

Revisiting Student Writer Apprehension: A New Interpretation of the Riffe and Stacks's *Writing Apprehension Measure*

Mark Popovich, Ph.D.

Mark Massé, M.S.

Beverley Pitts, Ph.D.

Ball State University

***Abstract:** The goal of this study of entry level media writing students at a Midwestern university was to determine whether their attitudes toward writing changed during the interval from beginning to end of their first (100 level) college journalism class. A well conceived and tested empirical tool for measuring writing apprehension was adapted for use as a Q sort. An individual assessment of writing apprehension was obtained by using Q Methodology to provide a personalized (subjective) measure of attitudes as opposed to analyzing group norms, thus confirming and extending previous research on the phenomenon conducted by Riffe and Stacks. The application of Q methodology provided a deeper understanding, that supported, but in some instances altered, the interpretation of previous observations. Data from the Pre- and Post-Class Q sorts were compared to assess the impact of the class on student attitudes toward writing. This study demonstrates the realignment of student confidence and career goals that accompanies increasing acquaintance with the realities of the chosen profession provided by the initial professional class.*

Introduction

Since the 1960's, communication researchers have been concerned about the effect of anxiety or apprehension on human communication. Over time they concluded that communication anxiety was a serious problem for a large proportion of the population. Phillips was one of the first to suggest that an individual is apprehensive when his "anxiety about communication outweighs his projection of gain from the situation" (Phillips 1968, 40).

Confidence in one's craft is critical to long-term success as a writer, but is often lacking in students in an introductory journalism or media writing classroom. Composition teachers, and subsequently media writing teachers, have explored the effect of this phenomenon on their students. Writing apprehension among students in a media writing course may result in fear,

Corresponding author's address: Department of Journalism, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306; e-mail: mnpopovich@bsu.edu.

Operant Subjectivity, 2003 (April), 26 (3):88-111.

frustration, and ongoing anxiety about learning the very skills required for media careers. Furthermore, apprehension may cause students to fear evaluation of their writing, avoid writing when possible, and have very low expectations for writing success. Apprehensive students may be less likely to volunteer for writing courses, consistently fail to turn in assignments, and even skip classes when writing assignments are scheduled.

Learning about student attitudes toward writing, especially at the outset of a course, can give an instructor more opportunities to address apprehension issues and implement strategies that help students to gain much-needed confidence in their writing abilities. Researchers have developed quantitative measures to help identify apprehension in writing students, generally in the form of Likert-type scales involving aspects of student writing activities and pedagogical strategies in writing classes. For example, students are asked to pick one of five possible responses for statements that deal with anxiety about writing in general, teacher evaluation of writing, peer evaluation of writing, confidence in grammar and punctuation, etc. William Stephenson (1953), the creator of Q Methodology, would argue that the use of such instruments can only provide measures of constructs for a more or less homogenous group of students, rather than any measure of the operant feelings of student writers.

Literature Review

Although writing is at the core of the discipline of journalism, research on the writing process and how it is influenced arose in the fields of English and composition in the early 1970's (Emig 1971, 1977). Zurek (1986) helped develop the link between the writing composition process and journalism. He placed strong emphasis on the revision process, which, as he pointed out, had been largely ignored in journalism textbooks. Conn (1968) and Smith (1979) developed early models of news writing and the news story.

The technique of *protocol analysis* is used in psychology to gather data about mental tasks such as problem solving, visual encoding, and concept learning. Verbal protocols require a subject to "think out loud" while performing a task. In the first application of this method to the tasks unique to journalism, Pitts (1982, 1987) qualitatively recorded the verbalized thought processes of professional journalists writing news stories on deadline in the newsroom. The "lead" or summary paragraph (who, what, when, where, and why) sets the tone and direction for the remainder of the news story. She found that all her subjects, wrote the lead for the news story first. The mechanical requirements of producing a daily news report require this unique approach. When a story requires shortening, editors traditionally started cutting from the bottom. Thus the reader received the important facts of the story, and lesser details were removed to make the story "fit" the allotted space. Her findings led to a new model of the news writing process (Pitts 1989).

Subsequent researchers have produced results that emphasize the importance of revision in the writing process (Murray 1978; Hayes and Flowers 1980; and Yoder 1993). Dodd, Mays and Tipton (1997) provided evidence that systematic feedback by instructors is important. Ward and Seifert (1990) determined that knowledge of the structural mechanics of language is an important component of effective writing. Schierhorn and Endres (1992) found that writing instructors were beginning to adapt composition strategies to improve journalistic writing. Massé and Popovich (1998) explored the use of Q methodology to assess the pedagogical orientations of journalism writing instructors, and Massé (1999) assessed the value of using student journals to understand the attitudes of media students toward writing. Humphrey (1982) considered attitudes of journalism student toward their intended careers to be significant predictors of writing abilities.

Studies have also targeted the relationship of apprehension to writing performance. Daly and Miller (1975) were the earliest investigators to create an instrument to measure apprehension toward writing. Their instrument consisted of 63 statements in Likert scale format with five possible responses (e.g., from [1] strongly agree to [5] strongly disagree). This instrument was administered to 164 undergraduate students enrolled in basic composition and interpersonal communication courses at West Virginia University. Factor analysis of the student scores produced a one-factor solution resulting in a 26-statement apprehension instrument. To ascertain predictive validity, 176 adults completed a modified instrument during extension courses conducted by WVU. Depending on their variance from the mean score on writing apprehension, individuals were classified as high, moderate, or low apprehensives. Individuals with high anxiety toward writing perceived their occupations as having significantly fewer written communication requirements than did low apprehensives. Significant differences were also found between high and moderate apprehensives, but not between moderate and low apprehensives.

In a follow-up study, Daly and Miller (1975b, 249-253) compared results from the 26-statement writing apprehension instrument with SAT-Verbal scores for 246 students enrolled in a basic composition course. Some significant findings included:

- Students with high writing apprehension reported less success in previous courses than those without writing apprehension.
- Students who voluntarily enrolled in advanced writing courses were lower than others in writing apprehension.
- Students high in apprehension perceived their past experiences in writing as less successful than did low apprehensives.
- Female students had lower scores than males on the writing apprehension measure.

According to Daly and Miller, the most important conclusion to draw was that predisposition toward writing may not be measured effectively by many aptitude tests currently used.

Daly (1977) explored the relationship between writing apprehension and message construction (i.e., how attitudes affect actual writing behavior), differentiating between people who found writing enjoyable and those who experienced high levels of anxiety. The two groups differed significantly on perceived message quality as well as on actual structural characteristics of the messages encoded. In that study, an individual with high apprehension tended to encode messages that were lower in perceived quality and had fewer words, sentences, and qualifications. He cautioned that the better writer in terms of simplicity might be the highly apprehensive one. This result was later supported by Humphrey (1982), whose use of multivariate analysis demonstrated that, contrary to expectation, the more apprehensive news writing students produced more effective news stories.

Daly also found that low apprehensive writers were “more elegant and expansive” in their writing, crafting messages of higher quality than those of high apprehensives. He concluded that some individuals had conceptualized apprehension as a learned response to writing encounters. The highly apprehensive writer expected negative evaluation of his/her writing due to past adverse responses. The expectation may become self-fulfilling: The high apprehensive tends to avoid writing, which leads to less practice, and in turn results in lower evaluations than those who have often practiced (i.e., worked on their writing).

Ruffner (1981) used multiple regression analysis to assess the relationship between journalistic writing ability and various psychological, demographic, and stylistic variables. He demonstrated that an enduring affective state has a measurable influence on the quality of written communication, and that a combination of psychological, demographic, and stylistic variables can provide sensitive discriminators of writing quality as measured by grade.

Emphasizing the *process* of writing (rather than the written *product*) has been recommended to address writing apprehension in the classroom (Boozer, Stacks, and Lally 1983). The *process* is defined as series of steps used by the writer in a recursive (non-linear) fashion — pre-writing, drafting, and revising or editing. The *process method* utilizes pedagogical strategies for creating a supportive environment (e.g., positive feedback, revision opportunities, selective marking of errors).

Riffe and Stacks (1988) believed that focused instructional strategies could be devised to help students overcome writing apprehension. They employed factor analysis in two studies to create, test, and refine a Likert-type instrument to identify the dimensions of writing apprehension. A sample of 621

undergraduate mass communication students at two southern universities completed the Mass Communication Writing Apprehension Measure (MCWAM). The instrument features thirty-eight items (statements) representing seven dimensions. The data indicate that writing attitudes are multidimensional in nature. The study also suggests that some differences among students could be related to characteristics such as gender as well as educational classifications (e.g., major, class standing).

In 1992 Riffe and Stacks replicated their earlier study adding *Audience Salience* as an eighth dimension and including 18 new items. The dimensions are:

General Affect (GA) encompasses enjoyment and anticipation of writing.

Blank Page Paralysis (BPP) occurs with actually starting the task. Students “go blank” or fixate on the right word.

Mechanical Skills Competence (MSC) is a basic skills orientation that represents either awareness of deficiency or lack of confidence.

Evaluation Apprehension (EA) encompasses both behavioral and cognitive/affective aspects of apprehension. This is more than just having writing read by someone, and reflects fear of critical evaluation, judgment, or grade.

Career and Essential Skills (CES) reflects the fact that some students see writing as irrelevant to their careers.

Task Avoidance (TA) is a straightforward avoidance by some students when writing is involved, and is seen as independent of Blank Page Paralysis.

Facts vs. Ideas (FI) expresses the possibility that the student writer’s confidence can be conditional, and tied to a particular type of writing (facts or ideas). If it indicates a preference for dealing with facts and information, it might distinguish mass communication majors from other majors, e.g., English, education, etc. It might also distinguish journalism majors from other types of majors within mass communication, e.g., advertising majors, public relations majors, graphics majors, etc.

Audience Salience (AS) refers to the importance of writing for others (whether to persuade or inform), as seems clear in this new mass communication dimension.

The expanded 56-item Likert scale instrument was completed by a sample of 708 undergraduates enrolled in introductory courses in mass communication and media writing. Results suggested that journalism majors enjoyed writing more than other mass communication majors, were less intimidated by a blank page (or screen), were more concerned about the career importance of

writing skills, and had a greater orientation toward an audience. (*Mass communications* is used here as an umbrella term referring to both print and electronic media. *Journalism* students are preparing for careers specifically in the print media.) Mass communication students were generally less apprehensive across the array of dimensions and on mass communication-specific items. Other findings suggested that writing ease or confidence (self-efficacy) depended on the type of writing assignment. Female students scored significantly better on all but *Blank Page Paralysis* and *Facts vs. Ideas*, supporting earlier research that indicated females tended to have lower writing apprehension than males.

Riffe and Stacks concluded that writing apprehension measurements could be utilized as a classroom diagnostic tool or student counseling instrument. They recommended further research to correlate apprehension with more direct measures of writing quality or classroom performance (e.g., assessment of student writing) and longitudinal tracking to test the effect of curriculum on writing quality and attitudes.

Objectives

The Riffe and Stacks's research was well conceived and tested an empirical tool that could be applied in many different writing environments. Q methodology has been used to study other aspects of writing creativity and pedagogy, and to explore the writing process (Massé 1999; Massé and Popovich 1998). It was postulated that use of Q methodology to assess student ratings of the MCWAM might bring another perspective to the understanding of writing apprehension.

Q methodology allows students to describe their individual preferences instead of having this data lost in the calculation of group norms. Q researchers can use the same basic instrument to characterize typical student attitudes rather than producing broad generalizations about the writing apprehension of the *average* student in a group. In this application, a single condition of instruction was used for two Q sorts performed by the same students at different times. Factor analyses were conducted separately on the Pre- and Post-Class sorts. The effects of class experiences on student attitudes and perceptions are demonstrated by comparing the results.

This study sought to support and extend the work of Riffe and Stacks through the use of Q methodology. Could this technique:

- confirm the multidimensional nature of student writing apprehension?
- verify and illustrate possible linkage between gender and writing apprehension?
- support an influence on writing apprehension among journalism students by their perception of the career importance of writing skills?
- demonstrate that the orientation toward audience is greater on the part of journalism majors than other mass communication majors?

- assess whether student expressions of writing apprehension change in the interval between the beginning and the completion of their first college media writing class?

Method

Investigators constructed a Q sort version of the MCWAM (Appendix 1). Respondents were 13 entering students (nine female and four male) at a Midwestern university with an accredited journalism program taking their first (100 level) college journalism writing class during a five-week summer term with daily class meetings of 95 minutes. The students had declared majors in five sequences: advertising (5 students), public relations (3), graphics (2), telecommunications (2), and magazine studies (1). The Q sort was performed twice under the same condition of instruction. "What are your feelings toward writing?" The first sort took place on the second day of class; the second sort on the next to last class of the five-week term. The statements were sorted along an eleven-point continuum from Most Agree (5) to Most Disagree (-5).

The Q sorts were analyzed with PQMethod, a public domain program available at www.qmethod.org. The program provided, among other things: a Q sort correlation matrix of all students involved in the study, unrotated and subsequently rotated factors, correlations between factors, sets of normalized z-scores for all statements on each factor, arrays of z-score differences between factors, factor Q-sort values for each statement, and a list of consensus items. PQMethod enabled investigators to compare and contrast judgmentally rotated factors with those that used a statistical criterion such as varimax.

To determine the number of factors, or patterns of perceptions, that might appear in the Pre-Class and Post-Class Q sorts, investigators employed procedures as described by Brown (1980). By calculating the standard error of a zero-order correlation, investigators could identify significant Q sort loadings on each factor. A factor with more than two significant loadings (>0.36) at the 0.01 level was considered viable. Once the factors were determined, investigators were able to examine statement factor scores for each factor. Significance of a statement for a particular factor was established by an absolute z-score value of 1.0 or greater. The criterion for significance of a difference between factors was an absolute difference of 3 or more between the factor scores for a given statement.

Findings

Pre-Class Q Sorts

Judgmental rotation of the Pre-Class factor matrix yielded two factors. This solution accounted for 56 percent of the variance in the matrix, and the correlation between factors was 0.460.

Factor 1: Optimists

Factor 1 contained six females and four males, none of whom were news-editorial majors. This factor was labeled *Optimists*. The group displayed a level of confidence and joy of writing that could be termed “upbeat.” Not only were they confident about their writing skills, they were convinced that these skills would be essential in their future careers (Table 1). This group did not express any apprehension about writing. Three of the highly rated statements were termed GA or *General Affect* statements that mirrored their enjoyment of writing. Two of the statements were CES, or *Career Essential Skills*, and these students felt strongly that their writing skills would be career assets. Three of the highly rated statements dealt with *Mechanical Skills Competence* (MSC) as these students expressed confidence in their spelling ability, basic writing skills, and sensitivity to grammar and punctuation. Factor 1 did not express apprehension about deadline writing, as two of their highly rated statements dealt with a positive attitude regarding *Task Avoidance* (TA). Finally, students on this factor did not seem to be affected by *Blank Page Paralysis* (BPP).

In all, five of the eight dimensions from the Riffe and Stacks study were represented on this factor, but the statements chosen did not represent writing apprehension. On the contrary, the students on this factor were eager to write and felt secure enough in their skills to pursue a career in writing. Negative statements chosen by Factor 1 students served to emphasize their confidence and security with their newly chosen career pursuit. They reasserted that they did not avoid writing (GA), they did not suffer from blank page paralysis (BPP), and they were not nervous to know that someone would read and evaluate their writing (EA). They disagreed with statements that downplayed the importance of writing in their career choices (CES). In short, these students were committed to careers in writing.

Factor 2: Pragmatists

Factor 2 students, labeled the *Pragmatists*, were three females, two of whom were older than their classroom peers. Two of these students majored in advertising and the third in public relations. In contrast to the enthusiasm expressed by Factor 1, Factor 2 students displayed some trepidation about their writing skills (Table 2). They too were convinced that their writing skills would be valuable in their career choices (CES), and they were not afraid to have others evaluate and criticize their writing (EA). The top two statements they agreed with dealt with deadlines (TA), but Factor 2 students admitted that they write only when they must (GA). Their insecurity about writing was manifest in concerns about punctuation and grammar rules (MSC), the subject of two statements with which they agreed. Factor 2 students lacked the enthusiasm of their Factor 1 counterparts, and exhibited more apprehension about their writing skills. In all, five of the Riffe and Stacks dimensions appeared on the statements with which Factor 2 students most agreed. And

whereas the most highly rated statements for Factor 1 students dealt with career concerns, Factor 2 students were more concerned about task avoidance issues like deadlines..”

Table 1: Significant statements for Pre-Class Factor 1 (Optimists)

<i>No.</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>z-score</i>
16	I enjoy writing. (GA) [†]	2.065*
39	Good writing skills are essential in my career. (CES)	1.708
40	My writing skills will be a valuable asset in my profession. (CES)	1.687
22	I like seeing my thoughts on paper. (GA)	1.574*
14	I look forward to writing. (GA)	1.315*
36	I am a good speller. (MSC)	1.313*
31	I usually seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas. (BPP)	1.221
37	I have good basic writing skills. (MSC)	1.210
2	I feel good when I meet deadlines. (TA)	1.126
3	I usually make deadlines. (TA)	1.026
35	I am conscious of my grammar and punctuation when I write. (MSC)	1.006
8	Writing is easy when I do not have to worry about getting the fact straight. (FI)	-1.001
28	I have a terrible time organizing my ideas when I try to write. (BPP)	-1.029
27	I am nervous about writing. (BPP)	-1.063
47	It is very difficult for me to write when I know my writing will be evaluated. (EA)	-1.077
46	It makes me nervous to know someone will read my writing. (EA)	-1.085
29	I spend too much time staring at a blank piece of paper when I try to write. (BPP)	-1.403
19	I write only when I have to. (GA)	-1.501*
41	My writing skills will not be important factors in whether I'm promoted in my profession.	-1.819
23	I avoid writing if I can. (GA)	-1.934
42	The ability to write well is becoming less important for professional success. (CES)	-1.945

[†] (GA) General Affect, (CES) Career Essential Skills, (MSC) Mechanical Skills Competence, (TA) Task Avoidance, (BPP) Blank Page Paralysis, (EA) Evaluation Apprehension, (FI) Facts vs. Ideas

*denotes statements significantly different from Factor 2.

These individuals were more concerned with needs and results, rather than ideas or theories. Their feelings when making deadlines and their reaction to criticism implies some need to find acceptance or success through accomplishment and acknowledgement of the quality of their work. Their focus is on work in this class, without projecting what their future career may hold. These students were older than the ones in Factor 1, and held more pragmatic expectations for themselves.

Table 2: Significant statements for Pre-Class Factor 2 (Pragmatists)

No.	Statement	z-score
2	I feel good when I meet deadlines. (TA) †	2.086
3	I usually make deadlines. (TA)	1.884
40	My writing skills will be a valuable asset in my profession. (CES)	1.779
44	It does not bother me to have my writing evaluated. (EA)	1.676*
45	Having others read and criticize my writing does not bother me. (EA)	1.657*
39	Good writing skills are essential in my career. (CES)	1.394
33	I am not very good at punctuation. (MSC)	1.235*
34	I have trouble remembering grammar rules. (MSC)	1.126*
19	I write only when I have to. (GA)	1.056
41	My writing skills will not be important factors in whether I'm promoted in my profession. (CES)	-1.009
49	When I know I've got a writing assignment due, I start work right away so I'll have time to do a good job. (TA)	-1.273
36	I am a good speller. (MSC)	-1.374
28	I have a terrible time organizing my ideas when I try to write. (BPP)	-1.474
43	I do not like having anyone change my writing. (EA)	-1.477*
46	It makes me nervous to know someone will read my writing. (EA)	-1.598
15	I practice my writing outside of class. (GA)	-1.683*
42	The ability to write well is becoming less important for professional success. (CES)	-1.925
47	It is very difficult for me to write when I know my writing will be evaluated. (EA)	-1.983

† (GA) General Affect, (CES) Career Essential Skills, (MSC) Mechanical Skills Competence, (TA) Task Avoidance, (BPP) Blank Page Paralysis, (EA) Evaluation Apprehension, (FI) Facts vs. Ideas

*denotes statements significantly different from Factor 1.

The commitment of Factor 2 to a writing career was evident in the statements with which they disagreed. They rejected statements about fears of outside evaluation and editing (EA), and they understood the importance of writing skills in their career choices (CES). They felt comfortable about their ability to organize their ideas when they tried to write (BPP). Their insecurity about their basic skills centered on spelling (MSC). Their commitment to writing, however, did not entail practicing skills outside of class (GA), nor did they admit to starting assignments early enough to give themselves time to do a good job (TA). This mindset is similar to the real world where journalists take on a deadline writing mentality in order to produce their work.

Post-Class Q Sorts

Judgmental rotation yielded two factors as the best solution for the Post-Class Q sort. It was noteworthy that 12 of the 13 students who participated in this Q sort were on the same factor. Only one male student displayed a different viewpoint. The three women, who were labeled *Pragmatists* in the Pre-Class Q sort, aligned with Factor A labeled *Professionals* in the Post-Class Q sort. This solution accounted for 58 percent of the variance in the study with a between-factor correlation of 0.081.

Factor A: Professionals

Their positive significant statements indicated that Factor A students had solidified their feelings about their craft by the end of the class. They had become more secure about their ability to handle the stresses of writing (Table 3). The *Professionals* looked forward to writing, and enjoyed seeing their thoughts on paper (GA). The two highest rated statements concerned their beliefs that writing was important to them and to their profession (CES). They showed confidence in their ability to perform under deadline pressure (TA) and in their writing skills (MSC). Students on this factor believed that they were able to express their ideas clearly in writing, as evidenced by their responses to the statements representing BPP (*Blank Page Paralysis*). Negative statements reinforced their confidence about their writing abilities. They rejected four statements that dealt with BPP, and their most negative ratings came on statements that downplayed their skills in the professional world (CES). They were convinced that their writing abilities provide a professional edge in the careers they seek. They were not intimidated by knowing that editors and others read and evaluate their work (EA). And, not surprisingly, they rejected the idea that they only wrote when they had to, or that they avoided writing whenever they could (GA). The outcome here suggests that even the three women who had rejected the same general affect statements as members of Factor 2 in the Pre-Class Q sort had changed their attitudes about the value of writing whenever they can. So it seems that the optimistic and eager perceptions that embraced most of the students in the

Pre-Class Q sort was solidified and reinforced or accepted by all but one individual.

Table 3: Significant statements for Post-Class Factor A (Professionals)

No.	Statement	z-scores
39	Good writing skills are essential in my career. (CES) [†]	2.115*
40	My writing skills will be a valuable asset in my profession. (CES)	1.813*
22	I like seeing my thoughts on paper. (GA)	1.618
16	I enjoy writing. (GA)	1.492*
37	I have good basic writing skills. (MSC)	1.396*
3	I usually make deadlines. (TA)	1.234
2	I feel good when I meet deadlines. (TA)	1.147*
14	I look forward to writing. (GA)	1.109*
31	I usually seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas. (BPP)	1.070
46	It makes me nervous to know someone will read my writing. (EA)	-1.183
28	I have a terrible time organizing my ideas when I try to write. (BPP)	-1.198
19	I write only when I have to. (GA)	-1.223*
26	My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a writing task. (BPP)	-1.251
47	It is very difficult for me to write when I know my writing will be evaluated. (EA)	-1.254
29	I spend too much time staring at a blank piece of paper when I try to write. (BPP)	-1.317
27	I am nervous about writing. (BPP)	-1.465*
23	I avoid writing if I can. (GA)	-1.744
42	The ability to write well is becoming less important for professional success. (CES)	-2.125
41	My writing skills will not be important factors in whether I'm promoted in my profession. (CES)	-2.206*

[†] (GA) General Affect, (CES) Career Essential Skills, (MSC) Mechanical Skills Competence, (TA) Task Avoidance, (BPP) Blank Page Paralysis, (EA) Evaluation Apprehension, (FI) Facts vs. Ideas

(AS) Audience Salience

*denotes statements significantly different from Factor B

Factor B: Creative

The one student on Factor B of the Post-Class Q sort, labeled *Creative*, demonstrated an interesting change of heart by the end of the five week class (Table 4). Initially, this student was just as eager and sure of his writing skills as others on Factor 1 of the Pre-Class Q sort. At the end of five weeks of classroom study, however, he still enjoyed writing, but was more interested in writing his own ideas than in assigned factual stories.

The highest positive statement for Factor B concerned deadlines that he believed to be detrimental to writing (TA). This student delayed writing assignments, and admitted that he always seemed to find some excuse for not starting a writing task (TA). Investigators assumed that Factor B meant class writing assignments, because he agreed with the statement that writing was easy when he did not have to worry about getting people's words straight (FI). Among the statements he ranked negatively was the idea that it was easier to write factual reports than to write his own ideas. During the five-week course, this student had developed an aversion toward factual writing, but had not lost the love of writing for his own pleasure. He liked writing for an audience, and it was important that readers liked what he wrote (AS). This was the first time that *Audience Salience* was mentioned as a significant reason for writing by any individual in either Q sort. He liked writing something others would read carefully and seeing his thoughts on paper. He believed that he probably would enjoy any kind of writing job.

The aversion of Factor B to factual writing was solidified by his choice of four negative statements. He did not like writing to inform or persuade people (AS) — negative aspects of *Audience Salience*. Evidence of a strong apprehension of criticism was found in his agreement that he would be dismayed if people evaluated his writing, and dislike even more the pressure of having this knowledge beforehand. Evaluation and criticism were seemingly perceived as threats to the desire to please people with his writing, rather than as sources of difficulty in the writing process. On the positive side, Factor B believed he was good at punctuation and grammar (MSC), could state his ideas clearly (BPP), and had a facility for choosing the right words. He was pragmatic about the role of writing in his career, and did not believe that the ability to write was becoming less important for professional success (CA).

Discussion and Conclusions

This study was undertaken to determine whether Q Methodology could be used to support and extend the work of Riffe and Stacks by addressing five research questions

►The results of the Q sorts support the assertion that a number influences impinge on student feelings toward writing, however, the data did not all

Table 4: Significant statements for Post-Class Factor B (Creative)

No.	Statement	z-score
1	If it were not for deadlines I'd write better. (TA) [†]	1.902*
21	I enjoy writing something that will be read carefully by others. (GA)	1.902*
48	I put off working on my writing assignments. (TA)	1.522*
50	It is important to me that readers enjoy what I write. (AS)	1.522*
51	I like writing for an audience. (AS)	1.522
56	I always seem to find some excuse for not starting a writing task. (TA)	1.522*
7	Writing is easy when I do not have to worry about getting other people's words straight. (FI)	1.141
22	I like seeing my thoughts on paper. (GA)	1.141
23	I avoid writing if I can. (GA)	1.141
24	I would enjoy any kind of writing job. (GA)	1.141*
25	My writing is clear and to the point. (BPP)	1.141
42	The ability to write well is becoming less important for professional success. (CA)	-1.141
33	I am not very good at punctuation. (MSC)	-1.141
30	I have a hard time choosing the right words when I write. (BPP)	-1.141
31	I usually seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas. (BPP)	-1.141
32	I feel lost when it comes to grammar and punctuation. (MSC)	-1.141
44	It does not bother me to have my writing evaluated. (EA)	-1.522*
52	I like writing to inform people. (AS)	-1.522*
53	I enjoy writing to persuade people. (AS)	-1.522*
55	It is easier for me to write factual reports than to write my own ideas. (FI)	-1.522*
47	It is very difficult for me to write when I know my writing will be evaluated. (EA)	-1.902
45	Having others read and criticize my writing does not bother me (EA)	-1.902*

[†] (GA) General Affect, (CES) Career Essential Skills, (MSC) Mechanical Skills Competence, (TA) Task Avoidance, (BPP) Blank Page Paralysis, (EA) Evaluation Apprehension, (FI) Facts vs. Ideas

(AS) Audience Salience

*denotes statements significantly different from Factor A

reflect apprehension. In the Pre-Class Q sort, for example, Factor 1 students agreed with statements that represented five dimensions created by Riffe and Stacks: *General Affect, Careers and Essential Skills, Mechanical Skill Competence, Blank Page Paralysis, and Task Avoidance*. However, all the statements chosen by students on this factor were positive. In more than one instance, multiple statements representing a dimension were positively ranked, such as the three statements chosen from the General Affect category: (16) I enjoy writing; (22) I like seeing my thoughts on paper, and (14) I look forward to writing. Students who defined this factor decidedly felt more joy and excitement than apprehension about writing.

▶The second research question dealt with evidence from Riffe and Stacks that gender differences might contribute to writing apprehension among students, with female attitudes likely to be more pro-writing than males. The majority of students in this study were female, and the definers for the Pre-Class Factor 2, where writing apprehension was found, were all females. Perhaps, further research on this question is warranted.

▶The third research question yielded some support for Riffe and Stacks's notion that the more relevant a writing career is for students, the less writing apprehension they exhibit. Regardless of level of apprehension expressed, all students in this study, gave high ranks to statements about the importance of writing skills in their professional careers. Even the one individual in the Post-Class Q sort who found writing about facts unappealing was convinced of the importance of writing skills regardless of the assigned subject.

▶Riffe and Stacks hypothesized that journalism majors would show less apprehension toward writing than students in other majors. This Q study could not test the relationship between student major and writing apprehension, because the journalism majors who participated were specializing in advertising, public relations, graphics, magazine journalism, and telecommunications — not just news writing. This suggests that a more specific definition of journalism majors needs to be crafted before those who qualify can be tested to determine if the hypothesis is supported. The degree of writing apprehension expressed by these students, appears to be unrelated to their majors. Statements that traced audience salience were significantly ranked by only one of the participants, the single-person Factor B that arose in the Post-Class Q sort. This student expressed a desire to write for, and be accepted by, an audience. Journalism students in this study were more concerned about writing skills, expressing ideas, and professional skills, rather than how audiences perceive their writing. The attitudes of these beginning student journalists already mirror those commonly found in professional newsrooms.

▶This study was designed to assess the effect of classroom activities on the writing apprehension of student writers. For the most part, students in this

study entered their first college media writing class filled with optimism and confidence in their abilities to pursue a career in writing. They enjoyed writing and were convinced that writing skills would be essential in the career they were seeking. The results of the Q study provide direct evidence about the ability of introductory courses to foster development in student self-awareness. The course provided a wakeup call for the aspiring writers.

The *Optimists* of Pre-Class Factor 1 were not apprehensive about writing and displayed confidence in their writing skills. At the end of the five-week course, these students retained their optimistic outlook about writing and their chosen careers. They now displayed a realistically lowered confidence in their spelling and grammar skills, both of which were heavily critiqued during the course.

It is notable that none of the three students loading on Factor 2 In the Pre-Class Q sort, was a news editorial major, and two were non-traditional students. Reluctance characterized their general attitude toward writing. While these *Pragmatists* strongly agreed with statements representing five dimensions of the MCWAM, they were less confident about writing rules (e.g., punctuation, spelling, etc.) than Factor 1, and expressed a reluctance to write outside a structured environment. Their apprehension was registered primarily on only two rule-based dimensions. They were sensitive about their weaknesses in spelling and grammar. Significantly, these students whose Pre-Class Q sorts indicated insecurity about their writing skills and desire to write emerged by course end more comfortable with their skills. Results on the Post-Class Q sort indicated that they had gained confidence about their skills in these areas.

Another example is the longitudinal history of the Post-Class Q sort single-definer Factor B, who began the course with optimism and enthusiasm for writing. Upon completion of the course, this student found that factual writing was less important to him than writing about ideas and trying to reach an audience. While he never lost his desire to write or to be a writer, he discovered that the subject matter of assignments made all the difference in the extent of his satisfaction from personal achievement. He remained enthusiastic about writing as a career, and was confident about the clarity of his writing, but he became dissatisfied with the discipline required in a career focused on factual writing. By the end of the five-week course, he found that he enjoyed writing his own ideas more than writing about facts and interviewing people to get the facts. For this student, the course had served a dual purpose.

Overall, investigators here found optimistic and enthusiastic feelings expressed by students enrolled in their first journalism college writing class. They exhibited little apprehension, and were convinced of the career importance of their writing skills. This seems to suggest that not all college writing students are apprehensive about careers in writing. The finding is

credible because all the students who chose to take this introductory college writing course declared themselves as journalism majors, even though they were specializing in public relations, advertising, magazine journalism, telecommunications, and graphics. It is believed that many of these students had high school experience in writing, and were somewhat aware of the rigors of their intended career. The course helped students grow in confidence by shifting their focus on writing to more professional concerns and by helping them understand more about their interests without diminishing their passion for writing.

Finally, these investigators were satisfied that the use of Q methodology in this study had brought richer and deeper meanings to the results originally reported by Riffe and Stacks. Designing our study on Q principles uncovered an interesting set of dynamics that might not have been visible using previously available methodological approaches, such as the finding that students in this study showed little evidence of apprehension toward writing. The one-person creative writer factor probably would never have surfaced if Q methodology had not been used. This outcome illustrates that Q methodology provides a mechanism whereby writing instructors can analyze self-reported feelings of student journalists toward writing and compare subjective attitudes revealed through Q sorting with other more overt behaviors. The combination of Q methodology with Riffe and Stacks's Likert-type instrument provides a powerful tool for journalism instructors to assess operant student feelings about media writing.

References

- Boozer, R.W., Stacks, D.W., and Lally, T.D. 1983. Writing apprehension: Further conceptualization and refinement of measurement. In *ABCA Proceedings: The corporate connection*, 27-47. Edited by S. Bruno. Houston: American Business Communication Association.
- Brown, S.R. 1980. *Political subjectivity: Applications of Q methodology in political science*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Conn, E. 1968. Tentative conception of the newswriting process. *Journalism Quarterly* 45:344-5.
- Daly, J. 1977. The effects of writing apprehension on message encoding. *Journalism Quarterly* 54:566-72.
- Daly, J. and Miller, M. 1975a. The empirical development of an instrument to measure writing apprehension. *Research in the Teaching of English* 9:242-9.
- . 1975b. Further studies in writing apprehension: SAT scores, success, expectations, willingness to take advanced courses and sex differences, *Research in the Teaching of English* 9:249-53.
- Dodd, J.E., Mays, R.P., and Tipton, J.H. 1997. The use of an accuracy survey to improve student writing. *Journalism and Mass Communications Educator* 52(1):45-51.

- Emig, J. 1971. *The composing process of twelfth graders*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Emig, J. 1977. Writing as a mode of learning. *College Composition and Communication* 28:122-8.
- Hayes, J.R. and Flower, L.S. 1980. Writing as problem solving. *Visible Language* 14(4):388-99.
- Humphrey, A.S. 1982. A multivariate model for the assessment of journalism writing abilities. Unpublished M.A. thesis, California State University, Fullerton.
- Massé, M.H. 1999. Evaluating students' progress by reading their journals. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 54(3):43-56.
- Massé, M.H. and Popovich, M.N. 1998. Assessing faculty attitudes toward the teaching of writing. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 53(3):50-64.
- Murray, D. 1972. Teach writing as a process not product. *The Leaflet* 71(4):11-14.
- . 1978. Internal revision: A process of discovery. In *Research on Composing*, 85-104. Edited by C.R. Cooper and L. Odell. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Pitts, B.J. 1984. Protocol analysis of the news writing process. *Newspaper Research Journal* 39(4):12-20.
- . 1987. Taping protocols helps professors grade news stories. *Journalism Educator* 42(2):28-30.
- . 1989. Model provides description of news writing process. *Journalism Educator* 44(1):12-19; 59.
- Phillips, G.M. 1968. Reticence: pathology of the normal speaker. *Speech Monographs* (35):39-49.
- Riffe, D. and Stacks, D.W. 1992. Student characteristics and writing apprehension. *Journalism Educator* 47(2):39-49.
- . 1988. Dimensions of writing apprehension among mass communication students. *Journalism Quarterly* 65(2):384-91.
- Ruffner, M. 1981. An empirical approach for the assessment of journalistic writing. *Journalism Quarterly* 58:77-82.
- Schierhorn, A.B. and Endres, K.L. 1992. Magazine writing instruction and the composition revolution. *Journalism Educator* 47(2):57-64.
- Smith, E.J. 1979. The screw model has advantages over inverted pyramid. *Journalism Educator* 33(1):17-19.
- Stephenson, W. 1953. *The study of behavior: Q-technique and its methodology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ward, S. and Seifert, R. 1990. The importance of mechanics in journalistic writing: A study of reporters and editors. *Journalism Quarterly* 67(1):104-13.
- Yoder, S. 1993. Teaching writing revision: Attitudes and copy changes. *Journalism Educator* 48(3):41-7.
- Zurek, J. 1986. Research on writing process can aid newswriting teachers. *Journalism Educator* 41(4):19-23.

Appendix

Riffe and Stacks's Mass Communication Writing Apprehension Measure (MCWAM)

I. General Affect

- 1 I practice my writing outside of class.
- 2 I enjoy talking about writing.
- 3 I enjoy studying other writers' ideas and writing style.
- 4 I enjoy studying words and their meanings.
- 5 I look forward to writing.
- 6 I enjoy playing with words.
- 7 I write only when I have to.
- 8 I enjoy writing.
- 9 I avoid writing if I can.
- 10 I write best when I work at my speed.
- 11 I write best when I choose when to write.
- 12 I write best when I can choose the tone (serious or humorous).
- 13 I write best when I can choose what points to emphasize.
- 14 I would enjoy any kind of writing job.
- 15 I enjoy writing something that will be read carefully by others.
- 16 I like seeing my thoughts on paper.

II. Blank Page Paralysis

- 17 I have a hard time choosing the right words while I write.
- 18 My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a writing task.
- 19 I spend too much time staring at a blank piece of paper when I try to write.
- 20 I have a terrible time organizing ideas when I try to write.
- 21 I'm nervous about writing.
- 22 I usually seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas.
- 23 My writing is clear and to the point.

III. Mechanical Skill Competence

- 24 I feel lost when it comes to grammar and punctuation.
- 25 I'm not very good at punctuation.
- 26 I have trouble remembering grammatical "rules."
- 27 I am conscious of my grammar and punctuation as I write.
- 28 I'm a good speller.
- 29 I have good basic writing skills.
- 30 I am conscious of my spelling as I write.

IV. Career and Essential Skills

- 31 Good writing skills are essential in my career.
 32 My writing skills will not be an important factor in whether I'm promoted in my profession.
 33 My writing skills will be a valuable asset in my profession.
 34 The ability to write well is becoming less important for professional success.

V. Evaluation Apprehension

- 35 It doesn't bother me to have my writing evaluated.
 36 Having others read and criticize my writing doesn't bother me.
 37 It makes me nervous to know someone will read my writing.
 38 It is very difficult for me to write when I know my writing will be evaluated.
 39 I don't like having anyone change my writing.

VI. Task Avoidance

- 40 I put off working on my writing assignments.
 41 When I know I've got a writing assignment due, I start work right away so I'll have time to do a good job.
 42 I always seem to find some excuse for not starting a writing task.
 43 I usually make deadlines.
 44 If it weren't for deadlines I'd write better.
 45 I feel good when I make deadlines.
 46 Finishing before deadline is more important than turning in a perfect assignment.

VII. Audience Salience

- 47 I like writing to inform people.
 48 I like writing for an audience.
 49 I enjoy writing to persuade people.
 50 It is important to me that readers enjoy what I write.

VIII. Facts vs. Ideas

- 51 I find it easier to write about "facts" than "ideas."
 52 It is easier for me to write factual reports than to write my own ideas.
 53 Writing is easy when I do not have to worry about getting the facts straight.
 54 Writing is easy when I do not have to worry about getting other people's words straight.
 55 I feel hemmed in when I have to write "just the facts."
 56 Writing "just the facts" bores me.

N.B.: Statement numbers here are for convenience only. Statement order in Q set assigned randomly.

Writers' Study Pre-Class Results

No.	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Z	Rank	Z	Rank
1	If it were not for deadlines I'd write better.	-0.53	38	-0.02	29
2	I feel good when I meet deadlines.	1.13	9	2.09	1
3	I usually make deadlines.	1.03	10	1.88	2
4	Finishing before deadline is more important that turning in a perfect assignment.	-0.86	45	0.49	18
5	I write best when I can choose the tone (serious or humorous).	0.92	13	0.59	17
6	I write best when I can choose what points to emphasize.	0.63	18	0.21	23
7	Writing is easy when I do not have to worry about getting other people's words straight.	-0.87	46	-0.65	43
8	Writing is easy when I do not have to worry about getting the facts straight.	-1.00	47	-0.66	44
9	I feel hemmed in when I have to write just the facts.	-0.44	36	-0.57	41
10	Writing just the facts bores me.	-0.77	42	-0.75	45
11	I write best when I work at my speed.	0.93	12	0.79	12
12	I write best when I choose when to write.	0.69	17	0.17	25
13	I enjoy talking about writing.	0.01	27	-0.49	37
14	I look forward to writing.	1.32	5	-0.51	38
15	I practice my writing outside of class.	0.79	15	-1.68	54
16	I enjoy writing.	2.06	1	0.28	22
17	I enjoy studying other writers' ideas and writing style.	0.06	25	-0.09	30
18	I enjoy studying words and their meanings.	-0.05	28	-0.41	36
19	I write only when I have to.	-1.50	53	1.06	9
20	I enjoy playing with words.	0.03	26	-0.23	34
21	I enjoy writing something that will be read carefully.	-0.10	29	-0.25	35
22	I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	1.57	4	0.34	20
23	I avoid writing if I can.	-1.93	55	-0.54	39
24	I would enjoy any kind of writing job.	-0.21	30	-0.85	46
25	My writing is clear and to the point.	0.41	22	0.08	26
26	My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a writing assignment.	-0.72	40	0.01	28
27	I am nervous about writing.	-1.06	49	0.05	27
28	I have a terrible time organizing my ideas when I try to write.	-1.03	48	-1.47	51
29	I spend too much time staring at a blank piece of paper when I try to write.	-1.40	52	-0.91	47
30	I have a hard time choosing the right words while I write.	-0.53	37	0.32	21

No.	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Z	Rank	Z	Rank
31	I usually seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas.	1.22	7	0.65	15
32	I feel lost when it comes to grammar and punctuation.	-0.72	41	0.63	16
33	I am not very good at punctuation.	-0.69	39	1.23	7
34	I have trouble remembering grammar rules.	-0.37	33	1.13	8
35	I am conscious of my grammar and punctuation when I write.	1.01	11	0.73	14
36	I am a good speller.	1.31	6	-1.37	50
37	I have good basic writing skills.	1.21	8	0.97	10
38	I am conscious of my spelling as I write.	0.85	14	0.75	13
39	Good writing skills are essential in my career.	1.71	2	1.39	6
40	My writing skills will be a valuable asset in my profession.	1.69	3	1.78	3
41	My writing skills will not be an important factor in whether I'm promoted in my	-1.82	54	-1.01	4
42	The ability to write well is becoming less important for professional success.	-1.94	56	-1.93	55
43	I do not like having anyone change my writing.	-0.30	32	-1.48	52
44	It does not bother me to have my writing evaluated.	0.53	20	1.68	4
45	Having others read and criticize my writing does not bother me.	0.52	21	1.66	5
46	It makes me nervous to know someone will read my writing.	-1.08	51	-1.60	53
47	It is very difficult for me to write when I know my writing will be evaluated.	-1.08	50	-1.98	56
48	I put off working on my writing assignments.	-0.42	35	0.95	11
49	When I know I've got a writing assignment due, I start work right away so I'll have time to do a good job.	-0.40	34	-1.27	49
50	It is important to me that readers enjoy what I write.	-0.82	44	-0.20	32
51	I like writing for an audience.	0.57	19	-0.57	42
52	I like writing to inform people.	0.70	16	-0.55	40
53	I enjoy writing to persuade people.	0.41	24	-0.18	31
54	I find it easier to write about "facts" than "ideas."	0.41	23	0.18	24
55	It is easier for me to write factual reports than to write my own ideas.	-0.25	31	0.36	19
56	I always seem to find some excuse for not starting a writing task.	-0.80	43	-0.22	33

Table 3. Writers' Study Post-Class Results

No.	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Z	Rank	Z	Rank
1	If it were not for deadlines I'd write better.	-0.71	44	1.90	2
2	I feel good when I meet deadlines.	1.15	7	0.00	32
3	I usually make deadlines.	1.23	6	0.76	17
4	Finishing before deadline is more important than turning in a perfect assignment.	-0.38	35	0.38	24
5	I write best when I can choose the tone (serious or humorous).	0.49	21	0.38	24
6	I write best when I can choose what points to emphasize.	0.69	15	0.38	24
7	Writing is easy when I do not have to worry about getting other people's words straight.	-0.28	34	1.14	11
8	Writing is easy when I do not have to worry about getting the facts straight.	-0.64	42	0.38	24
9	I feel hemmed in when I have to write just the facts.	0.29	26	0.00	32
10	Writing just the facts bores me.	-0.24	33	0.00	32
11	I write best when I work at my speed.	0.62	16	0.00	32
12	I write best when I choose when to write.	0.31	25	0.00	32
13	I enjoy talking about writing.	0.12	27	-0.76	45
14	I look forward to writing.	1.11	8	-0.76	45
15	I practice my writing outside of class.	0.45	22	-0.76	45
16	I enjoy writing.	1.49	4	-0.76	45
17	I enjoy studying other writers' ideas and writing style.	0.73	13	-0.38	39
18	I enjoy studying words and their meanings.	-0.05	30	-0.38	39
19	I write only when I have to.	-1.22	49	0.38	24
20	I enjoy playing with words.	0.51	20	0.38	24
21	I enjoy writing something that will be read carefully.	-0.08	31	1.90	2
22	I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	1.62	3	1.14	11
23	I avoid writing if I can.	-1.74	54	1.14	11
24	I would enjoy any kind of writing job.	-0.01	29	1.14	11
25	My writing is clear and to the point.	0.60	17	1.14	11
26	My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a writing assignment.	-1.25	50	-0.38	39
27	I am nervous about writing.	-1.46	53	-0.38	39
28	I have a terrible time organizing my ideas when I try to write.	-1.20	48	-0.76	45
29	I spend too much time staring at a blank piece of paper when I try to write.	-1.32	52	-0.76	45
30	I have a hard time choosing the right words while I write.	-0.64	43	-1.14	50

No.	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Z	Rank	Z	Rank
31	I usually seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas.	1.07	9	-1.14	50
32	I feel lost when it comes to grammar and punctuation.	-0.63	41	-1.14	50
33	I am not very good at punctuation.	-0.62	40	-1.14	50
34	I have trouble remembering grammar rules.	-0.40	36	-0.38	39
35	I am conscious of my grammar and punctuation when I write.	0.71	14	-0.38	39
36	I am a good speller.	0.89	10	-0.38	39
37	I have good basic writing skills.	1.40	5	0.38	24
38	I am conscious of my spelling as I write.	0.88	11	0.76	17
39	Good writing skills are essential in my career.	2.11	1	0.76	17
40	My writing skills will be a valuable asset in my profession.	1.81	2	0.76	17
41	My writing skills will not be an important factor in whether I'm promoted in my	-2.21	56	0.00	32
42	The ability to write well is becoming less important for professional success.	-2.13	55	-1.14	50
43	I do not like having anyone change my writing.	-0.47	37	0.76	17
44	It does not bother me to have my writing evaluated.	0.60	18	-1.52	54
45	Having others read and criticize my writing does not bother me.	0.60	19	-1.90	56
46	It makes me nervous to know someone will read my writing.	-1.18	47	0.00	32
47	It is very difficult for me to write when I know my writing will be evaluated.	-1.25	51	-1.90	56
48	I put off working on my writing assignments.	-0.89	45	1.52	6
49	When I know I've got a writing assignment due, I start work right away so I'll have time to do a good job.	-0.17	32	0.76	17
50	It is important to me that readers enjoy what I write.	-0.95	46	1.52	6
51	I like writing for an audience.	0.83	12	1.52	6
52	I like writing to inform people.	0.34	24	-1.52	54
53	I enjoy writing to persuade people.	0.08	28	-1.52	54
54	I find it easier to write about "facts" than "ideas."	0.41	23	0.00	32
55	It is easier for me to write factual reports than to write my own ideas.	-0.52	38	-1.52	54
56	I always seem to find some excuse for not starting a writing task.	-0.52	39	1.52	6