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ENGL 4810

20 March 2026

Genre as Action

Research articles play a central role in shaping how knowledge is created and understood within the field of Professional and Public Writing (PPW). Therefore, “The Death of the Lawyer,” by Lindsay Head, analyzes language and legal writing to explain the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the legal system. AI systems generate legal texts that resemble human writing, leading to her concern about the ‘death’ of the human lawyer. Viewing her work through a Rhetorical Genre Studies lens extends the conversation beyond AI and technology. Through this lens, Head’s article shows that research in PPW is a way of producing knowledge, shaping values, and guiding readers in interpreting complex issues.

In this essay, I use the work of Miller, Bawarshi, and Lemon to guide my analysis. Their ideas help explain how research genres are created through uptake and rhetorical situations, and how writing shapes both production and reading practices within PPW. Head’s research demonstrates that in PPW, writing is not solely about producing texts, but about participating in communication. Together, these authors show how meaning is created through rhetorical action, which is something AI cannot fully replicate.

The first point of the article explains that research genres function as a form of social action. Rather than presenting information, the article responds to a specific exigence: *Can AI*

replace lawyers? Miller explains that genres are not formal structures, but they are tied to action and purpose. Furthermore, she writes, “genre... becomes more than a formal entity; it becomes pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention and effect, an aspect of social action” (Miller 153). In other words, genres do not organize writing. They shape what writing does within the world. Head’s article enters an ongoing conversation about AI and legal writing. Therefore, she uses a research genre to frame and analyze the issue through a rhetorical lens. By applying Miller’s work to understand research genres, we learn something about the field. Ultimately, it shows how PPW values research as a form of social action that helps us respond to problems and build knowledge.

A crucial aspect of the article is understanding the research method used. Rather than collecting quantitative data or running experiments, Head develops her argument by reading and analyzing rhetoricians such as Barthes, Bitzer, and Austin. As Clary Lemon explains, “research does not start with a thesis statement. It starts with a question” (Lemons 6). Lemon also states that the research process is ‘recursive’, which requires researchers to move back and forth between ideas and sources (Lemon 6). This is exactly what Head is doing in her article. She allows her ideas to evolve through interpretation rather than proving a preexisting point. Instead of presenting a single answer, she creates meaning by exploring how language and legal discourse act within different contexts. In terms of PPW, this proves that research is not about confirming what a writer already believes, but about remaining open to different perspectives and developing ideas through engagement with existing discourse. The article teaches us that PPW values research as a process where knowledge is developed through interpretation and interaction.

Furthermore, Head challenges traditional ideas of meaning through its use of postmodern theory. She explains that the postmodern theory is difficult to define because it includes a wide range of “critical, strategic, and rhetorical practices” (50). In PPW, this perspective is important because the field does not treat knowledge as objective. Instead, meaning is created through language, context, and discourse. In legal writing, lawyers do not create completely original ideas; they rely on precedent, statutes, and past cases to build arguments. Since legal writing uses a shared language system, it is easy for AI to generate similar forms of text. This raises an important issue, because AI’s ability to replicate text proves that meaning is not tied to a single author. In PPW, this reinforces the idea that meaning comes from how readers and writers interact with existing discourse rather than from individual ownership.

By pushing her idea further, Head shows that writing is not only about meaning. Writing functions as a form of action; earlier theorists, such as Barthes, state that writing is constructed of shared language. Head builds on this by explaining that legal writing happens within a specific situation and has real effects. For example, she draws on the speech act theory, which proves that legal language produces real actions. It can be argued that the words themselves carry authority and create real consequences. But, we must ask: *who carries authority?* Lloyd Bitzer adds to the conversation by explaining how meaning shapes the relationship between the speaker and audience. Legal writing requires authority, intent, and participation within a situation. Yes, AI can imitate the structure and language of legal writing, but it cannot perform these actions. AI cannot act within a social environment because it cannot respond to rhetorical situations.

What does this mean for the field of PPW? Well, writing in the field is not treated as something neutral or passive; our writing has the power to act within real situations. The example of legal writing makes the argument clear and proves that language carries authority.

Writing in PPW is about understanding the impact our ideas have within a specific context.

Writers are expected to be aware of how their words function, who their audience is, and what actions they produce. Head's article teaches us that PPW values writing as an action that requires human judgment and awareness. This is how the field of PPW is powerful. We do not use words to describe the world; we help shape it.

Ultimately, genres shape how readers interpret and respond to writing within PPW, which is where Bawarshi becomes important. He explains that genres influence how texts are written, read, and understood. This means readers approach a text with prior knowledge and understanding of the genre and its expectations. In Head's article, the research genre positions readers to think about legal writing in terms of discourse and meaning rather than solely focusing on AI as a tool. Therefore, meaning is created through shared discourse, rather than by a singular author. Research genres reinforce this idea by guiding how readers interpret an argument and influencing what they gain from reading. In PPW, writing is more than a production; it is about shaping our understanding. By analyzing Head's research article through Bawarshi, we can see that reading and writing play a central role in constructing meaning.

Analyzing "The Death of the Lawyer" as a research genre reveals important values within the field of Professional and Public Writing. The article proves that research is not objective; it is shaped through discourse, genre, and interpretation. Her work demonstrates that writing functions through meaning and action, requiring awareness of audience and context. By engaging with other rhetoricians and building her argument through analysis, she reflects how knowledge in PPW is developed through engagement. Similarly, the research genre guides how readers understand and respond to ideas. Therefore, meaning is constructed through both reading and writing and through the writer and the reader. The article contributes to an ongoing

conversation about AI and legal writing, highlighting how the field of PPW values writing as a form of participation that shapes our understanding of the world.

Works Cited

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