

Series Editor's Preface

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The longer you work with genre, the more it reveals and the more it connects with—perhaps because genre is at a central nexus of human-sense-making, where typification meets utterance in pursuit of human action. To communicate effectively we need to know what kind of situation we are in, what kinds of things are being said, and what kinds of things we want to accomplish. The evolving variety of human circumstances, the creative potentials of language, and the cleverness of human action challenge us to know where we are and where we are going in interactions, especially since we must be intelligible to other people equally struggling to make sense of communicative situations from their separate perspectives. Shared social attributions of genre help us and those we communicate with to be on the same page, or close enough for our practical purposes.

Many aspects of communication, social arrangements, and human meaning-making are packaged in genre recognition. Genres are associated with sequences of thought, styles of self-presentation, author-audiences stances and relations, specific contents and organizations, epistemologies and ontologies, emotions and pleasures, speech acts and social accomplishments. Social roles, classes, institutional power are bound together with rights and responsibilities for producing, receiving, and being ruled by genres. Genres shape regularized communicative practices that bind together organizations, institutions, and activity systems. Genres by identifying contexts and plans for action also focus our cognitive attention and draw together the dynamics of our mind in pursuit of specific communicative relations, thereby exercising and developing particular ways of thinking. I would not be surprised if brain researchers were to find that typification and genre

leave their mark on brain organization as the child matures into an articulate and literate adult.

By following genres we can see both the complex regularities of communicative life and the individuality of each situated utterance. Awareness of robust types and purposeful individual variation responsive to local circumstances provides an antidote to over-simplifying models of writing instruction. Genre helps us see the purposefulness and flexibility of form, rather than form being just a matter of correctness and fulfillment of a few school-based tasks, created purely for instruction and assessment. A proper understanding of genre also reveals the underlying communicative action and social situation which give reason to the form and motive to acts of reading and writing. An understanding of genre brings us into touch with the manifold uses of writing in different parts of society, the economy, governance and culture. Awareness of genre and skill in adapting to the varieties of action possible, using a wide range of linguistic tools, prepares us and our students for wide ranging participation and purposeful innovation.

Given the richness of the concept of genre, it is no wonder that many approaches to understanding and teaching genre have developed, in many regions of the world. This volume provides an informed and thoughtful introduction to all of these approaches and provides means for understanding their relation as well as pursuing deeper study of each. I am deeply appreciative for the work of the authors and am confident you will find their work useful as you explore the meaning of genre for yourselves as writers, as teachers of writing, and as students of the wonder of human communicative accomplishment.