal.

Caleb also recognized a class pattern and adjusted to it. He referenced “patterns that professors do” in their “expectation and standards” for class readings. Because he believed the class covered the material well and without frequent tests and quizzes, his engagement changed during the semester. In instances where the professor or GA specifically mentioned a chapter or topic, he would go back and engage it. For him, the workload and time required for writing outweighed that of reading: “I know, like, when I was writing the essays, I feel like, like I was too focused on my research to sit down and read a textbook about how to do it.” He stressed the “window of time” from when the assignment is assigned to when it is due, and gauging if he has time for any extra stuff, and he perceives the textbook as “extra” in relation to the paper itself. He found more value from peer interaction:

I really never look, I never refer to the textbook for like writing and stuff. Like I would always refer to like my peers and the [GA] and stuff like with help and writing. I felt like I felt like peer interaction and writing helps out a lot more than looking at a text.

In the final interview, he concluded the textbook did not help his development as a writer, but it did increase his awareness of audience in writing.

An interesting thread in his cross comparison of classes was that he understands there are different levels of engagement between students. He and his roommate had the same Theology

course, yet “[his roommate] reads it every day to study, and [Caleb] just look[s] at it to complete a quiz and stuff.” According to Caleb’s description, textbooks are a benefit to the student but aren’t always utilized the same:

The professors and stuff, like, I don't feel like they sit there and like shove the textbooks down our throats because people engage with them at certain, like, levels and stuff. And some people don't even open a textbook while other people are in it every day. So I feel like the professors don't shove it down our throats, but unless they have an assignment that's based off the text.

One inference that can be drawn from this passage is corresponding assessments rather than assigning readings are the way Caleb believes professors prompt students to engage or “force” the textbook.

**Content Navigation and Generic Recognition.** When engaging the textbook, Caleb focused more on the orienting global and local features such as headings, highlighted portions, and bold terms, yet he avoided videos and pictures, which he identified as more aesthetic than essential. He remarked, “I don’t know what I [am] supposed to do with them.” He clarified visuals in a Health textbook might have a body diagram that illustrated the instructional text and was more helpful whereas English visuals were just decorative. He did explain he gravitated towards the bold terms and explanations in other textbooks too, not really differentiating between disciplines, yet as discussed above, his amount of engagement with English decreased. Another textbook feature he engaged more would be chapter examples and stories. He preferred the examples because they “put a better perspective versus just explaining a topic.” I was a bit surprised by this since he focuses so much on key words and points in the “regular text.” Figure 5 outlines his engagement according to global and local features.

Caleb often described his use of textbooks broadly, but he also displayed unique navigation techniques. For example, when using the digital formats, he'd use Command+F as a strategy to navigate the text and get to information quicker. He did not do this as often in English because it was less about memorizing key terms. He also perceived repetition of terms as conveying their importance, and figure 6 depicts this method with solid-lined green boxes being the repeated terms. Though the terms may not be different in font or color, if he noticed terms repeated in the text, he'd read around them to acquire the general idea being discussed. He also utilized Canvas<sup>59</sup> headings such as module titles to gauge a topic's importance. When the topic or idea is mentioned in the module titles or somewhere in Canvas, he'd interpret that chapter's section or concept as important. If not, he'd skip it. He filtered textbook sections using these titles. This is similar to his strategies in other classes where he used assignment questions to identify key terms within the text and then search for them using Command+F. Essentially, Caleb reverse engineered the process. Where an instructor likely found concepts or terms as important, they asked questions about them to prompt students to engage that material. Caleb identified key terms within the question, searched the terms, and then read the text surrounding them to gain a better understanding and potentially locate answers.

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<sup>59</sup> Canvas is Liberty's primary LMS. Administration expects all Canvas courses to follow a similar layout for consistency in the student experience.

**Figure 7**

*Illustration of Caleb's engagement with global and local features*

### 3-2 Summary

Now that you have carefully read the text and answered all of the questions, try to summarize the essay. A

**summary** condenses the main points of a piece to represent its message objectively. Summary writing forces you to engage with the text closely, enhances your memory of it, and helps you understand it. When writing a summary, it is crucial that you understand the hierarchy of information in the original text, identifying the thesis statement, the major points, the supporting evidence and details, and the concluding thoughts. When you are reading for information, you are playing the Believing Game. Whether or not you actually agree with the text is beside the point. In your summary, you will show that you have understood the main point of Prizant's essay.

Summaries are short—but they are powerful. In college, you will find summaries (sometimes referred to as **abstract**) at the beginning of research articles, in conference programs, and on book jackets. You will also be required to write them. The following summary is one example of how to condense the Prizant essay into one paragraph, taking care to include information from the introduction, the body, and the conclusion to identify his

**Figure 8**

*Illustration of Caleb's content navigation uses repeated terms*

### 3-1b Reading Rhetorically

As you annotate the text, you will ask questions that help you locate and respond to the specific features of the **rhetorical** situation: the writer's opportunity to propose change, the purpose of and audience of the message, the genre shaping the message. As you consider the context of the message, you will also think about the writer's place (where the writer is "coming from") and how that place influences the writer's stance toward the topic and you, the audience. Your challenge is to identify the **rhetorical** elements used to persuade you to believe the message and perhaps act on it, and evaluate the effectiveness of the delivery of the text in terms of genre and medium.

#### Reading for the writer's place

Questions about the writer's place provide information about the author that enriches your understanding of the message. You want to know as much as possible about the author so you can consider how social, educational, historical, or cultural influences affected the author's message. What **rhetorical** opportunity called for the author's use of specific words or visuals? Who is the author writing to? If not readily available, you can usually

## **Conclusion**

The discussion within this chapter investigates the depth this study's data provides that was not clearly seen through the broad, cross-participant analysis in the previous chapter. The aim was not to draw conclusions from their engagement practices and apply them to other participants in the study; rather, it was to exhibit the nuances of individual engagement and just how the thematic categories intersect to convey what that engagement looked like and associated with prior experiences. The final chapter discusses the results in Chapters IV and V, applying user, learner, and reader functions as lenses to interpret the data followed by potential implications of the study.



## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

The previous chapters presented thematized coding results of participant engagement with FYC textbooks, and though the individual tracing of the last chapter provided more depth than the collective cross-analysis in Chapter IV, understanding how that engagement embodies user, reader, and learner functions has not been explored in either. To answer the research question, I interpreted the results by applying definitions of user, reader, and learner developed in the literature review as lenses. The discussion below reflects those findings and highlights how students operated during the study.

#### User

Several students' initial expectations of the textbook foreshadowed user engagement early in the study. Without having experienced the FYC class prior to the first interview, Caleb, Delaney, James, and Jacob expected to engage the textbook for quiz or test answers, or as Jacob described, for "safety purposes." Johnson (1998) claimed prior experience as users of a text or technology informs participants use of subsequent materials, and Caleb explicitly mentioned his prior college course experience in Statistics informed his expectation since he used that textbook to complete assignments. Only Jacob continued to mention this expectation in the second and third interview whereas his peers adapted to the course "pattern" and modified those expectations. Had students maintained their expectation of assessment answers throughout the course based on prior experience, it could have led to "erroneous conclusions" (Carroll & Rosson, 1987). Despite the course not having many objective-based assessments, some students' previous engagement strategies revealed a prior history of user operation that would likely continue (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006). For Cadence, it was a strategy she remembered from

high school: read the heading and the first and last few sentences of a paragraph to get the “gist” of what it was saying. James described a Debate method from high school called “SPREAD,” where he extracted information from the text without reading it in detail. Neither student typically read texts in full and often skimmed content for a general understanding. The expectations of what the textbook would provide as well as prior history engaging with it as a user was consistent with scholarship suggesting user history and the selection from prior experiences inform current practices (Carroll & Rosson, 1987; Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006; Johnson, 1998).

This FYC course design incorporated the textbook as assigned readings to ground students in disciplinary knowledge—terminology, processes, and examples—to improve their development as writers, which positions the textbook as a core part of the curriculum and a “characteristic of the designed system” (Hassenzahl and Tractinsky, 2006, p.201). Nevertheless, several participants did not perceive engaging the textbook as essential to their success, which aligned with Johnson’s (1998) claim that “technology’s end” meets the user’s “perspective” rather than that of the designer (p.30). James’ overall aim was to improve his writing for law school, and his limited textbook engagement was due to interest in the topic, which is why he’d read some examples. Cadence’s primary motive of “finding a balance” was to succeed across all courses, which meant organizing time on task for all assignments and relying on class lectures and PowerPoints for content. After early grade confirmation in FYC, Cadence decreased textbook engagement and was more selective as she typically read the short overviews accompanying MindTap activities and then ceased engaging the book once they ended.<sup>60</sup> In fact,

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<sup>60</sup> Technically, the short overviews are not considered part of the textbook, but Cadence perceived the textbook and activities as one entity, and the most likely explanation is because the etextbook and MindTap activities are housed on the same publisher platform.

most students referenced their desire to succeed as their primary goal in the course and purpose for engaging the textbook, yet Cadence, Caleb, Jacob, and James mentioned they would usually engage if they felt like they were “struggling” or “had doubts.” Aagard, Connor, and Skidmore (2014), Jones (2011), and Juban and Lopez (2013) all noted the correlation of increased engagement with assessment practices, but because assessments in FYC were typically essays, students did not perceive a clear connection as reason for engagement. They chose when to engage despite the designed reading schedule. The textbook was there if needed, but in most cases, they felt they acquired sufficient knowledge from the class by using grades to confirm this. In many cases, the “sufficiency” related to course performance, which alters the expectations of what the textbook represents.

How participants navigated the textbook also embodied a user’s engagement, yet they varied on what features they engaged. Caleb, Cadence, Delaney, and James relied on the textbook’s global features (Anderson & Armbruster, 1985) such as headings when engaging the textbook; however, they would be selective on what sections to read based on their prior knowledge, comfort with the subject, and time constraints (Johnson, 1998). How those sections “cohered” with one another and within the chapter’s unity was secondary to how the content “cohered” with the participant’s prior knowledge, a factor both Johnson (1998) and Carroll and Rosson (1987) identified as informing user practice.

Other orienting features helped students move through the content sans linearity; however, the textbook’s generic conventions did not have the same role or value for each participant’s routinized functions (Swarts and Satterly, 2009; Weinberg et al., 2012).<sup>61</sup> For instance, Delaney maintained her skimming practices throughout, focusing on headings and local

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<sup>61</sup> Students also did not always distinguish these routinized patterns according to discipline either. Caleb often referenced other courses such as Statistics or Health when describing his engagement methods as did Cadence.

features (Anderson & Armbruster, 1985) such as bold terms to piece together meaning. After the first few weeks, Cadence also focused on bold terms and bullet points yet skipped “gray boxes” or example essays—what Janangelo (1999) called “decontextualized essays”—because they were not essential to her understanding of the content. However, Jacob, Kelly, and Caleb engaged with these more often because they perceived the models as more practical and interesting, a “better delivery” of the content. These examples “reinforced technical aspects” (Janangelo, 1999) yet did not necessarily help students develop their ideas (Gale, 1999; Spellmeyer, 1999). James sought out embedded articles because they appeared interesting and new rather than any technical illustration of generic features. These participants engaged as users as they skipped certain chapter sections according to their predefined predilections and motivations (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006; Phillips & Phillips, 2007) and used the generic conventions to recognize what aligned with their perceived needs (Swarts & Satterly, 2009).

Additionally, many of these participants operated as “functional readers” as they “skipp[ed] orienting material” to accomplish specific tasks (Sullivan and Flower, 1986, p.173). Cadence avoided “gray boxes” while Delaney and James also circumvented introductions, perceiving them as unnecessary. This is especially true for Delaney who mentioned using questions or assignments to filter her engagement with textbooks. Because the introduction does “not actually give you substance,” she did not value this textbook feature. James also considered the end of sections, including summaries, to be redundant and unnecessary. Not all studies have shown this avoidance of introductions and conclusions though. Besser, Stone, and Nan (1999) found students valued the introductions whereas Juban and Lopez’s (2013) study indicated the

chapter summary was beneficial.<sup>62</sup> Lee et al. (2013) also found students varied their navigation methods. Some utilized orienting material or organizational cues whereas others flipped through to identify needed information.

Caleb and James were the most interesting examples of navigating content as users within the study. Caleb's method of identifying repetition in the chapter, using keyword search to locate the repeated term, and engaging with the surrounding text proved to be a truly unique practice embodying the user's autonomy (Skeen, 2009) in complex systems (Eyman, 2009). He operated according to his own "motives" and "predilections" (Swarts and Satterly, 2009), which for Caleb was the desire to know the material, to succeed, but to do so efficiently within the time constraints. James, on the other hand, sought to engage new and interesting information since he felt confident with the writing process itself. He took the class for further development, so he only engaged the example essays and embedded articles. He was selective for his own motives, yet his engagement also reflected reader and learner roles discussed in the following sections.

Consistent with prior studies' results on textbook engagement (Aagard, Connor, & Skidmore, 2014; Jones, 2011; Juban & Lopez, 2013; Sullivan & Flower, 1986), user function appeared frequently in this study as well. Whether completing an assignment, preparing for class, or finding a model essay, students sought to accomplish a perceived objective or task beyond simply engaging the text (reader) or internalizing the content (learner). Though several expected to use it for assessments, they altered their patterns over the course of the semester, similar to Phillips and Phillips' (2007) findings. Also, they would rely on class discussions and PowerPoints more frequently to get the "gist" of what they were expected to do in the class.

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<sup>62</sup> Both of these studies focused on students in other disciplines and not first-years, which could be a contributing factor to why they valued the introductions and conclusions. Other influencing factors might be the writing of the textbook, correlating assessments, and course design.

Juban and Lopez (2013) found the same and lamented that “students who rely heavily on PowerPoint files will likely miss the details and depth necessary to truly understand most concepts” (p.329). Though I cannot draw such a conclusion here, the consistency of such practices between their study and mine highlights Juban and Lopez’s (2013) concern. It also suggests students perceive teacher and textbook content as redundant and interchangeable.

### **Reader**

Students engaging as readers occurred less often in this study. Rarely did students engage as Rosenblatt’s (1978) “aesthetic” reader. Though Kelly’s initial interview indicated an assumption this might be her experience in the course because she expected to read more literary works with explanatory footnotes, her engagement was more “efferent.” James was the only participant close to the “aesthetic” reader as he would engage with some examples for its interest and historical significance such as Sojourner Truth’s speech, but this revealed his motivation for engaging those sections and none of the data revealed a perceived “lived-through experience” with the text; it was primarily for new knowledge. Caleb did indicate examples were “more interesting to read,” which suggested an experience, but he did not expound on this further in any of the interviews.

The “efferent” reader was the prevalent reader function from participants, which is not surprising considering the textbook’s instructional tone, something Kelly described as “boring” and “stale” through much of her prior experience. Kelly, Kasey, Malachi, and Elijah typically read chapter readings from start to finish, skipping sections on occasion but mostly engaging with the chapter’s content, seeking information or knowledge relevant to the course. Malachi and Jacob both referenced getting more “knowledge” and a better “grasp” on the material by engaging the textbook. This is similar to Kelly and Kasey’s view that engaging the textbook

correlated with their course success. The text grounded content discussion and informed Kasey on “what we’re talking about” and Kelly to “understand what’s going on in class.” Both situations position the textbook as something that provides relevant information and it influences their class experience.

Even those who primarily “used” the textbook would “read” sections when seeking clarification. Both James and Delaney engaged as “efferent readers,” but as Brent (1992) noted, this engagement does not happen in “isolation.” Texts will overlap in ideas and appear similar and at other times might be “incompatible” (p.14). James and Delaney’s prior experience—a body of knowledge they already held—conflicted with the in-class lecture. James could not find added details on different signal tags in the textbook because this was an instructor-added element through in-class discussion and PowerPoint, and this ultimately frustrated him because he expected it to be in the text if discussed in class. Delaney heard the GA’s explanation of DOI’s in cite entries and felt it conflicted with what she knew from high school, and she likewise engaged the textbook’s MLA documentation chapter for further explanation. Both engaged the textbook as an arbitrator to make the “decision” of which to believe, to “updat[e] their system of beliefs” (Brent, 1992, p.21) or “update knowledge” (Rosenblatt, 1978).

### **Learner**

Extending beyond reader, the learner seeks intellectual development by internalizing the knowledge within the text, but like reader, not many students explained their engagement with the textbook was to learn. Kelly explained this is the primary reason she engaged with the textbook as she “wanted to learn [this new thing] well.” Malachi also expressed an interest in learning across all his interviews, yet his role as a learner actually decreased his engagement with the textbook as he sought to practice writing more. In this case, he reframed his task (engaging

the text) to align with his internal goal of learning (Luckin, 2010). Jacob, Elijah, and Kasey also detailed situations where they sought knowledge beyond what the textbook provided, utilizing online sources to clarify information and understand the course content further. Though this action fits the learner definition or seeking understanding in addition to the primary text, this was an easier process than referring back to the textbook as well, which again would suggest a more user-defined efficiency.

Perhaps why many students did not fully engage the textbook as they operated as “learners” was because they did not perceive the full value of the textbook in that process (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). As the results reflected, many students operated with a goal of finding assessment answers or generally succeeding in the course, which was confirmed through grades. Additionally, their prior knowledge (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Clines, 1995) and classroom experience (Bouwhuis, 1998; Moje, 1996) contributed to this. Clines (1995) argued FYC textbooks are either too similar or different to a student’s prior knowledge. We see this as Kelly described the “jump is not so far” that she would not be successful without the textbook, meaning it was similar to what she already knew and the class informed her enough to feel confident without engaging it. Many participants mentioned adapting to the instruction or “patterns” of the class, which Phillips and Phillips (2007) similarly identified and hypothesized contextual factors such as teacher, course design, or assessments could explain those variations.

### **Phasing of User, Reader, Learner**

To clarify, the above discussion is an attempt to parse the data and identify clear points where students operated in one of those roles. Still, there are inherent complexities in the results as students phased in and out of these. For example, Malachi began as more of a reader, but he phased to a textbook user when he adapted to the class pattern to fulfill his aim—improving his



writing—which ironically was also a learner function since he saw this as the best method for doing so. He perceived writing’s value across classes and beyond, so he was devoted to the goal of learning, yet this prompted him to operate as a user with the textbook in many ways. The text’s value as a body of disciplinary knowledge remained as he did not completely disengage with it, but the value in engaging with it did (Luckin, 2000). The contextual factors of teacher instruction and time influenced his preconceived views of the textbook and how he would engage it. Ironically, his desire to learn positioned him as more of a user of the text than a reader or learner.

Cadence began as a reader partly because she expected to read more in English and a general desire to do “better” than last semester; however, she consistently operated as a “user” in the course based on the “balance” she found in the class and grade confirmation. Cadence found that the class presentations and instructions were sufficient for her understanding of the material, which connected to Moje’s (1996) and Juban and Lopez’s (2013) claims that students adapt to pedagogical contexts and utilize other course texts to accomplish their goals. She did phase back into reader engagement for “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” midway through the semester, but she referenced the GA’s emphasis as a primary reason for the shift. Overall, grade confirmation, time constraints, and personal motivation prompted her to use the text sparingly, and she also mentioned the need to write more than read, which Caleb also mentioned.

Though he began the class expected to engage as a reader and learner, time constraints and pedagogical patterns influenced Caleb’s unique approach to the textbook later in the study. His method of ctrl+F allowed him to be user, reader, and learner. He did not read the text linearly as designed; he reorganized the content through patterns of word repetition and internalized the information from that point. Rosenblatt (1979) emphasized the “transaction” between reader and

text and the negotiation of meaning taking place. Despite the textbook's generic conventions of bolded terms, headings, orienting and local features, Caleb utilized repetition as an indication of importance and how he would navigate the text. Additionally, he did not follow the linear progression as set out by the text, making him a user who also operated with the intention of grasping the material as well.

### **Textbook Perception**

Following the first and second cycle of interviews, I realized students were describing the textbook in different ways, which prompted me to ask them directly how they defined it. The third interview responses confirmed diverse perceptions of the textbook; nonetheless, many of their perceptions mostly aligned with how they engaged with the textbook.

The aim of Glenn's textbook is to facilitate writer development, increasing awareness of the rhetorical situation and perceiving genre as the response to it. She described her text as a "rhetoric, research manual, and reader" (2018, p.xvi) combined as one central "guide." Yet, student engagement did not always align with the writer's intentions. Some students' engagement positioned the text as a repository of static knowledge useful for objective-based assessments.

Both Johnson (1998) and Skeen (2009) identified a user's engagement with technology often reflected their own "perspective of [it] and its ends" (Johnson, 1998, p.30). As discussed above, user engagement was prevalent, which is consistent with how many participants perceived the textbook. Caleb and Cadence saw it as course-specific with extra detail, with Caleb adding that the textbook is "set in stone." This would not align with an aesthetic reader experience where there is a transaction between reader and text shaping one another; rather, it would create a more information-driven engagement, and Brent (1992) said reading writing

created the “illusion that she is simply absorbing information from a text” (p.12), which is more of the hierarchical view participants held when viewing the text as “static.” Additionally, both students often engaged the textbook when completing MindTap activities or with some sort of assessment objective in mind, and both stopped engaging after interview two around the time MindTap activities concluded. Caleb elaborated in interview three the textbook “wasn’t of use to me,” again highlighting its lack of value in accomplishing his goals.

Similarly, James, Abigail, and Delaney viewed the textbook as supplemental. James did not see it as “necessary” or “inherent to the assignments.” Delaney and Abigail, like Cadence, felt the class provided what was needed for their success in the course and would not engage the textbook unless it was for MindTap, another assessment, or for clarification (i.e. when Delaney’s prior knowledge conflicted with class instruction). By perceiving the textbook as supplemental, participants positioned it outside of the necessary process for their intended motivations. It was present if needed; thus, its potential to assist is present (user), but without inherent value (learner) or providing an experience (reader), their engagement was information and task-driven.

Some students perceived the textbook as representing a broader body of knowledge with other voices present, which matched more reader and learner engagement. Rosenblatt (1978) and Brent (1992) also noted text perception shaped a reader’s experience with it, particularly if it is understood as objective rather than persuasive, likely prompting them to more information-driven engagement. Additionally, Luckin (2010) claimed a textbook’s value aligned with the learner’s perceived goals, meaning it must be perceived as capable of providing what’s needed. James, Jacob, and Malachi all described the textbook as someone else’s voice whether it was a “catalog of academics” (James) or just written by someone more skilled or “advanced” (Jacob) on the topic. James operated more frequently as a user, but when he did engage, it was for the

purposes of learning such as when he engaged a passage about ancient philosophers or another by Sojourner Truth. He was a “reader” seeking additional information for the sake of “updating” his knowledge (Brent, 1992). He was also a “learner” in that the textbook provided value for his goal of acquiring more knowledge; however, the textbook was limited in providing such experiences for him. He only noted those two situations where he engaged in this way.

Malachi and Jacob engaged the textbook as often as they could because they felt it provided more depth and understanding on the subject of writing, and time was a major factor as to why they could not engage as often as they desired. Interestingly, Malachi described the textbook as highly valuable to learning and wanted to engage it; however, he engaged less to practice and improve his writing. This contrast is notable for one reason: his engagement with the textbook does not position it as essential in improving his writing.

Elijah and Kasey labeled the textbook a “reference” or “a book that helps you,” and both said they read frequently. “Reference” evokes two meanings: one as an overview of material and second as an organized guide, which is closest to Glenn’s (2018) description. Though it can potentially be read, it can also permit people to use it for specific details when necessary. This duality matches Elijah and Kasey’s engagement in the study. Both found it helpful in grounding the course discussions, and Elijah even said he engaged it for a level of comfort to prepare for class. They utilized global and local features to navigate chapters, yet external factors such as time forced them to “skim,” which is more of a user function.

Although Kelly called it a book “for instruction or learning,” she also claimed she could “learn from the class” as well. Like Elijah, Kelly saw the textbook and class as “intertwined,” but it wasn’t essential for success either. Because they engaged the text more completely than some of the other participants, they could “fill in the gaps” that the class itself might not have filled.

They were both “readers” updating their knowledge and learners perceiving a particular value and “internalizing” information that would make latter processes easier.

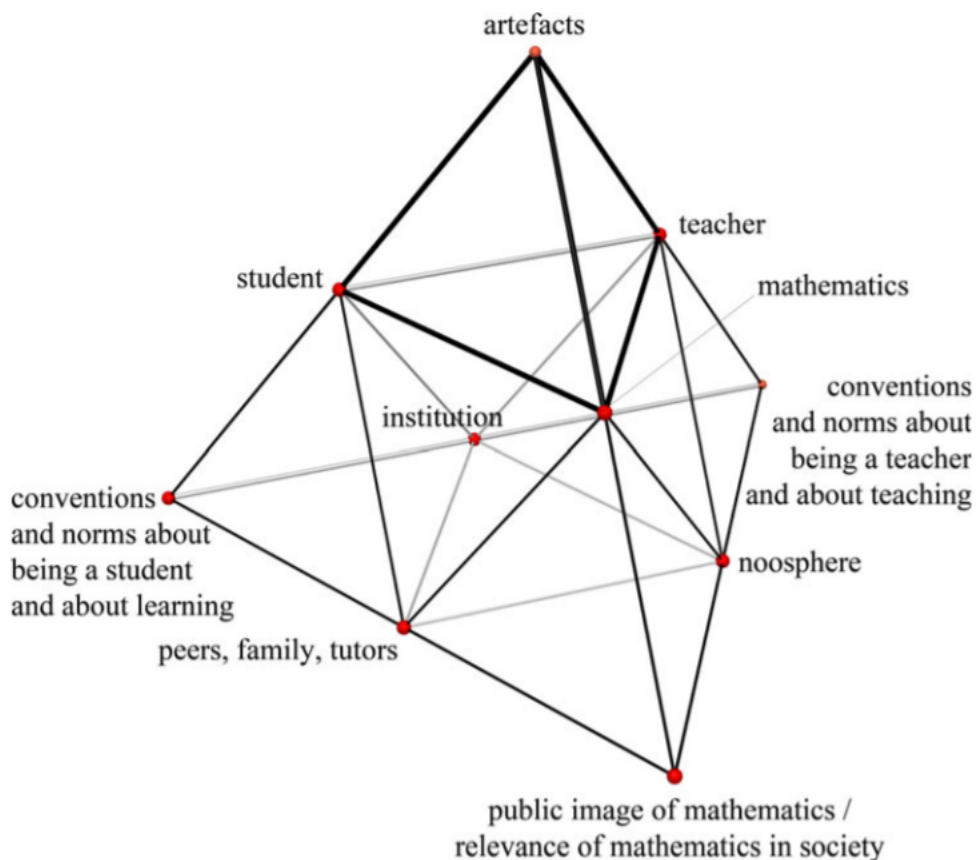
### **Socio-didactical Tetrahedron**

I return to Rezat and Sträber’s (2012) sociodidactical-tetrahedron mentioned in the literature review as a potential framework for explaining the functions of user, reader, and learner. Figure 1 is a second reference to this model in this dissertation. This model places the artifact—in this case the composition textbook—at the apex where all points eventually connect, and it also includes considerations of student, teacher, and subject matter—composition for this study. Though not every point or connection can be explicated due to the limited scope of this study’s data, the vertices can account for what data is present.

Prior experience with textbooks, gathered mostly in interview one, was one factor connected to students operating as users. Participants were not “blank slates” (Carroll and Rosson, 1987). Student expectations of what the textbook would provide (assessment answers) or engagement strategies such as SPREAD (James) originated in previous college courses or high school experiences. The tetrahedron’s base vertices under student—conventions and norms about being a student and peer, family, or tutors—include student educational histories. Conventions or norms convey a continuance of prior experiences as neither are established without repetition. Also, peer, family, or tutors accounts for how others have operated as students, and participants would build their knowledge of how to operate or act based on what others are doing. Kelly and Caleb both mentioned noticing a contrast in their own engagement practices compared to their roommates and classmates. For Kelly, this instilled confidence in her own approach since her peers were not “freaking out” about not reading. For Caleb, it was awareness that students

**Figure 9**

*Rezat and Sträber's (2012) socio-didactical tetrahedron model*



engage with textbooks differently yet still find similar levels of success. Both vertices connect to the other base point of “institution” in the tetrahedron, meaning these histories also inform how the student “fits” the “designed system” (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006). This system is not just ENGL 101, but it is Liberty University and the standards of being a student. Caleb mentioned his previous study habits in other classes such as Statistics when explaining what he expected from the textbook, and later participants began comparing their experiences with textbooks in other classes as a point of clarification when discussing engagement with the composition textbook.

Another primary thread for user function was utilizing technology for the participant's own purpose. Students' goals within the class varied as did their engagement; however, several mentioned success in the course as a primary objective and used grade confirmation to determine their comfort level. In this case, they measured their success according to their performance in the institutional system (grades) rather than their internalization and growth in the subject matter itself.<sup>63</sup> Although Aagard, Connor, & Skidmore (2014), Jones (2011), Juban & Lopez (2013) claimed assessments typically lead to increased engagement, most of the course's point value resided in writing essays and the writing process; thus, participants actually engaged less with the textbook in this study. This leads to their devaluation or misunderstanding of the noosphere,<sup>64</sup> a shared foundational vertex between teacher and subject matter. User operation moves away from the understanding and internalization of what the noosphere represents and prioritizes user motive and intention. Several participants mentioned having "sufficient" knowledge or no "sufficient" reason to engage differently than they did before, but this term is in relation to their course performance, not the requisite knowledge those connected to the noosphere would consider "sufficient." The textbook's intention and design are to guide students, to provide that requisite disciplinary knowledge including genre awareness and the writing process (Glenn, 2018). This understanding should be discovered through textbook engagement, but participant motivations to succeed in the course, to follow instructions and utilize content provided in class meant the intended discovery was bypassed. Again, there is more emphasis on the vertices connected to student rather than all points connected to the artifact. This is logical because the

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<sup>63</sup> It is quite possible students perceived grades as reflective of what was being internalized or learned, but internalization suggests long-term understanding whereas assessments are limited to short-term understanding.

<sup>64</sup> Rezat and Sträber (2012) described this as representing all invested in the subject matter (i.e. scholars, instructors, professional organizations), yet those groups represent a general agreed upon body of knowledge.

user operates according to their own task-driven motives rather than the full reader or learner experience.

Reader function is also present in the socio-didactical tetrahedron, but rather than a heavy emphasis on student connected vertices, it is the relation of student to subject matter content. Brent (1992) and Rosenblatt (1978) stressed reading to “update” knowledge, a transactional rather than merely transmissive experience. When participants displayed reader operation, they were often doing so when encountering new information or something perceived as interesting or important. Though the noosphere is a base vertex for composition, reader operation does not necessarily mean the student internalizes that knowledge as a learner; hence, the noosphere is present yet the student is unaware. Likewise, reader function included student autonomy in choosing where they opted to update their knowledge from. For instance, several participants described obtaining “sufficient” information from the class lectures and PowerPoints, alternate texts both Bouwhuis (1989) and Moje (1996) noted as having potential to be read. There were also instances where reader function occurred when James and Delaney encountered information in class that they did not recognize when compared to prior experience. In both cases, they engaged the textbook as readers to check that information. Rezat and Sträber (2012) also mentioned similar scenarios of comparison in their study when students “rel[ied] on the authority of the book in order to question the teacher” (p.649). User operation leaned heavily on the student tetrahedron, but reader function maintains the autonomy of the student while recognizing the authority of the subject matter presented in the composition textbook.

Operating as a learner requires more balance across the socio-didactical tetrahedron. Not only are there certain norms and conventions of being a student, there is also understanding a public image of the subject as well norms and conventions of being a teacher. Two students



embodied this in different ways. Malachi understood the scholarly voices represented in the text, and this was one of his reasons for engaging with it: to learn from them. He also understood writing's value in other classes and beyond, a more positive view of the subject compared to his peers, which also prompted his approach to the subject. However, what's interesting is to truly internalize the textbook content means knowing the practice of writing leads to improvement, which Malachi did; nevertheless, this also meant engaging with the textbook less to practice writing. Kelly, though, engaged with the textbook because of an unofficial contract between student and teacher that both would do their part in the process. This would be the norms and conventions at two bottom vertices, and she displayed awareness of the third as she was the only participant distinguishing between disciplinary content, their purposes, and their practices. She had increased awareness of the subject matter vertex whereas others prioritized more of the institutional and student expectation vertices for their operation.

### **Emerging Themes**

#### **Interpreting Courses as Genres**

Cadence's remark that "every class has a specific pattern" that clarifies "what's most important to do" resonated with me during and after data collection, particularly as every student had at least one instance of the "teacher pattern" code assigned to their responses. And as I mentioned in the results, the term "pattern" suggests something stable enough to be recognized. Though I included genre knowledge as an extension of prior knowledge in Chapter II, genre theory was not the underlying framework for this study. Nonetheless, there are enough connecting threads between the results and genre scholarship to warrant further study. For example, the class pattern students "interpreted" connects to Carolyn Miller's (1984) genre as "typified rhetorical actions in recurrent situations" (p.159). Granted, several participants

commented that “it depends on the professor,” implying incredible fluidity, which is why Miller’s (1984) definition relates so well. For her, genre is a “social occurrence” (p.156), contextualized yet “recurrent,” and Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) added that the very nature of genres is so complex that immersion and experience are necessary to develop genre knowledge.

Each participant represents years of said immersion and experience unique to their previous contexts, but they commonly inhabit multiple classes at once. While we can conclude they identify as students, they are students of various majors and instructors with their respective disciplines, which also adds to the level of fluidity and intertextuality informing actions in that no utterance is isolated or severed from others (Bakhtin, 1984). If we consider the classroom as a genre itself (Bazerman, 1997) and students inhabiting multiple identities at once, then their actions within the classroom are often fulfilling those identities simultaneously, which corresponds to the other commonly mentioned contextual factor that emerged in this study: time. Students responded to the generic characteristics of teacher patterns across classes coupled with the constraint of limited time. As a result, the student’s prioritized purpose became the driving force for how they operated as either user, learner, or reader at any given point.

Another common thread is the participant’s prioritized purpose. Miller (1984) emphasized the correlation of intention and action with respect to such an aim:

But at the level of the genre, motive becomes a conventionalized social purpose, or exigence, within the recurrent situation. In constructing discourse, we deal with purposes at several levels, not just one. We learn to adopt social motives as ways of satisfying private intentions through rhetorical action (p.48).

A student’s engagement according to prioritized purpose, then, depends on their recognition of what’s possible in that context (Bazerman, 1994) and whether that fulfills their personal goals.

While such commonalities between this case study and genre theory warrant, at the very least, further study, this is still conceptual and inconclusive.

### **Agency (Adaptation)**

In relation to pattern recognition, several participants “adapted” to the perceived class genre, thus informing how they could operate in the class to fulfill their individual aims. Issitt (2004) stressed the “context of use” where “the agencies of teacher and student act” as the future of textbook scholarship, and the results appear to confirm this as well. Yet, such research must include the contextual factors shaping agency. Many scholars agree agency is fluid and malleable by the social and cultural forces it existed in (Bevir, 1999; Campbell, 2005; Cooper, 2011; Ewald & Wallace, 1994; Flannery, 1991; Herndl & Licona, 2007); thus, agency is related to context and not solely the individual. This accounts for the class-as-genre theme above and positions agency as a “social act” embedded within a social and kairotic context (Herndl & Licona, 2007). Potentially, student operations as user, reader, or learner would be considered agency as the individual motive drives their actions within the realm of what’s available and possible.

Furthermore, such acts are connected to a history of contexts students encountered and responded to. Campbell (2005) called the intersection of these points where the act occurs as “articulation” (p.5), which Herndl and Licona (2007) expanded as one that emerges from an amalgamation of relations similar to the sum of Burke’s pentad ratios (p.142). In each of these views, the contextualized action is agentive and includes not only the present act in context but considerations of previous experiences contributing to that act. As the results showed, participants engaged with the textbook according to their own intentions and how it fulfilled their aims in context, one that extended beyond FYC and included the broader student experience in multiple courses.

## Limitations

During the planning phases of this study, Liberty administration expected to have several independent courses not connected to the large lecture/breakout model; however, due to lower enrollment across courses—described as a pandemic effect—the independent courses were shuttered prior to the spring semester. As a result, I could only recruit students from sections under my supervision, so all participants saw me as both instructor and researcher. Some affordances of this duality existed, including familiarity with me outside of the interview process. There appeared to be a growing level of comfort as our informal discussions about interests and well-being increased both before and after interviews, and some participants began asking about the class, assignments, or even the study itself.<sup>65</sup> Another affordance is my awareness of the course design, the intended outcomes and correlated assignments, and the course schedule in relation to the interview date. When participants referenced certain assignments, class activities, and chapters, they did not always use the same terminology or description, yet I was able to recognize they were often discussing the same course element because of my familiarity with the content, schedule, and overall design.

Yet using my own students as participants presented limitations as well. There was a possibility students were hesitant disclosing their engagement practices. Some participants apologized for their responses, particularly when they revealed minimal engagement with the textbook. While this was not prevalent in the data, it still indicated students were aware of not only my role, but their dual role as student-participant and how each answer connected to their identity. My role as interviewer and researcher could also influence the “emerging” of codes

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<sup>65</sup> Whenever students asked about the study’s exact focus, I declined to elaborate other than a generic remark about the student experience in FYC because I did not want to affect their current behavior in the course. If students knew the research question or the data I collected relevant to that focus, they may have altered their engagement.

during the first cycle. In vivo coding is meant to honor participant voices, to emanate from their words, yet I was the one identifying those codes. Any qualitative study where a researcher uses in vivo coding will have an inherent question of who is speaking: researcher or participant. Still, I relied on salient terms and ideas in the data as well as my knowledge of similar studies to identify codes and strengthen the reliability of this study's results.

Another limitation would be the GA role's potential impact on results. While I am the primary instructor, participants still perceived GA's as additional—or at least partial—authority in the classroom. Data revealed students discussing the instructor influence but not always distinguishing whether that was me or the GA. I often asked follow-up questions for clarification, but there are some data points where it remained unclear. GA personalities and pedagogies created layers of influence this study's questions likely could not fully account for. Two participants had the same GA and described engaging the textbook in preparation for breakout class discussions because they knew they might be called on to participate, but the same motive for engagement was less consistent for other participants. GA's had the freedom to develop class activities when facilitating course content, and this created disparity in student experiences despite all participants taking the same FYC course. Though this limitation was unavoidable without other FYC courses available during the time of this study and the unique lecture/breakout model, future studies might examine students from the same section or cross-compare two sections taught by a single instructor.

This would also invite more investigation into the instructor's perception of textbooks and their intended use, something this study does not provide. I inhabited the roles of course designer, researcher, and instructor, giving me a unique perspective of student textbook engagement, yet those overlapping roles also prevented me from including instructor data

because of the difficulty parsing those roles to present it objectively. Such data would include not only my intentions and goals (as primary instructor) regarding students' engagement with the textbook but also how these expectations were communicated in assignments, lectures, or class discussions by myself and GAs. It would allow for a more granular examination of the relationships among particular instructional goals, parts of the textbook intended to support these, specific assignments, classroom instruction, and students' decisions about engagement as users, learners, or readers. Understanding the instructor's course design and expected use of the textbook within it would thus extend discussions of user, learner, and reader functions. This would also further explore Rezat and Sträßer's (2012) two base vertices of norms or conventions of being a student and norms or conventions of being a teacher.

Finally, this study did not dive deep into the "mood" of the participants and how this contributed to engagement. "Mood" describes not just the actual feeling as they engaged, but their predisposition to textbooks and/or the specific disciplinary subject. My interview questions did not necessarily tap into this enough to fully observe its influence how students engaged. At times, students described their confidence in writing, their prior experience in English or other disciplinary courses, or their reasoning for engaging the way they did, but such descriptions were lacking at the moment of engagement. All data was reflective and looking back on the practical engagement rather than the immediate factors present. Future studies seeking to investigate this thread would require altering the methods, likely incorporating more real-time observation of textbook engagement taking place or a journal component where participants write on their experience and what was happening at that moment. Still, I avoided such methods in this study because of potential influence they would have on student engagement. Being aware of external

observation or the need to write on their engagement can alter their processes, particularly if the researcher is also their instructor for the course.

Each of the limitations above were unavoidable, yet their existence presented intriguing nuances. Additional factors influencing student engagement with textbooks likely exist, and this calls for future study and methodological adjustments in some cases. Still, the nuances present here do not discount nor devalue the collected data.

### **Recommendations for Future Study<sup>66</sup>**

#### **Textbook Design**

Although composition's textbook scholarship to date has focused on the underlying theories and ideas communicated to students (Bleich, 1999; Faigley, 1992; Gale & Gale, 1999; Kleine, 1999; Ohmann, 1979) or on textbook design through publisher influence (Mortensen, 1990; Miles, 2000; Zebrowski, 1999), it needs to explore how design impacts student engagement as user, learner, or reader in context. This case study's results indicate varied engagement with several factors shaping this experience, yet it does not investigate whether the FYC textbook design favors one more than another. Most students engaged as users during the study despite several participants' initial intentions to read more at the course's onset. Time, teacher influence, and textbook perception did influence their engagement, but it remains inconclusive as to how much the textbook's design influenced those results. A usability study on composition textbooks would explore this influence and how it might align with the engagement practices this and other case studies provide.

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<sup>66</sup> This study did not investigate the efficacy of my class, yet the results provide valuable data regarding student engagement within it. Moreover, the prevalence of "teacher pattern" revealed students increasingly responded to the class rather than just the textbook, which I considered and reflected on during the study. Though some dissertations include "recommendations" for course design, I will focus only on recommendations for future study because course efficacy was not the impetus or intention for my research. With additional data following more studies, scholars can begin to draw conclusions that inform course design and FYC student experience.

Such future studies should also investigate whether the textbook's generic conventions benefit one function more than others. This would build on previous yet minimal scholarship highlighting those conventions and their particular aims (Anderson & Armbruster, 1985; Besser, Stone, & Nan, 1999; Carter, 1985) as well as this study's results. Students often navigated the textbook's content utilizing its generic characteristics as expected, yet several preferred the chapter examples (Kelly, Jacob) or the narrative-style texts from other classes (Delaney, James, & Abigail). Delaney defined the FYC textbook as "just facts and facts and facts" and "more like a list," carrying a particular style she did not enjoy engaging compared to her Global Studies' text. James and Caleb even mentioned the visuals in the composition textbook were irrelevant to their engagement with the textbook with Caleb adding such illustrations might have a more practical purpose in a Health class. Preference for narratives and perceived superfluity of orienting materials suggest the typical generic conventions might be uninteresting, not fit the discipline's aim, or at the very least not promote the student's desired engagement or purpose.

### **Textbook Perception Origin and Influence**

Student perceptions of textbooks emerged as a specific thread in the second and third interviews, yet it was unclear whether these perceptions were pre-established or developed through engagement. Essentially, does a student's engagement influence their perception, or does their preestablished perceptions inform the engagement? All participants mentioned class pattern as a contributing factor to how they engaged, which would lead us to infer textbook perception develops within a single course; however, six participants described high school engagement practices as limited, with several saying it was occurred in conjunction with completing assignments. They commonly operated as a user prior to and during the study, which means the preestablished or developing thread cannot be distinguished yet.



Expanding research on this would be significant, especially since English is arguably one of if not the most common subject students experience in the K-12 setting. Extensive prior experience as K-12 provides might engrain certain habits and expectations for textbook engagement. Previous scholarship also acknowledged prior experience and its influence on engagement (Carroll & Rosson, 1987; Johnson, 1998). If students already view the textbook with a perceived value based on their prior experience and knowledge, it can directly impact the way they engage prior to the phenomenon (Clines, 1995; Alexander & Jetton, 2000). If prior experience *is* the definitive factor, then scholars and instructors should focus on textbook design as it relates to course objectives and build on those preexisting perceptions. On the other hand, if the course experience and ongoing engagement informs their perception, then textbook integration within FYC would be the primary focus.

Part of this is whether an individual's prioritized purpose—the intended aim or goal they seek to accomplish—works congruently with textbook perception, or does one define the other. The purpose to engage is an important factor for user (Hassanzahl & Tractinsky, 2006; Johnson, 1998), reader (Brent, 1992; Rosenblatt, 1978), and learner (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). If this prioritized purpose influenced textbook perception, then prior experience becomes more noteworthy. Nonetheless, if textbook perception influenced prioritized purpose, then textbook design becomes essential to future studies.

There also remains the possibility textbook perception corresponds to both prior experience and prioritized purpose, suggesting the relationship is not necessarily causal. This would prompt further investigation into textbook engagement as sensitive interplay of various factors, all contributing to the experience with some carrying more weight than others based on the individual.

### **Dynamics of Student-Text-Teacher**

Though this study examined a student-text relationship, a broader dynamic between student-text-teacher merits further exploration. Participants mentioned class “patterns” or “it depends on the teacher” when discussing textbook engagement in courses. They responded not just to the text within the scope of their own predispositions and prior history, but they adapted to the teacher’s implementation of course materials and assessments, which is consistent with Moje’s (1996) previous claims. Rezat and Sträßer (2012) also stressed the importance of seeing both the “distinct communities of teachers and students” as well as “the institution” as essential to understanding student use of artifacts (p.647). Student engagement is only part of picture, and additional studies are needed to piece together teacher and institution influence.

Such studies might further examine how students portray the role of a textbook in the course over three interview cycles in addition to teacher interviews asking the same question. Other instructor questions could include how they integrated the text within course design, how they expect students to engage it, and how they think students engage it over the course of the semester. Collecting both student and instructor data would provide a second part to student engagement research where perceptions (student) and intentions (teacher) intersect at the point of the textbook.

### **Future Case Studies**

The codes developed during the study emphasized the importance of socio-contextual factors that cannot be generalized across all FYC. Even if Glenn’s textbook and the course syllabus were identical for another study, each student’s distinctive engagement correlates with too many factors: the participant’s prioritized purpose, predilection for generic features and how this informs content navigation, textbook perception, time constraints related to their course load,

extra-curricular activities, responsibilities, and their interpretation of teacher influence and course design. Thus, we need additional case studies to understand this phenomenon's nuances.

What could be improved within the case study model is using more of an ethnographic approach. By including Chapter V's in-depth exploration of three participants, I attempted to trace a broader individual history chapter IV could not convey.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, an ethnography would permit more cross-case analysis through a longitudinal case-study design. Not only would it contrast individual engagement within FYC, but it could expand whether such practices evolve or solidify over time and across disciplines.

### **Conclusion**

The findings listed above apply definitions of user, reader, and learner to the initial results, yet as this discussion revealed, the nuances of textbook engagement are complex, difficult to parse, and worthy of further study. The amount of overlap and phasing between the three functions indicate engagement is always fluid. Perceptions of a static or linear process would be misleading, and even the socio-didactical tetrahedron potentially oversimplifies this phenomenon. As Rezat and Sträber (2012) conceded, the model is not to scale: the equal distance between vertices as well as their exact placement present a balanced set of relationships. The data suggests it is messier than what the model presents, and future case studies can establish a foundation for further adaptations of the socio-didactical tetrahedron and a better understanding of textbook engagement. The following chapter presents my final thoughts on the study and its potential.

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<sup>67</sup> I am not calling Chapter V an ethnography as it still lacks the depth such an approach provides; however, it was included to exemplify the nuances of a single participant's engagement and the potential a full ethnographic study might provide.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation with personal reflection of textbook engagement as a student followed by what I observed as an instructor, both of which led to authentic inquiry and desire to fully understand that experience. It is only fitting that the conclusion would include further reflection on the study's results and discussion, the potential significance for future studies, and a final thought on the process. Essentially, this chapter juxtaposes my prior experience with this study's results.

In addition to personal experience and interest, this case study's findings emanated from two merging threads—one established and one developing—in composition scholarship. The established thread is a longstanding discussion of textbooks in composition studies, most of which debated the genre's impact, formation, and role in the classroom (Besser et al., 1999; Carr, Carr, & Schultz, 2005; Colby, 2013; Connors, 1987; Edwards, 1984; Faigley, 1992; Gale & Gale, 1999; Hawhee, 1999; Issitt, 2004; Miles, 2000; Ohmann, 1979; Rendleman, 2009, 2011; Welch, 1987). The developing thread is textbook use as the object of study (Colby, 2013; Harris, 2012; Rendleman, 2009, 2011), one that has limited discussion since these original calls for it. This study extends the latter thread by examining multiple student functions as textbook engagement and by illustrating the diverse yet complex experience present within FYC classrooms.

As the results illustrated, students responded more to the perceived context than the textbook itself. Contextual factors such as time constraints, objectives, and teacher "patterns" informed textbook engagement more so than the construction of the textbook. Their prior knowledge and experience with textbooks also contributed to their engagement. Pre-established

expectations of how often they would engage the textbook and what they expected from it originated in a history of experience. Yet several adapted to immediate contextual factors both shared with their peers (textbook, teacher pattern, assessment) and those that were unique to their own situations (other classes, personal situations, individual motivations). Textbook engagement was thus not just the individual and the textbook but a smaller part of the greater student experience. Engagement with the textbook was part of their engagement with the course.

The emerging theme of “Interpreting Courses as Genres” is significant in how it positions textbooks as a contextual element. The textbook is not central to the course nor is it fully secondary; it is part of the teacher-student-knowledge interaction. Whether the textbook becomes central or secondary depends on the individual’s interpretation of the course, and that interpretation *manifests* as textbook engagement.<sup>68</sup> In Chapter I, I discussed my frustration when established engagement strategies did not correlate to success in English as it did in other disciplines; thus, I adjusted my practice in English while continuing what worked in other courses. Additionally, I noticed varying engagement practices in my own students later, but my initial thoughts were too limited since I assumed they were responding to the textbook alone rather than the course as a genre. As a student, I expected the textbook to fulfill an identical role in English as it did in other disciplines, but it did not. Yet my students’ engagement practices suggested it could be more than just disciplinary diversity.

Though the study did not examine the efficacy of my course, it naturally prompted me to reflect on my role as the instructor and how this influenced their engagement. I understood text integration was much more than connecting the class with a base curriculum, and this study provided practical evidence showing just how far this process extends into the student

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<sup>68</sup> I do not conclude textbook engagement is the full revelation of how a student interprets the course genre; however, it contributes to such an understanding.

experience. Through participant responses, I can see the diverse student experience and the need for a clear framing of the textbook's purpose and how it can be utilized. This will not prevent the diverse operations of user, reader, and learner, but it might provide more confidence for students to understand their agency and how to maximize the textbook's affordances for their goals.

Following this study, I returned to organizations such as NCTE and WPA and their expectations for FYC to identify where this study might fit or at least speak to established pedagogy. Though the *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (3.0)* discussed outcomes for what a student likely learns in regard to writing, they also apply to a broader context as well. First, rhetorical knowledge is defined as writers “negotiating purpose, audience, context, and conventions as they compose a variety of texts for different situations” (WPA, 2019). Student here is limited to “writer,” which is expected; however, if we reframe this statement and understand the student as a citizen of the education system, then rhetorical knowledge and “negotiating purpose, audience, context, and conventions” is exactly what the case study participants did. Consider the WPA's statement explaining conventions as part of rhetorical knowledge:

Conventions arise from a history of use and facilitate reading by invoking common expectations between writers and readers. These expectations are not universal; they vary by genre (conventions for lab notebooks and discussion-board exchanges differ), by discipline (conventional moves in literature reviews in Psychology differ from those in English), and by occasion (meeting minutes and executive summaries use different registers). A writer's grasp of conventions in one context does not mean a firm grasp in another. Successful writers understand, analyze, and negotiate conventions for purpose, audience, and genre, understanding that genres evolve in response to changes in material

conditions and composing technologies and attending carefully to emergent conventions.  
(WPA, 2019)

The WPA Outcomes include prior experience, contextual factors correlating with varied expectations, and the ability to negotiate conventions. The case study participants discussed prior experience and context informing their perceptions and engagement with the textbook. They negotiated the textbook's value according to that context, their motivations, and expectations. What the WPA outcomes expect from FYC writers is the lived experience many of them have within the course itself.

However, I also found one thread where textbooks did not seem to fit. NCTE's position statement emphasizes the practice of writing improves writing; however, with such emphasis on practice, where does that place textbooks in FYC's context? In their *Position Statement on Professional Knowledge and the Teaching of Writing*, the NCTE highlighted the importance of writing practice:

As is the case with many activities, becoming a better writer requires that students write. This means actual writing for real audiences, not merely listening to lectures about writing, doing grammar drills, or discussing readings. The more people write, the more familiar it becomes and the more they are motivated to do it. Writers learn from each session with their hands on a keyboard or fingers on a pencil as they draft, rethink, revise, and draft again. Improvement is built into the experience of writing when writers revise, strategizing ways to make their writing better. (NCTE, 2016)

If "improvement is built into the experience of writing," then how do textbooks contribute to that development? If they are guides for this practice, does this change the expectations of their engagement? Are they designed more for usability than readability? Writing is a skill, not

necessarily content to be memorized. While steps to improve writing can be internalized or learned, the discipline's stance is this happens through practice rather than reading. Participants in this study varied in their engagement, but the consistent presence of user function in the results align with the textbook as more of a guide. Still, we must look beyond the textbook as part of the student's FYC experience.

### **Final Thought**

Nothing about this case study was clean or easy despite how it might be presented in this dissertation. There was a constant fight with the entangled data, a struggle to follow threads only to see them intertwined at other points. Though the study only had ten participants, the data has more value than I probably could have covered in this study's scope. Student history and prior educational settings are a few threads extending beyond this study but should be pursued further. Granted, this merits more of a longitudinal, ethnographic case study. Additionally, we cannot overlook the immediate contextual factors influencing individual student experiences and how their prior experience informs their response. Future research needs to account for these rich individual histories and their point of intersection in FYC, and textbook engagement reveals part of this diversity. Finally, student engagement practices indicate a reevaluation of textbook design and inclusion. Are students engaging them as intended? If practicing writing fosters writer development, what role does a textbook contribute to that?

By its very nature, the textbook is a common genre, one often universalized for mass dissemination on campuses across the nation; however, individual students cannot be universalized. Their histories speak to their present experiences all while looking ahead to their future goal. Textbook engagement should not be generalized as a form of standard practice just as what it proposes to explain—how to write—cannot be oversimplified as many scholars have



maintained (Bleich, 1999; Edwards, 1984; Rose, 1981, 1983). As I reflect on this dissertation, I realize the magnitude not of what this study presents, but of what research is left to be done regarding how we recognize and understand the student experience in FYC.

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## APPENDIX A

### BASELINE SURVEY

Week 1 Survey (survey will be disseminated and responses collected using Microsoft Forms.

The hardcopy below represents the questions asked).

**The following survey is for an upcoming research case study I am conducting during the Fall 2021 semester. This survey gathers data to assist in selecting prospective participants; however, completing it does not automatically enroll you as part of the study. The researcher (I) will take reasonable steps to keep all data collected from this survey confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher will not identify you.**

**Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, or change your mind later, your decision will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the evaluation of your performance in this course, or your right to other services that you may be eligible for.**

Please, provide your name (first and last): \_\_\_\_\_.

Gender:

- Male
- Female

Age:

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21

- 22-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50 or older

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Two or more races: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Before attending college, which of the following was most of your high school experience?

- Public
- Private
- Homeschooled

2. Did you purchase the optional print version of the textbook for this course?

- Yes
- No

3. Please, provide a brief explanation why you chose that option.

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4. Please, indicate if any of the following pertain to you:



- I have received credit for ENGL 101 either in high school or at another institution.
  - I was previously enrolled in ENGL 101 and remained in the course beyond the Add/Drop period.
  - I took ENGL 100 at Liberty University.
  - None of the above.
5. Are you willing to participate in virtual interviews during this course, one during week 1, one in week 7, and the other in week 14? (Note: I will work with you to schedule interviews that do not interrupt your normal schedule).
- Yes
  - No

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW 1 QUESTIONS

This phenomenological case study investigates the first-year composition (FYC) student experience with assigned composition textbooks. Through three sets of interviews, FYC students will discuss their experience during the semester, providing the essential data for my primary research question: how do Liberty University students engage with the required composition textbook as readers, users, and learners? The student responses to the interview questions below not only extend the baseline data gathered in the survey, they present individual expectations, understandings, and beliefs of textbooks prior to engaging them in the FYC classroom.

**Script: Researchers will take reasonable steps to keep all data collected from this survey confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher will not identify you.**

**Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, or change your mind later, your decision will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the evaluation of your performance in this course, or your right to other services that you may be eligible for.**

1. As you begin this course, what do you think you will get from the textbook?
  1. Why that expectation?
  2. \*If “prior experience”: Can you describe what your “prior experience” was?
2. How much do you expect to engage the textbook during this course?
  1. Why that expectation?

2. \*If “prior experience”: Can you describe what “experiences” you remember?
3. In the survey you responded that you were in a public/private/home-schooled setting for most of your high school career. Can you explain how much you engaged with textbooks in this learning environment?
  1. \*If none: Can you explain? Were there textbooks in this setting?
  2. \*If none: Were there academic resources provided in that setting?
  3. \*If some: What do you mean by “some?” When might you engage and why? When might you not engage and why?
  4. \*If most/all: Why? Were they common in this setting?
  5. \*If most/all: So they were consistent. Was anything else consistent? As consistent? Less consistent than the textbook?
4. Do you typically read every page assigned? Why or why not?
5. Do you typically highlight, underline, or annotate the text in any way?
  1. \*If not: Is there a specific reason?
  2. \*If yes: Why do you find it important to engage the textbook that way?

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW 2 QUESTIONS

The second interview seeks to gather data on how students are engaging the textbook during the FYC course. This will be an artifact guided interview where students may reference specific parts of the textbook as part of their answer.

**Script: Researchers will take reasonable steps to keep all data collected from this survey confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher will not identify you.**

**Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, or change your mind later, your decision will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the evaluation of your performance in this course, or your right to other services that you may be eligible for.**

1. How would you describe your engagement with the textbook thus far in the course?
2. In the first interview, you said textbooks were/were not a major part of your education experience in high school. How does your experience thus far in the course compare to that history?
  - a. At the beginning of this course, when did you engage with the textbook?
  - b. What prompted you to engage with it?
  - c. Has your engagement evolved from the beginning until now?
  - d. If so, what prompted that change (if any)?
3. [I will ask the subject to access the textbook in the format they typically use it in (i.e. digital or print)]. In the first interview, you indicated you are using the print/digital textbook for this class. Can you walk me through how you've engaged with it thus far?

- a. [If the student does not go to a specific chapter to illustrate this, I will ask them to use Chapters 8 and 17 as these will be the most recent readings prior to week 7].
4. Are there specific parts of the textbook you've engaged more often? Why?
5. What have you gained from the textbook thus far in the course?

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW 3 QUESTIONS

The third interview seeks to gather data on how students engaged with the textbook during the entire FYC course. This interview seeks more reflection by the student on their specific reasons for engagement (or lack thereof) and how this did/did not contribute to their writing. This will be an artifact guided interview where students may reference specific parts of the textbook as part of their answer.

**Script: Researchers will take reasonable steps to keep all data collected from this survey confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher will not identify you.**

**Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, or change your mind later, your decision will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the evaluation of your performance in this course, or your right to other services that you may be eligible for.**

1. [I will ask the subject to access the textbook in the format they typically use it in (i.e. digital or print)]. From the beginning of the semester until now, did your engagement with the textbook change in any way? Can you illustrate what you may have done before compared to now? Why?
2. How do you see the textbook contributing (or not) to your development as a writer within this course?
  1. If there are any parts of the textbook you felt contributed to your development as a writer, identify those areas. Why do you think they contributed to your development?

2. If you avoided any parts of the textbook, point out those sections and explain the reasoning for not using them? Why do you think this is?
3. What would you say you've gained from this textbook?
3. In the first interview, you described your expectations of the textbook before the course began [I will remind subjects what their answers were in the first interview]. Did those expectations change? Why or why not?
4. Why did you engage with the book the way you did?
5. How would you define "textbook?"

## APPENDIX E

### LICENSE AGREEMENT: SOCIO-DIDACTICAL TETRAHEDRON

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