ETC: An Analysis of
A Review of General Semantics

Kylie Wojciechowski

General Education

Nominated by Suzan E. Aiken, Department of English

Kylie Wojciechowski began her collegiate career at SVSU in the fall of 2012 and is majoring in Rhetoric and Professional Writing, with minors in Psychology and Chemistry. She is a member of the Honors Program, Living through Literacy, and the Kantzler Fellowship. Her future career pathway is still up in the air.

Et cetera is a phrase writers use when they are coming to the end of a thought but have nothing left to say, when they want to continue forth in the same way, but have run out of examples or concepts to include. Therein lies the irony of the scholarly journal entitled *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, "devoted to publishing material which contributes to and advances the understanding of language, thought, and behavior" (The Institute of General Semantics). This scholarly journal, since its advent in 1943 through its present day publications, has never come to the end of an idea and had nothing left to say. I am able to draw such a bold conclusion after weeks of regular forays into the mysterious recesses of the microform area of the Saginaw Valley State University library. In near-solitary confinement there (as not many students dare to venture into such unknown territory), I conducted a careful and systematic analysis of this journal. This textual analysis will describe the processes behind my analysis, the result of that analysis, and what those results represent about the arts of writing, semantics, and language as a whole.

Groundwork

To begin this analysis, I first had to determine exactly what a scholarly text is. I had a crude, uneducated inkling of the genre; I conceptualized scholarly journals as authoritative magazines. But, after some research, I was able to determine that scholarly journals were collections of articles with a particular scholarly focus. A collected series of articles is called an issue (generally printed several times per year), and a bound series of issues is called a volume (an entire year's worth). Scholarly journal articles are written by professionals in their respective fields. The writing that these professionals produce (based on their own research) is refereed, or "peer-reviewed," to guarantee integrity, honesty, and accuracy. Unlike magazines, scholarly journals rarely feature glossy product advertising. Scholarly journals are all about the professional and credible research and information within them (Penn State Great Valley Library).

With that knowledge in mind, my next step was to physically familiarize myself with the genre of scholarly journals in a general sense. When I browsed the microform area, I chose five different scholarly journals to examine: *The Journal of General Psychology, The Journal of Applied Social Psychology, The Journal of Biochemical Genetics, The Journal of Experimental Psychology,* and *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*. I gathered general information about them and their publishers, their pagination, their intended audiences, their article submission guidelines, and their preferred type of citation. That information exposed me to a variety of scholarly texts, allowing me to observe and examine the parts that constituted each. (An example from *ETC* can be seen below in Table 1.)

Table 1
Example of General Information Derived from Articles in *ETC*

Publisher	Intended Audience	Pagination	Article Submission Guidelines	Citation Format Used
International Society for General Semantics; published *quarterly*	Writers, teachers, and those who study writing	Continuous pagination throughout annual volumes	Accepts articles about **1.** The symbolic environment, metaphors, the study of symbols, and human behavior in culture **2.** Cases of language misuse **3.** Instructional schemata for instructors **4.** Poems, diagrams, or short fiction that express ideas about symbols and behavior	Writer's preference

Processes of Analysis

Once acquainted with the physical form of scholarly journals, I continued my textual analysis of the journal *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*. I studied three main aspects of the journal: the **implicit techniques** used by the contributing writers, the **recurring themes** throughout the issues and volumes, and its **intended audience**.

I began by reading a random issue (Volume 59, Number 2, in this case), summarizing the content of each article to create an annotated bibliography (as required by my assignment guidelines). I then took note of four specific techniques used by the writers of each individual article. First, I examined the <u>tone</u> of each article, the general attitude of the writer towards his or her subject, evident by the types of words used. I noted the <u>voice</u> in each article, ranging from austere, impersonal, and objective to impassioned, sentimental, and subjective. I also addressed the <u>appeals</u> in each article, including *pathos* (an appeal to the audience's emotions), *ethos* (an appeal based on the writer's credibility), and *logos* (an appeal to logic). Finally, I studied the use of <u>language</u> in each article. I asked myself, "Are prestigious academic words (also known as jargon) used, or can the average reader understand the article with little-to-no background knowledge?" With all that information, I would be able to better grasp the **implicit techniques** used by the writers.

After that, I examined the first 15 volumes of *ETC* (from 1943-1957) and the most recent 16 volumes (1997-2012). I copied the table of contents for each issue in each volume to recognize and search for **recurring themes** and sections.

Finally, I then recompiled the Table of Contents for the first issue ever published and the most recent issue published and analyzed exactly who the **intended audience** of the journal was. That consisted of presenting the two tables to various people of different occupations, skill sets, and backgrounds and having them point out words, phrases or concepts in the table that they were not familiar with. I presented the tables to six specific people:

1. A female professor of English at Saginaw Valley State University
2. A middle-aged male dry-wall contractor with an associate's degree in business administration
3. A female peer, enrolled in English 212, currently a cashier, with a goal of medical administration

4. A middle-aged female medical billing specialist, returning to college to pursue a career as a surgical technician
5. A male junior in high school, focusing on baseball and girls
6. A male peer, a delivery driver with a bachelors equivalent in audio engineering.

There are limits to this qualitative study, however. I have little experience conducting any type of primary research, and completing all the above tasks made me keenly aware of just how infinitesimal that experience was. Still, regardless of my level of expertise as a researcher, my analysis has yielded some worthwhile results, disclosing more truths about writing, language, and semantics (and how they relate back to human nature) than I would have expected.

Results of the Analysis

In the **implicit technique** section of my textual analysis, I unearthed substantial information about the tones, voices, appeals, strategies, and language used by the writers in Volume 59, Number 2. No article in the issue examined was similar to the others; the genres of the articles varied:
- An appeal to redefine a specific word ("Error" by Edward MacNeal)
- Poetry ("13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by Wallace Stevens)
- A summary and response essay ("Right Reasoning: S. I. Hayakawa, Charles Sanders Peirce and the Scientific Method" by Shawn Taylor)
- A collection of quotes from distinguished people ("Abstractions")
- An explanation of etymological slurs ("What's In a Word: Etymological Slurs" by Michael Moore)
- Two "retro" pieces from the late 1970s that were republished because of their "continuing relevance and applicability" ("Fanaticism: Flight From Fallibility" by H. J. Perkinson, and "The Immediate Man: The Symbolic Environment of Fanaticism" by Christine L. Nystrom)
- A membership page
- An emotional essay about a man's reluctance to let go of records in favor of digital music ("Metaphors in Action: Warm Records, Cold CDs" by Raymond Gozzi, Jr.)
- An instructional concept for teachers to cut down on accidental plagiarism ("Make Your Paraphrasing Plagiarism-Proof with a Coat of E-Prime" by David F. Maas)
- A lengthy explanatory piece of advice for those in professional writing ("Using the Rule of Six to Convey Complex Content" by Phillip Vassallo)
- News and notes in the field
- Several book reviews
- A section labeled "Retrospect," eight pieces of writing by various writers, either previously published or relating to the past.

From my summaries and analyses of each of those articles, I was able to determine that there was no recurring implicit technique used across the board by all contributing writers. The <u>tones</u> used ranged from calmly explanatory ("Error" by Edward MacNeal) to bitterly acerbic ("Right Reasoning: S. I. Hayakawa, Charles Sanders Peirce and the Scientific Method" by Shawn Taylor). The <u>voices</u> ranged from straitlaced, extremely formal, and purely objective (used in the two "retro" pieces on fanaticism by Perkinson and Nystrom), to abstract, informal, and subjective ("13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by Wallace Stevens and "Metaphors in Action: Warm Records, Cold CDs" by Raymond Gozzi, Jr.). The <u>appeals</u> ranged as far as they could, utilizing *ethos* in persuasive pieces such as Taylor's ""Right Reasoning: S. I. Hayakawa, Charles Sanders Peirce and the Scientific Method," or taking advantage of *logos* in Moore's "What's in a Word: Etymological Slurs" or Vassallo's "Using the Rule of Six to Convey Complex Content." Appeals to *pathos* were

evident in emotionally-charged pieces such as Gozzi's "Warm Records, Cold CDs." As for the types of language used, semantic jargon was rarely present, except for Moore's "What's in a Word: Etymological Slurs." Most of the language throughout this particular volume of *ETC* was accessible to the general public, save for a few necessary exceptions. In other words, the analysis of **implicit techniques** identified no "universal" way of writing throughout the range of those articles.

Next, I turned my analytic focus on the **recurring themes** within *ETC*. To study those themes and sections, as described above, I used copies of the Table of Contents of the first fifteen volumes ever published and the most recent sixteen volumes published. From there, I highlighted any sections or headings that reappeared from issue to issue.

Dealing with the first 15 volumes (the first 60 issues), I was able to find only five recurring sections: "Discussion," "Book/Film Reviews," "Reader Correspondence," "News," and "Miscellany." Not all of these sections were present in each issue, but they were present *at least* once per volume. Focusing on the most recent 16 volumes of *ETC* (the most recent 64 issues), I found far more "recurring" sections, though the large majority of them faded out after a few volumes. These included "Metaphors in Action," "Probes," "Book Reviews," "Dates & Indexes," "Discussion," "From the Editor," "Poetry Ring," "Retrospect," "Abstractions," "Calling out the Symbol Rulers," "Words on the Line," "Reader's Correspondence," and "General Semantics Basics," in addition to sixteen others. As previously stated, many of those "recurring" sections seemed to be mere trends, able to be tossed aside after they had run their course in the timespan allotted. The sections that have remained consistent throughout the years, however, interested me greatly. With my analysis of **recurring themes**, I was able to find not only many trendy yet evanescent headings, but also, more significantly, a constant thread of three specific sections and headings that have survived the test of time to remain an integral part of the scholarly journal.

Finally, I began to gauge the **intended audience** of that particular scholarly journal. From my "ground work" study, my generalized scholarly journal study, I knew the journal's intended audience was general semanticists, professional writers, and collegiate instructors. And I also knew that I was not a member of any of those audiences. So why was I reading the journal? "Because Ms. Aiken, my instructor, made me" was not the real answer.

I happened upon the real answer when I learned of the phrase "secondary audiences." My lack of background as a general semanticist, professional writer, or college-level teacher did not mean that I was not allowed to, or incapable of, reading *ETC*. On the contrary, I was a student, passionate about the art of writing; thus, I was a member of *ETC*'s secondary audience. I realized that when the writers sat down to brainstorm and conceptualize themes for their next issue, they were not explicitly thinking of me. They were thinking about the needs and desires of their intended audience, of the general semanticists, the professional writers, and the professors. But they did not completely ignore me. Though the writers published informative articles about topics that their intended audiences would benefit from, they wrote (the majority of) their articles in ways that I could understand, in ways that are easily accessible by the curious general public, by the *secondary audience*.

But what if I was wrong? What if I was terribly off-base? What if the writers didn't care about me at all? What if I was just being asininely hopeful? I worried about that myself, so I conducted yet another study. This time I used other people. As stated above, I recompiled the first and the most recently published tables of contents (see Table 2).

Table 2

Comparison of Table of Contents in ETC

Volume 1, Issue 1 (August 1943): Table of Contents	Volume 69, Issue 4 (October 2012): Table of Contents
· "Science and Values" by Edward Thorndike · "General Semantics and Modern Art" by Oliver Bloodstein · "Etcetera" by e. e. cummings · "You Can't Write Writing" by Wendell Johnson · "General Semantics and Psychoanalysis" by Chas. I. Glicksberg · "Chemical Semantics" by S. Weiner · "Changing Food Habits" by Margaret Mead · "The Brotherhood of Doctrines (1922)" by Alfred Korzybski · Reviews, News, and Miscellany Total number of words: 67	· "General Semantics, Science, and Medicine: A Quality Approach" by Richard Fiordo · "Who's the Mother" by Bill Haase · "Indexing the Religious Beliefs of America's Founders" by Martin H. Levinson · "Fascism as a Semantic Void into the Meta-Narrative of Rational Modernity" by Alessandro Saluppo · Two Poems: "Foreclosure" by Peter E. Murphy, "Good Grief" by Peter E. Murphy · "One God" by Ed Tywoniak and Frances Tywoniak · "Objectivity--Does It Exist?" by Mark S. Tucker · "Advanced Thinking: Mathematics, General Semantics ... Ways to Improve Relationships" by Milton Dawes · "Formal Cause, *Poiesis*, Rhetoric: A Dialogue" by Eric McLuhan and Peter Zhang · "Bindings and Becomings: Korzybski, Deleuze, and Ecological Thinking" by Peter Zhang and Eric Jenkins · Metaphors in Action: "Two Generation Gaps" by Raymond Gozzi, Jr. · Probes: "Philosophy How?" by Peter Zhang · From the Editor, Book Reviews, and Dates and Indexes Total Number of words: 145

I then presented the comparison table to the same six participants, and asked them to point out words they were not familiar with. The results can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Words in Table 2 Unfamiliar to Six Participants

	Unfamiliar Words in V1, N1	Unfamiliar Words in V69, N4
S1: female English professor at SVSU	---	---
S2: middle-aged drywall contractor, bachelors in business administration	Semantics	Semantics, Fascism, Meta-Narrative, *Poiesis*
S3: 18 year old female, cashier, studying medical administration	---	Meta-Narrative, *Poiesis*
S4: middle-aged medical billing specialist, nontraditional student in surgical technology	---	Meta-Narrative, *Poiesis*
S5: 17 year old boy, HS junior	Semantics, Doctrines, Miscellany	Semantics, Meta-Narrative, Objectivity, *Poiesis*
S6: 19 year old male, bachelor's equivalent in audio engineering	Semantics	Semantics, *Poiesis*

Out of 67 words in the table of contents of Volume 1, Issue 1, only three different words were unknown by participants. Of the 145 words (including a Latin word) in the table of contents of Volume 69, Issue 4, only five different words were unknown by participants. Those numbers are surprisingly low, especially because they were registered by participants as diverse as the ones that I selected, who had zero members involved with general semantics or the like.

Those low numbers suggest that *ETC* is written not only for general semanticists, professional writers, and collegiate instructors; the numbers suggest that, during the brain-storming and conceptualization processes, the contributing writers may be thinking of drywall contractors, prospective medical administrators, billing specialists, high school juniors, and audio engineers. They may be thinking of me. The writers are writing *for* their intended audience, but they're writing in ways that are clear and accessible, free of jargon and prestigious, flashy language, so that any curious secondary audiences can satiate their curiosity.

What the Analysis Says about Writing in General

This section will take the results of my studies of **implicit techniques, recurring themes**, and **intended audience** of *ETC* and apply them to what I (and professional writers and semanticists) believe about the art of writing and language. Throughout readings of various articles in the past month for this course, including "Context-Sensitive Text Analysis" by Thomas N. Huckin and "Teaching about Writing" by Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle, I became aware of the fact that every single piece of writing I'd ever done was the mashed-up result of the various *discourse communities* that I belonged to, the groups that I, either accidentally or purposefully, found myself a member of, that shaped my perspectives and beliefs to coincide with mission statements and collective goals. I became convinced that writing does not happen in a vacuum. I learned that writing was more than a

mechanical, step-by-step process; writing was about not only the physical or mental act of "writing." I became aware of the inherent *intertextuality* in every piece of writing produced, of the tangled knot, developed as a result of the overlapping *discourse communities* every human writer belongs to, that every piece of writing finds itself tied into.

Reading and studying a scholarly journal has provided me with experiences that have allowed me to see first-hand the concepts discussed in class. The chance to conduct and collect primary research gave me the opportunity to produce my own scholarly work, where I was responsible for deep thinking and creation of new knowledge. That first-hand "view," wherein I was able to see classroom concepts in the "real world," significantly strengthened my own personal convictions concerning those concepts. Based on the results of each study in my textual analysis of *ETC*, it is undeniably clear that *intertextuality,* resulting from the infinite number of *discourse communities* that humanity belongs to, is inherent in every piece of writing ever composed.

From my study of **recurring themes**, I came to the conclusion that three main sections were constantly cycled throughout the issues of *ETC*, utilized from the journal's advent to its recent publications. These three main sections were "Discussion," "Book/Film Reviews," and "Reader's Correspondence." The constant reappearance of these sections was not accidental. Their consistent presence speaks volumes about writing and its inherent *intertextuality*. Huckin's argument, "the processes by which competent writers produce successful pieces of writing are not decontextualized cognitive operations or expressive acts carried out by isolated individuals; rather, they are more broadly based processes embedded within and influenced by community affiliations," is thus given stronger legitimacy (87).

ETC's continual commitment to publishing conversations between professionals (in "Discussion"), its desire to tie reading and writing together as a dialogue of reviews (in "Book/Film Reviews"), and its willingness to engage in conversations with readers (in "Reader's Correspondence), uncovers that *intertextuality*. The impossibility of writing within a vacuum is revealed. It's impossible for one person to write without being influenced by others, without being influenced by the beliefs and ambitions of the *discourse communities* that each individual belongs to. That notion, introduced by Huckin, has gained a new credibility in my mind, supported by my textual analysis of the **recurring themes** in a scholarly journal about writing and semantics.

Next, building from my study of the **implicit techniques** used by writers in *ETC*, I discovered the lack of uniformity between the articles in that particular issue. I remembered from my study of other scholarly journals (on scientific and psychological topics) that each article looked nearly identical to the others. So why was there such diversity in this particular journal?

I was unable to find a rationale for the hodge-podge of articles until I related it back to *intertextuality,* which states that no writer is ever composing on his or her own. Every piece of writing produced is the messy combination of the opinions and beliefs of the various *discourse communities* that the writer belongs to. That's not bad or wrong or even avoidable; it's the beautiful truth about the art of writing. Writing is not a science; it cannot be broken up into easily-digested and achievable steps. It's a personal process, where the only thing you can do is what seems *right*. Downs and Wardle argue that point in their prescription for the revision of First Year Composition in the university. They "understand writing…as more than collections of grammatical and syntactical constructions" (555). There is no formula that allows a few grammatical constructions to be added to a few verbs and nouns to produce good writing. Writing is written outside of prescriptions and formulas and vacuums. Writing, in and of itself, is a result of *intertextuality*, and the array of various genres within the scholarly journal *ETC* speaks to the notion that there is no "right" way to write.

My lack of knowledge in comparing biological and psychological journals, those with a clear-cut, solid, scientific focus, to a scholarly journal focused on understanding writing, language, and behavior, still amazes me. In such precise fields, there is no room for any kind of writing other than that explicitly referred to in the submission guidelines. With

a freer focus, as suggested by its own guidelines for article submissions, *ETC* is able to include a large and varied array of writing in its issues.

Finally, from my study of the journal's **intended audience**, I was able to conclude that *ETC* was being written not only for general semanticists, professional writers, and collegiate instructors, but also for a secondary audience, those willing to engage in conversation about the art of writing, language, thought, and behavior. The existence of that secondary audience also speaks to the *intertextuality* inherent in all writing. By choosing to exclude jargon from the large majority of its articles, *ETC* is recognizing its secondary audiences and their needs. That unintended audience is being thought of during the writing process. The contributing writers are not sitting within a vacuum, mindlessly writing for those who are professionals on the topic of the journal. They are likely thinking of the others; they are reimagining concepts and ideas and composing in various styles because of that *intertextuality.* The writers are being influenced by a secondary *discourse community*, an unintended audience, and that influence is evident in the lack of jargon used.

Conclusion

Upon completion of this textual analysis, I have to ask the question: why does the phrase *et cetera* exist? How can someone come to the end of a thought? Each person belongs to various *discourse communities*, and thus is inherently welcomed and knotted into that universal *intertextuality*. Each person has unlimited access to a constant, ever-flowing thread of contemporary, revolutionary ideas. With that, how does anyone run out of examples or concepts to include? How does anyone have to reach for words, in total desperation for ideas, with that infinite store of concepts at their fingertips? With the knowledge I gleaned from this textual analysis of the scholarly journal *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, that notion doesn't make much sense anymore.

Even within my textual analysis, I was able to reach out and exercise *intertextuality* – a self-induced form of it. I purposefully used authoritative, credible sources within my own *discourse community* and their inherent *intertextuality* to not only complete my assignment, but to also relate my results to my personal understanding of human culture and nature through written language.

In trying to fulfill assignment guidelines, I stumbled upon many inherent truths about written communication. As a result of my work on a "boring" textual analysis, I now have re-envisioned my understanding of human nature and culture through language. The many hours spent in seemingly-solitary confinement have literally forced me to reimagine the way I view writing, an art I've been indulging in since I learned to physically form words with an ink tip. In a mere attempt to pass this course, I've uncovered many truths about writing, most significantly the way it is intricately, inextricably intertwined into human nature.

I've realized that writing is not sitting alone and making scratches on a page. Writing is not an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Writing is not a command of the lexicon of the English language. Writing is not a mental store of every grammar rule and all the exceptions to it. Writing is not made up of mechanical syntactical constructions. In contrast with all of the beliefs about writing that I held previously, writing is not actually "writing." Writing is communication with the world; there is *intertextuality* inherent in every instance of writing. All writing is the combination of the conversations and opinions and beliefs of all the *discourse communities* that a writer may belong to. I have been forced to acknowledge that fact through the results of my textual research on the scholarly journal *ETC*, a journal about understanding language, thought and behavior through general semantics. Through analysis of the journal's **intended audience**, **implicit techniques,** and **recurring themes**, I have further fueled the fire, at least in my own mind, behind the notion of *intertextuality* resulting from membership in various *discourse communities*. While my analysis was not exhaustive of every aspect of the journal *ETC*, it did reveal significant tenets about writing and human nature that have, ultimately, made me

question the necessity for and existence of the phrase "et cetera." With *intertextuality* as a result of *discourse communities*, how can someone be at a loss for things to say?

Works Cited

Downs, Douglas, and Elizabeth Wardle. "Teaching about Writing, Right Misconceptions: (Re)envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies,'" *College Composition and Communication* 58.4 (2007): 552-581.

Huckin, Thomas N. "Context-Sensitive Analysis." *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*. Ed. Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1992. 84-104.

The Institute of General Semantics. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*. The Institute of General Semantics. N. d. The Institute of General Semantics. Web. 14 February 2013.

Penn State Great Valley Library. "Scholarly Journals." *What is a Scholarly Journal?* N. d. Penn State University. Web. 14 February 2013.