# Stony Brook University

The official electronic file of this thesis or dissertation is maintained by the University Libraries on behalf of The Graduate School at Stony Brook University.

**The Secondary/Postsecondary Writing Gap:**
**Obeying Standards, Striving for Authenticity**

A Thesis Presented

by

**Kelly Ann Streibel**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

in

**English**

Stony Brook University

**May 2014**

**Stony Brook University**

The Graduate School

**Kelly Ann Streibel**

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the

Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend

acceptance of this thesis.

**Peter Khost – Thesis Advisor**
**Assistant Professor of English**

**Patricia A. Dunn – Second Reader**
**Associate Professor of English**

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

# The Secondary/Postsecondary Writing Gap:
# Obeying Standards, Striving for Authenticity

by

**Kelly Ann Streibel**

**Master of Arts**

in

**English**

Stony Brook University

**2014**

Abstract: In times of daunting new standards for high school learning outcomes, high stakes assessments often result in teaching to the test. This, in turn, tends to deny high school students sufficient training in academic writing for authentic audiences and real contexts. This thesis will examine the New York State Regents Exam to present evidence that unfortunately, authentic writing experiences hardly ever appear on state assessment tests. Although the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) claim college and career readiness can be evaluated by way of assessments, examples of the Regents Exam will support the theory that valued habits like curiosity creativity, and openness are not present in students written work and therefore, do not truly prepare students for writing in college and career. Noteworthy theory and research will be presented to acknowledge that due to high stakes assessments, writing gaps can emerge between high school and college-level writing. Furthermore, reflection of the valued habits college-level writing entails will reveal authenticity in writing is a fundamental disparity between the two institutions. This will provide an opportunity to advocate for the importance for authentic writing as well as tangible solutions to help bridge the gap. First, a clearer understanding of what facets contribute to dividing high school and college writing will be described. Then, suggestions for how to approach high school writing more authentically will be identified as part of a strategic solution to help bridge the divide.

## Dedication Page

*for my parents*

# Table of Contents

# List of Abbreviations

CCCC: Conference on College Composition and Communication

CCR: College and Career Readiness (Standards)

CCSSO: Council of Chief State School Officers

CCSS: Common Core State Standards

CEP: Center on Education Policy

DOE: U.S. Department of Education

ELA: English Language Arts

K-12: Kindergarten to Twelfth grade

MIT: Massachusetts Institute of Technology

NCLB: No Child Left Behind (Act)

NCTE: National Council of Teachers of English

NGA: National Governors Association

SAT: Scholastic Assessment Test (Scholastic Aptitude Test)

TAAS: Texas Assessment of Academic Skills

The Framework: "The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing"

The Symposium: "Symposium On the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing"

WPA: Council of Writing Program Administrators

**Acknowledgments**

Completion of this Thesis required many people. Many thanks are due, above all, to my parents. I owe all my happiness in this world to them. I have also had many extraordinary teachers in my life that have contributed, either directly or indirectly, to my "career" as a student. Special thanks are owed to Patricia Dunn, and I would particularly like to thank Professor Peter Khost, if not only for his advisement and encouragement on this Thesis, but also for inspiring many students like myself as educators.

**<u>Introduction</u>**

  In a time when high school teachers, administrators, and students face daunting new standards for learning outcomes, high stakes assessments often result in teaching to the test. This, in turn, tends to deny high school students sufficient training in academic writing for authentic audiences and real contexts. Authentic writing is writing for real purposes and audiences and is most like that which occurs in everyday life. It is meaningful to the writer, often involves choice of genre or form, and includes the opportunity to interact with others. Authentic writing requires, in part, creativity, curiosity, and openness – skills students need to be able to demonstrate through their writing in order to succeed in college and career. Unfortunately, these tests rarely engage students in authentic opportunities to demonstrate their creativity, curiosity, and openness through writing. To show evidence of this trend, this paper will examine the New York State Regents Exam, a specific assessment that supposedly measures college and career readiness. The Regents is an example of how state assessments – in this case, New York – characteristically lack valuable components of authentic writing.  As a result, assessments tend to yield a shortage of creativity, curiosity, and openness in students' written work because exam prompts, and preparation for such exams, do not foster these habits of mind. An ideal response to this problem might be to eliminate these exams, or at least change them to a more authentic valuation system for effective writing, one that prompts students to write for real audiences, or supports a style that is less formulaic. In the meantime, it should be acknowledged that due to high stakes assessments, writing gaps can emerge between high school and college-level writing and that pedagogical interventions can be made. Reflecting on the habits college contexts value will reveal a fundamental disparity between secondary and postsecondary writing expectations, and provide an opportunity to advocate for tangible solutions to help bridge the gap. First, a clearer understanding of what facets contribute to dividing high school and college writing is essential.

Then, suggestions for how to approach high school writing more authentically will be identified. Giving students more opportunities to write about real-world issues and respond to real audiences will cultivate writing habits like curiosity, creativity and openness, and ultimately, better prepare students to transition effectively from high school to writing at the college level.

## **Common Standards, Collective Consequences**

A successful transition from high school to college can be challenging. Student and teacher's establishment of skills valued at the college-level is essential, but so is the ability to overcome various hurdles prior to graduation. How do secondary English and writing teachers prepare their students for a livelihood after high school, for college, community college, job interviews, or any other form of higher education when imposed upon them are unyielding state assessments to prepare for, exams to pass and standards to reach? By enforcing a standard, are we to believe that meeting a level of proficiency associated with that standard will predict that a student is capable to write at the college level? The logic of having national public school standards and tests is not insubstantial or unconvincing at first, but remember who exactly tends promote common standards. Policymakers and corporations – not teachers – are the main supporters of standardized tests. For-profit corporations like Pearson Education are joining forces with policymakers and dictating a large majority of what gets taught in schools across the United States. Specifically, Pearson has solidified a relationship with New York State governor and the State Education Department. Once individuals like David Wakelyn – a former employee of America's Choice School Design, a now-leading Pearson sub-division – was appointed to Deputy Secretary for Education, it can be confirmed that corporate representatives transition into government positions where they can promote products manufactured by the their former employer. Pulling in approximately $9 billion a year, Pearson generated approximately $3 billion

in 2011 on digital revenues alone (Pearson.com). Pearson also sees profit from their remedial education programs that are aligned with Pearson high stakes assessments and Pearson teacher evaluations. "In New York, Pearson Education currently has a five-year, $32 million contract to administer state tests and provide other "testing services" to the State Education Department" (Singer). By implementing instruction modules, Pearson wields considerable control over what is being taught in public schools, but not whether students are really developing habits that will improve their success in their postsecondary education.

In his article, "National Standards Closer to Reality," Thomas Toch states that in 2009, the President (Obama) and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan publicly praised the ideas of a shift in policy from local goals to a national standard. Toch goes on to say that at the time, Duncan was working closely with two organizations representing key stakeholders – the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the education policy arm of the National Governors Association (NGA) (71). Ultimately, these organizations called on states to demand more from their schools in the name of greater educational and economic competitiveness by voluntarily adopting a common core of benchmarked standards. In 2010, the governmental demands were answered in the creation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Interestingly, when Toch's article was written in 2009, 49 states and territories already had signed onto the CCSS initiative. Perhaps the incentive for states signing on even before the CCSS were even implemented in schools had to do with the fact that there were millions of dollars in federal grants waiting to be handed over to state leaders to step forward to craft common tests built on higher standards (72). In September of 2010, the U.S. Department of Education awarded a total of $330 million dollars that "will strengthen the hold the federal government and special interests have on K-12 curriculum content, increase the frequency of standardized tests, diminish the

importance of traditional classroom tests, and further marginalize the role of parents and teachers" (72). Regardless if the goal of initiating these common standards was to ignite the genuine political will to move away from disparate standards across the country, the detriments of the CCSS and how they perceive college readiness have begun to materialize as high-stakes, standardized assessments which evaluate students based on a standard set forth by federal and state governments. To name one of the many differences between secondary and postsecondary education, such control from governments is not nearly as prevalent in higher education. Millions of students make the transition from high school to college every year, but due to the distinct cultures of college and high school, many students face challenges they have not been prepared for.

## **A Great Divide**

Another difference between secondary and postsecondary education is the concept of college-ready writing. Although the aspirations for college readiness in high school writing and their manifestation as College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards in the CCSS are influential, they may be missing the mark given the landscape of present day college writing. Currently, secondary and postsecondary systems seem to hold disparate concepts of college-ready writing. Without a shared understanding for best practices to foster college readiness in writing all we have are two distinct education systems – secondary and postsecondary – that work in relative isolation from each other.

Today more than two-thirds of secondary education graduates go on to some form of postsecondary education after high school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in fall 2013, a record 21.8 million students are expected to attend American colleges and universities, constituting an increase of about 6.5 million since fall 2000. The lack of

dialogue and understanding between secondary and postsecondary education makes the transition from high school to college challenging for many students. With growing numbers of students attending college, competing for careers and reimagining the "American Dream," there is a desperate need to reevaluate the transitional climate. American colleges are no longer a place reserved for the intellectually or financially elite. Now, higher education offers diversified programs to promote maximum growth to students that hold a high school diploma and desire to enroll in college. Because of this, there is a need for secondary and postsecondary education to understand how their expectations differ – especially in writing – so their relationship can be strengthened. "The relationship between secondary education's state testing and college expectations is significant because policies, including high school state testing, send signals about college readiness to students" (qtd. in Kirst and Venezia 2004). If some alignment between testing and ultimate college-level expectations is a goal, then an assessment of the assessments – so to speak – is needed to clarify whether tests align with postsecondary expectations. "This is especially true for writing and language arts assessments where audience, context, motivation, and social languages need to be understood and engaged in the attempt to make meaning" (Hillocks, 2002). College professors representing various disciplines, pedagogical beliefs and experience levels expect their students to be able to write about novel topics, concepts and genres. If high school state standards and assessment tests are not on the radar of college professors as influential means for developing writing skills, then the current and only gauge of college readiness is a reminder of how divided high school and college education is from one another.

Although college readiness can be identified through multiple measures such as academic knowledge and skills, higher-order thinking, and in-depth subject area knowledge, "students can

be identified as 'college ready' when they have the knowledge, skills and behaviors to complete college course of study successfully, without remediation" (Mijares 1). This definition hits on an important fact considering college readiness: without a strong sense of it students are prone to remediation or non-completion of courses. Students who take remedial courses are less likely to finish college, and the more remedial courses they take, the less likely they are to attain a degree. "More than half of all students enrolled in one remedial course will not persist to earn a degree and of the students who take three or more remedial courses, less than 20% earn a degree" (National Center for Education Statistics). While the cause of such remediation can stem from factors such as financial, social or personal issues, experiences with state-mandated assessment tests that are incongruent with college expectations may be the biggest reason why students struggle when transitioning from secondary to postsecondary environments. In a recent study, *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School to College,* the U.S. Department of Education found that a rigorous high school curriculum – not social or economic status or ethnicity – is the strongest indicator of postsecondary preparation and degree achievement. Interestingly though, the common core curriculum, due to standardized assessments, has become extremely rigorous; the standards compel teachers and students to participate in instructional practices more focused on fitting the mold of imminent tests. If such instructional practices aren't aligned – and it's probable they are not – with college expectations, then the rigorous curriculum may only prepare students for the assessment. In turn, this offers little preparation for degree achievement and may actually increase the chance of a student enrolling a course they can't complete without remediation. Hence, it is doubtful that a rigorous curriculum alone decreases a student's chance of remediation.

## Standards in High School, Not Outcomes for College

Considering the instruction students receive in writing during their secondary educations, the CCSS describes the ELA-Literacy standards as a means to prepare students for life outside the classroom, "challenging them to ask questions that stress critical-thinking, problem solving and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career and life" (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/). In particular, the writing standards that fall within ELA-Literacy standards include three objective types of text that students should be able to write competently in. *Argumentative, Informative or Explanatory* and *Narrative* are identified by the CCSS as such types of text, and even more specifically, each type of text is supplemented with additional corresponding standards. The standards for each type of text are posted on the CCSS website, and although the website claims they "work in tandem to define college and career readiness expectations," they are followed by proficiencies that evaluate a student incongruously with postsecondary values. For example, when writing an *Argumentative* text students should be able to "Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing" (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1.d). Granted, students should be able to execute this proficiency, but secondary education has to understand that higher education institutions do not evaluate student writing in a compatible way. The means to assess student writing proficiency based on a required tone (objective) and style (formal) does not gauge the capability to appeal to an audience or use real-world experiences to support an argument – skills postsecondary writing professors value much more than abstract formalistic features. Although the ability to compose these specific texts is significant, the CCSS seems to only stress restrictive desired outcomes.

The standards do not emphasize that more or equally important is for students to possess *habits* or practices that can foster desired outcomes. Take for example Writing Program Administrators (WPA) "Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition," which states that achievement in writing "cannot be reached by exclusively writing in limited modes or only one type of genre" (2008). In addition, one of the outcomes WPA supports is students' ability to understand the writing processes they take part in when composing, yet that tenet is not included in the CCSS for writing. As WPA notes, basing student success in writing on the more comprehensive outcome of students' abilities, enables students to diversify themselves along disciplinary and professional lines, and advance to "whole new levels where expected outcomes expand, multiply and diverge". If postsecondary instructors advocate for their fellow educators at the secondary level to employ this type of judgment, then perhaps high school students' awareness of college-level writing would go beyond merely being able to write proficiently in a few specific genres. The Outcomes Statement recognizes that students' development of rhetorical knowledge, and specifically a focus on the needs of an audience, is a desired outcome of written work, improved upon as their education progresses, not a precise level of achievement students can check off a list. More students must be aware that college-ready writing is largely, in part, evaluated on how well students respond to the needs of different audiences, adopt appropriate levels of voice and formality, and understand how genre shapes writing responses. If this were the case, it could be possible more students graduate from high school able to distinguish the writing style in which they answer a test prompt differs from the writing style required to respond to different rhetorical situations.

A discrepancy to distinguish various genres and contexts may also cause students to view writing as more of a means to a grade than a communication tool to be used outside of the

8

classroom. This can pose more challenges during a transition to postsecondary education. It is ever more important secondary education stake-holders and decision makers realize that they need to aim to provide to students, by way of educators, instructional support to write beyond the limited types of texts and purposes that are specified in the CCSS. No matter what students' future educational or career path may be, a consciousness of writing outside of an assessment-based curriculum is a crucial skill that makes for a more successful transition to endeavors after high school.

Decades ago, before the assessment era had been established, studies had been conducted on the same concern. Apple and Jungck (1992) warned that educational bureaucrats are inclined to borrow ideologies outside of education, similar to that of industrial management, enabling "the tendency for the curriculum to become increasingly planned, systematized, and standardized at a central level, totally focused on competencies" (24). When curriculum becomes increasingly controlled, instruction – especially writing instruction – becomes limited and the outcomes school districts strive for may not be met. With all students taking assessments on core curriculum subjects, the way the curriculum is implemented has direct impact on student performance and thus, assessment scores. It is more than likely the implementation of core curriculum, especially during assessment years, is structured around assessments. Therefore, teachers of writing that train and exercise students on a curriculum structured around a test may not allow sufficient time for exploring the writing that can be accomplished outside of the test's structure: everything from journals, memoirs, poems, short stories, résumés, book reviews, press releases, to the more recent blogs and interactive fiction. Conclusions from a study of a large urban district from 2001 to 2005 (Valli &Buese, 2007) found that the higher the stakes are for educators, the more curriculum and instruction reflect what is on the test. Researchers showed

that as the school year progressed, "teachers matched what they taught to the content and format of the forthcoming state tests, concluding that the content of the tests realistically became the learning goals for students" (526). Similarly, a study of school districts in California, Georgia, and Pennsylvania reported that teachers boosted their use of test-like problem styles and formats and ultimately limited their curriculum and instruction to focus on tested topics (Hamilton et al., 2007). The ability to influence teachers' pedagogies to measure basic skills and memorization above critical thinking and rhetorical strategies is just one of the many outcomes produced by state standards and assessments. Similarly, Lori Assaf's 2005 study of a reading specialist in Texas reported that over time, testing the specialist conducted was sending signals that changed her attitude in the classroom and caused her to forsake her personal teaching philosophy garnered from years of experience in lieu of a testing curriculum. "Her reading instruction changed drastically, from rich and authentic discussions about books to a quiet, often subdued atmosphere of silent reading and mastery of low-level test skills isolated from real reading" (164). Assaf observed that despite the fact that her informant understood the limitations of teaching to the test, she believed that she needed to "take the time to teach her students explicit strategies to master it" (165). By teaching more selectively toward the goals of the test, Assaf observed that the reading specialist covered materials without the authentic depth professionals in disciplines across the field of English encourage. Assaf's case study originally sought to learn more about authentic reading instruction until her informant's work allowed her to witness how testing pressures are capable of transforming pedagogy and adapting to the new policy of accountability in education. The consequences of these methods unfortunately tend to become visible only after there is no assessment to study for or pass, when secondary education has ceased. Hence, even

the most thoughtfully designed standards investing in college and career readiness are only as effective as the assessments that evaluate how well students have reached them.

The distance between what policymakers are mandating and what research is showing has begun to forge a gap in education and spark controversy among educators. Recent policies encourage state governments to revise teacher evaluation systems and consider the impact of individual teachers on their students' achievement. Policymakers and supporters of this change argue current teacher evaluation systems are inadequate because they don't explicitly reflect teacher "effectiveness" by measure of the achievement gains for a specific teacher's students. This attribution however, assumes learning is reliably measured by a standardized test, is shaped solely by the teacher, and is independent from factors like influence of peers, classroom context, and socio-economic circumstances. Policymakers now support that an adequate way to evaluate teachers is to measure objective evidence of student learning. Approaching evaluation this way, districts are prone to utilize the most objective data they have: students' scores on high stakes assessment tests. Plus, the most fact-based data is also the easiest and inexpensive to quantify, which to some extent, makes assessment scores a catchall for evaluation. Individual states have responded to this proposal. "According to the National Council on Teacher Quality, 36 states and the District of Columbia have made policy changes in teacher evaluation since 2009, and thirty states now require these evaluations to include objective evidence of student learning" (Strauss 1). The rational for linking teacher evaluations with student assessment scores is to hold teachers accountable for how much students are learning, or more simply, how high their scores on assessments are. This means stakes are not only high for students, but for teachers as well. If teachers have low ratings on these new evaluations, their jobs, promotions, and salaries could be affected, as well as their reputations as effective teachers. This is problematic because teachers

11

may become more inclined to focus their lessons on test preparation and have extrinsic goals for student achievement drive their motivation. Heightened pressure for teachers can marginalize opportunities for lessons outside scope of the test, which translates into more time spent teaching students to observe a generic process for writing and less time for approaching writing authentically as an exploratory practice.

Thus far, research shows that successful high school writing is mostly gauged by measuring statistics; comparatively high average test scores, consistent progress that meets standards, overall grade point averages, etc. But because these standards are set nationally *and* locally, high school students learn to follow a specific set of rules that will supposedly lead them to a successful outcome. Although college is often thought of as the place where students "find their own voices," or the know-how to "think outside the box," and although that may be true, teachers should not overlook the fact that the quest students take in college to do such thinking often confronts them with foreign ideas and expectations to communicate and advocate for their own. Skills like abstract analysis, as well as practices of openness, creativity and curiosity are means that contribute to success. Disparate from the rigid nature of assessment preparation high school students learn, college students discover, starting with first-year composition, that each new course and instructor bear entirely new expectations that may not be consistent with those of previous instructors. "High school students learn to follow a specific set of rules; college students learn that there are no rules – or, better, that the rules change daily" (Fanetti et.al 83). Students need to be aware of both the variables and the constants their writing will require. The varying circumstances – demographic of audience, topic, and reference materials – that surround the writer impact both the process and product of composition. Writing assignments with diverse circumstances are the best representations of authenticity in school-based writing because they

mirror the nature of the real world. But the constants – habits like openness and creativity – are always with a writer. Regularly practiced habits become pillars of the writing process that encourage students to write effectively. Openness for example, is a habit that can support a student to think about new ways of presenting information to their audience. It is important for students to maintain a balance between changing authentic situations and regular habits when writing because the constants enable a writer to adapt to variable circumstances.

## How Does the SAT Measure Up?

Unfortunately, mainstream students preparing for college take standardized assessments that do not support consistent use of rhetorical behaviors or offer changing authentic situations. More specifically, several hundred thousand prospective college students take the SAT test each year. As the College Board's most widely recognized program, the SAT is supposedly a representation of the College Board's mission to "connect students to college success and opportunity" (collegeboard.com). The essay section of the SAT, which was added in 2005, counts for about 30% of a test-taker's score on the writing section. The time given to write the essay is a mere 25 minutes, no scratch-paper is provided, and the essay is always the first question on the SAT. When you think about it, what other situation will a person ever experience where they are asked to write an essay on demand, on a topic they have just been informed of, in twenty-five minutes? To evaluate student writing based on such a short amount of time, on a prompt that has never been thought about prior, may cause students to fill their essays with point-scoring, grade-winning techniques that are not any indication of an effective writer. Les Perelman, the recently retired former director of MIT's Writing Across the Curriculum program, is quoted in a recent article saying that when it comes to standardized tests like the SAT, because of the great importance students, parents and college admissions place on these test scores, high

school writing instructors are faced with a dilemma. "Teachers are under a huge amount of pressure from parents to teach to the test and to get their kids high scores. They sometimes have to make a choice between teaching writing methods that are rewarded by SAT essay-readers— thereby sending worse writers out into the world—or training pupils to write well generally, at the risk of parent complaints about their kids not being sufficiently prepared for the SAT" (Malady 2). Perelman understands that a harsh truth for the educators who score these essays is while they may be aware the scheme of grading isn't aligned with the writing that earns a student college credit, they risk their own positions and good-standings with their districts if they veer from the scheme. While this type of writing is valued on the SAT, it is unlikely that an essay composed in under thirty minutes provides an opportunity to plan, draft, revise, use outside sources, make connections with perspectives of others, practice different ways of presenting information, or be able to listen to and reflect on the responses of others. Consequently, fostering habits of mind like curiosity, creativity, and openness is not a task easily reached. Currently, the College Board is working to align the CCSS for reading, writing, and language with the SAT (and the ACT) as the premier college admission examinations have "become disconnected from the work of our high schools." This proclamation comes from David Coleman, president of the College Board (qtd. in Tepe). Having already played an active role in the development of the CCSS, the College Board's mission to "employ rigorous alignment methodologies as it compares standards, curricula and assessment frameworks" (collegeboard.com), implies that the CCSS and SAT will overlap in their ideologies and contribute to the new educational landscape that has taken place since the standards' widespread adoption. Although the *New York Times* pointed out that Coleman admits "high school grades are a better predictor of college success than standardized test scores," an alignment between the CCSS and the SAT will uphold the

acceptance of the CCSS and contribute to its longevity, regardless of whether or not the measures of college readiness are aligned with the ideologies of higher education (qtd. in Lewin). Whether future changes to the SAT – particularly one that involves making the essay optional – will make it a truer measure of college readiness remains an open question, but the teaming up of CCSS and assessment tests confirms the notion that "politically correct" standards are being impressed like a stamp upon the majority of education.

**A Framework in the Making**

It is a challenge to meet the goal of college readiness because there has been, and currently is, no guiding definition stressing that a joint effort between high school teachers and both two- and four-year colleges is necessary to establish a foundation for a college-ready writing. Fortunately, a task force that includes the voices of educators has come together to note the best behaviors and mindsets, as well as collaboratively describe the rhetorical and twenty-first-century skills students ought to demonstrate in order to succeed in college writing. In January of 2011, the result of the task force came in the form of the publication "The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing" (the Framework), and is more than a noteworthy document to concentrate on when reflecting on the skills students should have after high school. Striving to improve the paradigm for college and career-ready writing, the document is the first of its kind, available to students and teachers alike, written by creditable professionals in the field of writing, and unmasks highly regarded, respected, and required aptitudes for succeeding in writing in postsecondary education. By reviewing the Framework, further consideration of the skills identified within it can lead to a better understanding of the ideals and norms expected from college-level writers. Most importantly, when compared with secondary education's interpretation of college ready writing, the Framework can help educators better understand what

habits writers ought to possess in order to be successful in college. This understanding is

necessary to reach a consciousness for how to enhance efforts to improve college readiness in

high school.

Through collaborative efforts and contributions of writing experts, a "Symposium On the

Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing" (the Symposium) was published, reporting

not only on the inspiration, status, and influence of the Framework itself, but also that there is

more work to be done advocating for postsecondary writing instruction; gathering feedback on

the Framework is critical if we are to develop a bridge between secondary and postsecondary

writing instruction. Section one of the Framework lists eight various Habits of Mind: Curiosity,

Openness, Engagement, Creativity, Persistence, Responsibility, Flexibility, and Metacognition.

Section two lists Experiences in Writing, Reading, and Critical Analysis. Focusing on the Habits

of Mind, they resonate as a more substantial way to measure college readiness than assessment

scores or falling into a target SAT bracket. Linda Adler-Kassner, a professor of writing at the

University of California at Santa Barbra and president of CWPA noted at the 2011 annual

meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), that the

Framework does not offer a set of standards, (like the CCSS) but rather "seeks to define the

concepts that are associated with deep and permanent learning" (qtd. in Berrett). Take, for

example, the habit of Openness, which the Framework defines as the willingness to consider new

ways of being and thinking in the world. The Framework cites that Openness can be fostered

when student writers are encouraged to (1) examine their own perspectives to find connections

with the perspectives of others; (2) practice different ways of gathering, investigating,

developing, and presenting information; and (3) listen to and reflect on the ideas and responses

of others – both peers and instructors – to their writing. A main idea that supports the importance

16

of this Habit is that many students enroll in higher education or apply for jobs without a stringent plan for what lies ahead of them. One of the most valuable things that should be fostered in young people is to keep a sense of openness in that they will have to be willing to explore and discover the their own practice of gathering and communicating information as well as listen and respond to the practice of others. As educators, we constantly reinforce to students that they can become or do anything they set their minds to, but the truth is, lacking a strong sense of openness, or an open-mind, it is hardly likely one can accomplish anything.

Habits of Mind like Openness and Curiosity are resonating with educators as commendable and informative means that measure a student's readiness for college. Kristine Johnson optimistically writes that the Framework "positions the discipline (rhetoric and composition) to address gaps in American education by reinvigorating historical and traditional frames for writing instruction—ancient rhetoric and the liberal arts tradition" (1). Johnson cites the Framework as being a facet of current education policy that rouses realignment between high school and college. However, not all judgments of the Framework have been positive. Contributors to the Symposium have stated issues with the Framework's structure and remarked there is no explanation of the origin of the eight Habits of Mind (Anderson and Summerfield). Still, organizations and institutions outside of the consortium responsible for publishing the Framework have spoken out on their websites about the Framework gaining wider use and credibility. *Kansas City Public Media*, *Scoop* – an organization devoted to helping writers develop and publish their work, *Learning Ace* and *EdTechTalk* have the Framework readily available. *Education Week* has even done webinars on the very subject of teaching writing through the Common Core and using the Framework as a guide. It is more than likely that these

organizations share the belief the Framework is a valuable starting point for pinpointing the skills expected in postsecondary composition.

The Framework is, for the most part, on point with its establishment of meaningful skills and practices for meeting the demands of first-year composition, as well as the literate obligations students will eventually face. Nevertheless, comparison of this document to others akin to it is a challenging task because there has been no other document published with the same intent as the Framework. The nearest comparisons are the Outcomes Statement and the obvious Common Core State Standards – especially since the Framework was written as a response to the CCSS – but the WPA and CCSS are documents that function in disparate environments for different purposes. Bruce McComiskey, a contributor to the Symposium, identifies the true value of the Framework is: "to guide writing teachers, K – college, in discussions of the local transitions from elementary and secondary writing to college composition, and to guide assessments based on writing as a rhetorical act, not as a K-12 skill to be assessed in artificial structures". In this respect, the Framework can be seen as a bridge that can be used to compel secondary educators to recognize that assessments lack a rhetorical framework, and distinguish how such a framework is valued at the postsecondary level. Perhaps more importantly though, the Framework reveals a refreshing awareness, encourages teachers and students to approach writing as more than a grade, in various contexts, and for a genuine purpose. Having one document dedicated to college and career readiness in writing begins to fulfill its long-awaited need, as it is able to speak to students and teachers about some of the most significant things we can say about postsecondary life and learning.

## Primary Research and Findings

Worth bearing in mind along with how students apply these Habits to their writing and education after high school is by what method, if at all, students are trained to apply them to their writing while still in high school. Geographically speaking, high-stakes assessment tests vary in secondary education, but there the majority of them are influenced and guided by the CCSS. The model of the New York State English Regents Examination, a high stakes assessment in writing and English Language Arts (ELA), is a representation of how students are scored on writing proficiencies. Studying examples of a state writing exam from one particular state will by no means provide definitive reasoning for how often or able students are to apply the Habits to their writing in high school. However, a focus on specific examples will allow an investigation of what types of writing students will be graded on, and ultimately show further evidence of insufficient training in school-based writing for authentic purposes and audiences.

Students prepare for the Regents exam throughout the school year and are trained by teachers to understand what constituents a high-scoring piece of writing versus' a low-scoring piece of writing. Communicating to students how they will be scored on such writing exams is not only a common practice for instructors, but also an available one since state testing materials, past exams and scoring rubrics can be located through a simple Internet search. One preparation technique a writing instructor may utilize when preparing students for these exams is having students follow a standard format in accordance with grading rubrics. Therefore, teachers may show examples of student writing from past assessments that yield both high and low scores. This pedagogical method appears to be effective to ready students for the exam, but if we consider the expansive and more significant issue to ready students for postsecondary education,

then we must consider how the students' writing on an exam like the Regents will translate to their postsecondary education.

Created and maintained by the New York State Education Department, Engage NY is an organization that shares information with educators and the general public regarding the New York State Regents Exams. Information posted on the website claims the Regents exam is designed to measure a student's proficiency in the Common Core State Standards, and as a result measure the achievement of students in grades 11-12 through the respective Common Core State Standards adopted by the board of Regents. Engage NY maintains the exam makes up a broad spectrum of literacy expectations for students as they are defined in the CCSS and includes areas such as integrated comprehension, analysis, and communication of information gleaned from reading. Furthermore, it is noted "the exam will assess the key skills and content that students need to be on track for college and a career." Although this forum claims the Regents exam to be a good indicator of the skills students will need to possess to be on track for postsecondary education, the corresponding rubric for evaluating the test may lead one to question otherwise.

The grading rubric for the writing section on the Regents exam corresponds to a critical lens essay. A critical lens essay is a type of analytical essay that focuses on a quotation from a work literature, states whether or not the quotation is valid, and supports why using literary devices. This rubric scores students on a scale of one to six, six being the highest score awarded. Student essays are then evaluated with the rubric in areas of meaning, development, organization, language use, and conventions. A level-six essay excels in these areas, a level-five demonstrates a high level of skill but includes room for improvement, a level-four is proficient but may only demonstrate partial aptitude for the qualities listed, a level-three lacks dexterity or full understanding, and a level-two or level-one essay is deficient in these areas. When compared

with the Framework's Habits of Mind, the grading rubric is noticeably different. They both claim to be an authority on college readiness for writing, but the documents are not aligned, and only one of the documents was written by college writing instructors. With the exception of Language Use, where a student is expected to use a "notable sense of voice and awareness of audience and purpose," and the reinforcement of using proper writing conventions, the standards of the Regents rubric do not overlap with the Habits of Mind and the Framework at large. Whereas the Framework is consumed with communicating the message of fostering key habits of mind, and developing rhetorical knowledge and flexible writing processes, the rubric of for the Regents does not mention the importance of "creativity" or "curiosity" whatsoever. First, to expand on this point, it is vital to consider how the Framework lays out fundamental aspects for success when writing on the postsecondary level; it would only seem right those aspects be included when student writing is evaluated. Then, a reflection on sample Regents writing assessments and the opportunities where the assessment task supports the use of student openness, curiosity and creativity will further back up the theory that there is a large gap between how writing is evaluated at the high school and college levels. A review of sample critical lens writing prompts and responses from August 2011 (Essay 1) and June 2012 (Essay 2) ELA Regents Exams will provide evidence.

For a student to meet the already specified guidelines of the critical lens essay, they must construct an interpretation of the provided quote, maintain a position based off their interpretation, then include two works of literature and specifically list the literary elements within those works to best support their position and interpretation of the quote. With these already ample and definite guidelines, it can be speculated that students are less likely to exhibit

fluency of the Habits of Mind in their writing when pressed for time, and ultimately will be evaluated on their writing's compliance with a rubric – by a grader – in only a couple of minutes.

Sample critical lens essays (Essay 1 and 2) are examples of level six and level five pieces of writing. High score examples, rather than average or low score examples are most useful in this case because students who score highest on critical lens essays are more apt to believe – or be reinforced by the secondary system - they are college ready. High score examples will allow for the high school image of college-readiness in writing to be compared alongside of the Framework. If the Framework and Habits are the touchstones of college readiness in writing, then it's fitting to question whether or not Habits of Mind are demonstrated in sample essays 1 and 2. Just as well, it's applicable to reflect on how easily the Habits could be incorporated into a critical lens essay.

The Habit of Curiosity is cultivated, according to the Framework, when "students are encouraged to use inquiry to develop questions relevant for authentic audiences, conduct research methods for investigating questions appropriate to the discipline, and communicate their findings in writing to multiple audiences both inside and outside of school." In the most basic sense, curiosity is inquisitiveness, a desire to know. However both Essays 1 & 2 lack writing that poses questions that would cause a reader to think before accepting information. This is most likely probable because the critical lens, like most writing assessments, is designed for students to write what they already know, rather than act as a forum for discovery, response, or review. Curiosity is not as feasible a habit to cultivate through this nature of writing due to the fact that other than the quote provided, and the texts themselves the authors reference in their essays, there are no other available texts to research, investigate, or seek authoritative information. What's even more dubious is that according to the Framework, students who write effectively at

the college level are apt to reference research to supplement their topic, and write to multiple audiences both inside and outside of school. These are unlikely outcomes for the Regents essay considering the context of assessment writing is not geared toward a specific audience.

There are enduring motives for encouraging the habit of Creativity in writing both inside and outside an academic setting. In the Framework's terms, "novel approaches for generating, investigating and representing ideas, tapping into one's creativity when thinking and writing" is not only a practical custom in education, but is an esteemed habit to form as it helps develop a writer's personal voice. "Taking risks by exploring questions, topics, and new ideas, using imaginative methods to investigate questions, topics and ideas, represent what has been learned in a variety of ways, and evaluate the effects or consequences of creative choices," are all noted by the Framework as ways to nurture the habit of Creativity. Reading both sample essays through this lens, both authors in their respective pieces of writing follow the guidelines for their essays quite systematically. Each introduction restates the quote, lists two works of literature by title and author, and notes the literary devices that will be mentioned in paragraphs to follow. Both essays' first body paragraphs focus on the first mentioned work of literature and relate one literary device like setting or character description in depth. The second body paragraph does the same for the second mentioned work of literature before the conclusion briefly sums up each paragraph and alludes back to the quoted prompt. As both authors use the same format, as per their instruction and guidelines suggest, options to represent what has been learned are limited. Students are presented with new ideas when writing a critical lens. They most always will be unfamiliar with the quote they are to base their writing off of, but they are not recommended to use new methods to conduct their writing or present what they have learned various ways. No doubt there are parameters that go along with creativity in terms of college readiness; students

23

should have awareness for when to be creative and when to present honest facts, but also be reminded of the power of creativity in writing and be encouraged to use it when appropriate. Instead, both authors do not use creative measures to reinforce their points. Perhaps this is due to the fact that when a student writes more creatively on assessments they risk jeopardizing their grade.

Openness is described by way of the Framework as "the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world." Writing that encourages students to "examine their own perspectives to find connections with perspectives of others, practice different ways of gathering, investigating, developing and presenting information, as well as listening to reflect on the ideas and responses of others" – both peers and instructors – all contribute to the Habit of Openness. In the case of the critical lens, students aren't invited to discuss their own experiences; authors only allude to nonspecific experiences in one sentence. For example, author of Essay 1 begins the second paragraph with the sentences, "*The time of slavery in the United States was an extremely tragic and horrific experience for African Americans. Although Morrison's story Beloved begins after the Civil War, much of its action takes place in pre-Emancipation Proclamation America.*" The writing here is the closest example of openness. The author does present this information through a historical lens while alluding to a common perspective of slavery, but with the majority of the essay being driven by plot and literary devices, there is little opportunity to compare perspectives with others. The provided quote may be considered a new perspective, in which authors do respond to, but the methods of gathering, investigating, developing and presenting information does not change often. With minimal opportunity – due mostly to time constraints – to include real-world or personally relevant experiences in writing, it is difficult for students to uncover the relevancy of what they are being graded on and even more

difficult for students to find meaning in their writing. Further, the task does not encourage different ways of gathering or presenting information, and the idea of listening to others' ideas for reflection is non-existent in this assessment.

Using sample critical lens essays as a text-guide, the feasibility of meeting both the required guidelines of the Regents exam as well as applying the identified Habits of Mind is not promising. In effect, the authors of the sample essays did not show strong inclinations for Creativity, Curiosity, or Openness, yet received high scores on their Regents essays. As examples show, student performance can often be boiled down to meeting a governmental standard, just as a large portion of writing in high school can tend to focus around prepping students to pass exams. But does this really prepare students for the world in which they will be compelled to write for the majority of their lives? As it happens with this case, many gauges of college readiness between the Framework and the critical lens are disconnected in part due to the critical lens' lack of an emphasis of audience, rhetorical experience, and most importantly, authentic opportunity to write. Almost all of the Habits of Mind are connected to writing experiences that have an audience. And because audience can change frequently, writing experiences are designed to be inherently authentic. When writing involves a genuine purpose – stating an argument, voicing a concern, debating an issue, explaining concrete evidence, giving a toast, writing an apology letter, writing about a memorable experience – it is much more likely students can draw on habits like curiosity, creativity and openness to create effective writing. Accordingly, a large wedge responsible for the separation between high school and college writing is building authentic writing environments where students can write about original topics supported by key habits of mind.

**What's Next?**

An ideal response to the problem of a lack of authentic components on high stakes assessments might be to eliminate assessments or replace them with more open-minded means to evaluate student writing for long-term success. Yet the odds of policymakers removing or revising high-stakes assessments as such are probably close to zero. Truthfully, there is no simple solution for this problem. For small changes to occur, balance between quality and cost must be maintained and trust between educators must be up-held. Even with the long lead-times that typically surround improvements, the goals aren't always straightforward. It is not expected that policymakers and the nation's stakeholders in education legislation will revise the state assessment systems to fit the bill for all students as all students are different and require different needs. However, reflection of the valued habits of college-level writing provides an opportunity to advocate for the importance for authentic writing in high school. Suggestions for how to approach high school writing more authentically are fundamental to bridging this gap in the transitional climate of education. On account of assessments, branching out from writing tasks that go beyond assessment preparation is not a simple mission. However, the opportunity to provide students with authentic and varied writing tasks can foster habits of mind and provide a stronger understanding of college writing expectations. It is a hope that the examples to follow are taken as useful points of departure from limited writing expectations, and can either heighten attention to a handful of effective approaches when teaching writing or serve as affirmations for good practices that make a difference.

I.      Having More Than One Process to Write

Both inside and outside of assessment preparation, teaching adolescents strategies to plan, revise and edit their compositions should be encouraged. The effects of imparting such

strategies can be dramatic in increasing the quality of writing. "Strategy instruction involves explicitly and systematically teaching steps necessary for planning, revising, and/or editing text" with the ultimate goal to "teach students to use these strategies independently" (Graham and Perin 15). Practical implementation of this can come in the form of utilizing generic techniques that all writing teachers have experience with on some level. Brainstorming and peer review are just two examples that can be customized to virtually any type of writing. Using strategy instruction can emphasize for students how writing produced outside of assessments should allow time to brainstorm and plan ideas, then revise and rework those ideas. Allowing students to compose their writing over extended periods of time enables specific interests to arise and can promote curiosity, creativity, and openness.

Similarly, students who participate in collaborative learning are guided to listen to what their peers have to say. When students begin to see the word as other people see it and get to know each other as writers, habits of openness are fostered as well as the appreciation for various perspectives. "Through this process, students gain a more critical understanding of their work" (Bruffee, 105). Collaborative writing is another tool secondary writing teachers can provide to students when practicing effective writing techniques and processes. Graham and Perin, in their article "A Meta-Analysis of Writing Instruction for Adolescent Students," define collaborative writing as "a process that involves developing instructional arrangements whereby adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions; a varied process when compared with having students composes independently" (16). Although writing is often viewed as a solitary act, the conversations out of which writing come are not. Collaborative writing is an effective way for students to gain experience to work in groups during college and career. Collaborative learning can also inspire more creative outcomes when students can develop ideas

together and gain academic fortification as a group. These strategies are aligned with common goals of high school writing, yet still approach writing instruction as a process that can foster valuable habits, rather than a product that renders a grade.

II.      Prompting for Authenticity

Authentically designed writing assignments enable students to write for a specific, relevant purpose and audience. Students' attitudes toward writing might also improve when they see results of their writing extend beyond the classroom. The concepts of authentic writing assignments and prompts might at first seem like a contradiction, as prompts typically compel a student to write more than they would independently, but such concepts are small and practical steps to change the way required writing assignments are presented.

In her article for National Writing Project, "Getting Real: Authenticity in Writing Prompts," Patricia Slagle says that when designing writing prompts, authenticity is a key concept that she has learned to keep in mind. Slagle asks students to write pieces for a genuine audience beyond the classroom, using a real-world form such as a letter to the editor. With the purpose to communicate effectively to their reader, "whether to persuade the reader to agree with their position on an issue, share their sentiments in a memoir, present their solution to a mutual problem, or explore many other possibilities determined by the student-writer, writing for audiences beyond the teacher, and writing for real reasons, produces more effective writing" (Slagle, 2). This writing – consequential, useful, and relevant to the writer – is perpetually rooted in meaning-making for students. Rather than being germane to the institution or policy, authentic writing is more deeply or directly connected to the writer, and will likely result in more engaging and academically fulfilling results. Often, lessons that involve writing a letter to an editor, a responding to a current social or political movement, or even addressing a specific audience do

not come built into a curriculum. But when they do arise, outcomes tend to be rewarding for both teachers and students and produce effective pieces of writing. These prompts don't always have to be geared toward a powerful audience either; teachers may prompt a class of high school seniors to write letters to high school freshman about what to expect in high school. Different than responding to a piece of text in a controlled classroom environment, or drafting a "planned" letter, assignments spawned from authentic situations harvest the most authentic responses, which is the closest interpretation of the writing students are compelled to partake in after secondary education. This pedagogical practice of having students "respond to the real world" gratifies students by being able to position themselves in a dialogue with other writers, societal views, and gain exposure to other forms of effective writing. Looking closely at this particular writing activity demands that educators examine all the ways students "respond to more than just the 'formal,' dictated curriculum" (Hallman 47). This activity has the potential to surpass the Common Core writing standards because it creates remarkable opportunities for students, like the chance to become a published author. In their article, "Effective Writing Instruction for Students who Have Writing Difficulties," authors Tanya Santangelo and Natalie Olinghouse note that some researchers have argued that authentic literacy can increase students' motivation in writing altogether. "Although there is little empirical data to support that claim, several hypothesized benefits to a relationship between authentic writing and improved motivation allow students to first, express and refine their voice; second, discover a meaningful purpose by writing for a real audience; third, develop and adopt a personal writing style by exploring a variety of writing styles; and fourth, improve their writing ability by choosing from familiar topics" (10). These assumed benefits are speculated as being directly influenced by authentic writing in addition to being desired outcomes for writers at the postsecondary level. Cultivating personal

voice, finding meaning that's driven by a particular audience, adopting a personal style, and writing about topics that are memorable are all highly subjective outcomes that vary based on an individual writer.

III.     Diversity in Writing

More customized techniques become effective when writing instruction is focused on a particular genre and the technique is designed to develop a more refined knowledge of that genre. For example, persuasive essay writing calls for different pedagogical techniques than personal narratives. When teaching their students to write persuasive essays, instructors may want to stress the importance of appealing to an audience by way of ethos, logos and pathos, as to appeal to author's credibility, logic and emotional response of an audience. This practice may not be as appreciated when writing a short story of fiction. Thus, understanding how different techniques can be applied to specific writing tasks is essential for teachers of writing. An aim to diversify the genres of writing exposed to students, beginning in high school and continuing through college, fosters a transfer of communication across contexts as students can perceive the different modes and norms present in particular genres and contexts. One practical way to encourage such outcomes is to incorporate a structured genre like literary journalism, "rooted in artfully constructed narrative and critical research-based writing, into writing instruction" (Addison & McGee 170). Genres like literary journalism embrace the multimodal skills required across curriculums, in college and the workplace and therefore reinforce students the varied writing they will be compelled to do after high school.

Among the diversification of types of writing is the preservation of a diverse outlook on what effective writing at the high school level is. Because multiple discussions and paradigms for effective writing have emerged from both secondary and postsecondary sectors, there is not

one single disciplinary perspective that can reveal what effective writing looks and sounds like. Some educators believe that the five-paragraph essay, even in college, is applicable for just about any context, but they are most likely in the minority mind-set of college-level professors of writing. Learning the discourse to compose a piece of writing like the five-paragraph-essay can be argued as a primacy of secondary education, but that doesn't necessarily conclude that it should be the standard of effective writing.

IV.     Dialogic Instruction for Effective Writing

Arthur Applebee notes that as educators, we must "teach students to arrive at new understandings, to think for themselves, to become independent knowers and doers, the argument goes, if the United States is to remain competitive in an international economy" (1). In turn, Applebee developed "conceptual frameworks to define high-quality instruction for required curriculums for reading and writing in terms of quantity content, coherence and student voice" (1996). Student voice in particular refers to the use of "dialogic" instruction: when students engage in free-flowing discussions and expression of their own questions and opinions. A core belief of dialogic instruction is that classroom discussion activities stress the value of exploration of ideas and development of understanding through conversation. Rather than the pattern of a teacher's question, a student's answer, a teacher's evaluation of the response, dialogic instruction allows more time for open discussion involving a whole class or group of students and includes more use of authentic questions to explore students' different understandings. Subsequently, Martin Nystrand reports that an observational study of twenty-five students receiving such dialogic instruction in their high school language arts classrooms "outperformed peers receiving monologic instruction on assessments in which they were asked to critique literary passages" (1997). A highly effective instructional approach, one that results not only in high student

31

performance on assessments, but can improve student engagement and persistence – among other Habits of Mind – can be dialogic discourse before and after writing practice. This practice suggests that instruction is not just a delivery system, but a discussion between students and teachers. Having an audience to communicate with promotes effective writing because it directly enables students to exchange ideas from inside to outside the classroom. Ketter and Pool (2001), borrow from George Hillocks when they suggest what effective writing is stating, "Hillocks (1995) proposes that in order to create meaning for both the reader and the writer, the writing must, (1) construct a new relationship with an intended audience… or (2) construct new relationships in the substance of the writing… or (3) both" (Ketter & Pool 346). What this means is that the most effective writing not only assembles ideas and links them together, but it also is written with genuine intention behind it. It should be noted that engaging students in writing assignments for the purpose of reaching an audience is more likely to compel students to ask questions about their audience, think creatively how to reach that audience, and communicate the substance of their writing directly. When adapted, this pedagogy can provide greater quality control in terms of more uniform outcomes among diverse populations of students because it incorporates real conversations into core skills needed for success. Ultimately though, for more students to substantially master the core skills and knowledge within the curriculums teachers are instructing, for success in the modern economy, for competent writers to enter a postsecondary education and succeed, teachers will have to vary their nature and quantity of instruction given the differences in instructional needs, experiences and backgrounds, aptitudes and motivations of their students.

<u>**Resolutions**</u>

What sort of resolution can come from the documentation that provides information on secondary and postsecondary writing standards, outcomes and targets? In terms of bridging the gap between high school and college writing, research shows there is not one concrete solution just yet, but that doesn't mean there are not tangible starting points or strategies to improve college and career readiness in writing at the secondary level. There are many teachers who take an authentic stance in the classroom when crafting writing tasks for their students in hopes of preparing them for college and career, but an overall concern for change is still necessary. To begin bridging the writing gap between high school and college writing, a number of action items are required. Avoiding a secondary versus postsecondary attitude, consideration for the role the federal government in education, rethinking the meaning of "good" writing, and incorporating authentic writing tasks that foster habits of mind beneficial to students' future are all viable starting points.

    I.       Avoiding a Secondary vs. Postsecondary Attitude

While it is not realistic high school and college can acquire and practice an identical definition of effective college-level writing, both can begin to develop awareness for what their differences are. The flexibility that emerges in college-level writing must be recognized as not equally present in the prevailing common standards and assessments in high school. By eliminating a secondary versus postsecondary attitude, a stronger interface between educators can be built to help understand the goals both institutions have and allow for the sharing and better defining of goals. College instructors can become absorbed in the demands of their own disciplines, but it is imperative they come to understand and accept the pressures and priorities – as well as demands made upon – their colleagues in high school. College instructors of writing

need to ask themselves how viable their expectations of incoming freshman are and consider the objectives of high school writing instruction and evaluation. Such an understanding will facilitate college instructors to deal with the scope of problems their students seem to arrive with. Secondary teachers also need to understand they have a tremendous amount to offer in terms of collaboration with their colleagues at the college level. Organization of writing center programs can bring secondary and postsecondary teachers together to share their insights, experiences, and teaching strategies. Uniting educators from different levels can provide colleagues opportunity to improve their own teaching skills as well as gain exposure to a flexibility not viable in the current classroom situation. Because the teaching of writing, like writing itself, can always improve, developing, testing, conferencing and refining renewed teaching strategies collaboratively enables teachers to share in the habits of mind encouraged in students: curiosity, creativity and openness.

II.      Recognizing Education as Politically Correct

The involvement in education from the federal government has caused criticism not only from teachers and parents, but also from across the political spectrum as well. The broader failure of government education is increasingly in the spotlight. The common core and standardized testing are together one of the most controversial political issues today. And for good reason, as the control of grant funding for education, long-term agendas, failure to announce changes until after they are passed, and the teaming of large-scale corporations with governmental agencies have culminated into the federalization of schooling. Yielding just as much if not more debate as what's going on in Ukraine and the Affordable Care Act, a strong stance for or against the controversial standards and tests in education could be a determinate for who holds the next presidency. Perhaps a first step to restoring more opportunities for education

is to associate the changing and inhibiting educational landscape with the decisions of the federal government. More of an aspiration than a likely outcome is downgrading the Department of Education and restoring local control over schools so communities can see what works and what does not before acting accordingly.

III.     Is "Good" Writing Effective Writing?

Effective educators of English Language Arts and writing recognize "good writing" isn't a definitive noun or an expression that can be painted in black and white. "Good writing" entails the process, the revisions, the critiques, the red pen, the notes in the margins, the question marks, the *What about this*, the *I like how you, but I think you need more* dialogue that can so effortlessly get lost in the wake of intimidating assessments. Because the definition of "good writing" is only ever a working one, successful writing instruction should focus on teachers building authentic opportunities and experiences for their students where they can practice a range of flexible strategies for writing effectively beyond the classroom. Achieving effective writing adequate for the college level while still in high school largely requires authentic writing tasks *and* writing teachers at all levels to be conscious that effective writing is dynamic, often difficult to measure using a scale of static standards, and requires preserving much needed room for diversity.  Thus, to generate a stagnant definition or measurement scale for what it means to be a college-ready writer may be no more productive than having static learning standards. The contributions of college-level tasks are expected to differ in their impact and effectiveness, but maintain a common effort. Likewise, writing is expected to have variable outcomes dependent on student needs and characteristics.

IV.    Authenticity is a Cause and Effect

It is risky for policymakers, societies, and educators at all levels to accept and continue to ask students to participate in monotonous, formulaic, routinized processes in order to achieve passing scores on tests. Acceptance of this practice agrees to propagate students to exercise their minds only as routinely as they are taught. Because assessment tests prescribe to students in advance specifically what a high achievement score entails, chooses the topic, audience, format, and purpose, writing teachers need to work even harder to create effective and authentic writing practices that produce more than one "correct" response and enable students to respond to the real world. As authentic writing tasks mirror real-life experiences, they help a student become aware of the relevancy and meaningfulness of what they are learning. Additionally, they explore various circumstances and motives that cause writing to happen and are more aligned with the diverse nature of students' personal and academic experiences. Teachers of authentic writing tasks instill in students the importance to observe before they author, and understand for what, how and when language can be used. In the long run, this helps students assume habits of inquiry and discovery, creative problem-solving skills, and the independence and confidence to think openly about the task at hand and their own learning abilities. High school writing must be approached with greater consciousness for students being able to respond to the real world and real audiences so writing habits like curiosity, creativity and openness can be cultivated. Ultimately, this will better prepare students to transition from high school to writing effectively at the college level.

**Conclusion**

In writing, meaning "unfolds in the shared space between the reader and writer," (Kearns 343). To that end, instructors of writing must strive to understand how the meaning of their work

and pedagogy can unfold to reach full potential when engaged in intellectual conversations with one another, regardless of the level of writing being taught. Conceivably, through sustaining such practice professionally, teachers and educators at large can become closer to foster shared goals, achieve college readiness in writing, and include authenticity in class instruction and preparation. Inclusion of authenticity encourages better alignment between the two systems and promotes elimination of a secondary versus postsecondary attitude so teachers can share, exchange, rewrite, and better define goals. Through this interface, educators will not only be able to better understand one another's objectives and methodologies, but participants engaging in the process can be lead to contemplate their own pedagogy to teach writing. Through this practice, teachers may be able to better learn that no matter what mandates or assessments are regimented in secondary schools, they cannot leave students alone to bridge the gap between high school- and college-level writing. But to do this, both secondary and postsecondary educators must first understand how the state standards affect the design of high school writing assessment. And while state standards may not necessarily meet the college-level expectations of writers, an aim to understand the ways the standards falls short, and even the ways they provide merit can positively impact a transition from high school to college. With that said, teachers must incite and sustain awareness in one another that as individuals they develop and define teaching objectives. Teaching to an objective is more effective than teaching to a test, but teaching to an individual is even potentially better than that. Through collaboration on assignments, establishment of an avenue of communication, discussion, and at times debate, teachers at both levels of education begin to foster invaluable tools that will support students' achievement after high school.

Works Cited

Addison, Joanne and Sharon James McGee. "Writing in High School/Writing in College: Research Trends and Future Directions." *Conference on College Composition and Communication* 62.1 *The Future of Rhetoric and Composition* (2010): 147-179. Web. Feb. 2014.

Adelman, C. *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion From High School Through College*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2006. PDF File.

Alexander, Diane, Jabulani Leffall and Andrea Silenzi. "New Approach to Teaching Postsecondary Writing." Kansas City Public Media. *NPR*. Jan. 18, 2012. Web.

Allison, Paul. "Teachers Teaching Teachers 247 High School-College Transition and the "Framework for Success in Post-secondary Writing." *EdTechTalk.com.* EdTechTalk, 5.18.11. Web. Apr. 2014.

Apple, Michael, and S. Jungck. "You Don't Have to be a Teacher to Teach this Unit: Teaching, Technology, and Control in the Classroom." ed. Andy Hargraves and Michael Fullan. *Understanding Teach Development*. New York: Teacher's College Press, 1992. Print.

Applebee, Arthur N. "Toward Thoughtful Curriculum: Fostering Discipline-Based Conversation." *The English Journal* 83.3 (1994): 45-52. Web. Mar. 2014.

Applebee, Arthur N. *Curriculum as Conversation: Transforming Traditions of Teaching and Learning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. Print.

Assaf, Lori. "One Reading Specialist's Response to High-Stakes Testing Pressures." *The Reading Teacher* 60.2 (2006):158-167. Web. Mar. 2014.

Berett, Dan. "Far From Standard". *Inside Higher Ed*. April 7, 2011. Web. April 7, 2014.

Bruffee, K.A.. *A Short Course in Writing*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company (1980). Print.

Carney, Paul. "Identifying and Supporting College-Ready Writing Skills Among High School Students: An Intern-Institutional Alignment Model." *Minnesota English Journal* 8 (2007): 5. Web. Mar. 2014.

Committee on Programs for Advanced Study of Mathematics and Science in U.S. High Schools, National Research Council. *Learning and Understanding: Improving Advanced Study of Mathematics and Science in U.S. High Schools.* Washington DC: National Academy Press, 2002. Print.

Council of Writing Program Administrators. *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition*, 2008. Website. Jan. 2014

Education Week. *Edweek.org.* "Archived Webinars." 2014, Editorial Projects in Education. May 1, 2014. Web. May 2014.

Fanetti, Susan, Kathy M. Bushrow and David L. DeWeese. "Closing the Gap between High School Writing Instruction and College Writing Expectations." *The English Journal* 99.4 (2010): 77-83. Web. Mar. 2014.

Graham, Steve, and Delores Perin. "A Meta-Analysis of Writing Instruction for Adolescent Students." *Journal for Educational Psychology* 99.3 (2007): 445-76. Web. Dec. 2013.

Hallman, Heidi L. "Authentic, Dialogic Writing: The Case of a Letter to the Editor." *The English Journal* 98.5 (2009): 43-47. Web. Dec. 2013.

Hillocks, George. Jr. *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995. Print.

Hamilton, L. S., Stecher, B. M., Marsh, J. A., McCombs, J. S., Robyn, A., Russell, J. L.,

et al. *Standards-based Accountability Under No Child Left Behind: Experiences of Teachers and Administrators in Three States*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND (2007). Print. Apr. 2014.

Hillocks, George, Jr. *The Testing Trap: How State Writing Assessments Control Learning*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2002. Print.

Hoffman, J. Assaf, L, & Paris, S. "High-stakes Testing in Reading: Today in Texas, Tomorrow?" *The Reading Teacher* 54 (2001): 428-492. Web. Mar. 2014.

Johnson, Kristine. "Beyond Standards: Disciplinary and National Perspectives on Habits of Mind." *College Composition and Communication* 64.3 (2003): 517-541. Web. Mar. 2014.

Kearns, Chris. "The Recursive Character of College Writing." *What is "College-Level Writing?* Patrick Sullivan & Howard Tinberg (ed.) IL: National Council of Teachers of English (2006): 441-57. Web. Mar. 2014.

Ketter, Jean & Jonelle Pool. Exploring the Impact of a High-Stakes Direct Writing Assessment in Two High School Classrooms." Research in the Teaching of English 35.3 (2001): 344-393. Web. Mar. 2013.

Learning Ace. LearningAce.com. *Ace Learning Company, Inc*., 2012. Web. Apr. 2014

Lewin, Tamar. "A New SAT Aims to Realign With Schoolwork." The New York Times. March 5, 2014. Web. May 2014.

Malady, Matthew J.X. "We Are Teaching High School Students to Write Terribly: The Many Problems of the SAT's Essay Section." *Slate.com*. Web. April 2014.

Mijares, Al, ed. "The College Board Brief: Defining College Readiness. California Education Policy Convening October 19, 2007. Web. Apr. 2014. PDF File.

National Center for Education Statistics. *Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions* 2003. PDF File.

National Center for Education Statistics. *Projections of Education Statistics to 2021*, *U.S. Department of Education Institution of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics,* 2012. Website. Apr. 2014.

National Council of Teachers of English. "Symposium: On the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing ." *College English* 74.6 (2012): 520-553. Web. Mar. 2013. PDF File.

New York State Education Department. *EngageNY.org*, 2013. Website. Mar. 2014

Nystrand, Martin, ed., *Opening Dialogue: Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Learning in the English Classroom.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1997. Print.

Pearson. *Pearson.com*. News, 2014 Pearson plc. Web. May 2014.

Phillips, Vicki, and Carina Wong. "Tying Together the Common Core of Standards, Instruction, and Assessments." *The Phi Delta Kappan* 91.5 (2010): 37-42. Web. Nov. 2013.

Santangelo, Tanya and Natalie G Olinghouse. "Effective Writing Instruction for Students who Have Writing Difficulties." *Focus on Exceptional Children* 42.4 (2009): 1-20. Web. Apr. 2014.

Singer, Alan. "Cuomo, Common Core and Pearson-for-Profit." *Huffington Post*. Feb. 28, 2012. Web. May 2014.

Slagle, Patricia. "Getting Real: Authenticity in Writing Prompts." *The Quarterly, 19.3* (1997). Web. Mar. 2014.

Smith, Anna. "Developing Writers." *Scoop.com*. Scoop. n.d. Web. Apr. 2014.

Strauss, Valarie. "The Fundamental Flaws of 'Value Added' Teacher Evaluation." *The Washington Post*. December 23, 2012. Web. May 2014.

Tepe, Lindsey. "The Common Core Is Driving the Changes to the SAT." *The Atlantic*.

    March 10, 2014. Wed. May 2014.

Toch, Thomas. "National Standards Closer to Reality" *The Phi Delta Kappan* 91.1

    (2009): 72-73. Web. Dec. 2013.

Valli, Linda and Daria Buese. "The Changing Roles of Teachers in an Era of High-Stakes

    Accountability." *American Educational Research Journal* 44.3 (2007): 519-558

Vasavada, Natasha, Elaine Carman, Beth Hart and Danielle Luisier. "Common Core

    State Standards Alignment." *The College Board*, Research Report 20120 – 5A.

    (2010): 1 -26. Web. May 2014. PDF File.

**Appendices**

Appendix A

  Sample Essay 1

Appendix B

  Sample Essay 2

# Appendix A – Sample Essay 1

Through various life experiences, one almost always learns that nothing in life is free, or as L. M. Montgomery said, "... we pay a price for everything we get or take in this world." Essentially, any reward one receives or hasty decision one makes comes at a cost. Author Toni Morrison reveals this idea in her controversial book Beloved in which former slaves recount the horrors of bondage. In addition, the ancient playwright Sophocles in his play Oedipus unearths the consequences of the rash decisions of a seemingly great man.

The time of slavery in the United States was an extremely tragic and horrific experience for African-Americans. Although Morrison's story Beloved begins after the Civil War, much of its action takes place in pre-Emancipation Proclamation America. This setting serves to reveal the hardships that slaves Halle and Sethe endure. The first owner of Sweet Home plantation, Mr. Garner, allows his slave Halle to earn money in order to buy his mother's freedom. Halle had to work extra hours on weekends for years in order to save enough to pay for her release. His good deed came at the cost of years worth of labor-intensive activities. Mr. Garner, however, dies and control of the plantation is given to a man referred to as the schoolteacher. This schoolteacher is brutal and sadistic. Following horrific treatment, Sethe escapes and goes to stay with Halle's mother. Unfortunately the overseer at the plantation

discovers where she is, and when Sethe is come for, she chooses to kill her daughter, reasoning that being dead would be better for her daughter than being a slave. Morrison characterizes Sethe as selfless and nurturing, and she committing this murder only out of desperation and love. Because of her actions, however, the spirit of Sethe's dead baby came back to haunt her for eighteen years until it came back in human form and basically sucked the life out of Sethe. Though Sethe's act was done out of unconditional love, she still faced the repercussions.

Sophocles, the famous Greek writer, constructed a trilogy around a character named Oedipus. While Oedipus is characterized as a smart man who cares for the city of Thebes over which he ruled, his tragic flaws lead to his downfall. Consumed with hubris, Oedipus felt as though he was invincible. While traveling, Oedipus kills three men not knowing that one of them is King Laius of Thebes, who is actually his biological father. Oedipus is then named King of Thebes. When things do not go well in Thebes, Oedipus calls upon the gods for advice, and they tell him to find Laius' killer. When Oedipus finally discovers who the killer is (He is), his wife, who is his mother as well, kills herself. Oedipus gouges out his eyes, and exiles himself from Thebes. His decision made in haste to kill Laius, brings about his downfall. He loses his power and fame.

While many try to be good people, not all

45

reap the benefits of their good deeds, or have an easy time of doing so. Halle, in order to free his mother, had to exert hundreds of hours of grueling effort to do so while Sethe, trying to save her children out of love, kills one of them, and is haunted for years after. Oedipus receives a title of great power in Thebes, but ultimately must relinquish it and flee the city. All three characters had to "pay a price" for their actions, many of which were not worth the consequences that ensued.

**Anchor Level 6 – B**

| Quality | Commentary<br>The response: |
|---|---|
| Meaning | Provides an interpretation of the critical lens that is faithful to the complexity of the statement and clearly establishes the criteria for analysis (*Essentially, any reward one receives or hasty decision one makes comes at a cost*). The response uses the criteria to make insightful analysis of *Beloved* (*His good deed came at the cost of years worth of labor-intensive activities*) and *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*His decision made in haste to kill Laius, brings about his downfall*). |
| Development | Develops ideas clearly and fully, making effective use of a wide range of relevant and specific evidence to show how *characters had to "pay a price" for their actions*. The literary elements of setting (*This setting serves to reveal the hardships that slaves Halle and Sethe endure*) and characterization (*Morrison characterizes Sethe as selfless and nurturing* and *Oedipus is characterized as a smart man who cares for the city of Thebes* and who thought *he was invincible*) are incorporated into the discussion. |
| Organization | Maintains the focus established by the critical lens on *the consequences that ensued* as a result of characters' actions. The response exhibits a logical and coherent structure, introducing the characters for each work (*Halle and Sethe* and *a character named Oedipus*), then reviewing the cost of each character's action (*Halle … had to exert hundreds of hours of grueling effort* and *flee the city*), and concluding with a refocus on the price each paid. Transitions are skillfully used (*Through various life experiences, Following horrific treatment, While many … not all*). |
| Language Use | Is stylistically sophisticated, using language that is precise and engaging (*recount the horrors of bondage, unearths the consequences, Consumed with hubris*), with a notable sense of voice and awareness of audience and purpose (*Though Sethe's act was done out of unconditional love, she still faced the repercussions*). The response varies structure and length of sentences to enhance meaning (*This schoolteacher is brutal and sadistic*). |
| Conventions | Demonstrates control of the conventions, exhibiting occasional errors in punctuation (*Mr. Garner, however dies; eyes, and exiles; Laius, brings*). |
| **Conclusion:** Overall, the response best fits the criteria for Level 6, although it is somewhat weaker in conventions. ||

46

**Appendix B – Sample Essay 2**

Fyodor Dostoevsky said, "...fear is simply the consequence of every lie." However, in books such as The Catcher In the Rye by J.D. Salinger and To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee, that statement is contradicted through portrayals of characterization and setting. These books set up the idea that lies do not provoke fear, but lies are used as an escape route from fear, making Dosteevsky's statement false.

Holden, the main character in The Catcher in the Rye, has a habit of lying. Salinger uses this characterization to set up an example of how fearful Holden truely is of growing up and acting as himself. Through lying, Holden escapes his fear and can be anyone he truely wishes to be; anyone but himself. When he lies, his fear disappears because he is no longer Holden but someone else in Holden's body, making his future, his past, and his problems dissolve. Through lying, Holden becomes who he wants to be and fails at nothing, making him confident and fearless.

In comparison, Harper Lee's To Kill A Mockingbird sets up another example on how lies can be used to escape fear. The setting in the story, a very segregated small town in the South, causes a woman to accuse an innocent black man of rape, for fear that if the town ever found out of her liking and friendship with the man, her family would be completely shunned and looked down upon. By accusing the innocent black man of crimes he did not commit, she escaped fear of her father, and

47

his judgment, fear of condescending behavior from the towns people, and fear of being more alone than she already was ~~&~~ because ~~people~~ would view her as an oddity. The setting was very much manipulated to show the temptations that lying brought, and ~~He~~ Harper Lee established a strong ~~pre~~portrayal of the fear that caused the young white girl's lies.

Fear provokes many things from humans, one of the most common effects being lies. ~~By Harp~~ Both Harper Lee and J.D. Salinger use~~d~~ literary devices and characters in their plot to help develop and support the idea more, and examples are sure to be found even in everyday life, like when you lie to your mother for fear of punishment. Though not temporary, the escape lies provide from fear are ideal to those under its influence, and ~~are not~~ do not provoke fear.

**Anchor Level 5 – B**

| Quality | Commentary |
|---|---|
| | **The response:** |
| Meaning | Provides a thoughtful interpretation of the critical lens that clearly establishes the criteria for analysis by disagreeing with it (*lies do not provoke fear, but lies are used as an escape route from fear, making Dostoevsky's statement false*). The response uses the criteria to make a clear and reasoned analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger (*Through lying, Holden escapes his fear*) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (*By accusing the innocent black man of crimes he did not commit, she escaped fear of her father*). |
| Development | Develops some ideas more fully than others. The response makes general references to Holden and to Salinger's use of *characterization* (*When he lies, his fear disappears because he is no longer Holden but someone else in Holden's body*). The response discusses Lee's work more fully, providing specific information about the *setting* of the story and identifying its effect on the plot (*The setting in the story, a very segregated small town in the South, causes a woman to accuse an innocent black man of rape*). |
| Organization | Maintains the focus established by the disagreement with the critical lens (*Fear provokes many things from humans, one of the most common effects being lies*). The response exhibits a logical sequence of ideas, first disagreeing with Dostoevsky's statement, then providing body paragraphs to support the idea that lying is capable of easing fear, and concluding with a reiteration of the idea that lies *do not provoke fear*. Appropriate devices and transitions are used (*However, Through lying, In comparison*). |
| Language Use | Uses language that is fluent and original (*contradicted through portrayals, his problems dissolve, more alone than she already was*), with evident awareness of audience and purpose. The response varies structure and length of sentences to control rhythm and pacing (*Holden, the main character in The Catcher in the Rye, has a habit of lying*). |
| Conventions | Demonstrates control of the conventions, exhibiting occasional errors in spelling (*truely* and *towns people*), punctuation (*to be; anyone* and *influence, and*), and grammar (*escape ... are ... do not provoke*) only when using sophisticated language. |
| **Conclusion:** Overall, the response best fits the criteria for Level 5, although it is somewhat weaker in development. | |