

Everyday Writing Researchers: A Collaborative Co-Interview Dialogue

Anya Gregg and Kevin Roozen

Anya Gregg and Kevin Roozen conducted a *GWRJ* co-interview where they asked each other questions about their perspectives on everyday literate activity and writing research. The following transcript excerpts selected portions of their co-interview, and includes Kevin's and Anya's thoughts as they reflected on their exchange.

Touring a “Hidden World” of Writing

If you've ever wondered what every day writing researchers—people who are always looking for, examining, and trying to understand more about writing and how it works in the world—talk about when they get together, this collaborative co-interview dialogue should offer some insight. *The Grassroots Writing Research Journal* staff introduced two everyday writing researchers, Anya Gregg and Kevin Roozen, and got them talking about writing. Anya Gregg is a self-identified writing researcher who is currently taking a gap year but plans on attending ISU in the fall of 2021 and double majoring in psychology and writing. Kevin Roozen is a writing researcher who works at the University of Central Florida and examines the various kinds of writing people do in their lives and how it functions across their lifespans. In this collaborative co-interview and dialogue, we've woven together some selected excerpts from the dialogue between Anya and Kevin during their hour-long Zoom exchange as they talked about writing, what tools they use to do it, and how it functions in their lives.

The central theme of Anya and Kevin's conversation about writing might best be captured in this brief exchange, which emerged as they were talking about all the different kinds of writing they do in their everyday lives that rarely gets noticed:

Anya: (laughs). That's really interesting. I get so excited about this stuff, because it really is a hidden world.

Kevin: I love that phrase. A hidden world.

Anya's comment about the "hidden world" of writing provided a telling touchstone for their conversation. Their dialogue moved in many different directions, but Anya and Kevin's talk always seemed to circle back to the densely textured worlds of writing people are continually immersed in, and yet that too often remain fairly invisible. Across the pages that follow, we've threaded together portions of their conversation to offer a brief tour of the topics they explored, including the many different kinds of writing that texture their lives, their encounters with "writing gone wrong," their musings on what counts as "real" writing, and the possibilities they imagine for writing instruction in school.

Welcome to Our Hidden Worlds of Writing

It's probably no surprise that two people really interested in continually learning more about the hidden world of writing around us would talk about their own writing. As everyday writing researchers, we both spend a lot of time looking at and thinking about writing, and also doing a lot of writing ourselves. But as we read back through our conversation, we were both pretty interested to see the particular kinds of writing each of us discussed. One of the first kinds of writing that Kevin mentioned was the writing he does in the little notebooks that he has carried in his back pocket for a long time. In response, Anya brought up the digital writing she does using different apps on her phone, and reflected on some of the new genres of writing she sees emerging from people's use of digital writing technologies.

Kevin: So, one of my favorite texts to think about, when I think about writing, are these notebooks that I keep (see Figure 1 on the facing page). I've kept them for about twenty-seven years.

Anya: Oh my goodness.

Kevin: I carry these in my back pocket. I've been doing this since I took a job selling outdoor power equipment. I used to sell lawn mowers and stuff. And I've kept these little books for twenty-seven years. And this is what I

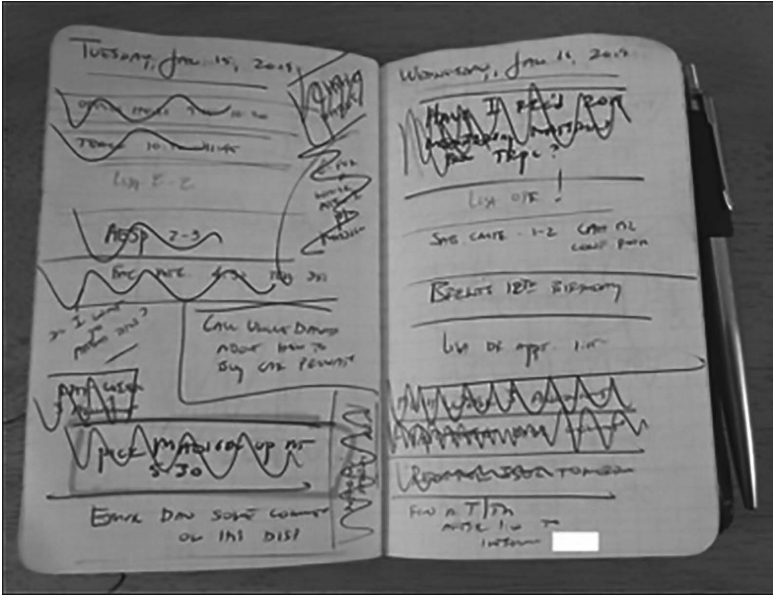


Figure 1: Pages from the notebook that Kevin keeps in his wallet.

think of, like, this is probably the writing I use the most, every day of my life. And it's just kind of funny how I look at these sort of things, little highlighted notes I write to myself. I've written articles on these little pads of paper. I've kept dates of birthdays and stuff. It's just a neat little text, and most people probably don't even notice it, but for me, everything is right there. And I think it's kind of a neat thing.

[...]

Anya: ... Your notes. I would never be able to do that. I've tried keeping planners, I've tried keeping notebooks, I've tried keeping diaries, I've tried everything. I just cannot do it. The one thing that I can do, I've figured out, is use my phone. So I put all of my schedules and all of my appointments, and all of my important reminders and everything on the apps on my phone (see Figure 2 on the next page). Which, actually, is a different form of writing. So, I feel like it's sort of this nebulous thing, that everyone is kind of unique at. You know. Everyone has a different way of remembering things or of going about writing something.

Kevin: I love that point, how both of us are taking notes and remembering things, but I'm doing it using a notepad and a black pen, you're doing it with using apps on your phone. In a way, we're doing very different kinds of writing, but in a way we're doing very similar kinds of writing.

[...]

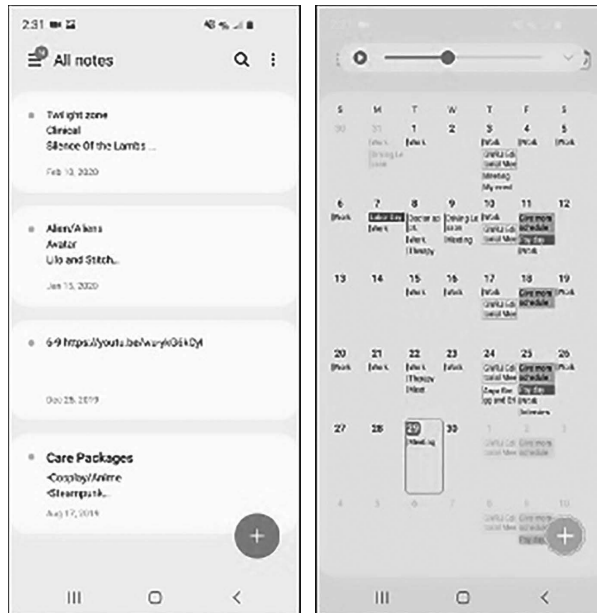


Figure 2. Screen captures of the apps Anya uses on her phone.

Anya: I’m a typical teenager: I’m on my phone for, like, many hours a day. I’ve actually found that there’s some really weird, upcoming new genres of writing. Like Instagram captions. Like, the little caption you put under your picture in order to gain more followers and stuff . . . like, what do you do to do that? And I’ve found that hashtags are one of the conventions there, and you want to keep it really short, and . . . it’s stuff like that going into it, I would have never have known [to look at], unless I was a writing researcher and really looked into it.

“Different Things That Are Kind of Smashed Together”

And from that early exchange about our notebooks and phone apps, our conversation about our writing branched out in some interesting directions. Pretty soon, we were talking about the different kinds of writing involved in people’s hobbies. Anya brought up the online “co-writing” she does with other people about a web series she enjoys and all of the inventive ways they smash and blend different genres together, and she later mentioned some of the texts involved in her horseback riding. Kevin described the wealth and variety of different kinds of writing done by his neighbor, a retired highway engineer who is building a model train set in his house.

Anya: Another one of my hobbies. I say that I like to write, but when I'm writing I oftentimes like to write with other people. So, like, they'll write for one character of the narrative and I'll write for another character of the narrative, and it'll kind of intertwine. And I've found that really fascinating. It's actually very common online.

Kevin: What kind of characters, like fan fiction kind of writing?

Anya: Yeah. Mhmm.

Kevin: What's your fandom?

Anya: (Laughs). I have a couple. I really like certain anime. *My Hero Academia* is one of them.

[**Anya's Note:** This fandom I write for is a group of web series called the slenderverse]

Kevin: Wow. Do you write with just one other person, or are there even more?

Anya: Oh, oftentimes there are even more.

Kevin: Wow.

Anya: So, yeah. It's really cool. I'm even, right now, I'm in an entire server just dedicated to these people writing out these characters, albeit, they are made up by the people writing, but it's just solely for these characters to interact. And I find that a really fascinating mix of narrative and playwriting and all these different things that are kind of smashed together to make this fun, new hobby.

Kevin: So you and all these other people, and you're just making it as you go. That's so exciting.

Anya: Yeah. Because very often I feel like when I write it's sort of, me writing, and then other people seeing it and reading it. But I feel like this is sort of a weird kind of co-writing. Where two, three, and four people are writing the same thing at once.

[...]

Anya: How about you? What is the most interesting sort of writing that you've come across lately?

Kevin: So, the most interesting. There's just so many. But one of the most interesting ones was that I have a neighbor who is setting up a model train set in his house. And I was talking to him the other day, and he started showing

me, like, all these maps and schematics and engineering drawings, to lay out the model train set, and build it and everything. And he could spend hours just telling me about it, showing me all these little drawings he's done and taking pictures, cutting pictures out of a magazine, and pasting it up to see what it looks like.

Anya: Mhmm, yeah.

Kevin: But it's just so interesting. He's making notes to himself, and he's doing these drawings, he's taking these measurements. He's taking pictures of other people's train sets. It's just so amazing to me, the amount of effort that he puts into it. I think it's just incredible, what people do with texts. On their own, inside of school or outside of school. It really is remarkable.

Anya: And I feel like, I don't think there is a hobby that doesn't involve some sort of text. Like, I know that football has plays that they have to write, and memorize. I do horseback riding, and we have certain patterns that we have to memorize. And there's text even, on signs during some shows and things, and there's rules you have to read, and directions you have to read, and everything. So I feel like there really isn't a hobby where you don't have to read something. Or write something.

"Writing Gone Wrong"

In addition to talking about some of the different kinds of writing we've encountered and that fascinate us, we also touched on some examples of writing we had experienced that had gone "wrong" in some way. One of the things that allows writing to remain hidden is that we don't tend to notice it when it works the way it should. It's when writing goes wrong in some manner that it becomes really visible to us, and all of a sudden we pay attention to it. Kevin discussed his personal experience with writing some comments on an anniversary card that didn't produce the result he imagined. Anya talked about the writing on an aspirin bottle that she'd seen on a TV commercial that had caught her attention. Later, she recounted her experience of bringing her published *GWRJ* article to her English teacher, which prompted an unexpected reaction.

Kevin: The one that sticks out to me, though it's going to sound a little strange. I was newly married. And it came time to celebrate my anniversary, my first anniversary with my wife, and so, I was very proud of myself. I'd gone out, like a week before, I'd found the perfect card, I'd hidden it away, and then I had written something in it, and so I gave it to her. We had a

dinner, our anniversary dinner, and I gave her my card, and she read it, and just said, “eh.”

Anya: Oh!

Kevin: So, it wasn't the reaction I was expecting, so I waited til the next day, and, nothing.

Anya: Aww.

Kevin: So after about three days, I just asked her. I was like, “You know, like, did you not like my card, or something?” She said, “Well,” and she went and got it. She'd saved it. And she opened it up, and she showed me, that I had basically just rewritten the words that were already on the card

Anya: Oh!

Kevin: You know, I had just kind of rephrased it in my own handwriting. So I was probably thirty-one years old. I may have been thirty. I was old, anyway. And that really hit me so powerfully. That, you know, this has consequences! It's not just what you write, but it's also all that stuff wrapped into it, and how obvious it may have looked to her, seeing basically my rephrasing, on the other side of the card. So, that was one of the first moments where I think it really hit me that, “wow, it's not just as simple as jotting something down in your anniversary card.” So, I mean you talk about a powerful, every day, moment. [...] It had consequences. I could feel the palpable weirdness of, “Hey, how come you're not saying ‘Awesome’ about this card?”

[...]

Anya: I was noticing the other day as I was just idly watching TV, I noticed how on some pharmaceutical commercials and other commercials, their texts that they really don't want you to see but they still have to be there by law, and I thought it was kind of ironic how there are certain texts that the way to write them correctly is to write them wrong. So I feel like that, along with our experiences with stumbling (laughs), is kind of funny, actually. Because we could have been writing this completely different thing, and gotten one thing wrong, and it could have been fantastic, and we wouldn't have even known it. But, because we were writing this certain genre, you know, we got something wrong.

Kevin: Anya, I can't tell you how many aspirin bottles I've looked at, but probably never really seen, in my life.

Anya: Oh yeah.

Kevin: Until you said that. So, like, what do you think made you notice that, because people look at aspirin bottles, like all the time, and they would never get attuned to that. What do you think made you focus on that?

Anya: Well, it was a really boring commercial. (Laughs).

Kevin: (Laughs).

Anya: And, I don't know, I was watching the commercial and there was a dog on the screen and whatever, and I was following it along with my eyes and I noticed this white blob, right, like, halfway through the screen and I was trying to read it, and I just couldn't, and I was like, "why have this here if you can't read it?" But, then it occurred to me, "Duh, lawsuits."

Kevin: It's funny. It's writing, but it's almost made, purposefully, not to be read easily.

Anya: Exactly. Or like, those bottles of pills where you have to peel back the label to read all about it. Or it makes it purposefully inaccessible.

Anya: Oh my gosh. That was one of the things that I was really, not impressed with, but I guess astounded by, when I first figured this all out. I was spying it everywhere, and I was like, "There's writing there! That's writing!" So ...

Kevin: I love how excited you get about it, like, I feel the same excitement. And when you're smiling, I must be smiling too, because I just think that's pretty cool.

Anya: Oh yeah. I don't know why I think it's cool. I think it's one of those things where, if you know, you know, and, it's kind of a niche topic. I tried explaining it to my boyfriend last night, because he was asking, "What are you preparing for? What are you doing?" And I was like, "Oh, I'm preparing for a writing research thing," and he's like, "Why do you research writing? It's just words." And I'm like, "Nononono!" And I tried explaining all this stuff to him, and he was kind of getting it, but I feel like it's very special, I guess, to be able to recognize that what you're doing isn't exactly what you're doing.

[...]

Anya: I actually brought my *Grassroots* [journal] article to [my teacher]. And I was like, "Oh, you can read through this. This is all about what I learned last year. I'm really excited to write more." You know, stuff like that, and I came back a couple of days later and he gave it back to me with the *grammar corrected*.

Kevin: (Exclaims) Oh, No!

Anya: (Laughs). So, that was a little bit disappointing. But it taught me very fast that different people have very different expectations, and clearly ours weren't lining up.

Kevin: Yeah. That had to be heartbreaking, you know. To have published a piece in *Grassroots*, which is something that [a lot people] haven't done.

Anya: Mhmm.

Kevin: And you give it to this gentleman, and he gives it back with some red ink on it, with some grammar ... (groans)

Anya: Oh my gosh. And he sat there. Bless his heart, he was trying so hard to explain to me, but he sat there with me for like, ten to twenty minutes, just, oh, you know, "You did this wrong; it's supposed to be like this," and I was like, "yeah, thanks." (Laughs).

[...]

Kevin: What did it feel like to be published in the *Grassroots* journal?

Anya: Well, first of all it was amazing. Because I could, you know, little Freshman me could walk up to people and be like, "I'm a published author." (laughs). I could show my teachers this article that I have that is, you know, college Freshman/Sophomores read, and, you know, do homework on! And, you know, it felt cool to me, but then again, it wasn't really that interesting to my teachers, especially the one that handed my article back with red ink all over it. (Laughs).

What Counts as "Real" Writing

In addition to describing the many different kinds of writing that each of us is involved in and what we use them for, we also mused about the kinds of texts and textual practices that people associate with "real" writing. At one point in our conversation, we started talking and thinking about what kinds of texts we use that might not even be recognized as "writing." Anya talked about her experiences with menus while ordering food at a restaurant, which prompted Kevin to talk about the sheet music his children routinely use and write on as they play the flute and the saxophone. Later, Anya mentioned some sewing patterns she used, and the kinds of texts she uses as an employee at a doggie daycare.

Anya: From the time I was in kindergarten, and I was learning how to read, I would, you know, read a menu at a restaurant, and I'd be like, "Oh, that counts for my pages for the week! Whoo-hoo, I read. Look at me, I'm smart!"

Kevin: (Laughs).

Anya: And my mom and my teacher would be like, "No, no, that's not how we read. We read like *this*." So.

Kevin: Isn't it funny, how, like, people have very definite notions about what reading is. What kind of materials would be valuable, and what it means to read them, whereas, like reading a menu for some people, it's like, "enhh. That's not really reading."

Anya: Yeah, exactly. But if you were trying to order something from a restaurant you don't know, probably that would be the most essential reading you could do at that moment in time.

Kevin: Yep. I have two kids. I have a son who's thirteen and my daughter is seventeen, and just watching them grow up, and paying attention to all of the things they were doing with, like, the texts around the house. Like my daughter loves to draw. And, both of my kids play musical instruments, and so, this kind of writing (see Figure 3 below) is constantly around my house. I do not know how to read music, but both of my children do. And, I don't know if you can see it but, they make these annotations on there? So they'll be taking their music lessons, but they're actually spending a lot of time writing.

Figure 3: An excerpt from a page of Kevin's daughter's flute sheet music with her annotations.

Anya: Mhmm.

Kevin: Just seeing all these different texts around, and them using them, has really kind of helped me think hard about, like, “Well, what do I think writing is? What do other people think writing is?” I better pay attention to what *they think* writing is, rather than what *I think* writing should be.

[...]

Anya: Well, actually right now I’m taking a semester off from school. I work a full-time job. I have this internship with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, and I have hobbies I like doing. I ride horses, I write, I sew. All these different things, and so a lot of my time has been spent more in the “not writing” realm. (laughs).

Kevin: When you do sewing, do you use patterns?

Anya: Oh, yeah.

Kevin: Would you call those writing? Would you call those texts?

Anya: See, that is interesting because patterns don’t really have any words on them, but they do have a way that you’re supposed to read them, you know? Like when a pattern says, “this is the measurement here,” you’re supposed to add on like a ¼ of an inch for the seam allowance. And most people that read the pattern would just know that, but people who didn’t know how to

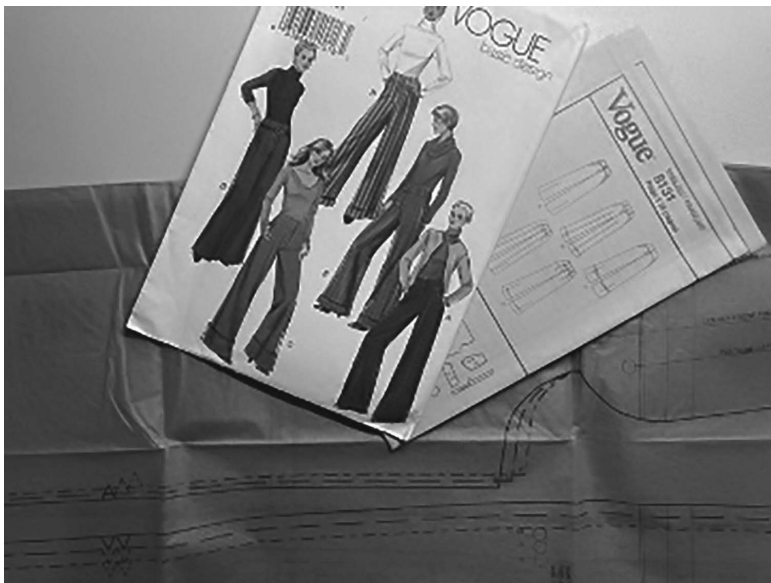


Figure 4: A sewing pattern. Additional inches need to be added when the fabric is cut.

read patterns wouldn't know that. That's actually really interesting, now that you bring that up.

Kevin: Isn't that neat, how you can look at a pattern, a simple thing about the measurement, and, you know how to read it like that, whereas I would just look at a pattern and see, the pattern, you know. That's kind of neat.

Anya: Mhmm.

Kevin: What do you do, what is your job?

Anya: I work as a doggie daycare attendant (laughs). So, even that, now that I think about it, I'm surrounded by writing even there. A lot of the stuff that we do. Like, we write down when we take the dogs out to go potty, and then we have to initial next to it. And so I've actually become really used to initialing and signing my name, and everything. And that's an unexpected sort of outcome of beginning this job.

Kevin: Like, even taking care of the dogs, keeping track of them, when they do things, requires some sort of text to keep track of it. Your initials on there to verify it. I mean, talk about being saturated with textuality. You know, from sewing to taking care of the animals, to co-writing with your friends. Your life is just like, saturated with it. It's everywhere. And, if you think about the variety of it, it's just amazing. And, as a writing researcher, I just think that the neatest thing in the world, to pay attention to those things.

Possibilities for Writing Instruction

Late in our conversation, we spent some time talking about the kinds of writing instruction that people experience in school, and some of the ways we would like it to be different. Kevin talked about his desire for people to maintain really broad notions about what writing is and what it does throughout their lives, and to continually be thinking about writing in new and different ways. Anya mused about the potential for inviting people to examine their everyday kinds of writing in school as a way to make classroom writing instruction engaging and exciting instead of drop dead boring.

Kevin: I would like it very much if people [...] could kind of think about writing in all kinds of different ways. And I think ultimately maybe the point is that there's no one way to think about writing. The whole point is just like you said. Just continually keep thinking about it in different ways, seeing it in different ways. Because, like you said, the writing is always changing, our perspectives always have to change, and I think there's something about this sense of wonder that you and I have, that we've been talking about? That's

what'll keep it going for the next generation. And I think *Grassroots* is such an exciting space, because it's a place for people to kind of think like this . . .

Anya: Yeah.

Kevin: And let other people think like this, so in your internship I hope you get to encounter all kinds of fun people thinking about writing in all kinds of fun ways.

Anya: Oh, I'm sure I will. I'm sure I'll get to read a bunch of different articles, from a bunch of different points of view. And I'm really excited for that, actually.

Kevin: Well, if you ever want to read some published writing researcher articles, about people who write fan fiction . . .

Anya: (Laughs).

Kevin: I've actually published a number of them.

Anya: Really?!

Kevin: So, yeah, some of my early case studies of a young woman who wrote fan fiction and then did fan art, and how it intertwined with her school writing.

Anya: Yeah. Interesting . . . That sounds really cool.

Kevin: I think fan fiction is so fascinating. I mean, like, really. I'm just very enamored of people who do it.

Anya: And just thinking back, in middle school, if I could write fan fiction when I was in this class talking about, you know, "Pronoun goes here" and stuff like that. I would have been so much more engaged. But, like I've mentioned before, I'm sure you've picked it up, that I'm not really pleased with the way that school teaches writing. And so I'm very hopeful that this does become more commonplace, and that this does become the new way of learning writing, too. Because I just, you know, it's like I said before, as a kid I was never like, "whoo-hoo! Writing!" I was just kind of "whatever" about it.

Kevin: (Laughs). And isn't it funny that you can do it [write in ways valued in school], but you don't get excited about it. But you get excited about other kinds of writing. I get that too. As a teacher I think about that every day. How to keep writing exciting. In fact, in my classes, students actually bring all their different kinds of writing into class, and we work on that. So, like, if they're writing fan fiction, we read and study some of their fan fiction, and their writing processes. Like, in my class right now, I've got somebody who

helps his dad do mechanical work on the weekends. And so he brings in all these drawings and these notebooks that they keep for working on cars. So, that's pretty cool.

Anya: That's amazing. Oh my gosh. I wish I was in a class like that. That sounds like the perfect class to me. Where I bring in all this writing I'm doing.

Kevin: Wouldn't it be cool, in a writing class, for your teacher to invite you to analyze and write about your use of your note apps?

Anya: Oh my gosh. That would be really cool. But, it never happened before. Still waiting for it to happen.

Reflections and Possibilities for the Future

For me (Kevin), reading back through our conversation a number of times really made me realize that being an everyday writing researcher is a very different endeavor than, say, looking for one "perfect" or "best" way of writing or form of writing. Instead, much of what Anya and I talked about helps me to recognize that everyday writing research is really more about being alert to all of the many different ways that writing, all sorts of writing for all sorts of reasons, gets entangled into people's lives and turned to their own purposes. At heart, being an everyday writing researcher is really just about a willingness and a curiosity to look closely, and differently, at writing, and what it does, and how people come to use it, even if that might carry us to texts we didn't readily consider or settings we didn't think we'd go. What I take away from the discussion Anya and I had about our hidden textual worlds is that every day writing is a fascinating place to begin looking at, and thinking and talking and researching and writing about, the richly literate lives we lead.

For me (Anya), speaking to Dr. Roozen absolutely made my day (more like my month), to begin with but I have found now that mundane, trivial tasks like keeping a schedule can be fun and exciting if viewed through a researcher's lens. Our conversation has further assured me that this is what I want to do all through college and perhaps even the rest of my life. Writing is such a personal thing that everyone can relate to. Everyone has their own unique personal experience with it and I am excited to not only continue growing in the field, but also expanding it even the smallest bit by contributing my own literary world.

Kevin Roozen is a professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Central Florida. His research examines people's literate activities and the historical pathways of their literate development throughout their lives. In addition to *Expanding Literate Landscapes* (2017), Kevin's scholarship has appeared in a number of journals and edited collections.



Anya Gregg is an eighteen-year-old trying to (and sometimes even succeeding in) being an adult. She is planning on fostering her love of writing next year when she ends her gap year and goes to school for a psychology and writing double major. When she isn't asking weird questions like "how do you remember stuff?" to her mom, Anya enjoys horseback riding and playing board games or video games with her friends. She lives at home with her two dogs and cat and hopes to one day become an animal assisted therapist.

