

What works? What does not? And why?  
Lessons from the Stanford Study

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# Longitudinal Studies of Writing (U.S.)

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- ▶ **2 large-scale longitudinal studies**
  - ▶ Pepperdine U (1994-1998, Carroll)
    - ▶ 46 participants total; reported on 20
  - ▶ Harvard U (1997-2002, Sommers)
    - ▶ 422 participants total
- ▶ **1 cross-sectional study (Haswell)**
  - ▶ 64 participants, freshman/juniors
- ▶ **8 small-scale longitudinal studies**
  - ▶ Fewer than 10 participants, usually 1-2



# Research Questions—Descriptive

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- ▶ Are there differences in students' experiences with bachelor's-level writing?
  - ▶ Gender
  - ▶ Race / ethnicity / international status
  - ▶ Discipline
- ▶ What are the changes in writing over time?
  - ▶ Knowledge of writing conventions
  - ▶ Voice / Authority / Complexity
- ▶ Are there patterns of development?
  - ▶ Impact of curriculum
  - ▶ Psychological development



# Research Methods

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## ▶ Textual Analysis

- ▶ Large archives of students' writing
- ▶ Creating coding protocols

## ▶ Questionnaires

- ▶ Researcher-created (how much writing, what kind, who helped)
- ▶ National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

## ▶ Observations

- ▶ Researcher observes classes, working groups, consultations

## ▶ Interviews

- ▶ Stimulated recall (looking at text that has been written)
- ▶ Descriptions of writing in different classes and environments



# Stanford Study of Writing

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- ▶ Professor Andrea Lunsford & team
- ▶ 5-year study (2001-2006)
  - ▶ 4 years of the bachelor's degree, plus 1 year beyond
- ▶ 189 participants
  - ▶ 12% of 2001 entering class
- ▶ Questionnaires each year
- ▶ Text collection each year – 15,000 texts
- ▶ 36 participants interviewed at least once each year



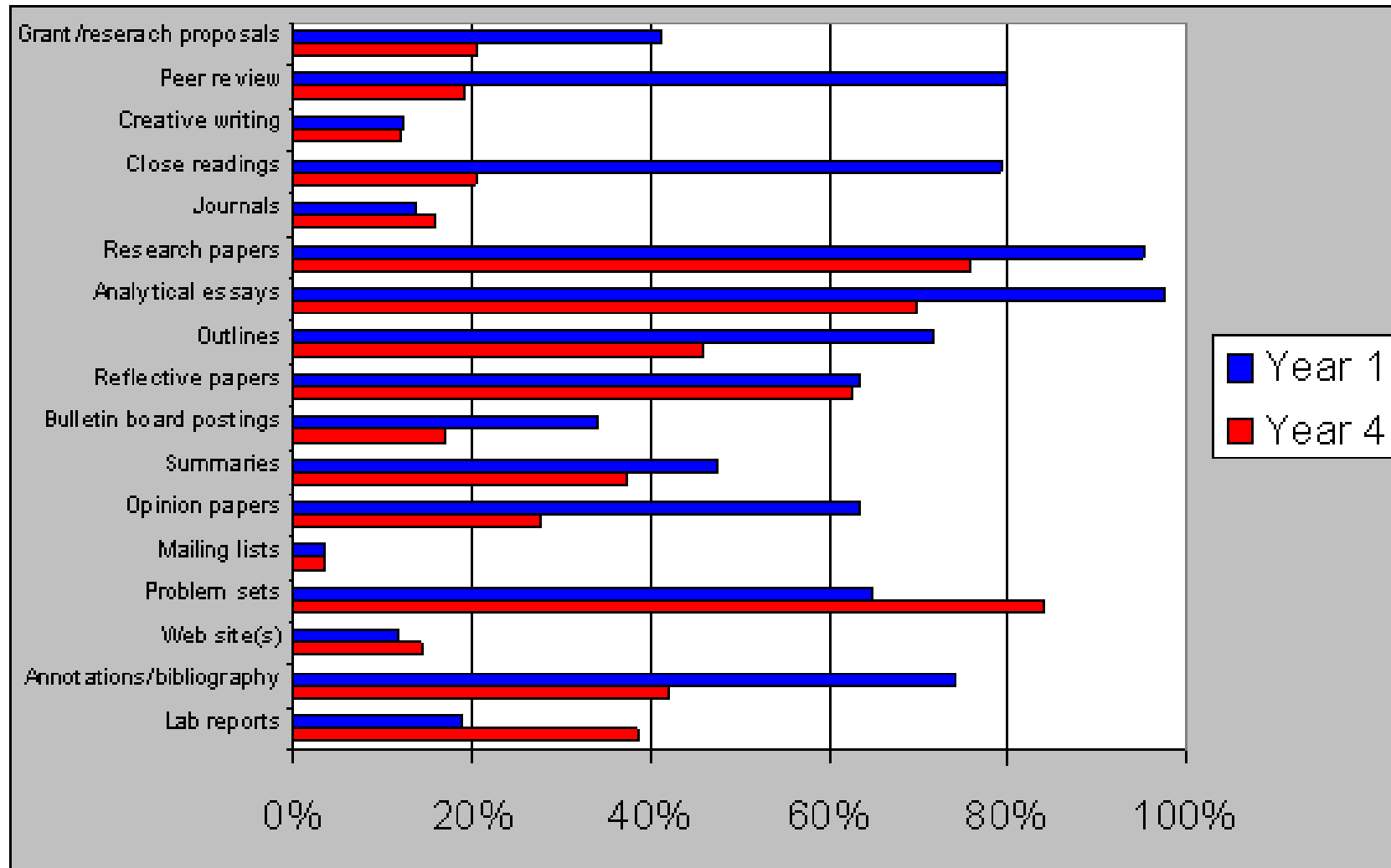
## Early Finding: Amount of Writing

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- ▶ Students generally wrote 60-100 pages in Year 1, more in Years 2-3, and then less in Year 4.
- ▶ Lunsford-Lunsford nationwide study of first-year writing
  - ▶ Random, stratified sample of collected texts (n=877)
  - ▶ Papers 2.5 times longer than 25 years ago
  - ▶ Types switched from personal essay to researched argument
  - ▶ Types of surface errors changed (e.g., spelling to wrong word)
  - ▶ Rate of error per 100 words has remained stable for 100 years



# Early Finding: Types of Writing in Years 1-4



## Early Finding: Students Valued Writing that Was Transactive

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- ▶ Writing needs to accomplish something ‘real’ – receive a response from an audience, change perceptions, contribute to a project.
- ▶ Extra-curricular writing valued over school writing
  - ▶ Posters, websites, brochures, newsletter
- ▶ Impact of digital communication?
  - ▶ Rapid response
  - ▶ Multimedia





## Early Finding: Students Valued Writing that Was Performative

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- ▶ Students often wrote pieces that were meant to be performed, and they valued them highly.
- ▶ Plays, spoken word, assignments written as dialogues
- ▶ Real audiences, immediate feedback



# Implications of Transactive/Performative Writing for Science Writing

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- ▶ “Real” effects of science writing are often obscure, especially in early years.
  - ▶ Textbooks & lectures hide conversations / debates
  - ▶ Lab reports – perceived as finding already known answers
  - ▶ Students do not have authority to speak, until they become assistants on real research projects (seniors).
- ▶ Audiences for science writing are often obscure.
  - ▶ Example – postdocs who are uncertain why words have been changed



# Implications of Transactive/Performative Writing for Science Writing

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- ▶ Science writing in school is very distant from professional science writing.
  - ▶ Students do not understand how journals operate
    - ▶ Societies & citation styles
    - ▶ Volume / issue numbers
  - ▶ Science writing in school does not look like today's journal articles
    - ▶ Use of multimedia in professional publications
    - ▶ Use of supplemental files
    - ▶ Re-organization of IMRaD



# Findings from Paul M. Rogers: Change & development

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- ▶ **Textual changes**
  - ▶ Integration of others' texts
  - ▶ Sophisticated, rhetorical awareness of readers
  - ▶ Understanding of disciplinary conventions
    - ▶ Claims & evidence
    - ▶ Theory & concepts
  
- ▶ **Development is not linear**
  - ▶ Regression
  - ▶ Cognitive overload (new tasks, new formats)



## Findings from Paul M. Rogers: Feedback

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- ▶ Students valued conversations about writing from those they considered above them (professors, TAs, postdocs).
  - ▶ Not just a one-time feedback session, but ongoing engagement with student
- ▶ Students increasingly sought peer conversations
- ▶ Students valued opportunities for revision of course papers, but also avoided such opportunities because of time constraints
- ▶ Students identified constructive, descriptive feedback as the most effective.



# Constructive, Descriptive Feedback

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4th Year Psychology Major: I worked primarily on this project with a woman who's a post doc in our lab. He [the major advisor] approved all of the ideas, but I was working most intensively with her. She was enormously helpful as far as guiding me structurally—**how to structure the paper, how to approach psychological writing. She gave me websites to access. I wrote the first draft. I brought it back. I thought it was good, and she didn't really think it was that good.** Writing for a scientific paper is supposed to be very sparse to an extent that doesn't come naturally to me. It's very much like "Don't be interesting. Tell me what it's going to be about." So I had to readdress my writing style. She was really helpful in revisions. I had a lot of help in it, but I did the writing myself.



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