FROM COMBAT TO COMPOSITION: MEETING THE NEEDS OF MILITARY VETERANS THROUGH POSTSECONDARY WRITING PEDAGOGY

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By

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This thesis is dedicated with gratitude

For the steadfast support, encouragement, and great good humor
of my loving husband, Chris

and for the thoughtful guidance and mentorship of Dr. Norma Tilden

in honor of the service and sacrifices of CDR Dennis J. Rocheford, Chaplain, USN.
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Introduction

*Let my spear lie idle for spiders to weave their web around it.\nMay I live in peace in white old age.\nMay I sing with garlands around my white head,\nHaving hung up my shield on the pillared house of the goddess.\nMay I unfold the voice of books, Which the wise honor.*

—Euripides, *Erechtheus*

Since Mina Shaughnessy's pioneering work in the field of composition studies during the late twentieth century, composition theorists, and the pedagogies they help shape, have begun to recognize and respond to differences between students in the postsecondary writing classroom—between, especially, the "basic writer" of a freshman composition class and the adult student of continuing studies education. My project builds on this development in composition theory by positing another category of student, one who occupies a kind of liminal position between those two types of writers: this writing student is the military veteran. In some ways, student-veterans may seem very similar to traditional college students—they may live in dorms, eat in campus dining halls, and participate in as many aspects of campus life as their classmates—but their lives will have been shaped by experiences radically unfamiliar to most college freshmen.

Some of the student-veterans' experiences—financial independence from parents and professional training and development, for example—provide the student-veteran with many of the same strengths as adult learners. Others, however, such as overseas
deployments and, potentially, the traumatic physical and psychological experiences of combat, present significant, singular challenges to veterans as they negotiate the transition from military to academic (and civilian) life and language. Of course, all first-year college writers face some form of transition as they enter the college writing classroom; as David Bartholomae puts it, each student "has to invent the university" and must "learn to speak" the "specialized discourse" of academia (134). However, the complex, interrelated, and sometimes profoundly difficult transitions with which veterans must cope in and out of the writing classroom suggest that a nuanced and sensitive response from educators is needed; student-veterans, after all, must invent not only the university, but also their civilian selves.

My project thus seeks to investigate what kinds of transition challenges military veterans share with traditional freshman composition students, what kinds they share with adult students, and what kinds they alone face in the writing classroom. I will rely largely on those pedagogical approaches and composition theories that focus on the relationship between language use and culture to answer questions about how the military shapes student-veterans' understandings of learning in general and of language and writing in particular; in addition, I will consider how—or whether—those understandings might resonate with classroom practices. How will a veteran's experiences of working and learning in the highly structured environment of a hierarchic, military culture affect his ability to adjust to the new culture of the college classroom as a writing student, where he must "assume privilege without having any"
(143), as Bartholomae suggests? How does the military's use of language and writing—generally speaking, as a precisely and formally standardized way of clearly transmitting essential information in a chaotic and noisy battlefield environment (whether actual or simulated for training)—affect how a student-veteran will perceive and adapt to (or adopt) the values and goals of academic writing. Current, official military writing guides will help answer these questions, since they demonstrate a sense of what student-veterans, accustomed to the military's language use practices and values, will expect about what they can and should achieve through writing. Postsecondary writing instructors must be familiar with these values if they are to shape a pedagogy that is sensitive to student-veterans' expectations about writing, and able to best support student-veterans as they learn to write in new ways that accomplish the goals of academic and scholarly work.

A consideration of the best ways to teach such a select group of postsecondary students as military veterans is merited not only by the particularity of the challenges they face, but also by the likelihood that the number of veterans in postsecondary writing classrooms will soon increase. According to a 2009 report from the American Council on Education, close to two million men and women have served in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan (Cook and Young vii), and with the financial support of the new post-9/11 GI Bill (which provides as much as full tuition funding and living allowance), many of these veterans are likely to attend college, and therefore likely to be first-year writing students. Despite this fact, little has been written about the question of veterans
in the composition classroom. My project thus seeks to illuminate and describe ways we might apply current composition theory—Patricia Bizzell's notion of discourse communities, David Bartholomae's argument that novice academic writers must assume expertise before they are comfortable doing so, and Anne Beaufort's exploration of the transferability of writing skills and knowledge—to the special circumstances of teaching academic writing to military veterans.

I am not only interested in exploring how teachers can best meet the specialized needs of student-veterans in the writing classroom, but also why the teaching of writing might be crucial, quite literally, to the survival and success of combat veterans—not just in their lives as students but also in their lives as emotional beings. In this sense, a student-veteran's personal transition from the trauma and destruction of combat to the literal putting-together process of composition takes on another, more urgent significance than any concerns about academic development. For combat veterans suffering from psychological injuries such as post traumatic stress disorder, an understanding of writing as a way of making meaning, of shaping and reshaping experience, and of materializing realities in both the world and writer can be a productive source of self-healing. Trauma theory acknowledges these therapeutic possibilities of writing, suggesting that events are "reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the [written] text" (Felman and Laub xiv-xv). This power of writing to make meaning—and to create change in the writer—is also emphasized by composition theorists Ann Berthoff and Wayne C. Booth, as well as
by psychologist James Pennebaker, who found that patients who wrote about past emotional traumas had quantifiable improvements in physical and mental health.

Instructors of creative writing workshops for veterans (like Maxine Hong Kingston's program in San Francisco) synthesize and put into practice these concepts about the therapeutic power of writing. Because the workshop approach to teaching writing invites participants to share the work of making meaning through language by reading and responding to each others' work, they are especially useful for creating a sense of community among writers. My project will consider what productive pedagogical implications for teachers of academic writing might inhere in the approaches to teaching therapeutic writing used by some of these workshops. Writing instruction—perhaps in concert with campus mental health resources—might be one way that educators can encourage student-veterans to discover the therapeutic possibilities of meaning-making through writing, or encourage supportive community building among student-veterans.

When Andrew Carroll, editor of the Operation Homecoming anthology of veterans' writing, asked veterans who had participated in his creative writing workshop what motivated them to write, a noncommissioned officer responded that "[t]his is the first time anyone's asked us to write about what we think of all that's going on" (qtd. in Carroll xxvii). Asking our students—veterans or not—to write about what they "think of all that's going on" seems to me to be at the heart of all good composition pedagogy. To put it another way, a way that resonates with the notion of military service, it is the
duty of teachers of writing to ask their students to engage critically through language with our culture and our world. It is, of course, important that all students recognize the power of language to create and reshape meaning and experience, but for veteran students in particular, such an understanding may be critical to their success as they make the whole-person transition from soldier to student. My project thus seeks to discover and define the best ways for postsecondary writing instructors to engage student-veterans in the project of making meaning through writing as members of the academic discourse community. In light of the service and sacrifices of the combat veterans we may meet as students in our classrooms and writing centers, seeking the ways to best to meet their needs may be the least we, as Americans and as educators, can do.
Chapter One: Military Culture and Language

"The man who really endured the War at its worst was everlastingly differentiated from everyone except his fellow soldiers."

— Siegfried Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer

Before entering a classroom, student-veterans must negotiate a huge battery of transitions that can often feel intensely personal, since these changes are really cultural shifts as the veterans move from military to civilian society. In an article published online by the New York Times in February of 2010, former Army infantry officer and current Harvard Business School graduate student Erik Malmstrom describes this "culture shock" of the transition to "the civilian world" as "greater than that of joining the military...I had to make a concerted effort to modify my appearance, language, and behavior...[t]hroughout this tortuous process, I realized how deeply the Army had permeated all realms of my life." The difficulty of this process may actually be heightened for a veteran who is not just joining the civilian world, but also a college campus: a recent sociological study of postsecondary student-veterans conducted by Robert Ackerman, David DiRamio, and Regina L. Garza Mitchell revealed that many veterans do not view their colleges and universities as particularly "veteran-friendly" (Ackerman New Directions 10).

Understandably, transitioning to civilian and student life will be more difficult for a veteran who is trying to adapt to a campus culture that doesn't acknowledge or
value her service experiences—which may include physical or mental injuries due to combat trauma. Harvard student and ROTC cadet Charles Cromwell, in his 2002 *Harvard Crimson* opinion piece titled "Explaining the Uniform," noted that "a large distrust and skepticism of the U.S. military...pervades the campus" and "[c]adets are continually disheartened by the persistent anti-ROTC sentiment." In 2004, another Harvard student, staff writer Christopher Looms, reported in *The Harvard Crimson* that a Navy ROTC Midshipman was "met with hostility...from members of the Faculty" when he received "disparaging comments from a knot of professors as he walked through the Yard in uniform." Harvard, of course, isn't alone in its campus climate—in a Columbia University student newspaper, a student wrote that "'joining the military is 'flushing your education down the toilet' and that he could not 'comprehend why anyone would want to be in the military'" (qtd. in Roth-Duqet and Schaeffer 48), and an ROTC cadet at Brown University was required to change seats because a classmate was made "uncomfortable" by the cadet's uniform (qtd. in Roth-Duqet and Schaeffer 50).

Although a veteran may not be as easily visually identifiable as uniformed ROTC cadets, the general culture of a campus—or classroom—and the attitudes of students, staff, and faculty toward military service and service members may make a dramatic difference in the difficulty of a student-veteran's transition to life as a college student.

A sense of the radical cultural change involved in leaving military service and joining not just civilian but academic life was emphasized by the student-veterans interviewed for a study published in 2009 in both the *NASPA Journal* and *New*
Directions for Student Services (professional journals for student service administrators) by Ackerman, DiRamio, and Garza Mitchell, who note that "the transition to college was among the most difficult adjustments" for veterans "returning from wartime service" (NASPA 97). Student-veterans in the study describe "how difficult it was to move from a strictly defined structure [of the military] to a loosely configured campus where there was no chain of command from which to get answers" (New Directions 12). Many of the interviewed student-veterans responded to this difficulty with a strategy of "blending in...being quiet and neutral in class" (NASPA 88) in an effort to pass as average college students; this approach can be especially challenging for student-veterans who may feel or look obviously different from their more traditional freshman classmates due to combat injuries. Ackerman et al. note that while the student-veterans who participated in their study were close to the same age as traditional college students, the veterans exhibited a distinct "level of maturity" (NASPA 87), which could make relating to their civilian classmates difficult. One Marine veteran, for example, said that he doesn't "like to give the jarhead appearance, because I am in college here and want to be a college student," but that classmates "always end up asking me whether I killed somebody over there or not...I probably wouldn't tell them if I did" (NASPA 88). Another Marine commented that most students "whine over nothing. They don't really know what it is to have a hard time...[t]hey sit in a sheltered dorm room and do homework. It's not too hard. You hear people complaining and you're just like, why are you complaining?" (NASPA 87). The differences between military and
campus culture may be vast, as well as obvious to both the student-veteran and his
civilian, freshman peers.

From the point of view of composition instruction, then, classroom practices that
could expose or emphasize a student-veteran's difference from his classmates—a shared
or workshop-style writing assignment that focuses on personal experience, for
example—may present difficulties that have little to do with writing to a student-veteran
who is trying to "blend in." That is to say, the life experiences of a student-veteran (of
boot camp, deployment, or combat) may be so unlike her classmates' that being required
to share them in writing workshops may heighten a veteran's feeling of otherness, rather
than encouraging a sense of shared community in the classroom. This disconnect,
between, for example, the college experience of an 18-year-old whose biggest challenge
of the day may be figuring out how to do his own laundry and that of a 22-year-old
military veteran who feels that "[a]ny day you are not being shot at is a good day" (New
Directions 8), may significantly isolate student-veterans from their civilian classmates.
Some of those feelings of difference may be related to combat trauma and injuries,
including PTSD, which Ackerman et al. point out can affect a student-veteran's
attention span, ability to focus, and comfort with large groups of people. One
interviewed veteran mentioned that after two tours in Iraq, sitting for "extended periods
of time" was very difficult, and so he had to ask his professors for permission to "get up
and walk around the classroom" (New Directions 11). The differences between student-
veterans and their civilian peers in the composition classroom may not only be apparent in their speech and writing, then, but even manifested physically.

Additionally, professors may unwittingly contribute to a student-veteran's feelings of difference—not only by expressing negative opinions about war or the military, but also by asking a student-veteran to function as a kind of military spokesperson by discussing his first-hand experiences of war in front of his classmates. One student-veteran in the Ackerman et al. study described feeling uncomfortable when asked to recount his military experiences in class: "I had a professor in journalism class. He kept pushing me for information and some sort of insight as to my experiences in the military...[but] that was gone and that's a different life...I kind of got to the point of dreading going to that class" (NASPA 88). As the Ackerman study indicates, college educators should strive to "understand and acknowledge" what student-veterans face, "including both health and academic challenges" (NASPA 95), without unnecessarily calling attention to their differences from their civilian classmates. In practical and general terms, this might mean establishing a classroom environment that is at least politically neutral (if not supportive) towards military service; a professor who makes a passing comment praising Vietnam-era draft dodgers, for example, may inadvertently alienate veterans in her classroom who interpret the remark as a general disparagement of military service. More specifically, it could mean that a composition instructor could avoid directing military-related questions specifically to student-veterans, or could encourage a student-veteran who chooses to write about her military experiences
to do so for assignments that will only be read by the instructor, rather than shared with
the class. In these and similar ways, instructors can strike the precarious balance
between helping student-veterans feel generally recognized and appreciated on campus
and in the writing classroom, without personally singling them out by demanding that
they speak or write publicly (or even at all) about their military service experiences in
the course of classroom work.

Finally, leaving the military and joining civilian life can be difficult due to the
emotional transition many veterans face as they negotiate a sense of ambivalence or
grief for the life they leave behind. A student-veteran's disconnect from civilian and
campus life may be deepened by a feeling of powerful and continuing connection with
fellow service members who are still deployed. As one Marine Corps veteran in the
Ackerman study explained, "People who I would consider my best friends here still can
not relate to me on certain levels as far as the experiences I've had. You just can't relate
unless you have been there. Those people have. Those relationships are still very strong
and very important" (New Directions 11). Some of the interviewed veterans expressed
a desire or at least a willingness to return to the military and even to combat (New
Directions 8) in order to recapture that deep, personal bond with fellow service
members. Student-veterans thus may be struggling, like many traditional college
freshmen, with a sense of homesickness as they adjust to life at college; veterans,
however, face the added paradox of feeling homesick for the excitement of combat and
camaraderie of their units—that is, homesick for a "home" to which it would be impossible or fatal to return.

In addition to the cultural adjustments that student-veterans must make—becoming acclimated to civilian and campus life and overcoming feelings of isolation or homesickness familiar only to those who have also experienced deployment or combat—student-veterans must also change the way they approach learning. When military service members aren't actively engaged in combat operations, they are learning and training—both as individuals and as units—and they are doing so according to strict procedural guidelines and requirements in order to meet official, known, and measurable performance standards. Military learning is based on a "Crawl, Walk, Run" strategy, in which expected behaviors or skills are first demonstrated by instructors before they are attempted by learners, and (as the basic Army training manual puts it) "training becomes increasingly more difficult, requiring more intense levels of involvement...and realism" (Training the Force 5-3). The military does encourage its learners to be adaptable and flexible in their application of learned skills; however, the emphasis is on meeting formally defined objectives by adhering "to the Army standard and...Army doctrine" (Training 2-6) as much as possible. Understanding the military's approach to teaching and learning helps illuminate what Galen Leonhardt, in an article published in Teaching English in the Two-Year College, wrote about the "vast majority of vets" he has taught in his English and composition classes: that they are "students who understand rule-based instruction" (346).
Composition instructors must be aware of student-veterans' tendencies toward rule-based or imitative performance in the classroom in order to help them develop more critical, creative, and individual learning and writing styles.

As student-veterans become more comfortable with learning in a new academic environment, they may also be required to adjust to a new style of performance assessment. Assessment is an extremely crucial phase of military training; as the Army training manual bluntly states, "[t]raining without evaluation is a waste of time and resources" (Training 6-4). Because training evaluations are a measurement of an "organization's ability to accomplish its wartime operational mission" (Training 6-1), and because the physical safety of the organization's members depends on mission success, military personnel are accustomed to feedback that is "candid and accurate" (Training 6-4). Military personnel value honest feedback, even when it is negative, because they recognize the greater goals of mission success and personal safety.

Assessment, defined as "a structured review process that allows participating soldiers, leaders, and units to discover for themselves what happened during the training, why it happened, and how it can be done better" (Training 6-4), happens on many levels and in many forms. Although assessment is "structured," meaning that it adheres to a standardized format, it can be informal: simply a verbal "debrief" among participants after a training exercise to discuss what happened and why. Assessment can also be a more formal written evaluation internal to one unit, or a more elaborate evaluation conducted by an outside reviewing entity. Whatever the level of formality, however,
the universal purpose of training assessment in the military is to analyze and catalog the "lessons learned" of previous training evolutions; when military personnel learn a particular procedure, they also learn why that procedure is best in a given situation, based on the previous experiences of others. In terms of the postsecondary composition classroom, student-veterans are therefore likely to want to know why particular conventions of academic writing are necessary or desired—in other words, what "mission objective" is being fulfilled by, for example, constructing a paragraph around one main idea? It is also likely that they will seek honest, candid feedback from instructors and will respond well to constructive criticism without taking suggestions for improvements in their academic work personally, especially if an instructor provides frequent feedback about both low-stakes and high-stakes writing assignments.

Not only must student-veterans change the way they approach learning, they must also change the way they think about and use language. Military language use focuses on rapid, concise, direct communication that curtails the possibility of confusion or ambiguity about the message being sent. Part of this emphasis is due to the way military communication is shaped—and sometimes limited—by the technologies through which it is enabled. Modern military communication has historical roots in Morse code and other encoded signaling methods; Navy enlistees and officer candidates still learn the entire alphabet in signal flags. Although it might seem that the kind of painstaking brevity required by Morse code or semaphore would be
rendered obsolete by the advent of radio and internet communication, the military continues to emphasize quick, clear, succinct communication.

Because multiple speakers and listeners share common radio channels (or internet chat rooms), military personnel are still taught to keep their transmissions short, using a standardized system of verbal abbreviation. For example, a lengthy radio call such as "Squadron headquarters, this is helicopter number 614, I am currently ten minutes away from home base. When I land, I will have two and a half hours of fuel remaining, and I would like to fill up my tanks. Send out the next flight crew," is instead transmitted as, "Indian base, 614. Ten mikes out, two plus three zero for a hot pump crew switch." Some of the most common radio calls reduce entire sentences to single words: "I have heard and understood your last transmission" becomes, "roger," and "I understand what you're asking me to do and will comply with your request," becomes "wilco." This verbal shorthand isn't simply the quickest way to convey information, it is the only way to communicate intelligibly on military radio channels: a speaker who does not hear his listener quickly respond with "roger" will assume that his message was not heard or understood and will repeat himself without being prompted. Such streamlined and predictable patterns in verbal communication eliminate ambiguity and inefficiency, and are essential for military personnel who must plan and practice for the time-critical crises of battle, casualties, equipment failure, or other emergencies.

This tendency toward brevity, directness, and standardization in communication is not limited to radio transmissions; it is internalized by military members and shapes
their culture of language use in general—even in informal, personal conversation.

Veterans may find it challenging to abandon the efficient shorthand of military jargon for what they may view as unnecessary and confusing ways of communicating. In a 2009 opinion piece titled "Let Me Get Right to the Point," published online for *The New York Times*, Marine Corps veteran Jeffrey Barnett chronicles the difficulties he had with learning to communicate with his civilian coworkers:

[Marine Corps] officers have little tolerance for meandering around your point and they have zero tolerance for trivial or deceptive nonsense...I've learned that in civilian life many people want to banter about nothing for about 90 seconds before discussing anything of substance...[s]ometimes I'm able to muster some brief small talk...I don’t think this verbal ego-stroking is actually more effective than direct communication, but it appears that over the long term, it's in my best interest to adopt it."

In other words, Barnett here is describing his struggle with learning to say, "I understand what you want me to do and I will do it," when what he really means could be efficiently and completely conveyed in a one-word response: "Wilco." In the context of the academic writing classroom, a student-veteran's tendency to communicate in such clear and direct ways could certainly be an asset; however, habitual reliance on formulaic or standardized forms (or even words), or impatience with "meandering" around an idea might forestall or prevent altogether the kind of
general curiosity, patient exploration, and interest in complicating an idea that is necessary for creative, insightful, complex writing.

A student-veteran's expectations about language use have been shaped not only by military technologies and culture but also by the military's codified regulations, some of which address writing specifically. These formal guidelines and instruction about military writing—set down by each branch (Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps) in instruction manuals—convey an intolerance for writing that does anything other than communicate a clear, uncomplicated and unambiguous point as simply and directly as possible. The Army writing guide points out that "[w]hen and if our soldiers are called upon to risk their lives in the accomplishment of their mission, there must be no mistaking exactly what we require of them" (Effective Writing for Army Leaders Forward), while the Air Force manual describes the "expensive mistakes...and in some cases...accidents or even death" that miscommunication can cause (The Tongue and Quill 5). Military writing guides consistently emphasize this "why" of language use: like verbal communication, writing must be brief, clear, and adhere to a predictable format whenever possible to preclude a reader's confusion, because confusion can cause casualties or mission failure. Military members exposed to this style of communication learn and internalize these values in order to produce and expect quick, concise, uncomplicated writing.

Advice from military writing guides about how to achieve this kind of writing—guidance which should rightly be considered the military's own composition theory—is
relatively consistent, despite the fact that the guides are individually produced and approved by separate branches. One of the most prominent principles of this writing theory is that writing can and should be thought of as a standardized procedure—a series of consistent steps that if followed methodically, will invariably produce an acceptable document. In particular, the Air Force's writing manual, *The Tongue and Quill*, presents the writing process as a series of specific, consecutive tasks (prewriting, drafting, and editing) conducted as a linear, unidirectional procedure. This guide indicates that if a writer simply follows the steps, stages, principles, and rules of writing, the finished product will be acceptable: "[g]rammar scares most of us," it reassuringly admits, but many mistakes can be avoided by "understanding a few rules" (7). The military writing guides require writers to adhere strictly to this system of rules and regulations about writing—again, in an effort to minimize the possibility that a message might be misunderstood and lead to costly battlefield mistakes.

Many of those writing rules convey a marked emphasis on writing product, rather than process, and each guide highlights the idea that writing should closely follow a standard format, depending on its purpose. Some of these formatting requirements may resonate with academic writing conventions, such as the Army writing guide's stipulation that writers must "put the recommendation, conclusion, or reason for writing—the "bottom line"—in the first or second paragraph, not at the end" (3-1), much like a thesis statement. Similarly, the Air Force's manual emphasizes the importance of highlighting the main idea at the beginning of a piece of writing by

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"get[ting] to the point" rather than "hid[ing]...ideas in a jungle of words" (7). Other kinds of military formatting requirements, however, will not resonate so well with academic writing practices. For example, the Navy's guide considers separately writing products like the "briefing memo or routing sheet," "point paper," "talking paper," "lessons learned," and the "Plan of Action and Milestones (POA&M)," among others—and not just in broad terms of genre or style. The guide delineates in detail the individual requirements for each type of document, specifying how the writer should use required headings, spacing, font, security information (whether the document is classified or unclassified, for example), and bullets—which elide any requirement for smooth and logical transitions between ideas in the writing itself. The overall effect of this guidance is to suggest that writing is simply a matter of filling in conceptual blanks: a writer utilizing the Navy's guide can feel confident that he is producing good writing as long as he follows the example document precisely, simply replacing the example's substantive information with his own.

The emphasis on form and format is shared by the other military writing guides, as well. The Air Force's guide, for example, addresses four separate types of memos, each with their own formatting requirements (The Tongue and Quill iv), and the Army's guide covers details as specific as the "expression of date," and "ink color" (Preparing and Managing ii). Standardizing written documents with these kinds of precise, exhaustive requirements serves an important purpose for the military; if every point paper adheres exactly to the same format, a reader can find the bottom line or "action
item" (Shenk 114) with no delay and little chance for confusion. These formatting requirements make clear that it is product, not process that truly matters in military writing, and that originality—a quality highly valued in academic writing—is not necessary or even desired.

The guides extend this focus on writing product rather than process by conveying a sense that the fewer words a writer uses—and the shorter those words—the better, even to the point of losing nuances of meaning. According to the writing guides, the key tools for evaluating the quality of military writing are whether a document can be "[understood] in a single rapid reading," and whether it is "generally free of errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage" (Effective Writing 1-4). Implicit in this definition, since the standard calls for writing that is only "generally" error-free, is the idea that quick dissemination of basic information is more important than details of grammar or punctuation, and the corollary idea that grammar and punctuation do not have a great impact on meaning. In fact, the Air Force guide even implies that shorter sentences are always more effective than longer ones, stating that "[t]he longer it takes to say something, the weaker you come across," and that "certain words and phrases" might waste time by "forc[ing] your reader to trudge through a dictionary" (The Tongue and Quill 79). This guide even has suggestions for "simpler words and phrases" (81) a writer might prefer: for example, the guide suggests a writer replace the word "anxiety" with the word "fear," or the word "authoritative" with the word "official" (81), apparently without any concern for connotations or lost meaning. The Army guide also
privileges brevity over clarity; for example, it suggests that writers choose the active voice because "[t]he active voice does more than make sentences clearer—it shortens sentences" (Effective Writing 3-2). Clearly, these guides are not as concerned with helping a writer discover how to carefully shape and reshape meaning as they are with ensuring the production of a certain kind of product—a document that can be quickly read for only the most essential information.

Portions of the guides take this emphasis on brevity, clarity, and standardization of format even further, nearly reducing the writing process to an exercise in mathematical computations. The Army guide in particular stresses this formulaic approach, providing a detailed explanation of an editing tool called the "clarity index," which helps avoid the problem of "[l]ong words and long sentences" (4-3). The index involves adding the percentage of long words (defined as three syllables or more) to the average sentence length; the ideal clarity index is 30: 15 words per sentence, 15 percent long words (4-3). For a student-veteran who is used to this kind formulaic writing, it will likely be very difficult to understand how sentence length and essay structure can or should vary according to the writer's goals.

Parts of the other branches' writing guides do provide glimpses of a broader, more organic look at the writing process than the Army's guide. For example, the Air Force's guide directs a writer's attention to audience and rhetorical strategies and goals: "to direct, inform, persuade or inspire" (19). The Navy's writing guide, The Naval Institute Guide to Writing (also used by the Marine Corps), goes further, introducing
some ideas about shaping meaning through the writing process that the other guides do not. It offers outlining as one way to begin exploring ideas before drafting (in addition to freewriting and brainstorming (11)), and emphasizes the tentative, exploratory nature of writing, pointing out that "there's no magic to that first outline. If it proves faulty later, you can change it. And sometimes it will be premature" (11). The guide becomes even more pointed about the nonlinear aspects of the writing process, describing what it terms the "heat of composition," and recommending that because "[i]deas can come and go very quickly," a writer should "[g]et them down on paper, and wait to polish and revise them" until later (12). Of course, because it, too, acknowledges the exigencies of real-time military communication, the Navy's writing guide shares with the other military writing manuals an emphasis on short sentences and familiar words. Ultimately, despite these isolated indications that the writing process requires flexibility, the Navy's guide, like the other military writing guides, recommends an approach to writing that involves following sequential steps in order to produce the desired product: a document that can be quickly read and easily understood.

Although these guides theorize writing in ways that meet the language-usage requirements of the military, they do not significantly address or invoke most of the prevailing academic theories of composition that have developed over the past forty years. There is no indication in the guides that writing is a process of meaning-making; that form might somehow affect the meaning that can be made; that long sentences may sometimes be needed to convey complex or interrelated ideas; that there may be more
than one acceptable way to say something; that the ideas a writer begins with may—and perhaps even should—change throughout the writing process. The key for effective pedagogy in the postsecondary writing classroom, it seems, will be helping student-veterans recognize that the values and goals of academic writing are different from those of military writing, because the work of academia is different from the work of the military. While good academic writing certainly yields a clear, concise product, it is also a process that is complex, organic, nuanced, creative, and singular to each writer. Helping student-veterans transition from military to academic writing will require helping them understand why that difference exists.
Chapter Two: Composition Theory and Teaching the Student-Veteran

Military writing guides provide a sound indication of what student-veterans are likely to expect about language use and writing because they reveal the values and conventions that shape the military as a discourse community. Composition instructors who can familiarize themselves with the writing principles outlined by the guides will be able to anticipate the specific teaching challenges of helping student-veterans transition to academic discourse in the writing classroom. Such insight will make it possible for instructors to identify those current composition theories and pedagogical approaches that can best address the particular strengths and needs of this specialized group of students. Although recent composition theory has not specifically addressed the issue of helping student-veterans transition from military language use and values to those of academia, there are some theories that may be quite applicable, especially those that acknowledge the dramatic change all writers undergo when they come to college. Particular value may attach to those theories that recognize that asking writers to change the way they write is really asking them to change the way they think, what kinds of knowledge they consider useful, and therefore, who they are. Student-veterans are, after all, negotiating multiple ways of redefining themselves—both as students and as civilian individuals.

David Bartholomae's notion of "inventing the university," for example, can help illuminate one aspect of learning to write academically that may be substantially problematic for a student-veteran who is used to learning a new skill with a step-by-
step, methodically standardized, "crawl-walk-run" approach. As Bartholomae suggests, learning to write in the academy requires a shift in what kinds of knowledge are privileged, and a beginning writer must somehow manage to be—or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say he "must impersonate"—an expert, because paradoxically, the discourse he is approximating is precisely what will enable the kinds of knowledge and expertise he doesn't yet possess. In terms of the military training analogy, the writer must crawl, walk, and run all at the same time, because he won't know what running is until he is already doing it. Composition instructors must be sensitive and sympathetic to how frustrating and fruitless this sort of nonlinear learning will likely seem for student-veterans, and constantly seek ways to help them become comfortable with what Ann Berthoff calls "the uses of chaos" (38).

Instead of offering the writing process to students as a series of ordered steps to follow, then, instructors should be as explicit as possible about the fact that writing should be understood as a nonlinear, sometimes messy process enroute to an eventual final product—that it's not as important to produce "clean" writing as it is to produce writing that does something to and with the way they (and their readers) think. Of course, such an emphasis directly contradicts the main principles of military writing outlined by the guides, which stress the primacy of writing products that adhere to standard, predictable formats and that can be easily understood "at a single rapid reading" (Effective Writing 1-4)—in other words, writing that requires as little thinking as possible. All the more reason, then, that postsecondary composition instructors...
should try to make the goals of academic discourse as transparent to student-veterans as possible. Composition instructors can also support their student-veterans by precisely defining goals for an assignment or even for the course, so that student-veterans can feel that they at least understand the "mission objective" of academic writing even if they don't yet know how to achieve it.

Bartholomae suggests that instructors can achieve this kind of transparency about academic discourse by helping students identify "the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections that determine 'what might be said'" (146). Although he ultimately concludes that the greatest challenge for instructors is helping students negotiate the "difficult and often violent accommodations that occur when students locate themselves" (147) in a new discourse, I would argue that his initial emphasis on "demystify[ing]" (147) academic writing conventions for students is a more pressing issue when teaching student-veterans than helping them locate themselves in a new culture. Student-veterans, after all, have already made just such a transition when they initially joined the military and learned to communicate in ways that served the military's values and purpose. It is difficult to imagine a more "violent accommodation" than the kind the military demands of its new recruits as they become acclimated to military culture in basic training. For student-veterans, reinventing themselves as members of the academic discourse community will likely be less difficult an
adjustment than will learning to complicate their thinking and writing in ways valued by academia.

In order for writers to become acclimated to the commonplaces of academic discourse, they must develop or even appropriate a sense of authority—what Bartholomae terms "the privilege of being 'insiders'—that is, the privilege both of being inside an established powerful discourse and of being granted a special right to speak" (143). But because of the way the military approaches training and learning, it may be extremely uncomfortable for a student-veteran to claim such self-conferred prerogative. A military member gains expertise and privilege in formal, structured, and externally-reinforced ways: for example, a helicopter mechanic must first watch a demonstration of the officially-mandated procedure (described in military maintenance instruction manuals) of how to repair an engine oil pump before she is permitted to try it herself. When she begins to perform the repair herself, she will always be under the guidance of her supervisor, who will eventually sanction her qualification officially, usually in the form of a certificate or other paperwork. Behaving as though she is already an expert in academic discourse without instruction that proceeds in a clearly described, standardized process and without the constant supervision or guidance of an authority figure—as Bartholomae argues basic writers must—will be the exact antithesis of her military experiences. A student-veteran's ability to claim such privilege may also be subject to obstacles that originate outside of the writing classroom, as well; a student-veteran's ability to feel like an "insider" (Bartholomae 143) may very well depend on
the degree to which student-veterans feel acknowledged, respected, or welcomed by the university community as a whole.

Although a student-veteran's unease with assuming expertise without any formal qualification may hinder his ability to gain access to the academic discourse community, it may also work to his advantage in certain ways. A student who realizes that he is, in fact, a beginner in the college writing class is recognizing that "something special or something different is required when one writes for an academic classroom," an understanding that may be necessary for eventual fluency in academic discourse (Bartholomae 156). Nancy Sommers and Laura Staltz agree, suggesting that "students who make the greatest gains as writers...initially accept their status as novices" (124) and that even when students "come to college as strong writers primed for success" they may "have difficulty when they refuse to be novices" (134). It seems likely that student-veterans will be readily able to accept their status as novices, since the culture of military training and learning to which they will be accustomed functions universally as a cycle of novice-to-expert in concert with the crawl-walk-run pedagogy.

In addition to their self-awareness and self-acceptance as novice writers, student-veterans may have another advantage within the framework of the novice-to/as-expert paradox: they may have significant and serious life experiences as resources on which to draw in the writing classroom. Bartholomae notes that successful college writers "set themselves in their essays against what they defined as some more naïve way of talking about their subject...or against earlier, more naïve versions of
themselves" (153). It is not difficult to imagine that a military veteran would have some immediate, personal access to this kind of approach to a writing assignment: for example, a student-veteran could choose to contrast what the general public believes about combat or war to the reality, or consider the difference between how they would have dealt with a difficult moral question prior to their military service and how they would deal with such a question now. Similarly, Saltz and Sommers propose that student experience should be part of the writing experience and argue that instructors should "treat freshmen as apprentice scholars, giving them real intellectual tasks that allow students to bring their interests into a course" (140), and which encourage students to see that there may be a "greater purpose" to academic writing "than completing an assignment" (139). Those student-veterans who are willing and able to write about their military experiences are perhaps well-positioned to come to these sorts of realizations—that by virtue of their personal experiences they have an important contribution to make to scholarship about real, public, political, and moral issues.

Patricia Bizell's notion of "discourse community" reveals other ways that a student-veteran's military language experience can be an asset, rather than a liability, in the writing classroom. Bizzell defines a discourse community as a group of people who use a "preferred dialect," "in a convention-bound discourse...that creates and organizes the knowledge that constitutes the community's world view" (168). She is here talking about academia as a discourse community—a group of language users whose goals, projects, and values are constituted and served by the discourse conventions they
share—but this description could just as neatly apply to the military. Critical to this definition is the idea that a discourse community has a particular function or task that unifies its members, "some work in the world its members could not accomplish on their own" (Bizzell 222). So, for example, because part of academia's "work in the world" has to do with sharing scholarly discovery or challenging intellectual hypotheses, academic writing conventions dictate that outside sources be carefully cataloged and credited. Similarly, the military writing conventions of extreme brevity and standardized format testifies to the time-critical and dynamic task of conducting battlefield operations with which the military is charged.

This connection between a discourse community's values and purpose and the way it uses language, Bizzell argues, becomes internalized by the members of that community. As she suggests, language conventions don't just affect or promote a discourse community's work; they also promote "a certain kind of thinking" which may eventually become "a habit of mind" (227). Thus, the habits of mind of military veterans have been shaped by the kind of thinking the military encourages and depends on to do the kind of work it must do—thinking and work which are, frequently and quite literally, matters of life or death. As the military writing guides make clear, it is likely that a veteran's expectations for language use will be focused on conveying unambiguous and undeniable information. Asking a student-veteran to become comfortable with the conventions of academic discourse, which require "a relatively high tolerance for frequent debate over what the community knows" (Bizzell 139) and
which "always [involve] persuasion" (139) and "argument" (140), is asking for a monumental change—not just in the way a student-veteran writes but also in the way he thinks and what he values about language use.

However, it is because the military's language conventions are so emphatically—and transparently—related to the kinds of work the military must do that student-veterans may actually have an advantage over more traditional postsecondary writers. Bizzell suggests that the difficulties faced by basic writers have to do with "the initial distance between their world views and the academic world view, and perhaps also from the resistance to changing their own world views that is caused by this very distance" (168). These problems, in turn, mean that composition instructors "will find it hard to assess the difficulty" of helping students to "[acquire] the academic world view until we know how different it is from basic writers' home world views" (169), a task that is nearly impossible due to the incredible diversity of basic writers themselves. In the case of student-veterans, however, because (as the Ackerman study demonstrates) veterans seem to understand the military as a culture of which they were or are part, and because there is a clear and logical relationship between the way the military uses language and its function as an organization, we can know something about a student-veteran's world view and habits of mind, as well as how far it is from an academic world view. Additionally, it is likely that student-veterans will be less resistant to changing those views than the basic writers Bizzell describes; generally speaking, military members choose to separate from service with the knowledge that they face
significant cultural changes as they begin their civilian lives.

Bizzell's discussion of discourse communities emphasizes a further advantage enjoyed by student-veterans in the writing classroom: they have first-hand, experiential knowledge of how language use is related to the goals and values of a discourse community, even if they don't know how to term their knowledge as such. If a student-veteran can be encouraged to critically examine her previous experiences of becoming acclimated to military culture and language use, she can begin to understand how writing is related to the goals and functions of particular communities. Similar to the way that the military writing guides make clear the "why" and "how" of military writing as it relates to the military's purpose, composition instructors should make clear that—and in what ways—academic writing conventions relate to and are dependent on the worldview and function of academia. Student-veterans will likely have an informed appreciation for the fact that academic discourse "conventions are established in use, by consensus of the community this discourse unites....shaped by communal practice" (Bizzell 139). To put it another way, it may be a concept familiar to student-veterans that all writing (including academic writing) depends on the consensus of a community to determine and shape what qualifies as "good" writing, within the context of that community's goals—after all, the military writing guides are clear that they offer advice about "Air Force writing" (The Tongue and Quill 19) or "Army writing" (Effective Writing 1-3). Ultimately, composition instructors should capitalize on the fact that by joining the military in the first place, student-veterans have already negotiated a
significant change in the way they value language and knowledge. Instructors can then encourage student-veterans to rely on that experience as they develop a meta-awareness of the way language use depends on and constitutes the work that different discourse communities do.

Cultivating a sense of this meta-awareness about writing processes and goals can do more than simply make student-veterans aware of what a discourse community is: it can also help them develop flexibility in their thinking and writing. Anne Beaufort advocates a flexibility-focused approach to writing pedagogy, arguing that certain principles of writing can be transferred or adapted across contexts, especially when a writer can be made aware of the relationship between "institutional values and goals" and specific kinds of "writing and textual forms" (180). Beaufort is specifically considering whether and how academic writing can prepare students for the various kinds of professional writing they will eventually do, but her focus on the adaptability of writing skills could also apply to student-veterans engaged in the opposite process: moving from professional to academic writing. The key to such transferability, Beaufort suggests, is demonstrating to students that both "general" and "task-specific" knowledge about writing are required in order to produce writing that will be considered successful by an intended audience (182). Like Bizzell's theory, which posits a relationship between a discourse community's world view and its language usage, Beaufort's approach to writing instruction also suggests that it is worthwhile to consider the connection between an organization's values or priorities and its writing
conventions. Again, composition instructors may find it productive to encourage student-veterans to explore their previous experiences with language use in the military as an example of precisely this kind of relationship.

Asking student-veterans to articulate what they know about military language practices will help them develop what Beaufort calls a "meta-level awareness of problem-solving strategies for dealing with particular rhetorical contexts" (182), which she sees as crucial to the transference of writing skills. She asserts that if the "social norms, values, and constraints" of a discourse community are understood, discovering how to write for a new discourse community becomes much easier (186), but students must know to seek and discover them. Again, demystifying the goals and values of academic writing will be crucial to helping student-veterans focus on "writing as a series of problem-solving activities" (Beaufort 182), rather than "issues of form and content in a given genre" (183). This will be such a crucial realization for student-veterans, since (as the military writing guides demonstrate) what they have learned from the military about writing is that what matters are form and product, not process. For Beaufort, this is the "general knowledge" of writing—the idea that writing is, at its core, a method of solving problems, and can therefore be applied to a wide range of genres and contexts. A practical way to apply this principle in the classroom would be to ask student-veterans to attend to what problems military writing or language-use practices seek to solve, and how and in what ways academic writing attempts to respond to a different set of problems. The recognition that different kinds of writing—especially in
the context of specific discourse communities—have different rhetorical goals may encourage student-veterans to develop versatility in their own writing by framing it as a method of solving problems through language.

In fact, Mike Rose enjoyed success with just such a writing-as-problem-solving approach when he taught composition to a group of Vietnam War veterans in UCLA's "Veteran's Program" ("Reclaiming" 9). Rather than assigning simple writing tasks focused on personal reflection, he invited his students (all of whom, he indicates, would have been classified as remedial writers) to wrestle with academically challenging topics that would "orient [the veterans] to some of the...habits of mind" that Rose identified as crucial to his own academic success ("Reclaiming" 13). He structured the course around four "intellectual strategies" (summarizing, classifying, comparing, and analyzing) that he felt would encourage his "students to think about thinking," and thus develop the metacognition and problem-solving capacities that Beaufort also finds so important.

What is significant about Rose's approach is that he taught these "strategies" not only as forms or structures for writing, but also as approaches to understanding and processing new information—approaches that enable new kinds of thinking. Rose drew his student-veterans' attention to the way these thinking strategies functioned as frameworks which structured their thought, thereby helping to develop the kind of metacognition that seems so crucial to helping veterans leverage the knowledge they already possess about how writing conventions are related to the goals of a discourse
community. Rose did not ask his students to consider military writing, or how the military might function as a discourse community, but such an approach may provide an even more vivid exercise in understanding how "thinking strategies," writing forms, and organizational priorities are related. For example, asking student-veterans to reflect on what kinds of thinking are forestalled by military writing conventions and forms (perhaps a reader's disagreement with the writer) could help them see how writing conventions are not only related to language practices, but also to thinking practices.

In order for writing skills to truly transfer between contexts, it is necessary for students to consider not only the "general" principles or strategies of writing as a problem-solving activity, but also the "local," genre-specific conventions. Beaufort suggests that "[w]ith...metacognitive awareness of...problem-solving strategies for writing tasks, and...the lenses of genre and discourse community as a means of clarifying how texts work," we can prepare our students to apply their writing skills flexibly. It's not enough, for example, that students be able to recognize when a strategy of analysis is more appropriate than argumentation to solve some intellectual problem; they must also have some sense of how a philosophy paper differs from a literary analysis, or when first-person pronouns are likely to be acceptable in academic work and when they are not. Part of helping student-veterans to discover these stylistic nuances will be encouraging them to become aware of and define the differences in norms and standards of writing in different academic disciplines, and the expectations
of different audiences—the smaller discourse communities within the larger academic community.

The first step in this discovery, I would argue, will be helping student-veterans see that they already know a great deal about how discourse communities work—the way a community's values and goals are served and structured by its language and writing conventions—and that investigating what work a discourse community is engaged in will reveal what sorts of problem-solving or thinking strategies will be most effective, and what type of writing forms will be most familiar or expected by an audience. In this way, a student-veteran's previous military experience can be an asset in the writing classroom, helping him develop this kind of meta-awareness about how discourse communities work, and how this knowledge can help him transition to new genres and contexts of writing. Although the writing process, because it enables the very thought it structures, probably can't be taught with quite the same crawl-walk-run training program to which student-veterans are accustomed, composition instructors can, I believe, successfully demystify it in ways that draw on the writing and language knowledge that student-veterans already possess.
Chapter Three: A Pedagogy in Practice

[T]he old standby, the writing of essays on unforgettable grandparents and My First Job, seemed as appropriate for the veterans as a hymn at a crapshoot.

— Mike Rose, "Reclaiming the Classroom"

When Mike Rose taught composition early in his career to a group of Vietnam veterans as part of UCLA's "Veteran's Program," he found that he "worried most about the curriculum" ("Reclaiming" 12). In his view, the conventional pedagogies relied on by other Veteran's Program writing instructors—"a handbook of rules of grammar, lectures on subordination and parallelism, papers requiring students to narrate and describe" ("Reclaiming" 12)—were simply unsuitable for the veterans. Rose recognized that his student-veterans were "strangers in a strange land" ("Reclaiming" 16), and that asking them to focus on grammatical error or write essays that had nothing to do with either the realities of their experiences or the real work of academia would not meet their educational needs. Instead, he sought ways to help them become "immersed" in the new discourse the way a foreign language-learner would: by "moving around in the culture, participating as fully as he can, making mistakes, saying things half right, blushing, then being encouraged by a friendly native speaker to try again" ("Reclaiming" 16). What Rose was able to intuit from his teaching experiences was that his student-veterans faced more than just a change in a set of intellectual skills, and that those classroom practices that did not address the significant cultural transition they faced would ultimately fail to fully meet their needs. Composition instructors who
attend to what can be known about the military as a discourse community, as well as how a student-veteran's writing experiences and expectations intersect with current compositional theory, will be able to create a targeted and effective pedagogy and praxis that does address this cultural shift.

As David Bartholomae and others have suggested, a student learning to write at the university level must take a leap of faith of sorts—must assume the privilege of expertise well before he is truly entitled to it, in order to develop that very expertise. Such a leap will be difficult for a student-veteran, whose experiences with military writing—either as writer or reader—will have shaped his understanding of writing not as a way of thinking, but as a method of conveying precise, unambiguous information. Additionally, the veteran's experiences with military training will shape his expectation of learning as a series of gradually more complex steps in a standardized, linear process—not a sudden leap. A composition instructor whose classroom practices are sensitive to student-veterans' preconceptions about writing and learning, and address the differences between the military and academic discourse communities will be more successful at meeting the educational needs of student-veterans than one who assumes that all undergraduate writing students face the same difficulties in the classroom.

But what, specifically and in practical terms, would such a classroom look like? Mike Rose and Galen Leonhardy, himself a military veteran, have written about their experiences teaching veterans in postsecondary writing classes; these experiences may provide some useful examples for composition instructors. Interestingly, Rose and
Leonhardy took relatively different pedagogical approaches in their writing courses. Rose focused his teaching around four "intellectual strategies" as "a methodical way to get [his] students to think about thinking" ("Reclaiming" 13), while Leonhardy crafted writing assignments that built consecutively on each other, moving from sentence-combining exercises, to personal narrative essays, and eventually to academic argumentation (Leonhardy 350). What their approaches shared, however, was an acknowledgement of the fact that their student-veterans needed a way to "find inclusion" (Leonhardy 349), and to "be let into the academic club" ("Reclaiming" 16).

What these first-hand accounts of teaching student-veterans demonstrate is that attending to the emotional dimensions of the classroom community—whether student-veterans feel included, listened to, and welcomed—may be as important as considering academic or pedagogical questions.

One way a composition instructor could attend to the emotional dynamic of the writing classroom would be to incorporate some familiar principles of military learning and culture into her own pedagogy, which would ease some of the culture shock student-veterans feel in the new environment of the classroom. Leonhardy, for example, recommends "leading by example" (345) in the classroom, one of the very basic tenets of military training and mentorship. Leonhardy completes his own course assignments, writing the same essays his students do, which allows him "opportunities to remember...the feelings, the mistakes, the hurdles, and the accomplishments that go with learning college-level requirements" (345). Not only does this approach encourage
his students to feel that the work of the class and instructor is the shared work of a single community, but it also experientially reminds the instructor of the sometimes painful "physical and mental" effort of "pounding, shaping, and reshaping" a piece of writing (345). The principles of military leadership can be manifested in the writing classroom in other ways, as well: one of the essential components of leadership is stewardship—a sense of personal responsibility and care toward those being led. Rose and his tutors in the Veteran's Program demonstrated this kind of stewardship, making lots of time to meet frequently and individually with his students, investing themselves personally in the success of their students: "[w]e would flatter and plead and use the phone and yell...and, more than once, walk down to the Morrison Hotel [where many of the student-veterans lived] to pound on a door" ("Reclaiming" 26). If student-veterans can view their instructor as a leader and mentor, and especially as one who cares about them personally and has an earnest appreciation for their struggles, it will be easier for them to view the class as a team engaged in accomplishing some common goal—in other words, as a new discourse community of which they are important, contributing members.

Another principle of military learning familiar to student-veterans that would be worthwhile to incorporate into an academic writing classroom is the "crawl, walk, run" approach. Although writing an effective academic essay can't exactly be taught as a series of simple, linear steps—which is generally how the "crawl, walk, run" process works—it may be possible to apply this principle of military training in other ways.
One option might be to think about writing assignments not as isolated exercises, but instead as a sequence of writing "moments," which build on each other gradually to culminate in a final assignment. For example, an instructor might ask his students to "crawl" by writing a short personal response to a complex intellectual question: What makes something funny? For the "walk" phase, student-veterans would revise and lengthen their essays after reading accessible essays or articles that broaden their understanding of the topic (modern critical essays about humor and newspaper articles about scientific studies on laughter, for example). The "run" phase could include further, more complex or difficult reading (the humor theories of Freud, Kant, Hobbes, and Aristotle) to deepen and complicate the students' thinking about the topic, as well a final revision of the original essay. As part of the "run" phase, the students could also be asked to write a short commentary about how their own writing changed as their thinking developed throughout the assignment sequence in response to a single, constant question. For student-veterans, it might be particularly reassuring to hear the instructor call the various assignments by familiar terminology ("This is the 'crawl' assignment, but by the end of the semester, you'll be running."), but the real pedagogical goal of the sequence would be for students to understand that writing develops as part of an ongoing and continual process, rather than as a series of procedural steps.

Mike Rose used a version of the "crawl, walk, run" strategy with reading assignments for his veterans' composition course. He asked his students to compare short readings about similar topics, beginning with easy essays and gradually increasing
the difficulty of the reading; he culminated one reading series by asking his students to compare an aboriginal creation myth and a scientific explanation of the Big Bang ("Reclaiming" 17-18). What makes this technique effective in helping student-veterans is that the move from simple to difficult material is made visible and explicit in the classroom; it seems likely that student-veterans who are aware that they are being asked to overcome increasingly complex challenges—just as they were throughout their military training—will enjoy a residual self-confidence in their abilities as learners.

This idea of making processes of learning and writing explicit to student-veterans cannot be overemphasized, since it is probably the most powerful way to leverage what student-veterans already know about language use. Military veterans are aware of the notion (if not the nomenclature) of a discourse community: why it exists, what language has to do with a discourse community's role or function in the world, and how joining a new discourse community involves both a change in language use and a change in the self. Student-veterans can and should be made aware that academia, like the military, is a discourse community that requires them to consider what goals and values they are serving through new ways of using language and writing.

One practical approach to encouraging student-veterans to see academia as a discourse community would be to employ a version of Wayne Booth's approach to reading and doing cultural anthropology, in which he asks his students to consider "how cultures are constituted in discourse" (78). So, for example, instructors could ask students to examine the relationship between culture, language, and the self by directing
them to read sections of Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words*, or Fan Shen's 1989 essay, "The Classroom and the Wider Culture," or even to examine a military writing guide or training manual. It would then be crucial to ask students (either in classroom discussion or writing) to extend that consideration to the more localized cultures of the campus and classroom, as well. Student-veterans who are able to analogize their experiences of becoming members of the military to their experiences of coming to college and doing academic writing will have access to powerful, experience-based insights about what kinds of cultural transitions they actually face.

Booth also suggests students can be encouraged to consider the relationship between culture, history, and language through comparison assignments, in which students read and write about different accounts of some historical event. Some student-veterans might be interested in considering the differences in accounts of war—comparing, for example, a historical newspaper article about WWI and a Wilfred Owen poem, or even differing accounts of the current conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan. For example, *Generation Kill* and *One Bullet Away* both describe the actions of the US Marine Corps' 1st Reconnaissance Battalion during the initial ground invasion of Iraq—one first-hand account written by a Rolling Stone reporter, the other by the executive officer of the unit in which the reporter was embedded. Examining the differences between the two accounts of the same events and people (events and people, incidentally, that may be uncannily familiar to student-veterans) would help them see that meaning is actually shaped and created through language, and not simply reported,
as the military writing guides seem to indicate. Part of this assignment should also require student-veterans to think about why the accounts are different; such a consideration of audience and the authors' rhetorical goals would highlight that different discourse communities have different language-use practices and values. Whatever approach the instructor takes—whether an assignment focused on some kind of cultural anthropology or a comparison of historical accounts—the crucial element is that instructors help student-veterans develop a meta-level awareness about their language use by thinking and writing about how cultural contexts affect language use, how culture is constituted by language, and why communities use language in different—and sometimes highly oppositional—ways.

In addition to focusing on these larger issues of discourse community and culture, composition instructors might also consider incorporating personal writing assignments into their curricula. Journal writing can be a fruitful exercise for a student-veteran working towards more sophisticated, academic writing, because the experiences a veteran is likely to write about may easily connect to larger social or historical issues. Leonhardy assigns personal journaling to his students, which he later asks them to develop into narrative essays, and finally into a research-based persuasive essay (again, a version of the "crawl, walk, run" strategy); one student's final paper, for example, was an essay about veteran's medical benefits (344). Finding ways to demonstrate to student-veterans that their personal experiences may connect directly to larger societal
concerns, as well as issues with which the academy is directly engaged, may help student-veterans feel less like outsiders in the academic community.

Of course, war and the military certainly aren't the only subjects with which a student-veteran will be able to personally engage in the classroom. Reading and writing assignments which address issues of other kinds of personal transitions—coming-of-age narratives, for example—might be good options, especially those in which characters struggle with a sense of ambivalence about a past self or past life. As the Ackerman study pointed out, many veterans struggle with simultaneous feelings of happiness, relief, guilt, and nostalgia over their separation from the military, and student-veterans may be especially invested in thinking through and responding to a fictional character's response to such feelings.

For instructors who do want to give student-veterans the opportunity to consider the transition home from war in particular, Tim O'Brian's *The Things They Carried* would be a rich source for reading and writing response assignments. The novel is not just about making a transition to war and home again, but also the difficulty and importance of writing about those experiences, as well as larger intellectual questions about the nature of truth and the self. O'Brien's novel depicts the challenge (or even impossibility) of ever arriving at some final, resolved response to war experience: "[i]n many cases," he writes, "a true war story cannot be believed...[i]n other cases you can't even tell a true war story. Sometimes it's just beyond telling" (71). Despite the inability of language to convey the truth about war, however, O'Brien also suggests that it is
necessary for those who have experienced war to tell their stories: "[o]ften they were exaggerated, or blatant lies, but it was a way of bringing body and soul back together, or a way of making new bodies for the souls to inhabit" (239). Asking a student-veteran to consider what O'Brien means by this paradox—that language is both inadequate and necessary to the process of coming home from war—could resonate powerfully with her own feelings of ambivalence toward her military experiences, and could result in some very strong, engaged writing.

Regardless of the kinds of assignment an instructor gives—whether personal writing or more traditional academic essays—probably the most difficult task in the writing classroom for a student-veteran will be to stop thinking of writing as product and to start thinking of writing as process. Military writing guides make clear that it is product, not process, that matters—in fact, the shorter and less complicated the process, the better; what matters is that the writer quickly produce a document in a standardized format, which can be easily understood "at a single rapid reading" (Effective Writing 1-4). Like writing, military training is also product-focused: everyone participating in a training or operational scenario knows certain steps are required to achieve the desired "mission objective." Composition instructors, then, will have to help student-veterans balance their emphasis on the finished writing product or assignment objective with a focus on the writing process as a way of seeing and re-seeing, and of knowing in new ways—not as a series of steps-in-sequence to be followed methodically for every writing task. Although student-veterans will likely need instructors to cover some basic
academic writing conventions, it will be more important that instructors help student-veterans become used to a way of learning that isn't entirely rule-based. For example, Leonhardy identified sentence-combining as a "foundational" (343) skill for academic writing, and he makes clear that this skill connects directly to writing as a form of thinking, and not just as a stand-alone rule that must always be followed. Student-veterans will likely need practice with sentence-combining in order to fully understand that complex ideas may—and frequently do—resist a single rapid reading, and instead necessitate longer and more complex sentence structures.

Instructors can help further ease the transition from product-centered or objective-oriented writing and learning by making their expectations and evaluation standards clear. It will be very important to a student-veteran's comfort and confidence with an assignment to know whether and how she will be evaluated; this could come in the form of a well-written grading rubric given at the beginning of the course, or in the form of individual assignment requirements. This maybe easiest to do with a series of assignments that build on and incorporate earlier, revised work—such as the "crawl, walk, run" assignment sequence. In this case, the grading rubric might include the requirement that the student's writing demonstrates a development in the complexity of the student's thinking about the topic or rhetorical strategies.

It will also be important that instructors hold their students to the standards enumerated by the grading rubric or assignment requirements; student-veterans who are accustomed to (sometimes brutally) honest evaluations of their military performance
will gain little from feedback that doesn't seem engaged and sincere. By giving student-veterans frequent feedback about low-stakes writing assignments (even when the feedback is negative), composition instructors will convey a sense that they are invested in the student-veteran's progress, that they believe in the student-veteran's ability to succeed, and that positive feedback is genuinely earned.

Finally, composition instructors should look for ways to encourage student-veterans to participate in their larger academic and civil communities through their writing. Student-veterans could write about any number of important social issues affecting military veterans in and out of college (education and medical benefits, for example, or the alarming rise in divorce and suicide rates among veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars), and with a wide range of audiences in mind—from the editor of the campus newspaper to their senators. Expanding the purposes of writing assignments will help student-veterans to focus on their writing in terms of audience and rhetorical strategies, as well as to understand why learning to write persuasive, well-researched, and well-reasoned essays is important for reasons beyond grades and transcripts. Although it is, of course, crucial that composition instructors help their student-veterans to achieve academic success, it is perhaps even more important for teachers of writing to realize that they are uniquely poised to help their student-veterans see the potential power of writing to shape their lives beyond the classroom walls.
Chapter Four: Writing Beyond the Classroom

One thousand years ago, a Chinese general led his army across the border into Viet Nam. He espied an enemy soldier keeping watch in the moonlight. The soldier was reciting poetry. The general turned back, saying, "We don't fight with a people whose soldiers sing poems."

—Maxine Hong Kingston, The Fifth Book of Peace

To ensure their success in postsecondary education, student-veterans must learn to write in ways that acknowledge and adhere to the expectations and conventions of the academic discourse community. However, other genres of writing, especially personal, reflective, and even therapeutic writing, may be more crucial to the success of veterans in the greater scope of their lives as emotional beings. I would here like to consider whether the postsecondary writing classroom might provide opportunities for student-veterans to pursue these other kinds of writing—writing that is perhaps more creative, intimate, and personally meaningful than the analytic or argumentative essays more traditional to the composition classroom. Helping student-veterans (especially those struggling with the traumatic effects of combat) see that the writing process can, in the words of composition theorist Richard Miller, "serve the function of generating hope" (282), not just analysis, would have substantial and positive implications beyond the classroom walls.

Incorporating this kind of hopeful, personal writing—writing that acknowledges the embodied experiences of the writer and perhaps imagines new, better possibilities for the writer's future—within the formal setting of academia may be difficult, however.
The classroom rarely feels like the appropriate place to reveal intimate details about lived experience; such personal testimony can feel like an inappropriate disruption, generating physical feelings of discomfort or embarrassment in the listeners or readers. Miller suggests that in the wrong context, "the revelation of personal experience" can even produce "revulsion" (281). These moments of unease demonstrate the distance between the personal and the academic—two categories of meaning and knowledge that can seem like "polarized positions" (Miller 267), mutually exclusive of each other.

So where does that leave a teacher of student-veterans who recognizes that personal writing may be as important for a student-veteran's transition to civilian life as academic writing is for his transition to academic life? One answer may be found by reimagining writing not as either academic or personal, but rather as "a place where the personal and the academic, the private and the public, the individual and the institutional, are always and inextricably interwoven" (Miller 267). Strikingly, a veteran's personal experience of military culture—and especially combat—seems a precise and obvious example of this exact nexus: a place where it is nearly impossible to untangle the self from the group, or the efforts of a private individual from the institutional work being done. The prevailing attitude of academia about writing does not always highlight those imbrications of the personal and the public in writing, so composition instructors must find creative ways to demonstrate the way the two categories connect with and affect each other. Miller suggests that one way to accomplish both kinds of work in the classroom might be to "expand our notion of the
rhetorical project to include the ongoing work of learning to make oneself heard in a variety of contexts” (282), deliberately inviting the personal into the classroom in order to make room for it there. The intellectual and emotional satisfaction for student-veterans of really being seen and heard (to the extent they choose make themselves visible and audible in personal writing or speech), not only by the instructor but also by their classmates is a feeling that, as the Ackerman study made evident, is crucial to a student-veteran's ability to feel fully recognized and accepted by their classroom and campus communities.

Especially pertinent to helping student-veterans see writing as a method of not just intellectual but also emotional exploration is the notion that writing can be a powerful intervention in one's embodied reality—that writing has the capacity to make meaning or even shape and reshape the self. Miller construes composition broadly as "the art of putting oneself and one's writing together" (273) and references the ability of writing to revise a painful past, since writing about memories "invites, or even requires, the intervention of an organizing, revivifying principle...[i]n place of chaos and confusion, order and clarity" (275-6). Student-veterans should be exposed to this and other composition theories that recognize the ability of composition to revise past experiences, as there is likely no student population in greater need of putting themselves together than veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. While, as the Ackerman study indicates, student-veterans may feel ambivalence about the idea of totally disconnecting from their past experiences, they likely will need a way to redefine
those experiences and themselves as they transition to civilian life—precisely the kind of redefinition that writing enables.

Part of what some student-veterans may seek to redefine in particular are the realities of combat that they carry with them: real, embodied, physical and mental injuries. According to issue reports from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, a nonprofit veteran advocacy group that frequently testifies before Congress on legislative veterans' issues, approximately twenty percent of the tens of thousands of troops returning from combat in the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will suffer from the "invisible wounds" of post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries, while "[h]undreds of thousands of veterans" will seek medical care or disability benefits for their physical wounds (Mulhall and Williamson 1). In the face of so much injury and pain, professional writers and writing teachers are already extending their support to veterans by creating and conducting writing programs and extracurricular workshops, which offer veterans the power of language to shape and transform the traumatic experiences of war into possibilities for healing. Instructors of academic writing can look to these writing programs for ways to offer veterans the support they need in undertaking the arduous project of attempting to heal the devastating wounds of combat through the productive power of writing.

It may actually be an understatement to call such a project arduous; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History, suggest that the project may even be a dangerous or
impossible one. The testimony of a war veteran may disturb both the listener and the speaker, the reader and the writer, as witnessing "leads to the experience of an existential crisis in all those involved" (Felman and Laub xvi). This crisis may be understood as a radical rupture in the stability of meaning, as well as the sense of the self, as those who give and those who receive testimony may find themselves "entirely at a loss, uprooted and disoriented, and profoundly shaken" in their fundamental beliefs (Felman and Laub xvi). Part of this disorientation may be attributable to the way testimony offers no ultimate resolution, but instead uses language "in process and in trial" (Felman and Laub 5). A combat veteran who attempts to put into words the traumatic events he or she has experienced must, therefore, confront these dangers—the profound instability of meaning and ultimate inability of language to express truth.

These dangers are further exacerbated by the fact that in the face of extreme trauma, language may simply fail. Tim O'Brien, a veteran of the Vietnam War, references this insufficiency of language to express the truth about war in *The Things They Carried*, writing that "there's nothing much to say about a true war story, except maybe "Oh" (77). Similarly, Paul Celan, a poet whose work reflects his experience as a Holocaust survivor, is unable to write about his war experience through structured narrative, so instead must write "elliptically and circularly...through the obsessional, compulsive repetitions and the vertiginous explosion of a mad song" which "bursts at once into a speechless, voiceless crying" (Felman and Laub 29). Language fails Celan; his testimony disintegrates into what Elaine Scarry would call "a state anterior to
language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Linear narrative cannot express what Celan has experienced because the extremity and trauma of the Holocaust defy any meaningful expression; to put it another way, the experience of the Holocaust has broken the linguistic structure of narrative. Felman describes such a disintegration of language in her students, who had watched a video of first-hand testimony of Holocaust survivors: although the class "throughout the course, had been particularly literate and eloquent," during and after the screening, they were "inarticulate and speechless. They looked subdued and kept their silence even as they left" (47). She calls this reaction "an anxiety of fragmentation," describing the feelings the class experienced as "a sort of panic that consisted in both emotional and intellectual disorientation" (49). War veterans, writing about their traumatic experiences, thus must struggle with dangers posed by the fundamental breakage of language, and the disorienting fragmentation of the emotional and intellectual self, attendant on the act of bearing witness.

Although language or writing may not be able to offer a totalized understanding of a traumatic event, it may offer other types of individual resolution—the opportunity to revise the impact of past traumas, as events are "reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the text" (Felman and Laub xiv-xv). Even more powerfully, testimony may be a way to actually create truth, as "the one who (in fact) witnesses" becomes the "one who begets" the truth (Felman and Laub 16). Ultimately, it may be that despite the limitations of language, attempting to put
traumatic memories of war and combat into words is the only way war veterans have of truly coming home; as Tim O'Brien puts it, expressing the impact of his war experiences in writing is "Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story" (246). Those writing programs or composition curricula that allow student-veterans the opportunity to create meaning out of their wartime experiences may thus also allow them to reclaim a sense of wholeness through language, in spite of its deficiencies.

That sense of wholeness is measurable, even palpable; clinical psychological studies show, both subjectively and objectively, positive results from writing about emotionally traumatic or stressful events. Developed by James Pennebaker, the clinical application of therapeutic writing has been shown to facilitate physical benefits for those who write about emotional events, including both long term improvements to the immune system as well as short term results such as lowered heart and respiratory rates (Pennebaker 162). Therapeutic writing also produces favorable changes in writers' behavior, including improved grades for students, and a lower rate of absences from work (Pennebaker 162). Merely communicating emotional trauma—through other approaches such as movement or art therapies, for example—does not produce these kinds of health and behavior improvements; these benefits necessitate writing. In one study conducted by Pennebaker, a group of students was asked to "express a traumatic experience using bodily movement" (164) only, while another group was asked to express themselves through both movement and writing; notably, "only the movement-plus-writing group showed significant improvements in physical health and grade point
average" (164). Pennebaker's conclusion, that "[t]he mere expression of a trauma is not sufficient," and "[h]ealth gains appear to require translating expression into" words (164), recognizes the productive power of language; however, he misidentifies the crucial aspect of that power: it is not the ability of language to "translate" experience, but rather, the ability of language to shape, re-make, and transform both experience and the self that creates change in the writer.

Leaders of veterans' writing programs share this understanding of writing as something more than the process of simply recording thoughts as they happen, more than just transcribing memories and ideas as they unfold in the mind. Although there is value in the telling of a story—for both the teller and the listener—veterans who participate in these programs seek something beyond mere communication. Sean McLain Brown, a veteran of the first Gulf War struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, said of his participation in Maxine Hong Kingston's writing program that he "was not only telling a story of something" he had experienced, but more importantly, was "find[ing] [his] way back from feeling incomplete" (Berton). Another of Kingston's workshop participants, asked by Kingston whether he felt changed by writing, replied, "[y]es, I can change myself, writing" (Kingston, Fifth 263). Writing, it seems, offers possibilities not just of reflection and communication, but also of production, evolution, completion, creation.

Exposing student-veterans to theories of writing that acknowledge this productive, creative power of writing will help them realize why writing matters outside
of the composition classroom. Ann Berthoff would be an excellent theorist for student-veterans to read, since she notes that language is "our chief means of shaping...experience" (19), and that writing is an act of the mind "by which we make meaning" (26). Literary critic and theorist Wayne Booth would be another excellent choice, since he argues that in addition to making meaning, writing has the capacity to make much more, asking "[w]hat kinds of reality can be made only—or made best" through writing (64, emphasis mine). Booth points to examples of the ways writing can make the present (through constructions and reconstructions of the self in political rhetoric), the past (in journalism and history), and the future (through written law). This notion that writing can make something, can materialize realities of the self and the world, is especially crucial to the work done by and through veterans' writing programs—Kingston, for example, asks the veteran participants in her program to "[t]ell the truth," and "so make peace" (Veterans 3, emphasis mine). Instructors should make explicit to their student-veterans the fact that writing can do more than advance an argument or tell a story; they should know that writing gives them the ability and opportunity to remake the past, their present selves, and our collective future.

Kingston chronicled her experiences leading her writing group for veterans in her 2003 book, The Fifth Book of Peace. Her narrative provides excellent examples of how to demonstrate this generative power of writing (while also dealing with extremely personal, often traumatic experiences) to returning war veterans, and would be an excellent resource for instructors of postsecondary composition interested in this kind of
approach. Because Kingston is aware of what words may have the power to do, she crafts the invitation to write about war carefully, offering gentle guidance and mindful, meditative practices. At her first workshop, she cataloged the veterans' temporal distance from the wars they fought, emphasizing their return home: "You veterans of the Viet Nam War have been home for almost two decades...Korean War veterans have been home for almost forty years...for the World War II veteran, it has been half a century that you are home" (Kingston, Fifth 259). She sought to bring these veterans back from war through language, hoping that if they heard her "voice repeating 'home...home...home,' they might follow it and return home" (Kingston, Fifth 260). She asks the writers in her workshops to be equally deliberate with their language as well, suggesting that they write by using "the other senses" (writing, to Kingston, is itself a sense) to describe "the smell and taste of it, the sound and touch of it" (Kingston, Fifth 266). One of Kingston's guest instructors, National Book Award-winning novelist Larry Heinemann, himself a Vietnam War veteran, also emphasizes the importance and the power of using language precisely, urging the workshop participants to:

Tell the truth. Tell the truth with your whole body...When you write the pain of war, you will relive it. You're going to live through the pain again...the emotions, the smells. But this time, you have a method for handling it—writing. You can control it, put it down,
pick it up. Writing is a craft of the hand. (qtd. in
Kingston, *Fifth* 290)

Implicit in these approaches is a sense that language and writing can intervene in traumatic, embodied experiences—that it can produce a real change in the writer, controlling actual, felt pain, bringing the writer home.

One effective approach to demonstrating the transformative power of writing would be for instructors to emphasize the process of revision as a kind of exact craft in which the writer painstakingly shapes and reshapes meaning through careful language. Kingston describes rewriting as a repeated journey into a tunnel from which more knowledge is brought out, telling the veterans that through the revision process, they will be able to "see more details, and make better sense" of a traumatic event (Kingston, *Fifth* 327). She asks them to "shine more light on some question, problem, hard time, suffering, memory, ignorance," and promises that they "will return home a different person. The story changes, and you change" (Kingston, *Fifth* 327). This kind of faith in the ultimately productive and transformative power of careful writing—as well as the recognition that the veterans have stories that need to be told—should underpin every instructor's approach to teaching veterans how to write about their experiences of war.

There is another lesson for composition instructors that Kingston's workshops approach demonstrates: the way a workshop setting conveys a sense of strength, support, and community to the participating writers. This sense of community is frequently missing from the academic classroom. Anne Ruggles Gere contrasts the way
that academic writing produces "autonomous individuals willing to adopt the language and perspectives of others," while "[c]omposition's extracurriculum," as practiced in nonacademic writing workshops, "frequently serves the opposite function" (89-90) by forging a sense of community among writers. The surveyed veterans of the Ackerman study expressed a similar need: to feel connected to other veterans, to feel that they are part of a community. Including the notion of the "extracurricular" in planning a course syllabus may be especially important for a postsecondary composition instructor who is teaching student-veterans, because it demonstrates an instructor's commitment to the idea that writing can be a source of solidarity and support as much as an academic skill to be learned. As Gere puts it, writing should not be thought of as "a barrier to be overcome, but an activity we do" as a connected group of individuals (Gere 88). A workshop approach can also help student-veterans feel included in the life of the university—rather than barred from it—by virtue of the power it vests in its participants, allowing them to determine "who will represent whom in what terms and in what language" (89). This aspect of the writing workshop approach would address another concern expressed by the student-veterans of the Ackerman study: their discomfort with being asked to speak on behalf of all military personnel, or all veterans. The informal atmosphere of a workshop approach, as well as its dual emphasis on individual voice and a sense of community among participants, might make it an excellent choice for composition instructors.
Of course, in a conventional composition classroom, a workshop approach to personal writing could exacerbate a student-veteran's feelings of isolation from his or her nonveteran peers. Rather than encourage a sense of connection, the vast differences—for example, between the stresses of living in a freshman dorm and the stresses of combat—would be magnified by small-group discussions about essays on those topics. Would it be fair for a composition instructor to assign a student-veteran to write about his or her military experiences? Mike Rose points to this concern when he suggests that "some of our students—particularly those from certain minority cultures—might not feel comfortable revealing highly personal experiences" ("Reclaiming" 113). Rather than making personal writing a requirement in the writing classroom, then, perhaps a better way to employ a workshop approach would be for composition instructors to coordinate with professional, on-campus counseling services to offer extracurricular veterans' writing workshops outside of the structure of academic classes, for interested student-veterans. Such a self-selecting group would likely benefit from the sense of community and healing that a therapeutic writing workshop could provide, without having to share any deeply personal and or traumatic memories with classmates who have few resources for responding to such writing in a meaningful or productive way.

Thus, composition instructors have several options for helping student-veterans understand the possibilities of all writing to shape new meanings, not just for intellectual and academic questions, but also for their intimate, possibly painful,
embodied experiences. Consciously incorporating personal writing in the classroom in ways that avoid magnifying a veteran's feelings of difference serves as one approach; asking student-veterans to examine and respond to composition theories that focus on the power of writing to make meaning is another. Perhaps the best approach, especially if used in addition to the other two, would be to give student-veterans a chance to come together as a community of writers by offering creative writing workshops outside of the formal structure of class. Of course, this approach would require that an instructor dedicate the extracurricular time and effort to organizing, coordinating, and administering such a workshop, which is admittedly asking much of instructors who already have significant professional and personal responsibilities. In light of the great sacrifices and service of their student-veterans, however, it isn't too much to ask. Composition instructors must realize that they bear a responsibility toward their student-veterans; because they are in a unique position to demonstrate what writing can do, intellectually and emotionally, they are also in a unique position to contribute to their veteran-students' successes, both in the classroom and beyond.
"I...do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

- U.S. Army Oath of Enlistment

"I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense."

- U.S. Armed Forces Code of Conduct

About three years ago, my fiancé and I, both military veterans, received our required pre-marriage counseling from Commander Dennis Rocheford, a Catholic chaplain in the Navy. Before he became a priest, Father Dennis had earned two Purple Heart Medals and a Bronze Star for gallantry in action as an enlisted Marine during the Vietnam War; as a Navy chaplain, he made several consecutive deployments to Iraq, ministering to Marines on the battlefield. He was kind and warm, and gently reminded Chris and me that we must always give our best to each other. He suggested that we consider incorporating John 15:13 as a reading in our wedding ceremony: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Unbeknownst to either of us, Father Dennis was, at the time, struggling mightily with the cumulative effects of his combat experiences in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder and
severe depression. On a Thursday morning last September, he lost that battle when he jumped to his death from Newport Bridge into Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island.

Father Dennis's story is not an isolated incident: in 2009, an article published in *The New York Times* revealed that "suicides among soldiers in 2008 rose for the fourth year in a row, reaching the highest level in nearly three decades" (Alvarez). America, as a democracy and as a culture, simply must do a better job of supporting its military veterans as they transition into civilian society; for many of our young veterans who choose to pursue higher education, a dedicated teacher could make the difference between success and failure—even, perhaps, between life and death. Soliciting the kind of personal and emotional investment I have advocated in the previous chapters is, admittedly, asking much of college professors: after all, they are not trained therapists and these young men and women are not their children. But, to put it simply, our veterans deserve this kind of support. Their needs may be great, but what they have given at the behest of our government and society is greater.

In a 2009 post on his blog, Mike Rose excerpted a chapter titled "Soldiers in the Classroom" from his upcoming book *Why School?: Reclaiming Education for All of Us*. He is blunt and honest about the complex needs of student-veterans, arguing that "to respond adequately to [their] educational needs, [educational programs must] address psychological, social, and economic needs as well." He recalls the emotional dimensions of his experiences teaching Vietnam veterans—their appreciation for a sense of community, their frustrations with challenging academic work, their stated
need to "explain to those closest to them the hell they endured." He affirms what I have here argued for: an education for veterans that "of necessity, has to go beyond the classroom." Composition instructors, by virtue of the complicated, powerful, personal, and necessary subject they teach, are uniquely positioned among all postsecondary educators to provide just this kind of education.

Crucial to meeting the needs of student-veterans in the writing classroom will be the earnest efforts of instructors to familiarize themselves with the military as a discourse community. Instructors must seek ways to increase their understanding of the military as a culture by undertaking an education of their own. Consulting military writing guides (some of which may actually be found in their own university libraries), observing military leadership classes given by ROTC instructors on campus, attending military air shows, or simply asking a military veteran about his or her experiences are all simple and readily accessible ways for a composition instructor to increase his knowledge of military culture and discourse. Instructors who want a deeper, more intensive experience could take advantage of opportunities like the Navy's "Leaders to Sea" program, in which community leaders (including educators) embark in a Navy ship at sea for day or two, completely immersing themselves in the life and work of the deployed sailors. These sorts of extracurricular efforts of instructors to better understand the cultural transitions required by leaving the military and coming to college will go a long way towards helping student-veterans feel welcomed, accepted, and encouraged by the academic community.
Veterans returning from World War II enjoyed generous and effective support from American society and government; veterans' benefits, including the original G.I. Bill, allowed them to buy homes for their families and to attend and succeed in higher education. Suzanne Mettler's recent study of WWII veterans' experiences with the original G.I. Bill's benefits revealed that the smooth implementation of the program conveyed "powerful messages" about how their service was valued by America at large, and about "their own worth as citizens in the polity" (59). We are now at a similar turning point in American history; we must dedicate ourselves to sending as powerful and appreciable a message about how we value the service and sacrifices of the current generation of military veterans as we did following World War II. "Supporting the troops" must not be mere rhetoric; educators must focus on finding ways to truly support the educational and personal success of veterans—not just because they need the support, but because they have rightfully earned it.
Bibliography


