

*Going Wireless: A Critical Exploration of Wireless and Mobile Technologies for Composition Teachers and Researchers*  
 edited by Amy C. Kimme Hea. Cresskill:  
 Hampton P, 2009. 366 pp.



Roughly two-thirds of the way into *Going Wireless*, editor Amy C. Kimme Hea contributes an essay in which she paraphrases Cynthia L. Selfe, cited by Kimme Hea as a “critical precursor” to *Going Wireless*.

In Kimme Hea’s words, Selfe argues that “simplistic, deterministic assumptions of technologies—as either our boon or bane—mask our ability to think carefully and ethically about the integration of technology” (199). This idea could arguably serve as the collection’s central theme. *Going Wireless* presents wireless technology through assessment of losses and gains, evaluating claims of ubiquity, stability, and even the idea of “wireless” itself to consider the pedagogical and material realities often elided by the assumed promises of the technology. It offers practical considerations for teachers and administrators at two-year colleges who

are considering either incorporation of wireless technology or use of existing wireless infrastructure.

*Going Wireless* is divided into five different thematic sections, and most contributions endeavor to relate their critiques to praxis. In “The Changing Shapes of Writing,” Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart E. Selber begin the discussion by introducing the practical heuristic “C3T” (Context, Change, Content, and Tools) to aid analysis of communicative practices engendered by wireless technology (20–21). Johnson-Eilola and Selber call for a flexible pedagogy with regard to mobile technology—as do Teddi Fishman and Kathleen Blake Yancey in “Learning Unplugged.” All suggest unsettling the doctrinaire assumptions that see unauthorized wireless communication by students in the classroom as, at best, distractions and, at worst, violations of legitimate learning, and instead suggest that teachers see these moments as opportunities to expand students’ rhetorical awareness.

Many essays in *Going Wireless* acknowledge the material decisions that departments make to incorporate wireless technology effectively. Kevin Brooks discusses the need for WPAs

to consider that an initial investment in wireless technology will inevitably require reinvestment, or a “refresh plan,” to keep the technology current. Similar material realities are central to Melinda Turnley’s “Reterritorialized Flows,” which advocates awareness of the “correlations among technology, socioeconomic factors, and access.” She also argues that without critical diligence, the “freedoms” attached to wireless technologies can often be means of reinscribing students within old hegemonic boundaries (95).

The way that *Going Wireless* keeps pedagogy central makes it a valuable resource for teachers interested in wireless technology. A minor “fault” of *Going Wireless* is one that it can hardly be blamed for: the high rate of obsolescence already affecting some of the gadgetry described within. Various contributors wryly acknowledge this, noting that by publication time, certain descriptions might feel dated. Given the exigencies of publishing a collection, *Going Wireless* has done relatively well in this regard. The recognition of obsolescence by contributors underscores the need for critical vigilance repeated throughout the book and ironically strengthens this admonition.

Regardless of whether the technology is the freshest, the major utility of *Going Wireless* is its ability to foreground real-world issues concerning integration or expansion of wireless technology in the classroom—issues that remain relevant despite changes in technology—such as considerations of student access and security, the shifting role of the teacher within a reconfigured/reimagined classroom space, the

correlation of performance and wireless technology (highlighted by various research projects in the third section), the impact of wireless technology on qualitative research (as illustrated in a lively essay by Clay Spinuzzi), and even considerations of the metaphors teachers use to frame acts of wireless composition. For a book self-described as “the first edited collection on wireless and mobile technologies in the field of rhetoric and composition,” *Going Wireless* has a refreshingly broad outlook.

The language of *Going Wireless* seems accessible to a range of audiences. As an added help, there is a wonderful appendix by David Menchaca that could, at the very least, serve as a helpful primer on wireless technology. However, staying close to the pedagogical aim of the book, Menchaca’s appendix not only defines the terms and history of wireless technology but again opens them up as areas of inquiry and shows how the terms “might shape composition pedagogies” (325). At every turn, *Going Wireless* seems mindful in considering various possible realities of educators, researchers, students, and administrators.

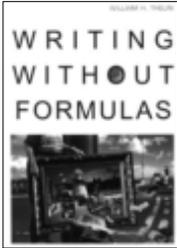
Teachers seeking reasons to sing the praises of wireless pedagogy will find such within, and those looking for critical material to caution against wireless pedagogy will be empowered as well. What the book hopes to do, however, is not polarize attitudes, but balance the views of the affordances and potential pitfalls of teaching writing with wireless technology.

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*Writing without Formulas*

by William H. Thelin. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008. 526 pp. Expanded ed., with additional chapter, Mason: Wadsworth-Cengage 2009. 577 pp.



Currently, there is a push for standardization in all academic fields, including composition. Some believe students must be acculturated into the established discourse before they can add their voices. Others, however, see that the old barriers are coming down and the rules are evolving toward a focus on message first, allowing more voices, and new ideas, to be heard. William H. Thelin's *Writing without Formulas* invites these new voices to the composition discourse by making content the priority. The book's purpose is to help students communicate their ideas effectively in writing by allowing them to focus primarily on the messages they wish to convey. Further, student writers are shown the need and practical uses for writing beyond the composition classroom in their academic and professional careers.

The book has three sections with chapters including short stories, personal essays, op-ed pieces, news stories, political satire, and observations of the human condition from professional writers such as Anna Quindlen, Shirley Jackson, P.J. O'Rourke, Gloria Naylor, and Joyce Carol Oates, and pieces by those who write as part of their professions, including Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Thelin also uses student writings to show that writing well is

a skill that can be acquired through learning and practice. The instructor can point to the sample writings and show how the writing processes worked and can be used by others. Most importantly, these sample writings tell the students that they also have something valuable to say.

Sections one and two include tools for effective writing. Each chapter has discussion topics after selected readings, to get students thinking and talking, and collaboration topics that provide opportunities for classes to break into smaller discussion groups or write collective pieces.

Section three provides additional examples and/or inspiration for student writers. The chapters cover holidays, hobbies, the supernatural, humor, honesty, and animals. Each has multiple readings for class discussion, work groups, or individual assignments.

A powerful feature of the book is its flexibility. The chapters are stand-alone lessons that work together yet do not have to be presented in order. Thelin even states in the preface: "Instructors can enter *Writing Without Formulas* at just about any point. . . . They do not need to feel bound to a particular order of approach" (xvi).

Some minor concerns arise with the 2009 version printed by Cengage, which has an additional chapter. Chapter 17, "Depression and Hope," at the very end of the book, seems to be a chapter meant to be in section three. The topic is mental health, which feels a bit incongruous with the other topics in the section, as they are generally things people don't mind discussing with strangers. Mental health is a touchy subject for some, which may limit or

prohibit a productive discourse among students who don't know each other. That being said, the chapter does allow for discussion, expression, research, and writing on mental health issues, including new data, modern therapies, social stigmas, and fallacies.

Thelin's text offers a breath of academic fresh air after years of teaching from "formula first" textbooks, such as *Grassroots* and *Evergreen* by Susan Fawcett, or "They Say/I Say" by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. For example, Graff and Birkenstein take a fill-in-the-blank approach to college writing. They do teach basic rhetorical moves, but by rote memorization of templates. In contrast, Thelin empowers students by teaching them critical analysis, solid research skills, audience awareness, and writing techniques they can use to make intelligent and informed use of rhetoric when communicating. Fawcett's approach is also template oriented with various exercises and examples. In addition, she has each basic rhetorical style broken into chapters. Thelin wisely moves beyond this formulaic approach by showing how rhetorical techniques are used in concert to convey the overall message, realizing that most business and professional documents are a combination of rhetorical styles. His approach gives students the skills that will help them succeed beyond the classroom.

Many nontraditional students are intimidated by the writing process, believing they are expected to write flawlessly formulaic papers immediately. Thelin's book is liberating because its focus is on communication, not following a formula. This empowering text has the potential to make writing once

again a vital means of communication and not be viewed as something only for academics. *Writing without Formulas* demystifies the writing process for students working to be professionals in various fields who will use writing to communicate effectively, by putting the primary focus on the message, not the format.

### Works Cited

- Fawcett, Susan. *Evergreen: A Guide to Writing with Readings*. 7th ed. Mason: Wadsworth-Cengage, 2003. Print.
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### Fear

by Pamela Garvey. Georgetown: Finishing Line P, 2008. 100+ pp.



I envy Pamela Garvey's St. Louis Community College-Meramec students. They get to study with someone who is an excellent wordsmith and who deeply contemplates the myriad of social and individual forces at play in our lives as women, men,

children, and parents. Her poems display the courage and wisdom required to unearth complex truths—qualities that can only serve to help students enter into productive debate with the world at large. Garvey's verse consistently reaches out beyond herself into the arena of sociopolitical relevancy, showing us that creative writing is no longer just for the poets—it is also a powerful medium to teach composition and critical thinking.

Although Garvey's chapbook is titled *Fear*, she is utterly fearless. With often stunning imagery she enters into a gritty, unapologetic dialogue with past wounds that form and shape who we are, tackling both personal and systemic violence, often connecting it to a male-dominated society. In Garvey's world, "Fear is a buried monument, / one that's gritty, dirt / filling its cracks," and she wants us to see who erected it.

The collection begins on the earthly plane. In "Blue Jay" a sensate daughter witnesses her mother use a spade to put an injured blue jay out of its misery, after which the girl declares that she now "owns no such tools." We might take this as a sign of weakness, but only if we are able to ignore Garvey's unshirking lens, revealing a world where fear "threads everything with blood." Thus we are led deeper into the poet's "industry of darkness." In "The Waves" a young girl's playful reverie is brutally invaded by a pack of boys, "like waves toppling in the ears when the tide takes you down."

From here, Garvey takes on the complex nexus of woman/mother/child meets spirit, meets evil, meets hope, often through male-created and

—perpetuated religious myths. "How it Works" revisits the Greek myth in which the rapist Terseus is let off the hook, his victim no longer just a pitiful, mute swallow, but something "graceful in the sky . . . her wingtips like blades, her sharp-turned stabs." In the nightmarish "The Annunciation" the speaker is visited by an angel, the experience "like winds / sweeping through fingers like sand, / each grain gliding coldly up the arms / into the frantic heart." Garvey often reminds us that encountering the divine is perilous, not as predictable as "the black and white of numbers on paper."

With the birth of her son, Garvey's poems—and faith itself—take on a different, but no less fierce, quality. In "Virgins and Mothers," the author muses on the Immaculate Conception, wondering how it is "[t]o be broken first by a baby and not a man, not desire . . . How her muscles must have stretched into fire." A plea for grace arises as the speaker worries for her son: "I lift him / from his crib, praying that faceless thieves / never lure the child he'll be."

In "Faith," a son's struggle to breathe elicits unashamed bargaining with a seemingly whimsical and cruel God, the "greedy, never wombed master." In response, the speaker offers her own body to protect her ailing son. What parent worth her salt hasn't stood on this crumbling precipice as she realizes the vulnerability in her children?

The second half of the book expands the world beyond the intimate circle of mother and child but does not free us from images of innocence and beauty assaulted by dumb fear, blindness, hate. An Argentinean *desaparecido*

(disappeared) tracks his loss of soul; a son touches the edge of cruelty through peer pressure; a refugee child sells bullets from her own village's massacre; a swan is murdered by drunks. Only in this last poem does Garvey kindle hope, imagining the perpetrators of this atrocity might awaken from their bad dream, "so when one man, one boy, / wrapped his arms around the swan's neck, he felt her becoming / a part of himself, and he didn't know what it meant / the hunted becomes what it nourishes."

The last poems of the book are meditations on the nature of fear and how we survive it when we choose to live with eyes open. In "Creed" lies an invocation, a response to the world as it is—not how we are seduced into believing it is—a belief in "the neurons of a child always raising her hand" (again, I envy the students in Garvey's classroom) and "in the clock / ticking through the infinite belly of night / where a woman's fate / is as flimsy as a handkerchief."

Perhaps fate is not so flimsy with a poet, teacher, and woman such as this.

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*A Taste for Language: Literacy, Class, and English Studies*

by James Ray Watkins Jr. Carbondale:  
Southern Illinois UP, 2009. 181 pp.

Framed as a narrative that recounts the history of the education of the author and his father, *A Taste for Language: Literacy, Class, and English Studies* by James Ray Watkins Jr. argues for a



new vision and version of our discipline that differs from the one we know of and work in today. The book's five chapters begin by providing a background, in the first chapter, about the author's father,

urging us to think about the relationships among discourse, pedagogy, and class and to consider what it means to teach and be middle class in terms of culture, literacy, and language—a topic important for two-year college instructors to contemplate, given that learners come from disparate backgrounds with varying literacy skills. The connections among literature, rhetoric, and middle-class values are explored in chapter 2, which argues that English studies functions to help students acquire "cultural capital," and through studying composition and literature, they gain the necessary means for class mobility. Consequently, English courses are "political projects consistent with interests of the professional middle class" (55).

The most compelling part of chapters 3 and 4 are the pedagogical ideas that Watkins presents. These chapters address two main questions: Why is literature important, and how should writing assignments be structured? Watkins advocates teaching composition along with literature. He suggests using New Criticism as a pedagogy to help students become more critical and aware of the formalistic properties of language and recognize how aesthetics operate, but no sample lessons are provided.

Watkins also advocates teaching writing in context through a strategy he calls “writing in the wild,” which begins by having students select and study the context for and within which they will compose, research its writing conventions, and use that knowledge to plan their composition. The context should extend beyond academia so that learners can choose any place that fits their interest. Through this approach, Watkins claims, students learn to recognize that conventions and knowledge are situated practices; writers must, therefore, be “richly strategic rather than narrowly formulaic” (127). This method can be useful in two-year colleges, where many students are interested in pragmatic skills. It allows them to see why composition matters for their future.

The final chapter calls for faculty unionization and restructuring of the college system. Watkins contends that unionization will create better working conditions for faculty (tenured and non-tenured), protect academic freedom of speech, and reduce the imposition of policies. Besides, he wants instruction, scholarship, and service to be equally privileged so that research would not be the main measure of productivity and so that teaching institutions would not be considered inferior to research universities. His call, if enacted, would drastically alter the status and perception of two-year colleges and research schools.

*A Taste for Language: Literacy, Class, and English Studies* addresses many topics—pedagogy, literacy, working conditions, and class—that are relevant to two-year colleges. I would recommend it to administrators, faculty, and

graduate students. It is relatively free of jargon, making it accessible to read. The biographical narratives that Watkins uses to frame his arguments blend well with the book’s scholarly content and make it unique. *A Taste for Language* represents a refreshing, unorthodox way to compose a scholarly work.

The book, however, leaves out an important issue. While it asserts that English studies provides cultural capital and propagates bourgeois values, the book does not critique how this could be problematic. At two-year colleges, learners come from disparate language, cultural, and socioeconomic situations. In what ways might teaching middle-class values be problematic for some of them? How might we capitalize upon diversity to challenge hegemonic cultural capital? How could class, cultural, and linguistic dissimilarities be used to transform how we think about our discipline and practices? Given that linguistic diversity and critical pedagogy have become major topics in composition studies, the connection between English studies and bourgeois values deserves closer scrutiny. Thus, readers might put Watkins’s arguments (and their own instructional approaches) into conversations with critical pedagogy and be more reflexive about the field and their teaching. But overall, Watkins offers a compelling and powerful vision to transform English studies. His arguments are worth considering; they matter to the future of our discipline—and they make *A Taste for Language: Literacy, Class, and English Studies* a worthwhile book to read.

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***Dangerous Writing: Understanding the Political Economy of Composition***

by Tony Scott. Logan: Utah State UP, 2009. 202 pp.



In this recession, community college instructors face classes full of un- and under-employed nontraditional students. Without sure economic paths, many attend college seeking “better jobs and middle class cultural ‘normalcy’” (120). Tony Scott, rhetoric and writing director at the University of North Carolina–Charlotte, blends these concerns in *Dangerous Writing*. Scott interrogates how socioeconomic structures shape what and how we teach and who teaches whom in college composition. The book offers a thorough exploration of current tensions between many students’ personal/professional goals and their academic experiences and provides interesting suggestions about how writing instruction might engage those tensions, but it is not as detailed in offering specific resources for putting its theory into practice.

*Dangerous Writing* opens with a series of vignettes about students who work at low-income jobs while attending school. Students balance time, money, and personal commitments; they reflect on work, school, and class. Scott reviews process pedagogy and the “social turn” (20), concerned that “social” means orientation to a narrow academic world rather than attention to students’ day-to-day experiences outside school. He advocates supporting students’

aspirations for improved lives through education while still looking critically at their academic and socioeconomic circumstances.

Chapter 1 discusses writing teachers’ working conditions. Scott surveys recent composition history, especially composition/literature, administrator/faculty, and full-time/part-time divides that cause tension in our field, arguing that academic and student work situations face similar struggles and merit similar scrutiny. Chapter 2 shares Scott’s small study of contingent faculty members’ selection and use of textbooks. Scott finds textbooks an often-limiting resource; worries that instructors do not examine textbook use frequently or critically enough; and learns that contingent faculty often make textbooks their primary sources of pedagogy, philosophy, and authority. To counteract these problems, Scott urges compositionists to develop “models of professional praxis that integrate scholarly, administrative, and pedagogical work” (107).

Chapters 3–5 place college composition within students’ and professors’ socioeconomically complicated lives. Chapter 3 discusses the goal of fostering personally and socially thoughtful writing in students and identifies some difficulties inherent in doing so within “marketable education that purports to produce marketable students” (110). Scott complicates ideas of higher education as primarily a route to conventional socioeconomic stability and encourages readers to pursue writing instruction that is “material *praxis* carried out by real people in real locales under real material terms” (117).

Chapter 4 discusses Scott’s own

teaching experience. Referencing classroom experiences and theorists from Bakhtin to Burke, Scott encourages questioning perceptions of “the university as a path to economic success” (138) and meaningfully engaging with worker/student identities and class/economic positions. Chapter 5, a brief coda entitled “Writing Dangerously,” recognizes that writing programs often cannot escape practical realities of the institutional cultures in which they exist, but it still encourages doing what we can to foster critically and socially active writing, teaching, and learning in our students and ourselves. Scott balances frankness about current challenges with hope for future changes.

*Dangerous Writing* performs timely services: recognizing that “pedagogical models and theoretical discourses still tend to assume ‘elite’ universities” despite “radica[l] chang[e] [in] both who students are and how they experience higher education” (5–6); focusing on these students; advocating “connecting writing more immediately to material concerns” (31), and encouraging complex understandings of economic/academic life.

However, the book does not demonstrate classroom applications as fully as it examines theories. Lack of sustained practical discussion about applying theory in the classroom disappointed this English instructor. Chapter 2 quotes from Scott’s composition instructor interviews; Appendix A pro-

vides the interview questions but could be stronger by including full transcripts as a resource for readers who would like to review the study’s details. Theoretical background comprises three-quarters of chapter 4 before a description of a semester’s course focusing—albeit with helpful detail—on one student. More varied examples and another appendix with syllabi and assignments would support moving theory to practice.

*Dangerous Writing* strengthens the discussions it pursues. Scott’s administrative role informs his perspective, and the book focuses more on theorizing than on enacting its suggestions. Community college English faculty will not find much material directly applicable to classroom practice, but we will find plentiful material for thinking *about* the classroom and about students’ broader lives. *Dangerous Writing*—referencing composition, social, political, and economic theories—will also help anyone researching institutional and social economic structures, the nature and position of academic work, and that work’s role in analyzing and influencing those structures. *Dangerous Writing* should inspire future works applying Scott’s theories to classroom practice, covering the practical ground it does not and pursuing its more “dangerous” goals.

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## 2011 NORMAN MAILER HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE WRITING AWARDS FOR CREATIVE NONFICTION

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