Writing Apprehension Among Communication Majors

1986

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WRITING APPREHENSION AMONG COMMUNICATION MAJORS

BY

ROBERT GEORGE DAVIS
B.A., University of Central Florida, 1983

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Communication in the Graduate Studies Program of the College of Arts and Sciences University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Fall Term 1986
Faith and wisdom. It takes an admixture of the two to make any worthwhile endeavor come to fruition. Several people have lent one or both of these to me. Special thanks go to the following people: from the faculty of the UCF Communication Department, Burt Pryor, Fred Fedler, and Phil Taylor; from the College of Education, Chuck Dzuiban; from the Department of Psychology, Ed Shirkey; and fellow students and friends Randy Freeman, Lori Farber, Erika Engstrom, and Connie Milbourne.
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INTRODUCTION

There is a partial quotation from the book *Errors and Expectation* by M. Shaughnessy which Fox (1981) used to illustrate the disintegrating process that sometimes occurs in the person with high writing apprehension, that is, a person who experiences anxiety when faced with the prospect of writing: "He is aware that he leaves a trail of errors behind him when he writes. He can usually think of little else while he is writing . . . Some writers, inhibited by their fear of error, produce but a few lines an hour . . . ." To those who reside somewhere below +1 standard deviation on a scale of writing apprehension this may seem almost incomprehensible, but to the high writing apprehensive the feelings can elicit anything from clever avoidance of writing situations to panic when faced with an unavoidable encounter with the generation of prose. Indeed, avoidance is the writing apprehensive's main weapon in combatting the anxiety he feels. It spans boundaries of educational and occupational choice much the same as other facets of communication apprehension.

The behavioral response similarity to other types of communication apprehension (e.g., audience anxiety) is by no means a fluke, as studies have shown. In fact, the study of writing apprehension blossomed out of the original constructs of communication apprehension, which dealt primarily with anxiety relative to oral communication. While there are a great number of similarities between oral and written communication
apprehension, correlations between measures of the two, although fairly consistent, have been mild (McCroskey, 1984). Some similarity of relationship between the measures of apprehension and personality factors has also been shown; however, no inference of the same quality being tapped is justified. By and large, the two remain distinct -- if by nothing other than situational factors that induce each alone.

This discussion could lead one to believe that writing apprehension is a widely studied phenomenon. On the contrary, there is a relative dearth of research in the area, especially when compared to the hundreds of studies on oral communication apprehension. But one must reexamine a key variable -- situational factors. The opportunities for oral communication far outnumber those for written communication. Getting up in the morning rarely entails any writing but usually at least includes muttering 'good morning' to someone. Thus, the imbalance in the research output is understandable. The research which has investigated writing apprehension, for obvious reasons, tends to gravitate toward the teaching of English. Following is a discussion of its significant findings, largely the work of its chief proponent, John Daly.

**Identification of the Writing Apprehensive**

The writing apprehensive can be either dispositional or situational in nature. That is, he/she can exhibit trait-like symptoms much the same as oral communication apprehensives, or he/she can react variably over a range of communication situations. Daly and Hailey (1984) note that the dispositional view that has persevered severely limits practical and theoretical applicability. Therefore, they studied five
situational variables that they believed would affect writing apprehension. The variables are much the same as ones used in state-like oral communication apprehension: level of perceived evaluation, novelty of the situation, ambiguity of the situation, perceived conspicuousness, and previous experiences. They were operationalized by giving subjects one of two versions of statements relating to a given situational variable. The subjects were told to imagine themselves in the given situation and to fill out some forms after reading it. Two of the forms probed situational anxiety, and a third examined dispositional anxiety.

Main effects were found on all five situational dimensions. That is, writing apprehension was significantly higher when the level of perceived evaluation was higher, the novelty of the situation was greater, the ambiguity of the situation was greater, the subject's perceived conspicuousness in the situation was greater, or the subject's previous experiences in the situation were poorer. Some interactions were found but not extensively evaluated. In addition, a moderate positive correlation was found between each of the two situational measures and the dispositional measure ($r=+.31$ and $r=.26$, $p<.001$). While the findings suggest that dispositional and situational factors tend to complement each other, there is no clear definition as to how and when. One reservation the authors note in their findings is the artificial nature of the experiment: subjects had only to imagine themselves in the given situation.

Although situational measures might yield a wealth of data on the nature of the writing apprehensive, the primary (and maybe only) measure
used until recently has been Daly and Miller's 26-item Writing Apprehension Test (WAT), developed in 1975. Drawing on similar measures for oral communication apprehension, Daly and Miller (1975c) constructed the Likert-type scaled device to tap trait anxiety using an analogy to oral measures. The authors honed an original list of 63 items down to the final 26 through factor analysis, favoring the self-report document over physiological and interview-observation measures for its ease of administration, low cost, expected reliability, and ability to access trait rather than state factors.

Even though it has been scored as a unidimensional device, recent factor analyses by Burgoon and Hale (1983a, 1983b) have suggested three categories within the test: ease, enjoyment, and rewards of writing. These findings are not as strange as they may seem in light of the WAT's original conception. The test was modeled on McCroskey's Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), a test widely used to examine anxiety about oral communication. With this in mind, eight dimensions were included in the construction of the WAT: general anxiety about writing, teacher evaluation of one's writing, professional evaluation of one's writing, anxiety about letter writing, the effects of environment on one's writing, test writing, and self-evaluation of one's writing and its worth.

The relationship of the three identified dimensions of writing apprehension measured by the WAT were also checked for correlations with factors sifted from both the PRCA and the Unwillingness-to-Communicate Scale (UCS). Subjects who filled out all three measures showed significant but moderate correlations between the ease of writing
dimension of the WAT and the public speaking dimension of the PRCA and between the rewards of writing dimension of the WAT and the nonverbal expressiveness dimension of the PRCA. Since the amount of variance accounted for in the correlations was not particularly high, the authors concluded that oral and written communication apprehension are clearly distinct traits. Further, Klopf and Cambra (1979) found a significant difference between unidimensional subject ratings on WAT and PRCA scores ($t=3.59, p<.001$), reinforcing an observation made by Phillips that reticent students would prefer to write when possible.

Burgoon and Hale’s research also led them to conclude that the general construct of communication apprehension varies with the mode of communication, personality type (introverted or extroverted), attitude toward the communication process, and history of consequences in communication experiences.

**Personality and the Writing Apprehensive**

Although it was stated earlier that oral and writing apprehensives are not necessarily of the same ilk, some similarities have emerged on personality factors. In a summary of writing apprehension research related to personality factors, Daly and Wilson (1983) found a small but significant negative relationship between writing apprehension and self-esteem. This parallels findings on oral communication apprehension summarized by Daly and Miller (1975c). Daly and Wilson attribute the relatively small correlation of writing apprehension to self-esteem to the broadness of self-esteem and the narrowness of writing apprehension as traits. To examine this further, the authors constructed a measure
of writing-specific self-esteem. As expected, the correlation between
the two factors was much higher, especially with regard to the
dimensions of evaluation, interest, tempo, forcefulness, and
organization.

Daly (1978), in his search for personality attributes, reported on
some possible causes of writing apprehension. Teachers attributed the
formation of it largely to poor development of skills and previous
negative feedback from teachers. Of course, on the issue of skills
development, this raises a chicken-or-the-egg question. Did poor skills
development preclude formation of writing apprehension, or was the
reverse true.

While this remains enigmatic, teacher perceptions certainly play a
role in the maintenance of writing apprehension. Daly and Shamo (1978)
found significant differences between teacher perceptions of high and
low writing apprehensives. Teachers regarded high writing apprehensives
as less likely to experience success in future academic work.
Additionally, when teachers evaluated written descriptions of
prototypical high and low writing apprehensives, they also expected less
success in specific subject areas, such as English and social studies
(Daly, 1979). However, the teachers did not perceive an expected lack
of success in math and science. Obviously, these subject areas were
perceived to require less writing skills.

Daly also reported findings in line with previous education
research concerning teacher expectations and students' gender. In a
2 X 2 design he examined two levels of writing apprehension with gender.
Since previous research (Daly and Miller, 1975b) suggested that females
rate higher in composition writing, he posited teacher expectations to be in line with perceived gender differences. That is, low writing apprehensive females would be rated most positively by teachers with respect to expected academic success. This group would be followed by high writing apprehensive males, low writing apprehensive males, and high writing apprehensive females. Teacher expectations were as predicted, although a note of caution must be added; only female teachers evaluated the hypothetical students. Also, the use of hypothetical students could be argued, but Daly felt this was necessary to both control for undesired interactions and to achieve the levels of writing apprehension. The study also yielded a main effect on writing apprehension. High writing apprehensives, regardless of gender, were perceived to be less likely to succeed than low writing apprehensives.

Not to be overlooked are self-perceptions and expectancies. Daly and Miller (1975b) found that subjects who received high writing apprehension scores perceived their likelihood of success to be lower and felt significantly less successful. Dividing subjects into high and low categories at the mean of the sample, the researchers also found the subjects high in writing apprehension less willing to enroll in courses that demanded more writing.

Related to this, Daly and Shamo (1978) reported a significant interaction between writing apprehension and writing requirements of college majors on perceived desirability of the majors. High writing apprehensives perceived those majors requiring a great deal of writing to be less desirable. Also, the high writing apprehensives reported their own majors to have significantly less writing requirements than
the low writing apprehensives reported in their majors. Finally, low writing apprehensives found their majors to be more desirable overall than majors reported by high writing apprehensives.

Extending this line of thinking, Daly and Wilson (1983) reported a negative relationship between writing apprehension and math anxiety \((r=-.33, p<.001)\) and a positive relationship between writing apprehension and oral communication apprehension \((r=.45, p<.001)\) and reading apprehension \((r=.38, p<.001)\). Since much of the research has dealt with college students, the next logical step is career choices. Daly and Miller (1975c) found a significant difference between level of writing apprehension and the amount of writing perceived to be required for a desired position. High writing apprehensives chose professions that they perceived to require less writing than either moderate or low writing apprehensives \((F=14.78, p<.05)\). This seems to fall in line with findings on oral communication apprehension -- systematic avoidance of anxiety-producing situations.

Other personality dimensions found by Daly and Wilson (1983) to have some relationship to writing apprehension level are alienation \((r=-.12, p<.05)\) and tolerance for ambiguity \((r=-.21, p<.05)\), although these correlations were not as strong as others reported in the research. Tolerance for ambiguity does seem to relate to the state-like construct of writing apprehension discussed earlier, though. Daly (1977) also reported no relationship between writing apprehension and locus of control, dogmatism, and Machiavellianism.

One finding that does not seem to follow what might be expected is the relationship between SAT scores and measures of writing
apprehension. Only a small ($r=.19$, $p<.01$) correlation was found between the two (Daly and Miller, 1975b). The importance here is that SAT verbal scores are often used to place students in either normal or remedial beginning composition classes in college. While SAT scores differed significantly between students placed in remedial and "normal" composition classes ($t=8.25$, $p<.05$), writing apprehension scores did not. This may be due to the SAT's reliance on vocabulary and reading rather than writing as a measure of aptitude. However, the question of attitude overcoming aptitude must be raised.

**Writing and the Writing Apprehensive**

Since nobody can avoid all written communication, especially college students, the next issue that must be probed is writing ability and its relationship to writing apprehension. Using a 68-item objective test of grammar, mechanics, and other related skills necessary for effective writing, Daly (1978) discovered a predicted relationship between writing apprehension as measured by the WAT and competency in these skills. High writing apprehensives scored significantly lower than low writing apprehensives. Within these findings spelling competency and adjective/adverb use emerged to produce most of the difference. Those with moderate writing apprehension had scores that fell between the two, suggesting a continuum for writing apprehension. Additionally, subjects high in writing apprehension showed less working knowledge of grammar and mechanics; however, since only nine percent of the variance was accounted for in these findings, attitude and aptitude may be viewed as separate. The author pointed out that the objective
measure of skills used in the experiment should be considered as part of the writing apprehension construct. High writing apprehensives not only write differently from low writing apprehensives but also have less knowledge of writing skills.

Several qualitative aspects of writing output of the writing apprehensive have been discovered. Daly (1977) found that high writing apprehensives used fewer words, sentences, commas, delimiting punctuation, and words ending in "ly" than low writing apprehensives. The use of punctuation was intended to be a measure of complexity, and the use of words ending in "ly" was used to indicate verbal qualification. Measures of these three items were adjusted for the reduced number of statements produced by the high writing apprehensives. Two measures that produced no significant difference between levels of writing apprehension were the use of uncommon and large words and readability. However, the findings on word diversity and readability should be tempered by the brevity of the essays written. Subjects were given 10 minutes in which to write the essays. It is possible that both of these findings would have been different with a larger writing sample. Still, this experiment involved the actual writing of essays, allowing verbal output to be measured directly. An interesting sidenote is that, overlooking quality, high writing apprehensives may actually produce the more readable material, since they show less propensity for complexity.

Using Burgoon and Hale's (1983b) multidimensional analysis of writing apprehension as measured by the WAT, enjoyment of writing was
found to have the most predictive value for complexity, diversity, and readability. Writing ease was also related to readability.

Another encoding variable that has been examined is language intensity, that is, the forcefulness (deviation from neutrality) of the words chosen. Daly and Miller (1975a) found that high writing apprehensives encoded significantly less intense messages. The procedure involved the use of message completion tasks with predetermined choices for completion. This finding was related to some earlier research by Burgoon, et. al. related to stress and language intensity in which it was found that stress causes a decrease in language intensity. Since high writing apprehensives could be expected to perceive stress in a writing situation, their language intensity would be expected to decrease. However, Burgoon and Hale's (1983b) multidimensional analysis produced a nonsignificant increase in language intensity as writing apprehension increased. One possible explanation for the difference between these results and those of Daly and Miller cited earlier was the use of three types of message completion: proattitudinal, neutral, and counterattitudinal (Daly and Miller's study used only one message.). This was done to counteract effects of prior attitude toward a topic on language choice.

Petty and Cacioppo's findings of an inverted-U effect on arousal might also offer some insight into the findings. The messages used in Burgoon and Hale's study might have produced a moderate level of arousal, causing a predictable higher level of performance. On the other hand, the nature of preparation for a writing assignment might produce a higher level of arousal, yielding different results.
One final note on encoding deals with the relationship to attitude change. Daly and Shamo (1978) reported Toth's findings that high writing apprehensives show less attitude change in counterattitudinal settings when actively involved in message encoding.

Whether the high writing apprehensive goes through different processes than the low writing apprehensive has not been extensively examined, but one study showed some differences. Unfortunately, there were only eight subjects involved, so there was no attempt to measure statistical significance. Generally, the findings showed high writing apprehensives were more fearful of approaching writing tasks, gathered less information about the audience and organization of the material, worried more about the first sentence than overall planning, and spent less time prefiguring (planning) the task (Selfe, 1984).

Remediation and the Writing Apprehensive

There is disagreement as to whether the act of writing is a help or hindrance to the writing apprehensive. McCroskey and Daly (1976) have long maintained that it is punishing for the subject to endure what makes him anxious. Their findings apply to oral communication apprehension as well as writing apprehension. This view was confirmed by Powers, Cook, and Meyer (1979), who found that, overall, subjects had increased ratings of writing apprehension after a compulsory composition class. The increase was attributed to two subgroups. Subjects in low writing apprehension and provisional college admissions groups showed significantly more writing apprehension after the course was over than when it began. However, subjects initially rated high in writing
apprehension and those who satisfied regular college admissions requirements did not have a significantly higher writing apprehension level after the course. A possible explanation for this could be a ceiling effect. These two groups started at such a high writing apprehension level that a significant increase could not be obtained due to the proximity of the upper limit of the test. Also, demand characteristics of the experiment may have affected the results concerning the low writing apprehension group, who might have rated themselves lower initially, and the provisional admissions group, who might have rated themselves higher initially.

Fox (1980) showed that classroom environment can affect writing apprehension. When students were placed in a student-oriented setting (i.e., one involving more peer evaluation and participation), they showed significantly less writing apprehension at the end of the course than students who were placed in a traditional lecture/assignment setting. Also, high writing apprehensives from the student-oriented setting showed significantly less writing apprehension at the end of the course than high writing apprehensives from the traditional setting. However, no difference was found in the quality of output in either of the two findings.

It seems only fitting that Daly be allowed the final suggestion on remediation. Since his view is one of attacking the anxiety rather than practicing the deficient skill, he has suggested that systematic desensitization might be employed as a treatment for writing apprehension, much the same as it is used in oral communication apprehension.
Further Study of Writing Apprehension

While a great deal of ground has been covered in the short history of writing apprehension studies, there still remain many unanswered questions. Principally, these come from the area of applications of writing apprehension studies to specific groups. Most studies have involved the use of either high school or college English students. Although this tends to cut across the spectrum of writing apprehension due to the requirement for taking these classes, further definition of the levels of writing apprehension can be gained by study of specific groups. This is especially true if writing apprehension is a multidimensional phenomenon as has been suggested.

Within the language-intensive academic major of communication there are several options open to students. At the University of Central Florida, students may choose among Advertising/Public Relations, Film, General Communication, News-Editorial Journalism, Organizational Communication, Radio-Television, and Speech. Why individuals choose a given discipline would probably elicit a plethora of responses; however, comments from some faculty members and former students suggest that it may at least partially relate to attitude toward writing. Specifically, students may avoid News-Editorial Journalism and opt for General Communication due to apprehension about writing. This would coincide with Daly and Shamo's (1978) findings that high writing apprehensives would perceive majors requiring a great deal of writing to be less desirable. Therefore, it was hypothesized that (H1) News-Editorial students would have a significantly lower writing apprehension level
than Advertising/Public Relations, Film, General Communication, Organizational Communication, Radio-Television, or Speech students.

Although Daly and Miller (1975b) found only a small correlation ($r = .19, p < .01$) between SAT scores and writing apprehension, Daly (1977) found qualitative differences in the writing of high and low writing apprehensives. Generally, high writing apprehensives produced less complex writing, a quality that might adversely affect a student's grade at the college level. Daly (1978), using an objective examination of understanding of grammar and mechanics, also found that high writing apprehensives had less grasp of writing fundamentals. This points to a difference between measures of aptitude (SAT) and performance (writing output). Since the SAT measures aptitude and a student's grade point average measures performance, it was hypothesized (H2) that the higher a person's grade point average, the lower his/her writing apprehension level.

Past studies involving the general student population have shown that the amount of writing perceived to be required in a profession is related to writing apprehension level (Daly and Miller, 1975c). Therefore, it was hypothesized (H3) that, among Communication majors, the more writing perceived to be required for a future profession, the lower the writing apprehension level.

A link between the academic and professional worlds exists through work on the staff of high school and college publications, providing the student the opportunity to work in a writing-intensive environment while still under the auspices of the educational institution. Given Daly and Shamo's (1978) findings that high writing apprehensives would find
classes requiring a great deal of writing less desirable than classes not requiring much writing and Daly and Miller's (1975c) findings that high writing apprehensives would select professions requiring less writing than low writing apprehensives, two hypotheses concerning current and past work in writing-intensive environments were suggested. Subjects who work for or intend to work for the college newspaper would have a lower writing apprehension level than subjects who do not (H4), and subjects who worked for high school publications would have a lower writing apprehension level than subjects who had not (H5).

Past studies have linked writing apprehension with reading apprehension (Daly and Wilson, 1983). Therefore, it was hypothesized that (H6) the more books subjects read per year the lower their writing apprehension, and the more days per week subjects read the newspaper, the lower their writing apprehension (H7).

Finally, how important subjects felt writing was to their future success in their career field was studied. Since it has already been established that writing apprehension is linked to choice of profession (Daly and Miller, 1975c), it seems logical to expect that perceptions of writing's importance to future success in a career field would follow. Thus, it was hypothesized that (H8) subjects with high writing apprehension would perceive writing to be significantly less important to future success than subjects with low writing apprehension.
METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The subjects were 391 of the 847 undergraduate Communication majors at the University of Central Florida, categorized by academic discipline: Advertising/Public Relations, Film, General Communication, Organizational Communication, News-Editorial Journalism, Radio-Television, and Speech.

Design

Independent Variables

The independent variables were academic discipline, overall grade point average, perception of amount of writing required for chosen profession, work for or intent to work for the college newspaper, work for a high school publication, books per year other than textbooks read, days per week the newspaper is read, and writing apprehension level. Academic discipline was operationalized as response to a multiple choice question with seven choices: Advertising/Public Relations, Film, General Communication, Organizational Communication, News-Editorial Journalism, Radio-Television, and Speech. Overall grade point average was operationalized as response to a multiple choice question with four choices: 2.0-2.5, 2.6-3.0, 3.1-3.5, and 3.6-4.0. Perception of amount of writing required for chosen profession was operationalized as response to a multiple choice question about what percentage of the
subjects' work after college would be writing. The question had four choices: 0-19%, 20-49%, 50-79%, and 80% or more. Work for or intent to work for the college newspaper was operationalized as response to two yes/no questions. Work for a high school publication was operationalized as response to a question with four choices: high school newspaper, high school magazine, yearbook, and other. Books per year other than textbooks read was operationalized as response to a multiple choice question with five choices: 0-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-11, and 12 or more books read per year. Days per week the newspaper is read was operationalized as response to a question with eight choices: 0 through 7. Writing apprehension level was operationalized as the score received on Daly and Miller's 26-item Writing Apprehension Test. A copy of the Writing Apprehension Test is included in Appendix A. A copy of the scoring form for the Writing Apprehension Test is included in Appendix B.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were writing apprehension level and importance of writing to future success in chosen career field. Importance of writing to future success in chosen career field was operationalized by responses to a Likert-scaled question of agreement with a statement on perceived importance. The Likert scale had five choices: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, or strongly disagree (See Appendix A.).
Procedure

The data were gathered during a one-week period in UCF Communication classes. Subjects were given the Writing Apprehension Test and answered the questions concerning academic discipline, grade point average, perception of amount of writing required in chosen career field, work for or intent to work for the college newspaper, work for a high school publication, books per year other than textbooks read, number of days per week they read the newspaper, and perceived importance of writing to future success in chosen career field.

An attempt was made to reach the entire population of Communication students by having the materials distributed in all Communication classes. Class instructors were told to have subjects complete the materials only once since it was known that many subjects would be taking more than one Communication class during the term. The return rate was 46.16 percent (391 of 847). Table 1 contains a breakdown of the number of students per academic discipline for the Communication department and the number of students per academic discipline for the current study.
## TABLE 1

**DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNICATION MAJORS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE</th>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SUBJECTS</th>
<th>PERCENT OF TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising/Public Relations</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>72.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Communication&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News-Editorial Journalism</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Communication&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio-Television</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>54.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>3753</td>
<td>44.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

1. No breakdown between General and Organizational Communication was available. There is a total of 314 students between the two academic disciplines.

2. Students listed as Undecided were divided between Advertising/Public Relations and News-Editorial Journalism.

3. Sixteen students reported more than one academic discipline and were not counted.
RESULTS

As might have been expected, writing apprehension levels for Communication students were lower than those reported in previous studies of college students in general. Daly and Miller (1975c) reported a mean WAT score of 79.28 with a standard deviation of 18.86; whereas, the subjects in the current study had a mean of 98.04 and a standard deviation of 16.39, placing them approximately +1 standard deviation below college students in general. Other studies employing a general college population have yielded similar results.

One-way analyses of variance were performed for the questions of academic discipline, grade point average, perception of amount of writing required in chosen career field, work for or intent to work for the college newspaper, work for a high school publication, books per year other than textbooks read, and days per week the newspaper is read versus writing apprehension level. Responses to each of the questions were the independent variables, and the score obtained on the WAT was the dependent variable.

A t-test was conducted comparing high and low writing apprehension levels on the Likert-scaled statement of importance of writing to future success in the subjects' chosen career field. The independent variable was the score obtained on the Writing Apprehension Test, and the response to the statement was the dependent variable. The high and low
writing apprehension groups were established by splitting the scores obtained on the Writing Apprehension Test at the median.

Pearson-product-moment correlations were performed for the questions of grade point average and perception of writing required versus writing apprehension score.

**Writing Apprehension and Academic Discipline**

H1 was partially confirmed. A one-way analysis of variance yielded a significant F-ratio for levels of writing apprehension across academic disciplines, $F(5, 366) = 2.25, p<.05$. Speech majors were eliminated from the analysis due to smallness of cell size ($n=3$). However, it must be noted that this number represented half of the department's Speech majors. Of the 391 subjects in the study 16 were also excluded due to selection of more than one academic discipline. Further probing by the Tukey method showed one comparison accounted for the difference: Radio-Television majors reported significantly higher writing apprehension than News-Editorial Journalism majors ($p<.05$). Writing apprehension means for the academic disciplines are given in Table 2. The higher the writing apprehension score, the lower the writing apprehension level.
TABLE 2
WRITING APPREHENSION MEANS FOR ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising/Public Relations</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>98.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>97.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Communication</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>99.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News-Editorial Journalism</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>105.49*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Communication</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>96.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio-Television</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>94.75*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates groups that differ significantly at the p<.05 level.

Writing Apprehension and Grade Point Average

H2 was also partially confirmed. A one-way analysis of variance yielded a significant difference in writing apprehension scores as a function of grade point average, \( F(3, 383) = 2.90, p<.05 \). Four subjects did not report their grade point average and were eliminated from the analysis. Probing by the Tukey method showed that one comparison accounted for the difference: those with grade point averages between 2.0 and 2.5 reported significantly higher writing apprehension than subjects with grade point averages between 3.6 and 4.0. Writing apprehension means for the grade point average groups are given in Table 3. The decrease in writing apprehension was linear from the
lowest grade point average group (2.0-2.5) to the highest grade point average group (3.6-4.0). A Pearson-product-moment correlation yielded a small but significant negative relationship between writing apprehension and grade point average ($r = -0.15$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 3

WRITING APPREHENSION MEANS FOR GRADE POINT AVERAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE POINT AVERAGE</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.0-2.5</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>94.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6-3.0</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>97.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1-3.5</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>99.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6-4.0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>104.43*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates groups that differ significantly at $p < 0.05$ level.

Writing Apprehension and Perception of Writing Required

H3 was confirmed. A one-way analysis of variance yielded a significant F-ratio for writing apprehension as a function of perceived writing requirements in the chosen career field, $F(3, 381) = 21.67$, $p < 0.0001$. Six subjects did not answer the question and were eliminated from the analysis. Further probing by the Tukey method showed several differences among comparison groups. Subjects who perceived their professions after college to require 0-19% writing reported significantly higher writing apprehension than any other group. Those
who perceived the amount of writing required to be 20-49% reported significantly higher writing apprehension than either the 50-79% or 80% or more groups. The comparison between the 50-79% and 80% or more groups was nonsignificant. Writing apprehension means for the four categories are given in Table 4. The decrease in writing apprehension was linear from the lowest perception of writing required group (0-19%) to the highest perception of writing required group (80% or more). A Pearson-product-moment correlation yielded a moderate and significant negative correlation between writing apprehension and perception of writing required ($r = -.37, p < .0001$).

**TABLE 4**

WRITING APPREHENSION MEANS FOR PERCENTAGE OF WRITING REQUIRED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF WRITING</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-19</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>86.95abc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-49</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>96.79ade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-79</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>101.82bd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 or More</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>106.79ce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means with common subscripts differ significantly at the $p < .05$ level.

Writing Apprehension and Working for the College Newspaper

H4 was confirmed. Analysis of variance showed that those who either reported working for *The Central Florida Future* or intended to
had significantly lower writing apprehension than those who did not and had no intention of doing so, $F(1, 386) = 10.38$, $p<.01$. Three subjects did not answer the question and were eliminated from the analysis. Writing apprehension means for the two groups are given in Table 5.

**TABLE 5**

**WRITING APPREHENSION MEANS FOR COLLEGE NEWSPAPER WORK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORK FOR/INTEND TO</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>104.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>96.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means differ significantly at $p<.01$ level.

Writing Apprehension and Work for High School Publications

H5 was confirmed. Analysis of variance showed that subjects who had worked for a high school publication reported significantly lower writing apprehension than those who had not, $F(1, 387) = 16.63$, $p<.0001$. Two subjects did not answer the question and were eliminated from the analysis. Writing apprehension means for the two groups are given in Table 6.
TABLE 6

WRITING APPREHENSION MEANS FOR HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORKED FOR</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>101.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>95.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means differ significantly at p<.0001 level.

Writing Apprehension and Reading

H6 was partially confirmed. A one-way analysis of variance yielded a significant difference in writing apprehension level as a function of reading 0-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-11, or 12 or more books per year, $F(4, 385) = 7.24$, p<.0001. One subject did not answer the question and was eliminated from the analysis. Further probing by the Tukey method showed that subjects who reported reading 0-2 books per year had significantly greater writing apprehension those who reported reading 9-11 books per year and those who reported reading 12 or more books per year. However, the relationship of cell means was not completely linear. Subjects who reported reading 9-11 books per year had a nonsignificantly lower writing apprehension mean than those who reported reading 12 or more books per year. Writing apprehension means for the five cells are given in Table 7.
TABLE 7
WRITING APPREHENSION MEANS FOR BOOKS READ PER YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOOKS READ PER YEAR</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>92.55ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>97.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>97.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>104.13a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 or More</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>103.76b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means with common subscripts differ significantly at the p<.05 level.

Writing Apprehension and Days per Week Newspaper Read

H7 was not confirmed. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant difference among groups that reported reading the newspaper from 0 to 7 days per week, F(7, 382) = 1.52, p>.1. Writing apprehension means for the eight cells are given in Table 8.
Writing Apprehension and Perception of Writing Importance

H8 was confirmed. A t-test comparing those who had writing apprehension scores at the median (99) or above with those who had scores below the median on the variable of perception of importance of writing to future success in a career field yielded significance, $t(195) = 6.59$, $p < .0001$. Subjects with lower writing apprehension agreed more with the statement "I think writing is important for success in my career field" than subjects with higher writing apprehension scores. Cell means are given in Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAYS PER WEEK</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEWSPAPER READ</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 9
IMPORTANCE OF WRITING MEANS FOR HIGH AND LOW WRITING APPREHENSIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WRITING APPREHENSION</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $t=6.59$, $p<.0001$
Overall, this research has offered some useful insights into the study of writing apprehension. However, it is not without its limitations. In the beginning of the results section it was pointed out that Communication students had a significantly lower writing apprehension level than the population at large. This was to be expected since previous research in the field showed that people with high writing apprehension would normally choose college majors which required less writing. That does not discount the significant differences found among the various groups tested, though. But it must be noted that even those found to have significantly higher writing apprehension levels still were below the mean level of writing apprehension for college students in general (Daly and Miller, 1975c). What effect the differences will have upon the future success of these subjects as communication professionals remains to be seen.

The findings on writing apprehension and academic discipline partially support the findings of Klopf and Cambra (1979) who reported significant differences between WAT and PRCA scores. Klopf and Cambra noted Phillips' observation that reticent students would prefer to write than speak. Since Radio-Television majors are more concerned with speech than writing, the reverse may be at work here, although that does not explain the lack of significant differences among the other academic disciplines involved in this study. More strength might have been lent
to the finding had the Speech majors been included in the analysis, but the cell size for this group (n=3) precluded analysis. In any case, this seems to be an area that merits further study, possibly using the approach of Burgoon and Hale (1983a, 1983b) who treated writing apprehension as a multidimensional phenomenon in their comparisons of it with oral communication apprehension. One final note on future studies in this area deals with perceived evaluation. Fox (1980) discovered differences in classroom environment relative to writing apprehension. Subjects in classes involving more peer evaluation than traditional lecture/assignment settings showed lower writing apprehension levels. The balance of these two techniques within various academic disciplines could be studied.

The findings concerning writing apprehension and grade point average seem noteworthy. Although not much relationship has been found between SAT scores and writing apprehension (Daly and Miller, 1975b), the current data indicate that students with higher grade point averages have lower levels of writing apprehension. What seems relevant is that the SAT measures aptitude, and the grade point average measures performance. Also, the SAT relies more heavily on reading and vocabulary than actual writing skills. Still, there were differences found in the amount of reading done by the subjects in this study and writing apprehension level. Since perception also has been shown to influence writing apprehension (Daly and Shamo, 1978), the grade point average findings seem reasonable, that is, teachers have been found to perceive high writing apprehensives to be less successful in future academic work (Daly, 1979).
That there were significant differences among WAT scores as a function of perceptions of writing required for chosen career fields supports the earlier findings of Daly and Miller (1975c). Thus, it might be said that the subjects studied represent a microcosm of the general population in this regard. Albeit they have lower levels of writing apprehension, those with the higher levels still employ a form of systematic avoidance of anxiety-producing situations. One shortcoming in this study should be noted, though. Unequal intervals were unintentionally employed in the choices of perceptions of writing required. Replication of the study with equal intervals could test whether this was of any significance in the findings.

Directly related to the results on perceived amount of writing required are the findings of subjects' perceptions of the importance of writing to future success in their career fields. Obviously, if a person chooses a profession requiring less writing, he/she will find it less important for future success.

Even before entering the work force, students, especially Journalism students, have the opportunity to occupy a position which would involve writing through work at the college newspaper. Avoidance again was evident in the findings of the current study. Higher writing apprehensives did not work for the college newspaper. The same applied to work for high school publications.

The positive relationship between writing apprehension and reading apprehension from previous research by Daly and Wilson (1983) was partially supported. While there were significant differences in writing apprehension as a function of the number of books read per year,
there was no relationship between number of days per week the newspaper is read and writing apprehension. This could be explained by the qualitative type of reading involved. Journalism studies have shown that people in the age group involved in this study are not among the most frequent readers of newspapers. It could be theorized that much of our ability to transfer language effectively via writing is related to how much of the written word we are exposed to. Again, selective avoidance of language-intensive activities could be at work in the case of high writing apprehensives. Of course, the relationship was not completely linear in this finding.

All in all, this study confirmed previous research in the area while demonstrating that even people actively involved in communication are subject to the same patterns of writing apprehension related behavior as the general public. However, it must be remembered that the mean writing apprehension levels for the subjects of the current study were much lower than the mean writing apprehension levels of the general public. Further, the mean levels for subjects in the academic discipline with the lowest writing apprehension level, News-Editorial Journalism, might suggest an active seeking out of writing situations rather than avoidance by any one group.

To aid in the process of remediation, further studies might employ writing exercises followed by thought-listing techniques employed in other communication studies by Cacioppo and Petty (1979) and others. An information-processing approach might help define how the encoding processes differ among various levels of writing apprehension and how
best to structure classes to remediate high writing apprehension. This might also provide teachers with insight into what behaviors of their own foster high writing apprehension.

Since there was a linear negative relationship between writing apprehension and academic success (i.e., grade point average), the WAT should be considered a valuable tool as a college entrance requirement, specifically for placement in various communication majors. Future studies could test the relationship of writing apprehension to grade point average across a larger cross-section of academic disciplines.
APPENDIX A

Directions: Below are a series of statements about writing. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by circling whether you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are uncertain, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree with the statement. While some of these statements may seem repetitious, take your time and try to be as honest as possible.

1. I avoid writing.  
2. I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.  
3. I look forward to writing down my ideas.  
4. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.  
5. Taking a composition course is a very frightening experience.  
6. Handing in a composition makes me feel good.  
7. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition.  
8. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.  
9. I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation.  
10. I like to write my ideas down.  
11. I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in writing.  
12. I like to have my friends read what I have written.  
13. I'm nervous about writing.  
14. People seem to enjoy what I write.
15. I enjoy writing.

16. I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas.

17. Writing is a lot of fun.

18. I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them.

19. I like seeing my thoughts on paper.

20. Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.

21. I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in a composition course.

22. When I hand in a composition, I know I'm going to do poorly.

23. It's easy for me to write good compositions.

24. I don't think I write as well as most other people.

25. I don't like my compositions to be evaluated.

26. I'm no good at writing.

27. I think writing is important for success in my career field.

Please answer the following questions:

1. How many days per week do you read the newspaper? ___

2. How many books per year other than textbooks do you read (check one)?
   - 0-2  - 3-5  - 6-8  - 9-11  - 12 or more

3. While in high school, did you work for (check all that apply):
   - school newspaper  - school magazine  - yearbook  - other_______

4. Do you work for The Central Florida Future? ____ Do you plan to?___
5a. Have you decided what type of work you want to do after college? __

5b. If so, what is it (e.g., reporter, copywriter, broadcaster, producer)? ________________________________

6. What percentage of your work after college do you expect will be writing (check one)?
   ___ 0-19  ___ 20-49  ___ 50-79  ___ 80 or more

7. My overall G.P.A. is (check one):
   ___ 2.0-2.5  ___ 2.6-3.0  ___ 3.1-3.5  ___ 3.6-4.0

8. My major area(s) of study (write 1 for primary, 2 for secondary if applicable):
   ___ Advertising/Public Relations
   ___ General Communication
   ___ News-Editorial Journalism
   ___ Organizational Communication
   ___ Radio-Television
### Positive Statements

1. 
4. 
5. 
7. 
8. 
13. 
16. 
18. 
21. 
22. 
24. 
25. 
26. 

\[ PT = \text{______} \]  
(positive total)

### Negative Statements

2. 
3. 
6. 
9. 
10. 
11. 
12. 
14. 
15. 
17. 
19. 
20. 
23. 

\[ NT = \text{______} \]  
(negative total)

---

**FORMULA:**

\[ WA = (PT - NT) + BL \]

**APPENDIX B**

**BL = 78**  
(base level)
REFERENCES


