This project analyzes the quality of high school writing textbooks from major publishers, textbooks purported to align with The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for writing. I measure the textbooks against the promise of CCSS’s tagline, “college and career readiness,” focusing specifically on the former goal to discern how “college-ready writing” is constructed and to analyze the degree to which the textbooks align with relevant research and theory in the fields of English Education and Rhetoric and Writing Studies. I begin the project by situating this study in current U.S. educational policy and rhetoric. Specifically, I describe the politicized rhetoric of school failure and subsequent policies—namely the No Child Left Behind Act—that promote market-based principles as a key component of school reform. Textbook publishers, I posit, capitalize on reform rhetoric and claims of CCSS.
alignment to promote their curricular materials, though the quality of their products remains mediocre at best.

To investigate my premise, I articulate five traits of composition pedagogy that recur in the scholarship on college preparatory writing—rhetorical knowledge and versatility, process-based writing, critical thinking, language and conventions, and new literacies—and use qualitative document analysis to describe the continuities and discontinuities between the scholarship and the textbooks in my sample. Though there is some variation in quality among the four textbooks, in general I find that they are often topically aligned with standards and research-based principles. However, when I analyze the exercises, exposition, heuristics, and major projects for the development of these principles, I conclude that the books are often reductive, insufficient, or inconsistent in their presentation of those very concepts. I also contend that although this project focuses narrowly on pre-college writing instruction, my findings are a paradigmatic example of false promises from major educational corporations—promises that particular products will beget heretofore-unseen student improvement in fundamental academic skills even though those products do not reflect the consensus of scholarship in related fields.