

# Identifying the Writer as Re-mixer: Rearticulating “Writing” in New Media

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**1 sentence:** Closely examines the changed nature of texts in new media and their effect on writing processes and the roles of writers.

## **Overview**

This panel examines the changed nature of texts in new media and their effect on writing processes and the roles of writers. Digital texts are increasingly ubiquitous, widely distributed, and intricately cross-linked. Content can be functionally modularized and remixed into new arrangements. For example, a digital news article can be divided into component parts (title, lead, body) and distributed to a website, PDA, or cell phone. Furthermore, these modular texts are often linked to more information (the full news item or related stories). To get the “full story,” readers must often aggregate several texts of this kind, sometimes across different media. As teachers of literacy practices, we must better understand the changed nature of digital texts in order to better prepare students for their roles as workers, consumers, and citizens in the information age.

Modular texts and remixable content challenge us to rethink basic assumptions about how we use and compose texts. Ultimately, modular and remixable texts bring into question the identity of the writer as the principal architect of meaning in a given text. To take seriously the cumulative impact of information technology on writing practice, we map out relevant conceptual concerns. We address changing perceptions about the function of text and the nature of “textuality,” the impact of modularity and remix on writing practices, and on the identity of the “writer.”

## **Writing as Remix: Coordinating Increasingly Fragmented Texts**

Digital media has led to a dramatic proliferation in the texts available at any given moment and puts writers in control of increasingly fine-grained aspects of texts. In addition to words, writers now control their display, hyper-linkage to other words, and metadata. The mechanics of hyperlinking require writers to manage the relationships between documents as well as the document itself.

This presenter will share findings from a recent study of workplace writing to illustrate the effect of such fine-grain control and document proliferation and interrelatedness on composing processes. The writers studied engage in an extremely fragmented process of writing – coordinating numerous texts in relatively short periods of time as they “write”. As researchers and teachers of writing, we must understand what it means to compose in digital environments which fundamentally change the nature of the texts produced and therefore, the processes by which they are created.

## **Writing as Remix: Identifying and Describing Base Units of Remixable Content**

Readers increasingly write their own texts by collecting and mixing fragments of information. Often, the sources are genred forms of information created for specialized use that readers must re-purpose. To do this, readers must identify accessible fragments that they can extract and remix in ways that are independent of the original genre’s context. This presentation asks if texts can be stripped down to modular and remixable units just as a song can be split into tracks and further cut into samples to seed a new

composition. If so, what do these remixable units look like and what happens to the role of writer as writing/remixing becomes the reader's concern?

The speaker will report research on how veterinary students and faculty created remixable content for delivery on personal digital assistants (PDAs). Through examples of modularized PDA content derived from complex narrative sources (e.g., lectures) the speaker will show how information is transformed from its original form to PDA form through a process of semantic and physical "reduction" and will argue that remixable content is semantically and structurally "independent" and "adaptable".

### **Writing as Remix: The Writer as Interscriptor**

The kinds of texts discussed by this panel challenge traditional notions of coherence and authorship. Speaker 3 argues that the writer's role in creating mobile, modular, and remixable texts, interscription, points to changes in the concept of "writer". Similar to Barthes' *scriptor*, "cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of *inscription* (and not of expression) . . . his only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others[,]" the interscriptor situates abstract knowledge in a way that resembles speech as much as it does traditional print. Because traditional print notions of textuality and writing dominate, the creative process of the interscriptor is largely ignored. However, the increasing presence and importance of remixable texts requires us to examine the generative process of interscription closely. Composing such texts requires interscriptors to consider traditional discursive concerns as well as several new responsibilities.