Professional Writers:
Masters of Rhetorical Knowledgeability

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La plupart des recherches sur l'écriture ont porté sur les professionnels appelés à rédiger dans leur discipline et beaucoup moins sur les professionnels de l'écriture eux-mêmes. En s'appuyant sur des entrevues auprès de quatre rédacteurs indépendants et sur sa propre expérience, l'auteure montre que les rédacteurs professionnels peuvent jouer six rôles distincts touchant leurs relations avec les clients et les textes, de façon à maîtriser les genres propres à divers groupes. Ces rôles leur permettent d'acquérir des savoirs rhétoriques sur les positions idéologiques d'un groupe donné, la manière dont ces positions sont prises en compte dans le discours et la façon dont les genres adoptés par le groupe peuvent être reproduits, mis en relief ou modifiés.

As a professional writer with 20 years of experience, I have found myself somewhat perplexed by one aspect of scholarly work into writing and genre studies—the lack of research about people for whom *writing is their discipline,* that is, they earn a living writing for communities of practice (COPs) such as government departments, corporations, professional associations, and non-profit organizations. Many scholars have studied writing in the workplace (Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller, 1985; Latour, 1987; Smart, 1993; Schryer, 1994; Gollin, 1996; Fias, Freedman, Medway, and Paré, 1999; Beaufort, 2000; Winsor, 2000), but their focus has always been on how employees have been able to achieve writing skills *within their disciplines,* e.g., engineer, social worker, insurance clerk, economist. This focus is understandable since many of these scholars are also educators trying to prepare students in different areas of academe for the demands of their future employers.

Nevertheless, it would seem useful to widen such research to include professional writers whose skills, attitudes, and insights into their work could provide a different perspective on workplace writing and whose strategies for achieving success might be useful for pedagogical purposes. The professional writers whose work life is particularly intriguing in the context of genre studies are those who are freelance, i.e., contracted by different clients to write in a variety of genres. Such writers work off-site and have little or no opportunity to share in what Dias et al. (1999, p. 22) call a community of practice's (COP's) *distributed cognition,* i.e., "the knowledge and knowl-

edge-making on which a group or organization depends in order to accomplish its activities; it includes both consciousness and storage of information and ideas." Theoretically, then, freelance, professional writers would lack the ability to create that COP's genres. As Dias et al. note:

> the knowledge that one needs in order to write effectively in a particular work context is not simply of the textual aspect of the accepted genres, in the general form in which it can be imparted outside the specific site; one also needs knowledge of the culture and the circumstances, and one needs to understand and take on the local *purposes,* the social motives that prevail in that setting. Participating in a genre means not just producing a text that looks like the ones that are usually produced in that milieu… (Dias et al., 1999, p. 22).

How, then, do such writers gain the knowledge and social motives that allow them to achieve writing success in a COP's genres although they are not part of that COP? What skills, experiences, and attitudes enable them to replicate, modify, and even create new genres for a COP on demand? What strategies do they use to overcome the barriers they face because they do not share in a COP's distributed cognition?

This paper reports on a research study[1] undertaken in 2001 to seek answers to these questions. The study involved interviews with four freelance, professional writers—all working full time at writing with each having at least 12 years of experience. The information gained from those interviews as well as my own experiences and insights in the field form the basis of this paper's discussion. In order to put this information into a theoretical context, the paper first examines the meaning of the title, *professional writer,* and then explores the concept of rhetorical knowledgeability. Finally, the paper demonstrates the significant role that rhetorical knowledgeability plays in the work life of freelance, professional writers. Ultimately, it is my hope that this report will contribute to genre research and current pedagogical inquiries into how students can more easily make the transition from academic writing to that required in today's workplace.

Theoretical Background

Defining the Professional Writer

A *professional writer,* as defined in this paper, is someone for whom writing is his or her discipline and who, in addition, earns money from writing assignments, i.e., he or she does not fall within the category of amateur. As Couture and Rymer note:

"writing competence is determined by members of the discourse community itself, not outsiders" (1993, p.6). In order to have a history of continual contracts, a professional writer requires a good reputation regarding quality of work, reliability in delivery, and personality, i.e., skills in developing good client relationships. This definition, essentially, coincides with that of *career writer* developed by Couture and Rymer who assume a state of employment:

> we postulated two rhetorical communities [in a workplace] that reflect a motivated relationship between the writing task and the writer's functional role: *professionals who write*, those for whom writing demonstrates their competence in another profession (for example, engineering); and *career writers*, those for whom writing is their profession (for example, technical communication) and hence a direct demonstration of their professional/technical competence.
>
> Furthermore, career writers are typically affiliated with these tasks in ways quite different from professionals who write. Engineers, for example, do write procedures…, but they tend to have developed the information themselves, whereas career writers typically prepare procedures originated by others. Although career writers may know a great deal about technical subjects and contribute to making meaning, their area of perceived expertise is not technical; typically, they are not "subject matter" experts. In short, career writers tend to document others' activities without having the central responsibility for invention or the personal stake in constructing meaning that is characteristic of professionals that write (Couture and Rymer, 1993, pp. 5, 9).

The question then arises: Why not use the term *career writer?* I suggest two primary reasons: self-identification and professionalism. First, in my experience, colleagues have never referred to themselves as *career writers*. For example, if someone were to ask me what I did for a living or a career, I would say that I was a "professional writer and editor." Furthermore, although Couture and Rymer may have used *career* to avoid confusion with *professional* which they applied to people such as engineers, architects, scientists, health professionals, and so on, their terminology underplays both the responsibilities and standards of professional writers.

Professional writers do "document others' activities" (Couture and Rymer, 1993, p. 9), but not in the narrow sense provided by Couture and Rymer whose study focused on writers in areas of technical documentation such as manuals and procedures. Rather, documenting "others' activities" (Couture and Rymer, 1993, p. 9) includes creating discourses around organizational messages and developing communications products that support organizational policies and programs. These discourses/products can be as diverse as speeches, policy documents, promotional brochures, information booklets, videos, posters, newsletters, Web sites, and so on. The writer's responsibilities for these assignments can include concept development, research, writing, and participating in production, i.e., working with designer(s) and illustrator(s) to ensure that text and graphical elements are complementary.

While clients do have "central responsibility" (Couture and Rymer, 1993, p. 9) for these projects since their COPs are the source of project funding, professional writers are often recruited to share the responsibility. In some cases, clients have messages they wish to convey with only an idea of the communications vehicle that would provide best message delivery, or conversely, they may require assistance in defining their message although they know precisely how to deliver it. For example, I recently had a project in which the client wanted to write a Communications Plan for her division, but was having difficulty defining and explaining the goals of that Plan. Whatever the case, the professional writer essentially holds the responsibility for "invention" within a broad and often vaguely articulated framework. Such "invention" can include: creating, rewording, or refining messages; setting the style and tone appropriate to the audience; suggesting that content be added or subtracted; and helping to determine the form and format of a communications product that would best suit client and audience needs.

Professional writers also have a "personal stake in constructing meaning" (Couture and Rymer, 1993, p. 9), albeit one that is different than that of clients who must ensure that the discourse fits organizational needs. The finished product, which is part of their portfolio, and their behaviours and activities around the development of the product, reflect their standards of professionalism and excellence. Success in a writing career, particularly for freelancers, lies in acting in a professional manner and having the ability to create high-quality, COP-based discourse over and over again. As noted above, their reputation and, therefore, their ability to get more work, depends on it.

As the term is used in this paper, then, *professional writer* covers a broad range of writers who may be employed or act in a freelance capacity. For example, it includes technical writers, whom the Society for Technical Communications (2001) define as those whose "work involves making technical information available to those who need

it," speechwriters, advertising copywriters, public relations specialists, corporate/government communications officers, and so on. In some cases, professional writers, through inclination or training, work primarily within one genre, e.g., speeches, or write within one field, e.g., medical writing. Other professionals may be generalists with a "have computer, will travel" mentality. And, others may be sufficiently versatile to branch into literary work. For example, one subject in this study has published a collection of short stories.

Rhetorical Knowledgeability

Research in organizational discourse (for example, Mumby: 1988, Iedema and Wodak: 1999) demonstrates a strong connection among ideology, power, and workplace language and texts. Mumby and Clair explain this triangular relationship:

> [Ideology] refers not simply to the ideas, beliefs, and values that individuals take on, but rather to the process by which social actors, as part of larger social collectives, develop particular identities and experience the world in a particular way. As such we can say that ideology, through its expression in various forms of discourse, constitutes who people are as thinking, experiencing social actors... [however] ideology does not emerge in a neutral fashion, but is tied up with the relations of power and control that characterize society. Ideology functions to maintain and reproduce existing relations of power (Giddens, 1979). Thus a three-way relationship emerges among discourse, ideology and power. Put simply, discourse reproduces, creates and challenges existing power relations; ideology is the mediating factor in this relationship, providing an interpretive frame through which discursive practices are given meaning (Mumby and Clair, 1997, p.184).

Workplace writers are, in general, not aware of the ways in which their discourse reproduces the ideologies of their workplaces. As Segal, Paré, Brent, and Vipond note, workplace writers tend to view "language as transparent: something to look through" (Segal et. al., 1998, p.75). The process that results in this behaviour begins with hegemony and ends with naturalized discourse. Mumby and Clair explain that "power [in organizations] is generally exercised not coercively, but subtly and routinely. The most effective use of power occurs when those with power are able to get those who

have less power to interpret the world from the former's point of view. Power is thus exercised through consent rather than coercion" (Mumby and Clair, 1997, p. 184). Iedema adds that:

> To achieve high levels of behavioural cohesion and institutional stabil-
> ity, bureaucrats/administrators apply a discourse which resists (renewed)
> negotiation of issues to do with the nature of control (must-ness); the
> source and target of control (hierarchical structures); and the object of
> control (the desired action) (Iedema, 1997a, p. 9).

The success of this hegemonic process results in what Fairclough describes as natu-ralized discourse since it has "achieve[d] the status of 'common sense'" (Fairclough, 1992, p.87). As ideologies are expressed repetitively in organizational language, the terms and phrases become familiar, comfortable, and accepted without question by workers in that organization.

Rhetoricians, on the other hand, believe, as Segal et al. note, that "language ought to be treated as opaque: something to look *at*." Looking at language is a way, so to speak, of achieving an "arm's length distance" from it for the purposes of analysis. "We pay attention to language *qua* language in order to amass information on how it works in context. Our stance proceeds from the assumption that discourse practices are more easily influenced and changed when one understands them, and that the rhetorically aware practitioner is less locked in to modes of thought and action than one whose rhetorical knowledge remains tacit." Being able to look at, rather than through, language leads to *rhetorical knowledgeability*, which is: "To know how one's behaviour reproduces the social matrix of one's community [and] is to avoid being totally constrained by that social matrix" (Segal et al., 1998, p. 76). Rhetorical knowl-edgeability, then, incorporates both an awareness of the triangular relationship among discourse, power, and ideology, and the ability to use that awareness to conform to, protect, enhance, or change organizational discourse practices.

In my experience as a freelance, professional writer and that of the subjects in-terviewed for this study, rhetorical knowledgeability is not only the key to our ability to achieve career success, but also the major challenge of our work lives. Although we may have an ongoing relationship with a particular COP and can share, to a small degree, in its distributed cognition, an important aspect of our work life is the acqui-sition of new clients who expect us to write organization-specific documents at a high level of expertise and frequently with tight deadlines. As one subject in the study explained: "I pick up the signals and organizational tone quickly, only taking in what I need to know. I don't understand the organization as an insider, but pick up enough

to create facsimiles." And, because time is money, he does not have the luxury to ponder an assignment: "I can't afford to sit, and I don't outline. I have to start writing immediately. You have to train yourself to be efficient and effective."

An examination of the difference between the work lives of professional writers and workplace writers, i.e., those for whom writing is *not* their discipline, illuminates this situation. Beaufort (2000, p. 195, 203), in a research study of how novice writers gain writing competence within an organization, notes that "writers were given writing tasks in proportion to the degree of the importance the text held in relation to the organization's meeting its goals." Writers who held the role of "expert," i.e., the authors of high-status documents, were those who had acquired "five areas of context-specific knowledge: discourse community knowledge, subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and task-specific procedural knowledge." (Beaufort, 2000, pp. 195, 203).

Figure 1 (adapted from Beaufort: 2000) is a visualization of the workplace relationships among the writer, distributed cognition, and the type of text. It demonstrates that for employees new to a community of practice (COP), the process of
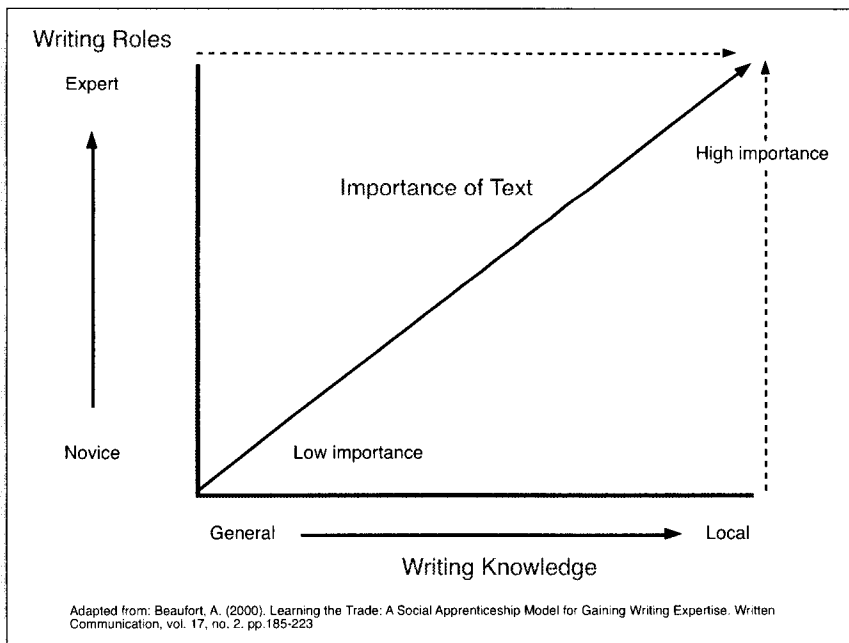

Writing Roles

Expert

Importance of Text

High importance

Novice   Low importance

General ──────────────▶ Local

Writing Knowledge

Adapted from: Beaufort, A. (2000). Learning the Trade: A Social Apprenticeship Model for Gaining Writing Expertise. Written Communication, vol. 17, no. 2. pp.185-223

Figure 1. Acquiring distributed cognition and gaining writing expertise takes time for workplace writers.

learning the "writing ropes" requires acculturation, i.e., time to absorb local knowl-
edge, to know who holds it and how to access it, and to figure out how an organiza-
tion's knowledge can be reproduced in its discursive practices.

Figure 2, on the other hand, is the same visualization of the relationships but
with the professional writer added into the "equation."

As Figure 2 demonstrates, clients do not generally use their funding to hire out-
side expertise to write low-level documents such as internal memos and correspond-
ence. Rather, such funding is reserved for important documents for which the client
wants greater expertise than he or she has in-house. In my experience, these docu-
ments are generally of two kinds: high-level internal documents and those designed
for the public. The internal documents are designed for superiors such as policy pa-
pers that require logic, clarity, and conciseness. Very often, in-house staff try to write
such papers, but the end result reflects the efforts of too many authors and levels of
approvals. The logic is often convoluted, the language naturalized, and the paper so
replete with different discourse styles and vocabulary that it is difficult to read. The
second type of high-level documents are communications products aimed at the
public—speeches, reports, brochures—in which the organization wants to "trans-
late" its discourse into a form more acceptable to the target audience. Clients often
say to me, "Make it less bureaucratic," or "Put this in words that ordinary people can
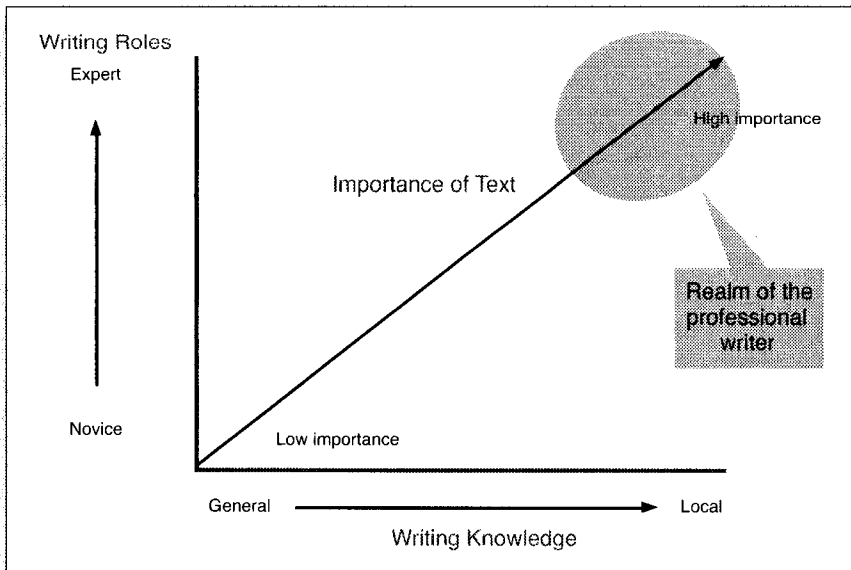

**Figure 2. Professional writers create high-level documents "on
demand."**

understand." What clients are purchasing, essentially, is the rhetorical knowledgeabil-
ity that eludes their staff because the process of developing communications prod-
ucts in-house reinforces the "constraints of the social matrix," i.e., the hegemony in-
herent in organizations and the naturalized discourse that results.

The Study

The findings in this study come from interviews with four freelance, professional
writers and reflections of my own experience. For the purposes of this paper, I sought
subjects whose work history represented success, i.e., having years of experience and
making a living from their work. Table 1 profiles the subjects of this study.

The subjects were contacted by phone and asked if they wished to participate.
They were then sent a questionnaire (see Appendix) based on the typical process of
meeting with a client and developing a communication product. The subjects were
then interviewed with each taped discussion taking about an hour. My aim was not to
limit them to answering the specific questions, but to provide them with a scenario
familiar and comfortable to them. I also emphasized my role as a colleague during
our discussions. I felt this was important because professional writers are often asked
to talk to novice writers and have generally developed a simplistic patter about their
work. I wanted them to have confidence in my ability to understand their work at a
deeper level. Therefore, the questions about their skills in listening, researching, and
writing were designed as a springboard to further discussion and a method for teas-
ing out their rhetorical knowledgeability.

	Educational Background	Years of Professional Experience	Type of Work
Robert R.	B.A. Journalism	18	Generalist: "I've written everything but published fiction and movie scripts."
Don C.	M.A. in Canadian History	13	Speechwriter: "I started off writing English correspondence for the Prime Minister's Office. That led to speechwriting opportunities."
Gabriella G.	M.A. in English Literature	21	Generalist: "I have no specialty. I've done a little bit of everything."
Raymond C.	M.A. in Modern Literature	11	TV scripts and industrial videos: "Originally, I was a freelance director and was always being asked to adapt English scripts into French. Soon I was doing more and more writing of my own."

Table 1. Study Participants

As this paper will demonstrate, the interviewees were acutely sensitive to organizational ideologies, the hegemonic process, and naturalized discourse in different workplaces. As I proceeded with the interviews, common themes began to emerge regarding the writers' attitudes and the strategies they used to deal with the complex "terrain" surrounding organizations and their discourse practices, the interpersonal issues involved in the client-contractor relationship, and their own personal concerns. I began to understand that, in order to achieve rhetorical knowledgeability, I and my fellow professionals have to assume a variety of roles for each writing assignment— roles that enable us to act, simultaneously, as an outsider to an organization who can change or improve upon organizational discourse, and as an insider who can faithfully reproduce it.

By roles, I refer to the different stances that writers take as responses to the rhetorical exigencies of their assignments, in the negotiations with clients from initial meetings to approvals, and to their own personal needs to act in a professional manner and create an environment in which they can develop quality work. These roles[2], which I constructed after analyzing the interview data and my own experience, are:

- The Repackager
- The Go-Between
- The Challenger
- The Facilitator/Collaborator
- The Pseudo-Insider
- The Risk-Taker

It's important to note that professional writers do not generally assume one role for any extended period of time. Rather, they make complex use of these roles. They can change roles continuously depending upon the flow and direction of conversation with a client, and depending on their attitude toward an assignment as they are writing. They may be a Challenger one minute, a Go-Between the next, and then act as a Risk-Taker. As well, they assume more than one role at the same time, e.g., making a writing decision that encompasses, say, the attitudes and aims of both the Challenger and Risk-Taker.

The Repackager

Gabriella G: *"It's not my stuff; it's not my voice."*

Raymond C: *"I develop, adapt, and edit their material."*

Robert R: *"I package it the best way I can."*

Don C.: *"I have no ego invested."*

The writers saw themselves, not as authors, but as craftspersons who took original material or concepts from the client, and developed and repackaged them for the required audience. By being Repackagers, professional writers can maintain the arm's length distance from the content they create—the space that allows for the development of rhetorical knowledgeability. In-house staff usually have invested ego and energy into believing or, at the very least, adhering to the ideologies of their workplaces. In doing so, these ideologies become attached to their identities—a connection that obstructs their ability to be aware and, thus, free from the constraints of the social matrix and the discourse it generates. The Repackager, on the other hand, enters the social matrix as a stranger and leaves as a mere acquaintance, essentially brushing off the ideologies as he or she goes. This lack of personal investment enables professional writers to recognize the constraints of the social matrix, and to determine if they will respect the constraints or try to stretch or break them.

For example, one of my public-sector clients works in partnership with a network of private-sector businesses. I was asked to write an e-newsletter to promote and encourage communication within the partnership and was provided with ideas for content. My first draft was deliberately provocative. I called the e-newsletter, "Let's E-Chat" and included a paragraph whose tone demonstrated my client's enthusiasm about a two-way exchange. As I anticipated, my client did not want to be *that* enthusiastic about communicating with the network since, if the membership took the message seriously, the result would be additional work, e.g., answering unwanted e-mails, and increased risk, i.e., someone could ask a difficult question or instigate a complaint.

The second draft, which was labelled the "E-Bulletin" and had a more formal tone, was approved immediately. This begs the question: why not give them the second draft in the first place? Because my client and her team would have considered that a draft so close to their real intentions was too "governmentese"; I had not understood the importance of communications within the network; and I had not provided them with the creativity they were paying for. Also, experience has taught me that clients always want to make changes to a first draft to assert their authority. This strategy of initially pushing the constraints a bit too far arises from my rhetorical knowledgeability about what discourse is acceptable and what is not within the client's social matrix. I often use this strategy for a second purpose; it usually eliminates the need for numerous drafts that creates work for everyone and is also costly for me as I usually work within a fixed-price contract.

The ability to write without ego is also crucial for professional writers' emotional survival. Since most clients feel that payment is praise enough, professional writers deal constantly with critiques of their work. As Repackagers, they must be

able to acknowledge when text needs changing, but also have the confidence to defend their textual choices if they think the client is in error. Learning how to handle criticism in a professional manner that engenders good client relationships is a major skill for freelancers.

The Go-Between

> Raymond C.: *"I have a real-world point of view. People who work in-house are hemmed in by the workplace. They're caught up in day-to-day activities."*

> Don C.: *"Clients often don't know the message. I take it from the audience's point of view, i.e., 'What is it that I'm going to remember from this?'"*

> Robert R.: *"I represent the consumer and reader, but I have a sliding scale. If it's an insider piece, I don't fight so much over the jargon. I'll go for good sentence structure."*

> Gabriella G.: *"I tell them: 'The reason I'm good for you is I'm not one of you.'"*

The writers saw themselves acting as intermediaries between the client and the target audience, negotiating a second kind of space—the gap between the client and the outside world. The Go-Between is a significant role since it is the main reason why clients hire writers on contract. While some may not have the in-house expertise to complete assignments, in many cases, clients are well aware that they need someone outside their organization to help sort through messages and present them with an appropriate style and tone—a recognition of their own lack of rhetorical knowledgeability and the value of that belonging to the writer.

However, given this knowledge on the part of clients, professional writers often find themselves arguing on behalf of the audience at client meetings. Such meetings frequently include more than one organizational representative, each with an agenda regarding the text. Clients often want to add more messages, mention another project, or have something explained in a particular way. If the addition of such elements will "muddy" the document, the writer must be able to articulate why in a confident and convincing manner. An inability to do this often leads to a difficult writing task since the writer must incorporate information that is conflicting and/or unsuitable within a text.

Being a Go-Between also has a strong impact on the writing process, continually affecting which words writers choose as appropriate or not appropriate for the intended audience. Shriver notes that many document writers, editors, and designers "imagine the audience and draw on their internal representation of the audience as a guide to writing and design.... The strength of intuitive modes is that they capture...the phenomenon that skilled communicators are good at 'doing things with words and pictures' that get the audience's attention and keep it" (Shriver, 1997, p.159). However, since intuition is derived from "the gut," it may lead to inaccurate judgments. Kirsch interviewed five experienced writers and found that they "develop rich representations of audiences," but that they became extremely attached to these representations, perhaps to the detriment of the audience (Kirsch, 1990, p.226). I suggest that professional writers who are in demand are those whose intuitions tend to be "dead on" most of the time.

The Challenger

Raymond C: *"They'll say the bullshit and propaganda, but I'll try to manage the interview. I always ask dumb questions such as 'What's your problem?' I try to be provocative in a goofy way. I want them to drop their guards and speak out."*

Robert R: *"We're not just there to give them what they want, but what they need. I act as a counter-force to the clients' acculturation which often works against clear communication."*

The writers, with the exception of Gabriella G., felt that sometimes they had to play a more forceful role than that of the Go-Between. Sometimes, they had to be Challengers—"play the devil's advocate" in the words of Raymond C.—to force clients to confront organizational ideologies and motives and to see how they obstructed good communications. As Robert R. noted: "Insiders have assumptions about what is true. I bring a fresh eye and skepticism to what people accept as given."

The events I recounted regarding the e-newsletter demonstrate that I was not only acting as a Repackager at that time, but also as a Challenger. In Canada, as in many developed nations, a number of complex factors such as public distrust in authority and the speed of modern communications have forced governments to take a stance of being more open, transparent, and accessible. As well, high deficits have compelled them to take on partnerships with the private sector to increase income and offset costs. Therefore, my client and her team were following the "company line," i.e., the contemporary government rhetoric of "increased communications" and

"strengthening partnerships" when they initially discussed the tone and style of the e-newsletter. The first draft challenged them to live up to these goals, but as their response demonstrated, putting their ideas in print forced them to acknowledge the real ideologies of their workplace in which the need for caution and facelessness are predominant.

The role of Challenger is a delicate one, particularly when dealing with new clients. It requires the ability to listen well, read body language, and have sensitivity to the undercurrents at a meeting. On the other hand, when clients are paying for expertise that they cannot find in-house, they expect to get value for their money. As I noted above, many welcome the outsider perspective, acknowledging the limitations of being inside the organizational "bubble."

The Facilitator/Collaborator

> Gabriella G.: *"I end up interviewing the client who has a hard time telling me the whole story because he/she assumes I know more than I do. And, they often keep talking around the subject and I keep pulling them back. What I listen for are the missing links."*

> Don C.: *"Sometimes I know more about the message than the client because I'm also writing for other clients and have a better understanding of the big picture than anyone else in the room. I help them tie things together."*

Gabriella G. never saw herself as a Challenger—she felt that was too strong a word. Rather, she saw herself as being in a helping profession—the role that I have termed Facilitator/Collaborator. As she said: "Insiders have a handicap. They're unable to communicate their thoughts clearly because they've developed sloppy or short-hand ways of speaking. They don't realize that it's meaningless [to the audience]. I help people find the right words. We negotiate over language. It's a push-and-pull situation." She found this role "good, pleasing, and interesting." All the writers agreed that one of their important functions was to help clients better understand what they wanted to say and why—an ability that arises from a rhetorical awareness of the purpose of an organization's discourse and its discourse practices.

As freelancers, the writers are not "locked into [the] modes of thought and action" of the social matrix (Segal et al., p. 76) and their rhetorical knowledgeability allows them to engage with clients in problem-solving activities and to help create, and participate in, an environment in which useful negotiations could occur and result in a high quality product. Gollin, in a study of writing collaboration in a

workplace, describes such a negotiation between a client and an outside writing consultant. Analyzing the use of high and low modality in one of their conversations, she notes:

> While the attention of the writers in this extract is ostensibly on content, there is a parallel negotiation going on in the interpersonal plane...power-holding shifts from Fiona to Max and then back to Fiona. In her role as project leader, Fiona mitigates some of her authority early in the exchange by using politeness...[Then] Max seems to be taking over the leading role. However, Max is sensitive to the need to maintain a harmonious working relationship. He realizes that they might be entering into a full-scale argument, which would be counter productive...we see a sudden shift. He moves from high modality to medium, shifting from strong expression of group obligation to personal belief...Fiona immediately seizes her opportunity, and reverts to high modality (Gollin, 1996, p. 24–25).

In my experience, the longer and better the client-contractor relationship, the more equality exists between client and writer, making the transitions between power-holding shifts smoother and even pleasurable to both parties.

The Pseudo-Insider

> Gabriella G: *"I'm like an actor playing a role. I'm distant and yet involved."*

> Raymond C: *"I try to find what it is that I agree with. You have to 'buy in'; make a private connection."*

> Robert R.: *"I let part of my brain think the way they do. I represent them and have to express their messages."*

> Don C.: *"I put myself in another consciousness and see how the world looks to them."*

Just as the writers have to represent the audience in the role of Go-Between, they also have to represent the perspective of the client in the role of Pseudo-Insider. Rhetorical knowledgeability is crucial for this role, because it enables the writer to cross another type of space—the gap between their own identities and that of their clients'. When arriving, so to speak, in the opposite camp, the writers must deliberately "wrap" themselves in its ideologies and discourse practices. For example, this is the major

role that I played when writing the second draft of the e-newsletter. Don C. who writes speeches for members of different political parties in Canada laughingly referred to himself as "an ideological slut." However, as the writers' quotes demonstrate, this role has a schizophrenic quality to it, i.e., they can only let one part of themselves be the Pseudo-Insider, while the other part retains its independence. The dangers of moving too far into the organizational terrain will be a loss of rhetorical knowledgeability if they identify so closely with an organization's ideologies that the discourse begins to sound like commonsense, i.e, naturalized.

Client meetings are key to learning about this role since the writer can intuit the organizational ideologies and hierarchies and pick up on the phraseology and jargon. Gabriella G. said that, in a first meeting, "I listen in a different way. Sometimes I tape their words, but I have no consistent method." Don C. writes down the vocabulary that he hears during a meeting with a new client: "I need to get tuned to their buzzwords, because I'm going to have to send those buzzwords back." Robert R. pointed out that the clients "are keen to make you understand. They say what's important, and they know the internal sensitivities." Raymond C. noted that years of experience had helped him "build sensitivity to general organizational patterns."

The Pseudo-Insider role also has a major effect on the writing process, causing the writer to structure content, shape ideas, and express information in ways that are organizationally appropriate and will be acceptable to the client. During this process, the writer is constantly alternating between the roles of Pseudo-Insider and Go-Between in an attempt to fashion text that meets the needs of both client and audience. This situation can have a knife-edge quality. Robert R. said: "I'm not always convinced that the organization wants to communicate the message clearly. Sometimes it's more manipulation and obfuscation." And Gabriella G. noted that: "Sometimes you're in a paradoxical situation where the text has to be clear and yet not clear. You have to find the right nuance."

The Risk-Taker

> Robert R: "Clients are risk averse because it's not efficient for them to take risks. They need to get approvals and don't want repercussions. So they use language that's already been approved, and it tends to get replicated over and over and imported into new documents. We tug at the other end of the rope and offer them a contrasting way to say things."

> Raymond C: "The clients are often timid and afraid and don't use real-life words. They write for the boss. I write for the audience."

The writers also believed that they had the opportunity to say things in ways that were off-limits to clients. Their use of rhetorical knowledgeability, particularly an awareness of the connection between the power hierarchy within an organization and its discourse, allowed them to make a deliberate attempt to change its discursive practices. As a Risk Taker, the writer may use a different vocabulary—for example, the e-newsletter title, "Let's E-Chat," which I chose for its non-bureaucratic tone. Another change can involve untangling intent. Iedema demonstrates through a simple example how organizations use modality to conceal the command, "Pay the fee," and who is commanding, by using the phrases: "It is required that you pay the fee" or "The requirement is that you pay the fee" (Iedema, 1997b, p. 8). The result, in more complex discourse, is highly convoluted and multi-syllabic text that makes it difficult for audiences to comprehend. In situations like these, professional writers generally try to provide clarity and reader appeal—for example, I might revise the command, leaving it hidden, but making it more dialogic, avoiding nominalizations, and eliminating the passive voice: "Are you interested in using this service? Then your fee will be..." As Robert R. noted: "You want to engage the reader in the process by asking rhetorical questions or speaking personally with the reader [by] using the 'second person.'"

Sometimes discursive changes are accepted and even welcomed; sometimes they are rejected. When the latter occurs, the writer's outsider status usually provides protection. For example, in the case of the e-newsletter, the client took full responsibility, saying that she and her group had not realized exactly what they wanted. Don C. said: "I'm given the benefit of the doubt for my lack of knowledge. That lets me say things in new ways." However, if a writer takes too many unacceptable risks, the client will ultimately assume that he or she was not the right contractor for the job. As Robert R. explained: "Risk-taking is an art and it varies from case to case. You need experience to know how far you can go." However, risk-taking is pleasurable because it provides space for creativity in both writing and problem-solving. And, when it is successful, clients are enthusiastic and appreciative. Don C. noted that he sometimes felt like a "white knight" who arrives to save the situation.

CONCLUSION

The study reported in this paper suggests that professional writers, particularly those who freelance, must be masters of rhetorical knowledgeability in order to earn a living. Further, the study shows that the key to this rhetorical knowledgeability is the capacity to take on various roles either sequentially or simultaneously. These roles, played out in complex ways towards both clients and text, allow professional writers to straddle the divide between a COP and the outside world with one foot, so to

speak, in either camp. This "stance" enables them to participate to some degree in a COP's social matrix and yet maintain a necessary distance from it. However, many research gaps remain. For example:

- Professional writers act as ethnographers when they enter a workplace. How do they acquire the skills to do this without training and yet clearly achieve success through their ability to recreate an organization's culture and language?

- Professional writers manage to share in some of the distributed cognition of a workplace. How do they gain and apply this knowledge?

- Professional writers have an almost instantaneous recognition of workplace genres. How have they acquired this ability? Do they develop mental schemata or templates and, if so, how does this take place?

- Professional writers' ability to role-play arises from experience and exigency, a heightened sensitivity to organizational language and interpersonal situations, and a talent for writing in a variety of genres and media. How do these specific factors and experiences interweave to create success? And, conversely, is there a mix that would result in failure?

- Professional writers have learned their role-playing skills on the job, so to speak. How effective would role-playing be for novice writers in an academic setting? And what steps need to be taken to teach this particular skill in the classroom.

In sum, the world of the professional writer provides, I suggest, a rich research source for scholars interested in the writing process, genre studies, and pedagogical strategies for assisting students as they make the transition from writing for academe to writing for the workplace.

Appendix: Questions for Professional Writers

Note: I've structured the questions along my own steps toward getting acculturated to a new client. They may not fit your approach. Please think of them only as a starting point.

The scenario: You have been phoned and asked to undertake an assignment for a new client. You agree and go to your first meeting.

At the meeting, the project manager explains the assignment to you.
- What do you listen for to ensure that you understand all the requirements of the assignment?
- How do you gather tacit information from the meeting about the organization to help you achieve your task, i.e., organizational culture, hierarchy, ideology?
- What clues do you get from people and attitudes around the table? How do you see these?
- What kind of questions do you find yourself asking at these meetings?
- What listening/interpreting skills do you think you use at this point in your assignment?

You're given background material to read.
- What do you find out from this information that allows you to write for the client as if you worked as an employee?
- What do you look for in a client's written materials that give you clues to how you have to write your own assignment?
- What reading skills do you think you use at this point in your assignment?

You start writing.
- How do you undertake your work? Plan, outline, just get into it, etc.?
- How do you ensure that you write in the appropriate style, tone and vocabulary of the client?
- How do you ensure that your writing both explicitly and implicitly duplicates the ideology of the client?
- Do you think your status as an outsider gives you an advantage? How?
- Do you think your status as an outsider has disadvantages and, if so, what are they?
- What writing skills do you think you use at this point in your assignment?

Throughout the process, you submit drafts and get back corrections, suggestions, additions, etc.

- What is the major area where you generally get corrections: structure, content, vocabulary, etc?
- What clues about the organizational culture and ideology do you learn from these corrections? How do you notice these clues?
- What do you do if the client appears to be changing the scope of the assignment? How does this affect your understanding the his/her organization?
- Do you find that some assignments require more "collaboration" with the client than others?
- What writing and interpersonal skills do you think you use at this point in your assignment?

Other Information

- How many years have you worked as a writing consultant?
- What genres do you primarily work in? Example: speeches, reports, scripts, brochures, Web sites, etc.
- What kind of clients do you have? Private sector, public sector, NGO.
- Do you have a particular writing content specialty?
- What do you think are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- If you had to give advice to a novice professional writer, what would you say?

NOTES

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities, Canadian Association for the Teachers of Technical Writing, Quebec City, May 26, 2001.

[2] While these roles emerged from the conversations with freelance professional writers, I suggest that they also apply to in-house professional writers. For example, after I presented this paper to a graduate class, one student who is a writer at the Bank of Canada said that she played all the roles in her job except that of Pseudo-Insider since she was, of course, "on the inside."

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