Views Afield

by Lynn Dirk

The Importance of Being Written

In January 1984, a journal that speaks to editors was born: *Written Communication: A Quarterly Journal of Research, Theory, and Application.* According to the editors' note in the first issue, the goal was ambitious: "to publish articles that treat major, substantive issues in writing from the perspective of such fields as rhetoric, psychology, linguistics, English, journalism, reading, communication, document design, anthropology, semiotics and education." The journal front matter also noted: "No worthy topic in writing is beyond the scope of the journal." The five inaugural articles exemplifed this approach: "Emerging Alphabetic Literacy in School Contexts", "Twentieth Century Magazine Advertising,", "Classical Rhetoric, Modern Rhetoric, and Contemporary Discourse Studies,", "Perceptions of Writing Skills", and "Images, Plans, and Prose: The Representation of Meaning in Writing".

In July 1998 Stephen P Witte, founding editor and current coeditor, stated: "For an independent and [society-]unaffiliated journal like *Written Communication*, 15 years represents a significant achievement." Witte's current coeditors attribute the journal's success directly to Witte and his vision, but he attributes its success to its editors' "maintaining 'ignorance' of whatever boundaries might be implied [by the journal's name] and 'confidence' that authors and articles would ultimately define" the journal.

Some insight into an editor with this perspective might be gleaned from knowing about another project of Witte's: the Center for Research on Workplace Literacy (*www.techtrans.kent.edu/directory/worklit.htm*). It "aims to develop research-based understandings of the relations between literacy (including the technologies of literacy production) and the various types of work college graduates do." Indeed, one of the attractions of *Written Communication* to editors is that it frequently features articles about teaching writing, which editors do continuously, either directly or indirectly.

The journal regularly offers articles of interest to science editors. A few such titles are featured here.

Fahnestock J. Accommodating science. This article was first published in 1986 (5:275-96) and was reprinted in the 15th anniversary issue (15:330-50). It compares information originally published in the science literature with stories about that information published in the popular press. The differences are explained in terms of rhetorical theory, which defines three types of persuasive speech first identified by Aristotle: forensic, or arguing over the nature and cause of past events; deliberative, or debating the best course of future action; and epideictic, determining value. The science literature is forensic; the popular press is either deliberative or epideictic. These differences are the basis for the transformations of scientific information, where, for instance, words like *appear* and *suggest* in the original are nowhere to be found in the popular presentation. Fahnestock analyzes numerous differences, using actual quotes about the same information from the academic and the popular press. This article also does a fine job of explaining why the differences occur.

Only titles are listed for the articles below—on the basis that, when it comes to the journal *Written Communication*, a title is similar to one picture: It is worth a thousand words.

Kaufer DS, Geisler C. Novelty in academic writing. Written Comm 1989;6: 286-311.

Winsor DA. Invention and writing in technical work: representing the object. Written Comm 1994;11:227-50.

Barton E, Halter E, McGee N, McNeilley L. The awkward problem of awkward sentences. Written Comm 1998;15:69-98.

Vande Kopple WJ. Relative clauses in spectroscopic articles in the Physical Review: beginnings and 1980: some changes in patterns of modification and a connection to a possible shift in style. Written Comm 1998;15:170-202.