

Editors' Introduction: New Editors, New Directions in Writing Assessment

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Abstract: The *JWA* 18.2 editors' introduction contains a welcome by the new journal editors, Mathew Gomes, Lizbett Tinoco, and Stacy Wittstock. It also provides an overview of the two articles and three-piece symposium in the issue: Bradley Queen, Kate Kirby, Maryam Eslami, and Kameryn Denaro's (2025) exploration of ePortfolios as instruments of fairness; Daniel Ernst's (2025) examination of the use of automated writing evaluation (AWE) technology in writing assessment; and Megan Von Bergen's (2025) critique of labor-based grading discussions by Kryger and Zimmerman (2020) and Carillo (2021), followed by responses from Griffin X. Zimmerman (2025) and Ellen Carillo (2025).

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As we step into our roles as the new editorial team of *JWA*, we want to begin by thanking the editors who have led and shaped this journal to where it is today, most recently Carl Whithaus, who guided *JWA* for more than a decade, along with leaders in writing assessment such as Brian Huot, Kathy Yancey, Diane Kelly-Riley, and Peggy O'Neill. We especially want to recognize Carl's many contributions and the care and vision he brought to the journal as well as his mentorship.

We also want to remember the life and career of Les Perelman. At *JWA*, we remember Perelman especially for his thoughtful and compelling criticisms of machine-scored writing, particularly in the area of Automated Essay Scoring (AES). Perelman gave careful and holistic attention to mass market writing assessments and to how organizations selling these products validate their products. For Perelman (2012), these organizations and their assessments propagate "bullshit," encouraging test-takers to bullshit by asking them to write about subjects without any requisite knowledge or expertise. Privileging reliability over content, they tend to enable and reward bullshit. They even circulate bullshit through reports that lack methodological transparency or even facticity (Perelman, 2012, p. 427). In his last *JWA* article, Perelman (2020) also showed us how to make bullshit. Reporting on the Basic Automatic BS Essay Language (BABEL) Generator, Perelman (2020) illustrated the possibility of writing successful machine-scored essays by generating writing consistent with simple variables privileged by these tools, like "long rarely used words" (p. 1).

The prescience of Perelman's work is striking. His critiques of testing organizations, mass market assessments, and automatically generated writing anticipated the questions and conditions so many writing teachers face today. Against the current proliferation of writing produced by large language models and generative AI, we hope readers will be inspired by the way Perelman constantly calls our attention to the intellectual substance of writing. His scholarly impact endures and is visible even in this issue of *JWA*.

JWA was fortunate to publish Perelman's scholarship, including the previously quoted article, "[The BABEL Generator and E-Rater: 21st Century Writing Constructs and Automated Essay Scoring \(AES\)](#)" as well as his "[Critique of Mark D. Shermis & Ben Hamner, 'Contrasting State-of-the-Art Automated Scoring of Essays: Analysis.'](#)" Perelman also provided generous reviews to *JWA* for years. We are thankful for his thoughtful insight and contributions. Along with others in the writing studies and writing assessment communities, we will miss him.

Turning to ourselves for a moment, for those of you who may not be familiar with us, we move into this co-editorship as active scholars whose research has centered on writing assessment and related issues throughout our respective careers. We have also each worked for *JWA* in a variety of capacities for a number of years. Stacy first joined *JWA* in 2016 as a junior copy-editor; over the years, she took on several roles, including Editorial Assistant for the [Special Issue on Contract Grading \(13.2\)](#), Assistant Editor on the *JWA* editorial team, and co-editor of the [JWA Reading List](#) with Chris Blankenship. Matt joined *JWA* in 2018 as Social Media Coordinator and moved into the position of Associate Editor in 2021. Lizbett joined the *JWA* editorial team in 2021 as Assistant Editor of manuscript reviews. In this role, she helps make sure the peer-review process is thorough, fair, and supportive of both authors and reviewers.

Looking ahead, we're excited and optimistic about the work to come and remain committed to supporting high-quality writing assessment research through a thoughtful, double-anonymous peer review process. Additionally, we also want to reaffirm our commitment to ethical and inclusive review practices, including the principles listed in the [CCCC Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct](#)

of [Research in Composition Studies \(2025\)](#) and the [Anti-Racist Scholarly Review Practices: A Heuristic of Editors, Reviewers, and Authors \(2021\)](#) as we strive to keep *JWA* a welcoming space for writing assessment researchers and scholars. In the next few months, we will begin revisiting and refining journal policies to address new challenges, especially those created by emerging technologies, such as Generative AI. We are also committed to continuing to welcome diverse scholarship, including work from two-year colleges, international researchers, those working in K-12 institutions, and more. We're excited by the scholarship we'll be showcasing in the next year, including a special issue on "Disability, Neurodivergence, and Writing Assessment" and a host of regular issue articles highlighting key issues in writing assessment today.

In This Issue

In the introduction to his last issue as editor of *JWA*, Whithaus (2025) observed shifts in the field of writing assessment toward our current concerns with fairness, writing technologies, and alternative grading. Our current issue of *JWA* provides a snapshot of this current moment, linking contemporary concerns in writing assessment to historical issues while also pointing toward future directions.

In "[Exploring Fairness and Seeking Social Justice for Writing Assessment: ePortfolios, Language Difference, and Metacognition.](#)" by Bradley Queen, Kate Kirby, Maryam Eslami, and Kameryn Denaro, the authors ask, "can ePortfolios be instruments of fairness in a local assessment ecology?" (p. 3). This study of ePortfolios in the composition program at the University of California, Irvine leverages quantitative methods to investigate language difference in three cohorts of students with differing relationships to English as a home language. Contextualized in a general education research-writing course in 2017, 2018, and 2020, the study aimed to better understand bias and fairness in ePortfolio writing assessment. While there was some variability between the three study years, the researchers found that the assessors in their study were able to simultaneously place value on "traditional indicators of literate proficiency" (p.15) such as elements of Standardized English while also acknowledging the ability of students across diverse linguistic experiences to demonstrate "rhetorical metacognition as a register of literate proficiency," suggesting that the emphasis on metacognition in the ePortfolio assessment model used in their program enabled assessors to "recognize multiple and distinctive literacies" among the linguistically diverse students being assessed (p. 16). This study reaffirms the power of ePortfolios as a tool for fairer and more socially just writing assessment while also demonstrating the value of quantitative methods and empirical, data-driven approaches in analyzing qualitative information like students' writing (Haswell, 2005).

The next article in *JWA* 18.2, "[The Effects of Automated Writing Evaluation Technology on Improving Student Writing](#)" by Daniel Ernst, uses a quasi-experimental design and comparative judgments from four college writing instructors to examine how advances in automated writing evaluation (AWE) technology have shifted the tools' aims from summative scoring to formative, analytical feedback. Four college writing instructors evaluated 85 pairs of essays, each pair containing one essay treated by Chegg's AWE tool, EasyBib Plus, which offered feedback on grammar, style, writing clarity, and plagiarism. Ernst finds that essays submitted to this AWE program significantly underperformed the expected benchmark. Overall, the results indicate that the program did not improve student writing. Although this study was conducted before the rise of

generative AI, Ernst's article draws attention to which stages of the writing process benefit the most from teacher feedback and guidance and which might be better supported by AWE technology.

Finally, we present a trio of manuscripts from Megan Von Bergen, Griffin X. Zimmerman, and Ellen Carillo. This symposium has been in development for the last few years and adds to recent scholarly attention to alternative grading models in writing courses, including [a special issue of Pedagogy focused on ungrading edited by Carillo](#) and [a special issue of JWA focused on contract grading edited by Asao B. Inoue](#). This symposium on labor-based and alternative grading also represents a new genre for the journal. We are excited to introduce this genre and enthusiastically encourage future manuscripts responding to scholarship published in *JWA*.

Megan Von Bergen's "[On Neurodivergence/Disability and Labor-Based Grading: A Response to Kryger and Zimmerman \(2020\) and Carillo \(2021\)](#)" focuses on Kryger and Zimmerman's article, "Neurodivergence and Intersectionality in Labor-Based Grading Contracts" and Carillo's book, *The Hidden Inequities of Labor-Based Grading*. Through lenses of neurodivergence and disability studies, both publications question aspects of the labor-based grading model Inoue (2019/2022) presents in *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom*. However, Von Bergen argues these recent critiques define labor-based grading too narrowly and conflate the lack of quantitative grades with a lack of scaffolding. Von Bergen highlights how some labor-based and alternative assessment approaches can invite students to express agency over writing processes and habits and calls for more research and conversation about accessible labor-based approaches.

Griffin X. Zimmerman's "[Troubling Definitions, Expanding Conceptions: A Response](#)" contextualizes "[Neurodivergence and Intersectionality](#)," writing that, while several years on, they might revise their definition of labor-based grading contracts today, they nevertheless stand by the claim that "neurodivergent students can be adversely impacted by any pedagogical or assessment method that seeks to assess student labor through documenting their labor, especially through time spent" (p. 2). Zimmerman reminds us that, as Von Bergen observes, their earlier article is not "a universal prohibition against LBGC or alternative assessment in general," (pp. 2–3) and notes similarities between their current grading practices and those Von Bergen describes.

Ellen Carillo's "[Continuing the Conversation: A Response to Megan Von Bergen's 'On Neurodivergence/Disability and Labor-Based Grading'](#)" explains the context around the publication of her book and how she has developed concepts of "engagement-based grading" since its publication (p. 3). Carillo also explains how a recent special issue on ungrading in *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* (2024) helps meet Von Bergen's call for more expansive conceptions of alternative grading. Finally, Carillo underscores the importance of editorial work, reminding us that "editing constitutes serious, scholarly activity" (p. 4).

Together, all three manuscripts help scholars interested in writing assessment learn more deeply about alternative and labor-based contract grading, and consider future directions in accessible, antiracist, and intersectional grading and assessment. They also help writing instructors consider the best and most appropriate grading models for their teaching contexts

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