



2015

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Recommended Citation

Hartshorn, K. James and Evans, Norman W. (2015) "The Journal of Response to Writing: A Response to a Professional Need," *Journal of Response to Writing*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/journalrw/vol1/iss1/2>

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JOURNAL OF RESPONSE TO WRITING

The Journal of Response to Writing: A Response to a Professional Need

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In a conversation with an editor of the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, the question was asked, “What is the most popular topic of submitted manuscripts to the Journal?” The response was as decisive as it was quick, “That’s easy. Feedback or response to writing is by far the most commonly submitted topic.” That brief exchange triggered a number of questions that needed answers. First and foremost among those questions is, if response to writing is such a popular topic, might there be a need within our profession for another venue for such scholarship? Though the *Journal of Second Language Writing* is extraordinary at disseminating the highest quality research on broad aspects of second language writing, space within its pages is limited. Therefore, we determined to investigate whether there is indeed a need for another venue for quality scholarship on response to writing for international dissemination.

The Study

Aims of this Study

This brief report presents the findings of an exploratory survey used to gather data regarding the potential interest and benefits of initiating a

new academic journal designed to focus on response to writing. Survey questions sought to identify (1) the perceived importance of feedback to writing improvement, (2) the relative importance of teachers focusing on language or content when working with native and non-native learners, (3) how often teachers consult specific types of scholarship associated with writing and how they access it, (4) the perceived need for a new scholarly journal that would focus exclusively on response to writing, and (5) teachers' views about the most important areas for future research.

Participants

The survey was sent to 1608 writing teachers from around the world and was completed by 544 individuals. First, we provide some background information about the respondents to help contextualize the findings of this study. On average, respondents had taught writing for 17.52 years. Most held advanced degrees as shown in Table 1 and worked in a variety of specialized areas of writing as shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Educational level of respondents

| <u>Educational level</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Completed bachelor's degree | 1.67% |
| Working on master's degree | 1.67% |
| Completed master's degree | 32.84% |
| Working on doctoral degree | 12.80% |
| Completed doctoral degree | 51.02% |

Table 2. Professional backgrounds of respondents

| <u>Professional backgrounds</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Foreign/second language teaching | 57.89% |
| Second language writing | 45.46% |
| Rhetoric/composition | 39.33% |
| Applied linguistics | 36.18% |
| Editing | 20.59% |
| Literature studies | 19.67% |
| Creative writing | 11.50% |

The Importance of Feedback to Writing Pedagogy

Participants in this study first addressed the question, how important is feedback to writing improvement? The purpose of this question was to help clarify the perceptions of the respondents regarding the underlying premise of a journal designed to focus on response to writing. Figure 1 displays response frequencies from the 5-point Likert-scale item. These results show that more than 90% of the teachers believe strongly in the importance of feedback to writing improvement. Perhaps one respondent's comment captures the level of importance best, "Response to writing is not part of teaching writing, it IS teaching writing. It's the heart and soul."

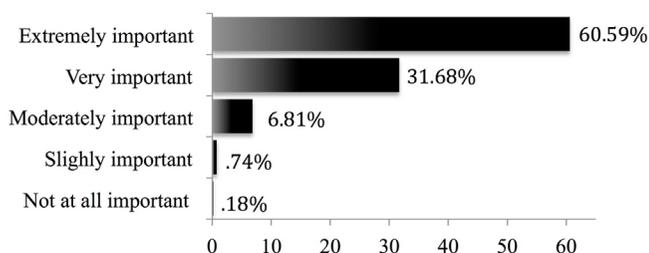


Figure 1. Teachers' view of the importance of feedback on writing

Differences in Responding to L1 and L2 Writing

Respondents also answered the question, when responding to student writing, what percent of your feedback is focused on language issues (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, mechanics) versus content issues (e.g., idea development, rhetoric, genre, style, organization) for non-native and native speakers? The purpose of this question was to determine whether practice differs depending on the language background of the learners. Table 3 presents mean percentages (M) and standard deviations (SD). Though the comparison of the feedback focusing on content for native and non-native speakers was statistically significant, $t(481) = -3.063$, $p = .001$, the effect size was negligible ($\eta^2 = .019$). However, the comparison focusing on language issues was statistically significant, $t(481) = -17.714$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = .395$). This suggests that while there may be some similarities in how writing teachers address content for their native and non-native students, they may believe that non-native

learners need a much greater focus on language-related issues. These findings are consistent with findings from other studies (e.g., Evans, Hartshorn, & Tuioti, 2010; Hartshorn, Evans, Tuioti, 2014).

Table 3. Mean percentages

| Native Language | Language | | Content | | Other |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|--------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | |
| Non-native English speakers | 38.94% | (21.90) | 54.78% | (24.03) | 6.28% |
| Native English speakers | 17.80% | (20.20) | 47.09% | (53.80) | 35.11% |

The Most Impactful Types of Scholarship

Teachers also responded to the question: *How often do you consult scholarship in the following areas?* The respective areas included writing program administration, writing centers, composition theory, L2 writing theory, composition pedagogy, L2 writing teaching, and responding to writing. Our purpose in asking this question was to determine which areas of scholarship appeared to have the largest impact on the practice of writing teachers. We reasoned that a new journal would only be useful if it focused on the areas of greatest need for the practitioners. Participants responded to a 6-point Likert scale which included the following categories: never (1), rarely (2), occasionally (3), regularly (4), frequently (5), and very frequently (6).

The frequency comparison across the seven areas of scholarship was significant, $F(6,3643)=40.921$, $p<.001$. Table 4 shows the number of responses (*N*), the mean (*M*), and standard deviation (*SD*) for each type of scholarship. Frequencies ranged between rarely and occasionally for writing program administration and writing centers and ranged between occasionally and regularly for composition theory, L2 writing theory, composition pedagogy, L2 writing teaching, and responding to student writing.

Table 4 also presents the results of a Tukey HSD test, which shows where statistically significant differences were observed across types of scholarship. The table shows six statistically significant groups differentiated by columns 1-6. While types of scholarship marked (X) within a single column are not significantly different from each other, they differ from the other types of scholarship marked (-) within each column. For example, access to scholarship on writing program administration did not differ

significantly from scholarship on writing centers, though it did differ from composition theory and each of the other types of scholarship with higher means. Similarly, responding to writing was the single most frequently accessed type of scholarship, and significantly differed from each of the other types of scholarship except for L2 writing teaching.

These results suggest that respondents seem fairly well informed regarding current research across a variety of closely related disciplines that support writing pedagogy. They also show that L2 writing teaching and responding to writing were the most popular topics, which supported our expectations. This finding led us to believe that a new writing journal would be the most beneficial if it focused primarily on issues of response to writing and included ideas for L2 writing teaching.

Table 4. Significant differences across types of scholarship

| | N | M | SD | Statistically different groupings | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----|-------|------|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Writing program admin | 501 | 2.707 | 1.52 | X | - | - | - | - | - |
| Writing centers | 515 | 2.885 | 1.42 | X | X | - | - | - | - |
| Composition theory | 518 | 3.143 | 1.46 | - | X | X | - | - | - |
| L2 writing theory | 525 | 3.310 | 1.43 | - | - | X | X | - | - |
| Composition pedagogy | 528 | 3.441 | 1.41 | - | - | - | X | X | - |
| L2 writing teaching | 532 | 3.607 | 1.42 | - | - | - | - | X | X |
| Responding to writing | 531 | 3.859 | 1.36 | - | - | - | - | - | X |

Preferred Methods for Accessing Scholarship

The next question addressed the frequency with which teachers access research among four common methods, including online, print, conferences, or books. The purpose for this question was to identify the most relevant methods for accessing research. Figure 2 displays the respondents' most frequent source for research access. Results show overwhelmingly that the vast majority of respondents most frequently access research

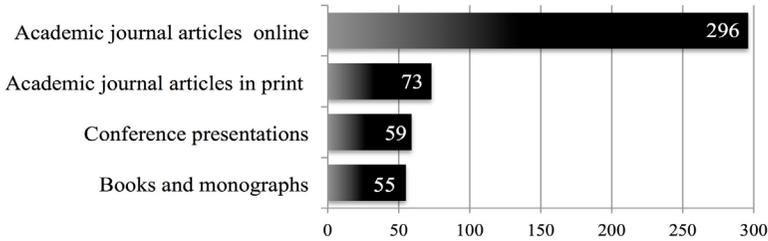


Figure 2. Most frequent method for research access

through online¹ sources, which greatly exceeded all other methods combined, $\chi^2(3, N= 483) = 340.611, p<.001, V= .485$. This suggests that an online journal format may be the most beneficial.

The Need for a New Scholarly Journal

Using an eight-point Likert scale, the next item invited respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the statement there is a need for a scholarly journal that focuses exclusively on response to writing. Response frequencies are presented in Figure 3. Though 21.40% of the respondents voiced some disagreement with the statement, 78.60% expressed some level of agreement, which proved to be statistically significant with a large effect size, $\chi^2(1, N= 542) = 177.306, p<.001, V= .572$.

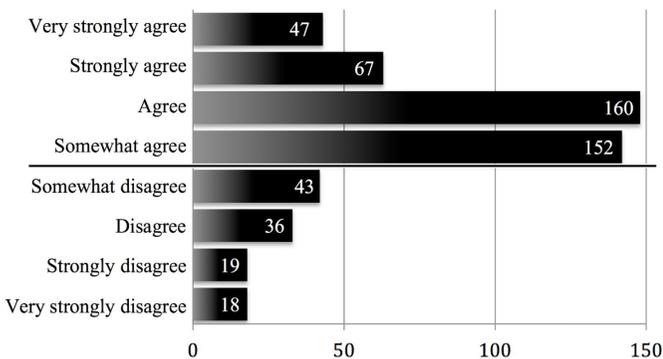


Figure 3. The perceived need for a new journal focusing on response to writing

1. Standardized residuals (*R*): online *R*=15.948, print *R*= -4.345, conferences *R*= -5.619, books *R*= -5.983.

The Most Important Areas for Research

The final question addressed which areas of response to writing the practitioners felt were the most important for researchers and practitioners. A small sampling of responses include the following:

- Principled approaches to responding
- Teacher preparation to provide feedback
- Learner preparation to receive feedback
- Learner transfer of feedback
- Learner feedback to the feedback
- Response and assessment: confluence and divergence
- The place of writing centers and response to writing
- Finding balance in response: language/content, efficiency and appropriateness
- The issue of time: time management, timely feedback, and when to respond
- Peer feedback and its various ramifications

Conclusion

The results of this survey seem to answer our initial questions quite clearly. There is indeed a need for another venue for quality scholarship on response to writing for international dissemination. These findings strongly support the launch of a new scholarly journal that focuses on response to writing in a context that recognizes important differences between the needs of L1 and L2 writers. Welcome to the *Journal of Response to Writing*.

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Hartshorn, K. James, and Norman W. Evans (2015). "The Journal of Response to Writing: A Response to a Professional Need." *Journal of Response to Writing*, 1(1): 11–18.