

Weaving a Web: Using Computer Technology to Teach Composition

by

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Dedication:

To my mother, Nancy Flick, who launched me on this voyage,
in more ways than one.

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Introduction

When I walked into class on the first day of the first composition class that I had been assigned to teach at Youngstown State University, I immediately sensed that the students were confused. The first-day session in January 1999 was held in a computer lab that would be home for two of the class's four 50-minute sessions each week of the academic term ahead, and many of the students were obviously confused about why a composition class would meet twice a week in a computer lab. After all, they seemed to be thinking, this was an English class, not a science class. The students seemed to wonder, "What *possible* good could computers be in learning how to write an essay?" The students understood the two days per week in a traditional classroom. Nearly all of the students were college freshmen who had spent most of their 12 previous years of schooling, from first to twelfth grades, in similar classrooms, in that traditional paradigm of learning – sitting quietly, looking straight ahead, listening and doing exactly what the teacher instructed them to do. Even the students who received computer instruction in high school were surprised that they would spend half their time in an *English* class sitting in front of a computer. After all, the students apparently wondered, how would these high-tech gizmos help them fulfill the university's requirement that they complete a college composition class before they would be eligible to graduate?

Not only would I need to instruct them in the writing of essays, I'd also need to acquaint them with a growing field that mixes hard science with humanistic study – computers and composition. I wondered how quickly I would be able to teach them how to make use of the newest tool of human communications – the computer – to help them research and write essays. From that first day of class, I found that even my students who had extensive computer experience – including a few computer science majors – were at first surprised that they would be able to put their computer skills to work in a composition class.

My first obstacle, the first difficulty I needed to overcome, was the students' attitudes toward computers. I wondered if the students would shift their expectations of the educational process quickly enough to benefit from using computers, including computer newsgroups, in a composition classroom. I knew that no matter what their academic major, they would benefit from learning how to communicate by using computers simply because computer are quickly becoming the dominant communication tool of the modern world.

Chapter 1: The Web we need to weave

This thesis examines my efforts to change students' attitudes toward computers, to teach them that the computer is a valuable tool for composing written work, as well as for conducting non-scientific research and discussion. After all, the most common use for computers today is not crunching numbers, but communicating. When I re-entered the academic world in the fall of 1998 – after nearly two decades as working as a journalist – I quickly noticed a reluctance among many students and collegiate faculty members to use computers to communicate. When I began to teach composition, I decided I needed to persuade my students that they could use computers to communicate as readily as they could use an earlier technological innovation – the pencil. My job as a composition instructor was to teach my students to effectively communicate. Because in today's world, with the computer's role as a communications tool already common and expanding rapidly, before they leave college students must learn to use computers to communicate. Today's college students must be able to use today's communication tool – the computer – as they pursue a career. After all, "Every day, computer technology becomes a larger part of our lives" (William Condon and Wayne Butler, ix).

Methodology

Each of the four classes included in the study group for this thesis – composition classes that I taught in winter, spring and fall quarters of 1999 and winter quarter 2000 – met four times per week during the academic term, spending two 50-minute class periods in traditional classrooms and two 50-minute class periods in computer labs equipped with computers loaded with programs including Microsoft Word, and access to both Telnet and the World Wide Web. The first three classes were Composition I classes, while the fourth was a Composition II section. The study group for this thesis included 88 students: 24 in the winter 1999 academic term; 22 in spring 1999; 20 in fall 1999; and 12 in winter 2000. Eighty-six of the 88 students in the study group were freshmen, aged 18 or 19. Both exceptions were members of the first class in my study group, my winter 1999 class; Kristine P. was a non-traditional student in her mid-20s, and Rebecca S. was a traditional student in her third academic year.

The academic majors of the students in my study group ran the gamut, since all students must complete both Composition I and Composition II before they are eligible to graduate. I encountered students with a wide range of attitudes toward computers and composition, both students with positive attitudes toward computer communications and students with negative attitudes toward the modern world's increasingly predominant method of communications. Some students had extensive experience with computers, and eagerly and openly explored the new

realms of communications; my class rosters included a few computer science majors and one computer lab assistant. But other students simply hated using computers and a few had never used computers before enrolling in my class.

The students don't know it when they walk into my college composition classroom for the first day of class, but lectures did not lie ahead of them. The sessions in the computer lab were not traditional composition sessions. A class newsgroup was established for each of the four classes. In all three of my composition I classes, newsgroup discussion of the readings I assigned through the syllabi was mandatory. On the first day each class met in a computer lab, I instructed the students to read a message from me at the beginning of each computer lab session. At first, I simply encouraged open discussion of the assigned readings. But I subsequently decided to post messages assigning students to compose answers to essay questions from our textbook, Language Awareness, and post their answers on the newsgroup. I instructed the students to read each other's answers, and engage in discussion by means of the newsgroup. I encouraged them to compare their answers, to engage in open discussion through the newsgroup. I also required students to post each draft of their essays on the newsgroup, and encouraged student discussion of the essays through the newsgroup.

On the other hand, what I didn't know when the students of my first class arrived for the first day of class in January 1999 was that many students at the collegiate level were inexperienced in using a computer to communicate. In fact, an undetermined number of the 88 students in the focus group for this thesis were not even computer literate before they enrolled in my class. Several were resistant to CAI, and a few were downright hostile toward computers in general. Due to the expanding role of the computer in the modern communications, I had assumed that most of my students would be computer literate and well acquainted with using computers to communicate. My expectations shifted during my first academic term as a composition instructor, as I perceived the wide range of experiences with, and attitudes toward, computers that students bring to class.

On the first day of each class, I introduced myself to the class and briefly described my background.

Class newsgroup discussions were an activity the students didn't expect when they first walked into my class because such discussions differ from the conduct of a traditional classroom. "The traditional writing classroom presumes that the students are the writers and the instructor (or grader) is the sole reader" (Thomas T. Barker and Fred O. Kemp, 6). But in my class computer labs, the students' written responses were read and critiqued not only by the instructor – me – but also by the other students.

I not only took part in those newsgroup discussions, but also posed questions to the class. In my third and fourth classes, once I had decided upon the topic of this thesis, I conducted opinion polls. Beginning with my third class, in the fall of 1999, after each computer lab session ended, I entered the newsgroup and preserved the student responses by copying them as Microsoft Word documents. I have selected student responses and sections of their essay for inclusion in this thesis. I also conducted a number of focus interviews with students.

Class computer newsgroups give students valuable exposure to an audience, to peer review, I believe, and I found that scholars hold the same view. “[N]ewsgroups give students concrete examples of rhetorical situations. Using newsgroups, students can make important gains in their research . . . and experience a ‘workshop’ environment in which various rhetorical strategies can be tested. At the same time, students learn that statements which are poorly argued or expressed unclearly will often be challenged, critiqued or ignored by other readers” (Daniel Anderson, Bret Benjamin, Christopher Busiel and Bill Padredes-Holt, 44-45). “By providing an opportunity for students to communicate with a larger and more varied discourse community, newsgroups give students concrete examples of rhetorical situations in which different audiences demand different argumentative strategies and different modes of presentation” (Benjamin and Busiel). Jane Collins explained that student newsgroups provide valuable experiences in writing classes she teaches at Pace University:

First, newsgroups made student writing a public act, a complex transaction between many writers and readers rather than a simple exchange between teacher and student. Writing for, and as part of, a community of readers allowed students a clearer sense of themselves and their classmates as “intellectuals,” writers who struggled with difficult ideas and concepts, not simple note-takers or empty vessels awaiting the professor’s definitive interpretation of the readings. Second, teachers could use student writing posted on the . . . newsgroup in the regular classroom to further increase the students’ authority as readers and writers.

By making “student writing a public act,” computer newsgroups promote students’ discussion – in effect, ongoing peer review – of their own and other students’ writings. “Anyone who has taught in a computerized classroom knows how easy it is to engage students in discussions about what they are writing, because their work is prominently displayed on the screens” (Thomas A. Barker, 15).

In my composition sections, I found that when students are required to use computers during the hours they spend each week in a computer lab, they quickly become comfortable with using computers. Any lack of experience doesn’t prevent them from easily learning to take part in newsgroup sessions, and academic background in computer-

intensive programs offer little apparent advantage for using computers in the context of a composition class. The key, I've concluded after teaching four sections of composition in a computers and composition context, is to require students to compose, converse and research via the computer. And give them time to tinker. Allowing students time to tinker helps students become comfortable with computer because tinkering allows them to explore the limits of computer-aided communications.

When I started teaching, I was concerned about students' ability to participate in a computer newsgroup. After all, I knew that few of my students would be computer science majors. However, I quickly found that learning how to use computers to communicate requires the same amount of computer expertise as dialing a telephone requires knowledge of electrical engineering – none at all. In fact, my experiences both as an editor and as a composition instructor showed me the veracity of the blunt statement made by Eric James Schroeder and John Boe, who said that the type of computer used in college composition classes “is designed so even an idiot . . . can use it” (30). Schroeder and Boe affirm that no class time needs to be devoted to teaching college students how to operate the computers involved in computer-aided instruction: “We don't need to take class time to teach the students about viewing files in different format, sizing and moving windows, and so forth. Students will usually learn these tricks on their own time anyway” (30).

Meeting the Machine

CAI was not only a new experience for my students; CAI was also a new endeavor for me as well when I taught my first class. But while CAI was new to me, I was well prepared for the concept of composing on computers. After graduating from Bowling Green State University with a bachelor's degree in journalism in June 1979, two decades of working as a free-lance writer, reporter and editor convinced me of the advantages of composing written work by means of computers. Before I started to use computer-aided composition, as a free-lance magazine writer in the early 1980s I sometimes needed to literally “cut and paste” stories – using scissors to cut out paragraphs that needed to appear earlier or later in the article, cutting apart the typed pages and taping the misplaced paragraphs into their proper places. I was delighted to learn how to make such changes in a newspaper story via computer, needing neither scissors nor tape. Today, “cut and paste” is a slang term sometimes used to describe reorganizing a written composition.

Newspapers started using computers to gather news in the 1960s, and the trend boomed in the 1990s: “By the early 1990s, . . . [t]raditional in-person and library archive research [by newspaper reporters and editors] began to

give way to computer-based reporting” (Garrison). I gained extensive experience in using computers to compose and edit written work beginning in October 1993, when I was hired as managing editor of Thomson Newspapers’ Ohio Week magazine. On the first day in my new job, I received the kind of on-the-job training I hope CAI in college composition classes will make unnecessary. The editor – my new boss – greeted me, explained my duties, pointed to my desk, and said, “There’s your computer. We’ve got stories we’re waiting for you to edit.” Then her own duties called her away, and I was left standing in front of what was then a strange machine, feeling nervous and puzzled. I had just found out that my new duties required me to work in Microsoft Word and Quark – two programs I’d never used before. However, since Microsoft Word and Quark were then the programs most commonly used by newspapers, and I’d worked as an editor at The Niles Times before I worked for Ohio Week, my new boss apparently assumed that I was familiar with those programs. To my relief, Ohio Week’s resident computer specialist’s desk was next to mine, and with his help, I was able to start editing stories that same day. Of course, he had assignments other than helping me master my duties, and I quickly found that a valuable method of learning how to use the programs was simply tinkering. At first, I was often stumped, but I knew I had an expert close at hand who could help me solve any problem. Knowing that I had an expert close at hand gave me the confidence to learn by experimenting – by tinkering. Later, I encouraged students in my composition classes at YSU to use the same technique – tinkering – but this time I was not the novice, but the expert who helped them solve problems.

Many college students today are well acquainted with using computers before they walk into a college classroom, and an increasing number of students in the future will be computer competent when they walk into college composition classes for the first time, since public schools across the country are introducing computers into the classrooms of elementary and secondary schools. Ohio, for instance, is significantly committed to establishing computer instruction in public schools in all of the state’s 611 school districts. In 1995, the Ohio Legislature created SchoolNet Plus and committed \$400 million to a “program aimed at putting planning money in the hands of all school districts [in Ohio] immediately and placing (computer) workstations in elementary schools at a ratio of one per every five K-4 [kindergarten through fourth grade] student,” “Get Ready for SchoolNet Plus” explains (6). At Ohio SchoolNet’s Web site, “About: OSN” adds:

When the Internet exploded in the early 1990’s, Ohio’s government leaders recognized the impact of networked computing on education. . . . [In 1995,] SchoolNet was designed as a \$95 million, state-funded partnership that expanded the traditional classroom experience for children to help them acquire skills

critical to the education and job markets of the future. . . . SchoolNet Plus was approved by the Ohio General Assembly in 1995 to expand the impact of SchoolNet in Ohio's public school grade K-4 classrooms. This \$430 million investment provided funding for computers, software, peripherals, and professional development . . .

In 1997, Ohio was awarded a five-year, \$42 million federal grant from the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund . . . [and the state decided to use to money to fund an] expansion of SchoolNet Plus into middle grades. Established as an independent state agency in 1997, Ohio SchoolNet administers the state's \$600 million investment in Ohio SchoolNet's companion technology programs.

Schools in Ohio's 611 public school districts "have reported that the computers have actually been installed in all kindergarten through fourth grade classrooms in their districts. A total of \$431.67 million has been appropriated by the [Ohio] General Assembly for this purpose since 1995, providing a total of approximately 150,021 computers," said "Report of the Ohio Schools Technology Implementation Task Force." The task force also recommended that the Ohio General Assembly "provide funding to extend the SchoolNet Plus program . . . by at least one grade level per fiscal year to include grades 5, 6, 7, 8 and to consider the further extension thereafter to grades 9-12."

The federal government and most states have provided public funds to buy computers for public school classrooms. The need for computers in classrooms has been recognized as a national concern for more than four years. In February 1996, President Bill Clinton said, in his address, "Technological Literacy: A National Priority – Getting America's Students Ready for the 21st Century: Meeting the Technology Literacy Challenge. A Report to the Nation on Technology and Education," "In our schools, every classroom in America must be connected to the information superhighway with computers and good software and well-trained teachers." Cynthia L. Selfe included an admittedly incomplete sampling of state-funded efforts across the United States to establish classroom computer usage in her keynote speech to the 1998 Conference on College Composition and Communication, citing programs in California, Idaho, Delaware, Maine, Montana, Texas, Wisconsin and the District of Columbia that have purchased computers for public schools. Selfe also referred in a hopeful tone Clinton's "Technology Literacy Challenge." The President's address promised the Clinton-Gore administration would support several projects that Selfe hoped come to fruition, including:

[A]n official national project to expand technological literacy, the “ability to use computers and other technology to improve learning, productivity and performance.” . . . By “technologically literate,” this document refers to the use of computers not only for the purposes of calculating, programming, and designing, but also for the purposes of reading, writing, and communicating – at least for the officially-sponsored academic tasks required in schools across the country. Estimates indicate that this particular literacy project may cost up to \$109 billion dollars – averaging either \$11 billion annually for a decade or between \$10 and \$20 billion annually for five years – from a variety of sources at the national, state, and local levels.

All levels of education throughout the United States are gaining increasing access to computers communications, and more is on the way. “According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of public schools in the United States with Internet access rose from 37% in fall 1994 to 78% in fall 1997: . . . Furthermore, a little notice provision of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 requires telephone companies to pay for wiring all schools and libraries in the United State to the Internet” (Faigley, 130).

Like most innovations, SchoolNet and other computer literacy programs have encountered a few difficulties in getting started. A problem with SchoolNet that I noticed through my personal contact with schools is that most teachers are afraid to unleash their students on expensive machinery – e.g. computers – placed in their classrooms. Furthermore, despite the onrush of computer technology, many teachers simply aren’t computer literate. This reluctance of teachers to use computers is common, according to a University of Washington study, which found: “Most older faculty won’t use technology.” After all, all but the youngest teachers finished their education before computers came into common use, before computers and composition became a recognized field of study. The University of Washington cited, as an example, a professor who did not use computers in his classroom simply because “he was leery that he might ‘push the wrong buttons’ and look foolish in front of his students.” But the study pointed out, “We need to rely on our students, who are often more tech savvy than professors are, to help us learn to use this equipment.”

A Sign of things to come

As a “tech savvy” adult, when the school district I live in acquired computers through SchoolNet Plus, I volunteered my free time to help teachers introduce their students to computers in the classroom. I couldn’t visit every classroom, so I decided to start at the beginning – in kindergarten. During the 1998-99 school year, I worked

with seven kindergarten teachers and approximately 300 students in 12 classes (two full-day programs and 10 traditional half-day programs). While this work was not part of my study, through my work with kindergarten classes I was able to experiment with methods of introducing novice students to using computers in the classroom. I employed a variety of instructional techniques, and almost invariably within half an hour the 6-year-old students would be able to successfully operate the computer. Admittedly, they were only playing simple games, but it was encouraging to see small children master the high-tech machinery so easily. I wondered what instructional technique had allowed me to best instruct the kindergartners, but I soon realized an insight that I carried with me into my collegiate classrooms: The key to teaching students to use computers is to require them to use computers, and give them time to tinker. Once they realized that they were free to experiment, explore, try new things, and make mistakes, but not fear the wrath of the instructor, they learned quickly. My observation was proof of King's statement that using computers in the classroom improves students' learning: "Children learn in the same way as adults in that they learn best when they can ask their own questions, seek answers in many places, consider different perspectives, exchange views with others and add their own findings to understandings" (156).

I also found that introducing fresh challenges helped my instruction – especially if I didn't offer simple answers and allowed students to experiment, to tinker, until they found the answer. On one occasion, after I noticed that a group of kindergartners had easily mastered my computer lessons, I purchased a game disk before their next computer lab session. When my session with the kindergarten students began, I handed the disk to the computer-savvy students and simply told them to have fun playing the game. The game seemed exciting, so the boys appeared grateful – but puzzled. I waited for one of them to ask the question: "How do we play this game?" "I don't know," I answered, "I've never played it. But I'm sure you can figure it out, and when you do, you can show me." After a moment of surprise, they returned to their computer, smiling, and began to tinker away. Within about 15 minutes, the 6-year-olds had the game up and running, and were eager to show me how to play.

Instructing kindergartners in how to play games with computers is admittedly a far different task than teaching college freshmen how to use computers to improve their essay-writing skills. But through my work with the kindergarten classes I developed a pattern of instruction that later worked well with college students – show them basic computer techniques, then back off and let them explore. While teaching both the kindergarten and collegiate students, I made it clear they were free to explore, to try new techniques, and ask me questions at any time. I also kept a sharp eye on students during initial sessions; since students were often reluctant to call for help if they were

puzzled about something, I casually wandered over to any students who seemed frustrated or puzzled, and offered to answer questions.

My work with students has also shown me that age has little to do with computer competence. A few of the kindergartners I worked with were clearly more computer literate than me, and needed not a bit of instruction on how to use the computer. On the other hand, an A student in one of my composition classes told me that the only way she could write her essays was by using a pencil to write the early drafts by hand; only after she had completed her handwritten drafts would she type them up on a computer disk so she could print them out to hand in, and enter them on the class newsgroup.

Review of literature

The introduction of computer-aided communications is not the first, or the most revolutionary, change in human communications. In fact, the written word itself is a relatively new invention: “*Homo Sapiens* has been in existence for between 30,000 and 50,000 years. The earliest script dates from only 6000 years ago” (Ong, 2). Furthermore, a long series of technologies have invaded the realm of communications. “The computer is simply the latest step in a long line of writing technologies. In many ways its development parallels that of the pencil . . . though the computer seems more complex and is undoubtedly more expensive” (Baron, 17).

My research warned me to expect to find some resistance to CAI among my students, since every previous advance in communications technology has encountered such resistance, despite the advantages that resulted. “[O]ther literacy technologies, including writing itself, were initially met with suspicion as well as enthusiasm” (Baron, 17). “[E]ssentially the same objections commonly urged today against computers were urged by Plato . . . against writing. Writing, Plato has Socrates say in the *Phaedrus*, is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can be only in the mind. It is a thing, a manufactured product. The same of course is said of computers” (Ong, 79). In a section titled, “Writing as technology,” Ong continued, “Plato was thinking of writing as an external, alien technology, as many people today think of the computer. . . . [W]e find it difficult to consider writing to be a technology. . . . Yet writing . . . is a technology, calling for the use of tools and other equipment: styli or brushes or pens, carefully prepared surfaces such as paper, animal skins, strips of wood, as well as inks or paints, and much more” (81-82).

Resistance to changes in the technology of communications cannot only be traced back more than 2,000 years, but also into the 20th century:

Of course the first writing technology was writing itself. Just like the telegraph and the computer, writing itself was once an innovation strongly resisted by traditionalists because it was unnatural and untrustworthy. Plato was one leading thinker who spoke out strongly against writing, fearing that it would weaken our memories . . . when the typewriter first began to sweep across America's offices, it too promised to change writing radically, in ways never before imagined. So threatening was the typewriter to the traditional literacies that in 1938 the New York Times editorialized against the machine that depersonalized writing, usurping the place of "writing with one's own hand" (Baron, 18-19).

Throughout history, new methods of human communications have gained popularity only slowly, and had to overcome resistance, and today mankind is apparently mounting a similar resistance to the latest technological development in communications:

A change is upon us – nothing could be clearer. . . . This shift is happening throughout our culture, away from the patterns and habits of the printed page and toward a new world distinguished by its reliance on computer communications. This is not, of course, the first such shift in our long history. In Greece, in the time of Socrates, several centuries after Homer, the dominant oral culture was overtaken by the writing technology. And in Europe another epochal transition was effected in the late fifteenth century after Gutenberg invented movable type. In both cases the long-term effects were overwhelming, as they will be for use in the years to come. The evidence of change is all around us . . . (Birkerts, 258).

Today, at least 30 millennia since the estimated date of the invention of the written word, researchers have found that computers can play a valuable role in the teaching of composition. "The single best-supported finding in the research literature is that the use of CAI as a supplement to traditional, teacher-directed instruction produces achievement effects superior to those obtained with traditional instruction alone," said Kathleen Cotton in "Computer-Assisted Instruction," an essay that I located – appropriately – on the World Wide Web. Students can make wide-ranging use of computers in the composition class:

Word processing programs, with their capability to add, delete, and rearrange text, are seen as being far more congruent with the writing process than more laborious pencil-and-paper approaches. And indeed, most research in this area indicates that the use of word processors in writing programs leads to better writing outcomes than the use of paper-and-pencil or conventional typewriters. . . . As well as enabling students to achieve at higher levels, researchers have also found that CAI enhances learning rate . . . student

scores on delayed tests indicate that the retention of content learned using CAI is superior to retention following traditional instruction alone (Cotton).

While the computer was once simply a tool, and continues to be used as a tool, “the computer offers us both new models of the mind and a new medium on which to project our ideas and fantasies. Most recently, the computer has become even more than a tool and mirror: We are able to step through the looking glass . . . [and] when we step through the looking glass, other people are there” (Turkle, 5). CAI gives students access to “any and all existing media . . . [and] information from many different perspectives . . . [because] pervasively networked computers will soon become a universal library, the age-old dream of those who love knowledge” (Kay, 156). Computers and composition is a growing academic field that originated as a reflection of the changing world of communications. “Student writers will spend their entire writing lives writing electronic text; that alone is sufficient reason to teach” composition classes with computers in the classroom (Lanham, xiv).

Many writing teachers – including me – quickly fall in love with the computerized classroom. “We’d rather teach writing in a computer classroom than in a regular classroom. Computer classrooms make teaching writing simpler; such classes can be more easily focused on writing and are usually more enjoyable,” declared Schroeder and Boe (28), who teach composition of the University of California-Davis. “Every year more writing and more teaching of writing is being done via computer. Our surveys show that most instructors, like most students, prefer such classrooms. We believe that whether individual composition instructor and administrators like it or not, by the twenty-first century all or almost all college writing classes will be held in computerized classrooms” (Schroeder and Boe 45-46). Already, most writing teachers believe CAI is a positive influence on students. When the Office of Scholarly Communications and Technology of the American Council of Learned Societies surveyed its members in 1985, 75% of the scholars who responded said, “that the technology contributes to improvement of writing efficiency” (William Goodrich Jones, 166). In fact, many writing teachers now recognize the linkage of literacy and technology, and are taking advantage of twenty-first century technology. “Computers are a part of our lives as writers and are increasingly more common in English departments and writing classrooms” (Hult).

Computers in the classroom facilitate not only the exploration of knowledge, but also the long-valued benefit of peer review, since “[t]he first benefit [of computers in the classroom] is great interactivity” (Kay, 156). Another value of CAI is that it makes the composition students more aware of their own writing process. Thanks to the use of computers in composition classrooms, “teachers can now bring their students into more direct contact with

the process itself” (Batson and Bass, 44). Making the student essay-writing process a public process benefits students because “computers mirror the mind because they externalize our cognitive processes. What was once the hidden process of mentally rearranging information becomes visible in our word processors. . . . By displaying our writing, making drafts public, the computer discloses the successive stages in the generation of documents. We are painters on a glass canvas, visible to our subject and our peers” (Barker, 16).

Furthermore, using computers to teach college composition prepares students for the world they will face when they graduate. “Every day computer technology becomes a larger part of our lives. Computer culture, once the domain of scientists and engineers, has permeated mainstream culture to such an extent that much of what we do during the course of our daily activities . . . is facilitated in outward and in more and more transparent ways, by computer technology” (Condon and Butler, ix). Computer communication is allowing an ever-expanding level of worldwide communication. Thanks to computers, a “rapidly expanding system of networks, collectively known as the Internet, links millions of people in new spaces that are constantly changing the way we think, the nature of our sexuality, the form of our communities, our very identities” (Turkle, 5). As the world changes, the collegiate classroom must change. “Our notions of the writing classroom and writing pedagogy must also change as electronic communication becomes increasingly common in our classes and institutions. The very concept of a writing class changes” (Corbett, xv). Teaching college composition by using computer-aided instruction creates a workshop format makes use of a “format based on the notion that writing is a learning process – that as students write, they explore how new concepts support or contradict ideas they have already assimilated. In networked computer environments, furthermore, students can immediately retrieve and respond to this classmates’ text, thus incorporating others ideas in their own writing – an interaction that should stimulate creativity and responsiveness to the reader” (Hawisher, “Reading and Writing Connections,” 76).

Computer-aided communications are becoming so dominant that virtually every one of today’s college students will need to use computers after they leave college, no matter what their academic major or career. As Cynthia L. Selfe pointed out in her 1998 address to CCCC: “[A]pproximately 70% of jobs requiring a bachelors degree or an advanced college degree now require the use of computers.” Since Selfe delivered that keynote speech two years ago, the percentage of jobs requiring computer skills undoubtedly has grown. College composition teachers would more fully accomplish their goal of preparing students for the future – of teaching students to communicate – by using computers in the classroom. “Our notions of the writing classroom and writing pedagogy

must also change as electronic communication becomes increasingly common in our classes and institutions” (Hawisher and LeBlanc, xv). Hawisher and LeBlanc are far from the only scholars to adopt that view. “[T]he role of education is to keep pace with a changing world, fostering new literacy skills . . .” (Costanzo, 21). Due to the growing dominance of computers in all fields of human communication, composition teachers clearly must, for the sake of their students, use computers in the classroom.

That belief is already growing within the ranks of college composition instructors. In fact, Selfe told the CCCC two years ago:

The teachers who choose not to use technology in their classes content themselves with the mistaken belief that their choice to avoid technology use absolves them and the students in their classes from paying critical attention to technology issues. In other words, both groups contribute to the very same end. The teachers who choose not to use technology in their classes content themselves with the mistaken belief that their choice to avoid technology use absolves them and the students in their classes from paying critical attention to technology issues. . . . I think we need to recognize, ourselves, that if written language and literacy practices are our professional business, so is technology.

Already, what Hawisher referred to as “networked computer environments” pervade the world’s communications in staggering numbers. United Press International estimated in May 1998 that 57,037,000 people in the U.S. accessed the World Wide Web (World Wide Web User Statistics). UPI also reported: “Estimated number of web pages, as of April, 1998: 320,000,000. . . . In 1998, 3.4 trillion e-mail messages delivered to 81 million e-mail users in the United States, says a marketing firm. That’s more than 6.5 million messages per minute. ‘Some people, particularly those in high-tech fields, get over 200 per day,’ said Geoffrey Ramsey of eMarketer, which performed the study” (World Wide Web User Statistics) “In May 1996, a Killen & Associates ‘Internet: Global Penetration and Forecast 2000’ survey estimated that at the beginning of 1996 there were 30,000,000 Internet users worldwide, predicting that by 2000 as many as 250,000,000 would have Internet access” (World Wide Web User Statistics).

The world’s newest method of communication hasn’t gained universal acceptance. As was true with previous changes in communications technology, acceptance of computer-aided communications is growing, although pockets of resistance still exist and certainly will continue to exist in the foreseeable future, since “major change does not occur overnight” (Faigley, 138). “I have no doubt that as pervasively networked intimate computers

become common, many of us will enlarge our points of view. When enough people change, modern culture will once again be transformed, as it was during the Renaissance. But given the current state of educational values, I fear that, just as in the 1500s, great numbers of people will not avail themselves of the opportunity for growth and will be left behind” (Kay, 157).

While students in my classrooms expressed fear that computers separate people, I’ve found that computer-borne discussion creates openness both between people and to ideas, and scholars in the field have made similar findings. Gail Hawisher praised the sense of community created by computer newsgroups in “Electronic Meetings of the Minds,” a chapter of a book that she also edited:

Connected to this idea of a real audience and of many communicating to many is a growing sense among participants and researchers that writer participants [in class newsgroups] perceive themselves as part of a community. . . . Electronic conferences foster an openness to other discourses and to multiple perspectives, making the weaving together of such disparate views possible. . . . Since paralinguistic cues are eliminated and participants can’t see or hear those with whom they are communicating . . . they are less likely to react to other participants’ gender, social class, appearance, or other status markers (87-89).

Scholars not only praise classroom computer newsgroups, but also say that computers allow greater student-to-student classroom interaction: “The major benefit of a computer network is that it permits computers to talk to each other, allowing users to communicate easily with one another. Computers, which were thought to promote isolation, may in fact prove to be of greatest help in creating cooperative learning environments” (Spitzer, 58-59). “Computer networks . . . help create communities among groups of students,” agreed Selfe in an article appropriately titled, “The Humanization of Computers.” LeBlanc said that computer classrooms are appropriate environs for composition classes: “The computer reveals new possibilities for the teaching of writing and makes the traditional writing class seem constrained. Indeed, computer technology often seems ideally suited to writing and current theories of composition” (196). Hawisher, in “Reading and Writing Connections,” sounded a similar note concerning the student interaction that can take place in a class newsgroup: “[T]he format is based on the notion that writing is a learning process – that as students write, they explore how new concepts support or contradict ideas they have already assimilated. In networks computer environments [such as newsgroups], furthermore, students can immediately retrieve and respond to their classmates’ text, thus incorporating others’ ideas in their own writing – an interaction that should stimulate creativity and responsiveness to the reader” (76).

Teaching composition in a computer-equipped classroom is a good method of preparing students to communicate in the world they will enter after they leave college: “Our responsibility as writing teachers, at least in part, is to ensure that our pedagogy reflects the evolving nature of literacy as our students will encounter it in the world – and increasingly, that involves computer-based communications” (LeBlanc, 194).

In fact, the *de facto* peer review that results from a classroom newsgroup helps improve student writing because “students take greater care when they write to their peers than they do when they write for their professors” (Spitzer, 60). “[N]etworking systems can provide students access to each other’s papers for comments and suggestions while the work is in progress” (Hult, 36). A class newsgroup forces students to ask themselves many questions any writer needs to ask: “[W]hen . . . students write to other students in their class, or to students in another town or in another part of the country, they must consider such questions as: What are my readers like? What will they know about my subject? What do I have to tell them so they will understand my point? In other words, participating in networks provides students with a focus and a sense of purpose that are absent in most academic writing” (Spitzer, 65).

CAI also creates a virtually all-enveloping milieu for a collegiate composition class. “When participants in an electronic conference communicate with one another, . . . they are totally immersed in writing” (Hawisher, “Electronic Meetings of the Minds,” 84). In fact, in a CAI classroom, students “are in an environment in which they constantly write and read” (Hawisher, “Electronic Meetings of the Minds,” 85). The computers can be used to force the students to take a new role in composition class: an active role. “Students, too, assume different roles in this newly configured writing community. They change from being passive recipients of a teacher’s judgment to active seekers of constructive criticism” (Boiarsky, 59). When using CAI, the instructor loses the traditional mystique, simply because the instructor is no longer the only person who will read and critique student writing. “The students write to and for one another, not for The Person Up Front . . . The new conception of CAI . . . offers a more promising replacement – the students themselves” (Lanham, xiii).

Today, examination of traditional modes of popular communication yields endless examples of – communication through computers that already affect not only today’s college students, but the public at large as well. For instance, that bastion of printed communications, the newspaper, is eagerly grabbing the world of computer communications. “More than 1,100 of the country’s 1,500 daily newspapers are online, including every one of the 100 largest” (Heyboer, 41). Newspapers often create separate staffs to staff their online editions: “Within the past year, sites from giants like the Washington Post and the New York Times to mid-size players like the Providence Journal and the St. Paul Pioneer Press have been pushing to get breaking news online well before it makes the next day’s paper. Some sites are asking their print staffs to produce mid-afternoon versions of the day’s top stories for the Web while the news is fresh. Others are hiring their own Web broadcast newsroom and report solely for the online audience” (Heyboer, 40).

National media organizations are keeping a watchful eye on issues concerning computer communications. USA Today publishes a regular feature page titled “eworld: Living with Technology.” The feature page includes a column, “eBriefing: The news behind the Net” by Janet Kornblum. In the May 16, 2000 edition, the main story on the “eworld” page was headlined “Lend me your techno-speak ears” and discussed “technology marketing language” that is creeping into general use. But USA Today is hardly unique among national news organization when it comes to reporting on computer-communication issues. For example, an Associated Press report published on June 25, 2000 in the Warren Tribune-Chronicle was headlined, “Government Web site being consolidated” (3A). “The government is consolidating its 20,000 Web sites into a single Internet location . . .” the story began. A page later,

the Warren Tribune-Chronicle headlined a second AP report related to computers and communications: “Internet becoming true World Wide Web” (4A). “Say ‘hello’ to a World Wide Web that is truly that. From content to culture, the Internet – born of American government need – is rapidly losing its U.S. flavor as more computer users connect from abroad,” the news story began. A graph accompanying the report explained that the “online population” in 1998 included 72 million English-speaking people and 45 million non-English-speaking people worldwide, and projected that by the year 2005 the global “online population” will include 265 million people who speak English and 740 million people whose primary language is something other than English, including 300 million Chinese-speaking people and 100 million Spanish-speaking people.

Both daily newspapers published in the Youngstown, Ohio area – where this classroom study was conducted – include many references to computer communications. For instance, the Warren Tribune-Chronicle publishes an “E-Mail & Web Site Directory” each Sunday. The May 28, 2000, edition featured 18 Web addresses, including listings for a local Christmas tree farm and local shops selling home accessories, real estate, and home accessories. When the USA Weekly inserted into the Tribune published its “Family Guide to Summer Movies” on May 14, 2000, the guide listed a Web site for each movie. On the front page of its “Business/Labor” section on June 4, 2000, The (Youngstown, Ohio) Vindicator published a story headlined, “Across the great digital divide,” concerning local efforts to provide high-speed Internet access. Each Sunday, The Vindicator publishes a syndicated column titled “Computers,” written by Jim Coates of the Chicago Tribune; the June 4 edition was headlined, “Beethoven music means trouble for cooling fan.” Clearly, newspaper editors believe computer-related issues interest their readers.

Modern concern with computer communication stretches beyond daily newspapers. For instance, Yahoo! Internet Life, a monthly magazine that began publishing as ZD Internet Life in fall 1995, each month includes a “Site Address Guide.” The “Site Address Guide” in the June 2000 edition listed 307 web sites. While the Web guide includes addresses for such obviously computer-related sites as Microsoft, Compaq and Netpliance, it also included Web addresses for many interests far beyond what many people consider the realm of computers – for instance, “About .com: Bed & Breakfasts,” “Lamaze International” and “The Animals’ Agenda.” The magazine explained the impact of Steven King’s decision to publish the novelette “Riding the Bullet” “exclusively on the Internet”:

Within 24 hours, about 400,000 people downloaded the text. . . . A day after the book went online, a

“stunned” Jack Romano, president of Simon & Schuster, told the New York Times, “I don’t think anybody

could have anticipated how many people were out there who are willing to accept the written word in a paperless form.” The electronic book, said Barnes & Noble representative Gus Carlson, “has arrived in a big way.” . . . Digital technology, she [American Association of Publisher president Patricia Schroeder] said is “going to transform books the way it is transforming everything else.” (Mann, 115)

The world of popular entertainment already makes widespread use of the computer-aided communications. Movie trailers list Web sites for new movies, and that’s just the beginning. “Hollywood and the Internet are on a collision course,” said noted film critic Roger Ebert. “The Internet will survive, and so will those in Hollywood who understand it. But the day of the unwired mogul is over. The movie industry has the same relationship to the Internet today that it had to talkies in the 1920s: Plug in or quit. . . . It is going to be fun, seeing how everything shakes down. It is also going to be revolutionary, and there will be blood in the streets of Hollywood before it’s over” (100).

The growth of computer-aided communications is not limited to the media and popular entertainment. “The number of commercial organizations with a World Wide Web presence has increased phenomenally in the last five years. . . . The growth is expected to continue for a number of reasons: personal computers are becoming cheaper and more people are using computers in their work place; in the USA and Europe de-regulation of the telecommunications market is resulting in cheaper phone calls and increased competition; the telecommunications industry is investing a great deal in infrastructures and in fast fibre optic backbones . . .” (Kipling and Wilson)

Furthermore, the world of computer communications is also constantly changing the most basic level of our communication – our language. Evidence of changes wrought by computer communications upon our language is easily found on the Web. For instance, Wired magazine has been publishing a monthly “Jargon Watch” column since January 1994; “Computer Jargon Watch” is a frequently updated list of “popular acronyms and abbreviations for computer terms” published online by Tech Tips Online; “Jargon Scout” is published online; and Fortune magazine offers its own “Jargon Watch” online. “Since the rise of the Internet as an information superhighway, connecting millions of users around the world a strange language has emerged. A language laced with technospeak, jargon, and plainly made up words! It is slang. . . . This new language has even spawned dictionaries to cope with it, with many Websites on the Net, devoted to the topic” (Apple).

This review of popular literature is not an attempt to list every instance of the general public’s exposure to computer-related issues; the instances cited in the preceding paragraphs are only a few examples. Computer-aided

communications pervades society so thoroughly that listing every public use of computers would be impossible. Public discussion of computer-related issues, and public use of the computer, is growing rapidly. These examples are presented only to offer proof for my contention – computer literacy is essential in the modern world, and therefore college composition classes should include computers and composition in their pedagogy. Colleges and universities must prepare students to use computers to communicate. The growing dominance of communications by means of the computer is simply a natural stage in human development, “not a revolution but an evolution” (Gup, 252). Certainly, courses that all college students are required to complete – Composition I and Composition II – are appropriate platforms for teaching students how to use computers to communicate.

Unfortunately, opposition to the latest development in the evolution of human communications has already arisen. For instance, people who oppose the computer’s rising role in communication have been dubbed “Luddites,” in honor of a group of “rebellious village workers in early 19th-century England who tried to stop the onrushing Industrial Revolution” (Katz). Katz’s article bears a descriptive sub-title: “A group of second wave intellectuals has rejected digital technology and declared a counterrevolution.” Luddites believe that “the upcoming technology will be this world’s downfall” (“Scrapheap Training”). Ironically, despite their criticism of computer-aided communications, the Luddites have established their own Web site: “Luddites on Line.”

Controversy concerning computer-aided communications also rages in the academic world. For instance, in Selfe rages against an essay which criticized her in a previous edition of the academic journal; Selfe’s response is titled “Reader Response: To His Nibs, G. Douglas Atkins – Just in Case You’re Serious about Your Not-So-Modest Proposal” and said:

I am tired of blusterers who pronounce prose written with the pen to be purer, more finely crafted, more “comely” than the words and images created on a computer screen . . . Here’s the good news: we don’t have to choose between pens and computers . . . We know enough to honor not one literacy, but many. Not one tool, but many. . . . But print is not equal to good; essay is not equal to smart; and pen is not equal to artful. Lots and lots of bad prose had been written with really good fountain pens. And not everything composed on a computer comes out plastic. Some of it is smart, and cogent, and funny, and fascinating. Just like the people who write it. . . . These new surfaces and environments for making meaning are richly rendered in multiple dimensions. They are extensive. Neither you nor I ever have to worry about filling them, G. Doug. But those students born to the keyboard, the pressure pad, the joystick, the tongue mouse,

the digital palette can begin wondrous work there, if we give them half an inch. And they can do so in other media too, in new ones we can't imagine (405-412).

In his response to Selfe's response – which JAC published on the pages immediately following Selfe's response – Atkins praised composing written communications with a pen: “As I understand it, the computer increases the speed of communication, evidently breeding haste, tossing notions of control to the wind. . . . A sensuous quality inheres in writing with a pen. . . . The pen. . . connects me to the past” (421-422).

Computer communications today pervade nearly every realm of human endeavor, just as the written word – despite Plato's objections – was adopted by cultures around the globe in previous millennia. Despite the examples above, the media, entertainment and academia are hardly the only realms that commonly use computer communications. The business world has eagerly taken hold of computer communications. “The Internet is spawning new business models faster than e-commerce analysts can name them” (Vanscoy, 91).

Despite the growing popularity of computer communications, “the number of people online, when viewed in the perspective of the total population of the United States, or of the world – the majority of whose residents are still illiterate – is still quite small” (Baron, 32).

As computer-aided communications becomes more prevalent in today's society, schools must find methods to adapt computers to the classroom. As computers wend their way into the classroom, teachers will discover the advantages offered by CAI:

[L]ooking forward, we can formulate new arguments beyond the imagination of 19th century thinkers, who could hardly have conjured images of media that would provide modes of accessing and manipulating knowledge radically different than those offered by the Rs. Nor could they have formulated what I see as the deep difference between education past the future: In the past, education adapted the mind to serve a very restricted set of available media; in the future, it will adapt media to serve the needs and tastes of each individual mind (Papert, 232).

Papert adds that in his forthcoming book, The Children's Machine: Rethinking School in the Age of Computer, he refers to the computer and other yet-to-be-invented forms of media as “the Knowledge Machine (a metaphor for much more varied forms of media) [that] will provide easier access to richer and fuller bodies of knowledge that can be offered by any printed media” (232).

Already, the educational organizations and private companies that service schools have recognized the

need, and the resulting demand, for computer resources within the schools. For instance, The Education Source, an online educational newsletter, has released a list of the top 100 educational Web sites. “After reviewing thousands of sites,” The Education Source announced, “we believe that these sites contain the best educational content on the Internet today.” The 100 sites are classified into 12 categories, including art, gardening, reading, writing, math, science, geography, history, foreign language, and simply “fun.” America Online, Inc. is also taking aim at the education market, through its AOL@SCHOOL Web site. “In the spring of 1996, the founders of Education World recognized the need for a Web site that would make the Internet easier for educators to use,” America Online explains. “The result is Education World, the Educator’s Complete Resource Guide to the Internet,” an online resource that includes subsites for each level of education, as well as subsites for teachers and administrators. A statement by the America Online adds, “95% of the nation’s public schools [are] expected to be online by the year 2000.”

While the use of computers is becoming dominant, the academic field of computers and composition is not growing fast enough and hasn’t yet sufficiently analyzed the social effects of the machines on communications, say many college composition scholars:

Yet in looking at the impact of computers we seem to have been treating them as discrete, essentially “democraticizing” entities. Until we examine the entire context – the teacher, students, and technology as the interrelate in the formation of a new educational culture and, just as importantly, as they all carry with them the traditional values, mores, and motivations of the larger culture of which they all develop – we will continue to partition this complex and evolving structure into contradictory parts and find ourselves either naively elated or inordinately disappointed in the results we find (Curtis and Klem, 159).

Clearly, we now live in an age of transition. Computers are *becoming* the dominant tool of modern communication, but the transition is not complete. “[W]e are living through a period of overlaps; one way is being is pushed athwart another” (Birkets, 260). Today’s transition can be compared with the transition of the ancient Greek world, which remained a predominantly oral culture until the fourth century AD. “But our historical moment, which we might call ‘proto-electric,’ will not require a transition of two centuries. The very essence of electric transmissions is to surmount the impedances and to hasten transitions. Fifty years, I’m sure, will suffice” (Birkets, 260).

Opposition to the use of the computer as a communications tool should not frighten academic institutions from including computers and composition in their pedagogy. If anything, opposition to computers and composition gives academia an additional reason to include it in the pedagogy, since students must be prepared to communicate in the modern world.

Chapter 2: My first class

The first day of the first college composition class I taught met in a traditional classroom in January 1999. All but two of the students were traditional college freshmen; as noted in the introduction to this thesis, Rebecca S. was in her third academic year and Kristine P. was in her mid-20s.

Based on my experiences with my computer-savvy 12-year-old son and his friends, I assumed the students would be comfortable working in the computer lab. Furthermore, while I was 20 years older than the students in my class, I had already experienced a decade of using computers on the job and was quite computer literate. I reflexively assumed that the students in my class were computer literate and could foresee the need to use computers in the careers they were beginning to pursue. But the first day of class in the computer showed me the error of my assumptions. I had requested the formation of a computer newsgroup prior to the class, and on the first day of class in the computer lab handed out information sheets provided for each student, which listed the name of the newsgroup and their initial password for joining it. After distributing the information sheets, I simply told them to log onto the newsgroup. But instead of entering the newsgroup, most of the class they simply looked at me with puzzled stares, a reaction I hadn't anticipated. So I backed up and told the students how to enter the newsgroup. Logging the entire class onto the newsgroup consumed all of the first class in the computer lab and part of the second.

I required my student to post the drafts of their essays on the newsgroup, and otherwise simply encouraged them to discuss through the newsgroup the essay topics and the readings I had assigned for the class via the syllabus (Appendix A). As my textbook for the course, I used Language Awareness: Essays for College Writers, and required the students to read a chapter each week of the academic term. But in talking with my students, I quickly found that most students were puzzled about what they should contribute to the class newsgroup. I decided to – in effect – give my students in-class writing assignments. Before class, I would post a message to the newsgroup assigning them to answer essay questions from the week's chapter of Language Awareness, and post and discuss their answers on the newsgroup. For instance, on Jan. 25, I posted the following message to the class newsgroup:

For today's newsgroup session, please read over your classmates' entries in the newsgroup, which include

most of the first essays. Please contribute your responses. My only rules for responses are 1.) don't use obscenity and 2.) no cheap shots. Responses should be thoroughly thought out. If you want to agree or disagree with a classmate's essay, explain why, and give reasons.

I won't grade on the basis of agreement or disagreement with your opinions, so don't worry about that. All that I'm worried about is how you express your thoughts.

If you're stumped, tackle these questions: 1.) Find a contention in a classmate's essay that you agree with, and tell the audience why. 2.) Locate a statement in a classmate's essay that you disagree with, that makes your blood boil, tell the audience why, and write a statement contradicting that statement. 3.) Which essay most effectively communicates the author's idea? Which essay least effectively makes a point? Why? What improvement(s) should the author try to make? How? Other suggestions for your classmates?

Okay, I'll include a more specific question or two: 1.) Is communicating via computer changing our language? How? 2.) How will the dominance of communicating via computers effect people who lack the finances or technology to become part of the WorldWide Web? What should be done to help these groups of people become part of the worldwide system of communications?

Since the class was scheduled to spend half of its time in a computer lab twice a week, and I believed my students wonder why a composition class was meeting in a computer lab twice each week, I had assigned the students to read Language Awareness' final chapter, Chapter 10, "The Language of Cyberspace," for the first week of class.

After a week of discussions concerning computers' role in communications, on Jan. 13 I asked each student to list five uses for computers in the career they planned to pursue after graduation. Since the question was open-ended, the responses were divergent, but revealed a few notable trends in students' awareness of computer uses. Only 50 percent of the students who responded to the survey (10 of 20) simply said they expected to use computers for job-related communications, yet every student named at least one – some students listed several – on-the-job uses for computers in their intended careers. Most of the on-the-job uses cited were specific, and a few were wide-ranging but vague. For instance, Chris P. replied that he is an art major, and computers "will play a big part in art, even bigger than they do now." Thirty-five percent of the class replied they could foresee using computers for

personal communications; 40% of the class said they would use computers to store business or personal records; 35% said computers would help them find jobs; 30% said computers would be used to store financial records; 30% said computers would help them complete job-oriented research; and 15% planned to use computers to purchase supplies for their job. Only 15% said they would use computers for the simple task of typing documents. But 10% mentioned a sophisticated use – storing photo images. Twenty percent of the class identified themselves as education majors and named a variety of tasks computers could accomplish for teachers, ranging from storing records of grades to finding materials for class presentations. Teachers could simply, as Clara W. put it, use the machines to, “Teach the children basic computer skills.” Other students could clearly foresee precise uses for computers in their intended careers. For instance, Bob S., who identified himself as a pre-med major; said computers could “help in hypothesizing what illness the patient has by means of typing in the symptoms.” Bob S. added that computers could help a doctor “explain to the patient what is wrong by using programs that show what is occurring and what will continue to occur if not treated.” Amanda S. planned to pursue a career in journalism and named several job-related computer uses that I’d already experienced, including “building page layouts [and] typing articles.” Kristine P. was a non-traditional student in her mid-20s who had held a job in a photo shop for several years; she named several sophisticated tasks she had accomplished thanks to the computer, including “scanning photos on the computer. This allows you to see your photo in just minutes [and] the photo can now be manipulated in many ways.” But Jeff S. conveyed the bottom line when he wrote, “Computers most likely will be used at every job there is.”

I was struck by an apparent contradiction within the students’ attitudes toward computers. While only 50 percent of the students said they expected to use computers in their careers, every student could name at least one task for which they would need the computer in the career they planned to pursue. This contradiction demonstrated to me that I needed to help my students adjust their attitudes toward the computer and its emerging role as a common tool for communications.

Soon, I received a clearer view of my students’ opinion regarding computers, when they turned in the first drafts of their first essay. The first essay assignment required them to:

Write an essay of at least 1,000 words concerning the computer’s apparently ongoing evolution as a universal means of communication, in roughly the same fashion as telephones became a part of society a

century ago. Other huge shifts in communication technology have occurred throughout history. In ancient Greece, in the time of Plato, the dominant oral culture was overtaken by the written word. In Europe, another monumental transition occurred in the late 15th century, after Gutenberg invented the printing press in *circa* 1455. Within the last century, worldwide communication has made a major change as people for the first time became accustomed to talking to people they couldn't see, thanks to the telephone. In all three cases, the long-term effects on society were overwhelming. The same thing is occurring today, with the computer as the culprit. Now, we are figuratively learning how to dial the phone, when it comes to computers.

Discuss in your essay changes computers have forced upon society, and changes that may lie ahead. The questions you focus on may include: What effect will the world of cyberspace have upon language? Does the fact that so much information is available via the computer threaten the privacy of individuals? As a means of communication that is worldwide in scope (i.e., the World Wide Web), have computers increased communication between groups of people? Will people without access to computer communication become isolated in our world culture; if so, what effect will be the effect of this isolation? Are the effects of computers on communications over-rated? Will computers enjoy only a short-lived reign over the world of communications? Is the "computer generation" still in grade school, or has it already joined the ranks of college students? How are computer communications changing the world of work? You may address any concerns about computers – these questions are neither matters that must be discussed nor the only questions that can be discussed in your essay. I'm interested in your own thoughts about cyberspace, and am simply providing a few possible paths to follow.

A common approach used by my many students was to begin their essay in response to assignment #1 by discussing the advantages offered by computers. But halfway through their essays, most of them began citing problems caused by computer use, and their discussion of computers' negative affects was usually more passionate than their discussion of benefits offered by computers. Many students said computers have allowed people to become "lazy" in their use of language, neglecting proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling, and instead using common computer functions such as spellcheck and grammarcheck. Several students predicted that this problem would continue to grow in future generations. Several students' comments indicated the students believed writers become lazy when composing their essays on computers. The students' comments reminded me that similar

objections have been made throughout history, whenever technology has created new methods of communications. For instance, more than 2,000 years ago, a renowned philosopher made a similar objection to the communications innovation of his day – the written word. “Plato was one leading thinker who spoke out strongly against writing, fearing that it would weaken our memories” (Baron, 18).

The common pattern of students voicing a “pro-computer” attitude early in their essays, followed by an “anti-computer” opinion later in the essays led me to believe that my students’ first thought was to “please the teacher” with their essays. After all, my talks about my experiences as a reporter and editor, my comments in class discussions, and my syllabus undoubtedly made it clear to them that I have a high regard for the computer’s developing role in communications. Besides, the university’s decision to assign every introductory composition class to spend half of its time in a computer lab undoubtedly shows students that the administration and faculty – and by extension, their instructor – consider computers and composition to be an important topic. But clearly, many students were unconvinced when my class began that computers are important factor in communications today. Therefore, after they aped the view of the university establishment, I reasoned, they probably voiced their own views later in the essays. In reviewing the essays, I found that 81% of the essays (17 of 21) held to this pattern of “pro-computer” sentiments early in the essay followed by an “anti-computer” theme later in the essay. For instance, early in her essay, Clara W. wrote; “Technology has had a good impact on society and has allowed us to do many things.” But after citing several improvements in communication resulting from the use of computers, she added:

Since these luxuries have come about, people have become lazier and they don’t take time out to do things completely. Modern technology has also had this effect on language. People don’t take the time to make sure they use correct English. . . . I think that modern technology does not create more niches for individual cultures to survive. Each culture has its own way of surviving and getting by in society, this is what makes the world have so many different cultures. Modern technology forces these individual cultures to blend win with the cultures that use technology . . .

The class’s lone honors student, Lisa M., held to this “please the teacher” first pattern. Early in her essay, Lisa acknowledged that computers have already changed the realm of human communications and that the process of change will continue: “[T]here is no doubt that computers will drastically change the way society operates . . . There is no doubt that computers have made human life much more convenient.” But most of the body of her essay discussed “the negative aspects of cyberspace . . . Here, at the turn of the 21st century, the problems of the Internet

are already rearing their ugly head.” Lisa then cited the problems posed by computer hackers, and problems that may result from people obtaining credit card information on the Web:

[A]ll computer uses are at the mercy of these cyberspace serial killers . . . Another present problem caused by computers is the access to endless information, including pornography and drugs. In today’s family where both parents work, it is not uncommon to have a child left at home unattended. Putting a young adolescent together without supervision can have dangerous consequences . . . One problem that is presently on a small scale, but will in no time be on a large scale, is the addicting tendency that the Internet possesses and the laziness that accompanies it. . . . People shop through the computer and miss out on the socialization that occurs in the mall.

Lisa also warned that government may use the computer to impose “tyranny” over the distribution of information and higher taxes, and would result in the government ignoring “the everyday problems of life such as homelessness, starvation and overpopulation.”

Another student who adhered to this pattern of a “pro-computer” attitude early and an “anti-computer” attitude later was Paul M., who wrote: “We now have computers that can do just about anything that we want them do. . . . The positives of cyberspace are overwhelming, but then again there are some negatives as well.” He complained that children can gain access to pornography through the Internet, and that “[computer] hackers take away one’s privacy . . . steal private information and even money.” Oddly, while he acknowledged that computers have increased worldwide communication, he added, “I feel that the world of cyberspace will have little effect upon language.” In the conclusion of his essay, Paul voiced a vague and somewhat irrational fear: “Or will the computers get so powerful they will be running us?”

Acceptance of a more conventional role of computers was expressed by Jenny O., who wrote that the computer “is producing new ways to improve everyday living . . .” She went on to cite computers’ role in designing and manufacturing a variety of material products, such as clothes and cars. “Computers are also extremely helpful in producing and keeping accurate records,” she continued, citing the importance of maintaining readily available and up-to-date medical, business and financial records. But after two pages of listing advantages offered by computers, she changed her tune: “Although there are many positive and important issues dealing with the computer, there are also many negative aspects . . .” She cited the damage that can occur if a person “sits for hours on end in front of a computer screen. . . . This problem can not only destroys one’s social life, but can also destroy one’s health and

well-being. One may gain a considerable amount of weight, or even worse, permanently damage their eyesight.” As I read her essay, I remembered that my mother was one of many people who had in the 1960s and 1970s expressed similar fears concerning the television’s effect on eyesight, and imposed time limits on our TV watching. My mother doesn’t take similar precautions for her grandchildren, and it’s been decade since I’ve heard anyone voice a fear that TV will damage children’s eyes. Jenny O. also expressed fear that “all personal files, including bank records, can be opened by unwanted visitors” by means of the computer. Computer users “may one day wind up with an empty bank account.” She also warned vaguely, “there is also such a thing as online stalking.”

In the introduction of his essay, Chris P. characterized computers as both positive and negative influences when he wrote: “Computers have forced a change onto society today and will continue to do so in the future, but not without its setbacks.” But on page 2, he said: “The one thing I feel is a problem though, is that it seems so often that people are totally dependent on computers, and it looks like people are only going to get more dependent on them as time goes on. . . . I think as a society, we should learn not to rely on computers so much.” When I read his comment, I remembered Baron’s account of Plato’s distrust of written language, Thoreau’s disdain of the telegraph, and the New York Times’ condemnation of typewriters (18-22). In time, I’m sure Chris P. and students with a similar attitude will use computer communications, even if they don’t abandon their disregard of the modern means of communications. While the students may not change their minds consciously, they will simply find that living in the modern world requires them to use the dominant means of modern communications.

Kristine P., the non-traditional student, who was employed in a local print shop, early in her essay discussed new processes introduced to the print shop through the computer, and how those new methods both improved the print process and made her job easier. But in the conclusion of her essay, like most of her classmates, she expressed a largely “thumbs down” attitude regarding computers: “I hope we are not becoming too dependent on them. The inherent dangers of computers and our dependency on them leave us open to failure and possible mass destruction. Maybe in the year 2000 [this was written in January 1999] we will get a sampling of what that destruction may be.”

In the introduction of his essay, Craig S. referred to computers as a “very necessary element,” but on page 3 of his four-page essay, he said, “But even though it sounds like computers are heaven sent, they are not. There are a lot of disadvantages. If someone knows what your Social Security number is, most likely they will be able to get into your personal life and even your bank account. So next time you go to the bank, don’t be surprised if all your money is gone.” Craig also said in the winter of 1999 that thanks to the Y2K crisis, when the new century began computers

“will be good for nothing.” He expressed thorough distrust of computers with the final sentence of his essay: “They are nice to have, but if in the wrong hands they could be the most deadly creation known to mankind.”

Early in her essay, Lisa S. praised computers when she wrote; “The computer has quickly become not only an important business tool as well as an education helpmate it is also a highly popular form of entertainment. It can even substitute [for] your local library and travel agent.” But, like most of her classmates, later in her essay she switched to a more suspicious tone regarding computers: “Please don’t allow me to lead you to believe that computers are the one and only sure way to do anything. Far from it. . . . But we can’t forget that as with all else the computers have their own downfalls as well. We cannot let ourselves become to wrapped up I them and forget about the outside world.” She named a number of crises that she said were the fault of the computer, including the Y2K crisis.

Only a small minority of students – 19% (4 out of 21) – simply praised computers’ contributions to society without also offering examples of the downside. For instance, Pam D. wrote: “The possibilities of the Internet are incredible. . . . Technology is what keeps a lot of people at work and keeps this country ahead of the game (most of the time).” Victor F. also wrote about the advantages offered by computers and names no drawbacks:

Today, computers link the entire world, and every day the number of people who are becoming computer literate increases. . . . Computers vital tools in education, and learning allows people to take interest in new things while expanding their knowledge levels to the fullest. Besides, you can never learn too much. . . . [T]he computer has created a whole new way of life for everyone. The unimaginable becomes imaginable, and the unthinkable is created. Nothing is out of reach with the help of a computer. Technology has made a tool that has changed everyday life for the whole world, and the convenience is at your fingertips. The computer has made jobs easier and school more interesting.

Also praising the affects of computers on modern society and citing no drawbacks was Kevin S., who said: “[A]ny business today would become lost without the aid of computers. They are so vital in the workplace today, that it is now a necessity to learn the procedures of a computer before one even begins the preparations of finding a job out in the world.” Because computer literacy is essential, children should be taught at an early age how to use computers, Kevin S. stated, adding in the conclusion of the essay, “No discovery . . . has ever changed the way the entire world lives like the computer.” But I wondered – then and now – if students

expressed opinions favoring computer use simply in response to my obvious attitudes. After all, the students may have believed I would give them higher grades if they praised computer usage.

One student whose disdain of using computers as a communication tool particularly puzzled me was Rebecca S., who carried a *cum laude* grade point average. Her academic major was anthropology, and she planned to attend graduate school. Rebecca was not shy about expressing her downright disgust for computer-aided communications through her written work, her newsgroup participation, and in class discussion. In fact, her first essay cited not a single advantage offered by computers, instead blaming computers for a wide range of problems:

Computers are everywhere. . . . [O]ur language is being eroded and altered on every level of society. Computers have popularized a “plain speak” which is short, simple and to the point. Complexity in language is becoming obsolete, as are literary tools such as irony, paradox, and subtlety. . . . Classic literature will become a thing of the past, including famous authors such as Shakespeare, Dante, Plato, and Milton.

E-mail has also had an impact on how we use our language. Here again we see the simplification of the language for convenience. There is less and less reliance on spelling and grammar. There is also less and less reliance on politeness and social skills . . .

Another effect of the computer . . . is . . . [that] we could do everything we need to do in a day and never have to get up from our chairs. It’s not just the television anymore. Idleness causes fatigue, muscle loss, bone loss, and premature aging. Our world requires that we be sitting at a screen for hours at a time. Our world is becoming less personal and more demanding. More and more people are suffering from depression and anxiety. Exercise helps fight depression and naturally relieves stress. When people become less and less active, they become more likely to feel overwhelmed and sad . . .

Another thing which concerns me about computers is the loss of the romance of life . . . I think that we still need to know how to be self-sufficient. There may come a day when disaster could dictate that we exist without our computers or merely on the elements of nature . . .

In response, and after a heated one-on-one conference with Rebecca, I gave her additional time to rewrite her essay before I gave it a grade, and wrote a three-page evaluation. As I wrote near the end of my evaluation:

I am interested in your opinion, but only if you offer me a reason to take it seriously. . . . You may draw upon the essays we’ve read in Language Awareness, or quote from any sources, but identify your sources.

In other words, no tantrums. Give the reader proof, and tell the reader where you found this proof. As you already know, the essays in Language Awareness offer considerable possible sources on computers. Feel free to use other choices, if you like. Just make sure you attribute.

Rebecca revised the essay, but the while revised draft tuned down her opposition to computers, it again features considerable criticism of the computers' effect on society:

Everyone knows that computers make things easy and fast, but there are other changes that are taking place which are not so harmless. While gaining one thing, something is usually lost. . . .

I am not trying to show why computers are bad things, they certainly aren't. There are just things that we need to be aware of. . . . Computers can't solve all our problems. Its wonderful how we've been able to use them, however we need to be aware of the potential problems in order to prevent abusing them.

After a series of heated confrontations that centered, in part, over the class use of the computer, Rebecca S. withdrew from my class. I feared that Rebecca's attitude indicated a class-wide disdain of using computers, but soon found that I was wrong. Informal discussions with members of the class showed me that many of my students had, in fact, resented Rebecca's frequently derogatory comments in class discussion regarding the use of computer. While I found it discouraging that a student who was otherwise academically accomplished totally disparaged the use of computers regarding communications, I was relieved to find that her views did not represent a significant portion of the class. I considered Rebecca's attitude evidence that throughout history each change in communications technology has had its opponents:

The effects of writing took thousands of years to spread; the printing press took several hundred years to change how we do things with words. Although the rate of change of computer development is significantly greater, it is still too early to do significant speculating. . . . Whether the computer will one day be as taken-for-granted as the pencil is an intriguing question. One thing is clear: were Thoreau alive today he would not be writing with a pencil of his own manufacture. He had better business sense than that. More likely, he would be keyboarding his complaints about the information superhighway on a personal computer that he assembled from spare parts in his garage (Baron, 32-33).

Because I was still planning how to conduct my research for this, I unfortunately neglected to conduct an exit survey of this class. However, the end-of-term student evaluation of their instructor yielded comments that addressed the students' attitude toward CAI. Their anonymous evaluations indicated a generally receptive attitude

toward the use of computers in composition classes. Eighty-eight percent of the students (14 out of 16) said that they agreed or strongly agreed that the course “helped me improve my communication skills,” while 81% responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that the course “provided experience with new/improved technical skills specific to subject matter.” One student said in the portion of the evaluation that asked for anonymous comments: “I had fun in this course . . . he really wanted us to learn and to explore the future of technology.” I was surprised that another student wrote that the strengths of my course included “good use of computers.” However, one student made an anonymous recommendation: “No more talking about computers.”

Observations

In retrospect, it seems clear to me that of the four classes studied for this thesis, this first class had the most collectively negative attitude toward computer-aided communications. Two pieces of data support this conclusion: First, only 50% of the class said in the poll I conducted during the first week of class that they expect to use computers for job-related communications. This data is confused by the fact that most students later said they could foresee using computers in their post-college career field. Secondly, 81% of the students’ essays in response to assignments #1 (page 25-26) voiced largely negative opinions regarding the computer’s effect on communications.

Perhaps part of the explanation for this class’s apparent confusion is the calendar; this class was conducted in the winter of 1999. Students in my later classes seemed to have gained a clearer picture of the growing role of computers in communications. Perhaps the discomfort toward computer-aided communications expressed most of the students in my first class reflects the stage of development of mankind’s attitude toward the computer’s growing role in communications. As Faigley pointed out, “major change does not come overnight” (138). Besides, the development of computer-aided communications as, “not a revolution but an evolution” (Gup, 252). A revolution results in dramatic overnight changes, but evolution is marked by minor changes over a long period of time.

Chapter 3: My second at-bat

The second class included in the study group for this thesis was the Composition I class I taught at YSU during the following academic term, winter 1999. This time, I arrived at the first computer lab session well prepared to introduce students to the newsgroup. By the end of the first lab session, every student was logged onto the newsgroup. Unfortunately, because my research for this thesis was still in the planning stage, I did not preserve all of the newsgroup entries for this class and did not conduct a beginning-of-term survey.

However, the attitudes of the students in my second class toward computers and communications became clear when I read their first essays, written in response to the same first essay assignment I'd given my previous class (see pages 25-26). This time, the students expressed considerably more acceptance of computer-aided communications. All 19 students in the class wrote that they realized computers hold an important role in the modern world of communications, and 74% said they believed computers are increasing the quantity of communications between people. However, it was also clear to me that not all of them enjoyed using computers – 42% wrote in their essays that computers are having a negative effect on human communications. The negative effects of computers most often named by the class were a violation of privacy and the isolation some portion of the population – both problems were cited by 37% of the students. On the other hand, one student said computers used for communications have helped end isolation. Computers make people “lazy,” said 17% of the class.

In their essays, the students largely conformed to the same organization of opinions I'd observed in the previous class – positive statements regarding computers early in the essays, and negative comments later in the paper. The positive statements were generally broad-based, not addressing any particular function, but the comments also demonstrated to me that the students were well aware of the computer's entry into their world. For instance, Gary W. wrote: “Computers are becoming extremely important in our world today in many different ways, such as entertainment, education, and communication.” Ryan B. agreed, saying: “The key change that computers have brought to society is that they have made life easier. . . . The use of computers for travel, business, shopping, and entertainment has become more accessible to society. I believe in this point in time that the computer is good for society.” Gina C. painted a downright rosy picture of the future of the computer's role in society: “But I believe that this is truly just the beginning of an exciting, modern tool that now is advancing with great speed, building a future with unlimited possibilities.” John D. not only praises computers, he took a slap at anyone who condemns computers: “I feel computers are a must and will always be for the better of society. Not only are they becoming a privilege but a necessity to succeed in life now and in the future. . . . Anyone who feels computers are not for the betterment of society are probably also conspiracy theorists any way.”

But once they “bowed their heads” to the apparent mindset of the university – which had scheduled half the class time in a computer lab – and their instructor – who had assigned them to write an essay focusing on computer-aided communications – many of the students revealed their distrust and/or distaste for the computer, generally in more detailed statements. For instance, after praising computers for making life easier, Ryan B. wrote:

There can also be problems in the future from the use of computers. . . . In the future computers might be used to do everything. People could lose their jobs and be replaced by a computer. . . .

Information that you might not want out could be leaked through the use of computers. . . . There will always be the risk of losing your individual privacy. Another issue dealing with the use of communication through computers is the isolation from people having them.

Tom H. also believed the computer presents many dangers to society: “Not only will computers be the number one technology used in warfare, but soon everyone’s life will be exposed to the government. . . . Computer technology may mean an easier more advanced life style, but it will be a while before it’s realized that it is causing more problems than are needed.”

One specific benefit of computer communications, several students agreed, is increasing worldwide communication. Ellen G. wrote: “Computer technology has emerged all over the world, which has brought communication of groups of people together. . . . The World Wide Web has enabled us to talk to people all over the world.” Jim M said; “Yes, the computer is helping cultures connect with other cultures.” On the other hand, Patrick T. betrayed his mistrust of computer communication when he wrote, “Computers have begun to make our society less social. People would much rather meet people on the computer and talk to them than to go and talk and meet people in person. So when people go out they don’t bother to try to meet anyone. They are becoming more isolated.” Patrick T. was hardly alone. Many other students later in the essays discussed specific pitfalls of the common use of computers in communications. For instance, Colleen C. wrote: “Privacy, a God-given right, is being invaded every day, as people become more aware of what is available on the Internet. The possibilities are terrifying.” Renee A. said the World Wide Web “will threaten the privacy of individuals.” Ryan B. agreed: “Since computer use is growing, there will always be the risk of losing your individual privacy.” However, the threat of computer communication to privacy perceived by some students was effectively refuted by John D., who pointed out that personal information can be obtained by means other than the computer: “While some people feel this growth of information available will aid people in violating the privacy of others, I feel they probably also are conspiracy theorists. The truth is I could find out everything I wanted about a person with their Social Security number or their driver’s license number, even without the Internet through less advanced means.”

Other students wrote that computers threaten people’s jobs. Russell S. said: “Computers are putting people out of work.” Patrick T. wrote:

Computers have started to take the place of people at jobs. This is making our society poorer as a whole. If computers continue to take jobs there will be none left for humans. . . . They [computers] are starting to take over our jobs. People are actually losing out on jobs to computers. What are we the humans to do about this? Do we stand by and let this happen? My answer is no! Everyone will be out of a job if we continue to let this happen to us. We have to control the flow of computers and what we let them do.

The students' gloomy views of the effects of computers upon employment is contradicted by a statement released by The White House Office on Jan. 21, 2000: "Since 1995, more than a third of all U.S. economic growth has resulted from IT [information technology] enterprises. Today, more than 13 million Americans hold IT-related jobs, and the rate of growth is six times as fast as overall job growth." The onset of computers on the job market means that people must acquire a new set of skills in order to remain employed – but jobs will remain available.

The high cost of computers concerned several students, who warn that people who can't afford to buy computers will be "cut off" from human culture. Ryan B. wrote: "The cost of computers can be very high and not everyone is able to afford them. Some cultures do not have the capability to have them. For example, tribes in the middle of Africa do not have the technology that is necessary for the use of a computer. . . . In time, people isolated from computers might not be able to communicate might not have jobs, and could possibly be almost non-existent in the world." Jim M. shared that fear, writing: "Another problem that has arisen from the 'computer revolution' is the fact that many people are being left behind." But similar fears have plagued each evolutionary stage in the development of human communications. In fact, concern that the latest technology of communications is too expensive for most people to use dates back more than 2,000 years, to the time of Plato, who was born in *circa* 428 BC. "[N]o more than ten percent of the classical Greek or Roman populations could have been literate. One reason for this must be that writing technology remained both cumbersome and expensive: writing instruments, paints, and inks had to be hand made, and writing surfaces like clay tablets, wax tablets, and papyrus had to be laboriously prepared. Writing therefore remained exclusive . . ." (Baron, 20).

A few students expressed vague, broad-based fears of computers that show me they had little experience with or knowledge of computers. Several students seemed to believe computers are sentient beings capable of independent thought, that computers aren't simply tools. I blame this attitude on bad science fiction movies. For instance, Gary W. wrote: "If we constantly depend on these computers to do everything for us we won't be able to think for ourselves." Justin R. fears that: "Computers are going to make the world lazy." On the other hand, "48%

of employers think the Web has raised productivity” and the Internet created an estimated 1.1million new jobs worldwide in 1996 (World Wide Web User Statistics). Since 65% of U.S. public schools were connected to the Internet in 1996 and 20,000,000 Americans “consider the Internet ‘indispensable,’” (World Wide Web User Statistics), it seems certain that computers have changed the *nature* of work, not the *amount* of work. By the same token, it might be said that the pulley, the winch and the motor made men “weaker” because it removed the necessity of heavy lifting, which had resulted in greater arm strength for many men.

Jim M. raised another issue when he said: “People’s real identity is being lost because there is no personal, physical exchange between people. People speak to each other but remain obscure. The physical contact with each other is missing.” A century ago, many people probably voiced the same objection to the telephone. But today, the telephone is as “taken-for-granted as the pencil,” (Baron, 33) while the computer is not. Many of my students certainly seemed to feel justified in blasting away at the technology they’ve not yet learned to take for granted.

I also noticed an attitude among students that I can only blame on bad science fiction movies that often feature free-thinking machines as villains: A number of students seem to have forgotten that computers are simply tools, devices inherently incapable of original thought. For instance, Gary W. wrote: “We as human beings shouldn’t let computers control our lives and do everything for us, because we if constantly depend on these computers to do everything for us we won’t be able to think for ourselves . . . If we let computers take over our lives, eventually the world will be run by computers and machinery and you never know, maybe the world will end up like they show in movies where humans are controlled by computers.”

Justin R. seemed to sum up the class attitude when he wrote: “I think that the whole idea of using the computer as a way of communications is a great idea and could be very beneficial to the fast-paced lifestyle we are creating. But I also think that it is going to cause a big problem in the future to come.” Justin R. also touched on the impending pre-dominance of computer communications and how that may affect both him and his classmates:

In a world that thrives on technology, it is important to possess knowledge of computers. Without this knowledge, one will fall behind in the ever-increasing world of technology. . . . Although these advancements can add ease to many young people’s lives, they can be very overwhelming to the older generation. School age children are often more computer savvy than middle-aged businessmen are. . . . Some adults, however, are finding it hard to keep up with all the new technological advances. While ten-year-olds are creating Web pages, a large amount of adults are still figuring out how to log on.

Marty G. made it quite clear he doesn't like to use computers in any way, even though he seems to realize that, like it or not, he'll need to use computers in the years ahead. Marty's father owns a small local construction company, which the father apparently expects Marty to take over in the years ahead. Of course, he's also needed to use computers in several classes at YSU. Marty wrote on April 7:

I am so amazed on how much computers have affected my daily life. It seems to be that every day I have to sit in front of a computer and plug away for either my English class or my engineering class. It is not like I have a choice in the matter because if I do not want to use the computer, more than likely I will fail my classes. It is sad to say that I am becoming more and more dependent on these complicated machines, which is a good thing because I will be forced to use them in my job future.

In private discussions, Marty emphatically told me he disliked and distrusted computers, but he apparently thought he should avoid disagreeing with the instructor in public. In the conclusion of his first draft of his first essay, Marty warned, in a comment apparently aimed at himself: "People that refuse to fall to the demands of becoming computer literate will suffer in the long run because of the rapid rate in which computers are changing today's society." Marty continued:

In conclusion, I myself will not be happy with all these changes to come with computers. But I'm not going to get an army of people and start a rebellion against the computer age. I'm going to learn as much as I can to get by in the future and maybe I might start to like the idea of a computer running the show. But I refuse to get so lazy that I end up shopping from the computer or reading books from the computer. I think those people like me who are not totally for or against computers will have an advantage in survival if in the very distant future computers come to an end. But I don't think I am lucky enough for that to happen.

Clearly, Marty was aware that he needed to become computer literate in order to succeed in his career, but he was far from eager to explore the opportunities available through the World Wide Web. On May 12, when I asked the class to comment on the use of the newsgroup, Marty wrote:

I hate to admit it but I'm going to be forced to at least look at a computer screen at least once a day in the future. I'm going to be a civil engineer and even though I'll spend most of my day out on the job site overlooking production. I'm going to have to report my files to a computer for reference. All of the blueprints will be changed by computer and a blueprint is the most essential tool. The only way I get away from the computer is if I quit college right now and become a concrete finisher. Believe me, I would love

to do that but that is not where the money is. For that extra 30 thousand a year I'll put up with computers. But not with a smile!

He seemed willing, but reluctant, to learn how to use computers in the career that lay ahead. To prove to him that he would need to use computers – like it or not – in his profession after he left college, I brought Marty a copy of an article I had written for the Business Journal in May 1998, an article headlined: “Mahoning Maps High-Tech Tools for Developers” (10). The article detailed plans for Mahoning County’s (Ohio) Geographic Information System, a system then being designed to make available through the Web “data about roads, bridges, sewers, water lines and utilities as well as zoning, school district boundaries, easements, flood plains, wetlands, soil types and other information associated with geographic locations.” Since the construction company owned by Marty’s family is located in Mahoning County, it seemed certain that Marty, or at least his family’s business, would need to access the Mahoning County GIS in the near future.

During the remainder of the academic term, Marty seemed unhappy during our class newsgroup sessions. He cut classes in the computer classroom the maximum number of days it was possible to miss and still earn a passing grade. My perception of his unhappiness with computer-aided communication was verified in the summer after the class, when I met him by chance on campus. When I lightheartedly asked him if he liked computers yet, he sighed, shook his head firmly and declared, “I still can’t stand those damn things.”

Ironically, perhaps the class’s strongest proponent for the use of computers in composition classrooms was a student who had a great deal of difficulty with writing when the course began. In her first essay, titled “We Have No Choice But Facing the Worldwide Web in the Near Future,” Renee A. demonstrated a serious problem in organizing her paper; as a result, I met with her after class on several occasions for lengthy conferences. Her first essay required several rewrites before I was satisfied with her efforts, which demonstrated significant improvement. The final draft, titled “Facing the World Wide Web,” isn’t an outstanding essay, but it demonstrated her accommodation with the concept of using computers to communicate:

Did you ever imagine a person in Japan could talk to people in Spain, United States, Canada, and Australia all at the same time? Well, a person can. Easily a person can with logging on to the Worldwide Web, WWW. All these questions can be answered in one word with one amazing tool called a computer and access to the Internet. Access on the Internet to the World Wide Web is the greatest source of

communication a person can have to chat with others from around the world. The human race has created a wonderful tool, the “computer,” which can be looked upon as a negative and positive issue. . . .

My overview on the whole computer World Wide Web is it will have great uses . . . Computers are just an essential in life to help us humans on what we have to do in our everyday tasks. We will soon see what will have the effect on the world as far as computers and the World Wide Web goes. It could be a huge controversy between the real world and the computer world.

Renee continued to praise the usefulness of computers in the class newsgroup. On May 12, Renee wrote in a posting to the newsgroup: “I think that [a computer newsgroup] is a wonderful way for a student to learn what they are doing wrong in their paper. In my experiences I learned to read out loud and understand what mistakes I’m making. Even if the students didn’t like computers, they now realized the class use of the newsgroup was helping them to prepare for life after graduation.” Renee was clearly learning that computer communications a useful method of exchanging thoughts and ideas with people – and that she would need to continue making use of computer communication throughout her life.

But while she considered them useful, Renee maintained her misgivings about computers. As she wrote on the class newsgroup: “My overview on the whole computer WWW [World Wide Web] is it will have great uses but also it comes with the negative side where people will have access to others records. The uses of computers are wonderful in every aspect but this will have a bad affect in the long run with people’s lives being on a document. We will soon see what will have the effect on the world as far as computers and the WWW goes.”

Another student who favored the use of computers to communicate was Chris G. He was not only one of class’s top students, but was also one of the most proficient students in the class regarding computer use. Unlike most students, he strongly supported the use of computers in communications, and clearly that attitude stemmed from the fact that – unlike most students – he was already using computers in the career he intended to pursue. To support himself while attending college and majoring in law enforcement, he was employed by a local law enforcement agency as a dispatcher. He was one of only a handful of students in the four classes that are the subject of this thesis who already had significant experience in communicating in the world beyond academia. On several occasions, he made it clear to the class that communicating by computer was a key to his job. In his first essay for my class, in response to assignment regarding the computer’ effect on communications, he wrote:

Computers have forced many changes on society. People are also addressing these changes from many

different directions. Computers are commonplace tools in government, business and industry; in scheduling and control of manufacturing operations; in medical analyses and producers; in transportation and communication systems; in military systems; in scientific activities; network services; and personal computers. Since the 1940's computers have affected everyone life in some way, because, almost everything that we do has a computer force behind it. . . .

Scientists will continue to build new generation of computers like questing knights. For the rest of the society, whether they succeed is beside the point, because our quality of life has improved. . . .

Computers give society contacts with societies of other countries, this interaction make the language richer. . . .

Computers have opened up a new means of communication worldwide via the worldwide Web. Groups of people or individuals can log on the computer and either through e-mail, chat rooms, or Web sites; they can communicate day or night. Communication used to be limited to people via personal visit or telephone communication. Now, if you own a computer or have access to one you can exchange ideas, write news or write books with relative ease. Through the Internet people can talk to anyone around the world, or in a chat room, many different people at one time. Computer communication has brought down barriers that people have constructed when making friends face to face. Certain fears seem to resolve when you do not have to look at the person your talking to. It is much easier to open up and express your feelings when you do not have to make the eye contact that verbal communication requires. . . .

During a newsgroup session, he wrote: "Computer communication has brought down barriers that people have constructed when making friends face-to-face." On the other hand, Chris G. also warned, "It is a shame that because an individual that can't afford to buy a computer they will be alienated from the technological world of the future."

The cost of computers has isolated lower-income portions of society, scholars note. "[A]ccess to emerging technologies, like access to other goods and services in America, is a function of wealth and social class. . . . Perhaps 100 million people have Internet access – a huge number, but just 2% of the world's population. It is widely understood among us that the over-riding factor in determining who gets access and who does not is wealth . . ." (Moran, 205-206). The cost of computers results in an access problem that plague schools:

As writing teachers, we have been able to ignore the question of access so long as the writing instrument of

choice was pencil and paper. . . . Now, however, when the writing instrument of choice costs \$2,000, and a printer another \$500, we can't level the playing field for our students, even in the limited space of the writing classroom. The distance between the haves and the have-nots confronts us every day. And it seems that in public education this problem will only get worse . . . (Moran, 209)

"[C]omputers are unequally distributed to teachers and learners in our educational system, and . . . access to emerging technologies is a function of wealth and social class. The rich have more, the poor less" (Moran, 215).

Despite the current high price of computers, which often put them out of reach of low-income students, CAI undoubtedly will dominate future composition instruction, and computers will become increasingly available to students of all social strata. "The cost of microcomputers keeps going down, and the number of computers available in schools keeps going up. Within a few years, the networked computer-writing classroom will become commonplace" (Spitzer, 58). "Computers are a part of our lives as writers and are increasingly more common in English departments and writing classrooms" (Hult, 29). LeBlanc pointed out that writing classrooms are receiving a major focus of the latest "emerging technology:" "In higher education, and increasingly within the secondary schools, the number one use of computers has been for writing" (LeBlanc, 195).

Despite the problems of cost and accessibility, computers communications are becoming increasingly common, and entering unlikely realms. For instance, Native Americans are storing and sharing their tribal records by means of the computer (Martin, 124-131). "Native Americans Are Fighting to Connect the 550 Nations – in Cyberspace," a sub-heading said (124) and the chapter explained:

[Attorney Tamera Crites] Shanker [of the Arapaho tribe], and her fellow [Native American Communication] council members are only too aware that a few thousand dollars won't fulfill the council's grand goal of linking up all 550 nations. By any measure, the job is huge. But council members are sanguine, even serene.

"The simple fact is that Natives need to be a significant presence on the Net, and we need to make that happen on our own terms," says Shanker, who acknowledges that the slippery nature of online data swapping makes any attempt to define and preserve fixed identities tricky in the extreme. "If we don't define who we are on the Net, other people will do it for us," says Shanker. "And when that happens, part of who we are disappears" (Martin, 131).

Late in the academic term, I decided to try to gauge the effects of my emphasis on computer

communications through a message I posted on the newsgroup prior to a class computer lab session on May 12:

I realize many of you believe that I am obsessed with computers and you don't enjoy using them. My point is that you'd better grow accustomed to working on computers. The world is obsessed with them. As I've said before, you'll need to use a computer after you leave college, in whatever career you choose. If you doubt that, access the Netscape Communicator on this computer, click on "search" at the top of the screen and type in the name of your college major or job title-to-be. You'll find thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, of entries.

For your response today, if you agree with me, tell the class how you are using a computer now (besides class) and how will you use computers in the future? If you disagree with me, why? I'm not asking for a quick opinion; if I'm wrong, show me why. My main goal is to lure all of you into communicating through the computers. Sooner or later, the world will force you to deal with computers, and that's what I'm trying to prepare you for.

The students' responses assured me that I had largely succeeded in changing their attitudes towards computer-aided communications. Whether they like using computers or not, the students unanimously agreed that using computers as I required in my class helped prepare them for the world ahead. For instance, Russell S. said, "When I first came to class I really wasn't into computers as much as I should have been. This class is making me realize even more how important computers will be in the new millennium. You will definitely have to be in tune with computers or you may not be able to get a good job. I feel it's definitely time everyone realizes the importance of computers." Gary W. also said he appreciated the opportunity to develop his skill in communicating by means to computers: "At the beginning of the quarter I would've totally disagreed with what you were saying about computers and how they're going to be a big part of our lives and careers after college. Now, after writing papers and using the computer more and more I understand exactly where you're coming from about computers and learning how to use them." Ryan B. could already foresee a benefit of the class-related use of computers: "It is good that we are using computers a lot; it will help us in the future. Almost all the jobs now involve the use of a computer. The more experience we get now the more qualified we will be in the future."

John D. was less specific, but agreed that students must be prepared to use computers to communicate: "I feel computers are a must and will always be for the better of society. Not only are they becoming a privilege but a necessity to succeed in life now and in the future." Patrick T. also realized he would need to use computers to

communicate in the years ahead: “Even though I don’t like computers I realize they are a huge part of our society and we all have to know how to use them. . . . I agree that you will have to use them in our line of work. So even if you don’t like them like I it is to our benefit to know how to use them.” In fact, Jeremy B. wrote that he believed that the computer’s effect on society is unparalleled: “Although greatly feared by many, the overwhelming revolution in communication has never before had such an impact on society like that of the computer.

Specific job-related uses for the computer lies ahead for many students in their chosen career fields, according to several students who thought my class had helped them prepare for the future. For instance, Christine L. said: “Mr. Flick – I think I am finally catching on to your point about how there is really no way to get around the use of computers in the future workplace. And just simply in our lives. Since I will be employed in a job field that is changing to computers as we speak, the photographic world, and it will continue to depend on the use of computers. Whereas, about 10 years ago it [the computer] was not a common tool for the photographer.” Ellen G. had arrived a similar conclusion: “I agree totally that computers are going to play a major role in all of our job fields. I use computers basically now for school, researching future colleges, and AOL. In my field, which is the medical field, I know I’m going to need a computer for my office needs. I can store my patients files in the computer, E-mail other doctors with my concerns, E-mail prescriptions to the pharmacy, or even look up updated materials or new in the medical field on the internet.”

Several students said that while they would need to use computers to communicate in the future, they didn’t relish the new technology. For instance, Colleen C. – who was, ironically, one of the best students in this class – said: “I believe that computers are becoming an obsession to a great deal of the world, but I don’t do anything else with computers because I don’t even own one. It is true that I will have to use a computer in my career, but I don’t think I can or ever would become obsessed with one.” Patrick T. agreed: “Even if you don’t like them like I it is to our benefit to know how to use them. . . . I think that computers are very important to society today, but I myself don’t like them. I think they are a hassle and I find them hard to work and understand. I really just dislike them a lot. Even though I dislike them I realize that they are a big part to our society and are getting bigger and more important to us as a whole.”

CAI in my class had changed students’ attitudes toward computer-aided communications, several students explained. For stance, Gary W. said: “At the beginning of the quarter I would’ve totally disagreed with what you were saying about computers and how they’re going to be a big part of our lives and careers after college. Now after

writing papers and using the computer more and more I understand exactly where you're coming from about computers and learning how to use them."

Gina C. indicated both awareness and reluctant acceptance of the use of computers in communications when she wrote:

You're right, computers are going to be brought into our lives sooner or later, whether we like it or not. I am not so reluctant to learn how to use the computer when it comes down to having a job or not, but I personally just get a little frustrated with constant talk about computers. This is not just in this class though! I bought a USA Today not too long ago, and guess what was right on the front page? "I lived on the Internet for a month." The pros and cons of shopping on the net, what is good and what is not! What the?!? We are being BOMBARDED with all of this computer babble . . .

John D. sarcastically voiced a positive view of computer-aided communications: "I feel computers . . . will always be for the better of society. . . . Anyone who feels computers are not for the betterment of society are probably also conspiracy theorists any way." He also expressed the bottom line for students when he wrote: "The only way we can deal with the continuing invasion of computers is to accept it."

Because my plans for this thesis remained unclear at the beginning in this academic term, I failed to preserve all of the class's newsgroup postings. I hadn't realized the value of the newsgroup postings. My practice of copying all student remarks wasn't instituted until my third class, the class I will discuss in the next chapter of this thesis. However, my records include a discussion of the number of messages posted on the newsgroup by this class. My spring 1999 class posted 667 messages to the newsgroup during 20 sessions in the computer lab, an average of 33.35 messages for each class held computer lab. Since my attendance records show me that attendance at newsgroup sessions averaged 16.35, each student posted an average of 2.04 messages per lab session. I'm certain that it's no coincidence that I required each student to post a minimum of two newsgroup messages during each class that met in the computer lab.

Observations

My second class displayed a wide range of informed attitudes toward computer-aided communications. The student who most completely accepted the modern role of computers in communications was Chris G. I believe his attitude reflects the fact that, unlike most students, he was already working in the field he planned to pursue after graduation – he could see frequently that computer-aided communications have had a positive effect on his chosen

career. On the other hand, Marty G. had already seen how computers affected his career field, and didn't like it at all. However, he clearly realized – although reluctantly – that he needed to come to terms with computer-aided communications.

The students also reflected a wide range of attitudes toward the scholastic uses of computers. One of the best students in this class – Colleen C. – simply could not bring herself to compose her essays on a computer. She clearly maintained a Luddite attitude toward CAI, and I found that attitude frightening for a reason unrelated to her work in my class – Colleen C. was majoring in education. I hope she doesn't impose that Luddite attitude on her students. The student with probably the most complete appreciation of CAI in this class was a student whose essay-writing skills were, at best, questionable – Renee A. When I demonstrated to Renee how the computer could help her improve her essays – through spellcheck, grammarcheck, and computer-aided peer review, for instance – she eagerly began to make use of the computer to improve her writing. Renee made considerable progress during my class, and while I can't credit the computer alone for that improvement, her use of the computer to improve her essays demonstrated to her that the computer is a valuable communication tool.

But the most satisfying aspect of this class was that most of the students' developed positive attitudes toward computer-aided communications by the end of the class. Even Marty S., the most adamant opponent to computer-aided communications, grew to accept the fact that, like it or not, he'd need to make use of computer-aided communications in his future endeavors.

Chapter 4: My third go-round

The third class I taught, in fall 1999, was again a section of Composition I (See Appendix C). The class met in the computer lab for the first time on Thursday, Sept. 23, after two one-hour sessions in a traditional classroom. This time around, I was well prepared to introduce the students to the newsgroup concept. Instructing students to log onto the newsgroup for the first time had consumed nearly two lab sessions with my first class, and about half an hour with my second class. Based on my past experiences with students, I had honed my method for introducing students to the newsgroup. The third time around, every student had logged onto the newsgroup within about 10 minutes.

After I introduced the students to the newsgroup, I asked them each to post as a newsgroup message their first homework assignment, an assignment I'd made the second day of class, a class held in a traditional lecture classroom. I had asked them to prepare two lists, "five ways you can use computers, and five ways you'll use

computers in your career.” During the class’s first computer lab session, I instructed the students to post their responses on the newsgroup, and read and comment on their classmates’ postings. In other words, I wanted the students in my class to hold their first newsgroup discussion.

The students’ responses to the homework assignment also allowed me to evaluate the students’ attitudes toward computers. Nearly all of the students, 94.4 % (17 of 18), said they use the computer to conduct research; 83.3% said they use computers to type reports or other documents; 83.3% said they communicate with friends, family and other person acquaintances by e-mail; 44.4% said they use computers to organize and/or store personal documents; 44.4% said they use computers to organize and/or store job-related documents; 38.9% said they use spell-check and/grammar-check functions to improve written documents; 27.8% said they can or will use computers to communicate with their employer; 33.3% said they shop via computer; and 33.3% said they simply entertain themselves via the computer by playing games or finding amusing Web sites. Several students demonstrated that they were already aware of how they would be able to use computers in the careers ahead of them. Among the class responses, 22.2% of the students indicated they were majoring in education and would use computers to keep records of grades, prepare lesson plans and create handouts for their students. Seventy-five percent of the education majors indicated they would use computers to instruct students. I was disappointed that none of the teachers-to-be specified how they would use computers in their own classrooms: Krista G. said she would use computers to “get information to teach them,” and Sarah B. said, “Some computer programs encourage children to want to learn.” Students pursuing other academic majors cited more specific and sometimes esoteric uses for computers. For instance, Brenda F., an instrumental music major, wrote: “Computers can be used to compose and edit music. And it’s a lot easier than trying to write it all out on paper. . . . You can use computers to create new sounds or noises.” Cristin V. said that in her career, she would use computers to “help edit/add special effects in movies,” “aid in music recording,” and “design buildings/make blueprints.” Cristin V. demonstrated her awareness of the increasing role of computer-aided communications when she wrote: “Just about every job involves computer use. It is important that people know how to use computers.” Overall, the student postings demonstrated a receptive attitude toward computer-aided communications.

During the class’s first computer lab session, I distributed copies of Dennis Baron’s essay about the history of communication technology, “From Pencils to Pixels,” and assigned them to read the essay in preparation for the class’s second computer lab session. During the second computer lab session, I instructed them to comment via the

newsgroup on Baron's essay and the growing use of computers in communications. I also asked them if they believe computers are "a passing fad." The students' responses showed me they were aware of the computer's increasing role in communications, but the students also expressed a general resistance, or reluctance, to accept the computer as a dominant means of communication. For instance, Kate M. wrote, "I feel that computers are a dominating way that people communicate with friends, brokers, stores, and much more. However, I don't think they will ever, or at least in the near future, totally dominate. Phones and writing by hand is just too important and much more personal than computers." I found her faith in the validity of written documents ironic in light of Baron's account of the distrust of handwritten messages in medieval times. "[W]hen writing was introduced as a means of recording land transfer in 11th-century England, it was initially perceived (and often rightly so) as a nasty Norman trick for stealing Saxon land" (Baron, 21).

Many students expressed familiarity with and acceptance of the computer's growing role in communications. In fact, Christina T. – who was majoring in education – believed the computer would play a growing role in education, and that the students of tomorrow would benefit from communicating via the computer: "Soon, all students will have computers at their desks and the rest of the world will need to understand this new technology to keep up in the world." Brian S. agreed that computer-aided communications are here to stay: "No, I do not believe that computers are a passing fad. They are used way too much and depended on too much to be considered a fad." Brian S., like Chris G. in my previous class, had had the advantage of making use of computers in a work setting, which had allowed him greater insight into the use of computer for communication purposes:

I have been using e-mail for about 4 years now and have found it to be a very useful tool in communicating with people and businesses from around the local area to around the country. For my job, I use e-mail to send AutoCAD drawings to my employer instead of having to work on-site. Recently, one of my friends went away to college. In order to stay in touch, we have both been using e-mail. Mainly because #1-it is cheaper than a long distance call, and #2-it is fast and more convenient than talking on the phone. Besides just e-mailing him, I am able to communicate with about 10 other people at the same time without any distractions at all. This would never be possible with a phone call. Also, with e-mail, if someone is not home or not at their computer, they will receive the message the next time that they log-on. This also comes in handy when trying to make plans or find out information.

Many of the students agreed with the views Baron expressed in his essay. For instance, Jamie K. said that computer use is becoming increasingly pervasive, and expressed a desire to improve her computer skills: “I think that computers will eventually become daily use for people everywhere. Just like the telephone (that I certainly need everyday), [computers] will be something that every person will have to have. You will have to do everything and more to function in daily life in the near future. I’m not very comfortable on the computer, and I don’t really like to use computers because I just think that it is way to complicated but after a quarter in this class I will be comfortable and may even enjoy them.” Alan J. showed awareness of, and receptive attitude toward, the growing role of computers in communications when he wrote:

In response to “From Pencils to Pixels,” I personally do believe that computers play a major role in communications. Most people who have computers believe that e-mail is the best way to keep in touch with friends and family around the U.S. or where ever they may be. Instant messaging is also an extremely powerful system of communicating without outrageous phone bills. In my opinion, computers do most definitely dominate in the field of communication.

Computers and their uses are most definitely not a passing fad. . . As technology advances, the computer will eventually become the dominating factor in day-to-day living. With the current technology not only is it easier to use a computer to type with some of the programs on the market today you don’t even need to use a keyboard to put your thoughts in to words you need only talk.

Bill B. strongly agreed with Baron, adding that the ever-expanding role of the computer was a reason for his decision to major in computer science at the collegiate level:

If I didn’t think that computers were gaining dominance in communications, then I wouldn’t see computers in the future of business and personal life, and I would not have chosen computer science as my major. But, I do think that computers are gaining dominance in communications. Newer uses for computer communication include smaller lightweight cell phones, pagers with alphanumeric text, satellite-connected palm top personal computers, and airplane telephones with better reception. (For about \$2 a minute.) In the future, computers will become smaller, faster, and communication between them will become clear, and definitely less expensive. . . . I don’t think that being computer literate, or being computer illiterate, will cause Americans to separate into different groups.

Several students disagreed with Baron's essay, and indicated objections to computer-aided communications. For instance, Sarah B. wrote:

I feel that Dennis Baron's prediction on the uses of computers for communication isn't exactly accurate. I don't think that computers are a passing fad, but I don't think that they will be used as frequently for communication in the future as he thinks. . . . I feel that using computers for communication is an impersonal way of doing things. From doing a lot of traveling, I know how nice it is to hear the voice of a loved one over the telephone, knowing that nobody else can download our conversation. Even though the computer is much more convenient for most people, I still feel that communicating through a computer is not for everyone. . . . I still think that it [computer usage] can make people lazy and sloppy. Especially when it comes to sending letter or e-mail. People forget the simple use of grammar and spelling because of computers.

After reading Sarah B.'s posting, I wondered if she worried that someone would tape-record her telephone conversations. Probably not, although tapping telephone lines is common and easily accomplished. I also wondered if Sarah B. remembers "the simple use of grammar and spelling" when writing letters to friends and family. Probably not. Grammar and spelling are often ignored in casual letters – not only in e-mail, but also in letters written the old-fashioned ways, by pen or typewriter. While I also find telephone conversations with far-off friends and family comforting, I remembered that only a century-and-a-half ago, a noted social critical blasted the most common electronic method of communications of his time: "[I]n 1849, Henry David Thoreau disparaged the information superhighway of his day, a telegraph connection from Maine to Texas. As Thoreau put it, 'Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate'" (Baron, 17). I believe that Sarah B.'s suspicions of computer communications indicated her unfamiliarity with "the information superhighway" of her day. However, I hoped that by engaging in newsgroup discussions twice a week throughout an academic term, Jamie K. would become more familiar with computer communications. Once she grew more familiar with the method, I was certain, her attitude toward computer-aided communications would become more accepting. Late in the quarter, Jamie K. posted a message on the newsgroup that assured me that I was on the right track. Jamie K. wrote: "I'm not very comfortable on the computer, and I don't really like to use a computers because I just think that it is way too complicated, but after a quarter in this class I will be comfortable and may even enjoy them."

Other students explained they were aware that the computer represents the latest change in communications technology, as Baron discussed, but said that the change isn't complete yet. For instance, Chris J. wrote: "I personally don't feel that computers dominate communications as Dennis Baron writes. We still have very important uses for telephones and regular postal messages (snail mail). We still call each other, or use the phone to get something because it is still more practical in that sense. . . . I really see it as a new addition to communications, with several great technological advances, but no domination of our society." Still, Chris J. admitted that computers have improved communications: "I think that the advantages of computers go without number. We haven't even seen a fraction of the scope that they will be able to do in the future. The disadvantages that we deal with computers now are slowly being eliminated. The disadvantages that we experience with them are merely inconveniences with using them. Have I gained more confidence from computers? No, but I've gained more experience in writing and using them, which some optimist could argue that creates confidence." The bottom line, he added in a later posting to the newsgroup, is that people should adjust to the inevitable: "I agree that in the years to follow those who don't adapt their lives will see themselves fall behind . . . however, I think that has been the story of the world for all time. Those who didn't adapt their lives to reading and writing became the worker peons, while those who achieved more inherited the earth."

In discussion through the class newsgroup, George K. agreed that computers are becoming dominant in communications, but obviously he wasn't entirely happy about it:

I believe that (unfortunately) computers will dominate communications in the future. I think it's kind of sad to think that in a few years, everyone will be talking on the computer and communication will become less personal. Will our lives be based on whether or not we hear 'you've got mail'? Will this be the only time we talk to one another? I am starting to think that friends and family will only talk when one writes an email to someone else and a reply is given. God, that will suck! It almost makes our society seem extremely pathetic. Oh well. There's really nothing we can do to change things to the way we want. If we do, we'll be left behind in a world obsessed with technology. . . .

I have had e-mail for 3 years now and I still write letters to people. [Mail] is a more personal form way of communicating. Writing a letter by hand or calling someone and hearing their voice is a much better because it's (again) more personal. There are some advantages to email, such as quickness, spellcheck, and in my case more legible.

In their essay written in response to essay assignment #1 on their syllabus (see Appendix C), the students cited a wide variety of advantages offered by the computer's expanding role in communications. For instance, Crystal R. pointed out a variety of advantages offered by the use of computers in communications:

My personal use of my E-mail account has dramatically helped my bank account. Just graduating from high school, most of my close friends decided to go away to school. Being able to write them e-mail has helped keep my phone bill to a minimum, and has helped me to save on trips to the post office. My main point is that computers are an excellent way to communicate, they are quick, and with enough practice, they are mostly easy to use, not to mention efficient. Using computers has increased my typing abilities as well as opened me to a world of new and exciting people. It is amazing how much you could learn from a person who is 3,000 miles away. It is amazing how much you can learn from a person who is 3,000 miles away.

Despite her praise of communicating via computer, Crystal R. retained a few reservations: "I suppose that sending email all the time can hurt your social skills. Also, computers don't always give you the information you want, and information can sometimes get you lost. I feel that we need to be reminded that a computer is a simple machine made to help ease our already hectic, complicated lives." Kate M. painted the same picture, citing a number of advantages offered by computer-communications as well as flaws with the modern means of communications:

Since coming to college, my basic form of communication to people outside of YSU has been e-mail. My friends, family, and I talk though this basically because you can write when you have time and most of us are on computers daily for something else anyway. E-mail is a convenient, cheap way of talking about your day, problems, who's marrying who, and so on. I don't rule out the phone totally, but the phone bill is what is telling me to use other forms of communication, like e-mail.

E-mail is the new exciting way that people communicate with each other without the hassle of stamps, phone bills, or plane tickets. Personally, I prefer to use e-mail in place of other forms of communication. It is a cheap, effective way of keeping in touch with people I might otherwise grow apart from. This would be due to basically the fact that it's hard to find time in your day to call or go visit. Although letters are great to receive, it is tough to keep up a good chain with everyone's busy schedules today. This is why many people including me are turning to e-mail. The rough part about not having the time, or the patience to send letters through the mail is that e-mail is a lot less personal. I know that when I receive a letter in my mailbox, some time and thought was put into my letter. E-mail is a lot more

convenient, but some may think of it as lazy or that you don't care enough if you are to send e-mail over an old-fashioned letter. . . .

Overall, I feel that e-mail has greatly affected my life and how I communicate with the ones close to me. It may be a little less formal, but it is an easier, less time-consuming way to communicate that I am thankful for.

Alan J. raised an objection to computer communications that I have found to be a common fear:

Access to computers most definitely separates groups of people. For most people who are computer literate the computer plays a good-sized role in their daily lives either through e-mail or through the use of computers as daily planner. Even those people who are not completely computer literate most still use e-mail even if it is only as a secondary form of communication. As far as the betterment of society goes computers most definitely make life easier and communication faster, cheaper in some cases and most definitely more accessible over long distances. In today's society access to a computer is almost a necessity if you can not find some way to use a computer you are almost exclude from a very good portion of the current electronic based society.

As we've seen previously, scholars share Alan J.'s fear that computers can separate people, and in fact computers today do separate the "haves" from the "have-nots."

In both their essays and their postings to the newsgroup, many students expressed distrust of computers-aided communications. For instance, Jamie K. wrote: "I think e-mail and computers make people lazy, but that is how society is today, so I guess it works out. E-mail has not changed my style of writing (at least not that I could see)." Brenda F. wrote: "I think probably it [computer usage] will somehow separate society. I mean, it kind of does already. . . . And if computers start to become a corporate thing more than a societal thing, I think people will separate themselves according to where they fall into it. There are tons of people who have never even touched a computer because they just don't want to." Ironically, despite her clear distrust of computers, Brenda posted the second-highest number of messages to the class newsgroup during the academic term – 65 messages. In fact, her contribution of 11 messages to the newsgroup on Oct. 21 marked the largest single-day student participation in the newsgroup during the entire academic term.

A student whose attitude toward computer communication particularly interested me was Jeff F., since he so totally opposed the use of computers when the quarter began. In an early draft of his first essay, he describes

computers simply as “evil,” without explaining why he believed computer use inherently results in insidious outcomes. In my evaluation of his essay, I told him that he was free to argue that computers are evil, but blasted his essay for failing to give the reader an explanation of why he believes computers are “evil.”

During a newsgroup session early in the quarter, Jeff F., a business major, listed very business-oriented uses for computers, saying computers could be used to obtain “quick and up to the minute stock quotes” and for “online investing.” On Oct. 5, he posted a message to the newsgroup stating his thesis for his first essay: “I feel that computers have diminished the quality of communication today. However, in terms of all other uses, I feel that computers are a very necessary evil.” I was so concerned about his thesis, I sent him a private e-mail that was not posted on the newsgroup: “Jeff, I have a problem here – I still don’t know why you’re calling computers ‘evil.’ What is evil about them, and how does that evil carry over into communications? From reading your essay, I know you simply don’t like computers. But ‘I feel’ is not good reasoning. I feel computers are good. Does that make them ‘good’? Why not? You need to give the reader solid reasoning, especially on a controversial topic. I don’t agree, and so far you’ve written nothing that even tries to convince me to adhere to your view.”

Later in that same newsgroup session, Jeff F. addressed question #3 on p. 426 of Language Awareness, (“Clearly, many Americans do not own computers nor even have the ability to use them. Often, however, those who are computer literate understandably make the assumption that everyone is computer literate. Write an essay [for my class, a response] in which you examine the proposition that such an assumption has serious implications for a democracy and international relations. In other words, will access to computers separate groups of people in such a way as to work against the betterment of society?”), which I’d assigned students to respond to. In response, Jeff F. posted the following message to the newsgroup: “In my mind the computer literate will leave behind the computer illiterate – for a few years anyway. It is my belief that once the computer generation comes of age there will be very few people who are still computer illiterate. Hence, any problems that arise now with some sort of gap between people will be narrowed quickly, and cause very few problems.”

Later on Oct. 5, he seemed to have already revised his attitude toward computers significantly, or at least decided to voice more acceptable views publicly: “From knowledge acquired in this class I am beginning to enjoy computers more and more. The ‘evil’ in my mind is the corruption of those who live on computers. I work on it extensively.” During the same class session, Jeff F. posted a message to the newsgroup about computers: “With the

easy access to E-mail I have written fewer and fewer letters. I feel that such things as electronic mail take away from the value of true communication. The greatest advantage of E-mail is obviously the time it saves.”

On Oct. 12, Jeff F. posted the latest draft of his first essay to the newsgroup, and titled it “Computers: Just the Beginning”:

It was said that the telephone made it easy for a person to reach out and touch someone. The same holds true with computers, with one exception. With a computer, someone can reach out and touch anything. We live in a time period in which computers simply make our lifestyles much easier. Everywhere one looks they can find a computer hard at work. Whether it is in an office keeping records, or as a digitized map in a car, or in a bowling alley automatically keeping score. Moreover, technological advances are being made in the computer industry every other minute. It is my strong belief that computers are not only a means to our present, but also our future.

Just as the world adapted to technological advances such as the telephone, and then became accustomed and dependent on them, so goes the computer era. It is my personal opinion that computers are in fact the key to our future . . . There are many people who know nothing but computers, and lack the skills to do much of anything else . . . I feel that in modern society more and more people are benefiting from computers. This can be compared to early century inventions such as the radio and television. I also feel that when it comes to computers we may only have reached the tip of the iceberg . . .

From the communication standpoint, computers have enhanced accessibility of communicating with someone thousands of miles away more than all other similar inventions from the past put together. The World Wide Web is indeed that, a Web that joins the world . . . I personally feel that communicating through the Internet has enhanced the quality of interaction far more than one can imagine. Electronic mail can strengthen and shorten ties between distant relationships because for many people it is easier than writing and mailing a letter by hand . . . Electronic mail broadens the overall reach of communication . . .

For one paragraph I will discuss what I believe to be the downside of the computer uprising . . . I often wonder what the world will be like when I reach my elder years, and I can't help but to think of those who don't seem to believe in computers today. I am afraid that in the future they may have no means by which to survive in a world that may be ruled by a keyboard and a screen. Those people will in fact become isolated, and will struggle to simply keep pace with the upcoming computer generation . . .

In conclusion, I praise computers for being a widely used source for not only communication, but also information, and for in some fashion or another making our everyday lives a bit more simplistic. Before long, computers could be the only source of communication that people are willing to use . . . In history classes of today we learn how Napoleon and Hitler came to power. Many years from now our grandchildren may learn how the computer came to power . . .

Jeff F. posted a message late in the academic term which seemed to indicate that even after ten weeks of using computers in my class, he retained some doubts about the benefits of computers: “As the computer generation comes into power in a few years down the road I feel that people my age and older will have less of a grip on the world. Especially those who refused to adapt their lives to computers and continued living the ‘old-fashioned way.’ There is a great chance that the entire universe may revolve and be recorded on nothing but computers. Those who are computer illiterate now will be the lower class of the 21st century.”

But during the last class newsgroup session, on Dec. 2, Jeff F. expressed rather guarded optimism concerning computers, and also showed me that requiring him to use a computer twice a week – forcing him to tinker – had honed his computer skills and improved his attitude toward computer-aided communications: “I can say honestly that because of this class I feel much more at home using a computer. Before this class started I thought e-mail and Internet stuff was dumb and boring. Now I’m like addicted to it. It doesn’t help that my girlfriend gets mad if I never write her, but e-mail and AOL has just created another way for us to communicate. I’ve learned that communication assistance is the greatest asset of the modern computer.”

I found more evidence of Jeff F.’s change of attitude toward computer-aided communications when I conducted a statistical analysis of the newsgroup for my fall 1999 class. To my surprise, Jeff F. was the class’ most frequent contributor to the newsgroup. He posted 74 messages to the newsgroup during the academic term, far more than the average student contribution of 42.5 newsgroup messages posted during the term.

Another student whose negative attitudes toward computers interested me was Heidi M. Since she was majoring in journalism and worked for the campus newspaper while enrolled in my class, she was more-or-less treading the same collegiate ground I had trod a quarter century before. Early in the class, she said she already knew computers played an important role in her chosen field. Of course, I know firsthand how thoroughly computers will dominate her career if she remains a journalist. Early in the class, she wrote about her uneasiness about using computers, largely due to her lack of knowledge about computers, but still cited several advantages of composing via

computer: "Computers cause more stress in my life. This is partly due to the fact that I know very little about them. Therefore, I have several gray hairs . . . I am affected every day by computers in one form or another . . . Computers are useful as well as stressful. They are more convenient than a typewriter, and much quicker. Mistakes are easier to correct with a computer. There are some really neat things that can be done with computers; unfortunately for me, I do not know how to do any of them.

Since I later found that she quietly, but thoroughly, disdained computers, I now find the comments she made a few days later rather ironic:

I believe that computers will become a very large part of communications as a whole. I've noticed, working at the newspaper, that computers are a great aspect of the operation. I've also noticed that computers have become very influential in our everyday lives. Such as: traffic lights, security systems, banks, telephone companies, automobiles, etc. I don't think that computers are a "fad," though I fear our growing dependence on these machines. Right now, if computers shut down, the company with the problem can just call another company and get their machines fixed. What would happen if thousands of companies had the same problem at the exact same time? I don't think Dennis Baron is crazy [in "From Pencils to Pixels"], I think he is fully aware of the possibility of mass destruction with computers. However, I also feel that computers have greatly improved the communication between people. It is easier now to speak to someone thousands of miles away than ever before. It only takes a few minutes to reach people across the computer. This is a great advantage. Current and up-to-date news can be delivered to the media and then passed to the public. Computers have bypassed the "middle man," [and are] gaining monumental advantages in communications.

Later in the quarter, Heidi M. said in a message posted to the newsgroup: "I still don't like computers. They are scary, horrible, awful things. I don't like them, but I'm learning. I have become more confident with these machines through the consistent necessity of their use. They are prevalent in today's society and they are becoming necessary for most occupations. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT I HAVE TO LIKE THEM!!!" Since she was planning to enter a field that will require her to use a computer nearly every day of her professional life, I hope for her sake she learns to like computers. After all, in March 1999, "87% of print journalists [were] connected to the Internet," (World Wide Web User Statistics) and that large percentage certainly will grow by the time Heidi earns

her degree. Heidi has chosen a career field that is particularly dependent on computer-aided communications, so in order to succeed professionally, she must become adept at computer communications.

By the end of the class, it seemed clear the Heidi had – although reluctantly – adopted a more accepting attitude toward computer-aided communications. However, my statistical analysis found that her participation in the class newsgroup had been below average. She posted only 32 messages to the newsgroup during the academic term, compared to the average student contribution of 42.5 messages. However, Heather’s newsgroup contributions reflected the precision expected of a journalist – I required each student to post a minimum of 32 messages to the newsgroup during the academic term, and she posted exactly that number of messages to the newsgroup. Fourteen of the 20 students in my study group for this class posted at least this required number of minimum newsgroup messages. Interestingly, one of the six students whose newsgroup participation fell below the magic number of 32 was Bill B., who posted on 27 newsgroup messages during the academic term. I found Bill B.’s less-than-minimal newsgroup participation ironic because Bill B. was majoring in computer science. I wondered if Bill B. had found newsgroup participation inappropriate, but that question was quickly dispelled when I received my class roster for my Composition II class for the following academic term and found that Bill B. was included in the class, at his request.

My fall 1999 class marked my most successful venture with a newsgroup in terms of the number of postings – 850 messages were posted on the class newsgroup by the 20 members of my study group during that academic term, an average of 42.5 messages post per student during the academic term, or 2.125 messages posted per student during each lab session. The students’ participation in the newsgroup assured me that – if nothing else – I’d succeeded in forcing my students to tinker with computer communications. A review of the newsgroup postings showed me that newsgroup participation started slowly, as students learned to use the machines and mushroomed in the middle of the academic term. The dates of the newsgroup sessions, the number of postings and the number of students participating (parenthesized), are as follows:

- Sept. 23 – 20 (18)
- Sept. 28 – 32 (19)
- Sept. 30 – 21(15)
- Oct. 5 – 46 (18)

- Oct. 7 – 73 (19)
- Oct. 12 – 70 (18)
- Oct. 14 – 54 (17)
- Oct. 19 – 80 (20)
- Oct. 21 – 79 (18)
- Oct. 26 – 51 (17)
- Oct. 28 – 25 (14)
- Nov. 2 – 54 (15)
- Nov. 4 – 58 (19)
- Nov. 16 – 47 (16)
- Nov. 18 – 16 (13)
- Nov. 23 – 39 (14)
- Nov. 30 – 48 (16)

An average of 18 students were present for each newsgroup session; the class posted an average of 48.22 messages to the newsgroup per lab session, or 2.82 newsgroup messages per student per lab session. During the first lab session for the class, Sept. 23, I introduced the students to the newsgroup, instructed them in how to log onto the newsgroup and required them to post only a single message. The low numbers of newsgroup postings on Oct. 28 and Nov. 18 reflect not student disinterest, but the fact that I instructed students to devote a portion of the class to activities other than newsgroup discussion on those dates. Therefore, I also calculated student newsgroup participation not including Sept. 23, Oct. 28 and Nov. 18. The class posted an average of 54.3 messages per lab session during the 14 classes held in the computer lab and devoted entirely to newsgroup discussion, and the average contribution for each student who participated in those 14 lab sessions was 3 messages posted to the newsgroup.

On the last day of class, Dec. 2, a class session held in a computer lab, I posted the following message on the newsgroup, then said “good-bye” and departed:

I'd like each of you to make one contribution to the newsgroup, answering this question: How much did using computers for two classes per week teach you about the growing role of computers in communications? Are you now comfortable communicating by e-mail, and perhaps researching on the

web? Also, computers have made it possible for you to read and comment on each other's essays and in-class writing. That's a big change. When I was an undergraduate (BGSU '79), we didn't read each other's essays. To share essays, we would have had to read them out loud to each other. How does the communication engendered by the computer effect your essay writing? Or does it?

In response, I received 28 messages from 18 students. They unanimously agreed that the computer newsgroup had been beneficial. For instance, Brandon S. wrote: "Using computers in this class has helped to make me much more aware of just how popular the computer is becoming in schools and in society in general. After using the computer a few times a week in this class, I fell much more confident using a computer than I ever did before." Kimberly H. wrote: "Using the computer has taught me a lot about communication and language. . . . I think that using the computer has definitely helped my writing." Jamie K. said: "I really never used computers as much as now. I think that this class has helped me a bit. And will keep using them." Chris J. wrote: "This lab really gave me a chance to see that the computer is actually more involved with work of any type than I realized – I now think more of it as an important tool for society and communicating." Jeff F. bluntly credited my class with improving his attitude toward computer-aided communications: "I can say honestly that because of this class I feel much more at home using a computer. Before this class started I thought e-mail and Internet stuff was dumb and boring. Now I'm addicted to it. . . . I've learned that communication assistance is the greatest asset of the modern computer."

However, four of the 18 students replied that while they enjoyed the computer lab sessions, it was nothing new to them. For instance, Steve D. wrote: "I would like to say computers we used in this class helped me to learn about communication with computers, but I can't. You see, for the past five years I've been on my computer at home using it to communicate on the Internet. . . . I've learned about as much as I can in those five years. Brenda F. wrote: "I think using computers in an English class setting is worthwhile, but nothing very new." On the other hand, Ken B. said that while the class newsgroup "hasn't taught me anything about computers that I didn't already know," he rarely uses computers to communicate, "because I just don't like to."

Observations

Once again, I found that all that tinkering had already borne fruit; the attitudes of my students toward computer usage had already significantly improved. Again, students' attitudes toward computer-aided communications improved when they succeeded in their use of computers. Clearly, many students distrusted computer communications when the class began, and still distrusted computers after 10 weeks of "tinkering" with

computers during two 50-minute class periods each week. This class demonstrated more awareness of computer-aided communications, but most of the students realized they would need to use computers to communicate in their future careers; many seemed uncomfortable with computer-aided communications.

I was quite pleased at the amount of tinkering the students of this class engaged in during the academic term. The large number of messages they posted on the newsgroup indicates the students – collectively, anyway – held a positive attitude toward computer communications. As Jamie K. wrote: “I’m not very comfortable on the computer . . . but after a quarter in this class I will be comfortable and may even enjoy them.” Feeling comfortable on the computer is a vital step toward a positive attitude toward the computer-aided communications they will need to use when they leave campus and pursue a career.

Chapter 5: A new challenge – teaching argumentative essays with help from the Web

In January 2000, I began a new venture in the computers and composition field when I was assigned to teach English 551, or Composition II, at YSU. The departmental course description for Composition II says that it is designed to “help [the student] develop [his or her] ability to read and think critically and to write argumentative essays supported by evidence.” Students are told that the class “will discuss strategies for research, persuasion, organization, style, and documentation. You will learn to locate and evaluate information on the World Wide Web.” I’d spent three quarters teaching students how to write their essays and hold discussions on computers; now, I needed to widen my the focus of my instruction and teach them how to conduct research *before* they wrote. This emphasis on research meant I would need to change my teaching strategy. But I wondered how quickly students would tackle researching on the Web.

I searched academic sources for advice on how to help students overcome their unfamiliarity with the WorldWide Web, but found nothing that directly addressed a classroom situation that I feared would become a problem. On the other hand, I found assurance that my students would have little difficulty in searching the Web for information to use in authoring argumentative essays. Apparently harboring a similar fear, the University of Calgary surveyed students’ attitudes regarding the use of computers in the composition classroom in the winter term of 1999 and found: “Students feel the introduction of educational technologies is enhancing their learning, and students for the most part have good access to technology. Most students (93.8%) report having access to a computer at home, 92% use e-mail, 81.6% have internet access from home, and 80.6% have good access to computers on campus, though there is evidence to suggest that this access is not as adequate as reported.”

Anne Bliss of the University of Colorado at Boulder assigned her composition students to use computers to conduct research for group essay projects. She found that students quickly learned how to surf the Web, often teaching each other how to research in cyber-space: “Students learned and improved skills in researching electronic sources. Although the students had basic familiarity with searching the WWW, some did not understand the function of the browsers. . . . Other students did not understand fully how to refine topics. . . . Team members quickly informed their partners about how to use these [computer] facilities” (Bliss).

At the University of Washington, Professor Günter Krumme explained that the university’s U-Wired Project helps introduce the cyber-world to the few students who lack computer skills when they arrive on campus: Considering that computers are already around high schools for many years, it is surprising that there are still a few students who arrive at the University [of Washington] with little or no computer and E-mail experience and a disturbing amount of computer phobia. After some initial handholding, all kinds of skills need to be acquired which either relate specifically to electronic communications or to the specifics of computerized Library services at this University. . . . In general, it takes relatively little (and less and less) prodding and arm-twisting for the majority of undergraduate students in my classes eventually to accept the electronic approach and to appreciate its various benefits.

On the other hand, I also found scholars that said my students might find *too much* information when using computers to conduct research. “Finding information on the World Wide Web has been compared to drinking from a fire hose. The quantity is overwhelming, even to experience researchers” (Faigley, 134).

I also sought guidance from computer guidebooks, and once again found assurance that I had little to fear. “[R]elax. Getting up to speed on the Internet takes a little time, but the effort will be well rewarded” (Quick Guide to the Internet for Composition, 2). I also worried that my students would encounter difficulty while learning – if they didn’t already know – how to search the Web for information. But the guidebooks assured me that I didn’t need to worry, that students would find that “[w]ith hardly more effort than it takes to rub your eyes opening in the morning” they would be able to access (Quick Guide, 2) “the collection of hundreds of hundreds of computers that make up the Web” (Quick Guide, 4). “In less than two decades, the Internet had evolved . . . into a massive electronic bazaar” (The Internet Handbook, 3) and students revel in “the richness of the Internet as a source of information” (The Internet Handbook, 4). A vast amount of information is available thanks to the Internet, and locating it isn’t always easy. “Finding information on the Internet brings new opportunities – and new challenges”

(Harnak and Kleppinger, 3). In fact, the Web is an excellent tool of education: “Because of the vast amounts and the wide variety of information that it provides, the Internet can be an excellent means of sharpening research skills. . . . This wealth of materials [available through the Internet] necessitates a focused topic, well-evaluated and documented sources, and good strategies for locating information” (Anderson, Benjamin, Busiel and Padredes-Holt, 3).

Reassured that my students would experience little difficulty in learning to conduct research via the computer, I prepared for the first day of my first Composition II. While taking attendance for the first time, I noticed that most of the 20-odd students seated before me appeared to be traditional college freshmen. An unexplained oddity about the class roster was that it included only two girls. One student, the only student who seemed not a bit nervous on the first day of class, was Bill B., the computer science major who had been a member of the composition I class I’d taught the previous quarter.

In preparation for the class, I had prepared a survey concerning the students' access to and experience in using computers. I had planned to have the students post their responses on the class newsgroup, but the newsgroup wasn’t available on the first day of class due to complications related to changing the calendar for the new millennium (the class first met on Jan. 3, 2000). Instead, I read the survey questions aloud, instructed the students to type out their answers on the computer, and collected their answers as they rolled off the printer. My first-day-of-class survey questions:

1. Do you own a computer? Or do you have frequent access to a computer?
2. Do you frequently send a receive e-mail? If you do, how often?
3. If you’re a freshman, was your high school equipped with computers that were used by students?
4. Have you ever researched via the World Wide Web?
5. If you have, what advantages does the Web offer? What problems have you encountered on the Web?
6. If you’ve never researched via the Web, what do you need to know to get started? Does the Web make you nervous? If so, why?
7. Do you believe you’ll be able to find all the resources you need for this course through the World Wide Web?

Unfortunately, I was not able to hand out the course syllabus the first day of class as I had planned (my teaching assignment was unexpectedly shifted from Comp I to my first stint in Comp II during Christmas break). As

a result, when the students responded to the survey, they were not entirely certain of the assignments that lay ahead of them. I distributed the syllabus (Appendix D) on the second day of class. But before I conducted the survey on the first day of class, I gave the students a brief oral summation of the work ahead of them. I received responses from 12 students who were part of my study group. (I omitted from the study group students who withdrew from the class or failed to complete the course for a variety of reasons not related to this study.) I also told the class that I would require each student to participate in a computer newsgroup, and that they must complete a group essay-writing project as well as an individual essay.

On the first day of class, 91.67% (11 of 12) of the students in my study group who present informed me they had both had daily access to a computer, and often communicated by e-mail; 100% replied that their high schools had been equipped with computers, but 16.67% of the class said they didn't have the opportunity to use the computers in high school; and 83.33% said they had conducted research by means of computers before entering my class. But while 83.33% also answered "yes" to the final question of the survey ("Do you believe you'll be able to find all the resources you need for this course through the World Wide Web?"); 40% of the students who answered "yes" said they also would need to consult books to verify the information they received by computer-borne research.

Through the first-day-of-class survey, I found that 15% of the class was studying to become computer professionals. Jeremy S. and Bill B. were majoring in computer science, while Marc P. worked as a help desk assistant in a computer center at the university. Of course, they could quickly foresee ways to use computers to do research for upcoming class projects. Bill B. said in his response to the survey, "The Web is the largest library in the world. Everyone can learn something on it." Marc P. said that the Web "provides a place to research up-to-date information at any time." But it wasn't only computer science majors who could foresee uses for the computer in the weeks ahead and praised the amount of information available through the World Wide Web. Jody W., an exercise science major, said: "I feel that . . . the Web will have all the information needed to do a research paper in this course." Jim F., an accounting major, said in response to the survey that while he attended high school, his high school "did have computer labs that we were taught on three hours a day, but they didn't have the Internet. The Internet offers more information at your fingertips than the conventional way of going to the library." Dave L., a music performance major, commented, "I have no doubt that all of the information that I could possibly digest in a lifetime is available on the Web." Jay D., an engineering major, said: "The Web gives you the ability to find many resources all at one place, all at the click of a button. I think that most things could be found on the Web . . ."

However, several students expressed distrust of information obtained through the Web. Jim F. said, “The downside [to research conducted on the Web], however, is that you have to be able to distinguish between what is correct and incorrect information.” Danielle H. agreed: “Everything on computers is not always correct.” Jeff T. warned: “The only problem is that you will stumble upon some false information.” Traditional sources – books – are more reliable sources than Web sources, according to Jay D., who said: “[A]t times you may need to get a book to verify what you have found [on the Web].”

I had hoped that my class would include students unfamiliar with the Web; I wanted to observe the efforts of first-timers’ as they learned to research through the Web. However, I realize that college students totally unfamiliar with the Web are rapidly becoming rare birds. But I found one rare bird among my “flock” – Lance N., a criminal justice major, said in response to my survey: “I have no computer experience whatsoever.” Throughout the quarter, I kept a sharp eye on Lance N., considering him the “blank slate” who could verify or disprove the ease of learning how to use computers to communicate.

For the first two weeks of the quarter, this class used the time in the computer lab to research for their essays. For the class’s first computer lab session with the newsgroup in operation, I posted the following message on the newsgroup:

You made it! Welcome to this class’ newsgroup. As I wrote on the syllabus, consider this open ground for discussion, to exchange ideas. If you have any questions, feel free to ask.

Also, share any information you discover during this quarter’s search for knowledge through the newsgroup. You can post messages to me or to the newsgroup at any time from any computer on campus.

I also posted a second message to the class with their first computer-borne assignment, and a follow-up survey. I decided to ask the students to fill out the follow-up survey after reading over the response to my first-day-of-class survey and realizing that I’d neglected to ask a key important question:

First, I’d like you all to enter your group research project proposal into the newsgroup. If you need them, I have with me the proposals already turned in. [As stated in my syllabus for this course, I assigned my students to participate in a group research project. During the early weeks in the quarter, I allowed the students class time to form their groups and choose their essay topics.]

Then I'd like you to read each other's proposals and comment on them, critique them, what was called peer review in English 550. I believe this class has formed about half a dozen groups, so I'd like to see half a dozen or so comments by each student by the end of the hour.

Finally, please answer a few questions for my survey: Were you surprised that this English class meets in a computer lab twice a week? Do you believe computers serve a useful function in composition classes? Are computers valuable research tools? Has your group so far been successful in finding information for your research project via computer? In general, what effects do you believe computers are having on the realm of communication? Are computers improving communications? Give me the bad news – what problems do you see computers causing in communications? In your education?

As I read their responses, I discovered a general acceptance of the use of computers in human communications. Of the nine students in the study group that responded to the survey, only one student responded that he was surprised to find the class was scheduled to meet twice weekly in a computer lab, but he thought the lab sessions were appropriate. "I am surprised to see computers play a major role in an English class," Jeremy S. explained, "but I think with the growing technology, it is only fitting. I believe they serve a useful function in that they allow students to feel comfortable using technology and use computers as a learning resource." Dave Q. replied: "I think that computers are a wonderful research tool and they do enhance communication. I know that most of our research is coming from the computer. There is not much of a downside to using the computer for research. The only one I can think of is the speed of the modem." The student who professed no experience with computers, Lance N., replied that he wasn't surprised the class met twice weekly in a computer lab, but added: "I was worried at first when I found out that we would be meeting in a computer lab. Although now I'm glad we've been meeting in the computer lab. I think I'm getting better at this."

Furthermore, every student who responded to the survey believed the computer lab sessions would prove valuable in helping them both write and research their essays. They agreed unanimously that their groups formed for the group essay assignment had already benefited from the use of computers. Marc P. responded; "Computers are extremely important and useful in English and composition classes . . . for either research or writing. For example, almost all of the research done for my group was done with the Web, and the paper [the group research proposal] that was handed in was also written on a computer." Wes H. said: "I believe that computers are a very useful tool in

the research process. It is possible to find information on any topic imaginable with just the click of a mouse. . . . [C]omputers are reliable and simple to use . . .”

The students not only said, in response to my survey, that computers would help them write their essays, but expressed confidence that computers will improve the world’s communications in general. For instance, Marc P. said: “Computers have also improved how people communicate. . . . [Computers] have opened a new world to many people throughout the world.” Jeremy S. responded: “Communication is ever-changing because of the computer. It allows us to speak freely with the world and become more active with more people faster. I believe computers are improving communications between people . . . Computers are greatly improving communication and I cannot see a bad side to this new trend.” Jody W. said: “I feel that computers have significantly boosted communication in the U.S. You can talk to anyone you want to just about by clicking on a little icon button.” Greg H. said: “I think computers are very important to the world, education wise, business wise, and even leisure wise. I also think [that] in the future everyone is going to have to be able to use computers, and not be afraid of them.”

For the next two weeks, I kept a sharp eye on the class during computer lab sessions. When anyone seemed to be encountering difficulty, I quietly offered help. I made sure I stopped by Lance N.’s station in the computer lab periodically, since he’d told me he had no computer experience prior to my class, and I encouraged students to help feel free to ask me for assistance whenever they needed it, and encouraged them to help each other. After about two weeks, on Feb. 2, when I was certain everyone in the class was competent on the computers, I posted the following message to the class on the newsgroup: “A couple of class announcements: It seems everyone is least competent in cyberspace, or at least on the way towards competency. Starting today, each one of you is required to post a minimum of three messages on the newsgroup on each day we meet in the lab.”

I held student conferences on Feb. 7-10, and took advantage of the opportunity to query each student about their perceptions of the value of the computer newsgroup. I asked each student if he or she believed feedback from his or her fellow students is valuable. I found almost universal approval, if not downright enthusiasm, for the newsgroup. Dave Q. and Jim F. both said newsgroup discussions have helped them develop their essay projects, and Wes H. remarked: “Yeah, a lot of students give us [his group for the group project] good ideas . . . good suggestions.” Jody W. was particularly enthusiastic about newsgroup: “Some people pose questions [on the newsgroup] that really make you think.” Discussions aren’t impersonal on the newsgroup, she insisted, because questions can be addressed directly to people, without worrying about the way she was dressed or the look on their

face. The computer newsgroup also made it easier to locate classmates, Jody added: "If I had a question for any particular person, I can get right to them, instead of trying to track them down [outside the class]."

Danielle H. said she was receiving good reader feedback from her classmates; their remarks are pointing her toward questions that need answered. Danielle also said the Web makes research "a lot easier . . . it seems too easy." She's more accustomed to spending hours and hours in the library pouring over books and magazines, and sitting in front of a computer and dialing up Web sites "seems like cheating." Greg H. was surprised at the class' acceptance of the newsgroup: "I didn't think at first people would say much" on the newsgroup. But he quickly found a lot of discussion; he found that people would react to each other's statements, that "interesting ideas" shot back and forth. The newsgroup provides a good venue for student interaction, he acknowledged, especially since most of the students have little contact with each other outside of the class. College students don't often encounter their classmates outside of class, Greg H. pointed out, explaining that in high school, you've known people in the class for years and many of them are your neighbors. Without the hometown/neighborhood contact, the newsgroup provides the public venue for the exchange of ideas. Greg H. said the newsgroup sessions help him write his essays because they allow a student "to know what your readers are thinking." Therefore, a writer can address the audience and the issue more clearly.

Jeremy S. was also quite enthusiastic about the newsgroup. He is a native of Houston, Texas, and therefore had no local community to draw upon for feedback, no group of friends or family he could with whom he could discuss his ideas off before turning in his essays. The newsgroup, he said, "actually allows students to take part" in drafting essays by "discussing the issues." Some students, he pointed out, are too shy to take part in face-to-face discussion, but in the newsgroup "they can hide behind their computer" and communicate their ideas. But through the newsgroup, Jeremy S. added, "I've gotten some individual views" that were helpful. Brent B. was involved in a group project concerning computer communication, but he said he has "mixed emotions" about the class newsgroup. He likes the fact that "you can put all the [class] input together. It's all there." He said he'd received helpful "hints and clues" from his classmates regarding his group and individual projects. Brent also said that remarks from classmates "help me think of things that I wouldn't have thought of on my own."

In conferences, I ran across a benefit of newsgroup discussions that hadn't occurred to me. Jody W. told me it's easier for women to discuss questions with men on the newsgroup because they strictly consider what she's saying. In discussion outside of class in person, she told me, men usually gang up on women and toss aside women's

comments, concentrate on asking for a date, or simply ogle women. “I just give up” arguing with men in person because they reject any good points women make in an argument and will justify any statements they make in the argument, no matter how ridiculous, Jody told me, adding that college-age men “are all really into that macho shit.” After I met with Jody, I cornered Danielle – the only other woman in the class – and asked her if she felt the same way. Clearly, Danielle agreed: “They [men] say more to me on the newsgroup” than they do in person. She also agreed the newsgroup is more helpful than face-to-face discussions with guys because when discussing things via computer they take the girls’ thoughts more seriously.

One complaint I received in conferences from a number of students was that they received too many nice messages via the newsgroup, messages that said something of the nature of “good job!” but offered no critical comments. These postings were worthless, the students agreed. As a result, I posted the following message on the newsgroup for the next lab session:

A new rule: No nice comments about each other’s essays. I don’t want you to be downright nasty, but you should try to pick apart your classmates’ essay, find flaws, and point out problems. You can also point out possible solutions to those weaknesses. By doing so, you’ll be helping your classmates. After all, better nasty remarks should come from a student than from me – in my case, the “nasty remark” might become a grade.

You may wonder why I feel compelled to post this new rule. The reason is the consistency of the remarks I heard from you during conferences last week. Several students said that remarks such as, “good idea,” “you’re going in the right direction,” et al, simply don’t help. Several students called such laudatory remarks “waste of time” and “no help at all.” A remark that simply praises fails to spur the author’s thoughts, point him/her in a promising direction or simply help the author realize what’s wrong. So point out problems, nit-pick, and blast away.

I allowed students to choose their own topics for their second essay of the quarter, and asked them to post questions regarding their individual projects on the newsgroup for the class to answer. I found Dave Q.’s choice of a topic particularly interesting and potentially helpful for my own project because it prompted a wide-ranging discussion of the topic of my study. Dave Q. posted the following question to the class newsgroup: “Here’s a question I have for the class. My topic for my individual project is how computers make our lives ‘easier.’ How do they make your life easier, or do they make your life harder?” From the beginning, I had I encouraged the class to

exchange comments about the essays via the newsgroup, and was gratified to see that Dave Q.'s query prompted an interchange. Furthermore, the extensive discussion that resulted – an online argument – provided me with an example of how newsgroup discussion can host discussion that helps students explore a topic. The first student to respond to Dave Q. was Mark P., who said: “This paper sounds like it may be interesting, but I don’t think that the use of the word ‘dominate’ is necessary. Computers did not intrude on our happy little lives and force us to use them; it was our choice to take advantage of what they had to offer. Although it is hard to get along these days without a computer, it is still possible.” Jeff T. joined the discussion, saying: “Computers make my life easier in many different ways. In almost anything that I do, a computer is needed or used in one way or another. When I go to school I use computers in almost all of my classes, and when I go to work, they are used all the time. Computers definitely make my life much easier because of all the time they save me.” Mark P. responded: “That is one heck of a general question, there are so many different areas that you could cover with that topic you could probably write 20-volume encyclopedia. Computers can make your life easier by writing a paper on them, research, to even cooking food, and keeping you entertained. There is obviously too much to cover, what topic are you going to take on this issue? Is it going to be with class work or at home or at work?” A mild note of dissent came from Jim F., who wrote, “Computers do make our life easier. But they are not essential to life. For years we went about our lives just fine without them and survived.” In response, Dave Q. clarified the topic of his essay: “No, I am not against computers. I will talk about how they are used in the business world (that will be my main focus) and how they are taking over the business world.” In response, Jody W. said: “I think that computers help our lives amazingly. They have just about everything you need on them. I am not fortunate enough to have a computer at home, so I use the school computers all the time. I feel like I am losing out by not having one at home!!!” Dave Q. replied to the class, via the newsgroup: “Thanks to all who gave the great input, I’m glad to know that computers are considered something that you guys feel very comfortable with.”

On Feb. 2, Dave Q. posted another question to the class that concerned the topic of my study: “I am concerned with another question about the computer. Do you think that computer knowledge will be necessary to get a job when we graduate college?” Jeremy S. replied: “I think computers have changed the way we perceive life and the way we work. I feel it is important to be computer literate, because those people who are will get a better job than those who aren’t. It is necessary to understand computers in the work field just to keep up and be a competitive business.” Dave Q. replied to Jeremy S., via the newsgroup: “I agree with you. The business world is becoming

more reliant on computers every day.” Bill B. said: “Being a future computer programmer, I know first-hand that it will be necessary to have computer knowledge when you graduate from college to get a job. Think about how many jobs have computers involved, nearly all of them. Besides, it wouldn’t hurt to have some experience in the field.” Jay D. replied: “I think that no matter what that the use of computers will help you to get a job no matter what field that you decide to enter.” Jeff T. said: “I agree with that with computer knowledge is very important because the future is in computers. I feel that without basic computer background you will definitely be left behind. Since computers are such a huge part of everyone’s life, it is necessary to have a good basis to get ahead.” Greg H. said he believed that the answer to Dave Q.’s question was obvious: “Of course, computers are going to be needed for everyone in any civilized society anywhere in the world. It is only a matter of time. So focus on something else, I’m sick of hearing about this. This question is like the free-bee test question . . . everyone knows the answer.”

However, the class as a whole wasn’t finished discussing the computer’s effect on communication. Jody W. started another interesting interchange by writing to the newsgroup: “By the time we graduate, I feel that we will most definitely need computer knowledge to get a job because they are such a great tool. They are involved with everything and I think that students in the future will be required to take some types of computer courses.” Wes Himes replied: “Yes, I do believe that it will be necessary to have computer knowledge to get a job when we graduate from college. Look at us right now, we are in college and talking to each other through computers.”

On the class’s last day in the computer lab, in March 2000 – at the end of the winter 2000 quarter – the thirteenth newsgroup session, I posted a follow-up survey on the class newsgroup and asked the students to respond:

1. After meeting in a computer twice a week during winter quarter, do you feel comfortable working at the computer? Has this class helped you hone your computer skills?
2. Are you still surprised that this English class met in a computer lab twice a week?
3. Did research via the World Wide Web help you write your essays for this class?
4. In general, what effects do you believe computers are having on the realm of communication? Are computers improving communications
5. Give me the bad news – what problems did our computer lab sessions cause in writing your essays, and in this course in general?
6. Do you have any other comments you’d like to make about the use of computers in writing essays?

Eleven of the 15 students in my study group attended class the day of the last newsgroup. All 11 said they were computer-competent before the class started. (Lance N., the class computer rookie, was absent on the day I conducted the follow-up survey), and 100% said they were computer-competent by the end of the quarter. Then again, 83.3% (10) said they were computer competent before the class started. All 11 agreed that the Internet provided valuable resources for their essays and that computers are improving the realm of communications in general, they would need to verify the information they received by computer-borne research. Only 9% of the study group (1), maintained he was still surprised that the class met twice weekly in a computer lab, while all 100% agreed that the Internet provided valuable resources for their essays and that computers are improving the realm of communications in general. Only 18.2% of the students (2) cited problems with the computer lab setting.

In response to my questions, students say they were convinced that a computer newsgroup aided their composition process because it allowed for immediate audience feedback. Greg H. told me that the newsgroup sessions help him write his essays because they allow a student “to know what your readers are thinking.” Jeremy S. was quite enthusiastic about the newsgroup; the newsgroup, he said, “actually allows students to take part” in drafting essays by “discussing the issues.” Some students, Jeremy S. pointed out, are too shy to take part in face-to-face discussion, but in the newsgroup “they can hide behind their computer” and communicate their ideas. “I’ve gotten some individual views” via the newsgroup that helped him improve his essay, Jeremy S. added.

Several students said that they found computer lab sessions helpful in writing their essay. Wes H. replied: “The use of computers has made the process of writing and essay much more simple and quick. . . . The actual writing of the paper is easier because of the speed of the computer and being able to spellcheck and other forms of revision for the essay.” Marc P. responded: “English and computers are almost complementary to each other. Each plays an important role in how we approach and use English. [C]omputers are a necessary part of this class and should remain that way.” Jay D. said he wasn’t surprised the class met in a computer lab, “because I think that all English classes should.” Danielle H. said; “English [composition class] is all about writing and these days everything is typed on the computer.” Jeff T. said he thought the computer newsgroup was valuable; “The computer helps the class communicate a great deal. It forces us to look and talk about things we would not normally talk about.”

Other students said that spending two class sessions per week in the computer lab helped them improve their abilities to operate the machines that are an increasingly important factor in human communications. Jay D.

said: “After working with computers more often due to this class I am more comfortable and I believe this class helped me to be that way.” Jim F. replied: “I think since so much of the future being based so much on computers that it would be stupid if we didn’t have at least one class a week in the lab.” Others commended the class sessions in the computer lab for another reason – the computer lab sessions helped them develop their research skills. Jeremy S. said: “Doing my research via the World Wide Web has helped me tremendously.” Jody W. remarked: “Research on the World Wide Web really helped in writing my papers. There was a great deal of information for both my topics on the Web.” A strong dissenting note came from Greg H., who replied that class time spent in the computer lab “basically, it was a waste of time for the most part . . . computer labs are useless in the teaching of English. . . . The WWW helped a little in the research . . . I still prefer old school magazine articles and books though. . . . We lost valuable time actually writing these papers. I’m sick of computers. I hope they find some other cool gadget pretty soon so we can throw these damned things away.”

After the class ended, I numerically analyzed the use my class had made of the newsgroup during the quarter. A few things surprised me. First, before class began I had believed the class use of the newsgroup would continue to grow, as they became increasingly familiar with using the newsgroup. That didn’t happen. Class use of the newsgroup grew and peaked early, then leveled off. To evaluate the class use of the newsgroup, I charted the number of responses:

- Jan. 19 – 16 responses
- Jan 24 – 24 responses
- Jan. 26 – 29 responses
- Jan. 31 – 69 responses
- Feb. 2 – 62 responses
- Feb. 14 – 29 responses (after a week off for student-teacher conferences)
- Feb. 16 – 31 responses
- Feb. 21 – 39 responses
- Feb. 23 – 24 responses
- Feb. 28 – 27 responses
- March 1 – 29 responses

- March 6 – 27 responses
- March 8 – 40 responses

I also logged the number of responses made by each student. The far-and-away leader was Dave Q., who logged 63 responses in 13 newsgroup sessions, an average of almost five responses per newsgroup sessions. Second place went to Jeff T. with 48 responses (3.7 per newsgroup session) and third place went to Jody W. (3.15 responses per newsgroup session). I found it interesting that the three budding computer experts in the class (Marc P., Jeremy S., and Bill B.) were not among the class leaders in frequency of newsgroup. Dave Q. and Jeff T. were listed as business majors, while Jody W. was studying exercise science.

Furthermore, the busiest single days of individual newsgroup participation were recorded by two other students not majoring in computer science – Jay D. (an engineering major) posted 11 messages on Jan. 31, while Jim F. (an accounting major) posted 10 messages on Jan. 31. Jan. 31 was the class's fourth newsgroup session, and the busiest, with 69 messages posted. Dave Q. posted nine messages in one session twice, on Feb. 2 and Feb. 21. The fact that students not majoring in computer science posted the most messages to the newsgroup confirmed my conviction – and personal experience – that students needed no computer training in order to learn how to use computers in an English class.

But how active in the newsgroup were the future computer professionals? I looked at the activities of our computer experts-to-be: Mark P. posted 36 messages to the newsgroup during the quarter (the sixth-highest total), and Jeremy S. posted 32 messages (the seventh-highest), while Bill B. posted only eight messages (the second-lowest total). They each recorded their busiest day on the newsgroup before the quarter was half finished. Mark P. posted eight messages to the newsgroup on Jan. 31; Jeremy S. posted seven messages on Feb. 2 and six on Jan. 31. Bill B. posted six messages on the newsgroup on Feb. 2 – then didn't post another message for the rest of the quarter, which included seven class computer lab sessions. The student who posted the fewest messages on the newsgroup was Dave L., who posted only seven messages on the newsgroup during the quarter, including three during the first newsgroup session on Jan. 19, and posted only a single message after Jan. 31. Throughout the quarter, I had kept an eye on the class to make sure they weren't playing games, reading newspapers, viewing porn sites or spending time on other useless activities. I could see that they were busily working at the computers during our lab sessions, but now I wondered, what were they doing?

I found an explanation in class members' response to my last-day-of-class survey. Danielle H. explained: "I figured that we would be in here so we could search the Web for information for our essays." Danielle H.'s total of newsgroup postings was the third lowest in the class; nine postings (however, she contracted mononucleosis at mid-quarter and was absent from several newsgroup sessions). Danielle H. added that my in-class queries posted to the newsgroup simply wasted time: "I would have rather been working on my paper or looking for information for my paper." Danielle H. wasn't the only student in the class who devoted class lab time to researching their papers. Wes H. wrote: "The research that I did over the Web was very useful . . . It really cuts down on the time that I have to spend in the library researching and reading through all kinds of books." David Q. explained: "It's a lot easier to use the Web than the library because all the information is right there" – that is, it could be tracked down during in the computer lab class sessions.

The question of what students had occupied my students' time during their computer lab time continued to haunt me. I searched for an answer to that question as I conducted a series of interviews with students after the class sessions had ended. I soon discovered that I'd asked a little too much of my students. Before each class, I posted a message that asked them questions and/or gave them instructions on activities for the class. Of course, the standard instructions also required students to post three messages of their own. Students told me that reading messages and posting responses devoured most of the class lab time, and they spent the rest of the time researching for their essays on the Web.

Jeff T. told me he'd spent probably 35 of the 50 minutes for each class reading my postings on the newsgroup, the responses his classmates' posted and typing his own postings. Jeff T. said, "I read all the messages, and probably could've responded to every one, but I'd pick and choose which ones I wanted to reply to." He spent remaining 15 minutes or so researching via the Internet for his essays. Jeremy S. told me he had spent most of the class lab periods searching the Internet for information he needed for his essays. Jody W. said she exchanged messages with her classmates through the newsgroup, "but when no messages were coming in, I'd do research."

Jeff T., Jeremy S., and a third student, Greg H., agreed that they received valuable criticism about their essays through the newsgroup. I required students to post their essay proposals, rough drafts and final drafts of their essays on the newsgroup. I encouraged them to criticize each other's writing – during a few class periods, I instructed them to listen while I took attendance, take note of the name of the student I called out after their own, and criticize that person's writing on the newsgroup. Jeremy S. said that critiques from his classmates "really helped"

him write his two essays, and explained, "In a sense, you can hide behind our computer. I got honest criticism not so much of this namby-pamby, nicey-nice stuff." Jeff T. said that criticizing essays via the computer newsgroup "lets you speak your mind." Greg H. also explained he received a significant amount of criticism concerning his essays through the newsgroup, saying, "It's easier to type out critical remarks on your computer instead of telling someone face-to-face that their paper stinks." After reading Greg H's statements in his newsgroup posting during the last lab session, I was surprised at his enthusiasm for the newsgroup.

Observations

Clearly, the students in this class – to paraphrase Faigley – learned how to drink from the World Wide Web's fire hose. Again, requiring students to tinker in the computer lab yielded tangible results, as became evident to me when I read their essays.

On the other hand, I again found that a significant number of students simply don't trust computer-aided communications. While nearly all of the students reported in my survey that they had used computers before they began their projects for my class, almost half of the students (40%) said they needed to confirm information they received by computer-borne research through books. When I compiled that information from my survey, I remembered Baron's account of early distrust of written documents: "[W]hen writing was introduced as a means of recording land transfer in 11th-century England, it was initially perceived (and often rightly so) as a nasty Norman trick for stealing Saxon land" (21).

While I was cheered to see an improvement in students' attitudes, I believe their attitudes toward computer-aided communications still must grow more positive to allow them to cope with the world they will enter when they leave campus. But I believe my composition class was a strong step in that direction.

Conclusions

After teaching four composition classes that spent half their time in computer labs, I felt I succeeded in improving students' attitudes toward computer-aided communications. Within a month of the beginning of each class, even the students with the least experience using computers had grown accustomed to using the computers for in-class writing, discussion and research. Furthermore, most of them clearly realized they will need to communicate through computers after they graduate. A few students continued to complain about computer communications even in the final days of class, but while they didn't like computers, they learned how to make use of them for my class. After using computers at least twice a week during the academic term, they certainly were prepared to use computers

after they leave college. The more success they encountered in their use of computers, the more positive their attitudes became.

By the last day of each class that I taught, even the students with the least computer experience seemed competent and comfortable in both researching and writing by computer. I noticed few differences in collective attitudes of each class, which is what I expected due to the relatively short time span of the study. In a few cases, the students who were least computer literate at the beginning of the class by the end of the academic term expressed the most satisfaction in learning to compose on the computer. For instance, during one of the class's last computer lab sessions, I asked Lance N. in my winter 2000 English 551 class – who said on the first day of class that he'd never used a computer – if he was comfortable with composing on computers. Lance N.'s answer was simple: he smiled broadly and enthusiastically replied, "These things are great!"

The development of communications is a never-ending process. As each new method of communications – the written word, the printing press, the telephone, etc. – has gained popularity, people have been forced to adjust their attitudes concerning communications. Society is now in transition in its use of, and attitude toward, computer-aided communications. Therefore, college composition instructors can't yet expect all of their students to be computer literate when they first walk into a CAI classroom. As I observed in my own classrooms, a growing proportion of students have already become computer literate before they enroll in college, and are eager for classes that make significant use of the computer-aided communications. In fact, when puzzled about computer functions, instructors can often find the answers by asking students. However, college composition instructors can also expect to find that a portion of the students in each class retain an "anti-computer" attitude similar to the resistance each new technology has encountered. It is unlikely that this "anti-computer" sentiment will completely die out completely. However, CAI classrooms will gain acceptance as class rosters include an increasing number of students who were exposed to computer communications from the early days of cognition and simply take computer communications for granted. Personally, I compare the utter disdain for CAI that I found in a small number of the 88 students in the student focus group for this thesis held attitudes similar to my paternal grandmother's attitude toward the telephone.

Until the day she died at age 92 ten years ago, my Grandma Flick seemed uncomfortable when talking on the telephone. In my telephone conversations with her, she didn't chat, but discussed utilitarian matters such as times, dates and places for family gatherings, giving or asking directions. Grandma Flick engaged in little chitchat or

gossip in her local telephone calls, in conversations with people she frequently saw in the flesh. Curious about her uneasiness with the telephone, I asked her why she didn't like to talk on the phone. Grandma Flick told me that as far as she was concerned, the telephone was a modern innovation she still needed to get used to. After all, she said, she didn't grow up with the telephone. Until she was a teenager, her family didn't telephone have a telephone in the home. To my grandmother, talking on the telephone never became "normal," a perception that seems odd. After all, she frequently spoke on the phone with her children – my aunts and uncles – who became residents of Alabama, Missouri and California, and her older sister – my Great-Aunt Martha – who lived in Seattle. Grandma Flick's stated discomfort with the telephone was contradicted by the frequency of her long-distance conversations. Jeff F. in my fall 1999 Composition I class demonstrated a similar contradiction – he stated in an early draft of his essay that computers are "evil" for unstated reasons, yet he became the most frequent contribution to that class's newsgroup. While Jeff F. never seemed thrilled with my requirement that he use computers during our twice-weekly computer lab sessions, he obviously was not intimidated by computers and was more than willing to use them in a classroom setting. But even though Jeff F. continued to gripe about computers until the end of our academic term together, his frequent use of the computer shows that I attained my goal of improving his attitude toward the use of computers. Both Grandma Flick and Jeff F. demonstrate that people sometimes adopt attitudes full of contradictions to inventions and changes they encounter; while they continue to voice criticism of new, unfamiliar devices and ways of doing things, they don't hesitate to enjoy the advantages offered by innovations. To paraphrase a line from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "The lady [and the student] dost protest too much, methinks."

After graduation, the students who don't already perceive the growing predominance of computer communications will inevitably discover they need to be computer competent. Some of my students had already encountered on-the-job computer usage, and their job-related experiences that support this conclusion. For instance, Chris G. in my spring 1999 class was employed part-time by a local law enforcement agency and one day told the class how he communicated on the job with law enforcement agencies around the country. Chris P. in my winter 1999 class worked in a print shop and used computers almost every day to set up print jobs. Brian S. in my fall 1999 class posted a message explaining how he used "e-mail to send AutoCAD drawings to [his] employer." Those three students weren't alone in explaining in through messages posted to the class newsgroup and in class discussions how valuable computers have become in many career fields. Also, several students in my classes had already declared academic majors in fields that specialize in computerization, including computer science. These students may have a

leg up on their classmates regarding modern methods of communications, but they're not the only students from my classes who will need to use computers after graduation. Whether they like it or not, virtually all of today's college students must grow accustomed to working on computers. "The computer has indeed changed the ways some of us do things with words, and the rapid changes in technological development suggest that it will continue to do so in ways we cannot yet imagine. . . . Computer communications are not going to go away" (Baron, 31-32). Computer communication is already very popular and growing increasingly popular, as shown by the information provided by "World Wide Web User Statistics" cited in Chapter 1 of this thesis (14-15). While opponents to computer communications – such as the Luddites – aren't likely to completely fade into oblivion anytime soon, if ever, the advantages offered by computer communication guarantee that the popularity of computer communications will continue to grow. After all, resistance to new technologies, to change, has occurred repeatedly throughout history. While "the computer is simply the latest in a long line of writing technologies. . . . [O]ther literacy technologies, including writing itself, were initially met with suspicion as well as enthusiasm" (Baron, 17). Over time, even the most vocal critics of new communication technologies are won over. In fact, "were Thoreau alive today he would not be writing with a pencil. . . . He had better business sense than that. More likely, he would be keyboarding his complaints about the information superhighway on a personal computer that he assembled from spare parts in his garage" (Baron, 32-33).

Looking back, flaws in my research become obvious. I now realize that I should have stored all student postings to the newsgroup from the first day each class met in a computer lab. Unfortunately, my research plans did not become clear to me until halfway through the second composition class I taught. Also unfortunately, when I began teaching I was unaware that class newsgroups implemented through the Telnet system at Youngstown State University do not remain intact permanently. Telnet newsgroups at the YSU are designed to preserve data only during the course of an academic term. After the term is concluded, the newsgroup begins to deteriorate, that is, allow postings to fade away in cyberspace. Therefore, when I clarified my thesis project, I was unable to backtrack and preserve newsgroup contributions from the first two classes; those postings had already been lost. During my third class, in fall 1999, I established a routine that I should have established during my first Composition class: After each newsgroup session in the computer lab, I copied all of the day's newsgroup postings onto a Microsoft Word document that I saved on 3½-inch hard disc. The result is much more comprehensive data, as can be seen in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis. If I conduct a similar study in the future, I will establish a similar routine for

permanently preserving all newsgroup postings beginning with the class's very first computer lab session. I urge anyone studying computer newsgroups to do the same.

While the role of computer communications is still evolving, one thing is clear: To prepare students to face the culture, the society, the area of employment they plan to enter after they earn their diploma – their future – students must learn how to make use of the computer in their communications. A student's attitude toward the computer is a key to learning how to use computers to communicate. I found that students' attitudes toward computer communications grew more positive when they successfully took part in classroom newsgroup sessions and other computer-related activities. By teaching them the value of the computer in composing written work, I helped the students develop a positive attitude toward computer communications. This positive attitude, I knew, would prepare them for the world they will enter after they leave college.

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Youngstown State University. Course Description: English 551. English Department handout.

Appendix A

Youngstown State University

English 550

Jim Flick, instructor

Office: DeBartolo Hall 216

Office phone: 740-3425

Office hours: 2-4 p.m. Mon. & Wed.

E-mail: jdflick@cc.ysu.edu

Class hours: 11-noon Monday-Thursday, DeBartolo Hall

REQUIRED TEXTS

A Writer's Reference by Diane Hacker, 3rd or 4th edition
Language Awareness

DESCRIPTION

In English 550, students will learn to read and think critically and analytically, and how to organize thoughts and express them in the written word. Students will write three essays of 750-1,000 words, plus an outline of one essay. The essays will be responses to assigned readings in *A Writer's Reference*. Students will share essays, and reactions to both the readings and to other students' writings, and ideas about assigned readings, in a computer news group. Students will be encouraged to research and communicate through the Internet. Unix accounts for the news group have been assigned for each student who doesn't already have an account; log-on Ids and e-mail addresses will be assigned the first day of class if students don't have them already.

Class discussions and essays will be based on *Language Awareness*. The class will meet in one-hour sessions 11 a.m.- noon each Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Mondays and Tuesdays are computer lab days, but on Wednesdays and Thursdays you will be forced to listen to the instructor and participate in group discussions. Writing requirements will include three essays. You will also participate in a "newsgroup" in the computer lab, where you will be required to post responses to assigned readings; as well as reading classmates' entries and posting responses on the news group to classmates' entries.

These activities will prepare you not only for the next class in the sequence, but also other classes that require reading, writing and computer skills, as well as for a place in the job market. These days, the job market requires an ever-increasing amount of computer competency.

This syllabus is subject to change, small ones anyway, but the instructor will always give students plenty of warning about any changes.

Attendance and due dates

Students are expected to attend every class and hand in all work on time. Your grade for "newsgroup participation" and "participation in group activities" depends, obviously, on your participation; at any rate, note that you are required to participate.

You may be absent from class three times for any reason, no questions asked, no penalty. After that, if you are absent for any reason, your points for "newsgroup participation" or "participation in group activities" will drop by five points for every additional absence. If you are absent 11 times (more than 25% of the class meetings) for any reason, you will receive a grade of NC for the class, no matter what your point total.

When students attend class, I will expect all students to behave as responsible citizens of the classroom. Students should complete all the work assigned during class diligently and with full attention, and should refrain from anti-social or disruptive behavior such as sleeping, reading the newspaper, doing homework, surfing Websites unrelated to class work, playing computer games and so forth.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means presenting the work of others as you own work, including copying materials from a published text, including an on-line text, without giving proper credit; allowing others to write or rewrite your assignments; copying the work of other students and passing it off as you own; and so forth. Plagiarism is a serious offense and could ruin your college career. No matter how desperate you are, don't do it. You must learn to give credit where credit is due and not steal the work of others.

Getting Help

YSU offers good, free, easily accessible help in writing at the Writing Center in Coffelt Hall. Help in reading is offered, again free of charge, in the Reading and Student Skills Lab in the new Education Building on Lincoln Avenue; and there is also the excellent Center for Student Progress in Kilcawley Center, which houses the First-Year Student Center, Tutoring Center and other agencies.

Useful Web Sites

- "A Student's Guide to Writing at YSU" <http://enterprise.cis.yzu.edu/~writing/Guide.htm>
- DeBartolo Labs <http://cis.yzu.edu/~dattardo/labs/>
- OhioLINK <http://karn.ohiolink.edu/~sg-yzu/>
- Maag Library <http://www.cis.yzu.edu/~library/>

Student Conferences

I will hold student conferences on request, or as I see they are needed, and hold brief student conferences during newsgroup sessions. I will observe office hours strictly, and meet with students privately upon request.

Class Schedule

Week 1 Computer introduction: reading -- "The Language of Cyberspace," *Language Awareness*, chapter 10

- Jan. 4* Hand out syllabus; assign first essay, which will include a requirement to submit and an outline; and discuss reading assignments – each chapter must be completed by the Wednesday of the week for which it is assigned on the syllabus. Explain e-mail accounts (including my address) and the operation of a class newsgroup.
- Jan. 5* First newsgroup session; during each newsgroup, each student must post at least two messages (usually the assignment, plus a response to another student's posting). Postings should concern about the readings; on this first day, they may post messages about their view of the future effect of computers on communications.
- Jan. 6* Changes in communications created by computer, break them into small group discussion.
- Jan. 7* Each small group reports to the class, and the entire class discusses the overall effect of computers on modern life. (First essay and the outline are due.)

Week 2 Reading -- "Discovering Language," *Language Awareness*, chapter 1

- Jan. 11* Students post their essays on the news group and exchange comments.
- Jan. 12* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 10. (Return essays and outlines.)
- Jan. 13* The writing process.
- Jan. 14* Writing skills and peer review of essays.

Week 3 Reading -- "Writers on Writing," *Language Awareness*, chapter 2

- Jan. 18 Newsgroup postings, discussing, *Language Awareness*, chapter 1
- Jan. 19 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 1.
- Jan. 20 The history of the English language and how it develops.
- Jan. 21 Small group discussion of words or phrases that have recently entered the English language.

Week 4 Reading -- "Language History and Usage," *Language Awareness* chapter 3

- Jan. 25 Assign second essay; newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 2.
- Jan. 26 More newsgroup discussion of chapter 2.
- Jan. 27 How the English language has changed.
- Jan. 28 How the English language continues to change.

Week 5 Reading -- "Names and Naming," *Language Awareness*, chapter 4

- Feb. 1 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 3; paper 2 due.
- Feb. 2 More newsgroup discussion of chapter 3; possible revisions (as a result of a student-instructor conference) due
- Feb. 3 How things are named.
- Feb. 4 Break the class into small groups and ask them each to create a name.

Week 6 Reading -- "Language Variety," *Language Awareness*, chapter 5

- Feb. 8 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 4.
- Feb. 9 Newsgroup discussion of names each student creates.
- Feb. 10 The problems in education posed by language varieties.
- Feb. 11 Local language varieties.

Week 7 Reading -- "Doublespeak, Euphemism, and Jargon," *Language Awareness*, chapter 6

- Feb. 15 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 5.
- Feb. 16 More newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 5.
- Feb. 17 Doublespeak, euphemism and jargon used today.
- Feb. 18 Local doublespeak, euphemism and jargon.

Week 8 Reading -- "Prejudice, Discrimination, and Language," *Language Awareness*, chapter 7

- Feb. 22 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 6.
- Feb. 23 More news Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 6.
- Feb. 24 Prejudice and discrimination in language; assign final paper project.
- Feb. 25 Small group discussion of language uses that include discriminatory or prejudicial language; after 25 minutes, the class reviews the results in a large group discussion.

Week 9 Reading -- "The Language of Politics," *Language Awareness*, chapter 8

- March 1 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 7.
- March 2 More newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 7.
- March 3 Oral presentation on language in politics, including examples of political double-talk.
- March 4 Small group discussion of politicians' double-talk; after 25 minutes, a large-group discussion.

Week 10 Reading -- "Advertising: The language of persuasion," *Language Awareness*, chapter 9

- March 8 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 8.
- March 9 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, both chapters 8 and 9. Final papers are due.

March 10 How language is used, or misused, in advertising.

March 11 Small group discussions on how advertising uses language. Conferences, as needed, on final papers.

Exam week – I will accept revisions of the final papers until the exam period.

(Dates italicized are sessions scheduled for the computer lab.)

Grading

I will assign grades to assigned papers, of course, but students may seek to raise those grades by rewriting any paper at any time before the end of the quarter. Lower grades will not be assigned as the result of rewriting.

My grade scale will be based on 200 points, with the following projects and aspects of classroom behavior assigned the following maximum number of points:

Paper #1 -- 25 points (including 10 points for the outline)

Paper #2 -- 25 points

Paper #3 -- 25 points

Newsgroup participation -- 50 points

Participation in group activities -- 50 points

Attendance -- 25 points

A: 200-175 points

B: 174-150 points

C: 149-110

NC: below 110 points

Final grades in composition classes at YSU are A, B, C or NC (“no credit.”) If you receive a grade of NC, you may repeat a class only once without special permission.

NOTE: If you do not complete all the assignments listed on the syllabus, you will receive a grade of NC for the class, no matter what your point total. If you are absent from more than 25% of the class sessions, you will receive a grade of NC, no matter what your point total.

Appendix B

Youngstown State University

English 550

Jim Flick, instructor

Office: DeBartolo Hall 216

Office phone: 742-3425

Office hours: 2-4 p.m. Tuesday & Thursday

E-mail: jdflick@cc.ysu.edu

Class hours: 11-noon Monday & Wednesday room B045 DeBartolo Hall (computer lab);

And Thursday & Friday, 3310 Engineering & Science

REQUIRED TEXTS

A Writer's Reference by Diane Hacker, 3rd or 4th edition

Language Awareness: Essays for College Writers, 7th edition, edited by Paul Escholtz, Alfred Rose & Virginia Clark

DESCRIPTION

In English 550, you will learn to read and think critically and analytically, how to organize thoughts and express them in the written word. Students will write three essays of at least 1,000 words, plus an outline of the first essay. Students must write four drafts of each essay. The essays will be responses to assigned readings in *A Writer's Reference*, but writers are also welcome to include other source materials in their essays. Students will share essays, and reactions to both the readings and to other students' writings, and ideas about assigned readings, in a computer newsgroup. Students also must participate in class discussion of assigned readings, of each other's essays and assignments made by the instructor during the class sessions. Unix accounts for the newsgroup have been assigned to each student who doesn't already have an account; log-in IDs and e-mail addresses will be assigned the first day of class if students don't have them already.

Class discussions and essays will be based on *Language Awareness*. The class will meet in one-hour sessions 10 – 11 a.m. each Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Mondays and Wednesdays are computer lab days, but on Thursdays and Fridays you will be forced to listen to the instructor and, more often, participate in group discussions and group projects. In the computer lab, you will be required to participate in a newsgroup by posting responses each Monday morning to the assigned reading. Each Wednesday, students are required to post messages commenting on classmates' essays, and other matters related to the reading, or in response to classmates' responses. I consider newsgroup an unfettered opportunity for students to exchange ideas and critique each other's writing. As long as students remain reasonable in their responses, I see little need to impose restrictions.

These activities will prepare you not only for the next class in the sequence, but also other classes that require reading, writing and computer skills – in other words, all your future classes -- as well as for a place in the job market. These days, the job market requires an ever-increasing amount of communication skills, including computer competency.

Attendance and due dates

Students are expected to attend every class and hand in all work on time. Your grade for "newsgroup participation" and "participation in group activities" depends, obviously, on your participation; at any rate, note that you are required to participate.

You may be absent from class three times for any reason, no questions asked, no penalty. After that, if you are absent for any reason, the points for your final grade will drop by five points for every additional absence. If you are absent 11 times (more than 25% of the class meetings) for any reason, you will receive a grade of NC for the class, no matter what your point total.

When you attend class, I expect you to behave as a responsible citizen of the classroom. You should complete all the work assigned during class diligently and with full attention, and should refrain from anti-social or disruptive behavior such as sleeping, reading the newspaper, doing homework, surfing Websites unrelated to class work, playing computer games and so forth.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means presenting the work of others as you own work, including copying materials from a published text or an on-line text, without giving proper credit; allowing others to write or rewrite your assignments; copying the work of other students and passing it off as you own; and so forth. Plagiarism is a serious offense and could ruin your college career. No matter how desperate you are, don't do it. You must learn to give credit where credit is due and not steal the work of others.

Getting Help

YSU offers good, free, easily accessible help in writing at the Writing Center in Coffelt Hall. Help in reading is offered, again free of charge, in the Reading and Student Skills Lab in the new Education Building on Lincoln Avenue; and there is also the excellent Center for Student Progress in Kilcawley Center, which houses the First-Year Student Center, Tutoring Center and other agencies.

Useful Web Sites

- "A Student's Guide to Writing at YSU" <http://enterprise.cis.ysu.edu/~writing/Guide.htm>
- DeBartolo Labs <http://cis.ysu.edu/~dattardo/labs/>
- OhioLINK <http://karn.ohiolink.edu/~sg-ysu/>
- Maag Library <http://www.cis.ysu.edu/~library/>

Student Conferences

I will hold student conferences on request, or as I see they are needed, and hold brief student conferences during newsgroup sessions. I will observe office hours strictly, and meet with students privately upon request.

Class Schedule

Week 1 Computer introduction: reading -- "The Language of Cyberspace," *Language Awareness*, chapter 10

- Mar. 29* Hand out syllabus; and discuss reading assignments – each chapter must be completed by the Monday of the week for which it is assigned on the syllabus. Explain e-mail accounts (including my address) and the operation of a class newsgroup.
- Mar. 31* First newsgroup session; during each newsgroup, each student must post at least two messages (usually the assignment, plus a response to another student's posting). Postings should concern the readings; on this first day, they may post messages about their view of the future effect of computers on communications. An assignment for the next day's class will be listed on the newsgroup.
- April 1* Each student gives an oral report on the assignment made through the newsgroup; also, a class discussion on the changes computers will cause, and have already caused in human communications
- April 2* Break the class into small groups for discussion of a question assigned by the instructor; if time allows, have groups report to the class.

Week 2 Reading -- "Discovering Language," *Language Awareness*, chapter 1

- April 5* Drafts of essays are posted on the newsgroup for an exchange of comments. Groups begin their presentations as a result of Friday's small group sessions.
- April 7* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 10, and of the first drafts of the first essay.
- April 8* The instructor will assign an in-class writing project and students begin reporting.
- April 9* Students continue to read their in-class writing projects.

Week 3 Reading -- "Writers on Writing," *Language Awareness*, chapter 2

- April 12* Newsgroup postings, discussing, *Language Awareness*, chapter 1
- April 14* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 1.
- April 15* Small group discussion of words or phrases that have recently entered the English language.
- April 16* Small groups continue to report.

Week 4 Reading -- "Language History and Usage," *Language Awareness* chapter 3

- April 19* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 2, and of drafts of essays.
- April 21* More newsgroup discussion of chapter 2 and essays..
- April 22* How the English language has changed.
- April 23* How the English language continues to change.

Week 5 Reading -- "Names and Naming," *Language Awareness*, chapter 4

- April 26* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 3 and of drafts of essays.
- April 28* More newsgroup discussion of chapter 3 and of drafts of essays.
- April 29* Break the class into small groups and ask them to create names.
- April 30* More discussion of how things are named.

Week 6 Reading -- "Language Variety," *Language Awareness*, chapter 5

- May 3* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 4 and of drafts of essays.
- May 5* Newsgroup discussion of names created by students.
- May 6* The problems in education posed by language varieties.
- May 7* Local language varieties.

Week 7 Reading -- "Doublespeak, Euphemism, and Jargon," *Language Awareness*, chapter 6

- May 10* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 5, and of drafts of essays.
- May 12* More newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 5, and of drafts of essays.
- May 13* Doublespeak, euphemism and jargon used today.
- May 14* Local doublespeak, euphemism and jargon.

Week 8 Reading -- "Prejudice, Discrimination, and Language," *Language Awareness*, chapter 7

- May 17* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 6, and of drafts of essays.
- May 19* More news Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 6, and of drafts of essays.
- May 20* Small group discussion of language uses that include discriminatory or prejudicial language.
- May 21* Student groups give reports on discriminatory or prejudicial language usage.

Week 9 Reading -- "The Language of Politics," *Language Awareness*, chapter 8

- May 24* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 7, and of drafts of essays.
- May 26* More newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 7, and of drafts of essays.
- May 27* Small group discussion of politicians' double-talk.
- May 28* Oral presentation on language in politics, including examples of political double-talk.

- Week 10** **Reading -- "Advertising: The language of persuasion," *Language Awareness*, chapter 9**
- May 31* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 8, and of drafts of essays.
- June 2* Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, both chapters 8 and 9.
- June 3 Small group discussions on how advertising uses, or misuses language.
- June 4 Small groups report on the usage of language in advertising. Conferences, as needed, with the instructor regarding final papers.

Exam week – I will accept revisions of the final papers until the exam period.

(Dates italicized are sessions scheduled for the computer lab.)

Grading

I will grade assigned papers, of course, but students may seek to raise those grades by rewriting any paper at any time before the end of the quarter. Lower grades will not be assigned as the result of rewriting.

My grade scale will be based on 200 points, with the following projects and aspects of classroom behavior assigned the following maximum number of points:

Paper #1 -- 50 points (including 10 points for the outline)

Paper #2 -- 50 points

Paper #3 -- 50 points

Class participation (including both participation in the computer newsgroup and in group projects) -- 50 points

A: 200-180 points

B: 179-149 points

C: 159-140 points

NC: below 110 points

Final grades in composition classes at YSU are A, B, C or NC ("no credit.") If you receive a grade of NC, you may repeat a class only once without special permission.

NOTE: If you do not complete all the assignments listed on the syllabus, you will receive a grade of NC for the class, no matter what your point total. If you are absent from more than 25% of the class sessions, you will receive a grade of NC, no matter what your point total. Failure to participate in the newsgroup or group projects will result in the loss of points from your final grade.

Essay assignments

In this class, we will study the English language, focusing largely on its use in written communications. That is, the composition of written communication will be the main focus of this class. We'll also touch on this history of written communication, its development and oddities. To explore these aspects of language, you will write three essays, engage in peer review and revision, as well as in-class writing projects and tossing ideas back and forth through a computer newsgroup during our two yours per week in the computer lab. Students will also take part in preparing group presentations for the class.

Our essay-writing process will include rough drafts and peer reviews of essays, so you'll have plenty of chances to improve your essay before handing it in. Even after I've slapped a grade on an essay, you can improve the essay by rewriting it again.

Essay assignment #1

Write an essay of at least 1,000 words (the equivalent of four typed, double-spaced pages, although I will impose no limit on length.) explaining how computers are now becoming a universal means of communication, in roughly the same fashion as telephones became a part of society a century ago. Other huge shifts have occurred in our society, even in ancient times. In Greece, in the time of Socrates, several centuries after Homer, the dominant oral culture was overtaken by the writing technology. In Europe, another monumental transition occurred in the late 15th century, after Gutenberg invented the printing press in *circa* 1455. In both cases, the long-term effects on society were overwhelming. The same thing is occurring today, with the computer as the culprit.

Discuss in your essay changes computers have forced upon society, and the changes that are yet to come. What effect will the world of cyberspace have upon language? Does the fact that so much information is available via the computer threaten the privacy of individuals? As a means of communication that is worldwide in scope (i.e., the worldwide Web), have computers increased communication between groups of people? Will people without access to computer communication become isolated in our world culture; if so, what effect will be the effect of this isolation? You may address any concerns about computers -- these questions are neither matters that must be discussed nor the only questions that can be discussed in the essay. I'm interested in your thoughts about computers.

The audience for all three essays will be not only myself, but also your classmates. Keep this in mind when writing the essay. Regarding grammar, word choice, punctuation, and other mechanics of writing, refer to Diane Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*.

Each essay should be typed onto a computer disc suitable for use in our computer lab. Be prepared to enter your first draft of the first essay into the class newsgroup by Monday, April 5.

Essay assignment # 2

Throughout the quarter, we will discuss changes in our language. Language has evolved throughout the centuries, and certainly will continue to evolve, to incorporate the changes that have affected our lives and our means of communications. The computer is not the only technical device to change language within your lifetime. Television and radio have spawned new words and new phrases, and modern means of transportation have fostered changes by allowing travel into once-isolated areas and interaction with once-isolated groups of people. Events and inventions once thought impossible are now universally recognized, affecting and influencing people around the world.

In this essay, please address changes that have occurred in our language within your lifetime due to the effects of technology, and predict the changes you foresee in the future. I don't mean just modern techno-babble or predicting the next variety of computer. Is the modern technology of communications creating a culture that is universal around the globe? Or do modern communications create more niches for the survival of individual cultures? Or is modern communications creating a new, 21st-century, global culture? Some experts believe English is on its way to becoming the world's language simply because United States companies dominate the develop of communications technology, particularly computers. Will other languages die out? Or how will language change in order to survive? How does language in general accommodate changing technology? How do people -- the audience of a language -- handle these changes? Do world leaders affect these changes in language due to changes in languages? If so, how do

they wield that influence? You may cite any individual world leaders or groups of people who believe have been particularly influential.

You may address any of your concerns about modern communications – again, my questions are neither matters that must be discussed nor the only questions that can be discussed in the essay. I'm interested in your thoughts about communications and language.

Please prepare a preliminary draft of this essay to hand in on Monday, May 10. In this first draft, concentrate on your thesis and content that supports that thesis. Also pay attention to organization. We'll pay more attention to grammar for a latter draft. Please print out a copy of the draft to hand in to me. However, the rough should be typed onto a computer disc suitable for use in our computer lab. Be prepared to enter the draft into the class newsgroup on Monday, May 10. You will also review each other's rough drafts in a "peer editing" session on the day the essays are due.

Essay assignment #3

Of course, it's not only technology that influences language. For your final essay assignment this quarter, discuss the effects on language of human factors such as prejudice and discrimination, and societal factors such as politics and advertising. Do these human endeavors and foibles create new words and phrases? Or change existing words and phrases? Does language evolve in a way that reflects flaws in human behavior? Can we use language to heal the wounds people inflict on each other? Can language evolve in a way that will help resolve prejudice, discrimination and other interpersonal woes? Or does language simply reflect these problems?

Please prepare a rough draft of this essay to hand in on Monday, May 17. Again, in this first draft concentrate on you thesis, supporting content and organization, and pay attention to organization. We'll pay more attention to grammar for a latter draft. Please print out a copy of each draft to hand in to me, and type your drafts onto a computer disc suitable for use in our computer lab. Drafts should be submitted to our class newsgroup. You will also review each other's rough drafts in "peer editing" sessions during class.

I realize these essay questions are broad-based. That's intentional. There are no "right" answers; these aren't "true and false" questions. These essays may express your personal opinions, but only if you can back up that opinion with examples proving your point or other sources verifying the validity of our view. You may draw upon the essays we've read in *Language Awareness*, or quote from any sources, but you must identify your sources. In other words, no tantrums. Give the reader proof, and tell the reader where you found this proof.

Regarding questions concerning grammar, word choice, punctuation, attributing your sources, and other mechanics of writing, refer to Diane Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*. Remember, the class sessions focus on composition, that is, organizing and expressing your thoughts.

Deadlines

(I realize that the deadlines for some essays overlap, and you will be working on more than one essay at a time. That's intentional.)

- Monday, April 5 – first draft of essay #1 due; peer conference of essay #1.
- Friday, April 9 – first draft of essay #1 returned with Mr. Flick's comments.
- Monday, April 12 – second draft of essay #1 due.
- Friday, April 16 – second draft of essay #1 returned with Mr. Flick's comments.
- Monday, April 19 – third draft of essay #1 due.
- Friday, April 23 – third draft of essay #1 returned with Mr. Flick's comments.
- Monday, April 26 – final draft of essay #1 due.
- Monday, April 19 – first draft of essay #2 due; peer conference of essay #2.
- Friday, April 23 – first draft of essay #2 returned with Mr. Flick's comments.
- Monday, April 26 – second draft of essay #2 due.
- Friday, April 30 – second draft of essay #2 returned with Mr. Flick's comments
- Monday, May 3 – third draft of essay #2 due.
- Friday, May 7 – third draft of essay #2 returned with Mr. Flick's comments.

- Monday, May 10 – final draft of essay #2 due.
- Monday, May 10 – first draft of essay #3 due; peer conference.
- Friday, May 14 – first draft of essay #3 returned with Mr. Flick’s comments.
- Monday, May 17 – second draft of essay #3 due.
- Friday, May 21 – second draft of essay #3 returned with Mr. Flick’s comments.
- Monday, May 24 – third draft of essay #3 due.
- Friday, May 28 – third draft of essay #3 returned with Mr. Flick’s comments.
- Monday, May 31 – final draft of essay #3 due.

Mr. Flick will accept additional revised drafts of essays, to improve your grade, of any essay until the end of the final exam period assigned for this class.

Appendix C

Youngstown State University

English 550

Jim Flick, instructor

Office: DeBartolo Hall 227

Office phone: 742-3642

Office hours: 2-5 p.m. Tuesday & Thursday

E-mail: jdflick@cc.ysu.edu (campus)

jdflick@aol.com (home)

Class hours: 1-1:50 p.m. Monday & Wednesday in 252 DeBartolo Hall and Tuesday & Thursday, B048 (computer lab in the basement of DeBartolo Hall).

REQUIRED TEXTS

Language Awareness: Essays for College Writers, 7th edition, edited by Paul Escholtz, Alfred Rose & Virginia Clark.

Decisions: A Writer's Handbook by Leonard Rosen. Also be aware of *Decisions'* Web site, <<http://www.abacon.com/compsite/index.html>>, which can answer many questions not only about composing essays, but also about grammar, punctuation and other basics concerning language.

"From Pencils to Pixels" by Dr. Dennis Baron (handout).

Also required: A 3½-inch computer disc, for your use in writing essays.

DESCRIPTION

In English 550, you will learn to how to organize your thoughts, and express them critically and analytically in the written word. Students must write three essays of at least 1,000 words, and four drafts of each essay. Assigned readings in *Language Awareness* and the essay "From Pencils to Pixels" may be used as sources, but writers are also welcome to include other source materials in their essays. Students will share essays, and reactions to both the readings and to other students' writings, and ideas about assigned readings, in a computer newsgroup. Students also must participate in class discussion of assigned readings, peer reviews of each other's essays and assignments made by the instructor during the class sessions. Unix accounts for the newsgroup have been assigned to each student who doesn't already have an account, and a class newsgroup already has been established. Don't worry -- we'll work out your entry into cyber-space during our first lab sessions. If you have questions about locating sources on the computer, ask. I'm not a computer science major, but I have extensive experience in writing via computers and researching through the Web.

Class discussions, group projects and essays will be based on topics suggested by *Language Awareness*. The class will meet in one-hour sessions 1– 1:50 p.m. each Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Tuesdays and Thursdays are computer lab days, but on Mondays and Wednesdays you will be forced to listen to the instructor or, more often, participate in group discussions and group projects. In the computer lab, I will post a message that must be read at the beginning of class; it will be an assignment to be pursued during that period. You also will be required to participate in a newsgroup by posting your own comments about the assigned readings, the drafts of your essays on the dates they are due, and to post peer reviews and comments about your classmates' essays. I consider newsgroup an unfettered opportunity for discussion, for students to exchange ideas and critique each other's writing. As long as students remain reasonable and tasteful in their responses, I see no reason to impose restrictions. I expect each student to post at least two messages per lab period, and, after a brief grace period while you're learning your way around the computers, I will record the number of your responses in my grade book. If you fail to post at least two messages per lab session, I will deduct points from your final grade total. Drafts of essays and responses to my assignment will count as newsgroup messages.

During each newsgroup session, I expect students to post a minimum of two messages. If you don't like talking in front of your classmates, here's your chance. Note that I don't pay attention to your

grammar, spelling or punctuation in messages posted to the newsgroup. I'm interested in your thoughts and ideas, and that's what you should be looking at in your classmates' newsgroup postings.

Students will also engage in peer conferences; you will critique each other's essays and post your evaluations on the newsgroup. I encourage students to freely comment on each other's essays. Comments won't affect your classmates' grades, but your input will help make students aware of problems that should be address through rewriting. Furthermore, feel free to discuss the reading assignments through the newsgroup.

I'm not overloading your newsgroup sessions. Rather, I'm giving you a wide range of options to pursue, which should make it easy for you to write two messages in each newsgroup session. As long as you post two messages per each class in the computer lab, you're in good shape. Also, I'll award extra credit points for outstanding participation in the newsgroup. After an introductory period during the first two weeks of the quarter, I will keep track of everyone's newsgroup participation in my grade book. You may find the computer newsgroup uncomfortable at first, but give it time.

I won't lecture on grammar, punctuation and other basic. You've probably had enough lectures on those subjects over the last 12 years. If you have questions about grammar or other language basics, refer to *Decisions*, or to the Web sites listed below. I will be glad to answer questions about grammar, and will point out mistakes and possible solutions in my responses to your drafts. That's what drafts are all about.

These activities will prepare you not only for your next English class, but also for any other classes that require reading and communication skills -- in other words, all your future classes. Learning computer skills also will help prepare you for a place in the job market, no matter what your major. These days, every career requires an ever-increasing amount of computer competency.

Attendance and due dates

Students are expected to attend every class and hand in all work on time. Your grades for "newsgroup participation" and "participation in group activities" depend, obviously, on your participation. At any rate, note that you are required to participate. Don't expect to sit back and remain silent during group presentations and discussions, and don't fail to contribute to the class computer newsgroup. Class sessions will focus on composition, that is, organizing and expressing your thoughts. One way or another, everything we will do in class will relate to composing essays.

You may be absent from class three times for any reason, no questions asked, no penalty. After that, if you are absent for any reason, the points for your final grade will drop by five points for every additional absence. If you are absent 11 times (more than 25% of the class meetings) for any reason, you will receive a grade of NC for the class, no matter what your point total. I also expect you to be on time. If you are consistently tardy, I will count your late arrivals as absences, which could result in lowering your grade. You should complete all the work assigned during class, and should refrain from anti-social or disruptive behavior such as sleeping, reading the newspaper, doing homework, surfing Web sites unrelated to class work, playing computer games and so forth.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means presenting the work of others as your own work, including copying materials from a published text or an on-line text. Plagiarism is a serious offense. No matter how desperate you are, don't do it. You must learn to give credit where credit is due and not steal the work of others.

Getting Help

YSU offers free, easily accessible help in writing at the Writing Center in Coffelt Hall. Help in reading is offered, again free of charge, in the Reading and Student Skills Lab in the new Education Building on Lincoln Avenue; and there is also the excellent Center for Student Progress in Kilcawley Center, which houses the First-Year Student Center, Tutoring Center and other agencies.

Useful Web Sites

- *A Student's Guide to Writing at YSU* <<http://enterprise.cis.ysu.edu/~writing/Guide.htm>>
- DeBartolo Labs <<http://cis.ysu.edu/~dattardo/labs/>>
- OhioLINK <<http://karn.ohiolink.edu/~sg-ysu/>>
- Maag Library <<http://www.cis.ysu.edu/~library/>>

And a few off-campus Web sites you may find useful

- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. <<http://www.cc.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/strunk/>>
- Jack Lynch's *Grammar and Style Notes* <<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/>>
- *Inkspot* <<http://www.inkspot.com>>
- *Online Reference Works* from Carnegie-Mellon <<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/references.html>>

Student Conferences

I will hold student conferences on request, or as I see they are needed, and hold brief student conferences during newsgroup sessions. I will observe office hours strictly, and meet with students privately upon request. You should also feel free to communicate with me via e-mail at any time, either at my campus e-mail address or at my home e-mail address.

Class Schedule

Note that since the first week of fall quarter begins on a Wednesday, I'll continue to organize our weeks for this class on a Wednesday-through-Tuesday basis for most of the quarter. I know, that's confusing, as if you don't have enough going on to boggle your mind...

Week 1: Reading -- "The Language of Cyberspace," *Language Awareness*, chapter 10, and "From Pencils to Pixels" by Dr. Dennis Baron (handout).

- Sept. 22 Hand out syllabus; and discuss reading assignments – each chapter must be completed by the Wednesday of the week for which it is assigned on the syllabus. Explain e-mail accounts and the operation of a class newsgroup.
- Sept. 23 First newsgroup session; on this first day, students may post messages about their view of the future effect of computers on communications. An assignment for the next day's class will be listed on the newsgroup.
- Sept. 27 Break the class into small groups for discussion of question assigned by the instructor; the discussion will concern the changes computers will cause, and have already caused, in human communications
- Sept. 28 Groups report to the class. Each student gives a portion of the oral report. Also, we'll work out any glitches in the newsgroup participation

Week 2: Reading -- "Discovering Language," *Language Awareness*, chapter 1

- Sept. 29 Assignment of an in-class writing project regarding audience.
- Sept. 30 Drafts of essays are posted on the newsgroup for an exchange of comments; peer reviews of essays are also posted on the newsgroup.
- Oct. 4 Students read their in-class writing projects
- Oct. 5 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 1.

Week 3: Reading -- "Writers on Writing," *Language Awareness*, chapter 2

- Oct. 6 Class breaks into small groups to list, by assigned category, words and phrases that have recently entered the English language.
- Oct. 7 Newsgroup postings, discussing, *Language Awareness*, chapter 2.
- Oct. 11 Small groups report to the class.
- Oct. 12 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 2.

Week 4: Reading -- "Language History and Usage," *Language Awareness* chapter 3

- Oct. 13 .Students break into small groups to discuss changes in the English language.
- Oct. 14 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 3, and of drafts of essays
- Oct. 18 Small groups report on changes in the English language.
- Oct. 19 More newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness* chapter 3 and essays.

Week 5: Reading -- "Names and Naming," *Language Awareness*, chapter 4

- Oct. 20 Break the class into small groups to create names by assigned category.
- Oct. 21 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 4 and of drafts of essays.
- Oct. 25 Groups report on the names they created.
- Oct. 26 More newsgroup discussion of chapter 4 and of drafts of essays.

Week 6: Reading -- "Language Variety," *Language Awareness*, chapter 5

- Oct. 27 Discussion of the problems posed by language varieties.
- Oct. 28 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 5 and of drafts of essays.
- Nov. 1 Presentations on local language varieties.
- Nov. 2 Newsgroup discussion of language varieties.

Week 7: Reading -- "Doublespeak, Euphemism, and Jargon," *Language Awareness*, chapter 6

- Nov. 3 Class forms small groups to plan presentations on doublespeak, euphemism and jargon.
- Nov. 4 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 6, and of drafts of essays.
- Nov. 8 Student groups make presentations on local doublespeak, euphemism and jargon.
- Nov. 9 More newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 6, and of drafts of essays.

Week 8: Reading -- "Prejudice, Discrimination, and Language," *Language Awareness*, chapter 7

- Nov. 10 Class forms small groups to plan presentations regarding discriminatory or prejudicial language.
- Nov. 11 VETERANS' DAY HOLIDAY -- no class.
- Nov. 15 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 7, and of drafts of essays.
- Nov. 16 Student groups give reports on discriminatory or prejudicial language usage.

Week 9: Reading -- "The Language of Politics," *Language Awareness*, chapter 8

- Nov. 17 Small groups plan political campaigns.
- Nov. 18 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 8, and of drafts of essays, and the "political campaigns."
- Nov. 22 Small groups present their "candidate" and their "campaign" to the class and answer questions.
- Nov. 23 More newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 8, and of drafts of essays, and reactions to the "political campaigns."

Week 10: Reading -- "Advertising: The language of persuasion," *Language Awareness*, chapter 9

- Nov. 29 Small groups plan an advertising campaign for a product
- Nov. 30 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 9, and of drafts of essays.
- Dec. 1 Small groups present their advertising campaigns and answer questions.
- Dec. 2 Newsgroup discussion of *Language Awareness*, chapter 9, essays, and wrapping up loose ends.

Exam week – I will accept additional revisions of your essays until the exam period.
(Dates italicized are sessions scheduled for the computer lab.)

Grading

My grade scale will be based on 200 points, with projects assigned the following maximum number of points:

- Paper #1 -- 50 points
- Paper #2 -- 50 points
- Paper #3 -- 50 points
- Class participation -- 25 points
- Participation in computer newsgroup – 25 points

Students must submit four drafts of each essay; failure to submit the required drafts will result in a 5-point penalty on the essay's final grade for each draft not submitted. However, I also have an open rewrite policy, meaning that in addition to the scheduled drafts, students may seek to raise essay grades by rewriting any paper any number of times at any time before the end of the quarter. Lower grades will not be assigned as the result of extra rewriting.

Grade Scale:

- A:** 200-180 points
- B:** 179-149 points
- C:** 159-140 points
- NC:** below 110 points.

NOTE: If you do not complete all three essays listed on the syllabus, you will receive a grade of NC for the class, no matter what your point total. Also, if you are absent from more than 25% of the class sessions, meaning 11 no-shows, you will receive a grade of NC, no matter what your point total. Failure to participate in the newsgroup or group projects will result in the loss of points from your final grade.

Essay assignments

You will be required to write four drafts of three essays and engage in peer review. You'll have plenty of opportunity to improve your essay before a final grade is assigned. Your first two drafts of each essay will not receive a grade; just my written evaluation, recommendations and perhaps a preliminary grade. Your third draft will receive a tentative grade, along with my written evaluation and recommendations for revision, and your fourth draft will receive a final grade. But even after I've slapped a final grade on an essay, you can improve the grade by writing additional drafts before the end of the quarter.

My attitude about writing essays can be summed up by Donald Murray's essay, "The Maker's Eye: Revising Your Own Manuscripts" in *Language Awareness*. Quoting Roald Dahl on page 62, Murray writes: "Good writing is essentially rewriting." Murray adds: "Rewriting ... is simply something that most writers find they have to do to discover what they have to say and how to say it."

Regarding my essay assignments; they are intentionally broad. I'm giving you plenty of room to find a subject that grabs you. However, don't write a broad essay, and don't think that I expect you to attempt to cover all the bases in the entire area of each essay topic. For the sake of your own sanity – and mine -- focus on a particular aspect of each essay topic; chose a facet of the broad topic that both catches your fancy and illustrates your point . For instance, you might write essay #1 on the effects of computers on the international sport of yo-yos (yes, I'm being silly). Focusing on a smaller topic within the wide realm of the essay assignment is a good method of sharpening the focus of your essay. Each essay should be typed onto a computer disc suitable for use in our computer lab; expect to post each draft on our newsgroup.

In the first draft of each essay, concentrate on your thesis and information that supports that thesis. Also pay attention to organization. If you like, you may outline the remainder of the paper. The second draft should add support and in the third draft you should be close to wrapping it up. In the fourth and final draft, and make sure all your spelling, grammar, punctuation and whatnot are straightened out. Also, it's never too late to add or improve your essay's style. I will return written responses for each draft, advising you what revisions I want for the next draft. Please print out a copy of each draft to hand in to

me. However, I'm not the only one who will read your essays – your classmates will read and comment on your essays. Each draft should be typed onto a computer disc suitable for use in the computer lab, to enable you to post it on the newsgroup. Don't be shy about commenting on your classmates' essays, but don't get nasty either. But remember, classmates' comments can help you improve your essay.

Essay assignment #1

Write an essay of at least 1,000 words concerning the computer's apparently ongoing evolution as a universal means of communication, in roughly the same fashion as telephones became a part of society a century ago. Other huge shifts in communication technology have occurred throughout history. In ancient Greece, in the time of Plato, the dominant oral culture was overtaken by the written word. In Europe, another monumental transition occurred in the late 15th century, after Gutenberg invented the printing press in *circa* 1455. Within the last century, worldwide communication has made a major change as people for the first time became accustomed to talking to people they couldn't see, thanks to the telephone. In all three cases, the long-term effects on society were overwhelming. The same thing is occurring today, with the computer as the culprit. Now, we are figuratively learning how to dial the phone, when it comes to computers.

Discuss in your essay changes computers have forced upon society, and changes that may lay ahead. The questions you focus on may include: What effect will the world of cyberspace have upon language? Does the fact that so much information is available via the computer threaten the privacy of individuals? As a means of communication that is worldwide in scope (i.e., the WorldWide Web), have computers increased communication between groups of people? Will people without access to computer communication become isolated in our world culture; if so, what effect will be the effect of this isolation? Are the effects of computers on communications over-rated? Will computers enjoy only a short-lived reign over the world of communications? Is the "computer generation" still in grade school, or has it already joined the ranks of college students? How are computer communications changing the world of work? You may address any concerns about computers -- these questions are neither matters that must be discussed nor the only questions that can be discussed in your essay. I'm interested in your own thoughts about cyber-space, and am simply providing a few possible paths to follow.

Essay assignment #2

Throughout the quarter, we will discuss changes in our language. Language has evolved throughout the centuries, and certainly will continue to evolve, to incorporate the changes that affect our lives and our means of communications. The computer is not the first technical device to prompt monumental changes in language within your lifetime. The pencil, television, radio and the telephone have spawned many new words and new phrases, and the train, the automobile and the airplane have fostered changes in language by allowing travel into once-isolated areas and interaction with once-isolated groups of people. Both electronic communications and rapid travel have dramatically increased the interaction of people and their cultures. Events and inventions once thought impossible are now universally recognized, affecting and influencing people around the world.

In this essay, please address changes that have occurred in our language within your lifetime due to the effects of technology, and predict the changes you foresee in the future. Is the modern technology of communications creating a culture that is universal around the globe? Or do modern communications create more niches for the survival of individual cultures? Or are modern communications creating a new, 21st-century, global culture? How is language changing? How does language in general accommodate changing technology? How do people -- the audience of a language -- handle these changes? You may cite any individual world leaders or groups of people. You may address any of your concerns about modern communications' effects on language – again, my questions are neither matters that must be discussed nor the only questions that can be discussed in the essay. In fact, these questions can be ignored if you find a strong focus for your essay that has nothing to do with my meanderings. Primarily, I'm interested in your thoughts about communications and language, and the above questions are merely intended to spur your thinking.

Let me emphasize that this is not a second essay assignment regarding computers. The word "computer" does not need to be mentioned in this essay. If you feel that the invention of paper clips was

the seminal technological event affecting communications, write about paper clips (fair warning – I’m being silly again).

Essay assignment #3

Of course, technology is not the only influence on language. For your final essay assignment this quarter, discuss the effects on language of human factors such as prejudice and discrimination, and societal factors such as politics and advertising. Do these human endeavors and foibles create new words and phrases? Or change existing words and phrases, or their meanings? Does language evolve in a way that reflects flaws in human behavior? Can we use language to heal the wounds people inflict on each other? Can language evolve in a way that will help resolve prejudice, discrimination and other interpersonal woes? Or does language simply reflect these problems? Again, your essay would be best served by focusing on one particular aspect or example of the topic.

There are no “right” or “wrong” answers to my essay assignments; these aren’t “true or false” questions. Your essays may express your personal opinions, but only if you can back up those opinions with examples or sources proving your point. You may draw upon the essays we’ll read in *Language Awareness*, or quote from any sources, but you must identify your sources. In other words, no tantrums. Give the reader proof, tell the reader where you found this proof, and offer sound reasoning. However, please note that I’m not requiring you to do research for these essays (that’ll come in English 551) unless you see the need to introduce facts that might confuse the reader. The bottom line is, be clear.

Deadlines

When you turn in your drafts, please assist my recordkeeping by writing at the top of the first page, along with your name and the date, the number of the essay and the number of the draft. For instance, “essay #2, draft #3.” I realize that the deadlines for drafts sometimes overlap and that as a result you will be working on more than one essay at a time. That’s intentional.

- Wednesday, Sept. 29 – first draft of essay #1 due; peer conference of essay #1.
- Monday, Oct. 4 – first draft of essay #1 returned with Jim Flick’s comments.
- Thursday, Oct. 8 – second draft of essay #1 due.
- Monday, Oct. 11 – second draft of essay #1 returned with Jim Flick’s comments.
- Thursday, Oct. 14 – third draft of essay #1 due.
- Monday, Oct. 18 – third draft of essay #1 returned with Jim Flick’s comments.
- Thursday, Oct. 21 – final draft of essay #1 due.
- Thursday, Oct. 14 – first draft of essay #2 due; peer conference of essay #2.
- Monday, Oct 18 – first draft of essay #2 returned with Jim Flick’s comments.
- Thursday, Oct. 21 – second draft of essay #2 due.
- Monday, Oct. 25 – second draft of essay #2 returned with Jim Flick’s comments
- Thursday, Oct. 28 – third draft of essay #2 due.
- Monday, Nov. 1 – third draft of essay #2 returned with Jim Flick’s comments.
- Thursday, Nov. 4 – final draft of essay #2 due.
- Thursday, Nov. 11 – first draft of essay #3 due; peer conference.
- Monday, Nov. 15 – first draft of essay #3 returned with Jim Flick’s comments.
- Thursday, Nov. 18 – second draft of essay #3 due.
- Monday, Nov. 22 – second draft of essay #3 returned with Jim Flick’s comments.
- Wednesday, Nov. 24 – third draft of essay #3 due.
- Monday, Nov. 29 – third draft of essay #3 returned with Jim Flick’s comments.
- Wednesday, Dec. 1 – final draft of essay #3 due.

Jim Flick will accept additional revised drafts of essays, to improve your grade, of any essay until the end of the final exam period assigned for this class.

Appendix D

Youngstown State University

English 551: College Composition II

Jim Flick, instructor

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Home phone: 505-9567

Office hours: 2-5 p.m. Tuesday & Thursday

E-mail: jdflick@cc.ysu.edu (campus)

jdflick@aol.com (home)

Class hours: 10-10:50 a.m. Monday & Wednesday in DeBartolo Hall 250 (computer lab),
Tuesday in DeBartolo 347 and Friday in DeBartolo 261.

Class newsgroup: ysu.english.w00-1072

Required materials

- *The Aims of Argument* (third edition) by Timothy W. Crusius and Carolyn E. Channell.
- *Decisions: A Writer's Handbook* by Leonard Rosen. Also be aware of *Decisions'* Web site, <http://www.abacon.com/compsite/index.html>, which can answer many questions not only about composing essays, but also about grammar, punctuation and other basics concerning language, and how to credit sources.
- At least two 3.5- inch computer discs.
- In addition to the textbook, I require you to reading materials located at *Research and Argument: Tools for Teachers and Students*, at the OhioLINK Web Site, <http://karn.ohiolink.edu/~sg-ysu/>.

Useful Web Sites

A Student's Guide to Writing at YSU <http://enterprise.cis.ysu.edu/~writing/Guide.htm>.

DeBartolo Labs <http://cis.ysu.edu/~dattardo/labs/>.

Maag Library <<http://www.cis.ysu.edu/~library/>>.

The Elements of Style by William Strunk Jr.,

<http://www.cc.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/strunk/>.

Jack Lynch's *Grammar and Style Notes*,

<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/>.

Inkspot, <http://www.inkspot.com>.

Online Reference Works from Carnegie-Mellon, <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/references.html>.

The Ohio Directory, <http://sites.ohio.com/>.

Description

During the next 10 weeks, you will complete two argumentative essays, one individually and one collaboratively. As the course description says: "This course will help you develop your ability to think critically and to write argumentative essays supported by evidence." The purpose of the group project is to allow you to practice the techniques you'll use in individual projects, and I'll always try to give you feedback on your group efforts before you complete your individual versions. In each case, you'll work your way through the planning, research, and writing processes, with assistance and advice from me as you move along. You'll do a lot of independent work, but I am always available to help. My job is to provide information and resources, a structured opportunity for learning. If you have questions about locating sources on the Web, ask. I'm not a computer science major, but I have extensive experience in writing via computers and researching through the Web. Also, feel free to help each other. A vast amount of information is available through the Web, an amount so vast that no one person can know all of the available resources.

A computer newsgroup will be available for this class. I'll use the newsgroup as a forum to communicate with the whole class, but don't be shy about using it as a place to share ideas and ask questions. Unix accounts for the newsgroup have been assigned to each student who doesn't already have an account; log-in IDs and e-mail addresses will be assigned the first day of class if students don't have

them already. I may have you post some of your assignments on the newsgroup and comment on each other's work. Reader feedback, audience input, is valuable for any writing project.

I will establish a class Web site, and expect you to check it frequently. Resources that I believe will aid the class as a whole will be posted on the class Web site.

You will receive a guided tour of the Web of some sort on Jan. 12, when a "hide and seek" database introduction will be provided to the class courtesy of Maag Library, while we meet as usual in DeBartolo 250.

Course Guidelines

- ❑ You should use an IBM-compatible word processing program. You have access to a number of computer labs on campus, so even if you don't have access to a computer at home you should be able to complete your assignments using a word processor. Don't hand in handwritten assignments. (Don't laugh – one student in my class last spring handed in handwritten drafts of each essay.)
- ❑ Papers are due at the beginning of class on a state due date, and I will not accept late papers unless you make arrangements in advance and agree you have a good reason to be late. If an emergency crops up, feel free to call or e-mail me -- that's why I have listed my home and office phone numbers and e-mail addresses at the top of this syllabus. And always make back-up copies of your files on a computer disc, to make sure your work doesn't disappear.
- ❑ Present your work in a neat, reasonably professional-looking format. Use the MLA documentation system for your bibliography and final projects. For instructions on MLA documentation, consult *Decisions*.
- ❑ If you're concerned about grammar and mechanics, consult *Decisions*. Help is also available through the Writing Center, or through me.
- ❑ If I find any plagiarism in either project, you will fail the course. Plagiarism means presenting the work of others as you own work, including copying materials from a published text or an on-line text, without giving proper credit; and copying the work of other students and passing it off as you own. No matter how desperate you are, don't plagiarize. You must learn to give credit where credit is due, do your own work and not steal the work of others.
- ❑ You may rewrite any of the assignments to improve your grade. I place no limit on the number of writes. I will accept rewrites until the end of the exam period scheduled for this class. My attitude about writing essays can be summed up by a statement made by Roald Dahl: "Good writing is essentially rewriting."
- ❑ I will hold student conferences on request, or as I see they are needed, and hold brief student conferences during our classes in the computer lab. I will observe office hours strictly, and meet with students privately upon request. You should also feel free to call me at home or in my office anytime, and communicate with me via e-mail, either at my campus e-mail address or at my home e-mail address. Let me know how I can help you.
- ❑ When you turn in your assignments, please assist my record keeping by writing at the top of the first page, along with your name and the date, a listing of the project and the specific assignment. For instance, "Individual project, source evaluation." If you are rewriting a part of the assignment, also list the number of the draft. This will help me avoid any confusion.

Attendance and due dates

You may be absent from class three times for any reason, no questions asked, no penalty. After that, if you are absent for any reason, the points for your final grade will drop by five points for every additional absence. If you are absent 11 times (more than 25% of the class meetings) for any reason, you will receive a grade of NC for the class, no matter what your point total. I also expect you to be on time. If you are consistently tardy, I will count your late arrivals as absences, which could result in lowering your grade.

While class is in session, I expect you to focus on classwork.

Grading

Final grades will be based on the two projects, with points awarded as follows:

Individual Project: 65 points total:

- Research proposal: 10 points
- Source evaluation: 15 points
- Paper: 40 points

Group Project: 35 points total:

- Research proposal: 5 points (group grade)
- Source evaluation: 5 points (individual grade)
- Paper: 15 points (group grade)
- Individual participation: 10 points (individual grade).

Class participation: 50 points total

Grade Scale:

A: 150-135 points

B: 134-120 points

C: 119-105 points

NC: below 105 points. If you receive a grade of NC, you may repeat a class only once without special permission.

NOTE: If you do not complete all aspects of both projects, you will receive a grade of NC for the class, no matter what your point total. Also, if you are absent from more than 25% of the class sessions, meaning 11 no-shows, you will receive a grade of NC, no matter what your point total.

Projects

The final product of each project should be a persuasive essay, an argumentative paper. Your projects may express your personal opinions, but only if you can back up those opinions with examples proving your point or sources verifying the validity of your views. After all, learning how to research is one of the main goals of this course. You may draw materials from a wide range of sources available through the Web, but you must identify your sources. Give the reader proof, tell the reader where you found this proof, and offer sound reasoning. The bottom line is, be clear and don't confuse the reader.

For each of the two projects, you'll need to complete three tasks:

- Write out a research proposal that explains why your topic interests you, outlines the central issues involved, describes the research you plan to undertake, and defines your intended audience.
- Locate, select and evaluate on-line, print and (when appropriate) other sources. You'll present your evaluation in an annotated bibliography.
- Write a persuasive essay for a specific audience, with clear ideas, appropriate supporting data, correct documentation, and effective prose. Consult *Decisions* for information about documentation.

You must complete all three portions of each project in order to pass this course. You must receive a passing grade for each task before you can move on to the next.

Group Research Project

Read over these possible topics for your project. During the first week of the quarter, I expect all of you to form groups of two or three to research and write an argumentative essay. After you form your groups, each group needs to agree on a topic. The topics I present here are broad topics, but don't think that I expect you to explore every minute aspect of a broad topic. Also, I strongly urge you to remember that questions I ask about topics are merely suggestions, neither subjects that must be discussed nor the only subjects that can be discussed. The goal of each project is a persuasive essay, so feel free to persuade me. The completed essay your groups turn in should be between 8 and 12 pages long, including a "Works Cited" or Bibliography page. Your first step will be to narrow the topic, to allow you to focus your essay. Your group needs to agree on how to narrow down the topic to focus your project:

- What impact has computer communication, the World Wide Web, had on the world's social structure, and what effects will it have in the future? Has society benefited from computers, and if so, how; on the other hand, what derogatory effects has society suffered due to computers? How do the effects of

- computers compare to the effects of earlier changes in communication technology? What does the Y2K “crisis” tell us about the world’s attitude toward computers?
- ❑ Should Ohio change the method it uses to fund public education in Ohio? If so, what changes should be made? In the controversial *DeRolph* decision, the Ohio Supreme Court ordered the state government to make changes in its funding system. (For a history of the *DeRolph* case, and resources, see <http://www.ohio.com/bj/projects/shortchange/032597/>.) Some changes have been made, and state government is telling the Ohio Supreme Court that public education in Ohio is now adequately funded. The Ohio Coalition for Adequacy and Equity -- the organization that filed the *DeRolph* lawsuit -- disagrees, saying more changes are needed. The decision remains under appeal. What is unfair about the state’s method of funding schools? Have the changes in state funding of education solved the problems cited in the *DeRolph* case? How does Ohio’s funding of public schools compare with that of other states? What other changes in school funding, if any, should be made in Ohio?
 - ❑ Is the steel industry dead in Youngstown, or have local steel mills simply refocused their production? Are the days of huge mills employing thousands of people to produce massive quantities of a raw material gone forever in the Youngstown area? Has the steel industry refocused on the production of more specific products, instead of massive quantities of a raw material? Have labor unions priced American steelworkers out of the market because it’s much cheaper to employ workers in foreign lands?
 - ❑ How much power does the Mafia wield in the Youngstown area? With the recent trials of several public officials, that question has been widely debated. But the influence of organized crime has been a widely debated subject in the Mahoning Valley for many years. For instance, the question of the Mob’s influence, or lack of influence, on Jim Traficant has been widely debated since his days as Mahoning County sheriff, before he was elected Congressman. Is the Mob truly a power in the Mahoning Valley, or is the power of the Mob simply overblown by the local media and urban legend?
 - ❑ Americans are often captivated by trials. The contentions of both sides in major lawsuits, or criminal trials, are often widely publicized. You may choose a famous trial, research both sides and synthesize your research into a persuasive essay supporting your position on one side of the case – and not necessarily on the side that won the case. You may retry Sam Shepherd, Patty Hearst, Sacco and Vanzetti, Alger Hiss, the Chicago Seven, the Menendez Brothers, the Boston Strangler, O.J. Simpson or the Scopes “money trial.” For other possibilities, log onto the Court TV Online at <http://www.courtTV.com/national/> or “Famous American Trials” by Doug Linder at <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/FTrials/ftrials.htm>. In order to argue your position effectively, you must consider what objections the opposing lawyer might raise about your contentions. Don’t be afraid to contradict or argue with the “authorities” or “experts.”
 - ❑ Finally, choose your own topic. Find a controversy that interests your group, a controversy with at least two defensible positions, and seek information concerning both sides of the controversy. Look at the questions for the above topics, and the requirements for your individual research project, for guidance on how you deal with the subject material. Research the subject and write a *persuasive* essay. As long as you keep me informed, and clear your ideas with before you move ahead, I can be flexible.

Individual Research Project

For this project, the choice of topic is entirely in your hands. Devise a topic that will allow you to meet the following requirements:

- ❑ Your paper must make an argument about a “real” issue. “Real” issues are those that people care about but that don’t have obvious or clear-cut answers. Choose a topic or problem that affects real people in serious ways, but that is also something about which serious, thoughtful people disagree.
- ❑ Your paper must be directed to a specific audience, such as your congressional representative, the manager of a business, the readers of a specific magazine, or the members of a specific organization.
- ❑ Your topic must be something that can be researched using published materials as well as Internet sources.
- ❑ Your finished paper should be between 8 and 12 pages long, including a “Works Cited” or Bibliography page.
- ❑ Your topic should be current, so that you can work with recent materials, but not so new that nothing is

available yet in print.

Due dates

Jan. 18: Group project proposals
Feb. 8: Group source evaluation/annotated bibliography
Feb. 29: Group essays due

Jan. 24: Individual project proposals
Feb. 21: Individual evaluation/annotated bibliography
March 6: Individual drafts due