

Poster Handout

24 April 2025

Writing Between the Lines

Poststructuralist Approaches to Creativity and Critique in the Writing Classroom

The Pedagogical Situation

The current condition of college-level writing instruction in the United States is a morass of contradictions, symptomatic of a university system fractured by neoliberal imperatives and epistemological incoherence. As the university increasingly orients itself around instrumentalized, careerist goals—what Bill Readings termed the “university of excellence,” hollowed of cultural mission but obsessed with market performance—the teaching of writing is recast as mere skills training, detached from inquiry and rendered palatable to bureaucratic metrics (Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 1996). Writing becomes a genre of compliance rather than critique, a surface-level competency divorced from the complexities of thinking, while simultaneously masquerading as neutral, objective, and assessable—a notion long deconstructed by scholars like Patricia Bizzell and Joseph Harris, who emphasize the ideological embeddedness of all discourse. Instructors are bound to a language of “outcomes,” “rubrics,” and “transferable skills,” even as poststructuralist pedagogues—from Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University” to Trimbur’s critique of the social construction of literacy—have shown that writing is always situated, agonistic, and saturated with power. The insistence on standardization, often couched in the language of accessibility, reconstructs positivist and moral binaries under the guise of equity: complexity, ambiguity, and difficulty are vilified as elitist, even as the institutions uphold an unspoken, culturally dominant linguistic habitus (cf. Bourdieu’s *Language and Symbolic Power*). Canonical texts are discarded not because their historical violence is grappled with, but because administrators seek ideological hygiene through curricular erasure, misunderstanding that critique requires proximity, not purification. Meanwhile, the techno-solutionism of AI writing tools threatens to reify the most reductive views of language—language as input-output, thought as automation—deepening the false belief that writing is a discrete, mechanical act rather than an event of subjectivation. And yet, the field is not unaware of these contradictions; indeed, its most advanced critiques emerge from the very theoretical traditions—critical pedagogy, feminist composition theory, multilingualism, postcolonial and Black radical thought—that neoliberal university policies quietly plunder for legitimacy while ignoring their implications. This is not a moment of crisis but a managed entropy, a pedagogical situation where the demand for “competency” masquerades as liberation, and the teaching of writing becomes a performance of inclusivity underwritten by the very structures it claims to resist.

The Poet-Critic

This research intends to begin, as everything does, with *writing*. Writing through semiology, structuralist linguistics, and poststructuralist deconstruction. Representative of the broader fracturing is a deeply rooted binary that I claim has only impeded the production and sharing of knowledge and can be seen in the teaching of college writing: the objective/subjective binary or the creative/critical. What Lyotard would describe as narrative vs scientific knowledge. Both of them are dependent on entrenched metaphysical assumptions that would see the knowledge as pure and distinct from language where language is merely the arbitrary symbolic forms used to cleanly represent knowledge. Poststructuralism shows *all* knowledge, empirical and poetic alike, are mediated through the symbolic. This split mirrors and reinforces a false ontology of writing: that some texts emerge from a self, and others from thought; that some are expressions of freedom and others of rigor; that some make and others unmake. But writing is never merely expressive nor merely analytical. It is not the transcription of a thought nor the free gesture of a voice. It is the site where language folds in on itself—where the subject is constituted and disarticulated through the movement of signifiers. Creative writing workshops emphasize aesthetic autonomy and artistic freedom, while literary and cultural theory courses foreground sociopolitical critique, historical context, and the instability of language. The schism not only fragments students’ understanding of creativity and textual analysis but also constrains pedagogical innovation.

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All Writing is Poetry

Drawing on Eliot, Derrida, Barthes, Kristeva, and Malarmé, I propose a writing pedagogy that does not teach skills but attends to ruptures—that treats writing not as the production of meaning, but as the scene where meaning is deferred, disoriented, and provisionally forged. Eliot teaches that the new poem alters the entire tradition that preceded it; Derrida shows that all meaning is already displaced, always elsewhere. There is no author prior to the text, only the event of writing that makes the author retroactively legible. The "creative" and "critical" are mutually dependent; to write is always to read, and reading is never pure reception. The institution, of course, resists this. Writing programs are often governed by a logic of assessment, clarity, outcomes, and normativity. But just as Stephanie West-Puckett's work shows how queer theory reveals joy in failure, this project insists there is joy in deconstruction—in the recognition that writing is not a tool but a site of struggle.

What Comes Before the Question?

How can poststructuralist theory inform hybrid writing teaching strategies in the context of fragmentation and an AI revolution that bridge the divide between critical and creative writing? How can a poststructuralist rethinking of the humanities classroom, where writing is the site of all thought and freedom, better foster inclusivity and joy *through* the reappraisal of difference, difficulty, and a certain excellence?

Theoretical Framework

T.S. ELIOT..... *TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT*
 EZRA POUND..... *ABC OF READING*
 JACQUES DERRIDA..... *WRITING AND DIFFERENCE*
 JACQUES LACAN..... *THE INSTANCE OF THE LETTER*
 ROLAND BARTHES..... *FROM WORK TO TEXT*
 JULIA KRISTEVA..... *REVOLUTION IN POETIC LANGUAGE*

Toward an ABC of Reading

- A return to language: multilingual classrooms that emphasize writing as subject constituting and as allegorical.
- Multimodal: reinscribe the importance and inescapability of writing by demonstrating in the writing classroom how the basic linguistic principles apply to other systems of meaning such as films, digital media, music. Begin a dialectical unification of the university through a thorough reassertion of the primacy of writing.
- Unacceptable outsourcing: curb the outsourcing of our very thought as seen in the writing classrooms, the in the STEM fields, in the business and political science classroom, that would have students uncritically surrender writing to a large language model under the erroneous dictate that "the writing itself is not what matters here."

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