

Thank You for Your Submission:
A *Grassroots* Literate Activity Interview between the Interns of the *GWRJ*

Eleanor Stamer and Sara Koziol

For this *Grassroots* literacy interview, Eleanor Stamer had the opportunity to interview her fellow *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* intern Sara Koziol, who provided valuable insight into how she has grown while working with the journal. Sara was also able to shed some light on what runs through our heads as we go through the reviewing and editing process. Hopefully this can demystify the process for folks!

ELEANOR: So, Sara, in your two years as an intern for the Writing Program, you've probably seen many different genres used or examined in the journal. What were some of them and have they changed over time?

SARA: Well, when looking at the genres of the articles themselves, I found that they either fell into the expository writing that discusses Writing Program concepts, in some way, or an interview. While accessibility, in both language and content, is a major goal of the articles in the journal, I tend to like the interviews a bit more because they're reader-friendly and you can get real-world insight into specific literate activities from the person you're interviewing.

But looking at the genres discussed within the articles, I've seen a lot of people discussing technology, social media, tattoos, billboards, flyers, and so on. As time went on, I noticed that authors started to write about more outside-of-the-box topics. In other words, conceptualizing seemingly random topics as genres was fascinating to me, and it helped even me—the reviewer—realize that literate activity is truly all around us in the world. One article looked at holiday decorations as a genre, and I found it fascinating

because it was a different way of thinking about something I see around me every winter. I've also started seeing more articles addressing social concepts like how machismo and how that functions in society. There was even one article that argued that dreams are a genre. I loved that one—it was so memorable. I've definitely seen the genres evolve into ones that are less expected and haven't been discussed as often.

As an intern for the Grassroots Journal, I encountered different genres during the review process itself—genres I was unfamiliar with prior to this internship. For instance, the first step to reviewing an article is to conduct an initial assessment. This is where I read the article for the first time, before anyone else does, and I identify basic information about the article, such as the topic, the length, the tone, etc. This is just a surface-level review where I make general comments. The next step in the review process is to write a review letter. This is the point at which two reviewers (which sometimes includes me) get deeper with their feedback, identify major areas of improvement, and make suggestions to the author. Then, the next step is for the editor (who, when I worked for the Writing Program, was the incredible Rebecca Lorenzo) to write an editor letter, which combines the feedback given by both reviewers into one letter that she sends to the author. These genres—initial assessments, review letters, and editor letters—were very unfamiliar to me upon entering the Writing Program. But now, two years later, they are just three more genres I have familiarized myself with and have added to my toolbelt! The skills I have obtained by working with these genres are transferrable to other genres I have (and will) come across in life, if that makes sense.

ELEANOR: On that note, has this job required any literacies you didn't have before?

SARA: Yes and no. While being a history major does require some different literacies than being a writing intern, the two do overlap and help each other. Training to be an intern made me look at my own writing much more closely, and I became much more critical of it. So, any time I would do historical writing, I would then look at it as though I was editing someone else's work. I would read through my work and give myself a general overview of what my work was trying to achieve and determine how successfully it was doing that—this is essentially what an initial assessment is for! When doing an initial assessment for an article, my aim is to determine how well it is fitting the genre of a *grassroots* article and take stock of the writing research the author is conducting. This helps the reviewers write review letters because they get an overview of what's working in the article and what might need some attention, especially in terms of the article's content.

Interestingly, I found I became a better editor and reviewer as I wrote more and more historical research papers and the like. And being an intern helped me hone in on the details, as the *GWRJ* team tends to do later in the review process with revision assessments, while keeping the big picture in mind—as I was trained to do with review letters. In history we tend to be much more focused on the big picture and have minimum worry about small finite details. With this internship, though, I was able to work on my copyediting skills since articles slated for publication go through that as well, and it made me focus on the details a bit more. So, I don't think any literacies were new to me; rather, they were preexisting ones that I further developed through this internship. I also learned to embrace the fact that I am reviewing the work of my peers and those older than me. I guess I could say that this job required me to have more confidence in the feedback I give.

ELEANOR: I definitely understand that confidence. Along with that growing confidence in your abilities, are you finding yourself using any skills from the job in your writing or your student teaching?

SARA: I am constantly giving students feedback, which is something I did all the time in initial assessments and review letters or assessments. The job has combined my specialized knowledge of history with the confidence I've gained in giving feedback, and so now I know what I'm looking for in terms of content and I know how to present changes to my students. When I first started reviewing for the *Journal*, I felt as though I wasn't "qualified" to be giving feedback to many of our authors who are graduate students. Yet, over time, I noticed that I was giving good feedback. So I grew more confident in that ability. Now, I'm able to help my students organize their ideas and show them how to implement big picture thinking while also looking at the details.

ELEANOR: Are you more aware of how you may be using some of the Writing Program concepts?

SARA: I know that I am using Writing Program concepts, but I don't always realize it, if that makes sense. Antecedent knowledge is the first thing that comes to mind of when it comes to how I work with my students. I usually refer to it as background knowledge when I'm working with them. It's like scaffolding—building on that antecedent knowledge so that they can "uptake" new information. See? More Writing Program terms! I like using different genres in my teaching, too. We usually refer to them as "text sets," so using different kinds of texts to convey the knowledge in different ways. This could be through music, photographs, films, video clips, field trips, and of course articles, text passages, and books. All of those texts show different parts of the time period and add to the overall understanding as well as appeal to different kinds of learning.

ELEANOR: That's great! It's wonderful to see the Writing Program concepts out in action, even if we don't always realize they're there. But, have you found your rhetoric changing as you've now had the opportunity to read through others' work?

SARA: In terms of my own writing, it does vary across genres. But I have been told that I have a very distinct voice no matter what writing it is. Typically, I try to be formal, but I add a human element to it. Subconsciously, I want my personality to show through and I suppose set my writing apart from other more "clinical" writing. I think that's part of what I liked about working with the journal: we aim to maintain an author's voice while helping author's better address Writing Program concepts in ways that may be helpful to other writer researchers.

Regarding how I give feedback, my rhetoric has changed in that my students are very different from the authors that write for the Journal. With both, I am very upfront about what they need to do to improve their writing, but with my students, I see them in person and I never want to discourage them or make them feel as though I'm reprimanding them. So, I might add an exclamation mark or smiley face to show them that what they are doing is good and to also let them know that I only give feedback to help them improve their skills. Reviewing for the journal is a bit different because I am reviewing people I don't know, I'm behind a keyboard, and I don't typically meet with the author to give further feedback (though the *GWRJ* is available for that!). So, while I am upfront and encouraging, I try to be as constructive as I can and this goal sometimes leaves less room for compliments—though I make sure to tell each author what's working in their article! I try to review in a way that doesn't discourage authors because submitting to the Journal is wonderful, but I certainly have a different rhetoric with authors (who are mostly college students) versus my students who are still in high school. In both cases, though, I try to be clear with my feedback to ensure that my suggestion gets across and makes sense. But I also try to make sure that the writer feels encouraged to revise and keep writing.

ELEANOR: You've had the very unique perspective of being both author and reviewer, so what advice would you give to someone who is writing an article?

SARA: The first thing I would say is: make sure that you understand the concepts, and go out of your way to genuinely learn them. Before you write a single word, you need to have a basic understanding of Writing Program concepts and understand what the program is about. That understanding can even help you find a topic if you're struggling to come up with one, and of course it helps when you already have a topic in mind. There have been

so many times where authors will use terms incorrectly because they don't fully understand, or they'll miss out on an opportunity to use a concept that they just don't know exists, or they'll discuss a term without knowing that it is a Writing Program concept. So, I recommend making a CHAT map, which is a graphic organizer used to sort your ideas in relation to CHAT. Start small and move forward, taking it one step at a time. I've read articles where I can tell that the author rushed through without putting much thought into the organization of the article. We can tell when there's thought behind an article, and usually those articles go hand-in-hand with the ones where the author is clearly very passionate about the topic. So, pick a topic that you love and have an interest in. Read through as many examples as you can, as most people learn best by example.

When I wrote my article, I looked through a lot of the articles that had been published. My ENG 101 professor Dr. Joyce Walker had us read through examples and write reviews for past articles, so I became well-aware of what content the journal puts out and what features—or conventions—*GWRJ* articles typically have. Knowing these things about the journal helped when I became an intern, too, and made me a better reviewer. So really, put in the time, put in the effort, and love what you write about. And *that* will give you the best article.



Eleanor Stamer (left) is a Publishing Major at Illinois State University. When she's not in class, you can find her scrolling through TikTok, binge-watching shows on Netflix, or having debates about Harry Potter theories.

Sara Koziol (right) graduated from Illinois State in May 2020 with her Bachelor of Arts in History-Social Sciences Education. Sara spent two years as an associate intern for the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* and looks back on her time at ISU with fondness. She will forever miss her fellow Writing Program team members and thanks them for their continual support and encouragement. Sara hopes to integrate Writing Program concepts into her future social studies classroom to teach students the significance of literate activity in the world around us.