

Book Review

Giving a Voice to the Technologically Illiterate

Morey, Sean. *The New Media Writer*. Fountainhead, 2014. Print: \$60.00. E-Book: \$52.20.

Michelle Gorges
Pittsburg State University

In the short few years since his work was first published, Sean Morey has earned a reputation as a forward-looking and insightful rhetorician. His works have been praised as “eye-opening,” “fascinating,” and “both scholarly and engaging.” In his most recent work, *The New Media Writer*, Morey continues this innovative philosophy, coaxing student readers out of their passive comfort zones and into their roles as modern academics that must interact with their technology-ridden world.

The New Media Writer combines the traditional textbook-reader relationship with an interactive media-producer one. The text takes students in their traditional role— passive guidebook readers—and invites them to transcend to the proactive role of informed and responsible media consumers and producers. The book rises to this modern challenge by presenting an academic yet non-condescending tone, practicing what it preaches, and urging (really, almost prodding) students to become involved in its content.

As is the custom in most textbook designs, Morey uses his first few chapters to introduce important terminology and provide student readers with the purpose and context of his argument.

What is immediately and noticeably unique about this text, however, is the tone with which Morey addresses his audience. While appearing knowledgeable and academic, at the same time he manages to give his readers the feeling that they are part of a two-way communication system, as opposed to victims enduring a mundane, one-way lecture. Morey asks readers to consider different viewpoints; critique advertisements, videos, and posters; to watch movies and find plot holes. He knows that they will only be as involved as they choose to be; yet everything in his language invites them to choose involvement.

The quality that I find the most inviting about this textbook is that it practices what it preaches. Morey guides his readers through the basics of visual design, accompanying text, website creation, and even movie production. He advises new media writers to keep their audience captivated, make relevant and useful references, and take advantage of their modern-day resources. His entire text emphasizes the importance of the timeless teacher-to-student advice: *show, don't tell*—and he does just that. The textbook illustrates visually appealing designs (complete with ample white space and media still frames), and its accompanying text is clear and appropriate. Morey provides countless modern media references, often accompanied by amusing anecdotes. He makes connections between concepts from various chapters, never leaving his readers in want of further explanation.

Although the print textbook itself is a demonstration of its own content, Morey and his publisher, Fountainhead Press, take the “practice what you preach” philosophy one step further by offering both a companion website and an online version of the text. While the print version provides URLs to advertisements, YouTube videos, blogs, podcasts, and various other web pages, these online publications provide ready-to-go links. Students reading the print version are

much more prone to fall back into their passive roles, for they are unlikely to go back and forth between print and media in order to look up the given URLs—that is, unless an example is unclear or an unknown reference happens to peak their curiosity on a day in which they feel they have enough free time for the online pursuit. With the online versions, however, students are much more likely to interact with the text and view the provided links as they come. Using his knowledge of his audience, however, Morey appeals to their reliance on instant gratification by offering the companion website and online edition of the text. He has done well to provide all the tools his audience needs; it is, after that point, up to them to take advantage of those tools.

Morey's publisher, Fountainhead Press, now comfortably sits in its twelfth year of business. The company's website depicts it as "forward-thinking in its product development and innovative content" while remaining "retro in its approach to customers." This combination of progression and tradition is echoed in Morey's *The New Media Writer*, leaving it no mystery that the two teamed up to create this and other interactive publications. If these publications prove anything, it is that even the average media user has the potential to find a voice in our society's technology-driven future. They show us that forward-thinkers like Sean Morey, along with publishers like Fountainhead Press, will continue to encourage us to embrace and interact with our ever-changing technologies rather than quietly sit in the background, convinced that having a voice is only an option for the most technologically literate.