Writing Confidence and Self-Identity: A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of First-Year Composition Students that Self-Identify as “Bad Writers”

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Writing Confidence and Self-Identity: A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of First-Year Composition Students that Self-Identify as “Bad Writers”

By

Millicent Ashlie Wells

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
In
Secondary Education
English

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to both my loving and eternally supportive husband, James, and my beloved mother, Cledis Adler. Without their support during this journey, I would have been lost. No matter the obstacle that appeared, they both showed me nothing but love and support along the way. While she is no longer here, I still feel my mother’s love and encouragement daily. Rest well, sweet angel.
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I cannot forget to acknowledge my cohort members, Corrie, Debbie, Kim, Krista, Leah, Kyle, Nick, Barbara, and honorary English cohort member, Laura for their jokes, collaboration, and continued support of me and my work. In them I gained friends and relationships that have helped me widen my perspective and enjoy the challenges that we faced together as scholars and educators.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge every single person that gave me a kind word or bit of encouragement as I worked toward this degree. From my coworkers to social media friends to course instructors, someone was always there with words to keep me going with pride and purpose. While many obstacles made me waiver in my dedication, your support gave me the motivation to complete this journey.

Thank you to all of you for supporting me and my work, and for changing my life for the better.
Abstract

Students identifying as “bad writers” is a phenomenon that has persisted throughout my career as an education in both the high school and college setting. The purpose of this study was to look at why first-year composition students self-identify as “bad writers,” and how their lived experiences may have affected their writing confidence and identities. This study utilized a phenomenological methodology, and grounded in sociocultural theory, along with expressivism pedagogy. Findings reveal that while there are commonalities that may exist between the lived experiences of participants, there are numerous reasons that students may begin to self-identify as “bad writers.” This study offers new insight into how lived experiences may affect student writing confidence and identity, as well as how stress, anxiety, and fear of academic writing tasks can cause students to self-identify as “bad writers” as early as middle school.

KEY WORDS: lived experiences, writing confidence, “bad writer,” writing identity
### Table of Contents

Copyright.................................................................................................................2
Dedication................................................................................................................3
Acknowledgements...............................................................................................4
Abstract..................................................................................................................5
Table of Contents.................................................................................................6-11

**Chapter One: Introduction** .............................................................................12
   Vignette.............................................................................................................12-13
Statement of the Problem.....................................................................................13-15
Research Purpose and Questions.......................................................................15-16
Purpose and Significance of Study....................................................................16
Conceptual Framework..........................................................................................16
   Social Cognitive Theory.....................................................................................17-18
   Expressive Pedagogy.........................................................................................18-19
Review of Relevant Terms...................................................................................19-20
Organization.........................................................................................................20-21

**Chapter Two: The Literature Review** ............................................................22
Introduction............................................................................................................22-23
Academic Writing..................................................................................................23-25
Theoretical Framework..........................................................................................25
Composition Pedagogy.........................................................................................25-27
Shifts Over the Last 50 Years.............................................................................27-28
Expressive Pedagogy...........................................................................................28-29
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

Cognitive Pedagogy ........................................................................................................... 29-31
Process Pedagogy .................................................................................................................. 32
Post-Process Pedagogy and the Social Turn ........................................................................ 32-33
Writing About Writing ....................................................................................................... 33-34
Current Writing Instruction in Middle and High School ..................................................... 34-36
Common Approaches to Writing Instruction in High School ............................................. 36-37
First-Year Composition Writing Instruction ..................................................................... 37-40
Effective Writing Instruction ............................................................................................ 40-42
College-Level Writing Instruction .................................................................................... 42-43
Current Composition Studies Pedagogy .......................................................................... 43-44
Writing Anxiety, Reluctance, and Apprehension ................................................................ 44-46
Writing, Identity, and Self-Efficacy .................................................................................... 47-48
Student Motivation and Self-Efficacy as Factors in Writing Instruction ......................... 48-50

Chapter 3: Methodology .................................................................................................... 51

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 51

Deciding upon Qualitative Research as a Methodology ..................................................... 51-53

- Value of Specific Methodology ...................................................................................... 53
- Tenets of Qualitative Research ...................................................................................... 53-55

Nature of Qualitative Questions .......................................................................................... 55-56

Qualitative Research: General Approaches ..................................................................... 56-57

- Key Concepts of Phenomenology .................................................................................. 57-58

Using a Phenomenological Lens in Writing Instruction Research .................................... 58-59

Deciding upon Phenomenology .......................................................................................... 59-61
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”  

Research Questions........................................................................................................61
Research Design.............................................................................................................61-62
Data Collection Methods...............................................................................................63
  Lived-Experience Descriptions..................................................................................63-64
  Lived-Experience Descriptions Requirements and Connection to Phenomenology.....64-65
  Figure 1. LED Requirements and their Connection to Phenomenology.................64
  Interviews...................................................................................................................65-68
  Researcher Reflections: Journal Entries.................................................................68-69
Setting and Overall Sample Populations.....................................................................69-70
Researcher Role as Instructor.......................................................................................70
Selecting Participants.....................................................................................................70-72
Data Collection Procedures.........................................................................................72-73
Data Analysis Procedures.............................................................................................73
Validity of Interpretation...............................................................................................73-74
Reliability......................................................................................................................74

Chapter 4: Findings.......................................................................................................75
Introduction..................................................................................................................75
Participants...................................................................................................................75-77
Data Collection Summary............................................................................................77-78
Data Analysis...............................................................................................................78
Lived Experience Descriptions.....................................................................................78-79
Open Coding of LEDs and Transcripts.........................................................................79-82
  Figure 2. Dedoose Codes and Descriptors...............................................................80-82
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

Randy’s LEDs…………………………………………………………………………………82-84
Figure 3. Randy LED 1 Code Application ..............................................................84
Figure 4. Randy LED 2 Code Application..............................................................84
Madeline’s LEDs………………………………………………………………………85-86
Figure 5. Madeline LED 1 Code Application.......................................................86
Figure 6. Madeline LED 2 Code Application.......................................................86
Prisha’s LEDs…………………………………………………………………………87-88
Figure 7. Prisha LED 1 Code Application.............................................................88
Figure 8. Prisha LED 2 Code Application.............................................................88
Michael’s LEDs………………………………………………………………………89-90
Figure 9. Michael LED 1 Code Application..........................................................90
Figure 10. Michael LED 2 Code Application.......................................................90
Figure 11. Participant Code Application LED 1 ....................................................91
Figure 12. Participant Code Application LED 2 ....................................................91

Semi-Structured Interviews………………………………………………………………………92
Randy’s Interview……………………………………………………………………92-95
Figure 13. Randy’s Interview Code Application..................................................95
Madeline’s Interview………………………………………………………………...95-97
Figure 14. Madeline’s Interview Code Application ...........................................98
Prisha’s Interview………………………………………………………………....98-100
Figure 15. Prisha’s Interview Code Application................................................101
Michael’s Interview………………………………………………………………101-103
Figure 16. Michael’s Interview Code Application.............................................104
Figure 17. Participant Code Application Interview Transcripts.....................105
Researcher Journal..................................................................................105
Purpose.................................................................................................105-106
Format.................................................................................................106
Journal Entry Analysis...........................................................................106-107
Figure 18: Code Application of Researcher Journal Entries......................107
Figure 19: Annotation and Coding Example of Researcher Journal Entries......108
Coding Themes.......................................................................................109-110
Figure 20. Open Code Occurrence Graph...............................................110
Figure 21. Categories from Open Codes Graph........................................110
Findings.................................................................................................111-112
Conclusion/Summary.............................................................................112

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications..............................113
Introduction..........................................................................................113
Research Questions..............................................................................113-114
Lived Experiences and Writing Confidence..........................................114
  Academic Writing Tasks.................................................................115
  Commonalities Between Participants’ Lived Experiences......................116
Lived Experiences and Self-Identification of “Bad Writers”....................116
Connections to Literature.....................................................................117-119
Limitations of Findings........................................................................119-120
Implications for Future Research.........................................................120-121
Implications for My Future Teaching....................................................121-122
Implications for Writing Instruction and Educational Policy..........................122-123
Writing about Writing..............................................................................123-125
Recommendations for Teaching..............................................................125
Middle School Instruction.......................................................................125-126
High School Instruction..........................................................................126-128
FYC Instructors.......................................................................................128-129
Conclusions.............................................................................................130
References...............................................................................................131-139
Appendix A: IRB Forms...........................................................................140-141
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Vignette

“He be trippin’ Mrs. Wells. Don’t pay him no mind,” Keyana said as the class sat silent in the wake of what had just happened. I didn’t know what to do. How did it get to this point? Just minutes before Gary sat in his seat calmly chatting with his group with his long black hair in his eyes hiding his facial expressions. He wore blue skinny jeans that were held together by safety pins that ran the length of his legs, and a green flannel shirt.

We were working on a persuasive essay in class and it was the third day of instruction. Today students were going to start the actual writing process for their selected topics. For Gary, this was his second time in 9th grade literature and composition, so he had a good idea of what to do.

The first two days of instruction went smoothly. Today, during the brainstorming process I could tell Gary was stressed a bit as he kept opening and tightening his hands while he worked with his group. His demeanor was otherwise calm and participatory, but it was his hands that gave away a hint of stress.

I remembered the first week of class, when Gary told me he was not a good writer and hated writing. Since then we had written several poems, short stories, and alternate endings to texts, all of which were demanding writing tasks in their own right. With pleasure, Gary worked on each of these assignments and could not wait to share with others. Even with positive feedback from his peers and myself, he still considered himself a bad writer, and even told me that these initial assignments were not really “writing.”

Now, when we were doing something that he considered “real writing,” Gary shut down. I asked him several times to start writing and he would say that he would, but several minutes later he was still talking and making no attempt to write his essay. The third time I asked him to start writing he lost it. He began screaming at me that he wasn’t disturbing anyone and that he wasn’t going to do an assignment that he already knew he would fail. He slammed his fists up and down on his desk as an act of defiance.

His face was a deep shade of red and his eyes began to glaze over, almost as if he was preparing to cry. He pushed his chair away from the group and ran out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

I could not understand why Gary would not let go of the idea that he was a bad writer. He wasn’t even willing to try. He would rather act out in anger and face possible disciplinary consequences than write a persuasive essay. What was the difference between writing a story and writing an essay? Apparently, much more than I could imagine. I never could have predicted how Gary would choose to repay me for trying to get him to write his essay.

At 6:45 a.m. the next day, I stood at my classroom door staring at Gary’s attempt at writing an “essay.” Red spray paint covered my classroom door as I stared at the word “whore” tagged in
lowercase letters. Of all the things he could have written, this word hurt the most. It hurt my
pride, it hurt my morals, and it hurt my heart.

All I wanted to do was see him succeed, but he was determined to fail. How could he be brave
enough to write this on my door, but not brave enough to write a thesis sentence? It was in this
moment that I knew I needed to find out why so many students came to my class knowing
they were bad writers and understand how I could help them see that they were more than this
self-imposed label.

I never saw Gary again. He was arrested and expelled from school as my door was not the only
one he and his friends chose to deface. I will never forget my experience with Gary and how I felt
knowing that I’d failed him as his writing teacher.

**Statement of the Problem**

Writing has always intrigued me as both an educator and a student, and this curiosity has
inspired and built the foundation of my research interests. Through my years in the classroom as
a composition instructor, I have witnessed many students struggle with using academic language
and formal tone. The students who seemed to have the most difficulty with academic writing
were the most reluctant to participate in a writing task, and they shied away from any type of
writing that could be considered academic in nature.

In addition to tone and diction, if the topic, template, or task appeared to be academically
challenging, many students opted out of completing the assignment. They might turn in products
that were rampant with overzealous vocabulary that exaggerated their normal diction patterns in
an attempt to demonstrate their “understanding” of academic writing. While these attempts at
producing what students believed academic writing was supposed to be allowed them to
compose a product, they did not improve their mastery of genre and showed that little
improvement was gained in regarding improving their academic writing.

Research indicates that students who struggle with writing, specifically academic writing,
often feel the need to compose texts that exaggerate their understanding of a text and use
elevated diction to camouflage their current vocabulary level (Smagorinsky, Daigle, O’Donnell-
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

Allen, & Bynum, 2010). When students feel the need to inflate their academic writing abilities, they reinforce beliefs that they are “bad” writers and help to initiate behavior that hinders participation in the writing process altogether (Daly & Wilson, 1983; Daly, 1979; Smagorinsky, 2012; Bayat, 2014; Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; French, 2018; Preece, 2018).

Khan (2002) also investigates the impact of fear on student writing confidence:

Teachers know the look of fear that appears on students’ faces when they start to hand back written assignments. Even assignments that aren’t graded seem to generate a “deer-in-the-headlights” gaze, as if students are silently praying that we won’t run over them, spilling ink, splashes, commas, semicolons inserted and deleted, ‘AWKS,’ ‘FRAGs,’ and so on all over their fragile egos. The body of composition lore would have it that students react this way because their high school teachers have spent years hacking up their writing, writing only complaints, and attacks in the margins, and providing no global commentary except a grade. (p. 339)

The fear of writing can stem from teacher feedback and the grades associated with writing assignments. Jones (2008) suggests that, “teachers of any subject, but perhaps especially English teachers, have long intuited that students’ beliefs about themselves play a crucial role in their ability to learn how to write” (p. 211). If students see their writing ability as something that is beyond their control, they may not believe their writing can improve, which can result in a lack of effort and participation in writing tasks (Irvin 2010).

Working with the understanding that self-efficacy derives from the beliefs a person holds about his or her own capabilities related to the performance of completing a task (Bandura, 1994), my research will attempt to better understand how students assess their own writing
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

confidence levels and how this judgment impacts their effort. I want to investigate how one’s self-efficacy relates to writing tasks. There has been a shift in writing education from a focus on the composition process to the effects of self-efficacy on writing (Pajares 2003), and research suggests that both students and teachers can benefit from addressing concerns and beliefs held by students regarding their own writing abilities (Daly, 1979; Bayat, 2014; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Smagorinsky & Daigle, 2012, Preece, 2018; Nelson, 2000; French, 2018).

I believe it is important that students feel comfortable and competent with academic writing because it opens opportunities for their futures. Whether academically or professionally, all students need to interact with society as both productive citizens and informed consumers. Academic writing competence and comfortability can help to bridge the gap from college student to adult, which, in turn, helps them participate with society in a more meaningful manner.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of first-year composition (FYC) students that may have affected their writing confidence to the degree that they now self-identify as “bad writers.” The first question directly addresses the lived experiences of participants that may have affected their writing confidence. The second research question examines how experiences with writing have, or have not, informed FYC students’ self-identities as writers. These questions attempt to address a gap in research as to why students may self-identify as “bad writers” based on their lived experiences with writing.

1. How do the lived experiences of FYC students affect their writing confidence regarding academic writing tasks, and what commonalities might exist between these lived experiences?
2. For students who self-identify as “bad writers,” how have their lived experiences informed their writing identities and shaped their self-efficacy beliefs?

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand why FYC students enrolled in ENGL 1101 at a large suburban state university in the southeastern United States self-identify as “bad writers.” My goal is to develop an understanding of the events, issues, and lived experiences that can affect students’ academic writing confidence and self-efficacy related to writing. While writing confidence relates to the beliefs a student has regarding their skills as a writer, self-efficacy connects to students’ abilities to identify and address their reluctance or apprehension toward academic writing tasks. Current research lacks attention to student feedback regarding apprehension toward academic writing tasks and possible ramifications on self-identity and academic performance. This study seeks to address this need regarding students in FYC courses.

Conceptual Framework

Because this work deals with one’s perceived self based on lived experiences with written tasks, this study uses a conceptual framework anchored on social cognitive theory and expressive pedagogy. The combination of social cognitive theory and expressive pedagogy helps to build a foundation that includes both student voice and experiences to develop self-identity regarding writing confidence. Writing confidence is key when examining why students self-identify as “bad writers,” and the potential impact of experiences with writing that may affect that confidence is worth noting and investigating to give legitimacy to the need to research this phenomenon.
Social Cognitive Theory

Aside from its theoretical application to this work, social cognitive theory affords the chance to view people as active participants or agents in their learning environment. It is this active participation in learning that I believe closely affects my participants’ writing confidence and self-identity. Connecting self-identity with writing confidence allows students to persevere in the face of obstacles and use their own experiences and observed models as ways to determine motivation toward a written task.

Social cognitive theory is useful in examining how a learning environment and learned behaviors affect students when they complete tasks and engage in behavior modeled by others. Because social cognitive theory “posits an interactive, though asymmetric, relation between perceived self-efficacy and fear arousal, with coping efficacy exercising the greater sway” (Bandura, 1986, p. 363), it can help to link self-efficacy with apprehension and fear. A connection between these two elements may further explain why students feel reluctant toward writing if they have not had positive experiences in the past.

While there are six constructs related to social cognitive theory, only four are relevant to this study. The four constructs are behavioral capability, reinforcements, expectations, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986b). Behavioral capability refers to a person’s ability to perform a behavior based on skills and knowledge. The ability to perform a behavior is reliant upon a person’s knowledge of how to complete the behavior and the consequences associated with said behavior, which can affect their environment as well (Bandura, 1986b). Reinforcements are responses, both internal and external, that determine the likelihood of a person repeating a behavior (Bandura, 1986b). This construct most closely demonstrates the connection between behavior and environment. Expectations are the consequences that a person anticipates will be
related to a certain behavior. Both previous experience and expectations affect a person’s
decision as to whether or not they will complete a behavior (Bandura, 1986b).

Lastly, self-efficacy is important to how students identify as individuals; therefore, it is
necessary that they have an accurate understanding of their own abilities to perform tasks such as
writing. It is also worth noting that “self-efficacy leads people to approach intimidating situations
anxiously, and experience of disruptive levels of arousal may further lower their sense that they
will be able to perform well” on a given writing task (Bandura, 1986. p. 366). There are also four
types of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and
emotional and psychological states. Bandura’s social cognitive theory allows this study to
connect the phenomenon of participants self-identifying as “bad writers” with the notions of
writing reluctance and self-efficacy.

Expressive Pedagogy

The inclusion of expressive pedagogy gives this work an opportunity to include written
expression of participants as a lens through which I can analyze their writing confidence and
self-identity. Expressive pedagogy allows for a more social and active approach to writing,
which is one way to link the environment of students to their work through social cognitive
theory. Expressivism is a journey that begins on the personal level, but it thrives on the
connections between language and meaning making. Through this process, students are able to
work on self-development and writing skills, which can affect their writing confidence.

Expressive pedagogy “[places] the writer at the center of its theory and pedagogy,
assigning highest value to the writer’s imaginative, psychological, social, and spiritual
development and how that development influences individual consciousness and social
behavior” (Burnham & Powell, 2014, p. 115). Focusing on the writer includes strategies that
foster reflection and opportunities for writers to discover their voice with their compositions. Strategies such as “freewriting, journaling, reflective writing, and small-group dialogic” help to develop writers’ aesthetic (Burnham & Powell, 2014, p. 116). Attention to a “sense of writer’s presence” allow instructors and students to engage in a writing context that was both social and active (Burnham & Powell, 2014, p. 116). As this study mostly deals with the reflective nature of writing through the use of lived experience descriptions (LEDs) submitted by participants, expressive pedagogical theory can be an effective framework in making sense of writing identities and why students self-identify as “bad writers.” Participants must be reflective of their lived experiences in relation to writing in order to report on their feelings and ideas about writing. I will design the LED assignments to hone in on the reflective elements of expressive pedagogy to help participants more fully report their experiences as they relate to writing and self-identifying as “bad writers.”

**Review of Relevant Terms**

Throughout the research process for this work, many terms became useful in helping to understand both the theoretical and practical underpinnings of this study. Some of these terms are listed here for reference as they apply to the phenomenon of students self-identifying as “bad writers” and the use of a phenomenological lens to conduct this work.

**bracketing**: the act of reserving judgement by removing personal experience in order to focus on the analysis of the experience (Van Manen, 1990).

**dasein**: the situated meaning of a human in the world (Flood, 2010).

**hermeneutic phenomenology**: allows the researcher to participate in the research without having to set aside their preconceived ideas and suppositions through a process known as bracketing.
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

(Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy & Sixmith, 2013; Flood, 2010; Standing, 2009; Converse, 2011; Van Manen, 1990).

*foreground:* when we are consciously paying attention or thinking about something, and when we are consciously deliberating or deciding (van der Lugt, 2011, p. 12).

*lifeworld:* the world of the natural attitude of everyday life; the original pre-reflective, pre-theoretical attitude (Van Manen, 1990).

*lived experiences:* in relation to hermeneutic phenomenology, are our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is unaware of itself (Van Manen, 1990).

*lived experience descriptions (LEDs):* help document and identify the issues participants believe they have concerning their academic writing confidence. Participants will be able to reflect upon their lived experiences through reflective writing and examine what educational experiences may have affected their confidence levels in relation to their writing skills (Van Manen, 1990).

**Organization**

Chapter one of this study includes an introduction to the work with a vignette of an experience that served as a catalyst to my interest in this work. The statement of the problem further details the intricacies of this work as it relates to students self-identifying as “bad writers.” The research questions are further lenses to guide the work as I attempt to understand students who exhibit this phenomenon. Lastly, the chapter closes with the purpose and significance of the study and definitions of related terms.

A review of literature related to academic writing, pedagogical approaches for FYC courses, writing reluctance and anxiety, and self-efficacy is presented in chapter two. This
literature review connects ideas and themes as they apply to this work both through theoretical application and practical application.

The study’s methodology, along with the research design is discussed in chapter three. Data collection methods of participant interviews, the researcher journal, and LED analyses from the ENGL 1101 FYC course participants completed are also detailed in this chapter. Finally, the chapter concludes with the discussion of the reliability and validity of the selected methodological approach for this study.

Chapter four includes the data and analysis of the data related to this work. The chapter outlines the codes, themes, and ideas identified in the Lived Experience Descriptions (LEDs) and interviews from each of the four participants. Findings related to the data sources are discussed in detail. Lastly, data analysis methods regarding the use of Dedoose software and open coding are explained.

Lastly, a discussion of the results, conclusions, and recommendations for continuation of this work is presented in chapter 5. Connections to literature are also presented, as well as limitations of this study and implications for further research on this study’s topic of why students self-identify as “bad writers.”
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This qualitative study uses a phenomenological lens to examine why FYC students self-identify as “bad writers.” Academic writing is at the center of this study as it is often a catalyst for writing reluctance, anxiety, and self-identification by FYC students as “bad writers.” With its formal tone and prescriptive regimens, academic writing can take many forms and requires specific skills to create compositions that are descriptive and precise. By examining the definition and types of academic writing, this section examines how this type of writing is taught at the collegiate level.

As this research is grounded in the identities and writing confidence of four FYC students, a brief overview of the history of composition pedagogy is necessary. This overview will provide insight into how writing has evolved and transformed to meet the needs of students and help them approach academic writing using a variety of perspectives and skill sets.

Writing anxiety, reluctance, and apprehension are some of the possible repercussions students experience as a result of having a negative lived experience with academic writing. These negative experiences may affect their writing confidence in many ways, which eventually can lead to feelings of reluctance toward academic writing tasks. This chapter examines writing negative emotions can affect FYC students and why these feelings can be so overwhelming.

Writing, identity, and self-efficacy are essential to understanding why FYC students self-identify as “bad writers.” Writing in itself is not always a task that FYC students set out to avoid; however, once the label of “academic” is added to the task, students may become apprehensive, and this apprehension may directly affect their identity and self-efficacy in the classroom. This
chapter discusses self-efficacy and writing in the context of FYC students and their approach to academic writing tasks.

**Academic Writing**

Academic writing is an informative, skills-based genre of writing that relies on the presentation of a scholarly argument supported by sources and relevant facts. In the literature, there is a general agreement that the characteristics of academic writing include the elements of formal tone, the use of scholarly sources, complexity of language, objectivity, accuracy, hedging, and adherence to the requirements outlined for the applicable academic field (Lam & Law, 2006; Bruning & Horn, 2000; Fernsten & Reda, 2011; Jones, 2008; Daly, 1979; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Sinclair, 2015). Some researchers refer to academic writing skills or the prominent components of such writing tasks as a way to define the term as a conclusive definition seems to be assumed by much of the literature (Fernsten & Reda, 2011; Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012; Margolin, Ram, and Mashiah, 2013; Swales & Feak, 2004, Giltrow, 2005). For instance, hedging, or the cautious use of vague language is a skill developed through adherence to the preferences of different academic fields. Other skills of academic writing that add to the complexity of the work are organization, explicitness of language, and precision of both the presented argument and supporting evidence.

Irvin (2010) defines academic writing as “a form of evaluation that asks you to demonstrate knowledge and show proficiency with certain disciplinary skills of thinking, interpreting, and presenting” (p. 4). Irvin (2010) expands the definition of academic writing as an argument and an analysis, which complements the plausibility that academic writing is assumed to be a set of skills acquired by students (Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012; Margolin, Ram, & Mashiah, 2013; Sinclair, 2015; Daly, 1979; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Giltrow, 2005), rather than a
specific task or separate entity. Swales and Feak (2004) further expand the definition of academic writing by suggesting that it is a “product of many considerations: audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation.” Dividing these products into categories can help to simplify and describe how academic writing can be organized and developed for a variety of purposes and applications.

While academic writing covers various skills and composition assignments, several types apply to this type of writing. Academic writing can be divided into four types: descriptive, analytical, persuasive, and critical. Descriptive academic writing tends to focus on the skills of identifying elements, reporting on findings, recording data or findings, and summarizing work. Analytical academic writing focuses on the analysis of subject or argument, comparing works or elements of research, relating findings to arguments, and examining research or arguments. Persuasive academic writing requires the writer to argue a point, evaluate another’s perspective or work, and to discuss the findings and research of their work and the work of others. Finally, critical academic writing allows for the critique of the work of others, debate amongst researchers, and opportunities to disagree with findings and research of others in a given field. Because of the complexity of academic writing, it is expected that it is challenging for some students (Golombek, Klingsieck, and Scharlau, 2019). I am curious to find out if the participants’ lived experiences will include the challenges and complexity of academic writing.

Academic writing encompasses many rules and requirements. Some common examples of academic writing are essays, conference papers, literary analysis, academic journal articles, projects, lecture notes, and theses (Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012). Many of these modes of academic writing will be part of coursework that FYC students will complete throughout their time in college. Notably, the components of academic writing separate it from other writing
genres. For example, an academic book review is more structured and formal in tone than a book review posted on a website or personal blog. Additionally, pieces in academic journals have more evidence and precise, descriptive language than articles found in the newspapers as they are geared toward scientific writing and findings. Therefore, academic writing creates a higher demand for analysis, critique, and evaluation than other types of less formal writing, which may be intimidating for some students.

Whatever the definition, assumed or not, the literature points to the understanding that academic writing is a rigorous undertaking that requires students to think critically while presenting a well-formed and supported argument (Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012; Margolin, Ram, & Mashiah, 2013; Sinclair, 2015; Daly, 1979; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Giltrow, 2005; Irvin, 2010; McVey, 2008; Antoniou & Moriarty, 2008). Academic writing helps students acquire and express knowledge, which can help support students’ self-regulated learning when they apply various writing strategies to writing tasks (Golombek, Klingsieck, and Scharlau, 2019). If students are reluctant or experience anxiety when faced with an academic writing task, they are stifling their ability to gain and express their knowledge of various issues and topics. This stifling can cause them to begin to self-identify as “bad writers” or become increasingly reluctant to participate in these writing tasks.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Composition Pedagogy**

Composition pedagogy has undergone many changes since its inception in the late 1800s. Before the 1870s college courses centered around the use of the recitation method. Professors assigned texts for students to master for homework, and students recited the work at the professor’s demand in class (Brereton, 1995). Courses also lacked discussion question periods,
and reserved lectures only for seniors on the premise that the purpose of college was to build character, not provide useful knowledge (Brereton, 1995). After the American Civil War college students wanted something more from their experience in higher education, thus a shift toward more literacy based instruction in the English curriculum began.

Beginning with its foundation in both rhetoric and literary analysis, composition pedagogy at this time asked students to produce complex and analytical writing tasks under the umbrella of academic writing. However, with changes in the college and university systems in 1870, Harvard introduced a new commitment and focus to more individualized writing and the related skills of grammar, punctuation, and spelling (Bereton, 1995). No longer would there be a focus on the orality of composition as was custom prior to 1870, rather a more literacy-based program would take hold as part of the evolution of composition studies at Harvard University. In 1872, Harvard instituted the first writing program, which grew out of an admissions test developed after the elimination of daily work with Latin and Greek from the composition curriculum (Russell, 2006).

Around 1900, composition pedagogy (also known as composition studies) sought a combination of individualized writing with the rhetoric and literary analysis previously emphasized. This combination (at the suggestion of the Modern Language Association, or MLA) was expected to be more rigorous and focused on producing work that focused more on analysis than composition (Bereton, 1995). In this model, professors assigned topics or rhetorical problems. No longer were students asked to respond in ways that explained how they felt about writing; they were to use literary analysis and the essay as their common response methods to teacher assigned topics, questions, and themes.
Around 1930, possibly as a result of the Great Depression and universities’ need to retain students, another shift occurred that focused on practical communication, also known as communicative composition (Shepley, 2016). This shift to communication as a form of writing accompanied standardized tests that attempted to predict student success in college (Russell, 2006). Over the next 30 years, multiple exams were administered in order to measure students’ abilities and scholastic aptitude, and the focus on writing, both of a literary and expressive nature, took a backseat to composition as a means of communication. It was not until the 1960s, with the introduction of expressive pedagogy, that students were able to investigate how to use their own voices in writing as a way to analyze and produce literary compositions.

**Shifts Over the Last 50 Years**

Writing instruction has undergone many changes in the last 50 years. Each movement within the field brought with it a myriad of changes and differing theoretical underpinnings. Prominent voices within the field helped to define each movement, offer strategies for implementation, and complete research that helped revolutionize the way teachers and students viewed the production of writing.

Beginning with expressive pedagogy in the 1960s, the focus of writing instruction was shifted to place the writer at the center and allow for a more imaginative and social development of student compositions (Burnham & Powell, 2014). In the 1970s and 1980s, after expressive pedagogy, composition studies shifted toward process pedagogy. The shift from the product to the process of writing allowed students to create work that better exhibited their unique voice and displayed their creativity (Anson, 2014).

While process pedagogy remains a prominent fixture in both secondary and college-level education, other pedagogical shifts have also impacted education in many ways. Such as the
“social turn” of the late 1990s and early 2000s. This “turn” away from individual minds and behavior toward a more social and cultural interaction spread across disciplines and influenced adaptive human social interaction (Gee, 1999). Current writing instruction incorporates a focus on technology and the nature of writing as empowerment (Downs & Wardle, 2012).

Expressive Pedagogy

After the decades of communicative composition and focus on grammar, punctuation, and spelling of the post-war pedagogies, expressivism introduced a mindset that creativity and voice in writing were as important as communicative writing. Emerging in the 1960s expressivism “[placed] the writer at the center of its theory and pedagogy, assigning highest value to the writer’s imaginative, psychological, social, and spiritual development and how that development influences individual consciousness and social behavior” (Burnham & Powell, 2014, p. 113). A focus on the writer included strategies that fostered reflection and opportunities for writers to discover their voice with their compositions, rather than using analysis of literature and rhetoric as had been done with previous pedagogies. Strategies such as freewriting, journaling, reflective writing, and small-group dialogues helped to develop “writers’ aesthetic” (Burnham & Powell, 2014). The use of “writer’s aesthetic” emphasized the individualized life experiences and attempted to embody what it meant to be from or live within a specific group or community. This attention to an essence of writer’s presence allowed both instructors and students to engage in a writing context that was both social and active (Burnham & Powell, 2014). A social and active approach let the writer express voice and creativity within their compositions in ways that went beyond the communication focused writing of the last several decades.
During this time, Peter Elbow became a prominent voice within the expressivist pedagogy movement. With *Writing with Power* (1981), Elbow “instructs writers to maintain a productive paradoxical tension between individual and group” which helped to equip writers with “well-developed personal identities [who could] function effectively in groups or culture” (Burnham & Powell, 2014, p.119). Writer identities promoted the work of the expressivists that worked to prevent the oppression of student voice through teaching and institutional practices (Burnham & Powell, 2014). Writers were now encouraged to explore their unique voices and to use writing as an outlet to delve into the complex world of language to express themselves. These unique voices then lead writers to begin to concern themselves with having an impact on an “actual audience” instead of focusing heavily on grammar, punctuation, and spelling; they were free to be creative and make the writing their own.

**Cognitive Pedagogy**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, cognitive pedagogy became a movement that brought to light the more scientific explanations for the thinking processes association with composition. Cognitive pedagogy considers three major elements of the writing task: the task environment, the writer’s long-term memory, and the writing process itself (Flower and Hayes, 1981). The task environment includes everything outside of the writer, such as the room, furniture, other people, and anything else within the confines of the writing space. The writer’s long-term memory exists within the mind, and represents a store of knowledge on various topics and audiences accessed throughout the act of writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981). The writing process is a writer’s “tool kit” in which they use various tools at different stages of writing as they compose based on a rhetorical problem or issue presented by the professor or researcher (Flower and Hayes, 1981).
These three elements work together to create a meaningful context for writing, while also allowing a more comprehensive look at the thinking processes students use to compose.

In order to obtain a more comprehensive look at the act of composing (also known as translating) by students as they wrote, cognitive pedagogy began to incorporate protocols. For example, the think-aloud protocol was introduced as a way to have students verbally express their goals of writing, as well as the distinctive thinking processes that occur during the act of writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981). Students would be given a written task or problem, then they would verbally describe the act of writing as a tape recorder gathered their words for transcription and analysis.

With cognitive pedagogy, writers create their own goals in order to develop a sense of purpose while composing. Writers seek to meet four specific goals, or purposes, when they write. These goals are: 1) focus on the effect the writer wants to have on the reader; 2) the relationship they wish to establish with the reader; 3) attempt to build a coherent network of ideas to create meaning; and 4) represent the formal or conventional features of a written text (Flower and Hayes, 1980). When writers seek to meet these four goals, their work begins to exhibit context in addition to a sense of purpose. Student compositions are able to use these goals to problem-solve as they compose. Problem solving is a cognitive process that includes free writing and daydreaming, in addition to the think aloud protocol (Flower and Hayes, 1980).

Throughout the cognitive pedagogy movement, Flower and Hayes became prominent voices, and their work helped to shape and define what approaches writers take when presented with written tasks. Their work used detailed records of subjects’ behavior to understand the processes conducted when their subjects faced a rhetorical writing task. While this work helped to find a more scientific approach to understanding how and why students write, expressive
pedagogy appears to have maintained a prominent position in composition pedagogy due to the creative nature of the pedagogy itself. Cognitive pedagogy appears to have migrated to the upper level college courses beyond what students are taught in first-year composition courses.

**Process Pedagogy**

In the early 1970s, theorists and researchers opened a new line of inquiry into the processes and steps involved in creating writing, from idea generation to final product. During this time, expressive pedagogy subsided as what became known as “process writing” became commonplace in many first-year composition classrooms. Implementing process pedagogy did not require any expensive training, equipment, textbooks, or raises in funding. Process pedagogy only required instructors to respect and respond to their students, not for what they wrote, but for what they could write (Murray, 1997).

Process writing centered around the idea that there are three stages to the writing process: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Prewriting is everything that takes place before the first draft and can take up to 85% of the writer’s time (Murray, 1997). The writing stage is the act of producing the first draft and considered the fastest and most frightening stage of the writing process (Murray, 1997). Even with the commitment of putting one’s ideas on paper, the writing stage may only take up as little as 1% of the writer’s time (Murray, 1997). The remaining 14% of the writer’s time is devoted to rewriting, or the act of reconsidering subject, form, and audience (Murray, 1997).

The most common defining characteristic of process writing was a change from a focus on the product of writing to the process of composition. Process pedagogy is based on the idea of knowing how to compose, rather than knowing what to compose (Blyler, 1987). It attempts to answer the question “What is the process we should teach?” (Murray, 1972). The answer being,
emphasizing the process of discovery through language and what we feel about language (Murray, 1972).

It is worth noting that a consequence of process writing shifted learning from the expectations of creating a text (rubrics, templates, and course requirements) to enhancing the knowledge and skills to produce it. Process pedagogy was meant to help students engage more with their writing in order to develop self-efficacy and confidence. As a result, students had more strategies for their toolboxes with which they could apply as they followed the writing process. Changing the focus of writing from product to process gave writers more leeway in using their voice to develop products that expressed their ideas in more creative and structured means than were not heavily utilized in expressive or cognitive pedagogies.

**Post-Process Pedagogy and the Social Turn**

Because writing is not a linear process, it makes sense that different students may have multiple approaches to various writing tasks, and post-process pedagogy sought a similar process that applied to all writers. In the mid-1990s, composition studies began, once again, to shift toward a new pedagogy. While many still utilized process writing as part of the first-year composition course, some began to take issue with the idea of a single writing process for every student, thus post-process pedagogy began to make its way into the literature and first-year composition classrooms. With the idea that novice writers do not have enough knowledge to effectively revise their work or may not understand that “good” writing often requires copious amounts of revision, composition pedagogy began to shift to the post-process movement (Anson, 2014).

Post-process pedagogy saw process writing as a “set of complex cognitive, linguistic, ideational, and interpersonal activities relying on prior experience with print literacy” (Anson,
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS” 2014, p.223). It did not seek to replace process pedagogy, rather, it sought to refine it and add more depth to what was already established. This modification in ideology centered on the “social turn.” The “social turn” emphasized social and cultural issues that were missing from cognitive and process writing (Downs & Wardle, 2012). Because process pedagogy did not highly prioritize basic skills and conventions, and mostly focused on a writer’s language and experience, it left some to speculate how much learning students gained from this type of pedagogy.

As a result, the field began to turn toward more social pedagogies. These pedagogies incorporated and acknowledged race, gender, and class as part of the writing experience. With the focus on these previously overlooked elements now taking center stage with the “social turn,” writing and the pedagogies associated with it needed to change, which is what lead to a development that addresses the rift between process and post-process writing called “writing about writing” (Anson, 2014).

**Writing about Writing**

Writing about writing (WAW), as a pedagogy, attempts to synthesize process and post-process pedagogy. It also attempts to improve students’ comprehension of rhetoric, language, and writing in a course that focuses on scholarly inquiry and realistic conceptions of writing (Anson, 2014). When students learn about writing, they can alter their approaches to and understandings of the process of writing while also incorporating context (Downs & Wardle, 2012). When students begin to compose writing that reflects upon their own writing, this metacognitive approach can allow them to reconcile how they write with why they write. These reflections can begin to take place in the first-year composition classroom, which is the ground-zero of writing pedagogy.
WAW gives students more opportunities to engage in meaningful discussion about texts and their application to writing and scholarship, rather than having students tear them apart in order to find and translate the scholarship of the work. Writing and literacy take center stage so that students can begin to experience various approaches to writing in lieu of following a single process such as process pedagogy entails. However, the writing process of prewriting, writing, and rewriting still maintains a place in many middle and high school classrooms as the prominent guide to teaching students how to write.

**Current Writing Instruction in Middle and High Schools**

Applebee and Langer (2015) found that process-oriented approaches to writing instruction were widespread with 91% of English classes implementing the pedagogy consistently when introducing extended writing tasks to students. To some extent, the concept of writing as a process is now institutionalized in most middle and high schools, and the later movements in composition pedagogy seem to have had a much more limited impact on curriculum and instruction. Prewriting, writing, and rewriting are stages imperative to the writing instruction approach in both middle and high school, but this approach often ignores the complexity of writing and simplifies it as “the” writing process. While many courses choose to follow the prewriting, writing, and rewriting process in a linear fashion, the composition of writing may not be so black and white, especially once students reach college. Research even suggests that many students, reportedly as many as 50%, graduate high school without obtaining adequate writing skills that will help them be successful in a college setting (Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken, 2009). Therefore, it is questionable as to why “the” writing process remains prevalent in middle and high school writing curriculums.
Not all students naturally choose “the” writing process in the way it is prescribed in middle and high school when engaged with writing when in first-year composition classes. Once students are left to their own creative devices for composition, some may choose to leave out sections of “the” writing process or create other meaningful ways to complete their work, such as journaling or poetry writing. While many instructors and students find parts of “the” writing process useful to various extents, some agree there is no single writing process applicable to all students that will be successful for every writing task. This is similar to the current school of thought in composition studies that there are various “writing processes” that students may choose to use when approaching composition tasks. The concerns related to an emphasis on the rules of writing could be a factor that affected the way students viewed their own ability to write, thus leading them to identify as “bad writers.”

In their work, Applebee and Langer (2015) suggested that most of the writing activities that teachers implemented during their study showed a more sophisticated understanding of effective writing instruction than was present in the 1980s; however, even with a better understanding of effective writing instruction, English teachers were not assigning much extended writing at all. It seems that collaborative writing work remains less popular than teacher-led activities, and that many writing teachers were more concerned with being clear about what the writing expectations were than on teaching students how to write effectively (Applebee and Langer, 2015). However, strategies such as gallery walks, feedback forms, discussion of writing, and writing portfolios were used as methods of assisting students in learning how to write, but an adequate amount of time was not given to writing instruction due to the competing priority of standardized test preparation (Applebee and Langer, 2015). If students are not supported with enough strategies or tools to use when composing, their self-identity as
writers may be adversely affected. These “bad” experiences when initially taught how to write may be paramount in why FYC students experience reluctance and anxiety when faced with an extended academic writing task.

**Common Approaches to Writing Instruction in High School**

High school writing instruction commonly includes short answer responses to homework, responses to materials that were read, completing worksheets, summaries of materials read, journals, personal narratives, poems, short stories, and five-paragraph essays (Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken, 2009). Much of the writing instruction in high school is also geared toward preparing students for high-stakes, state-mandated testing. The importance placed on mandated testing could suggest why “the” writing process, as well as the five-paragraph essay, remain as common assignments in the teaching of writing. In addition to the more standardized writing instruction focused on testing, poetry, narratives, and journals allows students to also have creative outlets when composing. However, research suggests that teachers who instruct younger high school students in writing tend to value creative writing more than teachers who teach upperclassmen (Frawley, 2014). If more creative types of writing are left out of the writing curriculum as students progress through grade levels in high school, they are being deprived of some of the skills necessary to participate in composition in college.

Even though evidence-based and research-supported practices are emphasized in reform efforts in education, there is almost no evidence to support high school teachers’ use of these practices in the teaching of writing (Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken, 2009). While there are many approaches to writing instruction in high school that teachers may implement to help students as they compose a variety of tasks, many are unable to confidently prepare students for written tasks. According to Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken (2009), most teachers in their survey did not
believe that their college teacher education program adequately prepared them to teach writing. Their research also found that 71% of all teachers who participated in their survey received minimal to no preparation to teach writing during their teacher preparation courses, and 44% said that there was little preparation provided after college through in-service workshops provided by their jobs (Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken, 2009). With so little effort given to teacher preparation for teaching writing, it is reasonable to assume that students are not being adequately prepared for life beyond high school, whether that be college or the workforce.

Baggage from bad instruction and writing experiences follows students from high school to college. The new, higher expectations of first-year composition courses may exacerbate feelings of reluctance and anxiety toward the writing process, leading students to self-identify as “bad writers.” With current expectations of FYC requiring students to implement critical thinking, research, analysis, and independent writing skills, all related to various complex topics, students may be ill prepared to participate in and respond to writing tasks they will encounter in college. Students in FYC courses need to be able to demonstrate their knowledge, while also being able to complete sustained writing for personal, imaginative, and persuasive purposes (Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken, 2009). The expectation that students can respond with multi-paged papers instead of the formulaic five-paragraph essay emphasized in middle and high school can be off-putting and possibly even intimidating to students who received poor writing instruction in high school.

**First-Year Composition Writing Instruction**

First-year composition (FYC) courses began in the late 1870s at Harvard with the implementation of a written admissions exam in 1874 (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014). This written admissions exam led to the creation of a composition course originally conceived as
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS” 38

remedial in 1885, and most colleges in America implemented similar composition courses within 15 years (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014). With the initial foundation labeled as a course for remedial students, FYC courses would change quite a bit over the next 150 years.

One event that continued to shape and define FYC courses was the 1949 annual conference for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). In 1947, the first interest group focused on teaching freshman composition and communication formed was the Conference on College Composition and Communication (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014). This interest group focused on common teaching strategies and practices as a means of collaboration and understanding (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014). At the 1949 NCTE conference, the council voted to recognize the Conference on College Composition and Communication as a conference for three additional years in order to support collaboration among those teaching the FYC courses. This approval allowed the collaborative work of the group to continue, which helped to define FYC courses and teaching practices that lead to student growth.

In the summer of 1966, Dartmouth held a conference for teachers of English from Canada, Great Britain, and the United States. This conference attempted to achieve three goals: 1) offering a definition of English; 2) providing an understanding of the proper role of literature; and 3) exploring effective teaching methods in the English classroom (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014). Findings from this conference determined that English is “a study of how one grows in his or her ability to use and understand English,” and that “English is not about literature, but [how] readers create the meanings they take from texts via various contexts that they bring to the reading of texts,” and, finally, that teachers were “against the traditional
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

authoritarian classroom…[and] in favor of one that focused…on the students and their individual growth” (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014, p.135).

In 1996 a group of 10 scholars from Australia, Great Britain, and the United States met to “consider the future of literacy teaching; to discuss what would need to be taught in a rapidly changing near future, and how this should be taught” (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, p.3). The New London Group, as they became known, saw “writing as a social action…and as a collection of ‘multiliteracies’” (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014, p.151). They “outlined a literacy program that would be comprised not only of linguistic literacy, but also Visual Design, Gestural Design, Spatial Design, and Audio Design” (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014, p.151). This new literacy program would argue the “the linguistic is multimodal” and that “all meaning making is multimodal,” leading to the idea that FYC courses should not be considered as just one thing, but a multitude of elements that are used to compose meaning (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014, p.152).

While originally focusing on grammar, mechanics, and essay structure, FYC courses were “often characterized as monolithic and uniformly bad” (Lunsford and Coxwell-Teague, 2014, p.152). Current academic writing instruction in the FYC classroom is “essentially a methods course that has no proprietary topics other than writing itself,” and the course often utilizes writing topics from other disciplines (Combs, 2015, p.2). Now academic writing instruction at the university level can serve multiple purposes within the writing course. Some purposes that academic writing can serve are for assessment, for learning, and for entering particular disciplinary communities (Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, and Swann, 2002). Many students begin FYC courses with a basic understanding of how to write an essay, but the skills needed for academic writing are often assumed to be “common sense” by
professors (Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, and Swann, 2002). This assumption could be damaging to students who lack confidence in their own writing and need support and scaffolding to help them have more positive experiences with writing in order to combat the phenomenon of self-identifying as “bad writers.”

**Effective Writing Instruction**

While Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken (2009) did find that up to 50% of high school students do not graduate with adequate writing skills for college. Effective writing instruction at the college-level requires that instructors resist the thinking that most students come to the first-year composition (FYC) course with little to no writing skills and need to be “saved” from their anticipated bad writing (Downs & Wardle, 2012). In order to build writing confidence and attempt to assess what writing skills students possess, instructors cannot approach their course assuming that their students’ writing abilities are greatly lacking, as this could be detrimental to students who already self-identify as “bad writers” and lack confidence in their own ability to write.

By utilizing a range of strategies and best practices, instructors can help to improve the writing of their students, no matter where each students’ writing ability begins. In their meta-analysis of effective writing instruction strategies, Graham and Perin (2007) identified 11 research-based best practices (treatments) that can improve student writing. These 11 best practices are:

1. writing strategies (planning, revising, and editing)
2. summarization
3. collaborative writing
4. specific product goals (identify purpose and characteristics of assignment)
5. word processing as an alternate mode of composing
6. sentence combining to teach complex sentence structure
7. prewriting
8. inquiry activities (analysis and evaluation)
9. process writing approach
10. study of models
11. writing for content learning

Each of the 11 best practices help to develop a writing program that intends to improve the skills of students for various writing tasks; however, the list does not constitute a full writing curriculum (Dean, 2010). As suggested by Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken (2009), there is little evidence that high school teachers include these 11 best practices into their curriculum; however, the literature also has even less to report regarding how often most of these practices are used in the FYC classroom.

Of the 11 methods of effective writing instruction mentioned by Graham and Perin (2007), two specific methods have shown to be especially effective for use in college-level writing courses: process pedagogy and modeling. While process pedagogy has been part of university writing curriculum for more than 50 years, the idea of a singular, recursive writing process still appeals to many and has shown to be effective in improving student writing (Graham & Perin, 2007; Anson, 2014). However, there is also the school of thought that no single writing process is completely effective for all writers, which allows for adjustments to be made to the processes that students apply when approaching a writing task. Process pedagogy requires that students complete certain steps as they compose a piece of writing. Some models have three steps of writing, while others have up to seven; however, all models of process
writing include prewriting, writing, and revising written assignments (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2005). As discussed previously, while process pedagogy is still used in many high school and FYC courses, it is worth noting that there is room for the inclusion of creativity and independence in the approaches students use when composing for academic purposes.

Modeling of mentor texts is an effective way for instructors to explicitly teach skills and assess student skill levels, all while engaging in meaningful discussions about writing. Instructors are able to have real-time, interactive feedback sessions with students while modeling exemplar texts for various elements of effective writing (Wette, 2014). Due to the variety of career fields of students within a single FYC course, modeling can be effective at also exposing students to the types of writing required for different fields, thus possibly enhancing understanding of writing across genres and building their writing confidence and views toward their own abilities as writers.

**College-Level Writing Instruction**

Students’ views of their abilities as writers is crucial not only to their composition of written products and tasks, but also to their ability to think critically and participate in the conversations necessary to grow as thinkers and writers in the FYC classroom. The primary goal of college-level writing instruction is to introduce students to an ongoing conversation that is multifaceted and complex (Sullivan, 2006). The introduction to the conversation must be thoughtful, and engage issues and ideas in such a way as to promote a willingness to write from students (Sullivan, 2006). As students are unlikely to be motivated to write for themselves, it is necessary for college-level writing instruction to mimic, or at least prepare students for, writing that will become a part of their career(s) after graduating from college (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007). Beyond the basic writing skills that are necessary for students to compose basic writing tasks,
college-level writing must also incorporate content for the various degree fields of a university. The rigor of writing increases as students progress through their degree programs, and it also becomes more focused in relation to specific academic content. Sullivan (2006) suggests that one element that makes college-level writing instruction different (for English teachers) from any other level is because our pedagogy makes this work very demanding, particularly on the most basic interpersonal, emotional level. Because our discipline has embraced a pedagogy of draft and revision, and because our classrooms typically promote collaborative learning, and because we typically work very closely with our students as they draft and revise their essays. (p. 8)

The demanding rigor related to the work of college-level writing instruction can not only be taxing for instructors, but also for students as they adjust to the new expectations and requirements of writing that may (and should) differ from those of their secondary education.

**Current Composition Studies Pedagogy**

With the increase in technology incorporation into curriculum and daily life, current writing instruction has seen a new focus on “technologies of writing and another focus on the politics of writing and literacy, which explores the nature of writing and texts as social and cultural empowerment” (Downs & Wardle, 2012). While encompassing this new ideology of empowerment, questions about how to proceed as a field still cause tension amongst instructors and theorists alike, affecting the attitudes toward students and writing.

Many current educators within the field of writing instruction hold several different attitudes regarding writing instruction, writing students, and the role of writing instruction in
higher education. Downs and Wardle (2012) have identified four common attitudes of teachers of writing. Those attitudes are:

1. A concern for the success of students as individuals bettering themselves through higher education.

2. A belief in the abilities of students, a centering sense, that students are already writers with things to say.

3. A critique of educational structures, systems, and myths that impede students as writers, thinkers, and participants in civic life.

4. A conviction that if teachers think more carefully about their work, taking these other starting points into account, we can improve writing instruction.

Each attitude holds a different possibility for the instructor and their students in regards to how they deliver their writing instruction, but at their most fundamental levels, these attitudes highlight modern issues in the field that need to be rectified or reconciled to move forward toward a more unified pedagogy.

**Writing Anxiety, Reluctance, and Apprehension**

Many students experience writing related anxiety at some point in their writing history. Whether it be anxiety about work overload, a due date, the content, research, or the skills necessary to complete writing tasks, the effects of this anxiety can be detrimental to the success of a student and their compositions. Writing anxiety, generally recognized as a psychological concept, can be experienced on different levels by different students (Daly & Miller, 1975). However, it can also create negative feelings that writers experience when attempting to capture ideas and compose (Tsao et al, 2017). Many factors can influence levels of writing anxiety in students. Some of these anxiety-inducing factors are the students’ linguistic abilities, their cognitive abilities, and the classroom practices implemented by the course instructor (Tsao et al, 2017). With these factors affect student writing anxiety to varying degrees, it may be difficult for
students to pinpoint which exact factor most affects their writing confidence and produces anxiety.

Due to the varying levels of anxiety associated with writing, students may manifest the stress of this anxiety emotionally as feelings of sadness, anger, and fear, while also experiencing physical manifestations of pain, cramps, and feelings of unwellness (Bayat, 2014). These symptoms of writing anxiety often results in students retreating from academically challenging writing tasks and seeking refuge in behaviors that may not be conducive to enhancing their own writing skills and abilities. Behaviors such as acting out, refusal to complete assignments, and missing class are possible consequences that can stem from writing anxiety.

In addition to emotional and physical anxiety, students can experience reluctance and apprehension when faced with an academic writing task. Writing apprehension refers to “a situation and subject specific individual difference associated with a person’s tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to potentially require writing accompanied by some amount of perceived evaluation” (Daly & Wilson, 1983, p.327). There are two categories a student may fall under regarding writing apprehension: high apprehensive and low apprehensive. Those who are high apprehensive find little reward in writing and consider it a punishment, and avoid situations where writing is required (Daly & Wilson, 1983). While those who are low apprehensive are confident in their writing abilities and do not mind participating in writing tasks (Daly & Wilson, 1983). These different levels of apprehension can directly affect self-efficacy and writing confidence depending on how much anxiety a student associates with a given writing task or with their own understanding and perception of the writing process.

There is a perception held by some writers that there is a particular order that needs to be closely followed in order to write correctly, which can lead to writing reluctance (Irvin 2010;
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”  

Daly & Miller, 1983).Viewing writing as formulaic and prescriptive can cause students to become reluctant to compose because an element of creativity and individuality has been removed. For some students, creativity and individuality in writing is what makes it appealing and tolerable. Considering the complexity of an arduous writing process may be a cause for apprehension, writing apprehension may also dissuade students from allocating more time and effort toward composing texts (Tsao et al, 2017).

Research indicates that students with high writing anxiety lack self-esteem and confidence in improving their writing skills, and tend to write sporadically and avoid writing classes, composing low-quality work, and lacking motivation in writing (Huwari and Hashima, 2011). A lack of self-esteem and confidence keep students from being successful with writing tasks, but perhaps the guidelines and requirements of writing tasks also affect their apprehension and reluctance when approaching an assigned writing task.

However, rather than following a strict adherence to a list of guidelines, writing can be a recursive process that allows for flexibility within the structure of the composition (Irvin 2010). The literature shows that scholars are aware of a lack of writing confidence in students, but there is little to address why students become deficient in their writing confidence skills or how their lived experiences may directly affect their writing achievement (Antoniou & Moriarty 2008, Bruning and Horn 2000, Carignan-Belleville 1989, Fernsten and Reda 2011). This study seeks to investigate reasons why students feel inadequate about their writing skills, while also letting participants express how writing instruction and feedback has, in their opinion, caused them to self-identify as “bad writers.”
Writing, Identity, and Self-Efficacy

Writing and identity are two possible components in expressing one’s inner voice and creative musings. It is important to recognize that “writing is a potentially powerful vehicle for transformation, for it opens up possibilities for awareness, reflection, and inquiry that writing as an act of textual production does not necessarily do” (Yagelski, 2009, p. 7). Awareness and reflection help to build identity and self-efficacy. Writing is often considered “an ontological act: when we write, we enact a sense of ourselves as beings into the world” (Yagelski, 2009, p.7). By enacting a sense of ourselves, writers are able to connect with who they are and their purpose as a writer engaging in reflection and composition. There is importance in understanding that writing can shape and reflect our identity in relation to each other and the world (Yagelski, 2009). These relationships to others in the world directly feed into our self-efficacy and confidence in ourselves as writers.

Some teachers have noted that students who are apprehensive toward writing also tend to feel less positive about themselves (Daly and Wilson, 1983). This lowered self-image connects to the idea that writing is intentional in nature and requires effort, which can directly or accidentally expose a student’s inner self to others (Daly and Wilson, 1983). Due to the personal and intentional nature of writing, students may feel reluctance, especially when the task connects with a grade or evaluation. If their apprehension level is high and they experience anxiety toward many, if not all, writing tasks, this could understandably explain why they may choose to self-identify as “bad writers.”

The concept of self-efficacy can be explained as students’ beliefs or confidence in their ability to produce desired outcomes by their behavior (Eller et al, 2016). Self-efficacy is not a constant among all areas as it depends on the person and the situation; however, a person can
have high self-efficacy for some areas of their life, but low self-efficacy for others (Eller et al, 2016). Weinert (2001) also describes self-efficacy as a motivational, voluntary, and social readiness of individuals to use solutions successfully and responsibly in a variety of situations with cognitive abilities and skills that individuals have learned to solve problems. With academic writing being a context-specific issue, students who experience writing anxiety or reluctance may find this area particularly challenging and possibly fearful. Conversely, students may not feel this same fear, anxiety, or reluctance toward perceived less complex types of writing, such as creative writing.

Self-efficacy and writing identity are closely connected with social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory “posits an interactive, though asymmetric, relation between perceived self-efficacy and fear arousal, with coping efficacy exercising the greater sway” (Bandura, 1986, p.562). If social cognitive theory can link self-efficacy with apprehension and fear, this further explains why students feel reluctance toward writing if they have not had experiences that were positive in the past. It is also important to note that “self-efficacy leads people to approach intimidating situations anxiously, and experience of disruptive levels of arousal may further lower their sense that they will be able to perform well” on a given writing task (Bandura, 1986, p.564). The anxiety experienced by students related to writing tasks can possibly further damage their identity as writers and leave them lacking motivation to participate in any type of writing task.

**Student Motivation and Self-Efficacy as Factors in Writing Instruction**

Student motivation and self-efficacy are factors that can hinder effective writing instruction at any level. As students often predict how they will do on an assignment based on their own beliefs about their level of skill, motivation levels can drop if a student does not hold
strong beliefs in their abilities as a writer (Schunk, 1996; Demir, 2018; Eller et al, 2016). It is important to understand that writing self-efficacy is important to a student’s beliefs regarding managing and achieving before beginning a writing task (Demir, 2018). Students use their beliefs regarding self-efficacy to help determine how much effort to pay in an activity, how hard they try to struggle when they encounter challenges and how much they may resist against negative situations (Demir, 2018). Self-efficacy in and of itself can be detrimental to student success if their beliefs are not highly positive. On the other hand, if a student holds strong, positive beliefs in their skills as a writer, their achievement is likely to be high on a written task.

Schunk (1996) asserts that “self-efficacy is not the only influence on achievement behavior; also important are ability, knowledge, skill, outcome expectations, and perceived value of learning or other outcomes” (p. 5). Each influence can become a factor in leading students to either being successful on a writing assignment, or predicting and achieving failure. It is essential to understand that self-efficacy and writing motivation are also closely linked with writing anxiety and apprehension (Daly & Wilson, 1978; Holmes, Waterbury, Baltrinic, & Davis, 2018). If a student has anxiety about a writing task based on their own beliefs about their skills as a writer, the results can be unpleasant and lead to further feelings of reluctance toward future writing opportunities.

Being anxious toward a writing task, specifically an academic writing task, may lead to students doubting their own beliefs in their abilities as a writer. Because of the situational nature of writing, students may enjoy writing in one setting and be terrified by writing when the setting is high stakes (Holmes, Waterbury, Baltrinic, & Davis, 2018). A fear of writing situations is important to consider when facing students who are apprehensive toward writing tasks. It may well be this fear that causes students to self-identify as “bad writers.” Unfortunately, academic
writing is often believed to be more “high stakes” than other types of writing; therefore, student anxiety and reluctance may hinder their ability to produce writing that is a more accurate example of their abilities to acquire and share their knowledge.

The implications of research regarding learner self-efficacy and student motivation are that instructors need to be aware of the stress and anxiety that students face when tasked with rigorous writing assignments. Challenging academic writing can be complex and perceived as risky by students, but this does not mean that students are never interested in writing (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007). Interestingly enough, the majority of students begin school believing that they can write (Pajares, Valiante, & Fai, 2007). However, writing self-efficacy beliefs tend to diminish as students move from elementary to middle school and only continue to do so as they continue their education.

Further implications also point to the need for instructors to understand that even if they offer fair, valid feedback on writing assignments and incorporate multiple effective writing instruction strategies into their courses, some students will continue to struggle with motivation and self-efficacy. Research has shown that “one entrenched, negative perceptions of one’s ability are exceedingly resistant to change, and even subsequent academic success often fails to alter these beliefs” (Pajares, Valiante, & Fai, 2007, p. 142). Patience is necessary for instructors as they continue to work with students of all ability levels, especially those who struggle with writing apprehension and self-efficacy.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As the purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the experiences FYC students may have had that possibly impacted their writing confidence, this chapter outlines the methodological basis for this work, the research design, data collection methods, participants and setting, the rationale for using a phenomenological lens, and an explanation of the validity and reliability.

For this work, I am interested in examining how and why the lived experiences of FYC students may affect their writing confidence, resulting in them self-identifying as “bad writers.” I want to hear and examine the stories that FYC students have to tell about their writing histories and the lived experiences related to writing that could have affected their identities as writers, especially as these experiences relate to academic writing. Mostly, I want to better understand the why behind students self-identifying as “bad writers,” and how I, as their instructor, can possibly offer instruction and lived experiences through writing that can positively affect their identities as writers. It is my hope that through the continuation of this work, I can offer insight to other FYC instructors who have students who also self-identify as “bad writers.”

Deciding Upon Qualitative Research as a Methodology

In order to complete this work, I chose to use methodological tools that would best assist me in attempting to gain a better understanding of my FYC participants and the lived experiences that affected their writing identities. Because of the innately human nature of this work, I felt that using a qualitative approach would be more suitable (rather than numerical, data-driven quantitative results) in order to collect the type of data I need to investigate my research questions more thoroughly. Qualitative research is more personal and situational than
quantitative research, which is another reason I chose it for this work. Quantitative research values knowledge that is more precise and measurable, while qualitative research allows for a more explorative approach to a topic or phenomenon.

Research based on quantitative methods can be experimental or quasi-experimental, and often begins with hypotheses that attempt to predict an outcome based on a cause-and-effect relationship between two or more elements. Qualitative research, on the other hand, depends on data collection that is verbal and observational, which can be analyzed more subjectively than quantitative data. While both qualitative and quantitative research methods can employ the use of surveys, qualitative surveys are open-ended, quantitative surveys use questions that are based on Likert scales or have a list of answer choices for you to choose from.

Because I wanted to look more closely at the why and how, as opposed to statistical data a quantitative approach could provide, I decided that a qualitative approach was more applicable and appropriate as a way for me to investigate the phenomenon of students self-identifying as “bad writers.” A common element of qualitative research is the use of thick descriptions of scenarios, which I thought would be helpful in my participants’ interviews and LEDs as they described their lived experiences. Qualitative research can also use observations, focus groups, and oral histories as ways to collect data, but these methods would not be beneficial to my work. Observations were not relevant to this work because participants have already lived through the experiences they would be sharing, so I would be unable to observe any behavior that may have affected their writing identity. Because the work focused on individual responses to lived experiences and writing, focus groups might cause participants to be more reserved in their responses due to the possible vulnerability when discussing their writing anxiety and reluctance. Also, participants could feed off of each other and offer responses that may or may not be as
accurate and factual as they would have been in a private interview setting. Oral histories can be effective when the researcher is attempting to gather a participant’s history chronologically from one point in their life to another set point; however, the lived experiences my participants might offer may not reported chronologically and I did not want other details of their lives to muddy the work specifically as it related to writing identity.

Lastly, qualitative research questions allow for novelty and the ability to investigate one’s own curiosities, while also linking work to what others have done and maintaining the unique nature of one’s own research. This ability to formulate questions that would be flexible enough to meet my curiosities about FYC students and their writing identities was also a deciding factor to use qualitative research for this project. Quantitative research questions rely upon variables that are independent or remain the same throughout the study and tend to have a very prescriptive method for creating questions. Formulaic questions were not something I thought would help to develop my research in a way that was meaningful and met the goals I wanted to investigate through this work.

**Value of Specific Methodology**

**Tenets of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research relies mainly on human perception and understanding of personal experience and intuition. Due to its interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic characteristics, qualitative research offers a glimpse of what it means to be human and how we participate in the world (Stake, 2010). A qualitative study is considered well done if it includes triangulation and is informed by the main theories and professional understandings of the field of study. Qualitative methodology has been used to help understand “complex phenomenon such as attitudes and behaviors toward completing tasks, because this approach allows researchers to
derive thick descriptions of a scenario or situation” (Fischer, Meyers, & Dobelbower, 2017, p. 258). It is the thick descriptions of phenomena that allow researchers to interpret and understand what it means to be a part of the world, and what will help elaborate the findings from my work.

Similar to Stake (2010), Creswell (2013) asserts that qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive and theoretical frameworks that address the meaning individuals give to a social or human problem. The human problem addressed in this work will focus on FYC students’ lived experiences that have affected their writing confidence and possibly led them to self-identify as “bad writers.”

Further defining the characteristics and elements of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2011), in their *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, assert that this form of research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world...[and] consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

My interest in why FYC students self-identify as “bad writers” best fits into a qualitative methodology. I am seeking to discover and interpret reasons as to why students believe that they are “bad writers” and why they may be apprehensive toward writing tasks. Qualitative research will allow me to utilize the personalistic and empathetic nature of this type of inquiry to seek to attempt to understand how lived experiences affect writing confidence. This avenue of research
also allows the perspectives of both the participants and the researcher to assist in seeking to understand a topic, which is part of my personal motivation for completing this work.

The situational nature of qualitative research describes contexts through the use of thick description and focused inquiry. This study does not seek generalizable data regarding what instructors can do to prevent FYC students from self-identifying as “bad writers”; rather, it is an attempt to understand what lived experiences affect writing confidence and have led to students self-identifying as “bad writers” and may have affected their writing confidence. Therefore, qualitative research is the most appropriate form of research to utilize in order to attempt to understand this phenomenon through the perspectives of the participants of this work. My reflexivity, along with that of the participants, will allow the context of knowledge construction to develop and guide the work toward a more descriptive, rather than analytical, outcome (Flick, 2009).

**Nature of Qualitative Questions**

Because qualitative research examines the human perspective of life, questions for this domain should reflect the intentions of the researcher. Stake (2010) suggests asking questions that have novelty, reflect your own curiosities, and link to what others have done while still maintaining ownership of the uniqueness of your work. The importance of creating research questions should be taken seriously (Stake, 2010; Creswell, 2013). Wording research questions is also an important task because, if done correctly, they tell better than the title of the report what you are going to do. A good research question leads the researcher to focus on increasing important knowledge and addresses problems in a field of investigation and practice (Vogt, 2007).

Qualitative research questions differ from quantitative research questions in that they are
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional (Stake, 2010). While quantitative research questions are designed to lead to a collection of data in order to gather evidence and solve a problem (Vogt, 2007), qualitative research questions look more closely at the what and how in order to explore a central phenomenon (Stake, 2010). As my work aims to understand what happened in my participants’ lived experiences and how those experiences affected their writing confidence and identities, a qualitative research approach would be best suited for this academic endeavor.

Qualitative Research: General Approaches

The situational nature of qualitative research describes contexts through the use of thick description and focused inquiry (Stake, 2010). This study does not seek generalizable data regarding what instructors can do to prevent FYC students from self-identifying as bad writers; rather, it is an attempt to understand what lived experiences affect writing confidence and have led to students self-identifying as bad writers. Therefore, qualitative research is the most appropriate form of research to utilize in order to attempt to understand this phenomenon through the perspectives of the participants of this work. By positioning myself in this qualitative work, I plan to state my reflexivity in my researcher notes. My reflexivity, along with that of the participants, will allow the context of knowledge construction to develop and guide the work toward a more descriptive, rather than analytical, outcome (Flick, 2009).

Being aware that using a phenomenological lens and qualitative methodology can become overwhelming for researchers, I intend to use reflective journal entries to help keep myself focused and open-minded to the possibilities that may reveal themselves through the research. As Heidegger (1962) warns, researchers can easily fall into a trap of being too literal while analyzing data or only seeing what they want to see. However, Gadamer (1975) suggests
that when one applies diligence when examining the data and one’s own understanding of the work, what emerges from the work will not be influenced by bias and presuppositions.

While I am not attempting to bracket out all of my personal background and beliefs about writing as I begin this work, I will attempt to limit the influence of my preconceptions so that the work can speak for itself in the most meaningful way. This limiting of my preconceptions will take place as part of foregrounding my thoughts and interpretations fully in my researcher journal entries before, during, and after analyzing data for this work.

**Key Concepts of Phenomenology**

The following elements of hermeneutic phenomenological research are presented in Van Manen’s *Researching Lived Experiences* (1990). Phenomenological research is

- the study of lived experience
- the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness
- the study of essences
- the human scientific study of phenomena
- a search for what it means to be human
- the attentive practice of thoughtfulness
- the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them
- a poetizing activity

Hermeneutic phenomenology asks questions about the experiences of life and what they are like to each individual. This type of phenomenological research fits my planned study as it affords an opportunity to engage in and reflect on the experiences of participants organically as they attempt to explain their lived experiences through human consciousness. Human consciousness is one of the only ways we have to experience and interpret the world around us.
This consciousness is what comprises the entirety of our lived experiences or lifeworld. It is the challenge of reflection and interpretation that draws me to further understanding the reasons that students struggle with writing confidence and motivation toward academic writing tasks. Attempting to understand the human condition is a heavy undertaking that is tackled under the realm of phenomenological research. Becoming aware of who we are affords researchers multiple perspectives and lenses through which they can draw meaning and understanding to connect others’ lived experiences to selected phenomenon.

Because phenomenology is scientific in a broad sense, as it is a systematic, explicit, self-critical, and intersubjective study of its subject matter, researchers are tasked with describing the nuances of this methodology to help justify the science within its methods (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological research is different from other types of qualitative research in many ways. To summarize a phenomenological study is to remove the very essence of the work and minimize the efforts afforded from both the researcher and the participants in such a way as to remove a sense of importance from the work.

Being that this work will be composed of reflections upon the lived experiences of FYC students, it is imperative to this work that students are given multiple opportunities and mediums to apply their thoughtfulness of the situations and experiences that connect to this study. With practice, the students may be able to better express and relay events that may have had an impact on their writing confidence.

**Using a Phenomenological Lens in Writing Instruction Research**

Writing is a deeply personal task for many students, and sharing something that expresses their uniqueness with others can be an extremely difficult experience, especially when the writing is attached to an evaluative score (Holmes, Waterbury, Baltrinic, & Davis, 2018).
Utilizing a phenomenological lens to investigate the emotional weight that students can attach to the act of writing offers a glimpse into the why behind their reluctance and anxiety. Examining their lived experiences related to their previous writing experiences and evaluations through this lens is advantageous because it will help to possibly shed light onto the role educators can play in developing student writing confidence.

Phenomenology gives me a chance, as a novice researcher, to delve into comprehending how previous experiences with writing shape the way students view their own abilities as writers. I believe it is the best method to examine my intended focus of this work and connect with the experiences of my participants in such a personal, meaningful way.

**Deciding Upon Phenomenology**

The purpose of phenomenological research is to “[seek] to understand how individuals perceive and make sense of their lived experiences” (Standing, 2009, p. 23). In other words, such inquiry seeks “to become more fully who we are” as individuals live and reflect upon his or her experiences to create their lifeworld (Van Manen, 1990, p. 58). I want to understand how and why students feel apprehensive about writing, which means I need to consider what lived experiences have affected their writing confidence.

Specifically, interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology allows the researcher to participate in the research without having to set aside their preconceived ideas and suppositions through a process known as bracketing (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Sixmith, & Murphy, 2013; Flood, 2010; Standing, 2009; Converse, 2011; Van Manen, 1990). Because of my experience as an educator, working with many students who struggle with writing confidence, my suppositions and preconceived ideas are tools for reflection rather than affecting the reporting of the data collected from this work.
Due to the ability for the researcher to intermingle their own lived experiences with those of their research participants in order to create a textual expression (Van Manen, 1997) of meaningful events, I have selected interpretive phenomenology as the methodology to help answer my research questions. My own lived experiences related to students and writing confidence give me a unique perspective that will help me attempt to understand how and why FYC students feel the need to self-identify as bad writers. Van Manen (1990) suggests that “to do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex that any explication of meaning can reveal” (p. 52). It is this complexity that I seek to further reflect on the human experience and the lifeworlds of my students in connection with their writing confidence.

The purpose of phenomenological research is to “[seek] to understand how individuals perceive and make sense of their lived experiences” (Standing, 2009). In other words, “to become more fully who we are” as each individual lives and reflects upon their experiences to create their lifeworld (Van Manen, 1990). Understanding how and why students feel apprehensive about writing means that I will need to consider and interpret what lived experiences have affected their writing confidence.

Specifically, interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology allows the researcher to participate in the research without having to set aside their preconceived ideas and suppositions through a process known as bracketing (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy & Sixmith, 2013; Flood, 2010; Standing, 2009; Converse, 2011; Van Manen, 1990). In interpretive phenomenology, bracketing has no place as the researcher is part of the research and their previous understanding and knowledge helps interpretation (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy,
& Sixsmith, 2013; Flood, 2010; Standing, 2009). The hermeneutic phenomenologist focuses on “describing the meanings of the individual’s dasein and how these meanings influence the choices they make rather than seeking purely descriptive categories of the real, perceived world in the narratives of the participants” (Flood, 2010, p.10).

**Research Questions**

1. How do the lived experiences of FYC students affect their writing confidence regarding academic writing tasks, and what commonalities exist between these lived experiences?

2. For students who self-identify as “bad writers,” how have their lived experiences informed their writing identities and shaped their self-efficacy beliefs?

My research questions are designed to address how the lived experiences of FYC students possibly affected their overall writing confidence and led them to self-identify as “bad writers.” Each of the two research questions looks at the importance of lived experiences related to writing and how those experiences have affected their writing identities. These questions are meant to look at the *what* and *how* of the phenomenon of students self-identifying as “bad writers” (Stake, 2010). Question one investigates the commonalities of lived experiences and writing tasks in order to analyze any impact one may have had over the other. Question two looks more closely at how FYC students’ lived experiences may have impacted their identity as “bad writers.”

**Research Design**

This work will employ the use of semi-structured interviews, LEDs, and researcher journals as tools to collect and analyze the data gathered from this work. As detailed later in this chapter, each methodological tool was chosen over others due to the flexible nature needed to
collect the stories from my participants and my reflections and thoughts as a researcher throughout the process.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen over open or structured interviews to ensure that the interview maintained a focus on the topic but also left room to introduce ideas that I could not have guessed or anticipated through my interview questions. It was important not only that we discussed the topics of the actual research project, but that students also felt that they had room to add thoughts and discuss experiences that they believed were relevant to why they self-identify as “bad writers.” LEDs were selected as a methodological instrument as they can be an essential way to examine student feedback through both a qualitative and phenomenological lens. The LEDs used in this work allowed students to give feedback and reflect on lived experiences in a low-risk setting, which was intentional and more useful than using other writing assignments from the course that did not give students an opportunity to express inner feelings and thoughts related to this research.

Finally, because of the human nature of this work and the interactions necessary with participants to gather data, I wanted documentation that gave me a chance to analyze information presented to me from my participants. As a way to reflect honestly upon the process of the work and what the data I was receiving could mean for both this and future work, I will use researcher journal entries as a final data source. While this work is unable to create generalizations based on the phenomenological foundation, the researcher journal is a way to add to the validity and reliability of this work through triangulation of data.
Data Collection Methods

In order to understand the lived experiences of students as a phenomenon in regards to their experiences with writing, this work draws from several sources of data and information in order to establish the validity of the work:

- Lived-experience descriptions (LEDs)
- Individual semi-structured audio-recorded interviews
- Reflections of interviews and upon student work samples in a researcher’s journal

Lived Experience Descriptions

Participants will compose Lived Experience Descriptions (LEDs), also known as protocol writing, to help document and identify the issues they believe they have concerning their academic writing confidence. LEDs are a written reflection of specific lived experience that asks participants to answer a question or prompt posed by the researcher. Students are asked to be specific in describing the details of the lived experience, and to avoid using flowery language in order for the reflection to remain as close to the factual experience as possible. They will be able to reflect upon their lived experiences and examine what educational experiences may have affected their confidence levels in relation to their writing skills. Van Manen (1990) suggests that the most straightforward way to go about phenomenological research is to ask participants to write about their experiences. To this end, effective LEDs address the phenomenon being researched and allow for a meaningful reflection by the participants on experiences that are relevant to the work.

Each participant will complete a total of two LEDs during the time this work is being conducted. Each LED will have a topic that will allow participants the opportunity to compose a more detailed response that follows a traditional written response formatted regarding paragraphs
and organized ideas. Topics will focus on the different lived experiences that have influenced their writing confidence and a reflection on how they define different kinds of writing and on their growth or intended growth as writers since the consequences of their lived experiences affected their writing confidence. Each prompt will allow participants to reflect on their experiences related to writing while also attempting to discover how their writing reflects their actual abilities as writers.

**Lived Experience Descriptions Requirements and Their Connection to Phenomenology**

As described by Van Manen in *Researching Lived Experiences* (1990), suggestions for the composition of LEDs follow six possible elements are stated below, along with their connections to the tenets of phenomenology.

**Figure 1.**

**LED Requirements and Related Phenomenological Tenets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LED Requirements</th>
<th>Phenomenology Tenets</th>
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| Emphasis on recounting specific events rather than abstract interpretations and generalizations. | ● The study of lived experiences  
● Search for what it means to be human                                              |
| The use of feelings, mood, and emotions to describe the lived experience.         | ● Search for what it means to be human  
● Poetizing activity                                                               |
| A focus on a particular example of the lived experience.                          | ● Attentive practice of thoughtfulness  
● The study of essences                                                           |
| Attention to the vividness of the experience.                                    | ● The study of essences  
● The study of lived experiences                                                    |
| A focus on sensory language as to how the experience felt, smelled, tasted, etc.  | ● Poetizing activity  
● Search for what it means to be human                                              |
| Emphasis on recounting specific events rather than incorporating flowery terminology. | ● Explication of phenomena  
● The study of lived experiences                                                    |

Each requirement of the LEDs directly correlates with a foundational tenet of phenomenology.
and the research goal of attempting to understand the lived experiences that may have affected participants’ writing identities. With the LEDs focusing on not only the lived experience but also asking participants to be clear in both the factual events and emotions and moods associated with the experience, the phenomenon of self-identifying as “bad writers” becomes more engaging for both the participant and the researcher. The emotions and moods associated with the lived experiences can help to reveal how much each experience may have affected a participant’s writing identity, as well as give them an opportunity to work with language that is self-descriptive and empowering as they share their reflections of these moments.

For this work, participants will complete the following LED prompts as part of their ENGL 1101 coursework. Each prompt used the LED requirements mentioned above and created by Van Manen (1990).

1. What was a time when you were given a writing assignment that you believe you did really well on, or enjoyed? What was it about this writing assignment that made you feel successful or that you enjoyed?

2. What was a time when you were given a writing assignment that you were not successful on or gave you an undue amount of stress? What about this assignment made it hard for you to be successful or made it stressful for you? How do you believe writing can affect your daily life both inside and outside of schoolwork? In what ways do you believe writing can influence student identity?

Interviews

Each participant participates in at least one semi-structured audiotaped interview lasting for 25-40 minutes. These interviews will be transcribed and open coded and analyzed for themes and consequences of lived experiences related to academic writing confidence and student
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS” 

writing identity. The hermeneutic interview is meant to serve two specific purposes: to be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, and to be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with an interviewee about the meaning of an experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Interview questions relate to the LED topics and ask participants to discuss how and why they identify as “bad writers” and what writing confidence means to them. The LEDs ask students to consider how writing affects student identity, to reflect on a writing assignment that went well and a writing assignment that caused them stress, and to think about how writing affects their everyday lives outside of school. These LED prompts help students begin reflecting on those lived experiences that I will ask about during the interviews, as participants are much more immediately involved in face-to-face conversations and may reply without developing the reflective attitude that an LED creates (Van Manen, 1990).

Van Manen (1990) suggests having the phenomenological research not enter into interviews without specific goals, research interests, and prewritten questions as the results can become confusing, which is why I decided upon having semi-structured interviews. Because the nature of a semi-structured interview allows for some organic discussion to occur that cannot be anticipated, I will enter each interview with a list of questions to help guide the discussion, but maintain flexibility if the interview needs to focus on different elements than those listed in the proposed questions (while still remaining relevant to the research).

Questions used to guide the semi-structured interviews are as follows:

- In what ways would you say you have developed as a writer since middle school?
- What experiences have affected the way you view or feel about writing?
- What would you consider your strengths in regards to writing?
• What would you consider your areas for growth in regards to writing?

• Have you ever experienced a feeling of reluctance or apprehension when approaching a written task?
  ○ What is it about writing that you think makes you apprehensive or reluctant to complete written tasks?
  ○ What feelings or emotions do you experience when you become reluctant toward a writing task?
  ○ Are there specific types of writing that cause you to become more reluctant toward completing a writing task?

• What causes or for what reasons do you refer to yourself as a “bad writer?”
  ○ What comments have others made, either in person or written on your work, that have contributed to you feeling that you are a “bad writer?”
  ○ What emotions or feelings stemmed from these comments?

• In your opinion, what makes someone a “good writer?”

• What lengths have you gone to in order to avoid completing a writing task?
  ○ Have you ever not completed a written task because of reluctance or apprehension? If so, tell me about that experience. How did you feel, emotionally or otherwise, making the decision to not complete the task? What were the consequences you faced as a result of not completing this task.

• How, if at all, do positive comments about your writing affect or change the way you feel about your own skills and abilities as a writer?

After I discussed my intentions with this work as part of my proposal defense, I began to generate a list of questions that would be appropriate to ask participants in the interviews. Once I
had the beginnings of questions from the proposal defense, I refined these final questions based on my goals as a researcher in order to offer chances for participants to have multiple avenues to express their lived experiences. Because the LEDs will address other elements of the research, and are more phenomenological in nature, the interview questions were more flexible than the written prompts of the LEDs.

Several of my interview questions were also based upon information I learned during the research process. Because these topics came up frequently in the literature, I wanted to investigate if these same ideas applied to my participants to connect to what I was reading. These questions also related to general classroom discussion that took place in the ENGL 1101 course regarding the LEDs after they were completed. The questions were intentionally aimed at allowing students to further reflect on and express their emotions and reactions related to lived experiences that they believed affected their writing identities.

**Researcher Reflections: Journal Entries**

As an additional source of data, I intend to keep a researcher journal in which I reflect upon and analyze my research. A journal blends personal reflections, accounts of events and descriptions of experiences, and its main purpose is to document and reflect on experiences as a way of thinking, understanding and learning (Hayman and Jackson, 2012). Journaling as part of research can be used in two ways: as a means of documenting and reflecting on the practice of research or of data collection that records information for later analysis (Hayman and Jackson, 2012). Because of the flexibility journaling offers in terms of reflecting upon this work, I will keep an electronic journal as I complete interviews, transcribe work, view LEDs, and code data. The purpose of the reflections is to elaborate upon my own presuppositions about the work and
to give each step of the process enough time and thought to more deeply understand and interpret the work as it is in progress.

My journal entries will also focus on takeaways from research and interviews, assumptions held by myself and participants, and connections between the lived experiences of the participants. Each entry will consist of at least a page (but without a page limit) of written commentary and reflection on interviews, LEDs, and interactions with my participants. I will also transcribe any written notes I have taken during the week or during interviews to aid in the recording of data. I will write journal entries after interviews and the submission of LED assignments, but at least once per week. Because I am unsure of the nature each interview or analysis will yield, these journals will be more freestyle, which is to say without a planned template. I also plan to annotate journals as necessary to connect ideas and themes as they become apparent throughout the study. I believe these reflections are necessary to help add to the validity of the work and to keep myself focused on the research.

**Setting and Overall and Sample Populations**

Participants for this study are from a First-Year Composition course (ENGL 1101) taught by the researcher. The course is taught at a large state public university in the Southeast U.S. Participants for this work were volunteers who self-identified as “bad writers” in the preliminary stages of my introduction of the work to the class when soliciting volunteers. Because the class was already small, only four students volunteered for this project, which eliminated the need for me to conduct a random sampling from a larger number of volunteers. Participants are from diverse age and as socio-economic backgrounds. There will be no additional compensation for participation in the study, and work samples collected for the study are part of the regular curriculum. Because this study will examine the lived experiences of students, there is little, if
any, potential risk or harm for participants as the experiences disclosed for this work have already happened before they began this course.

Due to the mentally taxing nature of phenomenological and qualitative research, Van Manen (1990) suggests using a smaller sample size in order to examine the human phenomenon selected for research. Smaller participant groups lend themselves as an aid to phenomenological research as researchers are able to look more closely at the phenomenon being investigated in order to gain a better understanding of the selected topic. Due to the personalistic nature of the research, a smaller number of participants affords more opportunities for the researcher to re-engaged with participants with follow-up or clarifying questions after interviews, if needed.

**Researcher Role as Instructor**

As a composition instructor, I have witnessed students from various age groups, socioeconomic status, and cultural backgrounds who struggle with writing. My experiences with these students is what inspired me to focus on writing confidence for my dissertation. Because of my continued role as a part-time instructor of FYC, I feel that working with a convenience sample of students from the university would be justified in completing my research. In addition, with this type of inquiry, researcher involvement in the direct experiences of participants is acceptable, especially in this context. As the instructor, I have more control over the types of assignments and experiences they will encounter with writing and their writing identities, which may help them to connect more fully as they participate with the research.

**Selecting Participants**

As phenomenology typically utilizes a smaller sampling of participants due to the demanding nature of the work and analysis, I originally proposed to use a sample of three to six participants for my research. My work would also solicit volunteers from my First-Year
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”  

Composition ENGL 1101 course, as I felt advertising or snowballing (i.e. chain referrals) for participants would not be beneficial to this work for two reasons. First, I would not have a personal connection to participants from outside of my class, which could aid in the interview process, and second, I would have to ask them to complete LEDs as additional work, rather than it being part of their assigned curriculum of my course. By asking them to complete additional work, they may request compensation for participation in this work, which was not available for participants who were taking my course.

For this work, I elected to conduct my research with voluntary participants from my ENGL 1101, rather than from my high school students. Mainly, this decision centered around the time it could possibly take to receive permission to conduct my research by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from both the public high school committee and the university committee. IRB approval at the public school level can be quite challenging and take a vast amount of time to complete paperwork and receive approval due to working with minors, so instead, I chose to submit an IRB exemption application to the university as its IRB committee meets monthly and gives feedback more quickly. Also, my participants would be at least 18 years old, so they would (in theory) have more lived experiences with writing to share and reflect upon, especially since they were in their first year as college students. The decision to obtain a more timely IRB approval through the use of university participants comes with the understanding I may limit my work and responses in both content and lived experiences as decisions based on convenience can hinder what understandings I might discover through this work.

As part of the research process in gathering participants, I added into my ENGL1101 syllabus time for me to discuss my role as a researcher while also instructing the class, as well as what my research entailed. After explaining my research, what was required from anyone who
volunteered to participate, and that there would be no additional compensation for participation, I will asked who was interested in participating in my work. From these volunteers, I selected my four participants for this study.

**Data Collection Procedures**

In the collection of the LEDs from the participants, the work will be submitted to an online platform used by the university as part of their regular classwork curriculum. I will download and save each LED as a file to my portable hard drive used as a housing mechanism for the data related to this work. Each participant will be made aware of this process as part of the agreement to participate in this research and must agree to allow me to access their assignments as a researcher as part of this work, not solely as their professor in the course.

For each semi-structured interview, I plan to schedule a time with each participant according to their availability and reserve a private conference room on campus for the interview to take place. Each interview will be audio-recorded on my phone and each participant will be asked to give verbal permission for me to record the interview as part of the research process. Each participant will sign their agreement to participate in the research at this time and will be given a chance to ask any questions about the process. As participants complete the interview, they will answer some of the questions I prepared beforehand and may add some of their own information that is still relevant to the work. I will ask each participant if I can take notes while they talk. These notes will consist of key phrases and times on the recording that I may want to refer back to for closer analysis.

My researcher journal entries will be composed both immediately after conducting interviews and after reading LEDs submitted by the participants. I will also reread and annotate journal entries for clarity and to further reflect and analyze both on the content of the work and
the process as it occurs. These journals will consist of reflections, analysis, personal thoughts and reactions to information learned during interviews, and planning to improve the research if I choose to continue this work in the future.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis begins with downloading and open coding the LEDs for themes and important findings both in Microsoft Word and to the data analysis platform, Dedoose. In addition, audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed and open coded for additional themes and connections to existing literature. I will use the researcher notes and journal entries to document reflections and connections as the work takes place and as the composition of the dissertation begins. Some notes may be open coded and analyzed for additional themes and ideas relevant to the work and other identified patterns of meaning.

**Validity of Interpretation**

Critics of qualitative research suggest that this type of research is not scientific and often dismiss qualitative work for not being able to effectively connect to the idea of psychometrics (Kuzmanic, 2009). However, discourse amongst researchers has resulted in three broad areas in defense of the validity of qualitative research: “direct application of validity from quantitative to qualitative research, outright rejection of validity and its importance, and the development of separate but somewhat correspondent criteria of validity for qualitative research” (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 40).

The search for validity has been referred to as a “search for truth,” which puts it at odds with the quantitative role of simply providing an instrument that actually measures “what it intends to measure” (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 41). In reference to outright rejection of validity due to the belief that it cannot be applied to qualitative research, it has been suggested that “there is no
sense in establishing validity…as the search for ‘truth’ itself makes no sense” (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 41).

In spite of critics, qualitative research can establish credible validity by “representing different social worlds [and] different interpretations to the readers” and by being explicit about what the truth refers to in our work (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 43). Because my work intends to interpret the lifeworld of my participants, essentially searching for truth, establishing validity will partially be done through semi-structured interviews. These interviews will allow me to attempt to understand the phenomena of writing reluctance and anxiety amongst FYC students who self-identify as “bad writers.”

The use of semi-structured interviews as “production of data” will only be one part of the research process this work will undertake as part of an attempt to establish validity of the work (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 46). The addition of data presentation and interpretation as part of my dissertation will also help to create validity, along with student work samples and my field notes and reflections (Kuzmanic, 2009; Stake, 2010).

Reliability

Triangulation of the data sources is one way qualitative researchers can address the validity and reliability of their work (Stake, 2010; Creswell, 2013). In this study, triangulation will be achieved through the use of semi-structured interviews, researcher field notes, and LEDs. By combining the different sources of data, I can be more confident that any conclusions I might draw are more accurate and relevant. I anticipate that my findings will both connect to the literature already available related to writing identities and add new insight from the participants’ perspectives as to how academic writing tasks may affect their writing identities.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This qualitative study focuses on attempting to understand why first-year composition (FYC) students self-identify as “bad writers,” especially when approaching academic writing tasks. The four participants in this study were students in a spring semester ENGL 1101 course that I taught, and they vary in age and socio-economic status. My research questions for this work focused on how lived experiences of FYC students may affect their writing confidence and how the lived experiences of students have informed their writing identities. The data collection for this study included Lived Experience Descriptions (LEDs), semi-structured interviews, and a researcher journal. This chapter examines the data collected from these sources in an effort to identify patterns and/or other findings that may be helpful in addressing the research questions.

Participants

Four participants volunteered to take part in this study, and I assigned each a pseudonym as part of their involvement in this work. Participants enrolled in my First-Year Composition course, ENGL 1101, and no participants received any additional compensation for their part in this work. Three of the four participants identify as Anglo American, while the fourth participant identifies as Indian-American. While I would have liked a more ethnically diverse group of participants, my pool of participants was limited to students who both self-identified as “bad writers” and enrolled in my course at the university. My original proposal sought three to six participants from this study who would be randomly selected from a pool of volunteers, but that was not necessary as only these four volunteered to participate in my study. All participants took part in one-on-one semi-structured interviews and submitted LEDs as part of their involvement in this study.
My first participant, Randy, is a married, White, upper middle-class man in his early 50s with two children in their late teens, and he works full time as an engineer. Randy is returning to college after leaving the university 14 years prior, after being unable to overcome his fear and anxiety associated with the Regents’ Writing Exam that was required to obtain a degree at that time. During our time together, Randy also expressed his concern that he was considerably older than the other students in the ENGL 1101 course, which made him feel pressured to perform well, especially for peer review sessions of written work. It is worth noting that Randy’s written assignments were always full of detail and grammatically correct, which were elements he expressed that “bad writers” were not able to convey in their work. His writing was more mature than that of his peers, whether that attributes to his age or ability is unclear. However, his written work did not suggest that he was someone who would self-identify as a “bad writer,” but he was certain that this label applied to him since at least high school.

Madeline, my second participant, is a White, middle-class woman in her mid-20s who works as an assistant in a doctor’s office. She is married and works full time while attending courses at the university at night. Madeline, like Randy, also identified that she began to self-identify as a “bad writer” in high school, and she believes that “good writers” give strong details and are able to use correct grammar when delivering their message. Through several discussions with Madeline, she told me how important writing is for success in the world, but that she felt she was unable to communicate clearly when writing out her thoughts. She said that she stumbles with meaning and was sometimes unable to find the right words to express herself. In her written assignments, I did not see these concerns. Rather, her work was concise and focused, and while she did occasionally make minor mistakes, her work did not demonstrate the writing of someone who seemed to be struggling in the ways Madeline suggested she did with her writing.
The third participant, Prisha, is a middle-class, Indian-American woman in her early 20s who does not work. Prisha lives with her family and attends college full time. Throughout our time together, she expressed that she found herself identifying as a “bad writer” in high school, similarly to Randy and Madeline. Prisha also said that she began to understand who she was as a writer and a person after the loss of her mother a year after she graduated high school. Because she struggled to understand who she was as a person in high school, her writing identity and self-efficacy beliefs were affected.

Michael, my final participant, is an upper middle-class White man in his late teens who works full time at a car dealership. Unlike the other participants, Michael said that he began to self-identify as a “bad writer” in middle school due to having a myriad of substitute teachers in his English class in fifth grade. He believes that he was unable to recover from missing this grammatical foundation, which is why he later self-identified as a “bad writer” in seventh grade, especially when he began writing his first school-assigned essay. Michael says that he now uses teacher feedback and grades as his motivation to do better on his work, but he still does not feel completely confident in his writing skills.

While each participant had unique insecurities about their writing confidence and abilities, it was interesting to note that several of them began self-identifying as “bad writers” around the same times in their lives.

**Data Collection Summary**

This qualitative study utilized three data sources--LEDs, semi-structured interviews, and researcher journals--in order to triangulate data. LEDs were collected as part of the participants’ curriculum in my FYC ENGL 1101 course they were enrolled in at the university. Semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and took place on campus in a private conference
room at a time set by each participant. Lastly, researcher journals were written both after each semi-structured interview and after reading and coding each LED submitted by the participants.

During the process of this research, four semi-structured interviews were conducted, resulting in a total 85 minutes of audio recordings. Each interview was transcribed using Gee’s (2011) discourse analysis stanzas method, resulting in 34 pages of transcripts. Participants also made themselves available for follow-up questions via email, which resulted in one email exchange with the participant Madeline. Researcher journals accounted for 21 pages of reflection and analysis. Each data source was used to develop themes and identify commonalities related to the lived experiences of the participants and why they may self-identify as “bad writers.”

Data Analysis

Lived Experience Descriptions

LEDs promote meaningful reflection and allow for more freedom when describing a lived experience that is relevant to a research topic. Participants in this study were asked to write LEDs and examine different lived experiences from their lives and the emotional ties that were connected to those experiences that led them to self-identify as “bad writers.” Each participant submitted three LEDs as part of their involvement in this research study. They submitted these written assignments as part of their planned ENGL1101 curriculum, and each participant gave me permission to access their work samples as part of my data collection for this study. The LEDs were designed to place participants in a more reflective state of mind, and each assignment asked them to look at writing from a different perspective. The prompts each participant answered are as follows:
1. What was a time when you were given a writing assignment that you believe you did really well on, or enjoyed? What was it about this writing assignment that made you feel successful or that you enjoyed?

2. What was a time when you were given a writing assignment that you were not successful on or gave you an undue amount of stress? What about this assignment made it hard for you to be successful or made it stressful for you?

3. (a) How do you believe writing can affect your daily life both inside and outside of school work? (b) In what ways do you believe writing can influence student identity?

As part of the data analysis, I printed each LED and hand annotated them based on my initial reactions. After I annotated each LED, I uploaded clean, annotation-free, digital copies of the files to the Dedoose platform and coded them based on a second reading, while also incorporating my initial thoughts and codes. As I analyzed and coded each LED, themes and relevant lived experiences became more noticeable. My summaries of the LEDs below attempt to capture the main ideas and important experiences each participant expressed about their writing identities and lived experiences related to writing.

**Open Coding of LEDs and Interview Transcripts**

Coding (i.e., classifying or sorting) is an effective method in qualitative research as it allows for the researcher to engage in analysis and reflection of text-related data sources to meet goals set forth by research questions and predetermined assertions (Stake, 2010). Open coding is an analytical process, which qualitative researchers use to deduce themes and data from various sources such as interviews, videos, or other written texts. For this work, both the participant LEDs and interview transcripts were open coded to identify themes and commonalities.

Dedoose is a data analysis platform that allows for the extrapolation of data and the
merging of video, audio, and text in order to identify patterns within data sources. The platform allows for real-time data realization and analysis, and it offers multiple features to use to help examine and analyze data sources. For this work, I utilized Dedoose as a housing platform for my coded LEDs and transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews I conducted. I chose this web-based application to conduct my data analysis after recommendations from both my instructors and peers. It was easy to navigate and user-friendly, which aided in my data analysis and coding.

I used Dedoose to chunk and open code participant LEDs and interview transcripts to identify patterns, themes, and commonalities as they related to writing identities and the lived experiences of my participants. LEDs and I chunked interview transcripts in sections of three or four lines, while I added possible themes and connections as annotations throughout each interview. This method allowed me to focus on manageable sections of each LED and interview for analysis, without being overly tedious and coding line by line, which could cause me to hyper-focus on the wording of participant responses instead of looking for connections and themes. This work produced 23 codes covering emotions, lived experiences, writing identities, and descriptions of both “good” and “bad writers.” The codes and their descriptors are shown below in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.**

*Dedoose Codes and Descriptors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Task</td>
<td>Any written assignment given by a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>Mentioned by name toward an academic writing assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Writer Definition</td>
<td>Participant’s definition of term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of Topic</td>
<td>Applies to academic written tasks when participant was allowed to choose their writing topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Stress, reluctance, lack of motivation toward academic writing tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear/Anxiety</td>
<td>Mentioned by name as related to an academic writing task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Refers to both peer and teacher feedback written or verbal on academic writing tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom/Flexibility</td>
<td>Refers to freedom of format and teacher flexibility with academic writing tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Writer Definition</td>
<td>Participant’s definition of term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading</td>
<td>Specific to evaluative scores given on assignments, different from written comments (i.e. feedback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>As it relates to writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Related to the impact, positive or negative, writing can have on an audience, both as an academic writing task and posted on social media platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Choice of Topic</td>
<td>Teacher assigned topics with no freedom or choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscommunication</td>
<td>Related to perceived miscommunication from participants in their own writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Academic writing tasks based on participants’ opinions of topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>Related to academic writing tasks that incorporate Aristotelian appeals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identify as Bad Writer</td>
<td>Participant reference to time/place/lived experience that notes when they began to or continue to identify as a bad writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Refers to teacher interaction or issues that participants identified as have an effect on their writing confidence and identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Confidence</td>
<td>Participant reference to their perception of their writing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Growth</td>
<td>Participant reference to their perceived growth since identifying as a bad writer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within these codes, I identified four emergent categories that reflected patterns and connections revealed throughout the coding process. The categories I decided upon based on the 23 original codes were emotions, writing identity, teacher influence, and writing tasks. For the codes of apprehension, emotions, and fear/anxiety, I discerned a clear similarity in that each of these codes related to the emotions of the participants. The writing identity category included bad writer definition, good writer definition, identity, self-identifying as a bad writer, writing confidence, writing growth, writing strengths, and writing weaknesses as I distinguished that each of these elements directly relates to the beliefs the participants had about their own abilities as writers. I developed the teacher influence category to connect the codes of feedback, teacher, and grading because of the importance related to evaluation of writing. Finally, I joined the codes of academic task, choice of topic, freedom/flexibility, miscommunication, opinion, persuasive, influence, and lack of choice of topic as part of the writing task category based on their similarities as elements related to the writing process.

The narrowing of categories and themes was more accessible to me using the open coding method as I was able to more easily make connections between participants’ lived experiences and explanations as to why they self-identified as “bad writers.” These codes and categories were especially helpful as I worked through the LEDs of each participant.

**Randy’s LEDs**

In his LEDs, Randy first hinted that writing caused him great anxiety and stress during his first attempt at attending college in his late 20s. He wrote:
I consider English my worst subject all the way back to high school. I even quit college years ago because I was up against the hours requirement where I had to take the Regents’ Writing Test. Rather than attempt the test, I left school.

Now in his mid-50s, Randy has begun his college journey again, and he writes that he will not let “stress and anxiety” get him to the point of giving up. The Regents’ Writing Exam is one way for the University System of Georgia to ensure that students have the writing skills necessary for obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Essentially, the writing exam consists of an essay on a given topic that students write about. This exam is no longer required at many universities in Georgia, which is one reason Randy felt comfortable re-enrolling in college. His fear of this exam cost him not only promotions at his job, but also the satisfaction of overcoming his anxiety and earning a degree.

Randy shared in one of his LEDs that he enjoyed completing a writing assignment that “stirred strong emotions,” and allowed him to write about something he believed. Because of these elements, he felt “successful” with this assignment because it seemed easier to write. His “thoughts, ideas, and feelings” flowed easier than he had imagined, and his final version of the assignment was enjoyable. Conversely, he also wrote that this same assignment was stressful for him because it was the “only writing assignment [he] had in years,” and it brought back his belief that English was his worst subject. He did not want the assignment to result in him dropping a class, so he completed the assignment and was able to overcome his stress associated with the task.

In his final LED, Randy wrote that he now believes that writing affects his daily life in a “more positive way” than it did before. He mentioned that the positive traits of writing “ensure proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling,” which he feels he is starting to master as he grows
older. Randy also wrote that writing tends to affect the modern world in many negative ways. He believes this because “any idiot with a phone, tablet, or laptop can publish junk,” which has led to writing becoming full of “lies and mis-information.” While he has expressed a positivity with writing in his personal life, Randy believes writing that others produce dilutes what “serious writers” create.

Figures 3 and 4 chart the codes derived from both of Randy’s LEDs. His most prevalent codes related to emotions, opinion, and academic tasks, as demonstrated in the charts.

Figure 3.

*Randy LED 1 Code Application Summary*

![Bar Chart](image)

Figure 4.

*Randy Code Application LED 2*

![Bar Chart](image)
**Madeline’s LEDs**

When reflecting on a writing assignment that was enjoyable to her, Madeline wrote that she most enjoyed a writing prompt from high school that allowed her to share her own opinion. She explained that the prompt asked her opinion “on whether or not social media [was] bringing society closer together or tearing [it] apart?” Madeline was excited to write on this topic because she had a “sense of knowledge” on the subject and was able to “spill out [her] essay quickly and flawlessly.” For this prompt, Madeline felt engaged and she felt that she was successful because this writing task asked for opinions and did not require research, which makes writing assignments “harder” for her.

In the same LED Madeline wrote that one of the LED prompts was the least enjoyable writing prompt that she could remember. Because the assignment asked her to “think too hard” and try to remember “all the assignments from [her past],” she did not enjoy writing this task. She felt that her LED would be “unsuccessful” because she did not enjoy writing it as much as the social media prompt. Due to her being in her mid-20s, Madeline felt that the last time she completed a writing task was “back in high school” and “so long ago that [she] couldn’t possibly remember” any writing task she did not enjoy.

In a later LED, Madeline stressed how positive writing can be because it allows you to “share how you feel” and it gives her “more freedom to pour out my thoughts and tell people what’s on [her] mind.” She wrote about how her life outside of school constantly requires her to write to some extent, whether it is a text message, email, or notes at work.

When considering how writing affects her identity, Madeline wrote “it is necessary” because it is the “best form of communication” for those who are not “right in front of you” and it is important to develop this skill to be successful both in and out of school. While she remains
more positive concerning her own use of writing in her daily life, her outlook for writing in the modern world is more neutral. She accepts that people write daily, especially on social media platforms, but that there is no “real influence or effects” that come from these types of writing other than garnering attention for those who post on these platforms. Figures 5 and 6 below show that Madeline’s most prevalent codes were opinion, academic task, freedom/flexibility, and emotions.

Figure 5.

*Madeline Code Application LED 1*

![Figure 5](image1.png)

Figure 6.

*Madeline Code Application LED 2*

![Figure 6](image2.png)
Prisha’s LEDs

In her first LED, Prisha reflected on writing assignments that she had in high school. One prompt that she was given that she enjoyed was “writing a research essay on a hero.” This assignment was appealing to Prisha because she was able to choose someone who was a real hero based on her opinion, not the opinion of her teacher or anyone else. She wrote that the assignment was “laid out in a format that was easy to follow” and gave her the freedom of using her own words and opinions to complete the task. In essence, she had freedom of topic, but there was a format or template provided by her teacher that guided how to write the essay.

In that same LED, Prisha explained a writing prompt that she was given that was not enjoyable to complete. This assignment asked her to write about “character development” on a text read in her English class. She wrote that because her “perception of the character was different from [her] teacher,” she was unsuccessful on this assignment. Prisha believes that writing opinionated pieces is not “difficult” for her, but when her “audience does not agree with [her] writing, it ends up being viewed in the way [she] did not mean.” This suggests that Prisha believes that she has trouble with miscommunication in her writing when she does not believe she connects to her audience.

Prisha wrote in a later LED that writing is a normal part of daily life. She explained that she is “someone who needs to write something down to remember it,” and that she writes out her goals and tasks at the beginning of each month to stay organized. Prisha also uses writing in her religious devotional that she keeps as a way to reflect on her beliefs and how they apply to her life. In these ways, Prisha is using writing in ways that are organizational and helpful to her. Concerning writing and others, she believes that her pen to paper method is not as useful in a “world that has gone digital.” Prisha believes that writing that is negative in nature tends to
receive more attention, however, writing that is positive is what “makes a difference in peoples’ lives.” The difference she makes in peoples’ lives is what she wants to focus on with her writing, not only attracting attention for negative opinions and posts on social media. In Figures 7 and 8 below, Prisha’s prevailing codes were opinion, academic task, influence, freedom/flexibility, and choice of topic.

Figure 7.

*Prisha Code Application LED 1*

![Prisha Code Application LED 1](image)

Figure 8.

*Prisha Code Application LED 2*

![Prisha Code Application LED 2](image)
Michael’s LEDs

Michael’s first LED explained that he enjoys writing about things when he is passionate about the topic because “it allows [him] to put his thoughts down in tangible letters that others can see.” He specifically wrote about an assignment where he was able to write about self-worth, which is a topic he is very fond of and enjoyed writing about to the extent that he “went way over the page limit.” While he is passionate about self-worth, Michael says that he is equally passionate about hating research papers.

In high school, he was “required to write a junior and senior year research essay.” Coupled with the fact that he “absolutely hates research papers,” Michael wrote that this type of writing “sucks” and made him “miserable.” He believes that his senior paper was better than his junior paper. This is because he was able to practice with the first paper, and because his senior year teacher “was not as strict” about the assignment as the previous one. Michael thinks that because of the flexibility with his senior year teacher, he was able to earn a higher score even though writing the paper was “not fun in any way.”

In a later LED, Michael writes that writing has never “been fun” for him, but he acknowledges that writing does play a major part in his life both in and out of school. At his current job he is required to send many emails to clients which requires him to “rely heavily on ethos, pathos, and logos” to convince customers to purchase products. He suggested that persuasive writing is easier for him because it allows him to express his opinion and gives him freedom to “use tactics that convince others to agree with [him].” In this LED Micheal wrote that he believes that the way you write can express to others your “level of intelligence and make or break how someone thinks about you,” which is why he tries to be very careful in everything he
writes as he does not want to be judged by his writing alone. In Figures 9 and 10, it is shown that Michael’s most common codes were emotions, opinion, and influence.

**Figure 9.**

*Michael Code Application LED 1*

![Figure 9 Chart]

**Figure 10.**

*Michael Code Application LED 2*

![Figure 10 Chart]

Figures 11 and 12 outline how the codes in Dedoose were applied across the eight LEDs submitted by participants, with the most prevalent codes being teacher, opinion, emotions, choice of topic, influence, and academic task. Emotions was the most frequently applied code, which demonstrates the reluctance, stress, and apprehension that participants felt when approaching
academic writing tasks. The most applied codes highlight the important elements of each participant’s LEDs by revealing commonalities between their lived experiences and writing identities.

**Figure 11.**

*Participant Code Application Summary LED 1*

![Participant Code Application Summary LED 1](image)

**Figure 12.**

*Participant Code Application Summary LED 2*

![Participant Code Application Summary LED 2](image)
Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviewing is one way to gather lived experiences of participants that allows for reflection and description necessary to the phenomenology methodology (Van Manen, 1990). Due to the useful nature of interviews, I decided to employ the use of semi-structured interviews in my study to help me better understand how the lived experiences of my participants may have affected their writing identities and confidence. While each interview began with the same list of questions, discussion focal points were determined by the participants’ individual responses.

I designed the semi-structured interviews to allow for both questions that helped investigate lived experiences that may have led to students self-identifying as “bad writers,” as well as connect to patterns in the literature that suggested a myriad of reasons students self-identify as “bad writers” and affect their writing identities. The interview questions were also open-ended so that participants would be able to expound upon ideas that they had, while still remaining on topic. Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed and open coded on Dedoose to identify themes and lived experience commonalities.

Randy’s Interview

Randy’s interview lasted 20 minutes and dealt with him defining “good” and “bad writers,” leaving college due to his fear and anxiety of writing and explaining the consequences his career faced after leaving college. His interview began by defining what he believed defined a “bad writer.” He said if someone does not use “proper grammar or punctuation” or know the “parts of a sentence or use general words properly” they would be considered a bad writer. Randy said that he believes that “good writers” are able to be “clear and concise” while keeping “topics and paragraphs together” to help their writing make sense.
High school was the first time that Randy said he self-identified as a “bad writer.” He remembered English as being his “worst subject” and that he had one teacher he did not “get along with,” which is what he identified as his “root cause” in identifying as a “bad writer” and losing confidence in his writing skills. He did not explain why he did not get along with his teacher, or why he believed the teacher did not like him, but after his experiences with that teacher, Randy said that writing began to make him “nervous.” Once his writing confidence wavered, he said that he “failed to pay attention to the basics” of writing, which made him more anxious about writing as he grew older. This heightened sense of “apprehension” began to manifest in procrastination of writing assignments due to his belief that he would fail, which became a “self-sustaining issue” as a result.

When asked about the idea of writing being associated with an evaluation or grade, Randy said that recently “peer review” had become more stressful to him than any judgment he received from a teacher’s grade. He feared that, because of his age, his younger peers would look at him differently if his work was not up to par or more mature than theirs as he did not want to “make a fool” out of himself. Randy was worried that his peers might believe that “this old fool can’t write to save his life,” which caused him to become stressed and anxious about writing assignments in ENGL 1101. However, positive comments from his peers about his writing had a “huge impact” on his writing confidence because he mostly received feedback on minor issues such as “commas or spacing,” so he began to feel more confident with peer review as the semester progressed.

Randy then explained that 14 years ago, he quit college because he was too anxious and nervous to take the Regents’ Writing Exam that was required to obtain a degree. He said that he continued to register for classes and tell the university he had registered to take the writing exam
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”  

until they told him he could not take any more classes until he took the exam. Randy explained that he had too many “mental demons” to be successful on a test that “was something written on a board that day,” especially after hearing “horror stories” from his peers about the difficulty of the exam. Part of his decision to return to college was because the Regents’ Writing Exam is no longer required to obtain a degree. He jokingly suggested that if he had “enough Paxil” he could have probably completed the exam and done “okay,” but he ultimately decided to leave college because he could not overcome his “fear” of the exam.

Randy said that there were several negative consequences related to his career because of his decision to leave college. For instance, he was not able to progress in his field to the level he wanted without the degree, but he did not feel comfortable enough to return to complete his coursework. Now that he has decided to finish his degree “just in time to retire,” Randy says that he has chosen to pursue an engineering field that “has the most math” since he does not have any fear or anxiety associated with math, he believes he will be more successful.

During his interview, while Randy was willing to talk about his experience leaving college due to the Regents’ Writing Exam, he used humor to deflect the fear he experienced during this time. His fear was such that he tried to deceive the university to allow him to continue to register for classes by ensuring them he would register for the exam, which he did not do until the university put a hold on his class registration. It was at this point that Randy knew he could no longer put off the inevitable, and his fear overcame him.

While I believe that Randy was honest and genuine throughout the interview regarding the other questions we discussed, his deflection of the fear and anxiety he experienced in relation to the writing exam was concerning. As he described what a “good writer was,” it almost seemed as if he was being sarcastic because his definition did not apply to himself in any way.
Conversely, when he described the characteristics of a “bad writer,” Randy seemed more resigned to the fact that he was describing his own abilities, which were too far removed from the abilities of “good writers” for him to achieve.

In Figure 13, it is clear that identity and fear/anxiety toward writing were the most common codes applied to Randy’s interview transcript, thus further demonstrating the impact the Regents’ Writing Exam had on his writing confidence and college experience.

**Figure 13.**

*Randy Code Application Interview Transcript*

![Randy Interview Transcript](chart)

**Madeline’s Interview**

Madeline’s interview lasted 22 minutes and dealt with her defining a “bad writer,” explaining her struggles with writing, and adding how grading affected her writing confidence. She began, similarly to Randy, by defining what makes someone a “bad writer.” Madeline believed that if someone makes “grammatical errors” and struggles with “spelling and the basics” of the English language, they are a “bad writer.” She mentioned that if you “struggle to get your point across” it makes the writing difficult to read. When explaining why she self-
identifies as a “bad writer,” Madeline said that she struggles to get her point across because her thoughts “don’t translate out that well sometimes.” Her “bad memory” plays a part in her difficulties to express her thoughts both in writing and verbally. Writing for her is difficult because it is hard for her to keep her papers from sounding “jumbled up” and “not flow[ing]” like the writing of “good writers.”

Madeline admitted to avoiding writing tasks due to her reluctance and apprehension toward writing. She agreed that if she “can get started” with a paper, she can usually “throw out 800 words,” but that her writing may be unclear or not defined enough for her audience or teacher. In the past, Madeline has received feedback from her teachers asking her to “give more detail,” which led to her using too many details in her writing and jumbling her work and causing miscommunication issues. Due to her becoming overly detailed with her work, Madeline said that she has even “changed a paper completely” after finishing it in order to make sure that it was clearer.

Grading related to writing caused Madeline to become apprehensive toward her work in the past, which affected her writing confidence. She said that she felt more “free” when a former professor allowed her to journal her thoughts without assigning a formal grade to each entry. By withholding the evaluation aspect of the journal writing, Madeline’s professor gave her a chance to write about what she was passionate about, and as a result, Madeline felt that this writing had more “flow” and was better than writing assignments she completed for other courses that were more academic in nature.

Madeline thought that she first began to self-identify as a “bad writer” in her late middle school and early high school years. She said that “when we started having to write essays” she struggled with writing and grading expectation changes from middle to high school.
Assignments and tests that are “super graded” cause Madeline the most stress related to writing. She considers assignments such as final essays or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) to be “super graded,” and more difficult than the writing that she normally experienced throughout middle and high school. Because of the grading standards of these more academic tasks, Madeline said that she often procrastinated in writing the final exam essays and studying for the SAT.

Over time, Madeline believed that her vocabulary has improved, which is one-step toward her becoming a “better” writer. She also stated that she has started to become more comfortable with “putting [her] ideas out there,” especially now that she spends less time re-doing essays once she has finished a draft. Her time is more focused on whether her work makes sense and meets the requirements given by the teacher.

As her interview began, Madeline was friendly and engaged, but as the interview wore on, it became apparent that she was holding back information and becoming more guarded with her words. While still friendly, she began to take more time when answering questions, almost as if she began to fear that I was judging her responses negatively. When I listened to the interview again, I took note of my tone, which I tried to ensure was inviting and approachable. We laughed through many parts of the interview, so I am not sure why (or if) she became more guarded in her answers. I feel that Madeline was honest in all of her answers, and that she has a firm grasp on her identity as both an individual and a writer. While she spoke of trying to improve her writing skills, I feel that she is confident enough in her current level of skills that she would not mind if her abilities stayed at the same level as she progresses toward her degree.
Figure 14 demonstrates Madeline’s most prevalent codes of writing weakness, writing confidence, and grading, which highlights her focus on her lived experiences related to writing evaluation and her areas of writing growth discussed in her interview.

**Figure 14.**

*Madeline Code Application Interview Transcript*

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Writing Weakness</td>
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<td>Writing Strength</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Growth</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Confidence</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identify as &quot;Bad Writer&quot;</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscommunication</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Writer Definition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom/Flexibility</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from Peers/Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear/Anxiety Toward Writing</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choice of Topic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Writer Definition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Task</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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**Prisha’s Interview**

Prisha’s interview lasted 25 minutes and dealt with explaining experiences that affected her writing confidence, talking about her miscommunication issues when writing, and starting a blog to help develop her identity as a person and a writer. She began by explaining experiences that have affected her view of writing, describing when she began to self-identify as a “bad writer,” and talking about how her writing identity has changed since high school. Prisha explained that in high school she wrote about literature in her English classes, specifically about
character development. This type of writing never allowed her to “tie in any of [herself] to the assignments,” which also affected her writing identity.

While she said that she easily retains information that she can access later for writing assignments, she struggled with “constructing [writing] to get her point across,” which led to miscommunication in writing between her and her audience. The miscommunication issue led to her beginning to self-identify as a “bad writer,” and she began procrastinating on her writing assignments as a result. However, one assignment that positively affected her writing confidence was her senior paper on *Beowulf*. Prisha said that her teacher told her “it was one of the top 10 essays” they had ever received, and this feedback made her start thinking about her writing skills in a more positive light. However, this feedback came at the end of her senior year, but the positive impact the comment made on her writing confidence followed her to college. She began to approach her writing differently after she entered college and after the death of her mother, which happened soon after she graduated high school. Prisha said that she still considered herself a “bad writer,” but after losing her mother, she wanted to work on writing as a way to help “figure out who [she] was” and what she wanted from life.

Prisha said that she began self-identifying as a “bad writer” because she struggled with her own identity as she matured in high school. Prisha explained that it took her a long time to discover who she was as a person, which affected her ability to share her feelings and parts of herself through writing. “Reflection assignments” were the hardest for her during high school because she did not know how to connect to the writing and what to share about herself that was relevant, which she said affected her confidence in herself and her writing. The “overwhelming” part of “figuring out who you are” made Prisha reluctant to begin assignments that asked her to share her own thoughts, especially because of her perceived miscommunication issues with her
writing. After her mother’s passing, Prisha said that it was easier to understand her identity because she made decisions without the help of her mother, which was both freeing and sad for her. She explained that making these decisions has helped shape who she is, and she is now a better writer for having experienced these emotions, especially when it comes to reflective writing.

Prisha said that she started a blog last summer to help her work through her emotions and put her thoughts “out there for [her] friends” to give feedback. She explained how freeing it was to use a blog to express herself in writing and not worry about grades or miscommunication. Being vulnerable in her writing was important to Prisha, and it was something that she’d never done before in her academic assignments in high school and college. The feedback from her peers on her blog positively affected her writing confidence, and she began to become a little less reluctant toward writing as a result of starting her blog.

Throughout her interview, Prisha seemed genuine and forthcoming. While she was approachable and lighthearted, she was also timid at certain points, which gave credibility to her words. Her vulnerability when discussing the passing of her mother made it clear that she was still in a place of indecision in her life but was trying her best to move forward and become a responsible adult. I could tell through her responses when she spoke of writing in high school that she spent quite a bit of time trying to find out who she was in relation to school, her family, and her own unique identity. Because of her struggle to know who she was, she was uncomfortable in school and wanted to keep parts of herself hidden to avoid judgment from her peers and teachers. She stated that this was why she did not enjoy writing assignments that were reflective in nature, as they would let others see who she was on the inside, and that was something private and undecided on her part.
Michael’s Interview

Michael’s interview lasted 16 minutes and dealt with him identifying what makes someone a “bad writer,” explaining his desire to improve his writing, and talking about his strengths and weaknesses as a writer. He began by defining what makes someone a “bad writer.” Michael said that when writers do not have “good flow” in their work or are “unable to keep the reader on the page,” are a “bad writer.” He explained that he first self-identified as a “bad writer” in fifth grade when his teacher was absent multiple times and he had substitute teachers. He believed that his teacher’s absence caused him to “miss out on the fundamentals of writing,” which made it harder for him in sixth grade when he was expected to use these fundamentals in
his writing. Once Michael reached seventh grade, he said he was “expected to write essays for
the first time” and he was “unprepared” because his work did not have “flow and lacked the
basic skills” he did not learn back in fifth grade.

Michael said that he believes his writing has “gotten better” over time, but that he is still
not a “perfect writer” and struggles with topics sometimes. Grading is important to him because
he wants to do well, but he uses his grades as motivation to try to do better on his next
assignment. Teacher feedback is important to Michael because it gives him a chance to make his
paper “as perfect as [he] can,” as his grades on his writing affects the way he feels about writing.
While he does not take writing grades personally, Michael “100,000%” understands how some
students “may be upset with grades” and believe that teacher feedback can be personal, but that
is not the case for him.

Michael explained that he hates writing that incorporates research because it keeps him
from writing about topics about which he is passionate. When given a choice of topic, Michael
said that he feels less reluctant about writing assignments, and he is able to “put more energy”
into his work. He mentioned that his strength in writing is providing detail and letting his
audience feed off the work and energy he puts into topics that are related to his passions in life.
Michael said that the area he needs to work on the most with his writing is transitioning from one
idea to another. Because he likes to incorporate as many details as possible, he struggles with
connecting ideas and deciding where one idea ends and another begins. This struggle with
writing is one of the reasons he said he still self-identifies as a “bad writer.”

In person, Michael is a very confident person who carries himself with a certain swagger,
especially in relation to his appearance. His clothes were crisp, neat, and freshly starched and
creased. His hair was perfectly styled in a modern pompadour with an appropriate amount of
product, and he wore his bright smile as his best accessory. This description of his appearance is important to my analysis of his interview. Throughout his interview, I began to feel that Michael did not actually identify as a “bad writer,” rather, he was using those words to describe the fact that he did not like writing. His tone of voice and posture remained confident throughout the interview, which was inconsistent with the revealing and vulnerable nature of the other three participant’s interviews. It almost seemed as if he was trying to sell me on his believing that he should be a part of this study; that he belonged here.

In no way am I trying to negate Michael’s feelings about writing or his lived experiences as a writer; however, something about his delivery during the interview seemed disingenuous. As he progressed through his writing education timeline, I noticed that he often blamed others for his dislike of writing or for failing to give him the knowledge he felt he should have learned throughout his schooling. I am not sure if he was deflecting feelings of insecurity or believed that his teachers had wronged him numerous times throughout his writing education, leaving him with a (perceived) hatred of writing.

As noted in Figure 16, Michael’s most common codes from his interview were writing confidence, grading, and writing weakness, which encompasses his major points of discussion from the interview. However, because his interview was the shortest of all four participant interviews, I found that coding overlapped in some places. For example, writing strength and writing confidence were two areas that I double-coded as his statements fit my explanation for both coding categories. Also, grading and feedback from teacher were two areas that he intermingled in his interview, therefore, I put them under two similar codes.
In Figure 17, the code application across all four interview transcripts is displayed. Amongst the interviews, four codes emerged as most common between participants. The codes of writing weakness, writing confidence, identity, and grading appeared at least a total of 30 times combined across all participant interview transcripts. This indicates that participants’ lived experiences related to these codes have affected their writing identities to some degree.
Figure 17.

*Participant Code Application Interview Transcripts*

### Participant Code Application Summary of Interview Transcripts

<table>
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</thead>
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<td>Writing Growth</td>
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<td>Writing Confidence</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Self-identify as Bad Writer</td>
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<td>Miscommunication</td>
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<td>Lack of Choice of Topic</td>
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<td>Identity</td>
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<td>Grading</td>
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<td>Good Writer Definition</td>
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<td>Feedback from Peers/Teacher</td>
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<td>Apprehension</td>
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### Researcher Journal

**Purpose**

The purpose of research journals for this study was not only to provide an additional data source for method triangulation of the work, but also to reflect upon interviews, LEDs, and discussions with my participants to attempt to ensure a deeper analysis of the data. Method triangulation involves the use of different methods of data collection about the same phenomenon (Carter et al, 2014).

I wrote journal entries immediately after each interview with the participants and after reading, annotating, and coding their LEDs. In order to keep the work fresh in my mind, I
reviewed, printed, and annotated the entries as the research process occurred. This process allowed me to consistently reflect and make any changes or additions to interviews as they occurred, or to conduct follow-up emails with participants, if needed.

I wanted these journals to not only be a data source, but a way for me to document my thinking and reactions to the study and participants in a way that was beneficial to analyzing the data and reporting findings in a clear manner.

**Format**

Journal entries were written with the date and subject at the top of the page, while the rest of the entry was written as free-flowing prose divided into paragraphs based on ideas, topics, and thoughts I had while or after conducting interviews or reading LEDs. There was no prescribed format or template as these were not field notes in any sense, which may consist of observations followed by interpretation. Rather, these journal entries coaxed out ideas that based on participant data sources, as well as my own understanding of the research process as it occurred. Because this work focused on experiences already lived by the participants, a field note approach would not have been beneficial to this study as there was nothing for me to observe and interpret based on interviews and LED submissions. While field notes allow for documentation of behaviors and reflections, these journal entries intended to capture my inner thoughts and reactions to the work as it occurred, and give me an opportunity to document and review the research in real time.

**Journal Entry Analysis**

The journal entries were printed and annotated as part of my data analysis for this study. I did not want to combine this data with the data gathered directly from my participants, so I did not code this work in the Dedoose platform; rather, I coded them through my annotations when
appropriate. My written annotations (i.e. summaries and emerging themes) helped me to chunk and combine parts of my journal entries into sections for analysis, along with the codes developed for the participant data sources. I used the entries as a reflective tool to help guide how I coded the LEDs and interview transcripts. The information outlined in the journal entries gave me starting points in the other data sources in which I could focus my analysis or review for further interpretation, such as keywords or events that stood out and warranted further review.

Figure 18 displays how I applied each of the codes to my researcher journal entries. The most common codes were identity, emotions, self-identify as bad writer, and grading. This coding is very similar to the themes and ideas commonly coded amongst the participant data sources. My reflections brought forth similar concerns and connections on the LEDs and interview transcripts as the data provided by the participants.

**Figure 18.**

**Code Application of Researcher Journal Entries**

While the lived experiences of the participants were different, as well as the experiences that negatively affected their writing confidence and identities, all four participants felt
emotional connections such as stress, fear, and anxiety toward academic writing tasks, which emerged in my journal entry reflections as important factors that may have caused them to self-identify as “bad writers.” It became clear that all three data sources, LEDs, interview transcripts, and researcher journal entries, were identifying common themes and ideas through coding.

Figure 19 demonstrates how each journal entry was coded and annotated.

**Figure 19.**

*Annotation and Coding Example of Researcher Journal Entries*
Coding Themes

Open coding of the LEDs and transcripts resulted in several common themes that I used to develop categories such as *emotions, writing identity, teacher influence, and writing task*. These categories gave insight as to how participants both viewed writing and felt about it on an emotional level, as well as contributing factors that developed or affected their writing identities. The *emotions* category encompassed expressions from the participants related to how they perceived academic writing tasks and feelings they experienced when approaching writing for school. Many ideas and themes contributed to the *writing identity* category, such as definitions of different types of writers and changes participants experienced as they matured as writers.

*Teacher influence* was important to the participants, as the impact of grading and teacher feedback was discussed in every interview. Lastly, the I developed the *writing task* category to help combine the elements associated with writing tasks, as well as the different genres and choices that are reflected in these types of assignments.

As shown in Figure 20, the various codes applied to the LEDs and transcripts of interviews are shown, along with the number of times each code was used across the four participants’ data sources.
Figure 20.

**Open Code Occurrence Graph**

Figure 21 presents the categories developed from combining themes and ideas, along with the number of times I applied the combined codes to the data sources. Both Figures 20 and 21 show the coding of the LEDs and interview transcripts from each participant.

Figure 21.

**Categories from Open Codes Graph**
Findings

All participants also mentioned that they felt they had more freedom of writing if they wrote about their own opinions. This ability to write “what they know” gave them an opportunity to show their thoughts and persuade others to agree with their reasoning. Michael, Prisha, and Madeline also mentioned that writing about opinions most often did not require them to participate in research, which lowered any reluctance or stress they may have normally experienced with other types of academic writing tasks. When asked to explain further why they believe opinion writing is easier than research-based writing, all four of the participants said that it was a way to show their “passions” and “intelligence” on an assignment that they may not normally get to talk about.

Teacher influence was a theme that presented itself throughout the interviews of all of the participants in relation to feedback and grading. While three participants, Prisha, Randy, and Madeline believed that grading or evaluation often affected their writing confidence, only Michael said that he did not take any grades personally, rather he used it as motivation to try to improve. It was the connection to grading that the three participants believed changed the way their teacher influenced their writing identities and confidence. All four participants stated that they began to self-identify as bad writers in their late middle school and early high school years. This commonality coupled with their similar beliefs that they were missing essential writing skills, which led to fear and anxiety toward academic writing tasks.

All of the participants mentioned fear and anxiety to some extent. Madeline, Randy, and Prisha said that they felt reluctant and anxious toward academic writing tasks but were mostly able to complete the tasks when they were assigned. In general, only two participants, Randy and Madeline, said that they had avoided and not completed a few writing tasks because the stress
related to those assignments was overwhelming. They said it was better to accept a failing score than to attempt the assignment, which was part of why they self-identify as “bad writers.”

**Conclusion/Summary**

Through interviews and reading the participants’ LED submissions, I found many examples of situations, or lived experiences that can affect a student’s writing identity. While parts of the lived experiences were common amongst participants, such as when they began to self-identify as “bad writers,” each participant had unique experiences that shaped their writing identity and affected their writing confidence. I anticipated that there would be connections to the literature in regards to information contained in the data sources (and discussed in chapter 5); however, I could not foresee some of the comments and experiences that the participants had faced on their journeys to college. The fact that a participant left college for almost 15 years because of his fear of a written exam was quite a surprising revelation in this study. Another participant’s ability to develop her personal and writing identities after the death of her mother was something that was not connected to any of the literature I read and gave me a chance to look more closely at an experience that affected writing confidence.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

As a writing instructor who has experienced the phenomenon of students self-identifying as “bad writers” throughout my career, I am interested in the findings from this study in order to begin to better understand how lived experiences affect student writing confidence. This phenomenological study examines the lived experiences of FYC students who self-identify as “bad writers,” and who have felt fear and anxiety when approaching an academic writing task. The work seeks to answer research questions related to how the lived experiences of FYC students affect their writing confidence, and how those experiences informed their identities as writers.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study, listed below, were developed to examine the phenomenon of why FYC students self-identify as “bad writers.”

1. How do the lived experiences of FYC students affect their writing confidence regarding academic writing tasks, and what commonalities might exist between these lived experiences?

2. For students who self-identify as “bad writers,” how have their lived experiences informed their writing identities and shaped their self-efficacy beliefs?

In order to look more closely at the lived experiences that can impact writing identity, I wanted to discuss with my participants their writing confidence and the emotional connections related to writing. It was important to see not only when they started to self-identify as “bad writers,” but to also look at how their writing identities had possibly changed as they matured. The information learned from the participants’ LEDs and interviews gave me an opportunity to
reflect on how I, as a writing instructor, should attempt to provide more choice of writing topics and offer more positive experiences with writing in my future courses.

**Lived Experiences and Writing Confidence**

All four participants used the LEDs and interviews to share their lived experiences that they believed negatively affected their writing confidence and caused them to begin to self-identify as “bad writers.” Randy believed that a bad relationship with his English teacher was the “root cause” for him beginning to doubt his skills as a writer. It was Shakespeare and character analysis that caused Prisha to start identifying as a “bad writer,” and Madeline attributed her decline in writing confidence to the essay writing that began in her early high school years. Finally, Michael said that his distaste for research essays and a lack of foundational writing skills from middle school led him to doubt himself as a competent writer. Each of the lived experiences that caused the participants to begin to self-identify as “bad writers” directly related to academic writing tasks such as essays, research, and character analysis based on readings.

All of my participants discussed their writing confidence to some degree, and while each of them expressed a desire to become better writers, they all acknowledged that their writing confidence had not improved much since they first began to self-identify as “bad writers.” While their lived experiences related to their writing confidence focused around experiences with teachers and learning, Prisha and Madeline said that their friends now had more impact on their writing confidence than feedback from their teachers. However, Michael and Randy still consider teacher feedback important as it relates to their writing confidence connected to academic writing tasks.
Academic Writing Tasks

For each of the participants an academic writing task played an integral role in them beginning to self-identify as “bad writers.” Because academic writing is considered a form of evaluation that asks you to demonstrate understanding and disciplinary skill, it can illicit negative reactions from students (Irvin, 2010). All four participants mentioned in their interviews that they did not like writing about topics that required research. All four participants mentioned essays as writing tasks that cause them stress and anxiety. While Prisha was able to explain that a template or formula for essay writing made it easier for her, Madeline and Michael both said that they struggle with essays even when a detailed explanation of the assignment and they are provided a writing template. Randy was so fearful of the Regents’ Writing Exam, essentially a state-mandated essay, that he fled from college to avoid the stress and panic he experienced when faced with completing the exam.

When asked about academic writing tasks, the participants always referred to some type of essay. Swales and Feak (2004) suggest that academic writing, especially essays, are the products of many considerations: audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation. Many of these same considerations were mentioned by my participants in their interviews as part of their definitions of “good writers.” The consensus was that if it required research or outside reading to complete, it was an academic writing task. Participants did not consider assignments such as journals and reflections academic because they were mainly based on the participants’ opinions and life experiences. All four participants dreaded essays, especially when on a teacher-assigned topic, because they felt they had little to no say in the actual argument if they did not have the same opinion as their teacher or felt they could not connect with their audience.
Commonalities between Participant Lived Experiences

All four of my participants discussed lived experiences that they believed negatively affected their writing confidence in their interviews. Each of the participants explained that teacher feedback and grading were part of what affected their belief that they were “bad writers.” Because of the importance of evaluation (or grading) associated with academic writing tasks, each participant became reluctant to complete writing tasks once they started to have doubt in their own abilities as writers. They all admitted that they had gone so far as to avoid certain writing assignments and take a lower score rather than face the stress and anxiety they associated with an academic writing task.

Another commonality amongst the participants was when they started to self-identify as “bad writers.” Randy, Madeline, Michael, and Prisha all identified that late middle school and early high school were when they first started to have lower writing confidence. This doubt manifested in similar ways, such as procrastination and feelings of stress and anxiety toward academic writing tasks. While each participant’s lived experiences were a little different, they all told similar stories of struggling with essay and research writing. These struggles led the participants to second-guess themselves when completing academic writing tasks, which then led to further stress and anxiety.

Lived Experiences and Self-Identification of “Bad Writers”

As I analyzed and coded the interview transcripts, I noticed that while all participants talked about their strengths as writers, they talked about their weaknesses and struggles related to writing at least twice as much. The participants highlighted how much their lived experiences have affected their writing identities by focusing more on the negative aspects of their writing confidence and beliefs about their own writing skills. As suggested by Kiuhara, Graham, and
Hawken (2009), up to 50% of high school students do not graduate with adequate writing skills for college, which aligned with what my participants discussed in their interviews in regards to their own confidence and beliefs about the writing skills they learned in high school. The negative aspect of the lived experiences obviously left lasting impressions that have caused the participants to become stunted in their beliefs that they can improve and become “good writers.”

Connections to Literature

Throughout this study, I found several connections to literature regarding writing reluctance and anxiety, as well as to when participants felt they began to self-identify as “bad writers.” As suggested by Daly and Wilson (1983), students who are apprehensive toward writing may also feel less positive about themselves. In my interviews with Randy, Prisha, and Madeline, I found that these participants expressed to some degree that their self-esteem in high school was affected by their writing identities for various reasons. Whether they felt inadequate as writers or were struggling with the influence their teachers’ feedback had over their writing confidence, each expressed that their anxiety toward writing made them feel bad about themselves as students.

Low self-esteem also affected their self-efficacy when it came to seeking help regarding revisions or improving on their work. A lack in self-efficacy in one area of a student’s life is consistent with the work of Eller, et al (2016) that suggests self-efficacy depends on the person and situation. In the case of my participants, the situation was similar as it was directly connected to writing confidence and identity affected by lived experiences in middle and high school.

All four participants only showed reluctance and apprehension toward academic writing tasks. They did not feel that creative writing such as poetry and journaling was as difficult or demanding as academic writing tasks such as research essays. This is important to note, as
academic writing is a form of evaluation that asks one to demonstrate knowledge and show proficiency (Irvin, 2010). Because of the evaluation, or grading, associated with academic writing tasks, my participants felt that this type of writing was more difficult and “stressful” for them to complete. As academic writing is a rigorous undertaking that requires students to think critically while presenting a well-formed and supported argument, this assumption from my participants is a valid concern (Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012; Irving, 2010). Participants viewed more expressive types of writing (freewriting, journaling, and reflective writing) as outlets to better exhibit their unique voice and show their creativity (Anson, 2014; Burnham & Powell, 2014).

Not surprisingly, my participants also expressed their anxiety and reluctance toward academic writing throughout their various data sources. When they viewed academic writing as formulaic and prescriptive, they became anxious toward completing the task (Daly & Wilson, 1983). Because writing anxiety is a psychological concept experienced on different levels by different students, it was predictable that my participants experienced varying levels of anxiety from procrastination to lack of motivation to dropping out of school (Daly & Miller, 1975). The negative feelings created when writers try to compose, as related to writing anxiety, were a common thread amongst the participants’ lived experiences (Tsao et al, 2017).

The apprehension experienced by my participants was also evident through the analysis of their LEDs and interviews. Apprehension is situational and can be associated with specific subjects based on a student’s perception of an academic writing task (Daly & Wilson, 1983). This could also mean that because of the situational nature of writing, students may be able to write in one setting and terrified to write in another, such as Randy and his fear of the Regents’ Writing Exam (Holmes, Waterbury, Baltrinic, & Davis, 2018). The perceived evaluative nature
of academic writing often leads to apprehension and feelings of unwellness (Daly & Wilson, 1983; Bayat, 2014). While each participant experienced different issues with writing apprehension, research indicates that students tend to write more sporadically and compose low-quality work because they lack motivation due to the negative feelings associated with writing apprehension (Huwari and Hashima, 2011).

Limitations of Findings

There were, as expected, limitations with this study. One limitation was the availability of the participants for face-to-face interviews. Because three of the four had full-time jobs in addition to taking night classes, it was difficult to schedule enough time to meet between classes for our interviews. Had there been more time to discuss the interview questions, I believe this work would have found more lived experiences and their effects on student writing identity and confidence than the current results have brought forth.

Another limitation of this work was choosing to use LEDs as a data source without proper modeling beforehand. The participants completed these assignments as part of their course work, but they simply answered the questions at face value and did not elaborate enough to provide thick descriptions of experiences. Because of the straightforward nature of their writing on the LEDs, I was not able to gather as much data as I expected. For future research on this phenomenon, I will alter the directions of the LEDs and model expectations for final products for participants. Also, I will give feedback and request revisions and further explanations when necessary.

Lastly, there are limitations of the methodology that can become taxing or difficult for the researcher, which can possibly limit the caliber of the work. Van Manen (1990) highlights several of the limitations for the researcher when implementing a phenomenological research
methodology. He presents the many challenges that may interfere with the production of quality, well-developed research beyond possibly getting buried in writing and not knowing what to do next. According to Van Manen (1990),

phenomenological human science is a form of qualitative research that is extraordinarily demanding of its practitioners. Unless the researcher remains strong in his or her orientation to the fundamental question or notion, there will be many temptations to get side-tracked or to wander aimlessly and indulge in wishy-washy speculations, to settle for preconceived opinions and conceptions, to become enchanted with narcissistic reflections or self-indulgent preoccupations, or to fall back onto taxonomic concepts or abstracting theories. (p. 33)

Beyond the physical and mental taxation for researchers utilizing a phenomenological research method, there are other limitations of this type of work. For instance, it may be difficult for participants to articulate their lived experiences in a way that accurately reflects their true experiences or that offers clarity for interpretation (Van Manen, 1990). In addition, because the results of phenomenology are not generalizable, it may lead to questioning of the validity of the work.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study highlight the necessity of continued research of both student writing identities and how lived experiences affect student writing confidence. Throughout the completion of this study, I sought not only to answer my research questions, but also to better understand why FYC students were self-identifying as “bad writers.” Because of the fear, anxiety, and stress related to academic writing tasks expressed by my participants, I believe that through more research, writing instructors will be able to connect more meaningfully with
students, and, in turn, help them develop positive writing identities and build writing confidence. Future research should take into account FYC student voices and lived experiences that affected their writing identities and confidence and consider them as important as the suppositions and assertions prevalent in the current literature and research on this topic.

One way to apply this work to future studies would be to investigate writing confidence and identity with high school students. I believe it is important to extend this work to high school students’ and their lived experiences with writing because each participant from my study had a negative experience with a writing teacher that affected their writing confidence and writing identity. Working to research similar ideas in a high school setting could be a powerful lens to improve writing instruction and student and teacher relationships. Attempting to identify and understand factors that hinder the success of writing confidence of high school students could also impact their experiences as writers in college. It would also be beneficial to focus on the emotional tolls students faced when approaching various writing tasks, especially those perceived as more academic in nature. Because of the possible negative associations students may already have with writing in high school, researching those associations can help to build a foundation for practitioners to reference as they develop and deliver instruction and writing opportunities to their students. It would also be of note to consider studies that investigate the potential benefits of specific strategies such as collaborative workshop models, the teacher-as-writer, meta-writing, and metacognition.

Implications for My Future Teaching

After my initial experience with Gary (see Vignette in Chapter 1), I immediately took steps within my classroom to attempt to understand why students felt the way they did about writing. I also began to implement more assignments that students identified as engaging, or in
their words “fun and interesting.” Assignments such as the six-word memoir, short narratives such as Nelson’s (2004) “I Remember” piece, and more poetry/lyrical writing activities. I began talking with students more openly about my writing in order to engage in discussions about writing, which quickly shifted to students drawing parallels between my writing struggles and their own. Writing became more of tangible presence in my classroom, and after completing this study, I plan to continue working with students to destigmatize both their assumptions and beliefs about what makes writing academic or creative in nature.

Even though I am only beginning to understand why students may self-identify as “bad writers,” the journey has been powerful and will impact my teaching. Using my new-found knowledge as an interpretive phenomenologist, I see many areas where my classroom instruction and engagement with students can change in order to afford my students more positive lived experiences with writing. As I begin to prepare for the next school year, I am already creating more opportunities to conference with students about their writing and engage in honest discussions about what they believe about different types of writing. I think it will be important to attempt to adjust student preconceptions and beliefs about writing that is more creative in nature, which is often assumed to be more fun and less rigorous to students and writing that is more formal and considered boring and rigorous, such as academic writing. My classroom will attempt to make writing something that is welcomed in all of its genres, modes, and iterations.

**Implications for Writing Instruction and Educational Policy**

Educational policy can sometimes be a hindrance to effective and meaningful classroom and writing instruction. From the nature of state standards, to the political and social implications of teaching in America, and the difficulties of procuring funding for various instructional needs, it would be impossible for me to suggest best practices that would work in every classroom.
an ideal world, every teacher of writing would have classes with a maximum of 20 students per period to participate in writing conferences and one-on-one instruction with students to support writing goals.

Additionally, in this ideal world, teachers would have a planning period every single day that would be free from meetings, appointments, and various other interruptions in order to give purposeful feedback to each student on their writing. While these ideals are not possible for many writing teachers today, implementing small steps toward engaging in the discussion and meta-cognitive process of writing with students can go a long way in teaching students to be stronger writers.

Finally, in a perfect instructional setting, all writing teachers would receive timely and continued training and professional development opportunities related to effective writing instruction. As mentioned by Applebee and Langer (2015), many writing teachers did not feel adequately prepared by their teacher preparatory programs to teach writing effectively at any level. In order to support teacher knowledge and comfortability with teaching writing, it should be a priority to obtain funding for training and development related to effective writing strategies that could be implemented across the nation in various grade levels and contents.

**Writing about Writing**

Downs and Wardle (2017) assert that it is more beneficial for students to learn about writing as opposed to being told how to write. Their work centers around changing what students know about writing in order to change and shape how they actually write. Writing is a relevant, useful, and experiential element of communication that many students struggle with (Downs & Wardle, 2017). During their interviews, each participant mentioned that I was the first teacher to talk to them about writing and their feelings about writing. It was a powerful epiphany for me to
realize that simply discussing writing and the emotions students relate to it could positively affect their writing confidence. Students can “accomplish far more than we typically give them credit for being able to do, if only we will ask them to do it” (Downs & Wardle, 2017). Pedagogical practices need not be far removed from the students in order to “teach” writing, rather, implementing meaningful readings, writing activities, and opportunities for discussions can be as impactful (maybe more) than explicit writing instruction.

A course that focuses on Writing about Writing (WAW) pedagogy should be steeped in readings centered on issues that students have experienced first-hand, which are data-driven and research-focused (Downs & Wardle, 2017). By avoiding theoretical readings in favor of the research-focused readings, students will be able to better access the writing, making it more relevant to them. A WAW course should ask students to consider, “How does writing work? How do people use writing? What are problems related to writing and reading and how can they be solved?” (Downs & Wardle, 2017). Instructors should also consider that writing cannot be taught effectively without content, which emphasizes the need for instructors to be expert readers in order to help guide students through the complex natures of critical thinking and writing.

It is important to note that a WAW course should include writing assignments that are reflective in nature. Students should reflect upon research-based course readings in order to compare their research skills and journey with other writers. Creating literacy narratives and auto-ethnographies can also be ways to help students reflect on their attitudes and approaches to literacy and writing (Downs & Wardle, 2017). Research assignments such as interpretive summaries, annotated bibliographies, and literature reviews can also add complex, yet rewarding writing experiences for students (Downs & Wardle, 2017). Finally, a WAW course should culminate with both a written and oral presentation of students’ research and work conducted
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

during the course (Downs & Wardle, 2017). A presentation of their findings can open discussion and room for further critical thinking amongst peers, which is necessary for obtaining positive experiences with writing, especially for students who self-identify as “bad writers.”

**Recommendations for Teaching**

**Middle School Instruction**

Research suggests that students begin to struggle with writing identity and self-identify as “bad writers” as early as middle school, it is important for writing teachers to begin offering positive writing experiences to students using effective writing instruction strategies (Schunk, 1996; Demir, 2018; Eller et al, 2016). There are multiple best practices, principles, and effective writing strategies to consider when creating significant interactions with writers that can positively affect their writing confidence and writing identity. For example, Lacina (2012) suggests four guiding principles to help students effectively engage in writing during their middle school years.

1. Teach explicit writing strategies
2. Write collaboratively
3. Have a specific product goal
4. Study models of writing.

The principles work together to mold writing experiences for students that foster critical thinking and pair intentional writing goals and tasks with socialized learning opportunities. Lucina (2012) implies that when a writing teacher is purposeful and thoughtful when creating writing assignments and tasks for students, the work will become engaging and accessible for students, especially for those who struggle with various aspects of writing.
Effective writing strategies are as important as guiding principles when working with young writers who are developing their writing identities. Gadd and Parr (2017) suggest the following effective writing strategies for middle school students:

- Purpose-driven rubrics
- Task setting
- Direct instruction
- Responding to learners
- Engaging students
- Organization/management
- Expectations
- Self-regulation
- Goal setting

Strategies such as engaging students, goal setting, and direct instruction align with Lucia’s (2012) suggestions in guiding middle school writers. Gadd and Parr (2017) do not solely offer strategies for student writing activities. Like others (Lucia, 2012; Graham and Perin, 2007; Dean, 2010), they also assert that writing teachers play a pivotal role by delivering effective writing instruction, as well as encouraging students to engage in the writing process and set goals. When writing teachers and students work together toward writing expectations and goals, the community and social aspects of writing can offer additional positive writing experiences.

**High School Instruction**

In many high school classrooms, the goal is to prepare students for college and career readiness. Writing, both academic and creative in nature, should be a significant part of that preparation. Worthman, Gardner, and Thole (2011) assert that high school writing instruction is
most effective when it focuses on the three “Rs” of writing instruction: recognition, relevance, and renegotiation. Recognition refers to the understanding of the complexity of our writing lives. It is also important to identify the relevance of in-school writing and out-of-school writing, while renegotiating what it means to be a writer in school. Because many students do not see themselves as writers outside of school, it is important to teach them how to think about multiple modes of writing, as well as how and why people write using multiple genres and platforms. When students look at writing as both a cognitive and meta-cognitive process, their self-efficacy is improved, as is their ability to talk about their writing more purposefully.

Peer review is another strategy that has found a place in many high school classrooms across the nation. By creating a social learning opportunity with relevant guidelines and norms, students can learn from each other, as well as implement various writing and communication strategies in a lower-risk setting. Students who participated in the work of Loretto, DeMartino, and Godley (2016) agreed that peer review was beneficial and effective when combined as part of social learning and the writing process in their high school writing classes. If students are grouped based on need and differentiation practices, peer review has the potential to build community amongst teachers and students, in addition to building trust and communication skills that work to improve writing.

It has been suggested that there is a writing revolution happening in high school classes across the nation (Hochman & Wexler, 2017). By including elements of the work of Worthman, Gardner, and Thole (2011) and Gadd and Parr (2017) to their own framework, Hochman and Wexler (2017) suggest that there are six principles that encompass the writing revolution happening in writing classes:

- Students need explicit instruction in writing
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

- Sentences are the building blocks of all writing
- When embedded in the content of the curriculum, writing instruction is a powerful teaching tool
- The content of the curriculum drives the rigor of the writing activities
- Grammar is best taught in the context of student writing
- The two most important phases of the writing process are planning and revising

While each principle alludes to what Hochman and Wexler (2017) call a writing revolution, many of these strategies and principles have been part of the English writing curriculum for many years. As there is no set of best practices that will work every time with every student, the six principles of Hochman and Wexler’s (2017) work offer a variety of entry points into writing instruction for teachers who have varying levels of comfortability with teaching the subject. With each principle building upon the next, each element affords significant interaction with writing for students to help build a foundation of successful writing strategies for reference as they grow and develop as writers.

**FYC Instructors**

This study revealed commonalities amongst the participants that can offer insight for FYC writing instructors. For instance, FYC instructors must resist the notion that FYC students need to be “saved” from their flawed high school writing instruction (Downs & Wardle, 2012). Instead, instructors need to be thoughtful and intentional in their writing curriculum and in the ways they introduce FYC students to the conversation of academic writing. By demonstrating patience and including creativity and independence in academic writing tasks, students who self-identify as “bad writers” may begin to build their writing confidence in a more positive manner (Graham & Perin, 2007). Also, through the incorporation of appropriate technology, writing
WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

instruction can offer a way for students who have low writing confidence to engage in the curriculum with more self-efficacy and less reluctance (Graham & Perin, 2007).

FYC instructors can also create more positive lived experiences related to academic writing tasks by including a variety of strategies such as collaborative writing, sentence combining, inquiry writing, summarization, models of mentor texts, and writing for content learning (Graham and Perin, 2007; Dean, 2010; Sullivan, 2006; Downs & Wardle, 2012). Through the implementation of a rigorous and diverse writing curriculum, instructors can offer students who self-identify as “bad writers,” as well as other students in their courses, opportunities to engage with purposeful instruction that builds confidence and helps to hinder reluctance and apprehension related to academic writing tasks.

Finally, by having conversations with students about their beliefs in their own writing abilities may give writing instructors further insight into what types of instruction and experiences with writing their students need to become successful and more competent writers. Bitchener and Cameron (2005) suggest that teacher and student conferencing about writing can be extremely beneficial for students, beyond any knowledge students may gain from peer review or collaborative writing. All four of my participants said that our discussions and interviews were the first time anyone tried to understand them as students and writers. It is important for writing instructors to note that it is important to understand that writing can shape and reflect our identities in relation to each other and the world (Yagelski, 2009). By opening the conversation and making students feel comfortable in expressing their writing confidence issues, writing instructors can grow their pedagogical practice, as well as begin to connect with students in ways that motivate and positively affect their understanding of writing.
Conclusion

This study examined the lived experiences of FYC students who self-identify as “bad writers.” Through the completion of this study, I found that several of my assumptions I held about why students self-identify as “bad writers” were correct. However, I could not have anticipated the severity of the impact anxiety and fear related to academic writing tasks held on students, such as Randy. While I did expect teacher relationships, grading, and feedback to have an impact on student writing identity and confidence, these factors were not as important as I had assumed. As both a researcher and instructor of writing, I learned the importance of offering rich, positive, and meaningful experiences with writing for students, especially when they offer choice of topic and flexibility within the assignment. Writing confidence and identity are both important factors in developing competent, well-rounded students, especially those in college pursuing degrees in various career fields. Because of the importance of the two aforementioned factors, I assert that the continuation of research is desperately needed in the field of English and writing education.
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WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS” 136


WHY STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS “BAD WRITERS”

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Appendix A: IRB Forms

SIGNED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: Writing Confidence and Self-Identity: A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of First-Year Composition Students that Self-Identify as “Bad Writers”

Researcher's Contact Information:

Faculty Advisor:
Student Researcher: Millicent Ashlie Wells

Introduction
You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Dr. Darren Crovitz (faculty advisor) and Millicent Ashlie Wells (student researcher). Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project
The purpose of the study is to seek an understanding of why students self-identify as “bad writers” through the reporting of lived experiences related to writing.

Explanation of Procedures
Participants will be asked to participate in audio recorded interviews and to submit samples of class work from their English 1101 or English 1102 class taught by M. Ashlie Wells.

Time Required
Participation in interviews will not require more than 90 minutes of each participants time and interviews will be conducted in one to two 30-45 minute sessions

Work samples will be taken from regular class assignments; therefore, the amount of time spent on each assignment will be determined by the student. A fair estimate of time would be between five and 10 hours.

Risks or Discomforts
There are no known or foreseeable risks to students who volunteer to participate in this study.

Benefits
It is hoped that participants in this study will benefit from the reflective nature of sharing their experiences with the researcher.
Compensation
There will be no compensation for participating in this study, as there will be no penalization for students who do not choose to participate in this study.

Confidentiality
The results of this participation will be confidential. All student names will be replaced with pseudonyms and the identities of all participants will be locked in a secure location accessible only by the student researcher.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation
The minimal age for participants in this study is 18, with no maximum age.

Student Researcher and Participant Communication
At times it may be necessary for the student researcher to send materials related to the research or ask questions via email. I give my consent for the student researcher to contact me via my university student email address, which I will provide below.

Signed Consent
I agree and give my consent to participate in this research project. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

__________________________________________________________
University Student Email Address

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE RESEARCHER.