

FRESH PERSPECTIVES: HOW JOURNALING DEVELOPS STUDENT VOICES IN FIRST-
YEAR WRITING

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of journaling in first-year writing classrooms and its impact on the development of voice in student writing. Drawing from personal experience and academic research, this study examines how journaling can serve as a tool for fostering self-discovery, creativity, and a deeper understanding of the writing process. The research highlights perspectives from scholars such as Peter Elbow, Kathleen Blake Yancey, and Jacqueline Jones Royster on voice in writing as well as Toby Fulwiler and Lynda Barry on journaling as a pedagogical tool. The study also employs a qualitative research approach that analyzes student responses collected through surveys conducted before and after a semester-long journaling process in a first-year writing course. The findings suggest that students who engage in consistent journaling develop a strong connection to their writing and gain confidence in their writerly voice. The thesis concludes by discussing the broader implications of integrating journaling into writing pedagogy and offers suggestions for educators to emphasize journaling and student voice in their writing classes.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents and my sister.
Thank you for being my biggest supporters, even from hundreds of miles away.

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INTRODUCTION

My History with Journaling

It's 2008. I'm at the store with my mom buying groceries. We walk past the stationary aisle, and I see a notebook. It's small enough to fit in my hand but as thick as a textbook. It's covered in cow print, and the inside is protected by a gold lock and key that holds the two covers together. I grab it off the shelf and ask my mom to buy it for me. She agrees, probably hoping that it will keep me busy at home while she works on the family computer. Once we're home, I immediately use the key to unlock the lock and open the front cover. I'm immediately greeted by four little words:

This journal belongs to



Figure 1: Signature line.

Being the youngest sibling, it's rare to have something that is entirely and completely mine. My sister is two years older than me, and most of my clothes, toys, and general belongings were hers first, sometimes even my parents'. To have something that was entirely my own, something that no one, not even my parents, could use or even see without my permission, was empowering. Staring at the first page, I wrote the first word that was *mine*.

This journal belongs to

A handwritten signature 'Rylee' written on a horizontal line.

Figure 2: 2008 signature.

It's 2014. I'm starting high school in a couple of weeks, and my dad is yelling at me for having a messy room. This is warranted: my room was a—in his words that I hear often—pig sty. I grab my speaker, connect it to my iPod, and set up camp on my bedroom floor with a trash bag and a mission. Cleaning my room was an all-day affair. I shift through a collection of trash, clothes, and miscellaneous objects, wearing a necklace I've long forgotten about and sunglasses that are missing a lens as "Story of my Life" by One Direction blasts through the room. I pick up a dirty t-shirt, and something underneath it catches my eye: a short and thick cow-print notebook with a gold lock. I grab it and try to open it, but it's locked. Little me was so excited to keep others out of my business that I didn't take this situation into consideration. I toss around clothes and stuffed animals for a minute until I uncover the key a few feet away from the journal. I unlock the journal and open it.

This journal belongs to

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rylee". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a single horizontal line that serves as an underline.

Figure 3: 2008 signature rediscovered.

I flip through the pages and read through all of eight and nine-year-old Rylee's problems. I listen to her talk about teachers, friends, the time she got in trouble at school for yelling in the classroom, her trip to the nearby amusement park, and all the times her older sister made her cry. I smiled as nostalgia filled my heart. What a gift to have left myself: a souvenir of thoughts and feelings that I had completely forgotten about. A connection to my past self who matters just as much as my current and future self. I closed the cover, locked the gold lock, and set the journal in the top drawer of my nightstand with the key placed gently on top of it.

It's 2019. I'm on summer vacation and living with my parents before I start my sophomore year of college. I'm sitting in the living room after a particularly exhausting shift at the animal hospital I worked at, not even bothering to take off my scrubs that smell overwhelmingly like wet dogs. I'm scrolling on Instagram when I come across a post that someone shared of their journal adorned with colorful patterns and calligraphy that takes years to perfect, reading "August 2019." The caption tells the story of this poster creating their August bullet journal spread.

I have heard of a bullet journal before and know that it's essentially a journal that you create all on your own in whatever way is most productive for you. I was always too intimidated to try them because I convinced myself that I wasn't creative and "artsy" enough to create something as visually appealing as this person had made. However, after breaking off a three-year relationship with my high school boyfriend and vowing to reinvent myself, I now have the confidence to give it a shot. I drive to the bookstore to find a dotted notebook and a pack of markers. I'm drawn to a teal notebook with a little band on the outside to keep it closed, and I pick up a pack of 32 brush pens. I buy them, drive back home, look on Pinterest for some inspiration, and open my very first bullet journal, making my mark on the first page.

This journal belongs to

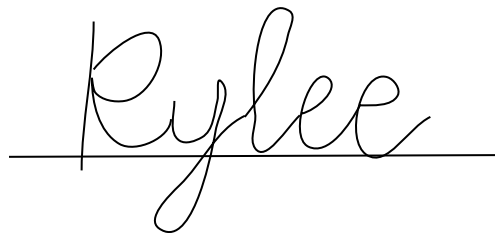
A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rylee". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line that serves as a baseline. The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop on the "R" and a long, sweeping tail on the "y".

Figure 4: 2019 signature.

It's 2022. It's August and I'm bored in my college house looking for something creative to do. I've tried working with fabric, but it was a lot of work. I tried embroidery, but it was too

expensive. I tried painting and drawing, but I just wasn't that good at it. I'm about to start my final semester of undergrad and the first semester without being in my university's marching band. So, I needed a hobby. I'm rearranging things in my room when I come across a teal notebook packed away in a box that was previously used for moving. I recognize the book as my bullet journal from a few years ago. I open the first page to see a sight that I'm all too familiar with at this point.

This journal belongs to

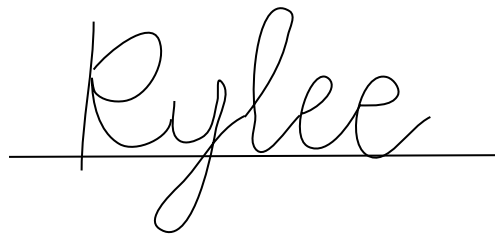
A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Kylee', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and elegant, with the 'K' and 'y' being particularly prominent.

Figure 5: 2019 signature rediscovered.

I flip through the pages to see a mess of beautiful yet complicated journal entries, until just a little over halfway through the book when they suddenly turn into blank pages, and I'm forced to think about why this journal is unfinished.

While I loved writing in my journal, talking about my day, naming three things that I'm grateful for, tracking my moods, checking off my daily to-do list, etc., it was not sustainable. I found myself beginning to view journaling as a chore and resentment slowly started to replace my appreciation for the act. If I missed a day, I forced myself to still fill out an entry for it the next day and pretend that I didn't miss it. All of this work I pressured myself to do—combined with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020—led me to abandon the journal altogether. Now, it is an incomplete relic, representing the debilitating perfectionism in me that took years to overcome.

As I look at this journal and remember the stress I put on myself over it, I also remember the joy it brought me and how good it felt to be creative. I want to rekindle the feeling of filling pages with words that feel so personal and reflective of who I truly am. So, I head to the store and buy another dotted notebook. This one is black. As I open it to begin writing, I don't sign my name on the first page. That feels too permanent, and I'm not sure if this is a hobby that's going to stick. I begin writing and creating, allowing myself to experiment, take risks, and make mistakes. I allowed myself to skip days and not remember things.

As time went on, I kept journaling. I finished that first notebook—there isn't an empty page to be found. I closed it and wrote on the cover in white sharpie "Aug 2022–Feb 2023." I wrote the same on the spine and added a 1 on the top, indicating that it's the first volume in a collection that has yet to be filled. I ordered the same exact notebook online so I could have some consistency, and I picked up where I left off.

Since then, two more completed notebooks have been added to the collection with a fourth one in the works. A lot of things have changed over the years, and I don't write in my journal every day. I try to write two or three times a week, but I don't put pressure on myself. I create things when I want to create them, and I write when I want to write. This era of my journaling has been so freeing, and I have gotten so much joy through this act. I feel fulfillment in the physical practice of getting my thoughts out of my head and onto paper. The act frees up mental space, and I am able to store these thoughts and feelings in a creative word salad.

Journaling has positively impacted my writing process as well. I've learned, especially in graduate school, the importance of getting words onto paper no matter how messy and unorganized they seem at first. This development has completely transformed my writing, teaching me to think now, write immediately, and polish it later. The process has become a

passion of mine; so much so that I've chosen to introduce it to my students and study it as a tool in my writing classroom. I feel like I have a little piece of comfort and happiness that I need to let others know about.

I especially love looking back on my journals, failed ones included. They are a time capsule of my identities, who I was and how I was feeling. They're filled with memories, failures, tragedies, and everything in between. Even now, I don't write my name on the first page of the journal anymore, but not because I'm scared of the permanency of doing so. I think it's because I've finally accepted that these journals are for me and only me, riddled with my identity and rich with my memories. I know who they belong to.

How I Got Here

My long-held appreciation for journaling stuck with me through my transition into graduate school. I saw it simply as a hobby and something that held no academic standing. I came into this program knowing that I wanted to write a thesis—and student voice was a top interest of mine for this—but centering my thesis around journaling never crossed my mind even as a possibility until my first week of classes.

In my first semester, I took WRA 810: Writing, Composing, Designing, Making with Dr. Dànielle Nicole DeVoss. On the first day, we were asked to introduce ourselves and to simply “describe what we write.” Not thinking much of it, I made a notably long list of the things I write and journaling was near the top. Dr. DeVoss pointed this out and asked me to talk more about it, so I explained my journaling process including the style I write in, the nature of a bullet journal, and that I sometimes go back and read old entries. She looked fascinated, and she said, “hm, I think there's a really interesting thesis topic hiding in there.” Once she said this, I couldn't stop thinking about it. It was so obvious that I couldn't believe I didn't see it sooner. My interest in

student voices and my hobby of journaling can be connected and foster a study that I feel deeply passionate about. This thesis is the amalgamation of that.

In this thesis, I begin by outlining the texts that are at the core of this study and their themes. These are the main reference points that I continued to come back to as I researched and wrote. This includes work from influential scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition, such as Jacqueline Jones Royster, Peter Elbow, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Toby Fulwiler, and more. Then, I turn to the methodology through which I approached my study. I situate myself as a student and a scholar in the field and the influences that have led me to this study. I discuss the process of creating the surveys used to collect data as well as the development of my research questions and purpose for conducting the study. I present the results of my research along with my own commentary on the survey questions and answers. I draw on this along with the aforementioned scholarship to analyze the results and present the implications of this research for myself and for the broader field of rhetoric and composition. I conclude by clearly stating my interpretation of my findings and suggestions for where we go from here.

CHAPTER 1: INFLUENTIAL VOICES

As a rhetoric and writing studies scholar and a teacher of writing, I'm interested in how the field approaches both voice and journaling/reflection. The reason I lump journaling and reflection together is because I believe that journaling is inherently reflective. It's a solitary act of getting my thoughts onto paper, and in order to understand my thoughts enough to write them down, I must reflect on them. In a similar vein, writing my thoughts encourages me to write in my voice. I often write in my voice in academic contexts as well, but it's especially prevalent in my journal. I use slang and shorthand language, make spelling errors that I don't bother to fix, and generally just write how I would speak to a good friend. I think that some of my best writing is born from this process, so I'm interested in how I can encourage my students to experience this same process.

When I say that I'm writing in my voice, I mean that I am writing in a way that feels authentically me. It's not about searching for identifying markers in my writing that indicate voice but rather a feeling I have when I reread my work. To me, I feel as though I have successfully written in my voice when I recognize myself in the words I've written. I also feel successful when my reader has a better understanding of who I am through my work. As much as finding my voice in my writing is a personal journey, I, as the writer, am only half of the equation.

Peter Elbow explains that when our voices are prevalent in our writing, it creates "resonance" within the reader (as cited in Yancey, 1994, p. xii). Yancey then draws this conclusion about voice:

From this perspective, voice is created as much by the reader as by the writer and the text; no longer is it controlled exclusively by the writer, nor is it here a means of seeking truth. It is rather a means of speaking to another, of trying to create a resonance between the reader and an audible voice carried in text. (p. xii).

I once believed that voice in writing was exclusive to the writer—an intimate practice between me and the text that the reader is merely witness to. I see now that the reader is just as much an active participant as

myself. At first, I questioned if a student's voice in their writing was measurable, but I believe now that the perception by the reader is an essential part of the process.

In what follows, I outline the six essential texts that contributed to this project. The first three are from scholars who discuss voice in writing, and the last three are from scholars who focus on journals and journaling in the writing classroom. I first summarize the focus and takeaways of these texts individually as they pertain to this project. I then conclude by synthesizing across these conversations to draw connections between these two essential elements of my thesis—voice and journaling—before moving on to my methodologies.

Scholars on Voice

The first text I want to highlight is Peter Elbow's edited collection *Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing*, the fourth volume in the *Landmark Essays* series. This text is an older one, published in 1995, and features essays from as early as 1925. However, I believe that it is foundational to the conversation of voice in writing and that the concepts remain relevant in the contemporary era of writing. The collection contains influential essays on the role of voice in writing and how it is perceived and functions. The scholars discuss the construction of voice and debate whether or not it is essential to the authenticity of writing or if it is an illusion created by perception. Many of the essays discuss the pedagogical implications of focusing on voice in the classroom and how that can be approached. Finally, some essays discuss voice as identity as well as its cultural significance within academic spaces. Although Elbow advocates for voice's place in writing, he shapes the collection to represent a balanced view of voice through presenting its rhetorical and expressive advantages while also including perspectives that challenge his approach to voice in writing. He provides an optimistic view on finding common ground among these differences in the conclusion of his introduction, stating:

We may not agree about the presence or absence in a particular text of audible, dramatic, distinctive, or authoritative voice, but we can agree about what these terms mean. Even for resonant voice we don't have to agree on the nature of the self. (p. xlvii).

Next, I look to Kathleen Blake Yancey's *Voices on Voice: Perspectives, Definitions, Inquiry* as another foundational text on the topic of voice in writing. Like *Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing*, this edited collection is older, published in 1994. The collection examines the idea of voice in writing and, like Elbow, explores definitions of voice, its pedagogical implications, and its place in composition studies, both as a pedagogical practice and a research interest. Yancey establishes that, within the collection, there is not a question of whether or not voice exists but "about how it is developed, about how it is re-created" (p. xviii). Many of the scholars investigate the legitimacy of voice as a staple concept in the field, and they connect voice to identity and agency within writing. They discuss the issue of power and who gets to decide what voices are privileged or not in academic and professional discourse; this is especially prevalent when talking about people and cultures who have been "otherized," or "portrayed alternatively as sub-human and as special-human" (Carr, 1994, p. 191). Yancey, too, frames her collection with a balanced perspective on voice and writing that both promotes its strengths—voice as "a means of expression, creation, and communication" (p. xix)—and questions its limitations—voice is fictional, faithful, and subjective (p. xix).

My final fundamental reference to voice is "When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own" by Jacqueline Jones Royster. Like the previous texts, this essay was written almost thirty years ago in 1996, yet Royster raises questions and discusses issues that we continue to grapple with today. As a Black woman, Royster's focus is primarily on voice in relation to identity and authority, and she approaches the conversation with a perspective that is severely underrepresented in academic discourse, in general and especially in composition studies. She criticizes the lack of diversity in this discourse and how it continues to privilege white, male, Western voices while suppressing the voices of marginalized groups. She argues in favor of experiential knowledge as valid knowledge, emphasizing that it has been dismissed as subjective and unimportant likely due to its accessibility to marginalized communities. Royster calls for scholars to abandon control within the discourse and support perspectives that differ from their own. Royster's work illuminates and critiques the exclusivity of these academic practices and calls to eliminate the one-dimensionality of the conversation around voice and writing.

Although these texts are older than I am, these conversations will likely never be outdated. In my graduate school experience, discussions about voice are sparse, and I had to seek them out. They aren't commonplace. Identity? Yes. Agency? Of course. But voice is not of the same caliber as these concepts, much less the voices of writers who don't fit the "standard." Royster recognizes this weakness, stating "I emphasize that there is a pressing need to construct paradigms that permit us to engage in better practices in cross-boundary discourse" (1996, p. 37) and offers the solution of voice as a system/multiple systems. The representation now is better than it was in Royster's era, but we are fighting the same battles. Yancey and Michael Spooner also emphasize the ongoing development of voice as an important topic in writing as we continue into the digital age—now even more relevant than in the *Voices on Voice* decade—stating, "the orality evoked in e-mail for me encourages me to bring different voices into contact, and I hear what happens, hear what response is created, and most importantly perhaps, hear who I become" (1994, pp. 311).

Scholars on Journaling

As I mentioned in the introduction, journaling as a rhetorical tool was not on my radar before graduate school. Similar to voice, once I decided that this was a topic I wanted to invest time into, I had to actively seek out texts about journaling. This is when I came across the work of Lynda Barry and her book *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor*. Published in 2014, I'm not sure many would consider this text foundational to the conversation on journaling, but nevertheless, it's foundational to my own studies on the topic. *Syllabus* is a delightful mix of written and visual text that is unlike any book I have seen before. Barry recollects her course plan for her workshop at the University of Wisconsin–Madison through a collage-filled notebook littered with handwritten notes, drawings, assignments and syllabi, and reflections. While the text discusses students journaling in the classroom, the actual book itself acts as a journal as well. Barry encourages students to play and create in her classroom no matter their talent level and emphasizes creativity as an essential step in the writing process. She discusses the daily activities she assigned to her students, including drawing and other creative practices as well as journaling in and out of

the classroom. One example of this is the “daily diary” that she had her students keep, asking them to list things that they saw and did as well as a quote they overheard and to draw a picture of something in their day, emphasizing that “having to write it down makes us begin to notice when we notice something” which will ultimately lead to reflection (p. 182). In addition, she discusses the importance of collaborative learning spaces where students are able to share their work and thoughts free of judgment and where experimentation is encouraged. *Syllabus* is a text that encourages teachers of writing to let their students create in the classroom free of fear.

While Barry covers creativity and how journals can be used in an explorative way, Toby Fulwiler’s *The Journal Book* discusses journaling as a general concept and its role in writing pedagogy. In this collection of essays, published in 1987, journaling is depicted as a tool for students to learn, think, and express themselves across disciplines. Fulwiler considers journaling as a low-stakes space for students to reflect and think critically about their writing and learning process and discusses how they can be used in subjects outside of writing/English, such as science and history. The book covers different types of journals and the purposes that they each serve, including personal journals, academic journals, response journals, and more. Like *Syllabus*, *The Journal Book* encourages exploration and emphasizes writing as a process over a product, and it offers journaling as a tool within that process that “[helps] writers experiment with language and document their progress” (p. 2). The book includes perspectives from teachers who have implemented these practices into their classrooms to encourage others to do the same. This text is not only foundational to academic discourse around journaling but to writing pedagogy as a whole.

The last text I want to highlight as fundamental to my studies of journaling is “From Journals to Journalism: Tracing Trajectories of Literate Development” by Kevin Roozen. After coming across this text in an independent study, I felt as though it emphasized all my thoughts on how journaling could benefit students in their writing development. Published in *College Composition and Communication* in 2009, Roozen examines the connection between private writing—journals—and public writing—journalism. Roozen investigates how private writing develops and influences public writing and argues

that the two aren't separate and exist on a continuum. He considers how journals can help writers develop voice and can be used as an exploratory space, similar to what we've seen from the previously summarized texts, stating about the student on whom he focused, "it was the very practices Angelica employed to inscribe her experiences in her private writing that allowed her voice to be heard both in the undergraduate curriculum and beyond" (p. 565). Roozen also considers how private writing can be a starting point for published work. He encourages writing teachers to view journaling as a genuine step in the process of writing rather than a separate practice.

These pieces on journaling summarize my thoughts on the matter quite well, and I found them to be extremely helpful when I began putting these thoughts into words last year. All three of them emphasize journals as a playground that fosters creativity and experimentation which ultimately has a positive impact on a writer's process.

Patterns Across the Texts

Together, these texts have painted a picture of the positionality of voice in writing as well as the use of journals in rhetoric and composition. Closely tied to voice is the concept of the self which is reiterated by a handful of the scholars. Elbow touches on the self many times within his *Landmark Essays* introduction, with claims such as "a self is continually being re-made by language" (1995, p. xix) and with implications of a "real me" or "real identity" (p. xxxi). Yancey approaches this topic in a similar fashion, stating that voice is "a vehicle for expression of the self" (1994, xi) and even quoting Elbow discussing the role of the self in experiencing resonance (p. xii). Roozen talks extensively about self as well when it comes to journaling, highlighting how the subject of his study had to "take [her] self out of the writing" (2009, p. 558) in order to get a better grade on an assignment. He continues to emphasize the difference of self within academic writing and private writing.

It's also continually restated that voice in writing is essential to hearing different and new perspectives that may have otherwise been suppressed. Royster's voice is at the forefront of this argument, criticizing scholars in the field for speaking for Black and other marginalized people and how we need "to recognize that an interpretive view is just that—interpretive" (1996, p. 31). She then ends her essay by powerfully stating that "voicing at its best is not just well-spoken, but also well-heard" (p. 40). Voices that have been disenfranchised within the discourse are too often spoken for instead of listened to, and Royster encourages us to take an active role in voicing by listening as much as we speak. Fulwiler emphasizes the importance of student perspectives in *The Journal Book*, saying that through journals "students are encouraged to express honestly their opinions, take some risks with their thought, and write in their own natural voice" (1987, p. 5). Because institutions still privilege a "standard" form of English that students don't naturally write in, it's not unusual to see writing educators discourage students from writing honestly and in a way that is instinctive to them. Roozen observes this when Angelica—his subject—is asked to take herself out of the writing (2009, p. 558). Different voices can be highlighted through journaling—a prominent overlap in these texts—and can "provide a place in which to write informally yet systematically in order to seek, discover, speculate, and figure things out" (Fulwiler, 1987, P. 9).

This idea of discovery is the foundation of using journals as an exploratory playground not only in writing but in other areas as well (I'll talk more about the relevance of discovery in the next chapter when I outline the first-year writing curriculum). Fulwiler begins his introductions by characterizing journals as "useful pedagogical tools in other disciplines—not just English—where critical independent thought, speculation, or exploration is important" (1987, p. 1). This notion of a place dedicated to exploration, creativity, risk-taking, play, etc. is

prevalent across the texts, and Lynda Barry goes as far to claim that by keeping her students “drawing without thinking about it too much, something quite original will appear” (2014, p. 21). This, I believe, can translate from drawing to writing, indicating that with enough freedom and time to create, students can improve their work and establish a uniqueness to their writing. This is also a way that journaling (or private writing, as Roozen often refers to it) can affect public and professional writing. Roozen spends much of his article analyzing how a student’s private writing can develop skills that translate into professional spaces by explaining that Angelica’s career was benefited due to “the literate resources from her journaling [serving] to self-scaffold her participation in journalism” (2009, p. 561). He emphasizes that “private writing is not an isolated island of writing limited to diaries and journals” (p. 566) and that the writing that happens in these spaces can be and often is developmental to the writing that we hold to a “professional standard.”

Overall, these texts consider journaling as a low-stakes act of exploration that fosters self-discovery and a better understanding of ourselves and how we write. By incorporating journals into writing pedagogy, students are encouraged to express themselves, be creative, take risks, and write in ways that feel authentic to who they are. While this is just a short list of the texts that influenced this project, they are the most pivotal and will be referenced the most, especially as I analyze the results of my survey and discuss the implications this data has in the field and within my own studies.

CHAPTER 2: EMBRACING THE PROCESS

In this chapter, I discuss the development of this study and my decision-making process throughout the project. I situate my methodological approach to the study, the methods through which I conducted it, and why I believed these methods would be most effective for collecting my desired data. I discuss my research questions and how they came to fruition, as well as outline the site of my study, why this site was chosen, and other factors behind the data I collected. Finally, I introduce the subjects of my study to transition into Results and Discussion.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that the six texts I reviewed were foundational to my own studies on voice and journaling. This is because I believe that voice and journaling are closely related and should be seen as essential elements in the writing process. These texts supported my ideas and provided organized thoughts and arguments for the concepts that I had been thinking about for a while at this point. They also presented multiple perspectives on the topic, including criticisms and essential conversations about race and marginalized people. They helped me make sense of how I was feeling when it came to grading student work and why I felt something was missing, the primary topic of discussion in the following paragraphs.

When I began brainstorming possible thesis topics, I found a handful of common themes surfacing from my interests: first-year writing, personal archives and measuring growth, voice, and reflection. My first semester of graduate school was also my first semester of teaching, and I found myself standing at the front of a first-year writing class, responsible for the writing education of students who weren't much younger than I was. I did my best with the resources I was given and followed the curriculum as I felt I should. After my first semester of instruction, I sat down and reflected on which practices I believed were effective in my classroom and which weren't. I found myself dissatisfied with a lot of things (as expected after my very first time

teaching), but I was especially discouraged with how I approached reflection with my students.

At MSU, the first-year writing (also commonly referred to as FYW) curriculum consists of five projects: the learning narrative, the cultural object inquiry, the disciplinary and professional literacies project, the remix project, and the final reflection. The deliverables for each project are a final draft and a reflective piece of writing. The point of the reflective piece is for students to think through their writing process and be able to see and reflect on the choices they are making in order to better understand how they write and what works and doesn't work for them in the process. In the first semester I taught WRA 101: Writing as Inquiry, I had my students write 2–3 page reflections, in addition to their 3–4 page final drafts, that were required to meet a large list of criteria (see Appendix A). As I graded my students' reflections, they were very structured and not what I was expecting. Students were simply trying to meet the criteria outlined in the rubric. They were reflecting for the sake of getting a good grade rather than letting the reflection benefit them and their process. Instead of student voices, I was reading generic and calculated AI-adjacent robot voices. I don't know why I didn't expect this, considering I set them up to do just as they did. I took accountability for not being clear with my expectations, and I knew I had to decide what exactly those expectations were. I worked toward this as I revised and experimented with my syllabus.

That next semester, the spring semester, I decided to have my students keep a journal and write in it every time we met for class. I categorized this as a "reflective journal" since the goal was for the students to be able to reflect on their writing within it throughout the semester. I began class by explaining what we would be doing that day and then immediately went into our first journal prompt. This initial journal entry is called the "warm-up." After we did all of our

learning for the day, the students responded to one more journal prompt before I went over reminders and let them head out. This closing journal entry is called the “cool-down.”

These terms—warm-up and cool-down—were inspired by when I used to run consistently for exercise. For years, I used the app *Couch to 5K* which instructed you to alternate between walking and running for specific amounts of time that gradually increased as you used the app. No matter how long you were directed to walk or run for, the workout always began with a 5-minute walking “warm-up” and ended with a 5-minute walking “cool-down” (Active Network, LLC, 2024). The warm-up was motivating; it would get me in the mindset of exercising and running prior to the actual workout. The cool-down was rewarding; I would simultaneously feel a sense of relief for no longer having to run and also a sense of accomplishment for what I had just achieved in my workout. These feelings were the intended outcome of the warm-ups and cool-downs in my writing class. I wanted to encourage students to get into a writing mindset and prepare for the nearly two hours of writing we were about to do, and I wanted them to feel proud of the work they had done by the end of class while also giving them space to feel relief that they get to go home now.

As for the content of these journal entries, they each stuck to a theme. The warm-up questions were usually fun and lighthearted, including questions like: “If you were a kitchen appliance, what would you be and why?” “What’s your favorite project you’ve ever done in school before?” and “What did you do over the long weekend?” Sometimes the questions were related to our class activities for that day, but most of the time they were random and fun. On the other hand, the cool-downs were always reflective. They focused on the content from class and asked students to reflect on how they will apply it to their upcoming projects. I also always asked them to write about what they learned that day; even if they learned nothing, I encouraged them

to write about that, too. The cool-downs especially emphasized my original intention of assigning journals: for students to learn the importance of reflection in the writing process through the habitual act of reflective writing.

At the end of each major project (with the exception of project 5¹), instead of the 2–3 page formal reflection I previously assigned, I asked students to do a much more informal reflection in their journals. The previous reflections were due outside of class and submitted to D2L just like their final drafts, but I decided that the reflective journal entries, as I dubbed them in my syllabus, should be done in class. In the class meeting immediately following the project due date, I skipped the warm-up and spent the first 30 minutes of class allowing the students to write in their journals and reflect on their writing process for the project they just completed. I provided guidelines (see Appendix B) for what this reflection might've looked like and what it should've ideally covered, but it was ultimately up to them how they chose to reflect. The students could either physically write this reflection in a notebook or they could write it in a document on their computer. Either way, they submitted the reflection to me on D2L once they finished (as a document, photo, or however was easiest for them).

By implementing journals, I took away all of the constraints that I previously had on what the reflection was supposed to look like and left it up to them how they wanted to individualize their work. Through this process, I noticed that the writing I was receiving from these students felt different than what I received from my fall-semester students. Instead of reflecting to satisfy me or to get a good grade on the assignment, I speculated that my students were beginning to actually learn what reflection was and how valuable of a tool it is, especially in the writing

¹ This is because project 5 is already a cumulative reflection of the entire course and is due after our last class of the semester

process, through the repetition and consistency of their journal and daily reflective writing. This notion was confirmed in their end-of-project reflections as well as the final reflection at the end of the course. One student, in their final reflection, wrote about the daily journals:

By reflecting on my writing process, I can gain insights into my strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, ultimately enhancing my overall performance and satisfaction. Additionally, reflection fosters self-awareness, critical thinking, and metacognitive skills, empowering me to become a lifelong learner and an effective communicator.

Another student responded to both the daily writing and the reflective journals at the end of each project, saying, “being able to reflect on what and how you did and to learn and develop from it so not to repeat any mistakes is vitally important and these tasks enable that opportunity.” This led me to adopt journals permanently to my syllabus and to conduct a study to gather evidence to support my suppositions of such learning.

My hypothesis developed into actual research questions during my independent study with Dr. DeVoss in the spring of 2024. Together, we investigated the role that journals could play in a writing class through my experiences with teaching FYW and looked for scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition on this topic, focusing specifically on the texts covered in my previous chapter. Through these inquiries, my expectations for what I was looking for in student reflections started to become clear. Something was missing, but what exactly was it? I concluded that the structured reflection that I wanted to avoid didn’t really invite students to use their authentic voice in their writing and write how they speak due to its limitations. I then wondered if journaling as reflection would lead students to write in their voice not just in a reflective context but all the time. This led to the question: how can the use of journals in first-

year writing encourage students to find and use their voice in their writing? This key question shaped my approach to the study I conducted and to this thesis.

The site for this study was WRA 101: Writing as Inquiry (otherwise referred to as first-year writing) section 9 in Case Hall room 339 at Michigan State University, and my research participants were students enrolled in this course. This specific class met in the fall semester of 2024 on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:20 A.M. until 12:10 P.M. The room was on the larger side, with two doors for entry on either end of the room and a wall lined with windows that made the space bright and inviting. The desks were individual rolling desks that were conducive to group work and easy to navigate through. They were often pushed to the back wall, so the distance between the majority of students and the front of the classroom was usually large. This was my class, and when I went to find the classroom I would be teaching in the weekend before classes officially began, I was very pleased with this room that I had been assigned.

I chose this site and population for a few reasons: first, I was the instructor for this course (more on this later in this chapter) and could easily access the students to communicate with them about the study. Second, the physical space was an inviting learning environment, as opposed to the classroom I taught in the semester before which had no windows and felt like a beige box. Third, this study was entirely dependent on students keeping journals throughout the semester, which is not a required practice within the department and is up to instructor discretion. Because journals were already incorporated into my syllabus in the style that I was interested in studying, I decided that focusing on these students would be most beneficial to my study.

The goals for this course—and all other FYW courses—are as follows, according to my syllabus:

Our curriculum in WRA 101 is grounded in program learning goals of **inquiry, discovery, and communication**. You can see how these three goals are interrelated:

- **Inquiry**: a recursive process of posing, following, and answering questions.
- **Discovery**: making new knowledge through the inquiry process.
- **Communication**: purposeful engagement of others through the products of inquiry and discovery.

The following **principles** are foundational to our work in First-Year Writing:

- For writers, **inquiry, discovery, and communication are related and recursive** acts.
- Learners of writing have **useful prior knowledge** and capacities.
- **Experience is central** in learning to write: it is both a source of knowledge and a subject for inquiry.
- Writers benefit from **working with others**.
- The practices, values, and effects of writing are variously **situated in communities and cultures**.
- **Culture is important** both in learning to write, and in assessing how writing works in the world. (Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures, n.d., emphasis original to my syllabus)

Our learning goals—inquiry, discovery, and communication—are why I have incorporated journaling into my curriculum. In order to inquire, we have to *write* and write consistently. My theory is that doing this will lead to discovery and reveal new knowledge about who we are and how we write which will ultimately allow us to develop a resonant voice in our writing. With this knowledge, we can effectively communicate with one another. So, consistent journaling means

consistent writing which leads to inquiry that promotes discovery and strengthens voice in writing.

After solidifying the site and goals of the study, I contemplated the best method for collecting data. I wanted to know students' preconceptions about journals and journaling in general and in school prior to the class, and then I wanted to see if these preconceptions changed after a semester of consistent journal writing. I was especially interested in the students' opinions on a specific topic that was going to largely inform my analysis and conclusions made from this study: *I wanted to know if the students feel like their voice is reflected in their academic writing.* The whole purpose of this study is to investigate how journals amplify student voices in FYW. I wanted to see the difference in their answers at the beginning of the semester and then at the end after they had spent fifteen weeks journaling.

I decided that surveys would be the best way to collect this data, specifically two surveys: one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end. I considered interviewing students, but that would be an additional layer of screening to see which students to choose (since it would be difficult to thoroughly interview all 24 students and this study was voluntary) which felt unnecessary. I also wanted to make the study accessible to all 24 students to collect as much information as I could, so surveys were the most conducive to these goals.

The process of receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board was long but smooth. I originally planned to send out the pre-survey within the first two weeks of the semester, but I waited to see if meeting my students would influence any of the questions I was planning to ask which didn't really happen, so I submitted both surveys immediately for approval. IRB asked for a few clarifications, such as ensuring that the surveys would not be kept as academic record, describing my recruitment methods, and explaining that choosing to

participate in and participating in the surveys will not in any way adversely affect students nor will it impact their ability and opportunity to engage the content of the course. Approval was granted three weeks after the initial submission.

Conducting this study with my own students was something I had little hesitation with. The study was approached in an ethical manner where participation was voluntary, and they could opt out at any time. I did not discuss the content of the surveys nor what I was hoping to see in their responses with any students. I presented this to them like so: “I’m doing a study for my Master’s thesis, including a survey at the beginning of the semester and one at the end. The links will be emailed to you. Participation is voluntary and will not affect your grade, your position in the class, or how I view you personally.” My only worry was that they would notice the benefits that I saw in journaling as the semester progressed which could potentially influence their responses, but I don’t think this was an issue in the end.

I distributed the pre-survey—Effectiveness of Reflective Journals Pre-Survey—to the WRA 101 students on September 27, 2024, via email (see Appendix C). The questions (see Appendix D) and responses were recorded through Google Forms and are discussed in the next chapter. The post-survey—Effectiveness of Reflective Journals Post-Survey—was distributed to the WRA 101 students on December 6, 2024, via email (see Appendix E). The questions (see Appendix F) and responses were recorded through Google Forms and are discussed in the next chapter as well.

The surveys were distributed to all 24 students and, as I said previously, were completely voluntary. I knew I was not going to get 24 responses, but I was hopeful to receive 10 or so. Still, I wasn’t surprised when only three students chose to participate, but I was confident that this would produce fruitful results regardless. The three participants—who I identify by

pseudonyms—are: Hunter, who chose to participate in the pre-survey only, and Charlie and Kelly, who participated in both surveys.

In sum, the development of my approach to this study and the questions I was looking to answer was slow and happened over a period of time. It was inspired by my first experience teaching and the feeling of something missing, and it was guided by influential scholars in rhetoric and composition as well as conversations between me and other writing scholars. I also thought about the learning goals of FYW as well as my own beliefs in writing pedagogy and ultimately created two surveys whose results I expected to promote my hypothesis. In the next chapter, I share what those results were and discuss where they lie in the conversation that I have introduced here.

CHAPTER 3: AMPLIFYING STUDENT VOICES

The following paragraphs present the results of my surveys, beginning with the pre-survey and then following with the post-survey. I share the data gathered as related to each question, share some of my thoughts related to the data, and finally, I share the overarching results of the survey across all questions and responses. This is to preface my analysis of the data in the next chapter.

Effectiveness of Reflective Journals Pre-Survey

The participants for my Effectiveness of Reflective Journals Pre-Survey were Hunter, Charlie, and Kelly.² Each participant answered every question. My focus for this study was on the pre-established ideas about journals and voice that the students were bringing with them to the course. In the following paragraphs, I outline their responses to each question in the pre-survey (see Appendix D).

My first question, aside from asking for their name, was, “when someone refers to writing in a journal or “journaling,” what does this mean to you?” My goal here was to understand their perspectives on journals prior to the remaining questions (which could possibly reveal my expectations for responses) and perhaps provide context to their following answers. This question also prepared them for the remainder of the questions by revealing the survey’s focus.

Hunter’s response: “I’ve always seen it as something I’ve gotten out of therapy.”

Charlie’s response: “Writing on a smaller type of notebook, but not writing anything school related.”

² Pseudonyms used

Kelly's response: "When someone refers to writing in a journal or journaling I think of it pretty different than I would think of just writing in general, what I picture is more of like personal thoughts or feelings written in your own time, almost like a bullet journal, where you would write down more personal notes in your free time, I also think of it to be a lot less formal than normal writing maybe with poor grammar or less completed sentences."

I noticed that none of them initially associated journaling with school. Charlie even explicitly said that they don't think about school when they think of journaling. I expected them all to associate journals with a more personal style of writing which is not commonly thought of in conjunction with schoolwork.

My next question was, "aside from our class, have you ever kept a journal of any type?" I wanted to know what their previous experiences were with journaling and if these opinions they had were coming from these experiences or from an outsider's perspective. Their responses were all "yes." My reaction to these responses is skewed by bias as I've spent a whole semester getting to know these students personally, so I was not surprised to find that these three had all kept journals before.

The following question was connected to the previous one: "if yes, how would you describe the type of journal(s) that you've kept?" This question was investigating the context for their previous responses; I wanted to know why they kept these journals, what the purpose was, what they looked like, and any other information about them they were willing to offer. Again, this provides context for their opinions on the subject by revealing how their past experiences have shaped their perspectives.

Hunter's response: "As stated above, journals for therapy, but I've found that I don't enjoy it that much."

Charlie's response: "I've kept many throughout my life as dairies [sic] or trackers for my therapy sessions, besides writing down a couple of my favorite book/lyrics/poems."

Kelly's response: "I would describe the journals that I've kept to be short lived to say the least. I would consider them to be more of a diary if that makes sense. But they included mostly personal thoughts or notes that I didn't really share with anyone else, that I used to kind of get my thoughts out onto paper to maybe understand what I was thinking better."

I noticed that therapy was mentioned by both Hunter and Charlie which is fairly common as I have also kept a journal for therapy. Charlie mentioned the journal being a sort of tracker which I felt was significant and will touch on more in my analysis. They and Kelly both mentioned a distinction between a journal and a diary which is something worth future exploration.

Next, I asked them, "aside from our class, have you ever kept a journal for school before?" Hunter and Kelly both said yes while Charlie said no. Since Charlie explicitly said that they don't associate journals with schoolwork, this answer made sense. However, I didn't expect the other two to have done this. They didn't mention this in their previous answers, but I suppose it's possible that they saw this specific question and waited to mention any school journaling until they got to this point. I had limited exposure to journaling in school which has incorrectly led me to think that everyone had similar experiences; this is something I've realized in the process of this project.

I then asked, "do you think there are benefits to keeping a school journal for personal writing? Why or why not? If so, what are one or two of the benefits?" This question has a lot of parts to it, but I felt it would be effective to combine them into one.

Hunter's response: "I think there are benefits, in that it gives you good practice, or, if anything, can help you improve your handwriting."

Charlie's response: "Yes! I believe it is very helpful to get to know yourself better and keep track of experiences. I love reading about what I felt when I was ten."

Kelly's response: "I think there can be benefits depending on the approach you take. I like the approach we take in class with the warm up and cool down because it relates to what we're talking about in class, which I would list as one of the benefits. I would say this is a benefit based on the fact that it kind of gets your thoughts flowing and helps you get into the class mindset. I would say another benefit of a journal would be just getting your thoughts out of your head and down onto paper, personally I find it calming and I think it just overall helps you clear your head a little bit and reduce stress."

I found it interesting that Hunter only saw benefits in terms of skill development. After their previous answers, I began to expect these types of responses from them. I also found it noteworthy that they mentioned using a journal to improve handwriting (another connection that I think is worthy of future exploration). Charlie and Kelly both emphasized the personal benefits that journaling in school could provide. Charlie, again, mentions the notion of tracking your thoughts and experiences, and they also reread their journals. I view this type of journaling interaction as a personal archive which I will discuss further in the next chapter. Kelly specifically references the journals that we keep in class and how that has benefited their writing. This is great, but I would rather this be an observation for the second survey which is a side effect of distributing the surveys later than anticipated. However, this doesn't invalidate any of the data.

Next, I asked, “when someone refers to “voice” in writing, what does this mean to you?”

I wanted to see how they interpret voice and if their interpretation differed from my own.

Hunter’s response: “How the words are written and subsequently read in a story or essay.”

Charlie’s response: “Your writing style/technique.”

Kelly’s response: “When someone refers to a voice in writing I think my initial thought is like my inner voice that is speaking to me while i’m writing, that tells me what to write down, so maybe a sort of inner monologue that helps you break down your ideas and thoughts into written out words. I also think of a voice referring to your opinions and morals that you uphold in your personal life.”

Hunter and Charlie’s responses were expected. Although they mentioned techniques that would make your writing your own, their answers lack a personal element. On the other hand, Kelly has a relatively advanced view of voice that I find comparable to my own. They perceive voice in writing as their own inner monologue that tells them what to write; written voice, in their perspective, is their inner voice, thoughts, and ideas manifested on paper.

This next question is, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the one I felt was going to shape the study. I asked, “do you think that your writing in school reflects your voice? Why or why not?” This question is getting at the exigence of this study, which is that, in my opinion, typical writing that is done in school doesn’t encourage student voices.

Hunter’s response: “I do. It is one comment I’ve consistent [sic] received from my teachers over the years, as far back as fourth grade.”

Charlie’s response: “Yes, and I’ve heard from different teachers over time my voice shines through and that I’ve had success in finding it.”

Kelly's response: "I think that my writing in school very much reflects my voice because I tend to stick to my morals and lifestyle and incorporate them as much as possible into my papers because it makes my pieces more authentic and makes them feel a lot more personal."

These answers genuinely surprised me. However, the more I think about it, they really shouldn't, especially based on the answers I received from the previous question. It makes sense that these specific students believe that their school writing reflects their voice. The problem that I've run into is wanting to tell them or to conclude that it doesn't. If they feel like their voice is reflected in their writing, isn't that what matters? Or are they falling victim to misconceptions of writing promoted by an exclusive education system? Hunter and Charlie both said that they have often been told by teachers that their voice is prevalent in their writing. Is this the only measurement that makes them believe this? Is it actually their voice or is it a representation of what those teachers think voice is or what it should look like? I don't think I would be asking these questions if it weren't for Kelly's response. Their answer is introspective, and they know that they use their voice in their writing because of their own qualifications and not anyone else's.

Next, I asked, "do you believe keeping a journal could help you develop your writing voice in a classroom setting? Why or why not?" Again, this question is getting at the purpose of this study. I want to know if journals can act as a tool for students to find their voice in their writing.

Hunter's response: "Personally, no, but that's because I don't believe it has helped me in the past."

Charlie's response: "Yes! I think some people have a certain difficulty to write because they restrain themselves too much, or stay too much inside the lines of what an

assignment should be. Whereas I believe to write, there needs to be passion. There needs to be a soul, you need to actively be present, and write what comes to mind.”

Kelly’s response: “I definitely believe that having a journal could help in terms of developing my writing voice in class because it gets you used to writing down your personal ideas and opinions which I have felt to have personally helped me build my confidence when it comes to sharing out in class and adding my own personal touch to my writing pieces. I mainly think that this helps because it adjusts you to not only having your opinion in your head.”

Hunter’s response is expected based on their prior responses. I appreciated that their answer is personal and based on their own experiences rather than concluding that journaling didn’t do this for them so it couldn’t do it for anyone else. Charlie made a great point about students restraining themselves and sticking to the rules of an assignment which doesn’t inherently foster the development of voice. This part of their response really stood out to me: “There needs to be a soul, you need to actively be present, and write what comes to mind.” This encapsulates my own thoughts on writing, journal writing especially, and the humanity that goes into it.

The final two questions were fairly open ended. I asked, “is there anything else you’d like to share about your thoughts/experiences with writing in journals or journaling?” This question was to ensure that they had space to share any lingering thoughts on the subject.

Hunter’s response: “I am honestly not a huge fan lol.”

Charlie’s response: “I like to buy my journals during trips. I like them to have a personality of their own. My current one was a gift from my tutor, from the Van Gogh Museum in the Netherlands. My previous one was bought in a Michaels, but right when I was starting a relationship.”

Kelly's response: "In terms of my thoughts and experiences with journaling I haven't had too much experience but I feel like the warm up and cool down in class has helped improve my writing and it makes me feel more open when it comes to sharing my personal values because I know you don't judge!"

Kelly again mentions the journals that we kept in class this semester and how it's already a space for them to feel comfortable being open and personal. I noticed that Charlie focused a few times on the physicality of the journal. The journal itself has significance to them: where it came from, who it came from, what time of life it was purchased in, all of that matters to Charlie. I would love to explore the embodiment of journaling in a future project.

For the last question of the pre-survey, I asked, "is there anything else you'd like to share about your thoughts/experiences with writing 'voice'?"

Hunter's response: "Nope :)"

Charlie's response: "Personally, what really helped me to find one was reading a lot, and getting familiar with the idea of writing about what I liked, apart from writing school assignments."

Kelly's response: "I think that it can sometimes be difficult to find your voice with writing and I haven't had a ton of chances to find it given past writing classes but I think it would be super beneficial to work towards making my voice a big part of my writing in terms of upcoming classes and papers."

Charlie reiterates the separation that they see between the writing being highlighted here and school assignments. I do like that they outlined what they believe helped them find their voice which included reading and writing about what they like. The latter part is significant for this project, but the connection between reading and writing is one to explore further in the future.

Kelly mentions not having opportunities in their past writing classes to find their voice which I certainly agree with and supports the importance of journals and providing a space to explore voice.

Overall, these pre-survey responses were fruitful and thought-provoking. The answers both met expectations and were surprising which feels like a successful collection of data. Hunter is a bit of a journal skeptic which is understandable. Their past experiences are valuable to their future ones. Hunter did not submit responses to the post-survey which is unfortunate because I am really interested in how their responses may have changed after a semester of journaling in our class. Charlie had intriguing responses. I thought the dichotomy of not associating this type of writing with schoolwork while also feeling like their school writing is representative of their voice is alluring. Kelly has a sophisticated approach to journaling that I didn't expect to see from any of the students. At some points, their answers felt like they were writing exactly what I wanted to hear, but as I mentioned, I never shared my thoughts on voice or journaling with them explicitly. I am biased in some of my thoughts about these responses since I know these students and spent fifteen weeks with them and their work, but their responses were very informative. I believe that this survey effectively provided an idea of the students' opinions on journaling and voice prior to their experiences with it in the context of FYW.

Effectiveness of Reflective Journals Post-Survey

The participants for my Effectiveness of Reflective Journals Post-Survey were Charlie and Kelly. As I mentioned, Hunter chose not to participate in this survey. In the following paragraphs, I outline their responses to each question in the post-survey (see Appendix F).

My first question of this survey, aside from asking for their names, was, “when someone refers to “voice” in writing, what do you think they mean? Has this idea changed for you since

the beginning of the semester?” Since I already established their relationships with journals and voice in the first survey, I jumped immediately into the content of this study for this survey. My goal with this question was to have the students restate their ideas of voice and think about if this has changed over the course of the semester.

Charlie’s response: “Not really! I still see it as my own self, a little voice in my head whispering what needs to be written down; sometimes I see it as a narrator too.”

Kelly’s response: “When someone refers to "voice" in writing, I think that they are typically talking about the distinct tone and style one writes in. Specifically, the attitude used as well as the type of punctuation that you use to convey specific emotions and such. I think my idea of this has changed since the beginning of the semester in terms of my depth of understanding, especially when it comes down to how using your voice in writing can change the way someone reading your writing perceives the piece.”

Looking at Charlie’s response to this question in the pre-survey, I don’t think they realize how drastically different this response is from that first one. They specifically mentioned writing style/technique in the pre-survey, which could be seen as a little voice in their head telling them how to write, but I’m taking their words at face value when they don’t mention that little voice at all in the pre-survey. I find this to be really interesting. They don’t think their perspective has changed, yet the language is completely different. Contrary to Kelly’s first answer, they actually mention style in this response. I like that their answer focused on how they view voice in terms of audience and how it is perceived by the reader. This aligns with Yancey and Elbow’s arguments that the reader is just as responsible for creating voice as the writer.

My next question was, “do you think your voice has changed this semester? Why or why not?” My goal was to see if they found the journals to be constructive when it came to voice, so I didn’t mention them specifically to see if the students would bring them up on their own volition.

Charlie’s response: “It has definitely evolved!”

Kelly’s response: “I think my voice has changed this semester mostly because of the types of projects that we completed. I definitely started writing more in the way that I actually speak when it comes to more personal projects.”

I would’ve liked Charlie to have said more about how the ways in which their voice evolved and what elements of the class and/or their writing process was the apparatus for this evolution. Kelly attributes their change to the class projects rather than the journal specifically. I do encourage a personal tone in our projects throughout the semester, and the journals are meant to help students practice writing in this way.

My next question helped clear up some of the questions I had about where exactly their development of voice happened. I asked, “was there a piece of writing or moment this semester where you felt your writing reflected your voice? When, what, how?” In the same question, I followed up with, “if not, why do you feel that your voice wasn’t reflected in your writing?” This was a long question, but all of the parts were necessary.

Charlie’s response: “I’d say my first two projects, and some daily reflections as well. I like to be very true to my passionate, poetic self when I write, and since high school I’ve been told my voice was clearly present.”

Kelly’s response: “I think my voice was reflected a lot in our first project because it was in my opinion, the most personal, so it gave me a chance to have creative freedom when telling a personal story of mine and it felt way less formal than a typical writing piece.”

Both students mentioned the first project of the semester which—I agree with Kelly—is the most personal. It’s a huge adjustment for students who don’t typically write about themselves or write in a relaxed tone to be thrown into such a personal project within the first two weeks of the semester. Charlie references the daily reflections, the class journals, in developing their voice. They took this and the creatively flexible projects as an opportunity to write passionately without limits which is a great way to promote self-discovery and voice exploration, as I explain in this analysis.

I then asked, “what are one or two things you learned about yourself through the journal you kept this semester?” I wanted to see how and if the journals were being used by the students as a space for self-discovery and learning. Even if they hadn’t thought about it before, I hoped that this question would allow them to reflect on the process and any growth that may have come out of it.

Charlie’s response: “Sometimes I am really lazy and uninspired to write, which makes it sound bad.”

Kelly’s response: “Through the journal that I kept during the semester, I learned a few different things about myself. I think the most important thing that I learned was in regard to what I personally prefer to write about, I realized with our journal entries that I look forward to getting to write my own personal opinion as well as write about less important things that are still relatively interesting.”

Charlie’s response is in line with their previously stated belief that writing requires passion. If writing lacks passion, it is bad. I don’t necessarily think that’s the case, but I do think you can tell when a writer is invested in their own work and when they aren’t. Kelly’s answer is interesting. I’ve noticed that college freshmen are not used to writing about themselves, and so

they find it difficult. This has been true with each new batch of students I teach. And yet, once they get used to this method of writing, they really enjoy it. I think this is what happened to Kelly. They liked writing without limitations.

Next, I wanted to see what they did when they were allowed to write freely. I asked, “what are some of the techniques you used in your journal? (For instance, did you title each entry? Did you date each entry? Was each entry set up in the same way? Did you use different colored pencils, pens, or markers? Did you draw? etc.)” This was another long question, but I wanted it to be clear what I was asking, and I wanted to encourage them to give as much detail as possible.

Charlie’s response: “I used to put the date, use some colored pens and keep it very free.”

Kelly’s response: “In my journal entries a technique that I used was dating my entries; I thought that having a sort of timeline to see how my entries developed over the course of the semester would be interesting and give me a little bit of insight as to what opinions of mine had changed. Each entry was set up the same way because I felt the consistency would be important. I wrote everything on my iPad because it was a little more convenient than carrying around sheets of paper and it was also easier to change the color I was writing in.”

Kelly gave more detail than Charlie, and Charlie’s response left me with some questions. I’m curious to know what they mean by “I used to put the date.” I’m assuming that means they stopped doing it at some point. When? Why? Kelly’s answer satisfied my expectations. I did tell my class at the beginning of the semester that the purpose of the journals was to be able to look back and have tangible evidence of growth, so it’s very possible that this influenced their answer.

However, based on their previous answers and my bias of knowing the students, this seems like something they would want to track regardless.

My next two questions were very focused on reflection and collecting their thoughts on the process as a whole. I asked, “what do you think were one or two benefits of keeping a journal in our class this semester?” I was curious to see how their answers after a semester of writing and journaling compared to their answers at the beginning of the process.

Charlie’s response: “It is fun to look back at how you feel every day.”

Kelly’s response: “I think one benefit of keeping a journal in our class was that it was a good way to start off class by getting ideas flowing without it being too serious or overwhelming, I also think that a benefit of the journal was keeping us interested in the class by writing about topics we enjoy.”

Charlie’s answer was consistent with their previous one. They expressed how they enjoyed being able to look back on their answers, and they continue to see this as a fun and helpful benefit.

Kelly’s answer was also consistent. They emphasized in both surveys that they thought the journals were a good way to transition into class and to get into writing-mode.

I then asked, “similarly, what do you think were one or two drawbacks?” I didn’t ask this question on the pre-survey because it felt redundant with the content covered in that survey. I was also more interested in their preconceived ideas of what the benefits could be rather than focusing on drawbacks, but in this survey, I want to know if they experienced any downsides to the journals in our class.

Charlie’s response: “I truly cannot say one.”

Kelly’s response: “I think that a drawback could potentially be that it took up time during class, though it was not much time. I cannot think of any serious drawbacks.”

This is a question that would have benefited from more data and hearing from more students. I don't think that just because these students struggle to see drawbacks doesn't mean there aren't any. I think Kelly's mention of it taking up time is valid. I often ran out of time at the end of class for the cool-down journal entries which made them rushed and sometimes even skipped entirely. When I managed my time well in class, this was not an issue, so I think this is more a reflection of me than it is on the journals themselves.

The following three questions were essentially tying a bow on the experience and gathering the students' final thoughts. First, I asked, "would you recommend to future students in WRA 101 that they keep a journal? Why or why not?" This question was to gauge whether or not they thought this activity was worthwhile overall. It was simultaneously to see their cumulative thoughts on the process as well as get feedback on my own teaching practices for my future students.

Charlie's response: "Absolutely! It is fun, helpful and truly a nice experience."

Kelly's response: "Yes, it helps you measure your growth throughout the semester in terms of voice, grammar, etc."

I expected both of these students to encourage future students to use journals. This is another question where more student input would be beneficial not only for the study but also for my classroom approaches moving forward.

The next question was investigating whether or not they would take these things they learned in class and translate them to other areas of their lives. I asked, "will you continue to keep a journal after WRA 101? Why or why not?"

Charlie's answer: "I keep one for my therapy sessions, and I have multiple where I write feelings; love both."

Kelly's response: "Possibly, I typically forget to continue things like this because I get busy, but I would like to because I think it would be good to keep track of important events or anything similar."

Both of these responses tell me that these students are aware of how they respond to activities like this, and both are very honest answers. I can tell that journaling brings Charlie a lot of joy and did prior to their experience in this class. If anything, the experience of journaling in our class simply introduced them to a new context in which keeping a journal can be beneficial. Kelly is very aware of the discipline that it takes to keep a journal, and they are unsure if that's something they can keep up with despite the fact that they want to. I can relate to this and run into this problem often for myself.

In my final question for this survey, I asked, "is there anything else you'd like to share about your thoughts/experiences with writing "voice" or with journaling this semester?" This question was to ensure that they had nothing left to say, and if they did, they had a place to say it.

Charlie did not respond to this question.

Kelly's response: "Not that I can think of, but I did enjoy getting to know how important a voice can be in determining the tone of whatever you are writing."

I appreciate Kelly saying this because a goal of this study was to not only show educators how important voice is in writing but to also convince students to see this. It seems like this process did in fact allow Kelly to see how important voice is.

Overall, I think this survey would have benefited from more students responding. I wrote these questions with the intention of there being more responses, so it is harder to draw conclusions with data from only two sources. Nonetheless, the data I collected from these two students has been conducive to my thoughts on the study and on journaling and voice and has

given me enough information to build off of. I do think that having Hunter's answers for both surveys would have developed the study further, but I appreciate all respondents. Charlie has a very optimistic view on journaling which was refreshing to read due to my own passion for it. It's obvious that they have experience with the benefits of journaling and understand what I was trying to do through this process. They had a unique approach to journals in the school context, as they had never done this nor associated journaling with school, but they seemed to not treat this journal any differently than the journals that they have kept before.

Kelly had another unique perspective as they appreciated the journal despite having little prior experience, but they are skeptical in their self-discipline to continue journaling on their own. They don't fault the journal in this, though, citing that they know how they are with tasks of this degree. I see a lot of my own thoughts in Kelly's responses and reflections which I believe are their genuine beliefs. Based on the connections between their pre- and post-survey responses, I don't think there is any reason to believe that I had an influence on their answers or that they were saying these things specifically to please me.

Conducting these surveys has not only shed light on the effects that journaling has for my students and in my classroom, but it has allowed me to reflect on my own experiences with journaling both as a student and outside of school and the implications that this has had in my life. Although the data is from a small group, I am confident in my ability to present an informed analysis based on this evidence and draw conclusions about journaling and voice as a tool in the writing classroom.

CHAPTER 4: SO, WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

So far, I have introduced my history with journaling as a personal practice in developing my writing voice, I have highlighted foundational texts on the subject and the work that they are doing both together and separately, I have stated my position as a researcher and scholar in the field on voice in writing and the process of conducting this study, and I have shared the results of two surveys created to serve as data for the claims and arguments I make in this final chapter. In the following paragraphs, I conclude that consistent journaling in the classroom cultivates habitual learning for students through discovery that naturally results in them developing a confident writing voice in a writing process that works for them individually instead of a standardized process that benefits some students over others. To show this, I analyze the data from the two surveys based on the aforementioned texts as well as additional research I have done on voice and writing, and I outline the implications that these results have for the field of rhetoric and composition as well as my own research and writing moving forward. Then, I offer suggestions on where to go from here and how to implement journaling into writing pedagogy and conclude with connections to my personal relationship with journaling and voice.

The Analysis

As I've continued to state throughout this project, journaling and voice are the two things I was the most curious about as I read through the survey responses and interpreted the data. One of the first things I noticed in their responses was a lack of association between journaling and schoolwork, and one of the participants clearly distinguished the two. Charlie said that journaling to them is "writing on a smaller type of notebook, but not writing anything school related" and also was the only participant to not have kept a journal in school before. I believe, whether

Charlie is conscious of it or not, that this is because of the reputation that journal writing has in academia which both Fulwiler and Roozen call attention to in their respective texts. Fulwiler opens his introduction by explaining that journaling is “the kind of prose teachers have learned to associate with haste, sloth, incompetence, immaturity, and maybe even anti-establishment radicalism” whereas academic writing is expected to be “clear, conventional, organized, assertive, and objective” (1987, p. 1). Because of this, informal language—the type of language that journaling encourages—is often dismissed as an invalid approach to writing in the academy. Similarly, Roozen highlights that while other unconventional forms of writing and communication like “spoken-word events and other public performances” become “significant additions to undergraduates’ repertoires,” private writing such as “diaries, personal journals, and scrapbooks have long been placed at a considerable remove from persons’ academic writing” (209, pp. 543–544). This reputation of illegitimacy causes journaling to not be considered a serious form of writing. This is why I’m not surprised by Charlie’s answers, but in this concluding chapter, I aim to analyze why this isn’t and shouldn’t be the case.

Voice

Something that I struggled with throughout this project, especially in the beginning, was how to measure whether or not a student is using their voice in writing or if it was even measurable. I wondered if my evaluation of a student’s writing voice was antithetical to the authenticity and whole purpose of voice as an element of writing. However, through my data collection and research, I’ve decided that student voice in writing is measurable. In this subsection of the chapter, I describe how I came to this conclusion, and my process by which voice can be measured and evaluated is discussed later in this chapter.

At some point in this process, I believed that voice is a one-sided effort controlled solely by the writer and something that everyone else is merely witness to. I mentioned this previously in my literature review, explaining that through the work of the featured scholars—specifically Peter Elbow and Kathleen Blake Yancey—I now realize that “voice is created as much by the reader as by the writer” (Yancey, 1994, p. xii) and that voice is measurable by external evaluators because the reader is an active participant. Elbow compares this process to a conversation, emphasizing an “audible” voice that the reader is engaging with through the text. He even sees voice more so from the reader’s perspective, saying:

If I experience resonance, surely, it’s more likely to reflect a good fit between the words and my self than a good fit between the words and the writer’s self; after all, my self is right here, in contact with the words on the page, while the writer’s self is nowhere to be found. (Elbow, 1981, as cited in Yancey, 1994).

This concept of resonance is what allows us to measure voice. Elbow describes resonance as “the sound of more of a person behind the words” (1995, p. xxxv); it’s what gives life to a text. It’s when we are able to read something and feel the presence of the writer within the words. In this sense, it can be argued that everything written by humans contains voice. This presents a problem: how do we know when voice is authentic? What makes a student’s writing voice “good enough” to be authentic and by whose standards?

Then there’s the idea that students have multiple voices to use in different contexts. Which one is the “most authentic” of them? It’s harmful to make this judgement when “the experience of feeling that one’s habitual voice is considered illegitimate makes you want to insist that a piece of one’s identity is at stake in one’s textual voice” (Elbow, 1995, p. xx). Telling someone that their voice is not “good” or “authentic” enough feels like a personal attack. Royster

highlights this issue when she tells the story of when she gave a presentation, and an audience member approached her to compliment her “authentic” voice that the audience member claims to have never heard before. She says that this voice was far more relaxed than Royster’s typical formal voice, which in her mind made it “authentic.” Royster thanks her, but internally, she wants to challenge her and say “all my voices are authentic” and explain that although she has a wide range of voices that fit many different contexts, one is not more authentic than the others (1996, p. 37). Reading this, I completely agreed with her point, and this made me question everything I previously believed about voice. I so strongly wanted students to put down their “student hat” in the writing classroom and write in ways that are authentic to them, but who am I to say that the voice a student chooses to use in the classroom is not as authentic to the voice they use at home, especially if they believe that it is? I also recognize that this mindset disproportionately affects minority students in a context of “standard” written English or “typical” academic writing; as Royster says, “I claim all my voices as my own very much authentic voices, even when it’s difficult for others to imagine a person like me having the capacity to do that” (1996, p. 37).

All of these factors then beg the question: does any of this even matter? Elbow says that “it’s worth questioning the positive *mystique* that sometimes surrounds the idea of ‘finding one’s voice’—questioning the assumption that it is necessarily better to have a recognizable, distinctive voice in one’s writing” (1995, p. xxxi, emphasis in original). I believe that asking these questions is indeed very important. We need to challenge the superiority of writing in an “authentic” voice and why some voices are favored over others. We need to question the standards to which we hold our students and why those standards exist in the first place. This

thought process will send me down a rabbit hole that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this project, but I believe that educators owe it to our students to reflect on these questions.

As for me, I've done a great deal of reflection, and I've decided that voice does matter to me in my pedagogical practices. I want to be able to feel a person behind the words my students write and resonate with the voice they choose to write in. I want to convince them that these things do matter and the humanity within writing is what makes it so special. However, I refuse to evaluate my students based on what I believe their voice should sound like. I am the reader of their work, and I want their voice to resonate with me through their words, but I am only a part of this process. When the students read their own work, they are 100% the equation needed to measure the resonance of their voice, and that is the judgement I will defer to. For example, I was surprised to see that, in the pre-survey, the participants felt like their voices were reflected in their academic writing. Granted, some of them based this off of what others have told them, but they confidently felt unrestricted by their own writing in this way. This was surprising to me because I did not feel like my writing in school reflected my voice, but I also recognize that my experience is not the only experience. Just as I don't want anyone to speak for me, I will not speak for my students and will listen to them when they tell me that their voice is authentic. This is how voice is a measurable element of writing.

Journaling

A theme that I observed within my own journaling experiences and as I read the responses from my participants is that journals can be used as a personal archive to track growth, learning, and general behavior over time. I first noticed this in my journaling process when I found my old journal from 2019. Flipping through the pages was like opening a time capsule filled with gifts from my past self. Despite seeing this journal as a failure for so long, reading

through my past thoughts and experiences made me realize how much had changed in just three years. New friends came and went, boyfriends, a world-stopping pandemic, etc., all hidden within the pages of this book that I had forgotten about. Since then, whenever I complete a journal, I read through it from the beginning. This allows me to reflect on the past six months or so stored within its pages and have tangible evidence of the changes that I've gone through. Having this gift from myself was a huge inspiration when I began to consider implementing journaling into my class. I wanted my students to be able to track their progress in real time, to have something to look back on in week 15 and think, "wow, maybe I did learn something here."

This seemed to work based on the survey responses. Several times in the post-survey, both students mentioned what they learned through their journaling and by looking back on the entries. They both learned about how they write—Charlie says that their writing is uninspired when they are feeling lazy and Kelly learned that they enjoy writing about their opinions and low-stakes topics. Kelly specifically mentioned that they dated each entry in order to track how their opinions changed throughout the semester, and Charlie said that a benefit of keeping the journal was to look back on how they were feeling for each class. Of course, these experiences don't speak for all students and not even all the students in my class most likely, but there is a notable pattern here. Roozen noticed this as well in his essay and quotes Miriam Camitta (1993) saying that through private journal writing,³ students create individuality by "inscribing the experience of the individual in time, and becoming a souvenir of that experience" (as cited in Roozen, 2009, p. 550). I love the wording of the journal becoming a "souvenir" because that reiterates my feelings of this archive being a gift. This current semester (spring 2025), I framed

³ The journals in our class are completely private. Students know beforehand if I plan on collecting and reading their journal entries.

the journal this way to my students. I want them to see journaling as an investment rather than an assignment, and I believe that my participants' responses are proof that students can buy into this.

I also believe that journals in the writing classroom should be viewed as an exploratory playground. Freedom to experiment through writing can be a very positive experience for students. Lynda Barry talks about the restriction of expectations that she casts onto herself in her own work and how that transfers over to her expectations for her students. She explains that when wanting begins to influence the creative process, "this stops the natural pace of discovery and replaces it with an objective" (2014, p. 145). Donald Murray supports a hands-off approach to writing pedagogy as well. He argues that it is a teacher's responsibility to "[place] the opportunity for discovery in [their] student's hands" and explains that "when you give [them] an assignment you tell [them] what to say and how to say it, and thereby cheat your student of the opportunity to learn the process of discover we call writing" (2023, p. 5). I support this claim, and I encourage my students to keep their journal in whatever way they would like. However, I do provide suggestions, and I do give them prompts to respond to, so while I support this approach, I need to work on giving up more of my control in the classroom in order to fully embrace this form of discovery.

The Implications

Through the separate analyses of voice and journaling, I conclude that because voice is developed through exploration and experimentation, journals are an effective classroom tool for developing voice in writing. This claim is supported by the responses I received from my survey as well as literature from scholars in the field. By writing and writing consistently with no limits on exploration, we are able to discover more about ourselves and about the world around us,

because “human beings find meaning in the world by exploring it through language” (Fulwiler, 1987, p. 1).

By means of this discovery, we are better equipped to solve problems that may arise in our writing or in day-to-day life. Kristie Smith and Kristina Falbe (2021) explore this in a middle school context—which, I believe, applies to the work we’re doing in FYW and beyond—claiming that ambiguity in writing is a means for learning and that “writing to name and sort out ambiguous problems of practice can help bring clarity and illuminate pathways for problem solving” (p. 69). Barry also supports this, promoting the need for an “active work space dedicated to real time creative activity to energize observers and encourage a different take on problem-solving” (2014, p. 2). Through exploration of language within a space that has no limits, students are able to think through problems and then track that thinking. This is likely why journaling is also used as a tool for therapy as is consistent with my personal experience as well as Hunter and Charlie’s.

As we’ve established individually, journaling facilitates self-discovery, and self-discovery leads to students developing their voice in writing. By doing this consistently in the classroom, voice becomes habitual, because “writing is behavior, and it’s hard for humans to engage in *any* behavior repeatedly without developing a habitual and thus recognizable way of doing it: a style” (Elbow, 1995, p. xxxi, emphasis in original). There’s also the physical effect that writing has on learning that is unique to this behavior as Janet Emig (1977) states that “writing involves the fullest possible functioning of the brain, which entails the active participation in the process of both the left and right hemispheres” (p. 125). I believe that in order to create an environment in first-year writing where students can develop the habit of writing and thus feel confident in their writerly voice, teachers should implement regular

journaling into their writing curriculum. My students journal twice every class, but even just starting small with freewriting or more reflective writing prompts that invite students to write freely is a step in this direction. This could also include asking students to journal outside of class to encourage the habit of writing beyond just the writing classroom. Roozen supports the attention to outside writing, stating:

...coming to terms with the complexity of undergraduates' growth as writers—not just in terms of improving their ability to produce academic prose but also in the kinds of literate activities in which they will participate and for how long and to what extent—increasingly meant attending to the writing that goes on beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the classroom. (2009, p. 543).

He agrees that teachers need to implement journaling into their pedagogy because “to focus only on [the] public forms...would be to overlook the more private writing in which persons are engaged and the critical connections it creates with other literate activities” (p. 567). So, dismissing journaling as an illegitimate form of writing is a disservice to students.

How I assess this work—and most of their work in the class—is measured by the students. At the end of the semester, I ask them to give themselves a grade for the course and justify it. This is their opportunity to tell me how they feel they have grown in their writing this semester. If they feel like they have done good work and feel satisfied with their writing (and if they actually did the work), they will get a 4.0 in the class. Even though I am their teacher, my role in their academic journey is fleeting. I have limited information about what their writing was before my class and no information about how it will be after. I only know what they have written to me in a semester, so like I said earlier, I look to them to tell me how they've grown. I look to them to tell me if their voice reflects their writing, and I look to them to decide what their

writing will look like moving forward. Looking at the final reflection of a student from my fall 2024 class, I see the positive effects of a space to write so freely without judgement, and I see a student already mourning the fact that they likely won't have a space like this again. This student has a deep passion for creative writing and often expressed how the journals in our class were a great way to bring this passion into their schoolwork. They said:

Sadly, I believe this class to be one of the last where I will freely express this passion.

Moving forward, I expect my papers to be more academic based, but I hope to never lose my passion. Which I will most likely do through journals, another really fun part of this class.

This is someone who is an expert in their own writing process and has the awareness to recognize what satisfies them and what tools they need to do "good" work. Who am I to tell them that their passionate writing didn't meet a standardized criteria? This is why I defer to my students in their own assessment, and I implore other writing teachers to do the same for the success of their students.

As for the field of rhetoric and composition as a whole, I think that researching voice in writing is daunting because it is a very nuanced and subjective topic. However, this doesn't make it any less worthy of investigation. I urge researchers to put the student experience at the forefront of their studies. I understand that research in writing pedagogy is only a portion of the research happening in the field, but there is no writing without writers, and the writers are our students. Much of the literature on voice and writing is older, as shown in this project, and although it is not necessarily outdated, I advocate for continued research on the topic, especially as we begin dealing with the repercussions of education through the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of artificial intelligence, and navigation through politics of education. All of these factors

have an effect on students in their writing which affects voice and the humanity behind words. As for my future contributions to the field, I've alluded to some of them throughout this thesis. I plan to continue my focus on journaling and its benefits to writing. I want to explore different types of journals and the affordances of each of them, including what the distinction might be between a diary and a journal as Charlie and Kelly mentioned in their survey responses. I also want to explore the physicality of a journal, including its interactions with embodiment as well as the art of handwriting and the role that journals play in that. I am especially interested in linguistic justice, and I want to learn more about the role the journals can play in bringing this to the classroom. These are just a few ideas that excite me, and I'm delighted to be in a field that creates space for me to research topics that I am passionate about and bring me joy, not only in the classroom but outside of it as well.

My personal relationship with journaling will continue as well. It would be disingenuous for me to encourage this work from my students and not practice it myself. After all, this hobby of mine is what inspired the implementation of journaling into my pedagogical toolbox in the first place. I think it's important to note that although I'm an advocate for journaling in general, my relationship with my journal is imperfect. I don't write in it every day, and in fact, I haven't written in it in weeks. Time and motivation slip away from me, especially at the busiest point of the semester. However, I've made peace with this as a result of taking all restrictions off myself and embracing an intuitive journaling process. I think of my journal as a dear, lifelong friend: we can not see each other for long periods of time, but when we come back to each other, it's as if no time has passed. It's what works for me and is a much healthier relationship than when I forced myself to write every day even when I really didn't want to.

I think this mixture of work and pleasure has created a passion for teaching that I wasn't sure I was capable of feeling. Teaching was kind of something that just happened to me (by my own doing), and in the beginning, it was really tough. In the spring of 2024, my second semester of graduate school and the same time I was first experimenting with journaling in my curriculum, I also kept a "teaching journal" that I wrote in after every class. Those few months were very challenging, both personally and professionally, and I felt the passion I had for writing and teaching writing dwindling into a dark, gray cloud. After a particularly difficult class meeting in March, I wrote in my journal: "I like teaching, but it feels so taxing lately, and I keep forgetting the good parts about it." It's funny to see now that this thing I was doing—journaling—became one of the best parts of teaching and completely changed my approach to pedagogy. Now, I'm constantly reminded of the good parts of teaching through my students and what they're able to accomplish. I see the good parts in their projects, in our conversations, and especially in their reflections. Through my advocacy for journaling and voice in writing, and most of all through my deep desire to see my students succeed in and out of the classroom, my passion is ablaze, and I'm reminded of my purpose.

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APPENDIX A: PROJECT 1 REFLECTION GRADING RUBRIC

Table 1: Project 1 Reflection Grading Rubric

Score	Grading Criteria
/10	The author's final reflection is 2 to 3 double-spaced pages in length. 10 pts.
/15	The author's final reflection describes three main points: The Story, Successes and Challenges, and Goals and Means. 5 pts. each
/10	The author discusses what they planned to do. 10 pts.
/10	The author discusses what they actually did in relation to what s/he planned to do. 10 pts.
/5	The author articulates their strengths--i.e., what worked well and how the author knows it worked well. 5 pts.
/5	The author articulates their challenges--i.e., what was challenging and how the author knows it was challenging. 5 pts.
/10	The author articulates goals for building upon both strengths and challenges (5 pts. each) that they have articulated in the reflection. 10 pts.
/10	The author articulates means for pursuing the goals that they have articulated in the reflection. 10 pts.
	The author identifies why and how they will build upon any of the strengths they have identified. 5 pts.
	The author identifies why and how they plan to continue to develop their approach to the challenges they have identified. 5 pts.
/15	The author provides evidence (from at least 3 of the four previous assignments) to support the claims made in the final reflection. 5 pts. each
	The author makes direct reference to the proposal. 5 pts.

Table 1 (cont'd)

	The author makes direct reference to the first draft. 5 pts.
	The author makes direct reference to the revision statement. 5 pts.
	The author makes direct reference to the final draft. 5 pts.
/10	The author makes direct reference to comments to and/or from peers or from the instructor to support claims they make in this reflection. 10 pts.
Total	
/100	

APPENDIX B: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRY GUIDELINES FROM MY CURRENT CLASS, SPECIFICALLY FOR PROJECT 2 (CULTURAL ARTIFACT/OBJECT INQUIRY)

Choose one way to structure your reflective journal entry: either of these approaches will help you achieve the desired results.

Or if you have another way you would like to reflect, feel free to do so!

We will regroup at 11!

Reflect on project 2

- what went well?
- what didn't go so well?

Reflect on your personal growth

- what did you learn about yourself?
- how did you feel about telling your story?

Reflect as a tool moving forward

- how are you going to take the things you learned in the project and apply them (or unapply them) to you next one?
- how are you going to use the information that you learned about yourself moving forward?

• The Story:

- What I planned to do
- What I did

• Successes and Challenges:

- Things that went and/or turned out well
 - What things went well?
 - How I know they went well
- Challenges that were difficult to manage
 - What was challenging?
 - How I know they were challenging

• Goals and Means:

- What I plan to do again (for our future projects)
 - Why will I plan to do this again?
 - How I plan to do so
- What I plan to work on
 - Why do I need to work on this?
 - How I plan to do so

Figure 6: Slide shown to my WRA 101 students in class

APPENDIX C: PRE-SURVEY EMAIL TO STUDENTS (SENT ON 9/27/2024)

Hi all,

Please read this email in its entirety!

Apologies for the delay in sending this out. Below, you will find the link to the survey I mentioned in class this week. **Please remember that participation in this study is voluntary.** Whether or not you participate will not affect your standing in our class. By continuing past the first page of the survey, you're providing consent to participate in this study.

If you choose to participate, please take your time in answering the questions. I encourage you to write your responses in a separate document because the Google form might not save your answers if you decide to take a break and come back to it later. I ask that you answer honestly, thoughtfully, and thoroughly.

Effectiveness of Reflective Journals Pre-Survey link: <https://forms.gle/LchMS6BM58ihf9kV6>

Take your time, but please submit your answers by next Friday, October 4 (a week from today). If you need more time, please let me know.

Note that there are two questions on the survey that have a clarification of “‘You’ in this question refers to you specifically.” This is to clarify that I’m not using a generalized use of “you” referring to the wider population but to you specifically as the student taking this survey.

Please let me know if you need further clarification on this or on any other questions in the survey.

Thank you all for your potential participation! It means a lot and will really help me out. Have a good weekend!

Rylee Mehr (*she/her/hers*)

First-Year Writing Graduate Teaching Assistant

Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures

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282 Bessey Hall

APPENDIX D: EFFECTIVENESS OF REFLECTIVE JOURNALS PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Name
2. When someone refers to writing in a journal or “journaling,” what does this mean to you?
3. Aside from our class, have you ever kept a journal of any type?
4. If yes, how would you describe the type of journal(s) that you’ve kept?
5. Aside from our class, have you ever kept a journal for school?
6. Do you think there are benefits to keeping a school journal for personal writing? Why or why not? If so, what are one or two of the benefits?
7. When someone refers to “voice” in writing, what does this mean to you?
8. Do you think that your writing in school reflects your voice? Why or why not?
9. Do you believe keeping a journal could help you develop your writing voice in a classroom setting? Why or why not?
10. Is there anything else you’d like to share about your thoughts/experiences with writing in journals or journaling?
11. Is there anything else you’d like to share about your thoughts/experiences with writing “voice?”

APPENDIX E: POST-SURVEY EMAIL TO STUDENTS (SENT ON 12/6/2024)

Hi all,

Please read this email in its entirety!

Apologies for the delay in sending this out. Below, you will find the link to the survey for my study I have been conducting this semester. **Please remember that participation in this study is voluntary.** Whether or not you participate will not affect your standing in our class. By continuing past the first page of the survey, you're providing consent to participate in this study. *Please note that even if you did not complete the survey at the beginning of the semester, your participation is still encouraged and would be greatly appreciated!*

If you choose to participate, please take your time in answering the questions. I encourage you to write your responses in a separate document because the Google form might not save your answers if you decide to take a break and come back to it later. I ask that you answer honestly, thoughtfully, and thoroughly.

Effectiveness of Reflective Journals Post-Survey link: <https://forms.gle/63AiwWVPZutTm5E69>

Take your time, but please submit your answers by next Friday, December 13 (a week from today). If you need more time, please let me know. Please also let me know if you need further clarification on any questions in the survey.

Thank you all for your potential/continuing participation! It means a lot and will really help me out. Good luck on your finals!

Rylee Mehr (she/her/hers)

First-Year Writing Graduate Teaching Assistant

Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures

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APPENDIX F: EFFECTIVENESS OF REFLECTIVE JOURNALS POST-SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Name
2. When someone refers to “voice” in writing, what do you think they mean? Has this idea changed for you since the beginning of the semester?
3. Do you think your voice has changed this semester? Why or why not?
4. Was there a piece of writing or moment this semester where you felt your writing reflected your voice? When, what, how?
5. If not, why do you feel that your voice wasn’t reflected in your writing?
6. What are one or two things you learned about yourself through the journal you kept this semester?
7. What are some of the techniques you used in your journal? (For instance, did you title each entry? Did you date each entry? Was each entry set up in the same way? Did you use different colored pencils, pens, or markers? Did you draw? etc.)
8. What do you think were one or two benefits of keeping a journal in our class this semester?
9. Similarly, what do you think were one or two drawbacks?
10. Would you recommend to future students in WRA 101 that they keep a journal? Why or why not?
11. Will you continue to keep a journal after WRA 101? Why or why not?
12. Is there anything else you’d like to share about your thoughts/experiences with writing “voice” or with journaling this semester?