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Imitation, not Limitation: Fan Fiction in the Classroom

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IMITATION, NOT LIMITATION: FAN FICTION IN THE CLASSROOM

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by
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Imitation, not Limitation: Fan fiction in the classroom

Introduction: Imitative writing in the advanced exposition classroom

There is a dizzying array of syllabi for various advanced exposition courses. Many of these syllabi address student writing development issues such as clarity, style, logic, and organization. They also address traditional focuses as description, narration, information, and argument. They can include anything from grammar texts to cable news web sites as required reading, and they usually include reassuring terms such as "improvement" to remind the student that s/he already has the basic skills necessary to compose a quality essay. Assignments might include reading a model text for guidance in writing. Some syllabi encourage imitating those models in the form of assigned essays. Professors have the option of assigning these imitative essays near the beginning of the course and sometimes throughout the course.

Imitative writing involves students drawing on the organizational, rhetorical, and stylistic strengths of an essay in order to compose an original work. When used properly, it can encourage students to develop original ideas derived from the models. The imitative writing assignment is traditional in the writing classroom, because it follows the natural pattern of learning for students. Strunk and White note in *The Elements of Style*:

> The use of language begins with imitation. The infant imitates the
> sounds made by its parents; the child imitates first the spoken language,
> then the stuff of books. The imitative life continues long after the writer
> is secure in the language, for it is almost impossible to avoid imitating
> what one admires. Never imitate consciously, but do not worry about
> being an imitator; take pains instead to admire what is good. Then when

you write in a way that comes naturally, you will echo the halloos that

bear repeating. (10)

This authoritative text demands that writers "never imitate consciously," instead

suggesting that students incorporate those traits from models in a natural, unforced way.

Professors who assign imitative writing, especially when using narratives as models,

follow this tradition of learning by doing.

English professors seek new, engaging writing activities for the advanced

exposition classroom every year. While they might already use imitative writing as a

helpful tool, certain strategies can expand its usefulness and make it a more accessible

classroom experience. Some of these strategies might be effective in the K-12 classroom,

but it requires careful attention to the writing skills of each classroom and the respective

students, according to an interview with Susan Georgecink, an instructor of advanced

exposition. While these strategies might be useful to professors teaching creative writing

or professional writing, it is the exposition classroom where all varieties of student

writers come together to advance their academic writing skills beyond the standard five

paragraph essay.

In the exposition classroom, students have already mastered walking; they are

ready to dance. They have seen how to put one foot in front of the other by reading

sample essays and imitating them in their composition courses. The same principle

applies in the exposition classroom, where students read essays that seek to explain,

describe, or inform an audience. Students can identify these rhetorical purposes and

stylistic elements as possible tools to improve their writing. They can experiment using

these tools in their own writing through imitative writing assignments. After a successful

exposition course that uses imitative writing, students can expand their knowledge and

use of rhetorical strategies, from the global (e.g. incorporating research and overall tone) to the local (e.g. diction and syntax). As long as there are guiding forces in text and professors to supplement the models with information about these strategies, students can access the benefits of imitative writing while understanding what they are.

Even after learning all of these benefits from assigning imitative writing, some professors refrain from using it in the classroom. Some claim that it limits the development of a student's voice and can be intimidating. Others claim that the benefits that imitative writing generates are not worth the investment of class time, and that shorter assignments involving readings from usage and style guides are equally if not more effective. Wendy Bishop elaborates on the misuse of imitation in the classroom:

> Memorization and imitation used to be standard forms of language
> instruction, forms that were abused… When used for control or
> intimidation—'Here, copy this Picasso and then tell me if you really
> believe you can paint!'—these practices can have a devastating effect on
> learners. However, most writers admit that they do learn a great deal
> from imitation. (74)

There is a negative association with imitation and memorization due to its perception as a limiting factor in writing. Professors might not consider that a guide through imitation in language is more helpful than teaching students to write by teaching them about language through grammar lessons (Georgecink). It is more straightforward to assign a reading about syllogisms and then to assign a paper using a syllogism than to give a shorter lesson on the definition of syllogisms, present a model that uses syllogisms, and then assign a paper that imitates the model's use of syllogism. Imperative statements that appear alone on the assignment sheet do not clarify so much as add to the student's

confusion in expanding their writing skills. Students need a model for guidance, as Ralph Fletcher points out:

> Voice in writing has to do with a unique personality-on-paper. But some writers find their voice by imitating other writers… By imitating another writer… you sometimes give yourself the freedom to find your own voice. (77)

Ironically, by limiting the scope of possible voices to a few models, students can find wholly unique voices that are also original. They do this through close reading and exploratory writing, filtering what rhetorical aspects of other writers are effective. When professors accept that imitation is not limitation they can access a wealth of enrichment activities for writing students.

Imitative writing is already practiced in many college classrooms. Consider the two syllabi below that use imitative writing in different ways.

Office Hours: CSU Writing Center (Arnold 209) MWF 11:00-noon - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File   Edit   View   Favorites   Tools   Help

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Address http://facstaff.colstate.edu/georgecink_susan/syllabi/English%203157%20syllabus.htm   ⌄ → Go   inks »

Texts: Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace,* 7th ed.
Anne Fadiman, *Ex Libris*
Sarah Vowell, *The Partly Cloudy Patriot*
Jill Ker Conway, *The Road from Coorain*

Course Description and Objectives: Our work for the semester will involve improving our skills as writers of expository prose. To that end, we will examine the essay as a genre and engage Williams' lessons on style as a framework for our study. More importantly, since writing is a craft that improves with dedicated practice, we will produce substantive portfolios of essays, both academic and personal. Peer review of essays will play an essential role in guiding revisions. Writers of particularly fine essays will be encouraged to submit their best pieces to student writing competitions at the end of the term.

Grading:
Essay assignments will be evaluated on a shifting mix of three elements: your process of drafting and revision, your final product, and your contributions to peer review of classmates' writing. (process/product/peer review)

15%	5/5/5	Essay 1 (week 3): an academic analysis of Fadiman
20%	10/5/5	Essay 2 (week 6): an academic analysis of Vowell
20%	10/5/5	Essay 3 (week 9): a personal essay modeled on elements of Vowell or Fadiman
20%	5/10/5	Essay 4 (week 12): a personal essay modeled on elements of Conway
25%	5/15/5	Essay 5 (week 15): an academic analysis of Conway

Attendance:
WF will be assigned to any student who misses more than 5 classes for any reason. DO NOT MISS Peer Review days. you cannot make up that activity and it will directly affect your grade for that essay.

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⊞ start   Gmail - Inbox - Micr...   Office Hours: CSU ...   iTunes   thesis draft july 12 -...   engl 400 syllabus - P...   7:13 PM

This syllabus assigns academic analyses of selected authors before introducing imitative

writing. This gives students the opportunity to outline the elements of each author that

stand out as particularly effective using a format that is familiar to them, the academic

analysis. Since the course is an advanced course, making it appropriate for students who

have taken a freshman composition course where they have interpreted or evaluated

literary works, this kind of assignment is most familiar and is effective as a first step in

developing expository writing skills.

The students can, after creating this familiar type of paper, experiment with incorporating those elements into their own personal narratives. They can use the strong traits of each author's writing as outlined in their academic analyses to guide them in progressing in the voice of the personal narrative. The professor using the syllabus above chooses authors that write personal narratives; for instance, the autobiography of Jill Ker Conway is the final subject for an academic analysis. Instead of students analyzing her work before creating a personal narrative, students in this case must use the effective strategies in Conway's writing for a personal narrative and then outline those elements academically, reversing the order of the previous assignments.

Title: Advanced Expository Writing (3 credit hours)

Catalog Description: A course designed to develop and enhance writing skills in expository prose, both in the personal essay and in writing from sources. Students will concentrate on improving style, clarity, and organization while developing more complex presentations related to various disciplines.

Purpose of the Course: Advanced Expository Writing is a course designed to give students in several different disciplines practice in writing expository prose. To that end it includes readings from a reader subtitled Issues Across the Disciplines and its writing assignments cover a variety of genres within nonfiction expository writing: personal narrative, argument and persuasive writing, and rhetorical analysis.

Course Objectives: You will practice different kinds of expository writing, using personal experience as well as oral and written sources, and you will learn to revise, applying to your own writing the attention to style, organization, rhetorical strategy, and unity that you first give to the writing of professional authors.

Content Outline and Instructional Activities: I will lead discussion and analysis of ten essays, eight from *The McGraw-Hill Reader* and two I will give to you in photocopy. In addition, we will read and discuss as many essays as there are members of the class; each class member will choose an essay and lead class discussion and analysis of it. Each of you will also choose a book from a reading list; the book will be the subject of the last writing assignment. A few minutes of each class meeting will be spent in style exercises from the text by Glaser. The writing portion of the course includes six papers of lengths varying between 600 and 1500 words:

An imitation of Twain's "Two Views of the Mississippi"
A personal narrative essay
An essay modeled after a *Newsweek* "My Turn" column
A revision of one of the two previous essays with interviews and written sources added
A rhetorical analysis of your chosen essay in *The McGraw-Hill Reader*
A book report or review of reviews of your chosen book

The course requires you to complete these assignments in acceptable drafts; acceptable means the essays did not contain or have been revised to eliminate any serious grammatical problems (fragments, comma splices or run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement errors, usage or verb form errors), that they are in agreement with the specific directions for the assignment, and that they are reasonably effective in accomplishing their purposes. From these assignments, I will determine your grade. Also included in calculating your grade will be quiz scores and a class participation score.

There is no final examination for the course. There will be quizzes on the assigned readings. Check unfamiliar vocabulary words in a good—hardbound—college dictionary, and be prepared to answer factual questions about the readings.

Mid-term grades will be calculated from all writing assignments and quizzes completed by the week before such grades are due.

The syllabus above uses two imitative writing assignments, one centered on Mark

Twain's "Two Views of the Mississippi" and another centered on a *Newsweek* column.

The first imitative writing assignment is also the first assignment in the course; students

are given a model to follow before they explore their own voices in a personal narrative

essay. The assignment following that is another imitative assignment, reinforcing the

role of imitation in developing a unique voice. Unlike the previous syllabus, an academic

assignment does not appear until closer to the end of the course; however, both syllabi

assign a traditional academic analysis as the final assignment, emphasizing the importance of quality exposition that uses effective strategies.

The more effective of the two syllabi is the first one, because it builds a bridge for the student who wants to create effective exposition. It begins with a familiar type of assignment, the academic analysis, which usually arrives to the professor in the form of a five paragraph essay. The thesis statement might sound forced as it tries to squeeze in three points for each body paragraph. The pattern of organization of these points could also be weak by following this format. Students might choose a surface aspect of the text they are analyzing as their thesis statement, because it is easier to support. They might overstate their points to sound convincing, or they might understate to avoid a mistake. After demonstrating through models and imitative writing more effective composition techniques, the professor can present alternatives to these choices.

In the end or throughout the course, the professor can complement the imitative writing assignments with traditional academic analyses, reinforcing that the goal of the exposition course is to improve how students explain, describe, or inform an audience. The result is a bridge that begins with a student equipped with few ideas about what exposition is and how to effectively produce it. It ends with a student fully prepared to produce effective exposition thanks to the steps of learning about exposition and its rhetorical strategies and seeing how they are effectively used in the writing of others. Either of these syllabi could benefit from the incorporation of another type of imitative writing, one that they might already read for fun: fan fiction.

Professors use imitative writing to help guide students, and many of those students see expository essays more clearly after seeing an effective model. Many
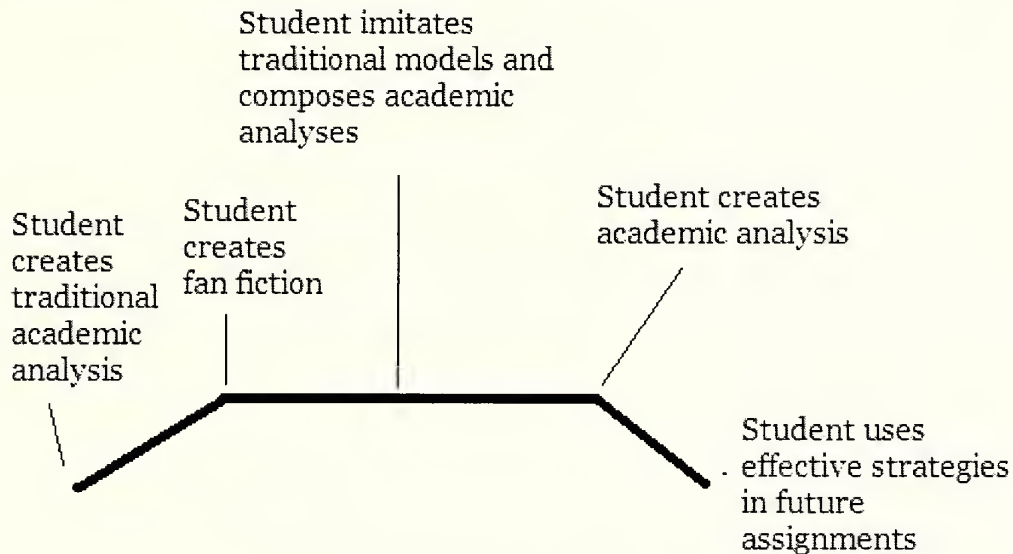
professors choose model essays from authors like George Orwell and Mark Twain. These are wonderful examples of academic prose, and in some cases offer some entertaining qualities as well. Students are familiar with composing essays after having read them, but how familiar or comfortable are they with a work like "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses"? Is this something that the student would read on a regular basis? While students certainly *should* read works like this daily, it is fairly unusual. Students today do most of their reading online, which means news sites, web logs (blogs), online journals (o.l.j.s), and fan fiction (fanfic). The goal in using sample essays is to make students more familiar with academic expository writing. Why not bridge the gap from the known to the unknown by using examples from what students read daily? The bridge would consist of the first step, a traditional academic analysis of a work, the new yet accessible step, fan fiction, followed by imitating traditional narratives, such as the one by Twain, ending with the final progression to a strong voice in original academic prose.

Of the different examples listed above, fan fiction is the most logical choice to incorporate into an imitative writing assignment. By its definition, it is imitative writing. It is also the easiest form for students to learn, since it is based on their own recreational reading and viewing, unlike blogs and news sites, which are based on a person's daily life and current events, respectively. Fan fiction is familiar to everyone, even those who might not know the term. Everyone writes it, even if they never get it on paper (or on a web site). A student who writes fan fiction cannot be unfamiliar with the subject matter, allowing them to focus entirely on the imitative writing experience. Before, a student would work with unfamiliar academic essays to imitate the stylistic elements for use in original works, leaving the chasm of the unknown to cross. After incorporating fan

fiction, a student can work with well known products of popular culture to become familiar with imitative writing. They can then use that experience to access the less familiar academic essays described earlier, easing the way for them to imitate those traditional models to eventually create original academic prose.

Student imitates
traditional models and
composes academic
analyses

Student creates
academic analysis

Student
creates
traditional
academic
analysis

Student
creates
fan fiction

Student uses
effective strategies
in future
assignments

All of these postulates bring up several important questions. What is fan fiction? If a professor is not familiar with it, it remains a suspect addition to any classroom. Does fan fiction have elements appropriate for academic prose writing? How difficult would it be to add this preliminary step to an exposition course? Is it worth the effort and class time? Fan fiction is a worthwhile study when building the bridge for exposition students.

What is fan fiction?

"Fan fiction," otherwise known as "fanfic," is a form of literature written by fans of previously published works in an attempt to creatively imitate those works in style, plot, and characters. It is usually composed by younger fans, and it is usually published online. Fans of a particular novel, television series, film, or video game compose works of fiction that use the same characters, the same kind of conflict, and the same elements

of the creator's style to produce an accurate imitation. The imitation is designed not only as a testament to the fan's devotion to the source work (i.e. the novel, television series, film, or video game), but it also has a secondary goal. The fan writer has the opportunity to focus on details of the source work that are left out by the original creator, who is more concerned with the overall work (Floyd 1). Typical fanfics involve relationships between characters that are not fully developed in the source work. The creator has deferred that possible relationship to maintain the source work as a whole, leaving the fans to hypothesize and experiment. Fan fiction is the epitome of participatory literature, because anyone can be a fan of the source material, an author of fan fiction, and a critic of the fan fiction of others, producing a creative and social community.

The primary purpose of participating with the source work remains central to the fan writer, but the secondary goal of expanding the canon of the source work stems from it, giving a solid direction to the fan writer. This emphasis functions much like a thesis statement in expository writing, because it allows the fan writer to streamline all of the details of a hypothetical addition to a source work into a structured, stratified work. While this kind of structure might seem more like work than play to build, it allows the fan writer to play with the elements of the canon in the work of fan fiction.

No one can understand the genre phenomenon of fan fiction without a basic knowledge of fandom in science fiction and fantasy writing. "Fandom" is, according to Peter Roberts, "the active readership of sf [science fiction] and fantasy, maintaining contacts through fanzines and conventions" (206). Fandom started in the late 1920s, according to Roberts, via science fiction magazines and their subsequent fan groups and clubs. Fandom encouraged a strong bond among the readers and between the readers and

the text, including writers and editors. The bond was so strong between fans and fandom partly because of the stock market crash, which created a powerful desire to escape reality ("Fandom" 273). Fandom progressed in stages influenced by factors such as world events, conflicts between fan groups, and changes in the source material.

Fandom soon began to narrow the focus from science fiction and fantasy down to subgroups and, eventually, to works by a single author; H.P. Lovecraft was the first author to be the subject of one of these groups after his death in 1937 (273). His works as well as those of others appeared in collections of science fiction stories first published on pulp. Fans of science fiction responded to the published magazines at first by sending in letters to the "Discussions" column of Hugo Gernsback's magazine *Amazing Stories*, thus sparking a unique relationship between fans and the authors and editors of science fiction (274). The fans created their own magazines, called "fanzines" or "zines" for short, which were about the science fiction/fantasy magazines already published. Fans gradually gained influence with science fiction/fantasy authors and editors, paving the way for active fans to become authors and editors themselves (272). One of the most successful science fiction authors, Harlan Ellison, started his career through "fanac" or fan activity. One of his pieces, "A Walk around the Park," was written for an early science fiction fanzine and is still featured on his web site, the Harlan Ellison Webderland (harlanellison.com).

In the process of learning how to write quality science fiction, aspiring writers would imitate their favorite works, adopting aspects from the source material and developing new techniques at the same time. In the spirit of the community among science fiction/fantasy fans, these imitations along with their final products were

circulated for peer review in small groups. These activities progressed into fan fiction writing groups and fanzines dedicated to publishing fan fiction and other fan-generated media. Fan fiction specifically began with Gene Roddenbury's 1966 television series "Star Trek," whose fans were dedicated enough to keep the series from being cancelled after an intense letter-writing campaign to NBC in 1967. Fandom was reaching its largest point at that time, and technology had developed that made self-publishing in small quantities relatively inexpensive. Since most science fiction fans at the time were also tuning in to "Star Trek," it was easier than ever before for science fiction fans to publish fanzines in small groups using typewriters and mimeograph machines. The first fanzine to publish fan fiction was *Spockanalia* in 1967, the same year that the network received millions of pieces of mail asking for a third season.[1]

Since the ending of the original series of "Star Trek" in 1969, other developments in science fiction and in technology have led to an expansion of fan fiction. It went from being an activity associated exclusively with science fiction/fantasy fans to being associated with anything produced for entertainment with a distinctive style. The development of the internet and the world wide web in the early 1990s made text easier than ever to produce and share with larger groups of people. A decade later, personal computers and the internet are an integral part of the American home. Fans can communicate via email regarding their fanac, they can read fan fiction online via "netzines" or "blogs," and they can create their own fanfics through any number of online networks.

Although fan fiction can focus on a fandom based on only one work, most fan fiction works focus on source works that appear as a series. The two most popular

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[1] This information is from the Wikipedia.com article on fan fiction.

canons for fan fiction have traditionally been "Star Trek" and George Lucas' 1977 film *Star Wars.* Canons can range from science fiction/fantasy roots to Jane Austen to "real person fiction" (also known as "rpf") about John Kerry and John Edwards during the 2004 presidential election. Real person fiction is based on the daily lives of real people, usually celebrities. This kind of fan fiction concentrates on the celebrities as characters in the media, reflecting a postmodern view of reality and fantasy being synonymous. Rpf works are a relatively new concept that stem from "actorfic" works of fan fiction that cover the lives of the actors, not their characters, in popular television programs and films, such as *The Lord of the Rings.* Rpfs are sometimes shunned because they focus on people and groups from outside the realm of fiction; fan fiction by definition involves imitating works of fiction.

Fan fiction stories need to alter only one of the elements of the source work to be considered worthwhile. There are countless possible combinations of bonds to maintain or alter. Some fans will compose stories using familiar characters and familiar settings with new plots. Others will introduce a new character to the cast and see how it changes the familiar settings and plots. Still others will invent new settings for the familiar characters and their typical conflicts to observe the differences. A fan work can never be purely original or an exact copy; it will always be a combination of ideas both original and extracted.

Various scholars have attempted to categorize these combinations for the benefit of those writing and reading fan fiction. One of the most popular subgenres is the "relationship story," which involves creating romances or friendships between characters in one or more source works. For example, a fan might explore a friendship between

Yoda and Chewbacca from *Star Wars*. Yoda is certainly old enough to have known Chewbacca, and in *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, the audience can see Chewbacca and Tarful, a fellow wookie, providing sanctuary for Yoda on the planet Kashyyyk. What could Yoda learn from Chewbacca, and vice versa? Could Chewbacca teach Yoda how to fly a star cruiser like Han Solo's Millennium Falcon, featured in *Episode IV*? A fan could explore these things freely, so long as s/he maintains the bond with the source work and does not depart from it too heavily.

Another subgenre is the "crossover story." This story involves characters from one canon interacting with other characters and other canons. Many of these stories involve similar settings, such as Manhattan. A crossover story set in Manhattan could involve Carrie Bradshaw, Sarah Jessica Parker's character from "Sex and the City" getting in a cab on the show "Taxi" and interacting with playboy cab driver Bobby Wheeler. What would happen when two characters from the same city shown in two different television programs get together for a chat? Would they laugh? Cry? Would they connect at all? More importantly, how did the fan writer choose to present this story? It could be in short story form, in the form of a television script for "Taxi," or an entry from Carrie's diary.

Setting and style are not the only factors in the crossover story. Some stories will "cross over" based on similar themes. For example, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," a popular television series stemming from a 1992 film and producing countless paperback novels, includes battles between good and bad magic. Willow, one of the characters on the program, is a practicing witch. Because they share the themes of magic and specifically training in magic to fight for good over evil, fan writers cross over "Buffy"

episodes featuring Willow with the *Harry Potter* series of children's books. How can Willow contribute to fighting evil at Hogwarts? How does her training differ from the kind that Harry and the other students have received? Sometimes crossover stories develop into relationship stories as characters develop friendships and romances.

A subgenre that involves introducing a completely new character into a fandom is the "self-insertion" story. This involves the fan writer creating a character based on him/herself and experimenting with the reactions from the other characters in the canon. The fan writer is already familiar with the source material, and so s/he can interact with the other characters at various levels of experience. For instance, a fan writer could write him/herself into an episode of the television series "M*A*S*H*" either as a patient who knows little about the 4077th unit that serves as the main setting of the show, or the fan writer can write him/herself in as a new medical officer who has spent years working in similar hospital units. One of the show's most pompous doctors, Major Charles Emerson Winchester, would react differently to the two different types of characters: the first choice, the patient with no experience, would receive benevolent though condescending care; the experienced doctor would receive a hostile and unforgiving attitude from the threatened Major Winchester.

There are works where introducing an entirely new character to a fandom is successful, but it requires careful consideration of the characters already in the source work and the changes the new character will effect. Self-insertion stories run the risk of turning into "Mary Sue" stories. This is considered "badfic," literally "bad fan fiction," and gets flamed-- harshly criticized-- more often and more intensely than any other badfic (Bacon-Smith 94). Mary Sues are works, usually composed by women, where the

fan author has inserted herself into a fandom as a perfect character that charms the most attractive characters and dies to save the life of another character or of all of the characters. The character is one-dimensional and self-serving to the author, and should not be shared with others lightly. Camille Bacon-Smith elaborates on the origin of the Mary Sue story, a term that first appeared in a 1974 "Star Trek" fanzine called *Menagerie*:

> Mary Sue is the youngest officer ever to serve on the starship *Enterprise*. She is a teenager, tall and slim, with clear skin and straight teeth... But Mary Sue is not just another pretty face. She is usually highly educated, with degrees from universities throughout the known universe in all fields of technical and cultural studies (or an equivalent head of her class in Starfleet Academy). She can mend the *Enterprise* with a hairpin, save the lives of the crew through wit, courage, and, occasionally, the sacrifice of her virtue. If the formula is strictly followed, Lieutenant Mary Sue dies in the last paragraph of the story, leaving behind a grieving but safe crew and ship. (94)

When fan writers can avoid a Mary Sue, they can create a complex and mature piece of fiction that includes self-insertion. The key to avoiding a Mary Sue is to make the self-inserted character believable, which seems to run counter to the fantastic nature of fan fiction. A fanfic of quality, though, will be an accurate imitation, complete with believable characters.

While there are many other subgenres of fan fiction, including "shippers," "lemons," and "slash" fiction, they are inappropriate for the exposition classroom. Many of these subgenres focus on sexual images, which undermine the goal of making the

student writer prepared for imitative writing. A student might not feel comfortable sharing a lemon (a fanfic with graphic sexual images between characters within a fandom) with a peer review group, for instance. The three subgenres of fan fiction that are best suited to a classroom environment for imitative writing assignments are nonsexual relationship stories, crossover stories, and self-insertion stories. These all require intense reading, viewing, or playing/gaming of the source work. They also require a good foundation in the elements of fiction, such as characters, setting, plot, and style. Students acquire such familiarity with source works and basic literary elements through daily recreational reading and their first English courses in college, respectively.
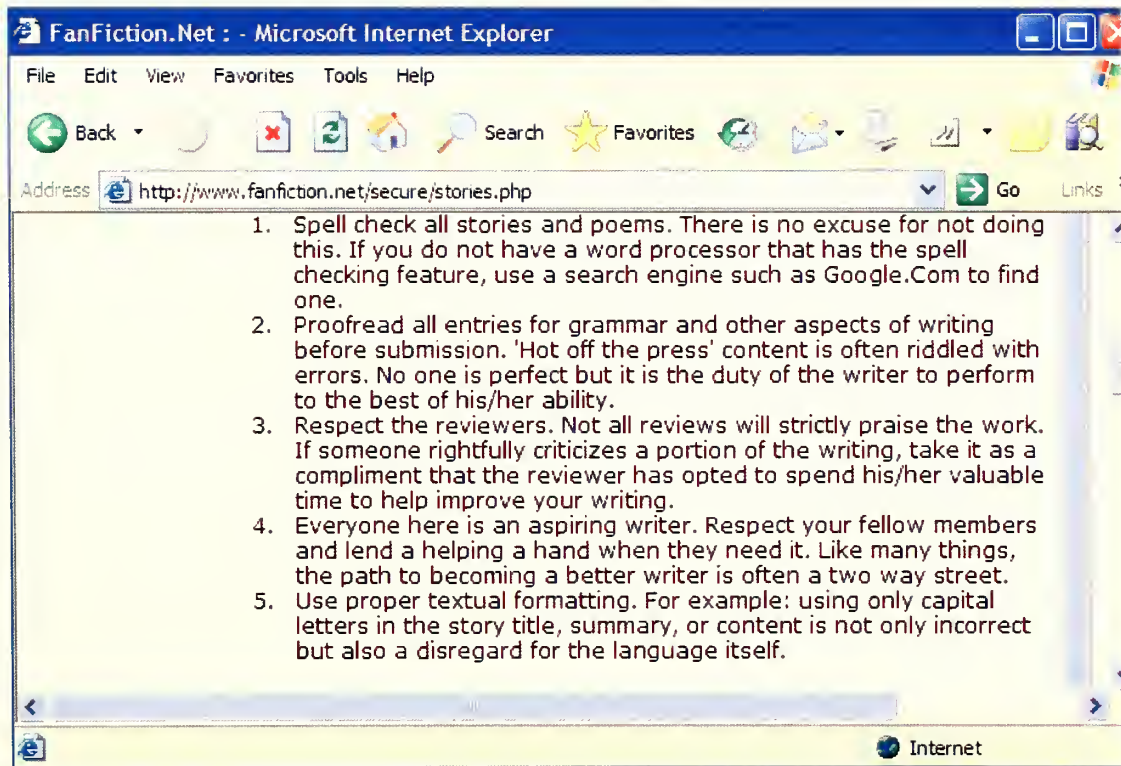
Publication of fan fiction

As a rule, fan fiction is never published for profit. While there are exceptions to this rule, they are rare. The vast majority of fan writers create fan fiction as recreation, not as anything potentially lucrative. Fans who try to publish fan fiction for profit must negotiate potentially lengthy legal avenues. Fan writers can create as much fan fiction as they desire without suffering penalty so long as it is purely a recreational pursuit. This creates a comfortable atmosphere for fan writers and the creators of source works alike. Fan writers have a fun and relaxing hobby, and creators of source material enjoy a kind of free advertising that encourages the bond between the fans and the source material. Fan writers can share works as quickly with the masses as they can respond.

Fan fiction is published in various ways. Before the internet, fans would handwrite or type their stories on typewriters (Jenkins 154). They would circulate their stories in small fan groups that met informally in people's homes. They would meet in larger groups with photocopies to distribute, and they would mail copies of stories to

friends. Fans with the right motivation could publish fanzines containing many fan

fiction pieces or other fan-generated media, including artwork or songs. The first fanzine

was published using carbon paper in 1929 by Siegel and Shuster, who would later go on

to create the character of Superman ("Fandom" 274). A zine publisher keeps

subscription costs low enough to cover costs without generating profit. This keeps the

works accessible to the fans, which is the goal of publishing fan fiction. The internet has

opened doors to fan fiction, making it available around the world, all day, every day.

Some sites require a membership, but these are usually free.

Established sites, such as fanfiction.net, include writing etiquette similar to

freshman composition guidelines and a rating system for content inappropriate for

immature audiences. Three of the five guidelines involve local concerns such as spelling,

refraining from abuse of the caps lock, and other distractions.

FanFiction.Net : - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File   Edit   View   Favorites   Tools   Help

Back   •   Search   Favorites

Address   http://www.fanfiction.net/secure/stories.php   Go   Links

1. Spell check all stories and poems. There is no excuse for not doing this. If you do not have a word processor that has the spell checking feature, use a search engine such as Google.Com to find one.
2. Proofread all entries for grammar and other aspects of writing before submission. 'Hot off the press' content is often riddled with errors. No one is perfect but it is the duty of the writer to perform to the best of his/her ability.
3. Respect the reviewers. Not all reviews will strictly praise the work. If someone rightfully criticizes a portion of the writing, take it as a compliment that the reviewer has opted to spend his/her valuable time to help improve your writing.
4. Everyone here is an aspiring writer. Respect your fellow members and lend a helping a hand when they need it. Like many things, the path to becoming a better writer is often a two way street.
5. Use proper textual formatting. For example: using only capital letters in the story title, summary, or content is not only incorrect but also a disregard for the language itself.

Internet

Since text does not take up much of a web site's cyberspace as images, fan writers usually have plenty of space on a site for posts. There are usually no guidelines regarding the length of a work except for online cataloging purposes. The internet allows for immediate posting and review of fan fiction works, so the guidelines discourage hastily written responses, especially negative ones.
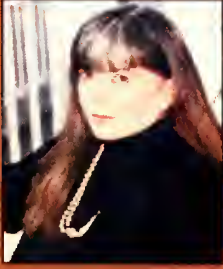
While producing fan fiction without generating profit is legal, there are authors who are opposed to their works being used to generate fan fiction online. Just as there are authors and creators who encourage fan writers, there are those who discourage fan writers just as intensely. An author cannot sue a fan writer, but s/he can issue a cease and desist order to the web site that hosts fanfics based on his/her work. Many fans see online fan fiction as either a harmless hobby or a genuine interest in the structure of the particular source material. In either case, fan fiction serves as free advertising for the source material; however, authors who discourage fan fiction based on their works are not always concerned about losing sales. After reading stories of low quality and questionable subject matter, an author might feel insulted or degraded.

Anne Rice, author of *Interview with a Vampire*, for example, is the most ardent protestor of fan fiction. While her cease and desist orders to various web sites and their webmasters cited copyright infringement during her clean sweep of fan fiction based on her fiction, Rice's biggest concerns were maintaining creative control over the quality of her characters. On her official web site, Rice posted:

MESSAGES FROM ANNE
Announcements

CHRISTOPHER RICE'S SECOND BOOK RELEASED
Christopher Rice's newest book, THE SNOW GARDEN, has been published by Talk Miramax books. Visit www.thesnowgarden.com for details.

IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM ANNE ON "FAN FICTION"
Anne has posted the following message regarding fan fiction: "I do not allow fan fiction. The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original stories with your own characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes."

< http://www.annerice.com/sh_xMFA_Announcements.htm>

Rice's hyperbolic diction and emotional tone, indicated by her claim to be "upset terribly," reinforces the strong and often emotional bond between the author and her work which mirrors the bond between the fans and the work.

Anne McCaffrey, a prominent fantasy author, has recently lifted her ban on fan fiction based on her work. Taken from a lengthy note from her official web site, McCaffrey will allow fan writers to produce their works if they are entirely noncommercial, include trademarks, exclude pornographic/slash fiction, use good taste, stick to canon, and "play nice" (McCaffrey 1). Her concerns mirror all of the major concerns from authors popular in fan fiction communities, ranging from commercial ventures to departures from canon to "niceness." McCaffrey opens the gates to a virtual playground of fan fiction, asking in return that everyone involved obey certain rules. In doing this, she acknowledges and balances the relationships developed between herself and her work, herself and her fans, and her fans and her work, maintaining a more maternal tone than that of Anne Rice. Since she does not personally monitor the fan

fiction produced, it will be up to sites like fanfiction.net to extend her wishes to their members.

Fanfiction.net is the largest collection of online fan fiction[2]. The site showcases many features of fan fiction, though it does leave some aspects of fan fiction out of the site. According to the site, there is no adult content with an NC-17 rating allowed. It has also banned real person fan fiction, because it defies the definition of fan fiction. It has banned MSTs, which are stories that use the premise of the television show *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, defined as "comments inserted in between the flow of a copied story" ("Guidelines" 1). These stories are considered inferior to the possible parodies and satires a fan writer could compose in response to a posted story. Interestingly enough, the site has also banned stories written in the form of a script or screenplay, forcing the fan writer to use proper dialogue notation and some kind of narration.

Despite these guidelines, Fanfiction.net is a useful model to anyone curious about publishing fan fiction online. To use the site, the fan writer must register with the site by providing an email address, password, and confirmation that s/he is over thirteen years of age. Once the account is set up, the fan writer can then post stories and review stories by other fan writers. Rather than cutting and pasting text, the site requires that you upload a file from a word processing program, such as Microsoft Word. The site accepts most file types, including such obscure types as NeoOffice (.sxw) files. The fan writer can preview and edit the file to make any adjustments before the story is posted.

No one knows how much fan fiction has been published. According to Henry Jenkins, the underground nature of fan writing's publication means that "no one has been able to produce a reasonable estimate of the full scope of media fandom's writing and

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[2] This claim is found on the Wikipedia.com article on fan fiction.

publishing activity or its readership" (157). Even technology such as story counters on fan fiction web sites cannot account for works published in zines in limited circulation or not published at all, affecting the production to publication ratio. Unpublished fan fiction can include fanfic concept developed extensively in the mind of a fan without actual production into words. It can also include privately written fan fiction that stays hidden within a fan's physical or electronic files.

Criticism in Fan fiction

The most popular way to publish fan fiction is online. The structure of the internet is such that fan writers can post an entry and get immediate feedback on their works. Some of these fan critics will wait to discuss the story until after composing a well thought out review, but most give immediate and unrevised thoughts in order to facilitate a discussion. Editing and revision in the writing process can continue after publication, both in the work of fan fiction and its criticism. A fan writer might compose a work where Zack Morris from "Saved by the Bell" marries a supermodel after graduating from college. An astute fan critic would then point out that Zack married Kelly Kapowski in Las Vegas, according to one of the made for television specials. The fan writer can adjust the timeline or remove that part of the plot to make the story follow the canon; sometimes a fanfic will produce a change in the canon so popular that fan writers will adopt the change as part of a fan-generated canon, or "fanon."

Some fanons end when the creator extends the canon. An example of this is the most recent novel in the *Harry Potter* series, *The Half-Blood Prince*. Because the canon is being expanded by its creator, J.K. Rowling, many fan writers will adjust fanfics written after its release to incorporate details from *THBP* in order to lend believability to

each work. While some sites for other canons might enforce this as a rule, the largest fan

fiction sites involving Harry Potter, such as Fiction Alley (fictionalley.org) or The Sugar

Quill (sugarquill.net), allow fan writers to disregard the changes if the work is either

unfinished (e.g. a novel length work of fan fiction) or of quality. The predominating

attitude of more liberal web sites like these is that a canon change should not cause

distress to writers of recreational literature. These sites usually have more positive

though not necessarily constructive review posts.

After posting a file on a fan fiction site, the fan writer can read reviews that can be

sent in immediately, sometimes as soon as the same day the story is posted. The reviews

can be signed or anonymous. Signed reviews cannot be deleted by the fan writer, but

anonymous reviews can. If the fan writer is constantly flamed by a fan critic, the writer

can block that critic and delete any attempts by the critic to flame anonymously. Most

fanfic sites do not allow writers to respond to their critics directly. Positive and negative

reviews have distinct diction and style that mix academic and street language. It is not

unusual to come across a post that can praise a fan author for "awesome characters" that

are "totally true to canon," or a post that can criticize a fan author for "being so mindless

in spelling that it should come with a shot of bleach and two aspirin." This call for

"bleeprin," bleach and aspirin, is a common insult for particularly bad fan fiction.

Positive reviews generate discussions on the details of the work, the overall

quality with respect to originality as well as similarity to the source work, and the fandom

in general. Usually the more reviews a fanfic has, the better the reviews are. Below

appears a set of reviews for one of the most popular Jane Austen fanfics. The story is

called "Shine," and it is a modern retelling of *Pride and Prejudice*. It has received four

hundred and ninety reviews since its first post in late September 2003, and it is still being updated. It has twenty chapters that are under constant revision. Here is some of what the fans had to say about this story:

Abby 2005-06-26 ch 20, anon.	This is up in my top 5 favorite fanfictions and believe me, it isn't easy to get there. This was really well written. I should have reviewed after every chapter. It would have given you 500+ reviews, but I was hooked. I'm so glad I read it just after it was finished, so I didn't have to wait. :-D By the way, I love your quotes.
Darcyfan 2005-06-25 ch 20, anon.	Luna--i'm lovin the change in chapt 19. I was settled after reading the new version and didn't even realize i was unsettled till i read the revision. Love it! Le sigh all good times must come to an end, but thanks for sharing such a HAUS story. I'm hoping you do something with Anne of Green Gables, because i love it so much, and in a similar style of this one . . . or another one of my fave books--The Blue Castle by LMMont. I'm missing your writing so write some more . . . question, do you criticize all writing or just stories/fanfiction--bec i've got some poetry i'm working on, and would like to get some prospective . . . let me know--email me here Thanks a million. Loved the story, keep up the good work and can't wait till the new work arrives! :) (PLEASE do AOGG!--or an LMM work where the focuse is ANNE and GIL!)

The fan critics observe details such as the quotes used in the story and the differences after the revision of a chapter. Darcyfan suggests many expansion ideas, including an AOGG (*Anne of Green Gables*) fanfic in the style of Lucy Maud Montgomery. His/her request for help on poetry demonstrates the community created by the web site. Below is a positive review for a *Back to the Future* story, a review that is well suited for a classroom peer review session:

Nightspore 2005-04-29 ch 1, signed	EXCELLENT – the density of the tiny, exquisite details and the perfectly in-character moments are just wonderful. I really like your version of George, you've developed him into a believeable and well-rounded character with this developing backstory. I especially love how the George/Marty slash is completely yet obviously implied by the interactions with the two original characters, for example the beatnik's "passing through" and use of "it's heavy". Just alltoegther a complex, rewarding piece!

This review combines what is most important to writers of fan fiction and academic writers alike. Details are very important in expository writing, especially in description. The dialogue supports the verisimilitude of the character in reference to the source material.

Negative reviews can be equally observant. They can range from constructive

posts like this:

Naraku's Phoenix 2005-06-06 ch 1, signed	...interesting...anyway, You might want to consider reposting this. I'm not sure if they'll count this as scripted work, but if they do, they'll delete it off the site. Also, you need to have a disclaimer saying you don't own ATHF...or they'll delete it off the site. Just tryin' to help out my favorite newbie. Not a bad first one-shot, though. You've got these guys in pretty good character.

to flames like this:

	Subject:	A short love letter and lesson in MS Word
	Time:	12:20 pm
	Current Mood:	IRCF 😣 testy

[dreadnot]

Dear Fanfic Author:

Welcome to the internet. To have gotten here, you must have completed the unthinkable task of sitting your ass down in front of a glowing screen and moving that little thing we call a mouse and making it click on that little picture called an icon. Then you clicked several more times and you found ff.net and submitted your opus for the world to see.

I'm not even going to go into the problems you have with characterization, plot, sentence structure, or readability that the average pithed vole would have problems with.

Instead, I'm going to focus on one minor matter. Your gods damned spelling.

You're using a computer, yes? From the fact that your quotes and apostrophes were automatically changed to curly quotes, I'm going to assume that you're using something other than notepad to do your so-called writing. (Because gods know, you're definitely not technically adept enough to have done that yourself and with your eye for details in canon, I don't expect much of you in terms of text formatting.) I'm even going to forgive the entire definitely/defiantly problem because, well, you're stupid and I know it.

However, you continually misspell the same word the same way. I'm going to introduce you to a *feature* of MS Word that I beg you to use. It will make you look smarter than you actually are.

Click on the menu labeled **Tools**
Pull down to the choice called **AutoCorrect**
Now, I know this part is complicated, but bear with me. Do you see the box labeled **Replace**? Put your consistently misspelled word there. Do you see the box labeled **With**? Put the correct spelling of the word in there. I know that may require using a dictionary or asking someone who passed third grade for help, but give it a shot.

Now you can type to your heart's content knowing that you will never again misspell that particular word in that particular way because Word will follow along behind you sweeping your crap into a can and leaving behind properly spelled gems automagically.

No Love,
An Angry, Moderately Technically Adept, and Highly Masochistic Reader

<http://www.livejournal.com/community/fanficrants/?skip=20>

Negative reviews are usually constructive, even going so far as to offer encouragement to a fan writer. The excerpted review by Naraku's Phoenix is negative, but it also emphasizes the positive relationship between fan critic and fan writer. Flames are only meant to insult the work of fiction and sometimes the fan writer, often using condescension and sarcasm (Epps 1). The excerpted flame above has fairly civil word choice; most flames are given to rampant expletives. It addresses one of the most common complaints that fan critics make about badfic: spelling errors. Spelling errors are extremely disappointing when reading fan fiction, because word processing technology (such as the AutoCorrect function listed in the flame above) is more advanced than ever in preventing common spelling mistakes. Flames can also address characters being "out of character" or "out of canon" (both labeled "OOC"), whether or not the fanfic is a Mary Sue (composed by a "Suethor"), as well as failed crossover experiments (e.g. putting Ace from *Ace Ventura, Pet Detective* in a Harry Potter story). Any element of a fanfic written badly enough is fair game for a flame.

Joseph Tabbi calls the internet a "cultural laboratory" that allows for the free circulation of free ideas while retaining a classroom environment (235). Because the internet speeds the process for communication, it reduces the editing process in time as well as quality. In other words, the internet is a good place to create ideas, but a bad place to refine them. The one possible exception to this rule is in fan fiction communities, where fan works published in a group are discussed. These communities can be part of independent web sites, but one of the most popular web sites for fan fiction communities online is through LiveJournal, a free online journal service. Other online journal programs, such as Greatest Journal, are structured identically and can also have

active fan fiction communities. LiveJournal is one of the oldest and most popular journal web sites for fan fiction posts, so it is a perfect example of the interactive nature of journal-style story posts. While fanfiction.net does not allow the author to respond under a "parent comment," LiveJournal encourages comment chains. It allows the fan writers to carry on a thread of discussion removed from the general posting area. Longer threads can collapse into smaller visual space, while shorter threads can remain expanded. The excerpt of a shorter thread below is a perfect example of the kind of dialogue fostered by journal web sites:

mystik_serena
2005-06-21 16:48 (link)

I scanned over most of this, so I only have a couple of things to pick on. You have pretty good grasp of dialogue and paragraphs. The only thing is that each paragraph should have something to with each other, and these were the particular parts I noticed that you need to correct. And, don't randomly drop in Japanese because A) most of the readers don't know Japanese, and B) when you write, you're assuming that they're already talking in Japanese, not English when it's Japanese characters, so dropping in Japanese is like "My translator broke..."

He woke from his dream world, the cold in his room immediately affecting him. He walked to his washroom ignoring the goosebumps invading his arms. There was no turning back to his shelter, to his mattressed hiding place, not until he went through yet another day. He looked at himself in the mirror.

It's awkward to have "He did. He did." so close to each other.

"OK... maybe if I go really quik... "

It's spelled quick, darlin'

Tetsu sat in mild entertainment watching Hyde read the menu as if it were an epic novel. He was happy to be with Hyde.

It's more effective to show how he was happy to be with Hyde, not just saying it.

"Your right Haido" (as if Tetsu would be this cooperative) "I'm not happy. But I can be with your help Doihachiro!"

Your should be "you're." Your is used when you're saying that it's possessive, while you're is used when you're saying "you are." The way I check is by trying out "you are" in place of the 'your' you plan on using, if it fits, it should be "you're"

(Reply to this)(Thread)

bemygoodday
2005-06-22 04:21 (link)

I never really thought of the Japanese that way. When writing it, I thought that putting the Japanese in would help with the characters voice. I used it minimally and I tried to use very simple/common terms that I thought people, even non-Japanese speakers, would understand. I see your point though and I thank you for that perspective.

Would:

Woken from his dream world, the cold in his room immediately affected him. Walking to his washroom he ignored the goosebumps invading his arms. There was no turning back to his shelter, to his mattressed hiding place, not until he went through yet another day. He looked at himself in the mirror.

be better?

The rest there is a nice compilation of typos. I know my you're, yore and yours. I'm just a lazy reviser... in the way that I'm so lazy, I never revise. guess I should work on that...

(Reply to this)(Parent) (Thread)

mystik_serena
2005-06-22 04:49 (link)

That makes a much better paragraph, and I was in a bit of a bitchy mood, so...yeah. >.> and revising is the best friend an author can have, other than drafts.

(Reply to this)(Parent)

Despite this discussion, fan writers do not usually submit revised versions of their stories for consideration. Whatever advice is given by response posts online is used for future stories, leaving the story at hand unrevised. A fan writer would rather create a new piece of fan fiction than revise an old one. This cycle of revision through creation is influenced by the high volume of fan fiction and the disposable nature of a fan fiction

story, which is an element that a classroom environment can dismiss in light of an assignment or make use of as a comfort zone.

Fan fiction's writing process

A fan writer can follow all of the steps in an academic writing process while writing fan fiction. The first and most crucial step is to read, view, or play the source material and read its fan fiction. A fan author will not write successful fan fiction without reading the fan fiction of all of the source works s/he intends to cover (Bacon-Smith 150). This forms a research component as well as the traditional use of a model text in exposition. After reading enough of the source material and its fan fiction to understand the basic elements of the text, the fan writer can draw from its elements to compose a quality draft. The fan writer must consider the context of the source work and the strategies adopted by other fan writers. These strategies, such as plot, character, and setting adjustments mentioned previously, require careful brainstorming and sometimes even prewriting or discussion with fellow fan writers.

After the rough draft is composed, some fan writers will take the time to draft or revise and share the story with a smaller group of friends before posting to a larger one. Some fan writers will even give their work to a fan writer they admire for a beta reading, coming from the concept of beta testing software before its release. Beta readers are usually other fan writers who do not accept monetary payment for their services. Beta reading, like proofreading, is exchanged among fan writers and has varying degrees of quality.[3] This kind of proofreading might encourage or discourage a fan writer to make changes after readers respond to the published work in a comment or review section.

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[3] Information on beta reading is available from http://www.subreality.com/glossary/terms.htm#B

Once the draft is posted, it is ready for review by peers, fan critics. The fan writer has the option of revising the draft based on the reviews or leaving it as it is. If the fan writer revises the draft, it can be done privately or posted again for review. The fan writer can revise the draft as many times as s/he wishes, although there is the possibility of revising too much. There is never a final draft, but there is a draft of superior quality that can be posted for final review. The publication step can occur more than once during a fan writer's process, so long as the medium of publication allows for it. The process for fan writers, as with academic writers, tailors itself according to the individual writing practices of each fan writer.

Matt Hills likens fan fiction to video games in that they both draw on "the myriad ways that fans can engage with textual structures and moments of their favoured cult shows, reactivating these in cultural practices of play" (41). Following this ideas, it is safe to say that fan fiction is a more comfortable and therefore productive form of writing, because its goal is not to produce anything that strays far from its source material. Therefore any progress in a fan writer's style is a natural, not forced, part of developing a writing style. The cultural practice of play will facilitate a more productive environment for composition and peer review, engaging the students with their writing process and voice.

How fan fiction fits

Barry Lane observes that "… all successful writing-process instruction depends on empowering students as writers, not simply following a prescribed formula" (4). If this is the case, then how can imitative writing assignments such as fan fiction encourage students to *stop* following models? The answer is in the assignment and its presentation.

Students and instructors alike must recognize and understand the purpose of using models in the classroom. They are never intended to function as a formula, except perhaps in mathematics courses. Even in math, though, formulas are presented to students as a tool for developing new theories and formulas. Similarly, students of advanced writing are expected to progress beyond following a formula, drawing from rhetorical models to produce a new and effective text.

When composing a sentence, one guiding principle is to go from old information to new information. On the first day of class, professors are wise to use this principle and take stock of what information students already know from previous courses. Students can progress more quickly by taking the kind of writing that is most comfortable for them, that older information, and begin to use that to produce something new. Fan fiction in the classroom would require a basic knowledge of a fandom and its elements, including typical plots and conflicts, characters, settings, and even style. Fan fiction fits into the expository classroom by allowing the students to isolate and experiment with the style aspect of their writing, since they are already familiar with the other aspects and should be comfortable imitating them.

There are many possible assignments using fan fiction that would isolate the elements of style that are part of the advanced exposition course. Strunk and White remark that using models is helpful when learning writing conventions, especially narrative strategies: "The application of this rule when dialogue and narrative are combined is best learned from examples in well-edited works of fiction." (16) Fan writers have a considerable advantage over other students in the exposition classroom when it comes to incorporating dialogue into narratives, since it is an integral part of

composing works of fan fiction. Dialogue is not a guaranteed part of traditionally assigned expository models.

Using the three most appropriate subgenres discussed earlier (nonsexual relationship stories, crossover stories, and self-insertion stories), student writers can concentrate on the style of the work as it would be affected by the addition of a relationship, the merging of two fandoms, or the addition of a character. How does this improve a student's style? By adding in somewhat unfamiliar elements, such as a friendship between Yoda and Chewbacca in a *Star Wars* fan fiction work, students can experiment with the altered dialogue that characters might have. Altered dialogue is an exercise in replicating a character's voice, which can lean to a student developing a unique voice as well.

For instance, Chewbacca knows some important technological skills. Yoda might be frustrated by a lesson in operating a new weapon and say, with characteristic left dislocation, "When nine hundred years old *you* reach, learn as quickly *you* will not, hm?" The slightly altered content allows the student to comfortably alter the style of Yoda's speech. Whereas Yoda's original line applied to his age ("When nine hundred years old you reach, look as good you will not, hm?") in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, it now applies to his ability to learn a new skill. His frustration presents a new perspective on Yoda that challenges the fandom's endorsement of him as a wise leader. It is up to the beta readers and fan critics to determine whether or not Yoda's frustration with the new weapon denotes something outside of Yoda's character, being unable to master something immediately, or if it denotes something well within Yoda's character, retaining his sense of humor. The style is then determined to be true to the character, and

the student has learned that left dislocation can be a useful tool in building an effective voice.

Activities using fan fiction

The first decision a professor must make while incorporating fan fiction into the exposition curriculum is which model from popular culture s/he should use. An appropriate model from popular culture for a fan fiction assignment should mirror the quality of writing produced in traditional models. Choosing models in imitative writing assignments is difficult, because the professor must consider factors such as the objectives of the course, the abilities of the students, and the source materials familiar to the professor. When choosing models for activities involving fan fiction, the decision can be even more difficult. As Bishop observes, science fiction is a good genre to include in a writing course as an introduction to scientific fact: "Have you ever read science fiction that wasn't based to some degree on what humans know about gravity, our solar system, and physics?" (110). Science fiction works can model themes and styles for students that are interdisciplinary, considering its roots in science and technology. These roots lead to themes such as man playing God, the conflict of man versus machine, and the alien invader (Kratz 718). Science fiction and fantasy both require thoughtful description, a central component of quality expository writing.

Regardless of which genre is introduced, a professor should consider ways to introduce a quality literary model. Nicholas and Nichol suggest the following parameters in selecting a literary model: "1. demonstrate clearly the appropriate technique or rhetorical strategy, 2. be in a style worthy of study, and 3. in the case of professional writing, have the subject matter more timeless than timely" (xix). Although each

professor has a unique classroom, there are several elements of exposition that apply to the rules of Nicholas and Nichol. An appropriate technique or rhetorical strategy would include information/explanation, description, and narration. Students who compose fan fiction based on any of the works by J.R.R. Tolkien can satisfy all of these requirements easily, especially if they adopt the narration style in the novel *The Hobbit* that is somewhat lacking in the films. The second rule for choosing an appropriate model, "be in a style worthy of study," is as much a matter of a professor's preferences as it is the components of that style.

The third rule, though it applies mostly to professional writing classrooms, is also a helpful guide for exposition professors. It seems ironic to point to works of popular culture, works that usually disappear as quickly as they appear on a television or film screen, as effective rhetorical models; however, there are works of popular culture that successfully work their way into academia. Tolkien's series of novels, *The Lord of the Rings*, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* are all popular with fan fiction writers as well as quality models for students of exposition.

Jenkins categorized ten ways of reworking television shows for good fan writing. These are essential to consider when composing introductory fan fiction/imitative writing assignments, mostly because they explore ways to twist elements of the work which involve intense analysis on the part of the student. Each of these choices can appear in an assignment that focuses on explanation, description, or information. An abridged list appears below, but the full list appears starting on page 162 in *Textual Poachers*:

"Recontextualization": Like anticipating the deleted scenes on a DVD, this piece requires a fan to expand on minor details while maintaining the overall focus of the show. An example would be expanding on the story of Anikan Skywalker's mother and her capture by the sand people in *Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. In the film, there is only a brief scene where Anikan sees the painful incarceration of his mother before she dies. How would George Lucas portray her plight if he had time for the scenes of her capture to appear in the final version of the film? Students can focus on explaining why and how she was captured using elements of the *Star Wars* canon.

"Expansion," or expanding the series timeline. In this piece, a fan writes about events before or after the time setting of the series. This is similar to recontextualization in that it requires careful attention to the details of a canon. An example of a classroom version of this assignment could include Jerry Seinfeld and George Costanza becoming friends in high school, before the series timeline began. According to canon, characters Jerry and George met in a high school gym class. Students could use the details of the show and its adult characters to postulate this teenage version of the show "Seinfeld." George could invite Jerry over to study, paving the way for a description of George's room in his parent's house.

"Refocalization": This piece requires a fan to focus on secondary characters. An example would be Lieutenant Uhura from the original Star Trek series appearing as a protagonist in Jane Land's *Demeter*. Most fan writers focus on a secondary character that reminds them of themselves, sometimes leading to the creation of the self-insertion story. When refocalization remains independent from self-insertion, it can be an effective

exploration of character. In the classroom this piece could show an effective use of character description.

"Moral Realignment": In this piece, an author questions or inverts the moral center of the series, usually giving the rationalized perspective of the villain. An example would be "The True Story of the Three Little Pigs," a story that reverses the roles of the three little pigs and the big bad wolf, making the wolf good and the pigs evil. An effective expository technique in this is not only character or setting description, but explanation. In the case of "The True Story of the Three Little Pigs," the wolf could explain his innocence and how he was branded as the villain.

"Genre shifting." This variety focuses on a generic element of the series, such as an intergalactic court scene in *Star Wars*, and using that as a basis for the piece of fan fiction. A fan of the previously mentioned *Star Wars* scene may write a similar piece where the point of attack is in the courtroom, action shifts away and then returns to the courtroom. The fan writer has thus shifted the genre from science fiction to a courtroom drama. The rhetorical strategy appropriate for this kind of fanfic depends on which genre the source work will adopt. In the case of the courtroom scene, explanation is the best strategy. If it were a classroom setting, such as a lecture on midichlorians given by Yoda to the younglings in the Jedi temple, information would be the best strategy.

"Crossovers": These stories blend two series together by combining characters from different series' settings (e.g. Kermit the Frog finds himself on "Fraggle Rock"), or by combining characters from different series that either share the same setting or similar settings (e.g. "CSI: New York" and "NYPD Blue"). Networks adopted this strategy by encouraging one of their shows to use a character from another show as a guest star. An

example would be Al Roker appearing on NBC's "Will and Grace" as series characters Jack and Will walk past a taping of "The Today Show." An effective technique in this case is comparing the characters before and after their crossover, a function of description.

"Character Dislocation": A more extreme version of a crossover story, character dislocation allows the fan writer to rename the character that goes from one series' setting to another setting. An example of this would be writing an episode of "House" where the title character, Dr. Gregory House, treats Tony Soprano from HBO's "The Sopranos" for a mysterious malady. The fan writer can choose to change Tony's name, or s/he can leave it alone; regardless of name, the character is the same. The clash between these two characters, neither of which is known for his social skills, would result in very heated dialogue. In this case, Dr. House could inform Tony of his ailment, Tony could explain a situation that might have caused his ailment, or Dr. House could describe the ailment to Tony's family, producing effective rhetorical strategies for an exposition assignment.

"Personalization." Personalizing a story usually involves the author's insertion into a piece and/or events that have happened in the author's life. This is where a writer runs the risk of creating a Mary Sue story. Another version is for the characters to exchange places with the actors who portray them.

"Emotional intensification": This piece focuses on recreating emotionally intense moments from a particular series. Characters must connect in a moment of vulnerability, a moment which serves as the climax of the plot. These stories usually fall under the Hurt-Comfort subgenre of fan fiction, a genre consisting of stories where the climactic moment serves as the majority of text.

"Eroticization": This piece frees a fan author from the censorship that most television writers face. Although most erotic material is usually separated from immature audiences by rating systems similar to movie theaters, there are no official censors to prevent its publication. A site that hosts fan fiction can forbid publication of erotic fan fiction, but they must hire a staff to patrol the stories for such content. A subcategory, slash, explores the homosocial desires of characters within a series.

The last three items on this list—personalization, emotional intensification, and eroticization-- might be appropriate for the creative writing classroom, but their usefulness in an exposition classroom is debatable. The first seven items are appropriate in that they challenge the student to choose and elaborate on a source work, a work possibly from a list provided by a professor that includes some universal items and some rare ones, all of which are familiar to the professor. Since the student is already familiar with the plot, characters, setting, and style of the source work s/he has chosen, s/he can concentrate on the elements of style and structure that s/he admires about the source work. With proper guidance from a professor in class discussions involving elements of style, students can make the most out of these activities, because the first step in composing fan fiction is to carefully read the source work and its fan fiction that has already been published.

Once the assignment has been given, students follow the writing process as outlined earlier with a few possible alternatives. It is perfectly acceptable to invite students to post to a class web site of fan fiction to recreate the extracurricular experience. Another option is to use a partner review setup, which involves trading papers and then writing a thorough review. A choice that involves actual class time is

using in-class review groups organized by source material covered. Any option will work well, but an in-class review group combines the immediate feedback of discussion with the preliminary thought of a hand-written review, provided that the group reads the other works before the class meeting. Basing the peer review group on the source material covered or type of story written accurately recreates the online environment. Professors might give students the option of revising their work after a peer review session before turning it in, just as fan writers have the option of revising work submitted online.

The peer review process is almost as important as composing the work itself. It introduces students, as Jenkins observes, to literary criticism: "Fan critics pull characters and narrative issues from the margins; they focus on details that are excessive or peripheral to the primary plots but gain significance within the fans' own conceptions of the series." (155) Compare this definition with that of the critical focus as defined by Elizabeth McMahan, Robert Funk, and Susan Day in *The Elements of Writing about Literature and Film*, which says that it should "… use the details of plot, tone, style, point of view, characterization, or structure to support or prove the critical generalizations…" (90). In both cases of criticism, readers must make marginal notes about a text and use those notes to support an argument about the text, particularly its quality. Whereas literary criticism is less evaluative than fan criticism, literary criticism does not involve as much emotional attachment to the text as fan criticism.

Peer review might not be a comfortable activity for students, but if it involves a fandom that they know and appreciate in detail, then that activity will feel much less intimidating. Sharing an essay in the style of essayist Sarah Vowell might not feel very

safe for a student, but sharing an essay in the voice of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" might. Here students have a connection already: they have at least a basic knowledge of a television program.

Peer reviews do not differ extensively from imitative writing assignments to fan fiction. Consider the following questions that Jenkins pulls from a work by Susan M. Garrett, designed for the fan-based peer review process:

1. Is the story consistent with what you know of the show?

2. Were the characters and dialogue true to the series, or were they false and stilted?

3. Was the plot logical or did it hang too much on coincidence?

4. Did the author have some original ideas, was the story just 'the same old thing', or was it 'the same old thing' in a new and vibrant style?

5. Was the tone of the story depressing or cheerful?

6. Was the description good, overdone, or minimal?

7. Did the story have a central idea or point?

8. Did you like it?

9. Did you understand it?   (161)

Some of these questions are descriptive rather than prescriptive, fostering discussion as well as evaluation in a review. Some of the questions are more concerned with plot choices made by the author than style elements. It is up to each classroom environment which questions are appropriate and which ones are not. The first question checks the accuracy of the details in the context of the show, something that can sharpen awareness of research used in academic research papers. The second also checks accuracy with regard to the character's description, description being an integral lesson in expository

writing. It also mentions the dialogue exchanged between characters, which can contribute to a student's voice.

The third concentrates on the logic and structure of the plot, which can easily translate into organizing an academic essay based on the same principles. The fourth deals with style directly, examining the choices the student has made about style elements, including which ones are most important or which ones should be avoided. The fifth addresses tone. "What is the tone of this piece?" could be an equally valid alternative. The sixth again covers description, this time focusing on details in description throughout the piece, not only with characters. The seventh addresses structure and organization.

The eighth is a question of aesthetic preference, but preferences when reviewing fan fiction are usually based on solid literary conventions, such as a logical plot. The ninth can deal with clarity or cohesion, strong factors in the quality of the style of a work. These questions might lead a professor to add in some other questions about style, but these cover many aspects of the exposition curriculum.

As Henry Jenkins observes about fan fiction, works of all quality can be published, and it can lead particular contributors to "even international recognition as fan writers…" (159). This environment, what Jenkins calls nurturing, is exactly what the classroom strives to produce for its students. Every student's work has good points to cherish as an accomplishment, and every work has the potential for international acclaim. Instead of recreational writing, the classroom encourages students to produce academic writing that is reviewed and submitted for publication to a professor for grading, to a

school newspaper/literary magazine, and/or to a conference group or professional association with far-reaching networks.

Final thoughts

It is easy to get caught up in a new and exciting writing activity such as involving fan fiction in the classroom. Students get so comfortable writing and chatting about "Buffy" that moving on to more traditional literature seems unpleasant. The most important thing to keep in mind is that using any activity in the classroom is supplementary, not primary, in achieving the course objective. The course objective in an exposition course is to introduce student writers to a world beyond the five paragraph essay, a world where paragraph order, syntax, tone, diction, and other such factors are able to change at the discretion of the writer. Fan fiction makes this process extremely accessible to any student, introducing them to imitative writing of more academic flavor, and then finally to original works where the most effective elements are integrated into the writer's individual voice.

Fan fiction is the best way to bring homework home. It facilitates comfort, productivity, community, and creativity in every student's work. It builds confidence when composing and in peer review. It introduces a kind of imitative writing that is recreational and participatory in nature, compelling students to engage in the activities with an element of entertainment instead of intimidation. Whether beginning or advanced, a fan fiction writer can easily transform into an academic writer by taking the elements of good fan writing into the classroom. This is the first step for a student who wishes to dance with words.

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