

SPEAKING UP: EXAMINING VOICE IN WAR CORRESPONDENCE

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Introduction

Voice. Every professional writer has one. Every writing instructor wants to hear one. Every student is challenged to express one. Therein lies the paradoxical nature of voice: an elusive concept crucial to make audible when writing rhetorically. As writing instructors, we tell students we want “to hear” their voices in compositions; however, students realize this as abstraction and are left confused by how to reveal their voices, and instructors are left frustrated by the lack of voice in students’ writing, particularly academic (non-fiction) writing. As I have found in my own teaching, voice is the individualistic aspect of writing that students learn to trust and express. Why? To develop a richer understanding and appreciation of language; to add greater depth and texture to their writing that’s meant to be read; and to become more engaging and effective writers who do not invent or construct a voice, but rather discover one.

Writers use their voices because they long to be heard. But how does voice—the permeating essence of writing—connect to language? Voice is integral to language. In *Language and Learning*, James Britton explains, “the interpretive function of language is essentially the use of words to ‘give shape to experience’” (13). Similarly, the “interpretive function” of voice is “essentially the use of words to give shape” to a writer’s expressions to an audience—self or others (13). As such, a writer’s language reveals a voice, the intangible aspect of the words eliciting rather immediate emotional and intellectual responses from an audience. In English studies, voice is both defined and ill defined.

Defining Voice

Included in the research are wide-ranging, inconsistent definitions of *voice*. Despite the elusiveness of this concept, there exists some scholarship on the topic showing its ongoing significance in the writing arena. Peter Elbow, Toby Fulwiler, and Donald Graves describe voice as the individualistic aspect that resonates from the page that makes us (the readers) aware of the essence of the writer. Fulwiler further points out that voice “lets us hear the person behind the sentences” (214). Mikhail Bakhtin argues that writers’ voices are inoculated with multiple voices of other writers whom they have read and heard. Writers sample, consciously or unconsciously, other writers’ voices on the never-ending pathway to developing their own voices. In epistolary writing between John Rouse and his former graduate student Edward Katz, Rouse writes, “It may be true that we are all social selves—each of us a gathering of voices with no hope of ever peeling away the layers of influence to find private, unitary, ‘real’ self” (121). Rouse continues, “We encourage young people to believe they are capable of controlling their texts they work on and becoming authors, capable of exercising their judgment and so responsible for the choices they make as acting subjects” (121). Combined, the authors validate voice in writing and explore its relations to the self or essence of writers.

Voice, as I am using the concept, is a writer’s expression of the “self” via disclosure of feelings and thoughts—the intensity and extent determined by the rhetorical situation. Related features to express one’s voice in writing include diction and tone.

Besides defining *voice*, many argue whether or not it can be taught. I argue that voice can be taught rhetorically using epistolary texts and the situations therein. For this discussion, I have chosen to focus on theory that accepts the concept of voice as an important component of strong writing, rather than defend the position against theories that reject the concept of voice. Elbow reasons, “we don’t need to resolve them [arguments on voice] in either/or terms” (“Introduction: About Voice and Writing” xi). Accordingly, Kathleen Blake Yancey argues, “voice does exist—

somehow literally, also metaphorically. The pertinent arguments thus are not about whether voice exists, but about how—about how it is developed, about how it is re-created” (“Introduction: Definition” xviii). Clearly here, the argument is on the process in which methods or means are used to construct and interpret voice in the writing classroom.

A Pedagogical Approach to Teaching Voice

The concept of voice became an acute concern during my composition courses at a military college where I have taught various levels of composition and literature for fourteen years. To place approximately 275 students (cadets) into composition courses during summer of 2011, several English colleagues and I assigned students based upon their SAT-Verbal and/or ACT-Verbal scores and performance on an in-house essay assessment. In my composition courses, particularly, I noticed that students expressed their feelings and thoughts easier in shorter writings, especially creative ones, and in discussions. In longer writings, their voices, shaped previously through five-paragraph essays and AP courses, became muted, that is, hidden beneath quotes cited and wooden words seen on standardized essay tests—essentially, arhetorical writing. My pedagogical goal was to move students from arhetorical to rhetorical writing by showing how to appropriate their voices in given contexts.

To address the concept of voice, I decided to focus on two sections of my introductory freshman composition course of 33 students who exhibited challenges with writing and critical-reading on our initial assessments. The course consisted of four major writing assignments: a rhetorical analysis, a synthesis of three academic articles on the same subject, a narrative, and a research paper. Prior to introducing the narrative assignment in which students wrote their stories of military college, I selected *War Letters*, a nonfiction collection offering authenticated correspondence to and from soldiers and their loved ones (plus a few from political officials to soldiers’ families). This collection asks students to notice the individual truths in the letters and to

examine and reflect upon their careers as future officers in human and moral—rather than military or political—terms. Thus, they became the audience of the war correspondence. Editor Andrew Carroll organized and commented on the letters for reasons revealed as rhetorical: a fire destroyed his family home, and he had an epiphany about the value of personal correspondence through a “Dear Abby” column on Veterans Day, 1998. In the collection, he also shares backstories of the correspondence, which helps to contextualize the writing and better understand the writers’ longings for expression. Given war as the “situation,” their communications from Civil through Persian Gulf Wars reveal voices close to the surface—raw and honest. In a word, accessible.

To address “how?” to which Yancey refers in the teaching of voice, I undertook the following exercises in my two sections at mid-semester after we had established an understanding of the rhetorical situation:

1. issued a survey asking for students’ definitions of voice;
2. discussed patterns across their definitions and read several definitions (noted in this article) from current research;
3. identified voices of public figures (e.g. Hillary Clinton and John McCain) as well as guest speakers at the college—more specifically, how they disclosed (or not) their expressed thoughts and feelings on political and military topics;
4. introduced War Letters collection and examined many sample letters to “hear” voices speaking from them;
5. discussed ways writers’ voices are revealed through diction and tone;
6. taught Lloyd F. Bitzer’s terms of the rhetorical situation and adapted the terms for class purposes;
7. issued a writing assignment (Appendix A) that asked students to select a soldier from anysoldier.com to

- practice voice through attention to rhetorical situation via their own letters to soldiers in Afghanistan;
8. commented on their letters using terms from class discussion, and asked students to revise drafts of letters and send to the soldiers; and
 9. reflected on the notion of voice in writing and on applying their learning to further readings and writings of academic papers.

After perusing the site, students selected given soldiers based on hometowns, same or similar surnames, common interests, military branches, and others. For instance, a Floridian student whose baseball coach served in the Marines chose a Marine because of his “deep respect for the service and its members.” If they hear writers’ voices and observe their own reactions, I surmised, they could potentially approximate their own voices in academic compositions. Using war correspondence was one of the few media that allowed my students a successful conception of voice by reading, discussing, and ultimately writing their own letters to soldiers serving in Afghanistan.

Background on Teaching Voice

Teaching at a military college has presented me with unique challenges, for instance, asking cadets who have adopted a collective identity to switch modes in the classroom and express their critical thought as college students who need to “continually declare the sort of person [they are] by the way [they] construe the world” (Britton 168). This applies to them as cadets–military members and students but still citizens in a democracy. I sought to illustrate that their voices still matter, especially in a college classroom. Assisting cadets to develop critical-thinking skills is a demanding yet essential prospect. Given the number of science and engineering majors in my classes in a military culture where voices are sometimes muted in favor of the group discourse, I have found it particularly essential to teach voice at a comprehensible, accessible level. I have found the need to uncover

their voices profound since they are expected to think critically about their roles and influence as future officers while earning a college degree.

Like many freshman students, they too assume academic writing has no voice: “Academic writing has been characterized as relatively impersonal—if not objective or neutral—and therefore voiceless” (Matsuda and Tardy 236). The result? Academic writing filled with chains of citations with little to no commentary or analysis. In short, no student writer’s voice is audible. One goal of freshman writing is helping students understand that the bedrock of argumentation, even in a research paper, calls for them to take a position, express intelligent commentary, and use research to underscore their theses.

Elbow said, “We can scarcely prevent ourselves from hearing the presence of human beings in language and attending to the relationship between the language and the person who speaks or writes it” (“Introduction: About Voice and Writing” xli). Precisely. This is the main reason I taught war correspondence early in the semester.

Before I found *War Letters* at a local bookstore, I had contemplated: How do I approach the concept of voice? These experiences led me to check handbooks and state curriculums for definitions and ideas to no avail. For instance, the latest edition of Diane Hacker and Nancy Sommers’ *A Writer’s Reference* and several other consulted handbooks (Longman’s and St. Martin’s) only identify voice as “active vs. passive.” There is no evident discussion of a writer’s voice. We have used Elaine Maimon, Janice Peritz, and Kathleen Blake Yancey’s text *A Writer’s Resource*, 4th edition, as our freshman handbook; the limited explanation is “the concept of voice is difficult to grasp in a discussion of writing because we think of voice as something we hear. But we also hear voices when we read, and we create voices when we write” (39). *A Writer’s Resource* provides several examples of “stuffy, casual, and appropriate academic voice,” but ultimately reminds students to “inspire trust by sounding informed, reasonable, and fair” (40), suggesting that one voice is appropriate for all academic papers. A

rhetorical analysis of the topic suggests otherwise: writers need to call upon appropriate expressions of voices within language situations.

Frustrated, I turned back to Britton's study of language. He argues, "Talk that is predominantly expressive . . . tells us a good deal about the speaker and relies heavily for its interpretation on the situation in which it occurs" (168). Given the relatively easy application of his theory to war letters, I returned to the collection and realized that each letter presented a distinct voice that students instinctively understood.

Content and Style of *War Letters*

In a poignant letter, Combat Nurse June Wandrey's letter (Carroll 251) to her family during World War II reveals her longing to express heartache toward one particular patient in a field hospital; she discloses her painful feelings in a distressed tone:

Dearest family,
Despite Sammy's desperate battle to live, he slipped away just as morning broke. It broke my heart. Desperately tired, hungry, and sick of the misery and futility of war, I wept uncontrollably, my tears falling on poor Sammy's bandaged remains I can't bear to leave Sammy; I sat on the ambulance floor next to his litter and held his corpse as we bounced over the pockmarked roads on his last trip to Graves Registration When he died, part of me died too . . . 'til the end of my days, I will still hear him say, 'Nurse, you have a smile like a whoooooole field of sunflowers.'
So sadly,
June

Expressing her anguished feelings about her special patient, June speaks to her family, a very familiar audience who undoubtedly notice that she expresses her longing of despair

toward the war and the senseless death of Sammy. Expectedly, her tone is somber, depressed, and her diction is simple and, at the end, slightly more optimistic with a play on words.

In another *War Letters* example, Bobbie Lou Pendergrass writes a letter to President Kennedy about her brother, one of the first casualties in Vietnam, with a longing to square her brother's death with the cause of war. She uses a direct, but respectful, tone and plain, assertive diction for her inquiry (391-392):

Dear President Kennedy, February 18, 1963
My brother, Specialist James Delmas McAndrew, was one of the seven crew members killed on January 11 in a Viet Nam helicopter crash Jim went into the Marines as soon as he was old enough and was overseas for a long time. During those war years and even all during the Korean conflict we worried . . . –but that was all very different. They were wars that our country were fighting, and everyone here knew that our sons and brothers were giving their lives for our country. I can't help but feel that giving one's life for one's country is one thing, but being sent to a country where half our country never even heard of and being shot at without even a chance to shoot back is another thing altogether! Can the small number of our boys over in Viet Nam possibly be doing enough good to justify the awful number of casualties? . . . If a war is worth fighting—isn't it worth fighting to win? Please answer this and help me and my family to reconcile ourselves to our loss and to feel that even though Jim died in Viet Nam—and it isn't our war—it wasn't in vain. I am a good Democrat—and I'm not criticizing. I think you are doing a wonderful job—and God Bless You—
Very sincerely,
Bobbie Lou Pendergrass

Upon examining her letter, specifically diction and tone, we noticed Ms. Pendergrass' facts giving way to her real feelings of

frustration buoyed by her pride in the end. Since she was writing to the President about an extraordinarily painful topic, her voice is still determined by the rhetorical situation; hence, she uses an honest, expressive voice decreasing in distance and rising to fulfill her longing—to make sense of her brother’s death in a chaotic war to the only audience who can respond to her pain as President Kennedy does in his response (392-393). Her audience is President Kennedy, and her context is the end of the Vietnam War at home. As President Kennedy moves from a prescribed formal tone of a standard condolence letter to a more personal one using the pronoun “I,” often he speaks from his heart.

Dear Mrs. Pendergrass:

March 6, 1963

I would like to express to you my deep and sincere sympathy in the loss of your brother. I can, of course, well understand your bereavement and the feelings which prompted you to write. Americans are in Viet Nam because we have determined that this country must not fall under Communist domination. [He continues with history of decision.] Your brother was in Viet Nam because the threat to the Vietnamese people is, in the long run, a threat to the Free World community, and ultimately a threat to us also.

I have written to you at length because I know that it is important to you to understand why we are in Viet Nam. James McAndrew must have foreseen that his service could take him into a war like this; a war in which he took part not as a combatant but as an advisor. I believe if you can see this as he must have seen it, you will believe as he must have believed, that he did not die in vain. Again, I would like to express to you and the members of your family my deepest personal sympathy.

Sincerely,

John F. Kennedy

Given the tenuous rhetorical situation, President Kennedy used a formal and moderately expressive voice; his voice was

determined by the tragedy, but only in his second draft. This, in contrast to his first draft, which was more officious:

Why did [your brother] have to prove his belief in a war which is not our own? That I can answer with certainty. We must continue to express our belief that ever[y] man has the God-given right to freedom, and we must continue to help those whom we can. We must not, however, spend our strength recklessly in danger of provoking a world conflict which could destroy our friends, our enemies, and ourselves. (394)

Immediately, students noticed the differences in his diction and tone from first to second drafts. When I asked, “Why did he soften his tone?” students said the President needed to show comfort and sympathy during a heartbreaking time. They noticed his confident voice in his response to Mrs. Pendergrass, his pained and bewildered audience member, to fulfill his purpose of justification for the war and explanation and condolences to her family. Yielding tempered feelings and thoughts, President Kennedy emphasized his reasoning and the historical part of the war while de-emphasizing pity. He longs to comfort an American citizen through loss but reassure her (and himself likely) that the Vietnam War was just. He wanted her to believe her brother did not die needlessly but for a righteous cause. Achieving two purposes, his words show an authenticity ripe for class analysis of voice.

Through the study of war letters, particularly the specific tone and diction within each, students became more aware of the meaning and presence of voice, translating this awareness to their own writing. Determined by their rhetorical situations, the soldiers, their loved ones, and politicians too used various voices revealed through diction and tone.

Students were moved by Carroll’s indisputable care for the military cause and the humanity in the letters; therefore, I asked them to write letters to soldiers in combat to capitalize on their

emotional and intellectual connection to the letters. Though their expression of voice remained problematic (more muted than expressive) in previous papers, students were now ready to write the letters with the following rhetorical situation: soldiers in combat; currently serving in Afghanistan in 2011; and longing to support and develop a rapport. Given the rhetorical situation, students agreed the appropriate voice was mainly professional with a more personal voice in a narrative section of stories about their own military experiences.

Voice Expressed Through Stylistics

How does voice show up in writing? Which conventions reveal a particular writer's voice? There are many paths to voice: stylistics, genre, expressionism, and more. When we read, we know someone is present and instinctively hear the writer's voice—sometimes loud, sometimes muted, and sometimes in-between. Some debate the place where voice ends and stylistics begins. Lynda Hamblin writes: "I decided that style, tone, mood, and persona are driven by voice," noting voice is the essence of a writer infused in the words revealed in stylistics (81). Nancy Dean, an English Educator and author of several pedagogical texts on voice, says: ". . . voice is expressed through stylistic devices, but it gets down to teaching the same thing: control of language to create an effect or experience for the reader" (Email Exchange, 27 November 2004).

These researchers share a common view that voice is infused in every word, sentence, paragraph, and format of texts. For the purposes of my research, I opted to focus on diction (word choice) and tone (writer's attitude toward subject) when teaching students new to argumentative writing, focusing on the subtler features of the writer. For instance, a soldier who wishes to express his love to his children uses a tender voice and soft diction and muted tone. I found it necessary to identify features of writing (diction and tone) to help student writers exhibit their voices in different types of writing.

To best identify other writers' longings, we looked carefully at their word choices and attitudes toward war and subjects therein, that is, homesickness and turmoil on the frontlines. We talked about the audience's ease of "hearing" the writer's voice from the disclosure of their thoughts and feelings about the subjects. Sometimes, a writer's expression is muted; sometimes, it is confessional to the point of extravagant sharing. Many times, a writer's expression is somewhere in-between on a range of disclosure. The summation question is then, To what extent has the writer disclosed his/her feelings and thoughts to express his/her longing?

Voice in the Rhetorical Situation

In my instruction, I focused on two guiding questions: "How can the study of correspondence associated with war aid in the understanding and expression of voice in writing? How do writers disclose their feelings and thoughts to express their longings?"

I wanted the concept of voice to become easier to understand; to examine voice in expressionistic writing where writers speak the truth of their lives in and afar from combat; to ease the sterilized feeling among their drafts; to practice with different voices so as to experience the power of expression. If they could match language to the instinct they know as voice in writing, I surmised, they could better understand how voice is determined by a rhetorical situation and how to "preserve" voice to transfer to other academic writing. At the beginning, I issued a brief survey asking my students to define *voice*; a sampling of their responses follows:

how you come across in a paper or letter

a writer's personal style

your perspective and attitude toward a topic

*voice is the tone you are using depending on whom you are writing
to and on what you are writing about*

Students know that writers, especially of non-fiction, cannot invent their voices, but that they too have a voice in their writing. (Appendix B contains student responses to more survey questions.) Examining definitions of *voice*, my classes noted that the authors take as fundamental several observations: identity, ownership of words, and idiosyncrasies play key roles in distinguishing a writer's voice. Elbow's point about "helping the writer understand voice as a means of developing a relationship with various live audiences" ("Introduction: Definition" xvi), applies to the situations of war letters exhibiting correspondents' voices appropriate to their audiences.

During these early discussions, I found teaching the concept of voice and guiding students to use appropriate voices for their own rhetorical situations were better served with a set of concrete terms. I chose to cast these terms relative to Bitzer's definition of the rhetorical situation: "the nature of those contexts in which speakers and writers create rhetorical discourse [language]" (1). I adapted Bitzer's rhetorical situation to include: the writer's longing (exigency; a pressing desire for something as of yet unattainable), audience (primary and real; I served as the secondary audience), and context (constraints: locale and date/time)—encapsulated by the question: Who is writing to whom? Where? When? Why? Voice is expressed in the writer's longing to a certain audience in a given situation. I introduced the terms to my classes and, using a sampling of letters, we identified the rhetorical situation for each letter. For example, subsequent to recent warfare in World War II (context), a soldier writes to his spouse (audience) seeking assurance (a longing) that their children were safe and nurtured at home.

Audience (Who?)

Teaching freshman writing has shown me that moving from high school to college writing cannot be underestimated; the

greatest challenge is for students to move from teacher-as-audience to conceived audiences. In my classes, I have often gone further and selected real audiences to ensure that students transcend the artificial writing present in the classroom with the instructor as primary audience. Instead, I ask students to choose a primary audience that transcends the classroom (e.g. parents, officers, politicians) and to consider me as a secondary audience to stave off voices lost in oppressed writing, that is, more “writer-based” than “reader-based” prose (Flower 235). So I constructed an assignment with real audiences to whom students could direct their writing.

For students, developing a voice is a process best realized rhetorically. As Elbow states,

Audience has a big effect on voice Partly it’s a matter of responding to those around us. That is, our voice tends to change as we speak to different people—often without awareness. We tend to speak differently to a child, a buddy, to someone we are afraid of. (4)

His argument speaks to adjusting one’s voice according to one’s audience in a rhetorical situation. Accordingly, my pedagogical goal was then to connect students’ thinking and expression in their writing using nonfiction, specifically war letters, each with its own rhetorical situation.

Context (Where? When?)

In class, we discussed the context of the letters from the Civil War to Persian Gulf Wars as well as the historical and political climates surrounding the wars. We also discussed the fact that the soldiers, their loved ones, and other correspondents did not know their writings would be published, thereby offering a more private-to-public rhetorical situation.

Longing (Why?)

Each letter was an opportunity for these writers to disclose expressions, reactions, and longings. They articulated their emotions while engaging their intellects. I encouraged students to listen to the voice expressed in the writers' longings: to vent, to validate, to seek love, to express doubts, to validate their patriotism, to document history, to connect, and more. Students seemed to assimilate to the situations fairly smoothly as I prepared them to write a letter to a soldier in combat.

In our discussions, we noted patterns of voice from American soldiers and their loved ones. Some letters were emotive, others newsy, still others distant and protective. Having left home twelve weeks prior, the cadets had recently completed summer boot camp; therefore, they could relate fairly to the soldiers' human experience. Students said they had not read "history of war" from such personal viewpoints. The letters were unfiltered and enriched our discussions. If soldiers chose to protect their loved ones at home, they tended to use minimally expressive voices to distance themselves from chaotic experiences on the frontline. For instance, Paul, an army private, writes to his brother Mitchell during WWII: "As I told you in the V-Mail, I have seen some action—a few hard, hard, days in which I saw more than I imagined I ever would. I don't think any man can exactly explain combat. It's beyond words" (Carroll 233). If soldiers were homesick, lovesick, or sick of war, they opened their hearts and expressed their feelings fully to loved ones or listeners at home. If they had mixed feelings, for instance, homesickness and determination to the point of stoicism, they displayed both feelings and facts into their letters. In contrast, their loved ones tended to use full expression to boost morale and express their sentiments. Rarely did loved ones use muted voices, that is, low disclosure of feelings and thoughts, when writing to their family members serving in war. As one might expect, unless crises occurred at home (e.g., a loved one's illness), they had no reason to restrain their feelings; therefore, they took the opportunities to fully disclose them.

Students' Responses to *War Letters*

I asked students to select letters that spoke to them individually to read and reflect on them in class. Students “heard” the voices immediately and responded emotionally and intellectually to them. Below is a sampling of student responses to a survey question, “What is your reaction to *War Letters*?”

I have a greater appreciation for written letters. War Letters is an eye-opener, not only how the family members and friends feel, but what these service men were going through physically, emotionally, and mentally.

It was very inspiring. It reminded me of why I joined the military. I could never imagine myself going to war, but its [sic] crazy to believe back in the day till now people are in war fighting for our freedom. There were many mixed emotions while reading these letters. Many sad, and many happy. But I truly enjoyed reading this book. It seemed like a personal connection was made with every writer.

After I read War Letters I was overwhelmed with emotions. It made me realize the importance of what we are doing. Also, it made me feel like I am part of a special family. This book assured me that I should be here right now.

Students were beginning to understand that connection to the text comes directly from their reactions to the writers' voices. Blake Yancey explains that writers seek

a truth that is not so much a function of a historical moment or the result of shared knowledge, but a function of a stable individual's seeking to square the writing with the self. When the self is so found and so revealed in text, authenticity results. (“Introduction: Definition” ix)

During discussions and shorter writings, students' emotions began to match the grief, longing, remorse, loneliness, and even tempered hope infused in the words. For instance, Melanie said a father's heartfelt letter to his young sons upon leaving for Iraq evoked a painful memory of the loneliness and sadness she felt upon her own father's leaving for the Persian Gulf War earlier in her life. The letter triggered Melanie's longing as she wished to express her painful feelings and make sense of a milestone in her family.

Students' Letters: Challenges to Discover their Voices

When I read their letters and provided advice on revisions, I was struck by a commonality: students' voices seemed wooden, inaccessible, and overly formal. Again, at a military academy, this is the expected voice when speaking to the chain of command, but they were not adapting to a rhetorical situation involving soldiers. Although they had not met these soldiers, they shared in the larger experience of serving in the military. Remote and ultra-polite in "military speak," their voices showed a restrictiveness in their first drafts. Despite our discussions about voice, many went to the "default position": writing articulate prose with suppressed voices rhetorically mismatched with the situation.

For a representative sample, I selected two letters from two students in my Introductory Composition course: Brandy and Alex (renamed for privacy purposes). For her letter, Brandy chose ENG (Ensign) Alexis Robles serving in the Army in Afghanistan because of gender and early stage of career purposes. For his letter, Alex chose Cpl. (Corporal) Brian M. Smith serving in the Marines in Afghanistan because Alex's baseball coach had served in the Marines and told stories to the team.

Their first drafts reflected Bakhtin's argument that writers sample other writers' voices as they develop their own. This was demonstrated by their first expressions of military voices rather

than their own voices as military members and human beings in uniform

Brandy: As a new female member of the military, I have chosen to write to you specifically, because you are a female serving our nation.

Alex: I hope to get good enough grades to go to flight school upon graduating. Coupled with my dream of flying, Pensacola NAS, where USCG, USN, and USMC members are sent to become pilots, is located close to my home.

As a class, we discussed students' feelings and perspectives on participating in a larger, unique rhetorical situation, during which time many (including Brandy and Alex) expressed discomfort with comparing their "safer and comfortable life" compared to soldiers serving in combat overseas. Overall, their concerns included: What do we say about our lives? How do we express that their lives are harder and in more danger than ours? How much do we ask about their lives?

In his own writing classes, Elbow said, "In this process [feedback for drafts] I feel I am giving students permission—indeed an invitation—to move in a direction they've never been invited to move in before" (*Writing with Power* 284). It was as though they needed "permission" in a new writing arena, and I arranged an informal discussion with an upper-class cadet, Scott, member of an active, well-regarded military family and student leader of the college's Correspondence Club (supports troops overseas with care packages and letters) to speak of the value of their correspondence and appreciation of the soldiers serving far from home (relatable point for students). After further discussion of this issue and ways to express voice in the smaller situations surrounding their letters, students wrote a second draft.

Appendix C includes sample drafts—original and revised—from Brandy and Alex. Their enhanced understanding of voice was demonstrated in various ways: deepening their expression, asking

questions of their audience members, using less military speak, and making smarter selections of relatable examples. Here again are Alex's and Brandy's letters demonstrating their increased conception of voice:

Alex: Following in my father's footsteps, I joined the _____ to become an aviator. I can remember as a child building model aircrafts that more often than not depicted military airplanes and helicopters. My father, to this day, recounts harrowing stories about search and rescue missions that enveloped his time at _____ station in Hawaii. Stories such as these sparked my interest in the military. What were the primary reasons that led you to join the Marine Corps?

Brandy: Overall, it [summer boot camp] was an experience that I would never want to do again, but it taught me things that I would not trade for the world. It was a challenge that has changed me forever. I now look at the world differently, not taking anything for granted, being thankful for everything I have, and have pride in my nation and those who have dedicated their lives to protecting our way of life. Knowing that you probably went through something fairly similar, I was wondering how you feel about your decision now, and if you believe that your experiences have changed you for the better?

On drafts of their letters, I included comments using Microsoft Word's Comment Function to point out areas in which they were writing too distantly and to nudge them to write their feelings and relax into the letters with their diction and tone. Sommers argued, "We comment on student writing to dramatize the presence of a reader . . . we believe that becoming such a reader will help them to evaluate what they have written and develop control over their writing" (148). As noted earlier, "voice relates to teaching the same thing: control of language to create an effect or experience for the reader" (email exchange). Together, these researchers posited that the goal of student writing is to increase

their awareness and management of their expression for the reader. My pedagogical goal was to use the same terms (e.g., primary audience) when commenting on students' drafts to reinforce their understanding of voice expressed through diction and tone.

My commentary about voice anchored next to paragraphs or sentences mobilized students to take more risks, i.e., developing a voice even in the face of potential critique, in their writing. Cumulatively, students seemed to understand that voice is associated with feelings and perspective, is attached to language, and matters to an audience. Using war correspondence to teach voice was satisfying because students became more acutely aware of the current war and somewhat of past wars. The letters proved especially valuable due to their honesty and immediacy exhibited in the voices present. Through students' experimentation and alteration of diction and tone, they further revealed their own voices. To this end, we came closer to managing an intangible, yet crucial aspect of writing.

In my experience teaching English, there are few places where authentic voices are found; the voices in the war correspondence, the personal letters, are those candid ones published without the writers knowing they would appear in a public arena (note: family members volunteered the letters to the editor's "Legacy Project"). We discussed connections between the writers under duress of war and the language nested in the letters situated in wars. The letters stimulated emotional and intellectual responses in class, and enabled attentiveness to authentic voices in profound situations.

Several students received letters from the soldiers to whom they corresponded, and reflection suggests that this pedagogical approach can work to ensure that students are satisfactorily prepared to understand language as a means to powerful, tailored communication and awareness. Drafting and revising also brought them closer to their real voices. More practice can only reinforce this goal of voice expression—crucial in a democratic society, especially in wartime.

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APPENDIX A

Course Assignment: Student Letters to Soldiers

Narrative

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a narrative is “a spoken or written account of connected events; a story.” Include a narrative section within your letter to reflect your understanding of our discussions/readings of voice in war correspondence.

Background

In a goodwill gesture of support for our men and women in uniform “fighting the good fight,” your next assignment is to write a letter that includes narrative to a soldier. Your correspondence yields important work and should reflect well on you and the military college. When you write the letters, remember to observe the following criteria (from CAPT O’C.):

When you write the letters please be mindful of a couple of important considerations:

- Since you’re writing as members of the military, be careful not to express your political views about the war; if you were acting as private citizens and made no affiliation with the military, you would be free to express your personal views.
- Make sure that your correspondence is supportive, upbeat, and professional. Don’t divulge too much personal information; exercise good judgment and decorum in the topics you choose to address.

Note: Since you are making this connection as members of the military college, you need to adhere to CG standards [including no profanity].

Rhetorical Situation

- Primary Audience: Male or female soldier currently serving in a combat zone; secondary audience: English professor and shipmates
- Longing: To support their efforts and to make a connection as fellow members of the military (acknowledging different service but still members)
- Context: November, 2011; from military college to Afghanistan war zones

Guidelines

First, go to the following website and secure a name for a male/female soldier: anysoldier.com Request a soldier(s)' name(s) and information. It may take time to receive a reply.

For the first correspondence (and class assignment), write a letter following these guidelines:

- Your name, address, rank, company, and hometown
- Relevant data points (your choice)
- Tell a story about life at military college (any aspect—sports, SWAB summer, academics, etc.)
- Inquire about their lives (to a level of appropriateness)
- Reflect your understanding of our discussions on “voice” in war correspondence
- Invite soldier to email or write in return
- Stamps/envelopes for letters provided; emails can follow first correspondence.
- Use business letter format on p.p. 202-203 of *A Writer's Resource*

APPENDIX B

Student Response to War Letters

When I posed the questions, Is your reaction to the letter primarily a military member's perspective? Or is your reaction more from a "human being in uniform" perspective? Or both? students responded as follows: Military Members in Uniform: 35%; Human Beings in Uniform: 42%; Both: 23%.

They reacted mainly as "one or the other," rather than both. With the majority of students reacting as human beings in uniforms, that is, still claiming their humanity, they show their dimension and need to claim an authentic self serving in the military. Perhaps this is why they responded very strongly to the essence of the letters. Perhaps also they are freshmen cadets who are still fresh from civilian life and now emerging as service men and women. Rouse and Katz describe this situation as "an experience in which they have been engaged as individuals, with thoughts of their own to express. In fact, how conceptual thought arises from individual, personal experience is important here" (ix). Students' voices in their reactions revealed a tone of compassion and insight.

My reaction is more from a human being in uniform perspective. In the end, we are in the military, but we are also humans who have feelings and views toward the world.

My reaction is mainly a military member's perspective. We all know that we have emotions and thoughts that are kept hidden and buried so that we are doing our duty. War Letters is simply a look inside the persona of a military member.

These two reactions are inseparable to me because these people writing the letters wear the uniform, but act as normal people would under these circumstances. Many often are young,

frightened, and unpredictable. They want the American dream such as I do, but first they need to fight a war.

My reaction to these letters was much more towards the “human being in uniform” side because the letters weren’t so much about bravado but most were focused on longing and the shock of war.

I understand the feeling of missing home, and can relate some things as a military member. However, I can never compare myself to one who has gone through the bloodshed and trials of war.

It is a ‘human being in uniform’ attitude toward the letters. Sometimes in the military you are unable to express your feelings. You have to put on a strong front. War Letters shows that military members have feelings too.

APPENDIX C

Excerpts from Students' Letters to Soldiers (Original and Revised Drafts)

[1a] Original Draft from freshman (fourth-class) Alex to Cpl. (Corporal) Brian M. Smith

I reported to the [military college] on June 27, 2011. It was kind of like the old saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." The hardest part of the day was not the pushups or being yelled at; it was saying goodbye to my mom. The summer progressed surprisingly fast as we developed from teenagers from across all walks of life to a single company, a single team. During the last few weeks of basic, I began to realize how closely our training in teamwork correlated with the other branches of the United States' military. I reached a point where I began putting the needs of my shipmates ahead of my goals. All in all, basic training taught me how to become a productive member of a team. How was your experience at basic training? What were some things that you learned during basic that you did not know or do before?

Appealing info to invite your audience into experience and express your longing.

*Develop your context
Where did your realization take place?*

Favorable outreach to your audience.

[1b] Revised Draft from freshman (fourth class) Alex (added text below to original text above)

Although the majority of basic training remains a complete blur to me, one day will be engrained in my mind forever. The upperclassmen refer to the final day of boot camp as Sea Trials. This culminating event begins at two in the morning and lasts until sundown. My shipmates and I awoke to the blaring of heavy metal and the screams of our cadre. Jumping out of the security of our racks and into the madness of Sea Trials, my roommate and I exchanged looks of pure terror. Everyone was given a list of items to pack into his or her sea bag. Reverting back to my old habit of not paying attention to details, I packed every single item in my possession. Needless to say, my bag weighed twice as much as anyone else's bag. At the time, I did not realize the magnitude of my mistake, but as the day progressed, I began to feel the effects of my detrimental error. After the completion of the obstacle course, my muscles were on fire. It was in moment of pure exhaustion that I discovered the true camaraderie that exists between members in the military. One by one, each of my shipmates took an item out of my bag and placed it in his or her bag. I will never forget how each of my friends came to my aide despite my mistake. I believe these moments encompass the values instilled by the military in serviceman or woman's heart. Have you had any experience where your shipmates came to your aide?

Why did you choose to delete previous opener and expression of your longing? Reached your audience quicker in original draft too.

Much more descriptive in expressive voice; you disclosed your feelings and thoughts about the tough event with a balanced measure.

[2a] Original Draft from freshman (fourth-class) Brandy to ENG (Ensign) Alexis Robles

The summer training, “Swab Summer,” is a program meant to challenge you mentally, emotionally, and physically. As the summer went on its true purpose emerged: to develop leaders of character and class with pride in their service and nation. It was a seven-week experience that I will never forget; yet it has already blurred in my mind. From the daily routine starting at 0520 and going straight until 2200 we were constantly being force fed a medley of information, knowledge and tradition that would become the blocks for the next four years of my life.

[2b] Revised Draft from freshman (fourth-class) Brandy

At the Academy, the upper class (second-class cadets) have the opportunity to learn firsthand leadership, by training what is to become the next class of cadets at the Academy, the 4/c cadets. The summer training, “Swab Summer,” is a program meant to challenge you mentally, emotionally, and physically. As the summer went on, its true purpose emerged: to develop leaders of character and class with pride in their service and nation. I am sure you can probably relate it to the training you went through. What was your training experience like? What

Your voice is formal here, and you seem to “report” the information. Adjust diction and tone to accommodate soldier audience to make more of a connection.

Good introduction context.

Describe further your experiences and longing as appropriate for that situation.

Maybe add some diction to show humor here; ENG Robles probably remembers boot camp too well.

Who? Bring to a more personal level for situation. Ex. us or me and my shipmates.

Voice still a little formal here but

kind of program did you go through? Swab summer was a seven-week experience that I will never forget; yet it has already blurred in my mind. Starting out with approximately 300 in class, the daily routine starting at 0530 and going straight until 2200 was a challenge where we were constantly being force fed a medley of information, knowledge, and tradition that would become the building blocks for the next four years of our lives. Inevitably, some were weeded out as we strived to be accepted as “worthy” of being Coast Guard Academy Cadets.

*connected with your next
comments mixes
professional and personal
well. Your voice is easier
to “hear” now as you
reach out to the soldier
and better suits the
situation of the letter.*

*Ok—your longing
to characterize “boot
camp” is coming
through.*