overview

In this piece, you will write about a technology that has affected your skills, abilities, and/or experiences as a writer and/or as a reader. This is not a research paper. This is an autobiography—a piece in which you tell a story about yourself as a writer and/or as a reader, specifically a story about how technology has changed your approaches to writing or to reading.

You might write about what you have learned about grammar from playing video games.
You might write about how composing on a computer has changed your approaches to writing.
You might write about how designing graphics on a computer has changed your ideas about what composing is and how words and images work together.
You might write about how you don’t consider Instant Messaging to be writing.

These are just examples—you can choose any narrative thread you wish to unfold your autobiography.

You can choose the medium and media that best facilitate your autobiography—PowerPoint presentation, report, web site, interactive narrative, blog, traditional essay, etc.

getting started

As you get started, you might consider questions like:

• What were your earliest experiences with a writing technology? With a digital writing technology? What do you remember about them? How did you use them? What did you write/create?
• How has your writing changed with or in relationship to digital writing technologies?
• What does your current digital writing environment look like? The physical environment—computer, desk, surrounding area; the virtual environment—the desktop, screens, and interfaces you write within? How does this environment reflect your digital writing practices?
• What digital tools do you currently use to write, compose, and/or create? What sorts of “texts” do you produce? How are the texts you produce different because they were created digitally?
• What would your writing be like if you did not have access to digital writing tools?

(some) example foci

I remember the first time I was profoundly struck by the ways in which the computer, specifically word-processing software, had shifted my writing practices: It was 1995, and I was in a graduate seminar. We were an hour-and-a-half into our three-hour session, and the instructor had just announced a 10-minute break. As I finished the sentence I was writing by hand and went to put my pen down, File > Save flashed through my head—precisely what I would do if I were composing on my computer and was taking a break.
...if I were to shape my paper around this particular story, I might next back up a bit, and write about how I initially learned to write, and then about how I learned to write with a computer. I might write about the writing practices that are shared in both realms, and the practices that are different across both realms. I might tell another particular story or two about the ways in which I found my composing processes altered by writing across traditional and digital spaces.

Growing up, access to the computer—a Commodore 64/128 with a modem the size of a toaster—was a battle, if not an all-out war. Being the girl of the house, the computer was not seen as my domain. I was not taught how to use it, nor was I expected to use it. I learned to launch the terminal software and access the modem by covertly watching over my brother’s shoulder as he and his friends gathered around the machine and used it to access local bulletin board systems via telephone. When they left, I snuck onto the machine and, by trial and error, replicated their steps, logged on, established an account and a user name for myself, and began my path toward becoming a digital writer and an avid online community member.

...if I were to create a PowerPoint around this particular experience, I might title the presentation “How to be a Covert Computer Interloper.” I might shape my presentation as a set of recommendations about how to access a computer when, for whatever reason, you’re not allowed access to one. I would include photographs of the Commodore 64/128, or of my brother and his friends playing on the computer; I might embed an audio file of the sound of a modem connecting to another modem. I might conclude the presentation by including information as to how one can transition from someone who is disenfranchised to someone who is an active computer user and active online community member.

My father, despite ending up an electrician at GM instead of an engineer, was still a huge tech geek. Other than short spans for training, he’s always worked second shift, which for a kid in school meant that you only saw your dad on the weekend, since he slept during the day, left for work before you got home from school and got home when you were in bed. Every weekend my dad would attempt some new task—installing a new component, some new software, something—and without fail, things would not work as they should, he would cuss the machine(s) blue in a fit of anger, and I would try to physically or mentally absent myself from the situation.

My younger brother and I were both dragged into my dad’s endeavors. Other than the Commodore (and one early portable that I remember but my dad doesn’t), my dad constructed every computer we owned from parts. Which meant lots of opportunities for us to:

- screw in boards of one type of another
- fish dropped screws out of inopportune places
- check cords
- toggle dip switches
- hold the solder (“still, dammit!”) for the soldering iron
- navigate through interfaces for configuration, setup, settings, etc. under his instruction
- blow dust out of things
- just sit and watch and wait for the next command, should we be needed

This last, in particular, was my job.

...the graduate student author of this web site launched her autobiography by providing some background and backdrop for her life and her literacy experiences before delving deeply into the relationship she had with her father, and how it was framed by technology. She continued the pages of the web site by embedding pictures from her childhood and interrogating the gendered nature of work with technology through the pictures, the text, short examples, and quotations from technology theorists.

Last semester was my first on "the other side of the monitor”—in the front of the computer composition classroom, that is. The only computer classroom environment I had found myself in, with the exception of a few "smarter" classrooms, was concurrent with my third semester of college teaching experience. My students were purely lab rats (no physical likeness to rodents suggested), and we were working through the great laboratory maze together. I did, however, bring a hodge-podge of experiences working with technology to the environment. Peruse the maze of memory-links with me...

...the author of this web site launched her autobiography by talking about teaching in a computer classroom. She continued by looking backwards and talking about her past experiences with technology before she returned to the present and more deeply analyzed the experiences she has had teaching in a computer lab.