Reading as a Writer: Analyzing Rhetorical Choices

1. In his essay, Graff shifts between detailed descriptions of classroom experiences that are probably pretty familiar to you, and more abstract claims about the many shortcomings he sees in contemporary university education. In his opening paragraphs, he makes just this move between description of college experiences and the more abstract idea that "cognitive dissonance" (para. 5) is common for students. What does he mean by "cognitive dissonance"? Locate other places in the essay where this idea recurs, and be ready to discuss how this idea contributes to his argument.
2. What is the effect of saving the metaphor about learning baseball for the final paragraph of the essay? What does that metaphor help you re-see in the many examples Graff cites throughout his piece? What would be gained or lost, do you think, if Graff's essay opened, rather than closed, with this metaphor?

Writing as a Reader: Entering the Conversation of Ideas

1. Graff and Mark Edmundson are fairly critical of contemporary education. While they are both professors who are the beneficiaries of the current system, they both argue that most professors ought to change their current strategies. Write an essay in which you use ideas from both authors to propose a new kind of "ideal" professor, based on these writers' perspectives. Give examples of how such a professor would teach, and what kinds of information he or she would teach. How might students have to change their learning strategies to meet these new standards? Is this a vision of education you would support? Why or why not?
2. James W. Loewen, Graff, and Deborah Tannen have different perspectives on the value of conflict in the classroom. Placing these writers in conversation with one another, write an essay in which you compare their ideas about the place of conflict in education. Given the evidence each author presents, and perhaps your own educational experiences, where do you stand in this conversation about conflict and learning?

DEBORAH TANNEN

How Male and Female Students Use Language Differently

Deborah Tannen is a professor of linguistics at Georgetown University who is well known by both scholars and generalist readers with an interest in the ways people talk to one another. As a linguistic researcher, Tannen is curious about the relationship between the speech patterns we develop as a result of our socialization and the ways we are heard and misheard in the classroom, the workplace, our families, and our culture. This selection is from Tannen's book *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conver-*

sation (1990), which spent almost four years on the *New York Times* best seller list.

Tannen uses a writing style influenced by journalism. How does she express complex ideas within often short, punchy sentences? Pay attention to places where you see her moving smoothly between scholarly references to sociologists, anthropologists, and linguists, and personal anecdotes and observations about classroom behavior. Tannen argues that most classroom dynamics are "fundamentally male" and are characterized by an understanding that "the pursuit of knowledge is believed to be achieved by ritual opposition: public display followed by argument and challenge" (para. 5). How does this claim line up with your own experiences—good and bad—in the classroom?

Critics sometimes complain that Tannen's examples are too selective and that she makes generalizing claims from too little evidence, though she also has many admirers among academics, book award committees, and the millions of readers who purchase her books. It's difficult to be neutral about Tannen's work, because she asks us to question and analyze the ways we interact with others, and this feels very personal—as it should. This selection focuses on linguistic dynamics in the classroom, but you may find that her insights will make you reconsider conversations you have had in almost every part of your life.

When I researched and wrote . . . *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, the furthest thing from my mind was reevaluating my teaching strategies. But that has been one of the direct benefits of having written the book. 1

The primary focus of my linguistic research always has been the language of everyday conversation. One facet of this is conversational style: how different regional, ethnic, and class backgrounds, as well as age and gender, result in different ways of using language to communicate. *You Just Don't Understand* is about the conversational styles of women and men. As I gained more insight into typically male and female ways of using language, I began to suspect some of the causes of the troubling facts that women who go to single-sex schools do better in later life, and that when young women sit next to young men in classrooms, the males talk more. This is not to say that all men talk in class, nor that no women do. It is simply that a greater percentage of discussion time is taken by men's voices. 2

The research of sociologists and anthropologists such as Janet Lever, Marjorie Harness Goodwin, and Donna Eder has shown that girls and boys learn to use language differently in their sex-separate peer groups. Typically, a girl has a best friend with whom she sits and talks, frequently telling secrets. It's the telling of secrets, the fact and the way that they talk to each other, that makes them best friends. For boys, activities are central: Their best friends are the ones they do things with. Boys also tend to play in larger groups that are hierarchical. High-status boys give orders and 3

push low-status boys around. So boys are expected to use language to seize center stage: by exhibiting their skill, displaying their knowledge, and challenging and resisting challenges.

These patterns have stunning implications for classroom interaction. 4
Most faculty members assume that participating in class discussion is a necessary part of successful performance. Yet speaking in a classroom is more congenial to boys' language experience than to girls', since it entails putting oneself forward in front of a large group of people, many of whom are strangers and at least one of whom is sure to judge speakers' knowledge and intelligence by their verbal display.

Another aspect of many classrooms that makes them more hospitable 5
to most men than to most women is the use of debatelike formats as a learning tool. Our educational system, as Walter Ong argues persuasively in his book *Fighting for Life* (Cornell University Press, 1981), is fundamentally male in that the pursuit of knowledge is believed to be achieved by ritual opposition: public display followed by argument and challenge. Father Ong demonstrates that ritual opposition—what he calls "adversativeness" or "agonism"—is fundamental to the way most males approach almost any activity. (Consider, for example, the little boy who shows he likes a little girl by pulling her braids and shoving her.) But ritual opposition is antithetical to the way most females learn and like to interact. It is not that females don't fight, but that they don't fight for fun. They don't *ritualize* opposition.

Anthropologists working in widely disparate parts of the world have found 6
contrasting verbal rituals for women and men. Women in completely unrelated cultures (for example, Greece and Bali) engage in ritual laments: spontaneously produced rhyming couplets that express their pain, for example, over the loss of loved ones. Men do not take part in laments. They have their own, very different verbal ritual: a contest, a war of words in which they vie with each other to devise clever insults.

When discussing these phenomena with a colleague, I commented that 7
I see these two styles in American conversation: Many women bond by talking about troubles, and many men bond by exchanging playful insults and put-downs, and other sorts of verbal sparring. He exclaimed: "I never thought of this, but that's the way I teach: I have students read an article, and then I invite them to tear it apart. After we've torn it to shreds, we talk about how to build a better model."

This contrasts sharply with the way I teach: I open the discussion of 8
readings by asking, "What did you find useful in this? What can we use in our own theory building and our own methods?" I note what I see as weaknesses in the author's approach, but I also point out that the writer's discipline and purposes might be different from ours. Finally, I offer personal anecdotes illustrating the phenomena under discussion and praise students' anecdotes as well as their critical acumen.

These different teaching styles must make our classrooms wildly different places and hospitable to different students. Male students are more likely to be comfortable attacking the readings and might find the inclusion of personal anecdotes irrelevant and "soft." Women are more likely to resist discussion they perceive as hostile, and, indeed, it is women in my classes who are most likely to offer personal anecdotes. 9

A colleague who read my book commented that he had always taken for granted that the best way to deal with students' comments is to challenge them; this, he felt it was self-evident, sharpens their minds and helps them develop debating skills. But he had noticed that women were relatively silent in his classes, so he decided to try beginning discussion with relatively open-ended questions and letting comments go unchallenged. He found, to his amazement and satisfaction, that more women began to speak up. 10

Though some of the women in his class clearly liked this better, perhaps some of the men liked it less. One young man in my class wrote in a questionnaire about a history professor who gave students questions to think about and called on people to answer them: "He would then play devil's advocate . . . i.e., he debated us. . . . That class *really* sharpened me intellectually. . . . We as students do need to know how to defend ourselves." This young man valued the experience of being attacked and challenged publicly. Many, if not most, women would shrink from such "challenge," experiencing it as public humiliation. 11

A professor at Hamilton College told me of a young man who was upset because he felt his class presentation had been a failure. The professor was puzzled because he had observed that class members had listened attentively and agreed with the student's observations. It turned out that it was this very agreement that the student interpreted as failure: since no one had engaged his ideas by arguing with him, he felt they had found them unworthy of attention. 12

So one reason men speak in class more than women is that many of them find the "public" classroom setting more conducive to speaking, whereas most women are more comfortable speaking in private to a small group of people they know well. A second reason is that men are more likely to be comfortable with the debatelike form that discussion may take. Yet another reason is the different attitudes toward speaking in class that typify women and men. 13

Students who speak frequently in class, many of whom are men, assume that it is their job to think of contributions and try to get the floor to express them. But many women monitor their participation not only to get the floor but to avoid getting it. Women students in my class tell me that if they have spoken up once or twice, they hold back for the rest of the class because they don't want to dominate. If they have spoken a lot one week, they will remain silent the next. These different ethics of participation are, 14

of course, unstated, so those who speak freely assume that those who remain silent have nothing to say, and those who are reining themselves in assume that the big talkers are selfish and hoggish.

When I looked around my classes, I could see these differing ethics 15
and habits at work. For example, my graduate class in analyzing conversation had twenty students, eleven women and nine men. Of the men, four were foreign students: two Japanese, one Chinese, and one Syrian. With the exception of the three Asian men, all the men spoke in class at least occasionally. The biggest talker in the class was a woman, but there were also five women who never spoke at all, only one of whom was Japanese. I decided to try something different.

I broke the class into small groups to discuss the issues raised in the 16
readings and to analyze their own conversational transcripts. I devised three ways of dividing the students into groups: one by the degree program they were in, one by gender, and one by conversational style, as closely as I could guess it. This meant that when the class was grouped according to conversational style, I put Asian students together, fast talkers together, and quiet students together. The class split into groups six times during the semester, so they met in each grouping twice. I told students to regard the groups as examples of interactional data and to note the different ways they participated in the different groups. Toward the end of the term, I gave them a questionnaire asking about their class and group participation.

I could see plainly from my observation of the groups at work that 17
women who never opened their mouths in class were talking away in the small groups. In fact, the Japanese woman commented that she found it particularly hard to contribute to the all-woman group she was in because "I was overwhelmed by how talkative the female students were in the female-only group." This is particularly revealing because it highlights that the same person who can be "oppressed" into silence in one context can become the talkative "oppressor" in another. No one's conversational style is absolute; everyone's style changes in response to the context and others' styles.

Some of the students (seven) said they preferred the same-gender groups; 18
others preferred the same-style groups. In answer to the question "Would you have liked to speak in class more than you did?" six of the seven who said yes were women; the one man was Japanese. Most startlingly, this response did not come only from quiet women; it came from women who had indicated they had spoken in class never, rarely, sometimes, and often. Of the eleven students who said the amount they had spoken was fine, seven were men. Of the four women who checked "fine," two added qualifications indicating it wasn't completely fine: One wrote in "maybe more," and one wrote, "I have an urge to participate but often feel I should have something more interesting/relevant/wonderful/intelligent to say!!"

I counted my experiment a success. Everyone in the class found the 19
small groups interesting, and no one indicated he or she would have pre-

ferred that the class not break into groups. Perhaps most instructive, however, was the fact that the experience of breaking into groups, and of talking about participation in class, raised everyone's awareness about classroom participation. After we had talked about it, some of the quietest women in the class made a few voluntary contributions, though sometimes I had to ensure their participation by interrupting the students who were exuberantly speaking out.

Americans are often proud that they discount the significance of cultural differences: "We are all individuals," many people boast. Ignoring such issues as gender and ethnicity becomes a source of pride: "I treat everyone the same." But treating people the same is not equal treatment if they are not the same. 20

The classroom is a different environment for those who feel comfortable putting themselves forward in a group than it is for those who find the prospect of doing so chastening, or even terrifying. When a professor asks, "Are there any questions?" students who can formulate statements the fastest have the greatest opportunity to respond. Those who need significant time to do so have not really been given a chance at all, since by the time they are ready to speak, someone else has the floor. 21

In a class where some students speak out without raising hands, those who feel they must raise their hands and wait to be recognized do not have equal opportunity to speak. Telling them to feel free to jump in will not make them feel free; one's sense of timing, of one's rights and obligations in a classroom, are automatic, learned over years of interaction. They may be changed over time, with motivation and effort, but they cannot be changed on the spot. And everyone assumes his or her own way is best. When I asked my students how the class could be changed to make it easier for them to speak more, the most talkative woman said she would prefer it if no one had to raise hands, and a foreign student said he wished people would raise their hands and wait to be recognized. 22

My experience in this class has convinced me that small-group interaction should be part of any class that is not a small seminar. I also am convinced that having the students become observers of their own interaction is a crucial part of their education. Talking about ways of talking in class makes students aware that their ways of talking affect other students, that the motivations they impute to others may not truly reflect others' motives, and that the behaviors they assume to be self-evidently right are not universal norms. 23

The goal of complete equal opportunity in class may not be attainable, but realizing that one monolithic classroom-participation structure is not equal opportunity is itself a powerful motivation to find more-diverse methods to serve diverse students—and every classroom is diverse. 24

Reading as a Writer: Analyzing Rhetorical Choices

1. Given that Tannen is concerned with classroom dynamics, why does she open her essay with a discussion of sociologists and anthropologists? How do the framing ideas of those experts contribute to her descriptions of classroom dynamics? In particular, how does she use the concept of "ritual opposition" to help build her argument?
2. How would you describe Tannen's own style of making an argument? Are there aspects of both "female" and "male" conversational styles, as she defines them? How successfully do you think she addresses readers who might disagree with her?

Writing as a Reader: Entering the Conversation of Ideas

1. Both Tannen and James W. Loewen notice that the way we learn is connected to what we learn. How might Tannen's insights help explain some of the dynamics Loewen describes in his essay? What can Loewen's ideas about the shortcomings of history textbooks and classrooms help us see in Tannen's text? Compose an essay that places these two writers' ideas in conversation as you propose an approach to teaching and learning history that would satisfy the demands for "inclusivity" that both writers desire. What are the strengths and possible shortfalls of what you propose?
2. Tannen's insights about gendered classroom conversational patterns may help bring aspects of Beverly Daniel Tatum's essay into clearer focus. Write an essay in which you use Tannen's insights about gender and conversational style to analyze some of the vocal exchanges you find most interesting in Tatum's essay. How might the sociological and anthropological ideas about gender dynamics that Tannen cites in her essay help you analyze both the problems and the solutions Tatum describes in her essay?

PEGGY McINTOSH

White Privilege: The Invisible Knapsack

Peggy McIntosh is associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. She has written many well-known articles on multicultural and gender-equitable curricula and is a sought-after lecturer on these topics. The ideas in this very influential essay, which are drawn from conference presentations in 1986 and 1987, were published as a working paper in 1988 and reprinted in the winter 1990 issue of *Independent School*.

When McIntosh first spoke out about white privilege, she was among the first scholars developing an analysis of "whiteness" as a racial category, which involves in part examining the ways European-Americans have become an "invisible norm" against which other racial categories are often measured. In this article, McIntosh traces her own shift from simply seeing nonwhites as "disadvantaged" to seeing her own whiteness as an unearned "privilege." As she explains early in her essay,