



**One Book,  
Four Years of Writing:**  
How Appalachian State  
University's RC Program  
Built a Custom Text That  
Reflects Who They Are

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The Rhetoric and Composition program at Appalachian State University runs one of the more unusual writing curricula in American higher education: four required writing courses, vertically sequenced from the first year through the senior capstone, woven across every major on campus. The first two levels—RC 1000 and RC 2001—are taught by the RC program and are the critical foundation for everything that follows.

For years, those two courses operated without a shared text. Faculty used a patchwork of materials—portions of a customized Writer's Reference, individual instructor choices from a range of supplementary readers, and a hard-copy rental program that varied widely from section to section. The experience was inconsistent for students moving between courses and instructors, and it made it difficult to build and communicate a coherent program identity.

Working with Macmillan Learning Custom Solutions, Senior Lecturer Kelly Terzaken led a committee-driven effort to consolidate all of that into a single, program-defining e-book: a custom text that serves both RC 1000 and RC 2001, draws on curated Macmillan content alongside original program-authored material, and embeds links to campus resources from the writing center, the library, and the writing across the curriculum program.

The result is a book that, in Terzaken's words, "represents our values in many ways"—and that gives every student entering the program the same grounding in what Appalachian State's RC program believes writing instruction should be.

## At a Glance

**Institution:** Appalachian State University

**Department:** Rhetoric and Composition (housed in English)

**Courses Served:** RC 1000 (First-Year Writing) and RC 2001 (Intro to Writing Across the Curriculum)

**Base Content:** Curated Macmillan readings (Bedford/St. Martin's) + original program-authored front matter

**Delivery:** Digital e-book via Vital Source, embedded in Moodle LMS (transitioning to Canvas)

**Launched:** Approximately 2022

**Primary Contact:** Kelly Terzaken,  
Senior Lecturer & Customization Committee Chair

**Current Rep:** Scott Kelly





# Background and Context

## The RC Program and its Vertical Writing Curriculum

Appalachian State's writing curriculum is built on a premise most institutions don't attempt: every student, regardless of major, takes four writing courses across their four years. The RC program teaches the first two. RC 1000 is the foundational first-year writing course. RC 2001 is an introduction to writing across the curriculum—a bridge course that prepares students to understand how writing works in different academic disciplines before they take a discipline-specific writing course in their junior year and a capstone course as seniors.

Kelly Terzaken, an 18-year veteran of first and second-year writing instruction, is also a writing across the curriculum (WAC) consultant at the university—a role that gives her visibility into how writing instruction plays out across the entire vertical sequence. She chaired the committee that developed the custom text and served as the primary liaison with Macmillan throughout the process.

### A Long Relationship with Macmillan

The RC program's relationship with Macmillan's Bedford/St. Martin's imprint predates the custom project by many years. The program has brought Bedford/St. Martin's scholars to campus—Peter Elbow, Nancy Sommers, Nedra Reynolds among them—and has long drawn from the Bedford catalog for course readings. That established relationship was a meaningful asset when the program decided to pursue a custom solution.





# The Challenge

## Fragmentation Across a Multi-Section Program

Before the custom text, the RC program's materials situation was, by Terzaken's description, a collection of "a lot of different moving pieces." The department used a customized version of *A Writer's Reference* as part of a campus rental program, but individual faculty layered on top of that with their own supplementary choices—*An Insider's Guide*, *Writing About Writing*, and others. All of these were hard copies. The result varied "wildly across courses."

A student moving from one RC section to another, or taking RC 1000 with one instructor and RC 2001 with another, might encounter entirely different reading materials. That inconsistency undermined a core goal of the vertical writing curriculum: ensuring students build a coherent, cumulative understanding of writing before they move into their discipline-specific coursework.

## No Text Reflected the Program's Identity

Beyond consistency, the program faced a more fundamental challenge: none of the available off-the-shelf texts accurately represented what the RC program actually does. RC 2001—the introduction to writing across the curriculum—focuses on discourse communities, writing in different disciplines, and preparing

students for writing in their majors. Few existing textbooks address that directly, and none of them carried the institutional voice and values of the Appalachian State RC program.

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**When I go to conferences and I talk to other faculty members and I hear about the programs at their institutions, it's very different. We have a very special model, and to be able to have a textbook that represents that is really important.”**

– Kelly Terzaken, Senior Lecturer  
& Customization Committee Chair

## The Rental-to-Digital Transition

The timing of the custom project coincided with a campus-wide shift: the bookstore moved all rental materials to the Vital Source digital platform. This meant the department was designing a digital resource from the start—which changed what was possible. A digital book could link out to campus websites, writing center resources, and library tools with a click rather than a URL. It could be as long as needed without cost implications tied to print volume. And students would always have it: no forgotten copies, no out-of-print issues, no cost difference between owning and renting.



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# The Solution: A Program-Defining Custom E-Book

## Structure and Content

The custom text is organized in two main parts. The first is an Appalachian State-specific front section authored by the RC program and its campus partners. This section establishes the program's identity, values, and expectations—covering the vertical writing curriculum, e-portfolio requirements (the program is portfolio-based), and links to campus resources including the writing center, the library, and the WAC program. It sets the context for everything that follows.

The second part draws from curated Macmillan/Bedford content: readings and sections selected by faculty from materials they were already using and wanted to retain, plus content from *An Insider's Guide to Academic Writing* that supports the writing-in-the-disciplines focus of RC 2001. The table of contents was organized collaboratively with the Macmillan team to ensure the pieces cohered logically.

## One Text, Two Courses

A central design goal was to make the book serve both RC 1000 and RC 2001. Instructors can assign readings from either section of the book depending on course level, and some readings appear in both courses—intentionally. The program views some repetition as pedagogically valuable: if a student encounters the same foundational essay in their first-year course and again in their second-year course, the second encounter builds rather than duplicates.





## A Collaborative Build Process

The development process began with a department-wide survey. Rather than arriving at the custom project with a predetermined vision, Terzaken's committee asked every faculty member what they were currently using and what they wanted to keep. The goal was to avoid pulling the rug out from under instructors who had built their courses around specific readings.

The program also extended the conversation beyond the RC faculty, inviting contributions from the writing center, the library, and the WAC program—institutional partners who had standing relationships with RC instructors and whose resources students needed to know about. Including those voices in the front matter gave the book a campus-community character that no off-the-shelf text could replicate.

## Delivery via Vital Source

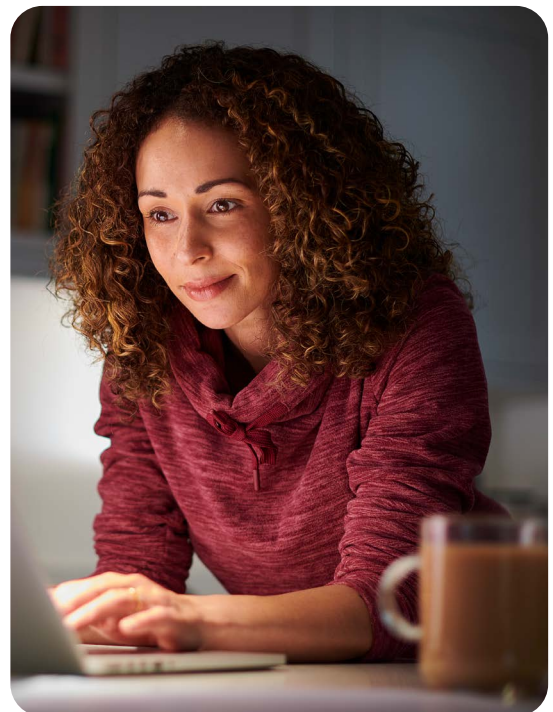
The finished text is delivered as a digital e-book through Vital Source, integrated into the campus LMS (currently Moodle; transitioning to Canvas). Students access it through a single link in their course page alongside their other rental materials. The platform supports text resizing, background adjustment, text-to-speech, annotation, and highlighting—accessibility and engagement features students use across all their digital course materials.

The department evaluated Achieve as a platform option and chose not to move in that direction, opting for the simpler, more direct e-book experience through Vital Source.

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We didn't want to say, 'We're doing this new thing, so now you're going to completely have to change it up.' If they had a reading they really liked, we would put that on the list of things to keep.”

- Kelly Terzaken





# The Process: How It Came Together

## Committee Structure and Faculty Buy-In

Terzaken chaired a customization committee and served as the primary point of contact with Macmillan throughout. The committee's first move was the faculty survey—a deliberate step to ensure the process felt collaborative rather than imposed. This was especially important in a multi-section program where instructors had significant autonomy over their course materials.

## Timeline

The project extended across more than one semester. Terzaken recalls working through a December deadline and continuing revisions the following summer before the text was finalized. The overall arc was approximately a year from initial planning to delivery.

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Our Macmillan contact was like, ‘Okay, I think I see how this can work.’ And she sort of put it together, and it was really, really great. It was like a person to bridge us and our needs and the publishing world.”

— Kelly Terzaken

## Working with the Macmillan Team

The primary Macmillan contact was Chad, who managed the project on the publishing side. Terzaken describes the relationship as requiring “some translation” in both directions—the publishing world and the composition classroom operate with different vocabularies and logics—but that translation was handled without friction.

The most significant Macmillan contribution came when the committee had assembled all its content pieces but couldn't see how they would cohere into a single book. Chad connected Terzaken with a Macmillan curriculum specialist with a background in rhetoric and composition who took the committee's wish list and built a workable organizational structure around it.



## One Area for Improvement

Terzaken offered one candid piece of feedback about the process: the initial phase felt like an open-ended wish list without clear visibility into what would be cost-feasible. When the full cost picture emerged, the committee had to walk back some selections. She frames this as a transparency issue rather than a relationship issue—the Macmillan team handled it well once everyone was aligned—but she’d recommend that future projects surface cost parameters earlier in the conversation.

## Ongoing Maintenance

The text has required only minor updates since launch. A small number of readings became unavailable due to copyright changes and were removed; MLA and APA guidance was added. The current director of composition has managed those revisions. A new director of composition (Belinda Walzer) assumes the role as of June 2026, and the program anticipates she may lead more substantive revisions given her involvement in the original development.





# Outcomes and Impact

## Program Consistency

The clearest outcome is also the one the program set out to achieve: consistency. Every RC 1000 and RC 2001 student at Appalachian State now works from the same foundational text. Shared readings create shared reference points across sections, instructors, and years. Terzaken notes that certain touchstone essays—Anne Lamott’s “Shitty First Drafts” among them—have become near-universal experiences for RC students in a way that simply wasn’t possible before.

## Faculty Efficiency, Especially for New Instructors

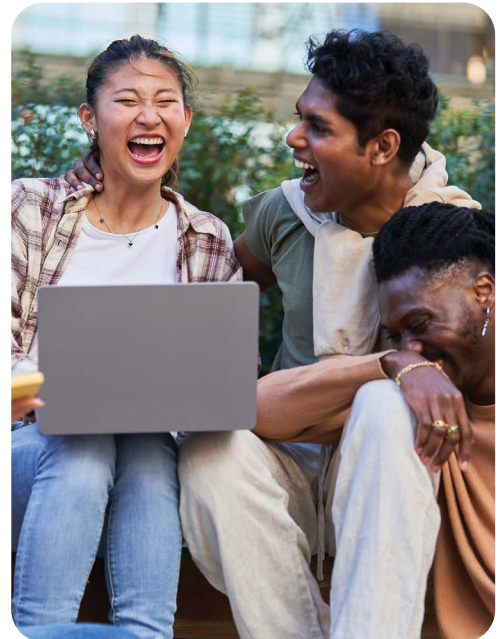
The custom text has been particularly valuable for new faculty and graduate teaching assistants who come into RC courses without deep institutional knowledge. The program-authored front matter functions as an orientation document as well as a course text—communicating program values, pedagogical approach, and campus resource landscape in a way that previously would have required significant onboarding conversation.

In the classroom, the digital format has made instruction more fluid: instructors can link directly to readings on course schedules, pull up material in real time during class, and eliminate the “I forgot my book” friction point.

“

I’m pretty sure every single person at this university going through our courses has read ‘Shitty First Drafts’. It’s building more consistency and identity as a program. That’s been a huge thing.”

– Kelly Terzaken





## Student Accessibility and Engagement

The Vital Source platform gives students a range of accessibility features—text-to-speech, adjustable display settings, annotation and highlighting—that complement the content. Terzaken encourages students to use the text-to-speech feature for assigned readings, which she notes students use readily regardless of whether they have documented learning needs.

On the question of whether local content in the front matter resonates with students differently than off-the-shelf material, Terzaken offers an honest assessment: the effect may be stronger in print, where the physical artifact signals “this is about us,” than on a screen where all digital content looks roughly similar. That said, she sees value in the content itself regardless of medium.

## A Note on Formal Assessment

The program has not conducted formal assessment of outcomes attributable to the custom text—no pre/post comparisons, no grade distribution analysis, no student survey data specifically on the custom materials. Terzaken is candid about this. The program values assessment but has not designed a study around this specific intervention. That represents an opportunity for future measurement as the text continues to mature.





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# Lessons for Institutions Considering Custom Publishing

## Start with a Faculty Survey

Terzaken's single most important process recommendation: before building anything, find out what faculty are actually using and what they want to keep. Arriving with a predetermined vision and asking faculty to adopt it is a recipe for low uptake. Arriving with a framework and asking faculty to help fill it in is a recipe for ownership.

## Build a Solid Committee

The project required sustained coordination—across faculty, campus partners, and the Macmillan team—over the better part of a year. Terzaken is clear that this isn't a one-person job, and that having a committee with real authority and investment was essential to getting it done.

## Include Campus Voices Beyond Your Department

The writing center, library, and WAC program all contributed to the Appalachian State custom text. Those partnerships made the final product richer and gave it a campus-community character no off-the-shelf text could replicate. For programs with natural institutional partners—writing centers, libraries, tutoring programs, student services—bringing those voices in early adds significant value.

## Get Clarity on Cost Parameters Early

The project hit a bump when wish-list aspirations ran into budget realities. That friction is avoidable. Terzaken recommends that future projects establish cost parameters and access limitations at the start of the content selection process, so committees can make informed tradeoff decisions rather than building toward a vision that has to be revised later.

## The Digital Format Changes What's Possible

The decision to build for Vital Source rather than print opened up the project significantly. Hyperlinking to campus resources, building a large and comprehensive text without print cost constraints, and giving students always-available access are all features of the digital format that wouldn't have been feasible—or wouldn't have had the same impact—in a print book.

# About Macmillan Learning Custom Solutions

Macmillan Learning Custom Solutions partners with higher education institutions to develop course materials tailored to specific departmental needs—incorporating original content, curating existing resources, and delivering custom materials through digital platforms including Vital Source and Achieve. From individual chapter selections to fully original program-authored front matter, Custom Solutions supports the full production lifecycle: content curation and rights management, organizational design, platform integration, print and digital fulfillment, and ongoing support.

**Contact Your Rep for More Information**

