

## C&W History: Literacy and the Visual Transcription

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**Paul Leblanc:** “When we talk about writing, when we think about the design of writing programs and writing courses, we have to be really thoughtful about what we’re including and what we’re not including, and how the course changes in each of those contexts. So, if you’re thinking about a freshman writing class which prepares students for the academic discourse which has remained largely unchanged. It probably does not look dramatically different than it did twenty years ago, frankly. If you, and I think the danger sometimes and I think this is a danger- really to be honest with you- when I saw those of us who were graduate students in 1990-whatever, when we were thinking of working in the field, in 1990 was that we got really excited about new technologies and new forms of communication. We often engaged our students in that work when in reality almost all of our colleagues in the academy who would then ask our students to do writing would use none of those. So, you know, we have faculty who loves using the Wiki’s in their classes. Not sure our freshman writing needs sort of a count for that, because the great bulk of our faculty are still going to be looking for five page papers on X. And they are going to expect the kind of discourse that their models expected. I think to the extent that the academic writing students do is more research based certainly digital literacy has become paramount for everybody. What counts as a good source and using a source and citing a source and new kinds of sources we didn’t have before.”

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**Charlie Moran:** “The short answer is yes, writing is- my sense of what writing is has dramatically changed from the eight and a half by eleven career, twelve point, double spaced essay to something that has graphics, could conceivably include sound, and so on and so forth. I was director of the Western Massachusetts writing project for about eight or nine years, and in the process decided we needed the newsletter and also in the process decided I needed to learn page making. Which was absolutely a vertical learning curve, and I spent more time than I would like to admit trying to even out the columns by slightly changing type size and putting a graphic in and realizing my god, now I have to rewrite the text because the graphic is in there and the text doesn't talk to the graphic and vice versa. And so the innerplate between graphics and text became just intensely interesting to me and it is clear that it is there and has to be worked with. And it was fun, just messing with PageMaker and trying to come up with text and graphics that connected. Of course, newspapers have been doing that forever. My wife, a journalist, just said “Yes!” from the other room. But for me, as an academic writer, bringing graphics in was sort of extraordinary and liberating and difficult and fun. It was interesting to me that in our English department seminar series for Tuesdays at 4, everybody reads papers. In my colleague Bill

Mullan's Physics counterpart to that, everyone talks over his what are now powerpoints. And so really different moments in different places. And if in our first year writing course we think we are preparing people for English or Philosophy or maybe, I'm not even sure about Art History, but a very narrow range of humanity and the humanities. the eight and a half by eleven essay focusing on that and using that to teach argument predominantly seems to be the right choice. But as soon as you get out of that, it makes you question and wonder."

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**Steven Krause:** "Why I didn't include images in essays I wrote in college is because it wasn't possible! I mean the tools did not exist. So it's like one of the reasons I think it's okay nowadays for students to do that is because it is possible! Heck, you can embed a video in those things nowadays, you know what I mean? So in other words a lot of what's changed in terms of what is acceptable in a writing class or what is acceptable in writing across the university- really writing across you know, everything, is because you can do it. I mean the New York Times publishes lots of videos and it's because they can! They would have done that like fifty years ago if they could've!"

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**Paul Leblanc:** "But I mean the expectations of college graduates going into the workplace for what will count as writing is evolving. That tool has been around forever so there's nothing dramatic or breakthrough about powerpoint but when we think about the kinds of writing we have to prepare students to do, it looks different in the workplace. So, I am going to go back to that first question which was 'If you think about first year writing, if you think about outcomes, is your outcome to prepare students for that kind of discourse or is it your outcome to prepare them for sophomore year of college?' Which leads to junior, which leads to their ability to do that kind of writing."