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Black Linguistic Justice from Theory to Practice

While writing studies and linguistic scholarship has interrogated race and college writing instruction over the last fifty years, we contend that explicit, actionable, and supportive guidance on giving feedback to Black students' writing is still needed. Building on the legacy of work visible in the *Students' Right to Their Own Language* original (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1974) and updated (2006) annotated bibliography, as well as the crucial work done since then, our interdisciplinary team of linguists and writing studies scholars and students constructed the Students' Right to Their Own Writing website. We describe the research-based design of the website and share evaluations of the website from focus group sessions. Acknowledging the contingent and overburdened nature of the labor force in most writing programs, the focus group participants particularly appreciated the infographics, how-tos and how-not-tos, and samples of feedback. The result is a demonstration of how to actually take up the call to enact Black Linguistic Justice (Baker-Bell et al., "This Ain't Another Statement").

Black linguistic justice has yet to fully arrive in the curriculum and teaching practices of higher education. For this arrival to truly happen, Black college students must be part of this conversation. Students and their faculty instructors deserve to know about African American English

(AAE) so they can make informed decisions about their own language use in academic contexts (Charity Hudley et al., *Talking College*). To model how this process can happen, Black students have played a key role in the planning, design, and execution of this project as members of the research

Writing courses . . . can serve as an effective vehicle for empowering Black students with linguistic information about AAE.

team, specifically coauthors Rowell, Tano, and Johnson. Together we have created a website to provide tools for multiple audiences. Our primary audiences are Black students, who can use the website to advocate for linguistic justice in the writing classroom, and their instructors, so they can turn Black linguistic justice theory into practice. However, we recognize that this resource will also be useful for a tertiary audience of instructors who teach Black language practices to non-Black audiences whose writing benefits therefrom (Perryman-Clark, *Toward a Pedagogy of Linguistic Diversity*) and who use practices designed to serve Black students because they also serve other students of color, like the growing use of grading contracts (Inoue, *Labor-Based Grading Contracts*).

In this article, we describe the research-driven development of this website, Students' Right to Their Own Writing (SRTOW). SRTOW shares linguistic information about AAE with Black students and their instructors regardless of major. SRTOW guides students in advocating for their right to use AAE in the college writing classroom. It is the responsibility of college writing instructors to use pedagogical practices rooted in Black linguistic justice, so SRTOW contains resources specifically designed for faculty that describe sociolinguistically informed practices and skills directly relevant to the college writing context. Throughout the website, we give concrete suggestions that faculty can immediately apply to their feedback on student writing. The creation of SRTOW was an iterative process; we conducted faculty, student, and alum focus groups throughout to enhance the website's evidence base and usefulness.

Theoretical Impetus

Just as so many other social movements and advancements in the United States have started with the insights and actions of Black college students (see, e.g., Libresco; We The Protestors), our work is a step to answer their calls for educational justice and the desire to preserve their

identity and voices in learning environments. Black students are ready communicators and processors of the language varieties around them (Charity Hudley et al., *Talking College*), and we contend that brilliance must be curricularized. Yet information about the linguistic practices of African Americans is rarely incorporated into college and university curricula outside of a few fields of study, and students would benefit from the insights of linguistics as they interact with others, learn, and make sense of their worlds. A primary reason that linguistic information has not fully reached Black students is that linguistics as a discipline has primarily thrived at elite, Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). And as such, there are currently no Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) with linguistics as a standalone department. As a result, most courses about African American linguistics are taught at elite PWIs—which disproportionately under-enroll Black students (Horsford). As Ashkenas et al. summarize, “Even after decades of affirmative action, Black and Hispanic students are more underrepresented at the nation’s top colleges and universities than they were 35 years ago. The share of Black first-year students at elite schools has remained constant since 1980. Black students are just 6 percent of first-year students but 15 percent of college-age Americans” (para. 1). These inequities persist at the graduate level: only 3.5 percent of humanities doctoral recipients were African American in 2015 (“Humanities Indicators”).

In addition, structural challenges and barriers that are endemic to PWIs often inhibit the persistence and success of African American students and other students of color in higher education (Harper and Simmons). Writing courses, however, are both present and usually required at a wide range of colleges and universities; they can serve as an effective vehicle for empowering Black students with linguistic information about AAE (e.g., Perryman-Clark, *Afrocentric Teacher-Research*; Richardson) for several reasons. First-year and other writing courses often have goals for developing students’ rhetorical knowledge and linguistic agency. Understanding AAE—its cultural and linguistic nature and significance—is central to such development (Richardson) and has been found effective in increasing students’ rhetorical skills across racial demographics (Perryman-Clark, *Toward a Pedagogy of Linguistic Diversity*). Moreover, the field of composition has declared for decades that students have a right to their own language,

through the position statement *Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL)*, based largely on research on AAE (Conference on College Composition and Communication).

Because there is a need for more linguistic information to reach Black students, there is thus a need for accessible linguistic information that is specific and practical for writing instructors. When faculty who teach writing aim to honor students' right to their own language, they often grapple with how to simultaneously teach students standardized conventions (Charity Hudley and Mallinson, *We Do Language*; Delpit; Green). Even faculty who teach AAE as an academic topic vary in their responses to AAE in student papers and include feedback and revision suggestions that contradict their teaching that all language varieties are equal (Sedlacek et al.; Weldon).

AAE has a long history that is robustly documented in literature from sociolinguistics and related areas. AAE is widely spoken across the United States (for an overview, see Bloomquist et al.; Lanehart; Rickford and Rickford). Yet particularly strong linguistic biases against AAE are well documented, including in writing assessment (e.g., Fogel and Ehri; Gilyard and Richardson; Johnson and Van Brackle; Matarese and Anson; Mosher; Taylor). Educator bias tilts in favor of students who speak and write in more standardized ways. This tilt is a significant contributing factor to structural inequality for African American students (see, e.g., Charity et al., "Familiarity with School English"; Charity Hudley and Mallinson, *Understanding English Language Variation*). As a result, sociolinguistic research has addressed the need to mitigate such barriers for African American students, while demonstrating that African American student success can be supported and enhanced by having students learn about African American language and culture (see, e.g., Alim and Baugh; Ball; Fogel and Ehri; Labov). In writing studies, there is much scholarship that supports and builds on SRTOL theoretically and pedagogically (e.g., Baker-Bell; Baker-Bell et al.; Inoue, *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies*, "How Do We Language"; Perryman-Clark, *Afrocentric Teacher-Research*; Richardson; Young, *Should Writers Use They Own English?*). But there is less scholarship detailing the concrete skills necessary for instructors to implement curricula that value language variation in their day-to-day practices, although scholars have provided information on AAE features for college writing instructors (e.g., Redd and Webb). Meanwhile, existing work on skills in language variation is aimed at

K–12 teachers more often than college instructors (e.g., Ball; Charity Hudley and Mallinson, *English Language Variation, We Do Language*).

Empirical Research Base

In response to this lack of concrete skills for instructors and the paucity of opportunities for most college writing instructors to learn about how to address AAE and other language variations in the classroom, Franz and Petty Grue, in their respective dissertations, examined instructor feedback on AAE and ways to weave Black linguistic justice into writing, rhetoric, and composition doctoral programs. Through a review of writing and rhetoric PhD programs, Petty Grue (*Walking the Walk*) found that the vast majority of institutions don't offer required courses on race and only somewhat more offer elective courses on race. Those that did came from a wide variety of institutions in terms of college versus university, but certainly, the majority of the top ten programs were either state schools, minority-serving institutions (MSIs), or HBCUs. Such curricular exclusions add to the need for graduate students and faculty alike to seek digital spaces to learn about race and writing studies. Resources like the SRTOW website, which was created with input from faculty and students across institution types, join those spaces in doing the work that should be at the center of writing, rhetoric, and composition—not pushed to the margins.

Franz used a variationist sociolinguistic lens to investigate what and how linguistic features were rewarded, penalized, and otherwise responded to—including via grades—in student papers in community college composition courses. In interviews and curricular documents, the composition instructors expressed goals for rhetorical variation and linguistic flexibility. At the same time, analysis of graded papers demonstrated that instructors often corrected, penalized, or inaccurately labeled AAE patterns. These results suggest the need for models for grading and responding to AAE in light of common instructional goals for rhetorical variation. The SRTOW website is a direct response to this need.

The SRTOW Website: An Iterative Research Project

A Research Initiative grant (<https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/awards/researchinitiative>) from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) allowed us to construct a research design for our website that was

iterative in nature. Empirical research methodologies informed all stages of the website's creation, including the authors' empirical research on college writing (Franz, *Instructor Response to Language Variation*) and writing programs (Petty Grue, *Walking the Walk*). This work informed the initial draft of the website and the intentional inclusion of Black student researchers to ensure Black students' needs and perspectives remained at the forefront of the project. We also worked with focus groups to ensure multiple audiences were able to provide vital feedback on how these constituents would use the website and what still needed to be added in order to meet our stated goals. This multistage, research-informed website design process thus enabled us to apply current Black linguistic justice theory and knowledge about AAE in the creation of a website that foregrounds what Black college students deserve to know and what their instructors need to know about AAE to the issue of writing feedback and grading, which is pertinent across disciplines.

To comprehensively create the SRTOW website, we posed the following research questions:

1. How can Black students be empowered to advocate for themselves and the right to their own languages in classrooms where their writing is graded?
 - a. How can students use information on language variation to advocate for the right to their own languages in classrooms?
 - b. How can students use information about grading processes to advocate for the right to their own languages in classrooms?
 - c. How can the information described in (a) and (b) be made accessible to students?
2. How can writing instructors be educated by students, knowledge about AAE, and the information addressed in the previous questions on how to grade student writing to enact students' right to their own languages?

Stage 1: Theory into Practice

The first stage of our research process was to consider contemporary grading practices of college writing and the present theories on how to better serve Black students in the college writing classroom. We found that common approaches to grading writing tend to reward assimilation to a set

of dominant writing expectations (Canagarajah). This approach can “easily be racist” (Inoue, *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* 52), penalizing students for or requiring

them to edit their own language patterns, including particular features of AAE (Franz, *A Linguistically Inclusive Approach*; Kynard; Matarese and Anson, *Teacher Response to AAE Features*; Mitchell and Randolph; Young, *Should Writers Use They Own English?* and Young-Rivera, *It Ain't What It Is*). Such practices have implications for gatekeeper courses and assessments, such as writing placement exams, which disproportionately fail students of color (Poe et al.). Our previous research found that even when course objectives emphasize students' linguistic agency, writing assessment does not reward language variation (Franz, *A Linguistically Inclusive Approach*).

Writing programs impact students and the university community through first-year composition programs; writing across the curriculum programs at some colleges and universities; and the cross-campus work they do for undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty in writing centers. Yet, a qualitative survey-based study of the perception of race in writing programs found that many programs “either do not consider or only marginally consider race when developing and administering their writing programs” (García de Müller and Ruiz). Indeed, Petty Grue's research of doctoral programs in writing, rhetoric, and composition shows that 71 percent of the seventy-nine programs in her study offered no required courses that mentioned race in their titles or course descriptions. García de Müller and Ruiz found that their respondents with the highest confidence in their support in doing intersectional writing studies work were at institutions that offered frequent professional development on race, though such institutions were rare. Repeated, supported structural resources provided by their institutions made scholars feel more confident in doing intersectional writing studies work. Our scholar and educator focus group participants, such as Dr. Kendra Mitchell, Dr. David Green, and Candice Thornton, reiterated this point and suggested that the website guides be used in workshops for writing centers in addition to writing programs. We are working to create workshops for students and faculty that draw from both the *Talking College* book and the website resources discussed earlier in order to facilitate website use. See Table 1 for our key takeaways.

Our website provides resources for both students and faculty that inform feedback, grading, and revision in ways that support Black students' linguistic agency.

Table 1. Key Takeaways

Evidence-Based Need	How SRTOW Addresses This Need
Practical support on African American English and writing for faculty, including faculty without a background in linguistics	Updating advice from Purdue OWL and providing more critically informed content on audience, genre, organization, word choice, and grammar
Repeated professional development on race, language variation, and writing	Featuring self-assessment questions, infographics, sample graded papers, and sample grading criteria that can be used for workshops for instructors and writing center tutors
SRTOL-informed postcollege writing preparation for Black students	Using input from recent Black college graduates to inform content on voice and questions to ask when revising

It was not messaging alone that made the difference, but practical support that enabled instructors to feel confident in doing work that, for many faculty members, was not included in the training they received when they earned their doctorates (Petty Grue, *Walking the Walk*). Respondents in García de Müeller and Ruiz also mentioned that the most effective professional development carefully avoided putting faculty of color in the department on the spot and instead featured articles by authors from various racial, gender, and social class backgrounds that addressed these issues in both subject content and pedagogy. One respondent had monthly staff development meetings that at times featured race or gender in the classroom and taught controversial topics. What made these meetings most helpful was the “forum for voicing all kinds of concerns in the classroom/curriculum” (García de Müeller and Ruiz 31). In the same way that the discipline often expects new teachers to take a course throughout their first semester or year teaching, it might be worthwhile to have monthly meetings to discuss the “roses and thorns” of teaching a newly intersectional curriculum. Thus, our website provides resources for both students and faculty that inform feedback, grading, and revision in ways that support Black students’ linguistic agency and enable faculty to talk with their students, which for many may include future writing instructors, about what such assessment looks like. In the resources we have created, we offer examples to support

students as they interact with writing instructors. We also provide writing materials and examples of feedback to support instructors as they respond to student writing and design writing prompts. We also update advice from the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) and provide new content that is more critically informed.

As faculty and students engage with AAE in students' writing, they can reconsider the sometimes competing messages they may be sending and receiving about writing expectations for Black college students. Feedback and grades on written work often send the message that AAE has no place in college writing, even though many Black college students use AAE rhetorically in their writing (Perryman Clark, "African American Language"). This message denies students the right to their own language and overlooks the tension a Black student encounters when the use of Standard English may result in having their authentic Blackness questioned (see Mitchell and Randolph). Moreover, while particular AAE features are frequently corrected and penalized by instructors, such correction does not motivate student learning and can take students' attention away from other important features of their writing (Redd and Webb). Students need better instruction on how to maintain their Black voices as an authentic part of the experience of engaging in and navigating academic writing. The resources we have created through this project provide many alternatives to correction and grade penalties. These alternative feedback approaches include developing students' metalinguistic awareness by pointing out discursive, grammatical, and spelling patterns in student papers and asking students to consider how they may use these patterns more purposefully, such as to establish a relationship with their audience, to enact the right to their own language, or to strive for language empowerment.

Charity Hudley and Mallinson (*We Do Language*) address these issues in secondary English. For this project, we are building on our 6–12 educator teaching and research experiences that we developed as part of the Virginia College & Career Readiness Initiative. That discussion continued as we created the William & Mary Scholars Undergraduate Research Experience, an undergraduate research program for high-achieving students from underrepresented backgrounds (Dickter et al.). Talking to William & Mary

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scholars about their writing, we learned that they received various kinds of feedback from their professors, including feedback that supported them as Black student writers and feedback that discriminated against them as Black student writers.

In 2018, our team began the *Talking College Project*, a four-year study, where we worked with over one hundred Black and African American undergraduate and graduate students across the United States. Students shared about their linguistic experiences in college and why recognition and respect for Black language and culture are things that all Black college students need to know about (Charity Hudley et al., *Talking College*). Black college students deserve to reap the benefits of decades of linguistic research into Black language practices, including the specific variety often referred to as AAE. Linguists know that all languages and varieties have inherent value. From a Black-centered perspective, the cultural value of Black language practices is even more important. Through language and communication, social relationships and community belonging are forged. The need for this information to reach Black students is a critical equity issue in education as we support all students to claim and create their own linguistic and cultural destinies. Black language matters because Black lives matter.

The SRTOW website is a specific, targeted intervention that is both an answer to the call for Black linguistic justice issued within writing, rhetoric, and composition (Baker-Bell et al.) and a direct extension of the multipronged approach called for in *Talking College: Making Space for Black Language Practices in Higher Education* (Charity Hudley et al.), an African American student-centered book with a focus on what African American students in higher education deserve to know about linguistics. The book concludes by expanding the framework of the scholarship of teaching and learning of Black students (Charity Hudley et al., *Talking College*) in the form of liberatory linguistics. *Liberatory linguistics* are intentionally designed by Black people (as well as people from other communities in solidarity) and are expressly focused on Black languages, language varieties, linguistic expression, and communicative practices within the ongoing struggle for Black liberation.

Stage 2: Student Researchers

We began this article by acknowledging the pivotal part Black students have had in advancing social movements in the United States. The faculty authors

of this article were motivated from the beginning of the project to include Black students due to our mutual dedication to agentic Black scholarship and student success. Hannah has experience as a white educator of Black students across settings such as K–12 schools, community and four-year colleges, and scholarship foundations. In all of these roles, she continually strives to be a “Dreamkeeper” for African American students by “questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice” of educational systems (Ladson-Billings 140). Michelle has worked to ground her research on higher education in race-based theories and has also worked to recruit Black students from University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) in her research projects. These students come from some of the expected honors spaces, but Michelle has been intentional about also choosing students from basic writing classes who have the potential to be strong researchers, if only someone gave them the opportunity and training.

The role of the student researcher in this project is essential. We cannot empower students to advocate for sociolinguistically informed writing assessment without substantial contributions from African American college students. Thus, our CCCC grant included funding for the Black undergraduate and graduate researchers who have contributed to the design and content of these resources and who serve as coauthors on this paper (see Table 2). While we evaluated and improved our working draft of the guide based on the focus group feedback described later, our web design graduate student assistant, Angela Rowell, designed the web version. Angela earned a BA in media studies with a minor in English, completed a post-baccalaureate program in speech-language pathology (SLP), and recently graduated from the SLP master’s program at San Francisco State University. She was motivated to participate in the project due to her passion for affirming Black students’ linguistic and cultural identities within educational spaces. Undergraduate research assistant Sierra J. Johnson is a recent graduate of the College of William & Mary in linguistics. Sierra contributed literary examples to the website to support both students and instructors. She also conducted research on finding your voice in writing and worked to construct a method to help students figure out how to picture an audience as they write by using an antiracist version of the Purdue OWL model. Sierra had conducted research prior to this project that involved Black American English as well as the social stigma toward the dialect

inside and outside of higher academia. As a Black scholar who speaks this dialect fluently, she has both studied and experienced the stigma firsthand, which aids her in her onus to combat the implicit and explicit biases toward it. Graduate student assistant Marie Tano recently received a BA in cognitive science from Pomona College and is currently a PhD student in linguistics at Stanford University. As a child of West African immigrants, Marie is passionate about work that acknowledges the diverse repertoires and linguistic experiences of Black individuals across the globe. She applied her own experiences in academia to the website content and found relevant literature in sociolinguistics to help inform the rationale behind this project.

Stage 3: Drafting the SRTOW Website

SRTOW includes a guide for writing instructors and a guide for students. The stages of the website development included creating content for the guide based on our prior work, gathering feedback from student and faculty focus groups, updating content based on these focus groups, designing the guide's web format, and disseminating the guide through targeted outlets. We began drafting the website text in summer 2020 and completed the first draft on September 10, 2020. The instructor guide and student guide each include the following sections:

Table 2. Coauthors (Project Participants)

Name	Role at Time of Participation	Contribution to the Project
Hannah Franz	Scholarship foundation graduate advisor	Coprincipal investigator
Anne Charity Hudley	Higher education faculty—education and linguistics	Coprincipal investigator
Michelle Petty Grue	Higher education faculty—writing studies	Coauthor
Sierra J. Johnson	Undergraduate student—linguistics	Student assistant and coauthor: Content development
Angela Rowell	Graduate student—speech-language pathology	Student assistant and coauthor: Website design
Marie Tano	Graduate student—linguistics	Student assistant and coauthor: Content development

- Types of Grading, Feedback, and Revision
- African American English in College Student Writing
- African American English Across Genres
- Audience
- Further Resources

The instructor guide additionally includes a section on students' writing experiences in K–12. Our goal for each section is to demonstrate and explain practical examples. For instructors, we exemplify comments on student papers, rubrics, grading approaches, and explanations of these approaches to share with students. Examples of comments cover recommendations for responding to language variation in ways that support students' right to their own language and examples of how *not* to respond. We have based these practical examples on empirical findings about instructor comments (Franz, *Instructor Response to Language Variation*) and what has worked in K–12 contexts (Charity Hudley and Mallinson, *Understanding English Language Variation, We Do Language*), as well as the theories behind SRTOL. For students, we emphasize questions to ask instructors during class, office hours, and individual conferences. These student tools are driven by our research into what Black college students need and deserve to know (Charity Hudley et al., *Talking College*). Our approach provides both instructors and students with immediate, theoretically grounded take-aways for their practice or college studies.

The website content was therefore directly informed by our prior work, specifically our analyses of writing and rhetoric curricula (Petty Grue, *Walking the Walk*), instructor grades and comments on student writing (Franz, *A Linguistically Inclusive Approach*), and writing teachers' application of understandings of language variation to their classroom practices (Charity Hudley and Mallinson, *Understanding English Language Variation, We Do Language*). Our research findings helped us determine what specific language patterns and styles to emphasize throughout the guide. We also used our findings to generate the sample comments and rubrics and create questions for students to ask their instructors. Examples include making it an A-worthy effort in the "word choice" section of the rubric to use diction that "is sophisticated in its experimentation and shows consideration of using Black/African American Vernacular English, among other dialects,

Spanglish, and languages other than English” (Petty Grue, *Assignment for Writing 1*, 1). These example rubrics and comments on student writing were drawn from the authors’ classroom materials and former students’ work, with permission from students. Some feedback comments were drawn from the original feedback, whereas others were designed as examples for this project.

For instructors, the section “Types of Grading, Feedback, and Revision” describes the variation that students may experience in grading approaches from high school to college and across instructors and where students might get confused. We demonstrate how instructors can explain their own approach to prevent this confusion. This section also provides sample rubrics and other strategies for aligning grading approaches with students’ right to their own language. For students, the “Types of Grading, Feedback, and Revision” section similarly explains different approaches so that students can understand how different instructors may use grades, feedback, and rubrics differently (Balester). This section opens with questions that students can ask during office hours or class, such as “I see you made a lot of comments on ____ (ex: grammar, punctuation, citation, etc.) _____. This pattern/style is new to me. Can you explain how to use it or point me to some resources on this pattern/style?”

The section “African American English in College Student Writing,” called “African American English in Graded Writing” in the student guide, describes organizational, lexical, grammatical, and mechanical features of AAE used in college student writing (see Figure 1). In the instructor version, for each set of features, we give examples of the feature type, examples of how to comment on the feature, and examples of how not to comment on the feature. We explain how to comment using an explicit description that highlights the value of AAE features. In this way, we provide strategies for implementing pedagogical recommendations such as those from Young (*It Ain’t What It Is*) that writing be taught descriptively rather than prescriptively. We provide full student papers in two sample graded versions: a how-to-respond version and a how-not-to-respond version. These sample graded papers put together our recommended responses (and discouraged responses) to AAE organization, word choice, grammar, and spelling.

We recruited our undergraduate research assistant, Sierra Johnson, to work on the “Genre” and “Audience” sections. For the “Genre” section,

Student Guide: African American English in Graded Writing



SUMMARY & QUESTIONS TO ASK



ORGANIZATIONAL STYLES



WORD CHOICE



GRAMMAR PATTERNS



SPELLING VARIATION

Figure 1. Menu page for "African American English in Graded Writing."

Sierra located literary examples that demonstrated the use of AAE. These examples included fiction, nonfiction, and an anthology. For each work, Sierra wrote a synopsis, trigger warnings, and a description of the writing style and language used. These selections served to illustrate the possibility of using readings that incorporated AAE significantly and provided an opportunity for more diverse linguistic representation during the learning process. In the “Audience” section, Sierra investigated ways to rework the audience model from Purdue OWL using a more inclusive, antiracist schema. Sierra revised the model that Purdue OWL currently has for guiding students with idealizing their audience by applying ways to include African American verbal traditions (Williams) and examples from published works. The works used in the examples included excerpts from popular poetry, speeches, and novels under Black authorship. See Franz et al. for content examples and accompanying explanations.

Stage 4: Collecting Feedback

In our early stages of content development, we presented an outline of SR-TOW and its rationale at the Second Annual Advancing African American Linguist(ic)s Symposium in August 2020 (Franz and Grue). Linguists and educators from a range of colleges, universities, and K–12 schools attended our virtual presentation. Attendees provided a wealth of feedback during our question and answer session and throughout the presentation in the session’s chat box. Attendees shared their own experiences with colleagues and students that demonstrated the need for the information we presented and recommended resources to incorporate, such as examples of written AAE in academic genres and literature.

This early feedback helped us design questions for formal focus groups. We conducted focus groups with groups of (1) faculty and doctoral students and (2) current college students and recent college alums. Here, we report on the findings from the faculty and doctoral student focus groups. See Franz et al. for a description of our college student and alum focus group findings. We conducted four focus groups with a total of thirteen faculty members and doctoral students in fall 2020. Table 2 lists the roles and disciplines of our participants. We provided participants with a working draft of the guide content before the meeting. The scholars who participated covered the disciplines of rhetoric and composition, education, and linguistics.

We recruited more established scholars and emerging scholars, including graduate students, who research AAE and literacy instruction in college and K–12 schools. The more established scholars have years of experience presenting information about AAE to teachers across the United States and the world. Emerging scholars bring new exigencies regarding what is missing from the existing materials on language variation for nonlinguists. We also recruited senior composition scholars who do not have a research focus on AAE to learn how we might most effectively address audiences familiar with writing instruction but without expertise in language variation. We recruited high school English teachers who have collaborated with us on research projects in the past and who teach students who speak AAE. The perspectives of high school English teachers with knowledge of AAE provided us with insight into incoming college students' experiences with writing instruction, writing feedback, and language variation in writing.

Stage 5: Addressing Participant Feedback

As we expanded SRTOW, we used focus group feedback to prioritize what participants found most valuable. We added content to the website in response to participants' insight and experiences with audience and language variation. The faculty and doctoral student focus groups also crucially helped us to reframe some of the content in terms of formative versus summative feedback. This and other participant feedback helped maximize SRTOW's potential to meet the needs of the instructor side of our audience, while also sharpening our plans for dissemination of the website to those who need it.

Overall Value of the SRTOW Website

Focus group participants (see Table 3) urged the authors to use this project and future work on graded writing to address the linguistic violence that students have endured for so long, from the red pen and other feedback methods. Part of that effort needs to acknowledge the most considerable trouble with trying to help teachers is that when we talk about the presence of AAE in an academic paper, we tend to think in terms of difference; it has to be either/or. As focus group participant dr. vay said, AAE is and should be portrayed as an academic language variety. Both dr. vay and Perryman-Clark (*Toward a Pedagogy of Linguistic Diversity*) evidence this belief in their

Table 3. Focus Group Participants

Name/Pseudonym	Role at Time of Participation	Contribution to the Project
Kirsten Bradley	High school educator – English	Focus group participant
Mary Bucholtz	Higher education faculty – Linguistics	Focus group participant
Kendra Calhoun	Graduate student – Linguistics	Focus group participant
Jeremy Edwards	Graduate student – Education	Focus group participant
Jessi Grieser	Higher education faculty – Linguistics	Focus group participant
David Green	Higher education faculty – English	Focus group participant
Teaira McMurtry	Higher education faculty – Education	Focus group participant
deandre miles-hercules	Graduate student – Linguistics	Focus group participant
Kendra Mitchell	Higher education faculty – English	Focus group participant
Jamaal Muwwakkil	Graduate student – Linguistics	Focus group participant
Candice Thornton	Graduate student – English	Focus group participant
dr. vay	Higher education faculty – English	Focus group participant

own work. In our focus groups, dr. vay also emphasized the ways in which Black individuals often use rich African American patterns of oration in their writing. Educators should take such an opportunity to make use of this linguistic diversity by drawing upon articles by Bonnie Williams-Farrier and Lena Ampadu, harnessing and building up pride in Black language.

The focus group participants appreciated the website's information on how to implement SRTOL and related work in their teaching—the actual details of “what to put on the paper.” Focus group participants acknowledged work such as Baker-Bell's *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy* as helpful for laying out the theory, especially in the K–12 educational context. While participants appreciated our goal to accentuate how-to examples, they also pointed to the value of including why instructors should implement these examples. In response, we added a brief background section on theories of race and language in writing pedagogy. This section describes the implications of personally mediated raciolinguicism, institutional raciolinguicism, and internalized raciolinguicism for the writing classroom (see Charity Hudley and Martin, forthcoming). As such, this section sets up the examples we provide as part of antiracist pedagogy.

Many educators still face the challenge of learning about what AAE is and what it is not (Gupta). Our website gives guidance on this challenge and provides educators with references to further their knowledge. In addition, we share examples of forms of writing so that readers can see the most common AAE patterns that college students use in their writing in context. We found that our focus group participants agreed that making certain documents like rubrics explicitly call attention to AAE was important both for students and instructors. Educators can learn through a dialogic model of responding to feedback and reshowing it to faculty and students. In this way, we show we are language learners along with our students.

Language Variation and Audience

While this project has a focus on college writing, we found that having feedback from both high school and college educators was valuable. Students in the focus groups often referenced their high school writing experiences, which added to our motivation to include the perspectives of high school teachers along with college faculty so we could address what skills and knowledge students are bringing with them into the college writing classroom. Dr. Mary Bucholtz, a focus group participant and linguistics professor, commented that class assignments tend to call for students to write to an abstract audience rather than a specific intended audience, let alone actual readers. Our prior research has revealed a lack of actualized readers as well (Franz, *A Linguistically Inclusive Approach*). In this model, audience adaptation goals are reduced to teaching students to write to an implicitly white, usually explicitly academic, audience, reinforced through grading and feedback (Banks; Franz, *A Linguistically Inclusive Approach*). Another of our focus group participants, Mrs. Kirsten Bradley, addresses this challenge in her teaching of high school English. Mrs. Bradley encourages her student writers to make choices based on real readers. In peer feedback sessions, her students respond to the question, "What is the impact of this piece of writing?" as they read each other's work. Our discussion with Mrs. Bradley motivated us to add a section on peer feedback to SRTOW. This type of peer feedback instruction helps to highlight the subjectivity of readers as students center in on their intended audiences.

With this approach, Mrs. Bradley also helped her high school seniors understand that feedback and revision are about more than grammar when they had learned otherwise from years of standardized writing test prepara-

tion. High school and college educators who are encouraging more variation in writing often have to counter their students' previous instruction. Therefore, it's important for educators to formulate rubrics that are more amenable to language variation. And this allowance of flexibility has to be explicit in every level of feedback. Emphasizing reader impact aligns with the goals of many African American students to engage a particular audience. Many Black writers are accustomed to the linguistic double-consciousness of writing to multiple audiences (Du Bois; Rickford and Rickford; Smitherman). SRTOW seeks to maintain "a focus on African American students writing for their own communities and for all students writing for multiple communities" (Banks 31). For example, instructors can teach variation in grammatical elements, such as person and voice, according to audience and purpose, even within academic genres. In contrast, teaching static rules about grammatical elements, such as second person or passive voice, reinforces a homogeneous style and implies that academic audiences are homogeneous.

Formative Assessment and Grading

Another key issue that arose out of our faculty focus group discussions is that many teachers are in the habit of referring to "grading" versus "formative assessment." A discussion on the realities of college instruction is necessary. Some instructors, especially adjuncts and teaching assistants, are in situations that require grading and provide few opportunities for revision and genuine formative assessment that includes feedback to guide revision. Yet writing studies scholars, especially those focused on antiracist pedagogy (Inoue, *Antiracist Writing Assessment*; Perryman-Clark *Who We Aren't Assessing*), call for formative assessment and a movement away from grades. Focus group participant Dr. McMurtry called for the guide to include a discussion of different kinds of formative assessment and examples thereof, such as audio-recorded feedback and writing conference, or examples of rubrics co-constructed by instructors and students (see Lipson and Wixon).

Reaching Writing Instructors

Ultimately, our focus group participants encouraged us to think critically about how to most effectively reach our intended audiences, who may have different capacity levels. Dr. Jessi Grieser, a sociolinguist, suggested emphasizing downloadable documents that have enough information but

not too much so that busier instructors could implement the information effectively into their own instruction. A full load for a writing instructor can involve an amount ranging from three to six courses per semester, equating to a total of sixty to one hundred students or more at any given point throughout the entire school year (Lee). Additionally, many writing instructors have a plethora of academic and administrative duties. As such, finding time to provide effective feedback to students could be more difficult (Lee). Therefore, the main goal for our guides is to promote instructor education on feedback as efficiently as possible. One of our student research assistants, Angela Rowell, designed infographics that summarized key feedback and grading practices (see Figure 2), as well as other graphics for the site (see Figure 3). Our next steps are to focus on implementation evaluation and observation from faculty and students who use the website

Culturally Sustaining Approach	Traditional Approach
 Asks questions about students' choices rather than directly correcting.	 Penalizes usage of African American English (AAE) through direct corrections.
 Uses explicit descriptions to help students understand feedback.	 Labels AAE as "informal," "confusing," "unclear," or "off-topic."
 Highlights your subjectivity as a reader, acknowledging alternative audiences.	 Assumes only a White, standardized-English speaking audience.
 Rewards linguistic flexibility.	 Rewards linguistic assimilation.



Figure 2. Infographic contrasting our recommendations with traditional feedback and grading approaches.



Figure 3. Sample graphic.

and particular guides. In other work, we detail the feedback from current undergraduates and our own former students that we used to develop the website and guides (Franz et al.). Student focus group participants were interested in the guide's potential to support the development of students' own individual voices as writers, especially as those voices include AAE (see also Hankerson). Student focus group participants shared that our recommendations for questions to ask instructors could give students a way to turn feedback into a conversation and, in the process, advocate for the right to their own writing.

Conclusion

Writing programs are uniquely situated to address race in the context of college student writing. Franz's forthcoming book, *A Linguistically Inclusive Approach to Grading Writing: A Practical Guide*, is written for college writing instructors. Elaborating on the instructor portion of SRTOW, the book details the specific practices of a sociolinguistically informed approach to grading and feedback. As the book exemplifies grading and comments, it grounds the recommendations in Black linguistic justice, variationist sociolinguistics, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. While research driven,

the book maintains a practical focus for a teaching readership, explicitly taking into account considerations of busy writing instructors and different programmatic contexts for responding to student work.

In other future work, we plan to gather and learn from the writing experiences of Black alums and how their college writing preparation has shaped these experiences, following the model of the Wayfinding Project (Alexander et al.). Our focus group with recent Black college alums has already provided some insight into how writing instructors and programs can better support Black students in their postcollege writing preparation (Franz et al.). Such knowledge will further inform the advice for instructors and students on the SRTOW website by addressing how to prepare Black students to adapt their writing across the workplace and other contexts and to advocate for their writer's voice in these contexts.

Our final message is for faculty and students to be proactive in creating a curricular and instructional environment that sustains Black student writers and their linguistic agency. We intend for the SRTOW website to assist you in these efforts by providing materials and examples for teaching, assessment, and advocacy in the classroom, in programs and departments, and the larger institutional level.

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