

## CALL FOR CHAPTERS

**Working Title:** *Exigence in the Anthropocene: Teaching Ecocomposition in the Age of Climate Change*

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**Abstract Submission Deadline:** December 15, 2019

**Decisions:** March 1, 2020

**Full Chapter Submission Deadline:** June 1, 2020

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Global climate change is perhaps the most serious threat human beings have ever faced. Human-caused global warming is already upon us with increased temperatures, extreme weather events, massive storms, unprecedented drought, flooding, wildfires, melting ice, sea rise, warming and acidification of oceans, and growing animal extinctions. Scientists now predict that, within a generation, planetary catastrophes may significantly disrupt global food production, create unlivable temperatures in many regions, submerge cities, and create hundreds of millions of refugees. Unchecked, climate change has apocalyptic consequences not only for human beings, but for all life on earth. How can we go on writing, teaching, and living without acknowledging and responding to this growing crisis?

Earth scientists are increasingly describing our present era of accelerating, human-created climate change as the “Anthropocene Epoch,” a term popularized by Crutzen (2006). Though written in a genre long overlooked by the general public, the IPCC Report (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2018) and the Fourth National Climate Assessment (Reidmiller et al., 2018) have even made international headlines. Even these scientific reports offering conservative projections for life on a rapidly warming planet look increasingly apocalyptic. Wallace-Wells’ (2019) bestselling book, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*, further sketches out the gritty details the catastrophic projections for a widespread climate chaos in the coming decades. Importantly, as Wallace-Wells frequently reminds the reader, whether or not we continue on our current path of industrial capitalism driven by fossil fuels. That is to say, while human actions created this mess, our collective current and future actions can still work to minimize the severity of the crisis. Indeed, recent activism from Extinction Rebellion and the youth-led School Strike for Climate have garnered global attention on the need for immediate political and social action. As educators, we are interested in the impact of these actions on teaching, learning, curriculum, and our institutions.

Clearly, climate change is not simply a scientific or technological issue. It is also a significantly human problem. That is to say, it constitutes a deeply social, political, cultural, and discursive challenge. Indeed, Wallace-Wells makes clear that climate change is, in many ways, a rhetorical

problem, suggesting: “Rhetoric often fails us on climate because the only factually appropriate language is of a kind we’ve been trained, by a buoyant culture of sunny-side-up optimism, to dismiss, categorically, as hyperbole” (p. 29). Therefore, we ask how might scholars of composition and rhetoric write or teach about the glaring realities of climate change without being dismissed as political partisans or pessimistic killjoys?

Understanding the complexities of climate change as a rhetorical problem can be confounding. In his groundbreaking article “The Rhetorical Situation,” Bitzer (1968) defines rhetoric as “a mode of altering reality . . . by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes a mediator of change” (p. 4). Further, he argues that rhetorical situations require three elements to be present: exigence, audience, and constraints. Exigence he defined as “imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (p. 6). While Bitzer’s work helps clarify the rhetorical situation at hand, significant questions still remain: Why might a long record of evidence and “exigence” lack discursive meaning for engaging myriad global audiences? How might we overcome the social, political, and economic constraints through communication and rhetoric?

In spite of growing public interest in and concern for the urgency of the climate crisis, there has been surprisingly little scholarship in the field of writing studies on the subject, especially as it relates to teaching first-year writing, rhetoric, or writing across the curriculum (WAC). Most of the work published around climate change and writing studies appears in a handful of important but increasingly dated volumes: Owens’ (2001) *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation*; Weisser and Dobrin’s (2001) *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches*; Dobrin and Weisser’s (2002) *Natural Discourse*; and Moser and Dilling’s (2007) *Creating a Climate for Change: Communicating Climate Change and Facilitating Social Change*. As editors and educators, we recognize this gap in the literature on ecocomposition, and we feel an urgent need to revisit and update these important ideas while we reconceptualize the field of writing studies in light of the worsening climate crisis. Whether and how we address issues of climate change, the Anthropocene, place, and the environment in our writing classrooms and syllabi is both a political and ethical decision about what is worth teaching at this monumental junction in human history.

As Orr (1994) suggests, “all education is environmental education” (p. 13). In other words, our curricular inclusions and omissions communicate where humans see ourselves in relation to the more-than-human world. We are excited to note that “ecological” metaphors have proliferated in recent years with regard to writing environments (Barton, 2017; Dobrin & Keller, 2012), writing program administration (Reiff, Bawarshi, Ballif, & Weisser, 2015), and writing assessment (Inoue, 2015; Wardle & Roozen, 2012). This speaks to the growing importance and impact of ecocomposition as a valuable concept and rhetorical tool in the field of writing studies. Moreover, we’ve also seen a recent proliferation of “ecocriticism” (Clark, 2015; Gerrard, 2011) through the work of colleagues in English studies and the humanities—no doubt due to the growing climate crisis. We seek to contribute to this ongoing conversation, moving beyond strictly metaphorical uses of “ecology” now common in writing studies by directly

engaging relationships of place and natural environments with the teaching, studying, and production of writing, while infusing the work of ecocomposition with a renewed sense of urgency that climate change and the Anthropocene demand.

Students, teachers, and scholars today note a renewed urgency and a new set of circumstances that should be shaping the work of writing studies, education, and society writ large. As many college students feel anxiety about climate change, and since no small share of them seek to write essays in their classes on this topic, it is clear that recent pedagogical scholarship is needed on writing and rhetoric in the Anthropocene. As editors of this proposed volume, we seek to provide writing scholars/educators with theoretical and pedagogical approaches to ecocomposition with first-year writing classes. Moreover, we hope for theoretically sound and practically-informed essays of practitioners engaging with climate change across various contexts, from WAC programs and writing centers, to courses wherein students are the producers of texts: rhetoric, media, communications, linguistics, creative writing, cultural studies, literary studies, and English Education.

NCTE's (2019) "Resolution on Literacy Teaching on Climate Change" suggests: "Understanding climate change challenges the imagination; addressing climate change demands all the tools of language and communication, including the ability to tell compelling stories about the people and conflicts at the heart of this global discussion." Through this book, we hope to reinvigorate the concept of ecocomposition for as a critical tool for teaching writing amid the impending existential climate crisis.

Essays proposed for this collection may wish to consider the following:

1. What does *exigence* mean in an era of rapid climate change? How does the urgency of public calls for change affect the way climate is discussed or written about in a college writing class?
2. What *audiences* are appropriate for students to target as they attempt to reach beyond the confines of the classroom?
3. What role can activism play in the writing class, especially when students reach beyond the *constraints* in the classroom to reach broader audiences through public discourse or activism? How might new, emergent forms of public/counterpublic activism change the framing of such discourse? How is this activism related to *exigence* and urgency?
4. How does *kairos* differ from *exigence* in terms of writing about climate change? How does the moving target of the daily news cycle about climate change impact the dynamics of teaching writing relative to this topic?
5. What role does climate change denial, "fake news," and post-truth rhetoric play when approaching this topic in the classroom? What happens to *logos* in this situation?
6. How do authority structures and other components of *ethos* affect writing and teaching about climate change? How do the authority structures of different groups within the rhetorical ecology of climate change—scientists, politicians, religious leaders, celebrities, activists—affect the rhetorical situations surrounding this topic?
7. How does *pathos* affect the ability of students to approach this topic with some degree of intellectual detachment?

8. What competing narratives have shaped the past and present debates over climate change? How can *metaphor* and story be useful tools for teaching ecocomposition?
9. What role does *stasis theory* play in teaching, discussing, and writing about climate change? In other words, how might considerations of facts/reality, definition/classification, quality/severity, and policy/action be a valuable heuristic for ecocomposition?
10. What *genres* are most commonly employed by climate change rhetors? What other forms or genres can (or could) be used? How is the topic approached differently through forensic, deliberative, and epideictic approaches?
11. What value can other approaches—animal studies, dis/ability, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, ecoliteracy, ecopedagogy, environmental justice, indigenous studies, literary studies, outdoor education, place-based education, political ecology, postcolonial studies, queer studies, etc.—contribute to teaching writing in the Anthropocene?

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**Audience:**

*Exigence in the Anthropocene: Teaching Ecocomposition in the Age of Climate Change* is intended for a broad audience. The book will feature chapters from scholars/educators from across writing/English studies who approach the teaching of writing/rhetoric through the concepts of ecocomposition and climate change. We seek essays that communicate an understanding and analysis of the challenges and contradictions of writing and teaching in the Anthropocene. With this collection, we hope to reach many of the following audiences: writing scholars, educators, and researchers; writing program administrators; concerned citizens; community organizers; and environmental activists. With that said, we suggest you write with an audience of upper-level undergraduates and graduate students of composition/rhetoric in mind.

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**Genre:**

We seek essays, narratives, and other multimodal forms that explore and address teaching (eco)composition in the Anthropocene. We find great value in inviting audiences perhaps unfamiliar with theories and practices of ecology, composition, rhetoric, and pedagogy to clearly envision such work through new frames, forms, and foci. Please keep in mind that narrative does not rule out theorizing, and theorizing does not rule out story. Keep in mind, too, that because essays and narratives typically emerge out of specific contexts, we encourage authors to deeply ground their writing in a specific place, space, environment, and/or community.

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**Proposed structure:**

Rhetoricians since Aristotle have referred to *topoi* or “commonplaces” as patterns of discourse around a particular subject or topic. With regard to studies across educational settings, Schwab (1978) writes that “Defensible educational thought must take account of four commonplaces of equal rank: the learner, the teacher, the milieu, and the subject matter. None of these can be omitted without omitting a vital factor in educational thought and practice” (p. 371). Following Schwab, the following four *topoi* will help provide an organizational structure for the collection:

- *Ecocomposition as Subject Matter*: Place, curriculum, and (inter)disciplinary discourse
- *Ecocomposition and the Learner*: Writers, writing, and learning
- *Ecocomposition and the Teacher*: Pedagogy, programs, and assessment
- *Ecocomposition and the Milieu*: Institutions and wider social, political, environmental contexts

Authors are encouraged to write their submissions with one of these *topoi* in clearly mind.

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#### Timeline:

- CFP shared online and via social media: October 1, 2019
  - Individual abstracts due: December 15, 2019
  - Acceptance notifications: March 1, 2020
  - First drafts due: June 1, 2020
  - Returned edits: September 1, 2020
  - Final manuscript submission: November 1, 2020
  - Proposed publication: February 1, 2021
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#### Submissions:

Abstracts should: include author's (or authors') full name, email address, and affiliation; be no more than 1,000 words, not including references; and include references in APA style. Eventual chapter submissions should be 6,000-8,000 words. Co-authored texts are welcome. No simultaneous submissions please. Please submit your abstract as a Word document to:

**Ecocomp2021@gmail.com.**

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