

Freewrite:

Using one or more of the following quotes from Medway, develop a definition of genre and try to address some of the following questions:

- What does it mean for a genre to be “fuzzy?” Why might one genre be fuzzier than another?
- Why is the concept of ‘genre’ useful for researching writing and communication?
- Do you agree with Medway’s assessment of the sketchbooks? Why or why not?

“Is it possible for texts that are strikingly diverse and that may be unread by anyone but the writer, and yet are recognizable responses to the problematics and opportunities (the ‘exigences’) of a shared situation, to contribute to the building and sustaining of shared communal identities? And if, as appears, this is indeed possible, how does the process work?”

“Genre theory may amount to little more than this; that it’s helpful to be able to say that when people do roughly similar sorts of textual things in circumstances perceived as roughly similar, then we are in the presence of a construct that is a real social fact—and let’s call it a genre. In doing no more than this, genre theory takes us a sizable step forward from those taxonomic grids that locate texts in terms of function, audience, level of abstraction, and the like (e.g., Kinneavy, 1983), by adding to those dimensions an acknowledgment of localized and historical situation types (Freedman & Medway, 1994b)” (141)

“Viewed in the perspective that is potentially most useful for research, these students *are* doing the same sort of thing and *are* responding to a common exigence, and it is indeed useful to have the notion of genre for this sort of communality of practice and response [...] The essential criteria are rather that the practitioners are themselves in a socially recognized and typified situation, and engaged in a semiotic activity that is socially recognized as a response that situation and has meaning in relation to it” (142)

Group Work

For this in-class work, you'll be assigned a specific kind of text, object, or artifact and try to determine whether or not it is a genre. Research your assigned artifact, answer the questions below, gather examples (if possible), and each group will present their findings to the class.

1. Develop a definition of genre (guided by Medway and the group's free writing)
2. What specific aspects of your assigned text or social artifact fit this notion of genre (what argues for its definition as a genre)?
3. What aspects do not fit this notion (what argues against its definition as a genre)?
4. Ultimately, do you think this constitutes a genre or not?
5. Why might this matter for research? For understanding the world around us?