Through the Looking Glass: Applying Makeup to Genre and Transfer

Emily Capan

Capan explores her experiences as a makeup artist and her struggles associated with moving between genres. Transferring skills from one genre to another is not as easy as it would appear to be and requires practice and evaluation of uptake and antecedent knowledge.

To adapt one of my favorite lines from the '80s classic film *The Princess Bride*, "[Writing] is pain, Highness! Anyone who says differently is selling something." Having to write in new situations and venues might seem like a piece of cake if you are a confident writer. Yet, it can be devastating for a writer to realize that what is being written is not working and the project is turning into a medusa head of text, which cannot even be looked at because it is so hideous. "But what happened? I've written countless papers before! Why wasn't this piece successful?" Being able to overcome these obstacles is painstaking and frustrating, but it can be done! The key is to understand **genres**: productions that can be identified by a set of similar conventions or features that are informed by time, place, and context. Moving between genres is a difficulty that is faced not only by writers, but also by creators of any kind. I hope that my stories of being a makeup artist and a writer can help you, my fellow writer, figure out how to work toward success in writing situations.

My Indoctrination into the World of Makeup

I've always considered myself a crafty person rather than an artistic person. What I mean by that is this: I like using stickers as decoration in my planner. I can fill in small spaces and coordinate colors in paint-by-number projects, and I'm really good at following step-by-step directions when putting together IKEA furniture. However, my freehand drawing does not surpass more than stick-figure quality, and my doodles barely resemble what I am attempting to recreate. I had always looked at pictures of makeup in magazines and noticed when someone had interesting makeup on TV and in movies, but I never understood how to make that happen on my own. This was the main reason why I was so drawn to makeup tutorials on YouTube. YouTube tutorials were more helpful to me because they gave me a step-by-step account of how to accomplish these looks, and these videos allowed me, as a crafter, to be able to follow along and learn.

In 2009, makeup tutorials began to be popular uploads on YouTube. The tutorials demonstrate almost any technique: From winged liner to smooth foundation to colorful looks based on your favorite Disney princesses! If you want to know how to do a certain makeup look, there is most likely a YouTube makeup tutorial showing you how to do it. Finally! I had something that was going to give me step-by-step accounts of how to do the makeup looks that I had been ogling in magazines for years. I would bring my chunky laptop into the bathroom and prop it up on the toilet tank. Laying out all of my makeup products in front of me, I would begin to play the video of what I was going to practice that day. For example, I wanted to know how to do a proper smoky eye and could never figure it out on my own. So, I found a tutorial that demonstrated how to do so. The first step told me that I needed to lay down eyeshadow primer first. I paused the video, put on my primer, and then clicked *play* on the video to watch what the next step was going to be. I used this pause-and-play method throughout the video until I finished the look. Throughout my uptake experience of following these YouTube tutorials step-by-step, I was able to learn how to do a variety of different looks, practice different techniques, and learn the lingo of the makeup discourse community. **Uptake** refers to the process that people go through to think about and understand a new idea. Uptake includes combining new knowledge with what you already know, and the process of thinking through new knowledge to incorporate it into how you think about the world. The way in which each person takes up different concepts is unique because everyone sees the world differently. In my own makeup journey, once I felt like I did not have to watch a video every time that I did my makeup, I began to explore and expand my creativity. I began playing around with aspects, shapes, and colors, making them uniquely my own.

I felt confident with my makeup skills and began wearing my makeup looks to school and in public. At my high school, my peers and my teachers began to notice my makeup and commended me on the creativity that I was displaying for everyone to see. I began to think of my face as a blank canvas that I could paint new every day. I had the ability to wash it off every night, so experimenting with my makeup was fairly low risk. Because of all my YouTube **content research** (research that is done to gain knowledge on a particular subject), I was also simultaneously, and somewhat subconsciously, doing **genre research** (research that is conducted to create a specific kind of text for a specific kind of situation) about how to do a step-by-step makeup tutorial. In my high school speech class, we were required to prepare and present a demonstrative speech in which we showed the class how to do a particular task or skill. With my uptake knowledge of makeup tutorials, I decided to give a live demonstration on how to apply a rainbow eyeshadow look. Just as I had learned from watching YouTube, I verbally and visually showed how to apply this makeup, using myself as a model, just as other YouTubers do. I felt confident enough in the discourse and terminology of makeup that I was able to fully perform what I had been watching online. My assurance in doing makeup made me feel like I could take on any makeup challenge that came my way.

Turning My Passion into a Career

After high school, I found myself in college and in need of some extra cash, so I thought about how I could translate my passion for makeup into a job. I applied at the Macy's in my local mall, wanting to work in their beauty department. When I walked into my interview, the manager took one look at me and said, "Oh, thank God. You know how to do makeup." My job was both selling makeup and skincare as a beauty advisor, as well as applying makeup as a makeup artist. I was beyond thrilled to be working with makeup all day long and getting paid to talk about it! Yet, there was a catch. Although I had been applying makeup on myself for many years and felt confident doing so, I had never applied makeup on another person. When I landed the job, this fact did not bother me. "If I can apply makeup on myself, I can surely apply makeup on someone else." Or so I thought.

During one of my first days on the job, a woman approached me and told me that she wanted to try out one of our new foundations. The store was quiet at that time, so I told her I'd love to give her an application and a quick makeup look to go along with it. She accepted, and for the first time I had someone in my makeup chair. Nervous, but excited, I went over to the

thirty foundation shades that the brand I was working with had and picked one out that looked to be about her skin color. However, when I applied it to her face in a small stroke to test out the color, something was off, and it didn't look quite right. The shade looked right, but the undertone of the color was off. Her undertone was different from my own, so I was not able to match it on the first go. I told my client that finding the right foundation shade can be tricky, so I went back and tried again. I picked one that had more of a pink undertone, instead of yellow, and it worked much better.

My client was happy with how the foundation suited her, so I moved onto her eyes. I grabbed a few eyeshadows that I thought were pretty and would go well together. They were similar to eyeshadows that I had at home and used on myself. I loaded up my big eye shader brush and went in to apply the golden reflective eyeshadow, but I stopped short—her eyelid space was so much smaller than mine! However, I kept moving forward with the makeup look, and I swept the color all over her lid anyway, just like I did on myself when doing my makeup at home. The next step that I always did during my own makeup routine was giving the eye some dimension. I did this by adding a darker color in the crease of the eye. So, I loaded up another brush with a dark brown and smoked it out in the crease of her eye. However, not only was her eyelid space small, but her eyes were much more deep-set and hooded than my own. I then polished the makeup look by applying a light fuchsia lipstick because I always liked how that kind of color looked on me. After I was finished with my application and pulled back, the gold shadow was splattered everywhere and the dark brown shadow in the crease made her eyes look even more sunken in than they did before. The bright lip color stood out against her pale skin, making her lips look like a neon store sign. I was horrified. Her makeup looked like a Halloween look gone wrong!

I admitted to this woman, who was so patient with me, that I did not like the makeup look that I had done. I apologized and asked her if I could try again. She told me that she was off work that day and was in the mood to be pampered—she did not mind at all if I started over. I took off her eye makeup and studied her eyes this time before going in with makeup. I used a smaller brush and less shadow for the golden color on her eyelid, and this helped concentrate the color in one area and helped it to not relocate somewhere else on her face. Then, I put a very light tan in her crease to lift her eye up and out, instead of dragging it further down and inward. I chose a natural beige lipstick that was a few shades darker than her skin tone to give her lips some color and gloss, without making her look like a clown. The corrections that I made improved her makeup look drastically, and I took a sigh of relief. She liked the final application as well, bought the foundation that I had originally applied, and left happy.

My first day was not as joyous as my client's, though. I went home and flopped on my bed face first. I was so disappointed with myself because I was not able to do the woman's makeup perfectly on my first try. I couldn't understand it! I had done my makeup successfully on myself so many times—why couldn't I do it on somebody else?! Had I suddenly forgotten all that I'd learned?! Was I, in fact, bad at makeup, and I just didn't know it until I saw it from a different perspective?! My antecedent knowledge of doing my own makeup was getting in the way of my being able to apply makeup on someone else. **Antecedent knowledge** refers to the knowledge that a person brings with them from their past to new situations and venues. For example, I had brought my own antecedent knowledge on makeup: the fact that I knew how to apply makeup on one skin tone, one eye shape, one lip shape, and so on—my own. There are a variety of different faces out there, and I was not able to rely on the one way that I knew how to do things in order to **transfer** (taking knowledge from one context and applying it to another) my skills. My confidence in makeup was shattered, but I knew I couldn't give up. This was my job now, and integrity in my work was very important to me.

I knew I had to get out of my box and try something new. I had to think of a strategy so that this frustrating and difficult situation did not happen again. I turned back to YouTube to do some more content research on how to determine skin undertone, how to do eyeshadow looks on hooded eyelids and mono-eyelids, how to line lips to make them even, and so much more. Many of the makeup techniques were similar, but just different enough that if you did not follow along with the recommendations, it was not going to turn out right. The next time that I went in to apply makeup on someone, I was ready. I made a quick checklist of what the customer wanted out of me as the artist. If someone wanted their makeup done for a school dance, they might want something a little more glamourous and colorful. These clients weren't there to learn how to apply this kind of makeup on their own; instead they just wanted to be pampered. Other times, clients wanted to learn how to do natural everyday makeup. So, these makeup sessions were more involved because I had to explain how and why I was doing various steps. I then also had to determine how I was going to accomplish these established goals based on the client's expectations and their face attributes. By creating this sort of outline, I was able to prepare for each situation before I actually began applying the makeup. Then, when I was applying the makeup on whatever face I was presented with, I was able to adapt and revise my makeup application process based on my uptake knowledge. At first, this process was fairly slow-going—I did a good amount of double-checking my outline and debating between options, sometimes having

to backtrack. However, the more that I applied makeup on different face shapes, skin textures, eye shapes and colors, skin tones, and lip shapes, the more that I was able to transfer my knowledge when I was presented with a new face. My makeup looks turned out better and better, and my clients were ecstatic with the results. I felt proud when the girls going to prom wanted to take a picture with me, their makeup artist. My joy and love of makeup had returned. I continued to improve and adapt to new situations—the learning never stopped. I would continue to run into new situations and obstacles, but with my knowledge and practice of how to adapt and transfer my knowledge and skills, I was confident that I could be successful, even if it took me a few tries.

Uptake, Antecedent Knowledge, and Transfer for Writers

Now, you may ask, how does all of this talk of makeup connect to writing?! Writers run into very similar situations as I did when I was working as a makeup artist. When I was learning how to do makeup on myself, I was learning how to do makeup one way, and one way only; however, I became very good at that one way of doing makeup. Many times, when writers first are learning how to write, they will begin to learn how to write exclusively in one form, style, tone, and so on, such as in a five-paragraph essay. It may be a struggle at first, but after doing content and genre research on that one way of writing, writers can become very successful and effective at that form. Without even thinking much about it, they will be able to sit down and begin writing in that form—that is when their antecedent knowledge of that genre of writing begins to develop. These writers feel confident in their writing ability, and maybe even have a notion that they feel they are good at writing. In some cases, this might not be a bad thing! However, certain writing skills might not transfer well to new genres or different writing situations. When transfer is difficult, a writer's confidence can be shaken.

When I was a novice writer, I was very confident in writing five-page papers. This was mainly based on the fact that I had written numerous five-page papers for different kinds of classes, such as English, history, biology, and so on. I knew about how narrow my topic was going to have to be, how complicated I could make my thesis, and how in-depth my research was going to have to be in order to fill up those five pages. But finally, I had a writing prompt dropped in front of me telling me that I was going to have to write fifteen pages. I had never attempted to write something so sophisticated before, but I assumed that it wasn't going to be that hard—it's just more pages that I have to fill. After trying to write this paper as if it were a five-page paper, I quickly became aware that I couldn't use the same writing

processes and methods that I had used before, because it wasn't working, and my paper wasn't turning out the way I wanted. But I didn't have to scrap the whole thing—I could transfer my antecedent knowledge and tweak it until it worked in this new situation. It took some trial and error, but eventually I was able to produce an effective fifteen-page paper. To do this, I conducted both content and genre research, and I created outlines, check lists, and goal sheets. These were the same revision and transfer skills that I had conducted as a makeup artist when I was moving from one makeup genre to another. The more that I wrote fifteen-page papers, the more I was able to write them efficiently and effectively. I am continually improving as a writer to this day, even as I write the article that you are reading right now!

Listening to and internalizing audience feedback was helpful for me as a makeup artist and as a writer, because the audience will let you know if something is not working for them. When I was doing someone's makeup, I would always question the client about whether they liked something or if they thought something could be improved. Sometimes the feedback I got was vague, as in "I don't like this cheek color, but I don't know why." I then had to analyze that section of their face and determine what about it wasn't working, and then revise it. The same kind of feedback can be helpful for revising one's writing as well. If a reader finds that there isn't a strong transition between two of my ideas, I have to be able to look back at that section and analyze it based on the research and strategies that I have conducted, and revise based on my uptake knowledge. Just as with my makeup artist career, uptake knowledge in writing is constantly forming, and the learning never ceases. Having the knowledge and the confidence that you can adapt to new situations and grow as a writer is key when coming across new obstacles and contexts when writing.

The main takeaway that I've had from both working as a makeup artist and working as a writer is that creating in a new genre is not easy. The most important piece of advice that I can give to my fellow writers is that even though it isn't always easy, you can't let that discourage you! Just because you run into obstacles while composing in a new genre does not mean that you are a poor writer—it simply means that you've got to switch things up, which also means that you've got some work to do. Go back to the drawing board, do some more research, come up with some new strategies, outline and determine your goals, listen to your reader, and revise, revise, revise. Adapting to new writing venues and being able to transfer your antecedent knowledge about writing in particular genres is tricky, but doable. Using your newly established uptake knowledge, you can transcend genres, flowing from one to the next with ease. Think outside of the box with your creativity, and you'll be proficient in writing, or in makeup and other skills, in no time.

Emily Capan is a PhD student at Illinois State University studying rhetoric and composition. You can usually find her wearing an oversized faux fur coat talking about *Lord of the Rings, Star Wars*, or some other facet of nerd culture. She is a Dungeon Master for an all-women *Dungeons and Dragons* league. E-mail her for more details if you would like to join.