

## **Privileging writing over speech in teaching contexts**

*Author:* Terence Rajivan Edward

*Abstract.* Jacques Derrida famously claims that the Western philosophical tradition has privileged speech over writing. In this paper, I present two teaching-related contexts in which it makes sense to privilege writing over speech.

Jacques Derrida is associated with a claim about how speech and writing have been valued in the Western tradition. Explaining Derrida's perspective, Sarah Richmond writes:

According to Derrida, Western thought, from at least Plato onwards, has repeatedly propagated a false hierarchy, placing speech above writing. Philosophers have regarded writing with suspicion, as a dangerous repository of thought, in which the speaker's intentions are likely to be betrayed. (1996: 39)

In this paper, I wish to present two contexts in which it makes sense to favour writing over speech.

(i) Given their ends and yours, some students need to acquire some information and you are the best they can hope for; but if you convey it by teaching in classrooms, they cannot resist misbehaving severely or otherwise preventing the imparting of information. There is something about you which causes that reaction or something about the topic material or the enforcement of norms in the teaching situation, perhaps the mere thought "What is to stop us from doing this?" They interrupt; they ask distracting questions; they deliberately misinterpret. For example,

if you offer an analogy from football to illustrate a point, a student asks, “So you are interested in football now?” In this situation, it may be better for you to communicate by writing instead, if the option is available.

(ii) There are two professionals in different subfields of one field and they are both highly respected figures in their subfields. Nevertheless, they regard each other as idiots and as failing to understand some important things, which matter for the field as a whole. They might be two economists, or two medics, or two philosophers. It is important for them to communicate with each other and share information but this is much easier by writing. Each party explains things to the other and the other reacts more patiently when reading the text, compared with during face-to-face interaction.

## **References**

Derrida, J.1977 (originally 1972). Signature Event Context. *Glyph* 1: 172-197.

Richmond, S. 1996. Derrida and Analytical Philosophy: Speech Acts and their Force. *European Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1): 38-62.