

# Violence Risk Assessment of the Written Word (VRAW<sup>2</sup>)

## Author

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## Abstract

The VRAW<sup>2</sup> is a newly created instrument used to assess emails, letters, or creative writing that contain direct threats or violent themes of concern. The article reviews the five factors and corresponding sub-factors used to assess the potential for threat. Scoring considerations and case examples are provided to illustrate how to score each of the sub-factors informing the overall factors. The VRAW<sup>2</sup> is then discussed in context of the NaBITA Threat Assessment Tool and the Structured Interview for Violence Risk Assessment (SIVRA-35).

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## Introduction

Increasingly, staff at universities, colleges, and high schools are being asked to assess potentially dangerous writing contained in students' emails, letters, and creative writing assignments. While tools such as the Historical, Clinical, Risk Management-20 (HCR-20), the Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk (WAVR-21), the Method for Objectively Selecting Areas of Inquiry Consistently (MOSAIC), and the Structured Interview for Violence Risk Assessment (SIVRA-35) offer the ability to better understand the individuals creating these messages, it would be helpful to have a specific tool designed to help staff rate the level of risk based on writing samples.

There are times when the writing samples or video messages emerge following an attack as part of a media package or "legacy token" created by the attacker. In other instances, violent writing or other disturbing content is discovered or shared prior to a potential attack as leakage. In all of these cases, the content should be explored and analyzed. This is one of the central recommendations offered in a 2008 report to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education by O'Neill, Fox, Depue, and Englander: "Writings, drawings, and other forms of individual expression reflecting violent fantasy and causing a faculty member to be fearful or concerned about safety, should be evaluated contextually for any potential threat" (pp. 32–33).

While risk and threat assessment cannot be predictive, multiple agencies (e.g., the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Secret Service, Department of Education, U.S. Post Office, ASIS International, the Society for Human Resource Management, and ASME-ITI) have suggested risk factors to consider when determining the potential danger an individual may represent. Several prominent experts in campus violence and workplace threat assessment have also recommended key considerations that are salient when assessing risk and threat (Meloy, 2000; Turner & Gelles, 2003; Deisinger, Randazzo, O'Neill & Savage, 2008; Meloy, Hoffmann, Guldman, & James, 2011; Van Brunt, 2015).

The VRAW<sup>2</sup> is designed to offer members of campus Behavioral Intervention Teams with an additional risk rubric to apply when faced with written communication of concern. The VRAW<sup>2</sup> is not designed as a psychological test, but rather as a structured way of thinking about written communication and writing samples. The VRAW<sup>2</sup> should be used in conjunction with the NaBITA Threat Assessment Tool (Sokolow, Lewis, Schuster, Swinton, and Van Brunt, 2014) and the SIVRA-35 (Van Brunt, 2012), not to replace either of these measures.

## Overview

The VRAW<sup>2</sup> is designed as a structured risk and threat assessment rubric for psychological, administrative, and campus Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) members to better gauge the risk associated with a particular writing sample. While no degree or clinical expertise is

required to use the VRAW<sup>2</sup>, those with a master's degree in counseling, successful completion of a graduate-level testing and assessment course, and/or experience with criminal justice, law enforcement, and threat assessment will help make this tool more efficacious.

The VRAW<sup>2</sup> consists of five main factors: 1) Fixation and Focus; 2) Hierarchical Thematic Content; 3) Action and Time Imperative; 4) Pre-Attack Planning; and 5) Injustice Collecting. Each of the five factors has five sub-items that are numerically scored to assist campus staff completing an assessment to make a decision about the endorsement of the main factor. Ideally, the assessment should take place after the assessor has reviewed incident reports, available documents related to conduct in the educational setting and in the immediate community, and any other information available in the context of the writing sample.

It is important to keep in mind that there is no set of risk factors or list of concerning behaviors that can predict a future violent event. VRAW<sup>2</sup> is a useful reference when reviewing concerning writing samples. Any violence risk assessment involves static and dynamic risk factors, contextual and environmental elements, and mitigating factors. But the fact remains that no current tool or computer model exists that can accurately predict future violent behavior based on a writing sample, and no tool is ever a substitute for professional expertise. Therefore, the use of Structured Professional Judgment (SPJ) (Van Brunt, 2015; Hart and Logan, 2011) in combination with documentation and consultation with trusted colleagues is the current best practice.

While the VRAW<sup>2</sup> primarily assists those conducting violence risk assessments through a structured rubric, there is a quantitative, numeric scoring key to further assist staff in their decision-making. A single administrator will review the document and rate the sub-items to determine if an overall factor is endorsed.

In terms of assessing fiction writing, separating the fantasy from the reality is a challenge. The VRAW<sup>2</sup> errs on the side of acknowledging that many who have been involved in targeted and predatory violent attacks have written some disturbing creative fiction. A synopsis of some of these writings are collected in Table 1.1. And while this correlation may be a place for further exploration, caution is warranted to avoid making a direct causation argument between writing disturbing content and the reality of carrying out violence. As Polish-American philosopher Alfred Korzybski wrote, "The map is not the territory" (Kendig, 1990, p. 299).

Stephen King, the popular horror author, notes in the front material of his book *It*, that "fiction is the truth inside the lie." Creative fiction, when done well, often pulls from the author's deeper fantasies and desires. This provides a projective test, of sorts, for those willing to listen. So while BIT members should not assume those writing creative fiction with disturbing

violent content are planning the next mass campus shooting, this content, particularly when shared through social media or in a public forum, often warrants completing a more detailed violence risk assessment.

**Table 1.1: Creative Fiction and Mass Shootings**

Date of Attack	Attacker	Story
9/13/2006	Kimveer Singh Gill	Stories of the death knight killing disgusting human creatures in online posts at <a href="http://www.vampirefreaks.com">www.vampirefreaks.com</a> .
4/17/2007	Seung-Hui Cho	<i>Richard McBeef</i> describes violent arguments between a boy and his stepfather that involve accusations of rape and a mother wielding a chainsaw. <i>Mr. Brownstone</i> explores three teenagers' hatred for their math teacher. They describe him as an "ass-raper" and talk about wanting to "watch him bleed like the way he made us kids bleed."
2/12/2010	Amy Bishop	<i>Amazon Fever</i> details a professor worried about being denied tenure while fighting against a worldwide pandemic. <i>Easter in Boston</i> recounts tales of depression, suicide and murder.
2/27/2012	T. J. Lane	Writes a sing-song story about a man attacking a castle called Lucifer's Laboratory and posts it on Facebook months prior to his attack.

### Scoring and Risk Rating

To score the VRAW<sup>2</sup>, the writing sample should be read through carefully several times and areas of concern highlighted. In the case of

video footage or other recorded audio messages or voicemails, the content should be transcribed into text and then reviewed.

Staff using the VRAW<sup>2</sup> then makes a decision surrounding each of the main five factors to determine if risk is present or not present. This is determined by rating each of the five sub-factors 0 for not present, 1 for unsure, and 2 for present. The sub-factor scores are then added up. Scores of 5 or more indicate that the overall factor is endorsed.

The following chart provides guidance in terms of the number of factors that are endorsed and the corresponding risk level on the NaBITA Threat Assessment Tool (Sokolow et al., 2014) and the Structured Interview for Violence Risk Assessment, or SIVRA-35 (Van Brunt, 2012).

Factors Endorsed	NaBITA Tool	SIVRA-35
5 factors	Extreme	High
4 factors	Severe	High
3 factors	Elevated	Moderate
2 factors	Moderate	Moderate
1 factor	Mild	Low

To assist readers, two sample threat scenarios are scored via the VRAW<sup>2</sup> in Appendix A and B at the conclusion of this article.

### Factor A: Fixation and Focus

This factor is based on the concept of a specific target being identified in the writing sample. This is a target in real life and the target is identified specifically.

Turner and Gelles (2003) suggested that individuals with a fixation and focus on their threats present a higher risk than those who lack these traits. Fixations are strongly held beliefs and obsessions about a certain group being responsible for the pain or suffering an individual may be experiencing. Fixation relates to the degree of blame and how it is attributed; a group of individuals is stereotyped in a grandiose or sweeping manner. Focus is a further narrowing that occurs when an individual with a particular fixation begins to zero in on an individual, system, or location.

### Sub-Factors for Fixation and Focus

Each of the following sub-factors are scored 0 for not present, 1 for unsure, and 2 for present. The sub-factors scores for Factor A are then added up. If the score is 5 or more, Factor A: Fixation and Focus, is endorsed.

*Sub-factor A.1: Naming of Target:* Is the person, place, or system being

targeted identified clearly in the writing sample? This may be a person (e.g., “I’m going to hunt down that Mrs. Castor and make her pay for what she did to me.”), a place (e.g., “The mosque on campus is a symbol of everything that is wrong with this country. Things will be better when it is destroyed.”), or a system, (e.g., “The conduct office thinks it can get away with anything, I’ll show them how very wrong they are.”).

*Sub-factor A.2: Repetition of the Target:* Is the target mentioned more than once? Is the target identified and then repeated multiple times for emphasis? Are there multiple targets mentioned? Is there an organization to the plan that narrows blame or violence to a single target, or is there a disorganization that spreads across multiple targets and systems? Individuals with disorganized thoughts often do not have the same heightened risk as those with organized thoughts.

*Sub-factor A.3: Objectification of Target:* Is there language that indicates a negative view or dehumanizing of the target? The language may be hostile, insulting, or diminishing. The language may also be misogynistic or focused on separating the person writing from empathizing or understanding the motives or thoughts of the target. An example might be, “That bitch Carol who runs parking and transportation thinks she is above everyone else. Like her shit doesn’t stink. I’ll show that whore.”

*Sub-factor A.4: Emphasis of Target:* Does the writer use capital letters, quotes, color changes, graphics, parenthetical inserts, or emoji used to emphasize the target? This becomes more concerning if related to a theme of retaliation, blaming others, or wounded self-image (e.g., “My life is over.”). An example would be, “I have a big problem with the so-called ‘Chief’ Baily who thinks he runs the kingdom with some kind of iron-fist, but his fist is really nothing but a fist of clay. BAILY will pay, you can be sure of that. His days are numbered. ☹️ ☹️ ☹️”

*Sub-factor A.5: Graphic Language:* Does the writer describe what s/he wants to do to the target in a graphic or detailed manner? Is there a description of torture and killing described in a fantasy or wistful manner?

## Factor B: Hierarchical Thematic Content

This factor is based on the concept of the writer or protagonist in the story being identified in the writing sample as superior or in an avenging or punishing role. This can occur through the anti-hero of the story or writer being portrayed as all-powerful and handing down judgment for past wrongs, or the proletariat or targets in the story being seek as weak, stupid, or naïve.

### Sub-Factors for Hierarchical Thematic Content

Each of the following sub-factors are scored 0 for not present, 1 for unsure, and 2 for present. The sub-factors scores for Factor B are

then added up. If the score is 5 or more, Factor B: Hierarchical Thematic Content, is endorsed.

*Sub-factor B.1: Disempowering Language:* Is the person, place, or system being targeted described as a sheep, lemming, cattle, retarded, or something similar? Is the target described as stupid, being unaware of his/her surroundings, or in need of punishment? An example would be, “All of those students will find their end, like so many bits of trash floating in the ocean waiting for the tide to sweep them deep under the sea.”

*Sub-factor B.2: Glorified Avenger:* Is the writer or protagonist described as an all-powerful figure or someone who is smart, knowledgeable, and able to avenge and punish those who have wronged him/her? The writer may use a name like “avenger” or “punisher” to convey the perceived responsibility and role to dole out judgment and make things right. An example would be, “You may think you are safe, but there will come a time when things are made right. Vengeance will sweep down on the ignorant. Karma is a bitch.” There may also be a tendency to use the gun or weapon to enhance the attacker’s gender status to present him/herself as all-powerful or superior.

*Sub-factor B.3: Reality Crossover:* For fiction pieces, is there a cross-over between fiction and reality? Do names sound the same, or are there other identifying factors that give away the author’s attempt at a metaphor? If the writing sample is an email or letter, this item is scored a two if the writer mentions an actual person, place, or system that is being targeted. Additionally, does the writer reference an ideology or historical figure such as Hitler/Nazis or previous mass murderer as a role model or someone to emulate or copy?

*Sub-factor B.4: Militaristic Language:* Does the writer use military language around tactical or strategic attacks on a target? Does s/he use phrases like “advancing on the courtyard” or include very specific timing as part of an overall attack? Is there mention of particular weapons, tactical gear, black cloaks, or jumpsuits? Meloy et al. (2011) referred to this as identification warning behavior — any behavior that indicates a psychological desire to be a “pseudo-commando” (Dietz, 1986; Knoll, 2010), have a “warrior mentality” (Hempel, Meloy, & Richards, 1999), closely associate with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia, identify with previous attackers or assassins, or identify oneself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system (p. 265).

*Sub-factor B.5: Paranoid Content:* Does the story structure give a sense of paranoia or worry beyond what would be considered normal? Does the writer talk about being plotted against, being the victim of a conspiracy, or that the world is working actively against him/her? This

may also include grandiose themes focused on superiority, references to hearing voices, and tangled syntax or misuse of language. An example would be, "All of you at the college think you are so smart, having your parties and private conversations about me. There will come a day when things will be equalized. There will be a payback."

### **Factor C: Action and Time Imperative**

This factor is concerned with content that conveys a sense of impending movement toward action. This may be communicated by mentioning a specific time, location, or event such as a graduation, academic admission decision, or results of a conduct meeting.

#### **Sub-Factors for Action and Time Imperative**

Each of the following sub-factors are scored 0 for not present, 1 for unsure, and 2 for present. The sub-factors scores for Factor C are then added up. If the score is 5 or more, Factor C: Action and Time Imperative, is endorsed.

*Sub-factor C.1: Location of the Attack:* Is the location of a potential attack site mentioned in detail? Is the site mapped out or highlighted by areas where certain people will be? If looking at a fiction story, is the attack location alluded to through the story's details? Does the imposing castle with a moat strike a similar resemblance to the student union?

*Sub-factor C.2: Time of the Attack:* Is there a time or date given for the attack in the writing? Is a specific period given that offers insight into when the attack might occur? This can be specific, such as, "I'm coming for you all at 2 p.m. on Tuesday," or more vague, such as, "If this isn't resolved by next spring, you won't have a very happy summer."

*Sub-factor C.3: Weapons and Materials to be Used:* Are specific weapons or materials mentioned in the writing that will be used in the attack? Does the individual discuss specific weapons knowledge or bomb-making knowledge needed prior the attack?

*Sub-factor C.4: Overcoming Obstacles:* Does the writing sample include obstacles that must be first overcome to carry out an attack? This might include acquiring a weapon or having a job to get money to buy a plane ticket to come back to the school. The writer may discuss obstacles in the past that have thwarted an attack but that will no longer stand in the way. An example might be, "You think you can stop me from communicating, but now I will send your communication far and wide to the board of trustees, your boss, and the college president."

*Sub-factor C.5: Conditional Ultimatum:* Is there an ultimatum attached to the time and the location of the attack? Does the writer demand compliance to stave off a potential attack? An example might be, "Change my grade on this paper or else there will be hell to pay,"

or "You have until next week to take the hold off my account and refund my tuition."

### **Factor D: Pre-Attack Planning**

Many who move forward with violent attacks write and plan in detail prior to these attacks. Sometimes, this pre-attack planning is boastful and can be described as a "howling" behavior designed to intimidate others towards compliance. Other times, the pre-attack planning is unintentionally leaked prior to the attack and discovered by a third party.

#### **Sub-Factors for Pre Attack Planning**

Each of the following sub-factors are scored 0 for not present, 1 for unsure, and 2 for present. The sub-factors scores for Factor D are then added up. If the score is 5 or more, Factor D: Pre-Attack Planning, is endorsed.

*Sub-factor D.1: Discussion and Acquisition of Weapons:* Does the writing contain evidence of discussion about potential weapons or materials that may be used to carry out an attack? If evaluating a fiction piece, is there a reality crossover with the weapons in the fiction pointing to real-world planning? An example might be, "The cloaked figure waited patiently outside of the school's auditorium with his long, black rifle, the scope's optics covered to prevent glints of sunlight from giving away his position."

*Sub-factor D.2: Evidence of Researching or Stalking the Target:* Does the writing give evidence that the author has conducted detailed research concerning the potential target? This could be related to stalking his/her social media, obtaining copies of his/her schedule, or learning personal information about his/her family or home. An example might be, "I've watched you, attending your parties and having your fun at school, while I'm made to suffer because of your decisions about my life."

*Sub-factor D.3: Details Concerning Target:* Has the writer offered evidence of studying the details of a particular location for the attack? This could be obtaining the schematics for a building or studying police response time, security camera placement, or lock-down procedures. Has the author discussed obtaining certain tools or items needed to overcome potential obstacles, such as tape, spray paint, or chains to bar doors?

*Sub-factor D.4: Fantasy Rehearsal for Attack:* Is there evidence of a fantasy rehearsal concerning a potential attack? Does the writer convey a sense of relishing what it will be like to carry out the attack and how it will feel to have revenge or to be known or understood by others?

*Sub-factor D.5: Costuming Description:* In fiction writing, is there a discussion of elaborate, dark costuming worn by the anti-hero prior to



or during the attack? This could include a black cloak, tactical gear, or drastic body changes such as shaving off or coloring hair, or dressing as a villain from popular media. In emails or letters, are there descriptions of tactical clothing or a meaningful outfit that will be worn on the day of retribution? Is there mention of accessories such as a personally named gun or weapon, or a particular bag or case to be carried to the attack?

### Factor E: Injustice Collecting

The term “injustice collector” was coined by Mary Ellen O’Toole as a risk factor in the first prong of the threat assessment approach: the personality of the student.

In her 2012 book, *Dangerous Instincts* (2011), O’Toole describes this individual as “a person who feels ‘wronged,’ ‘persecuted,’ and ‘destroyed,’ blowing injustices way out of proportion, and never forgiving the person they felt has wronged them” (O’Toole and Bowman, 2011, p. 186). Thus, the injustice collector keeps track of his/her past wrongs and is often upset in a manner way beyond what would typically be expected. This person tends to hold on to past slights, many back as far as childhood, and see the world from this singled-out viewpoint, often having poor coping skills to deal with their frustrations.

Other researchers have made reference to this concept in the threat assessment literature. ASIS International and the Society for Human Resource Management published, *Workplace Violence Prevention and Intervention* (2011), a set of standards for security and human resource personnel to prevent or intervene in potentially dangerous scenarios. The concept is described as “chronic, unsubstantiated complaints about persecution or injustice; a victim mindset” (p. 22).

### Sub-Factors for Injustice Collecting

Each of the following sub-factors are scored 0 for not present, 1 for unsure, and 2 for present. The sub-factors scores for Factor E are then added up. If the score is 5 or more, Factor E: Pre-Attack Planning, is endorsed.

*Sub-factor E.1: Perseverating on Past Wrongs:* Does the writer give evidence of being wronged by others? Does the writing convey a sense that the author or protagonist believes certain others have mistreated him/her through social interactions, business relationships, academic assessment, or administrative action? The writer may see this in a hardened and inflexible manner, unwilling to accept attempts to have his/her feelings normalized or rationalized. The writer may also use techniques to amplify the message of threat, objectification, or insult through repetition, the use of ALL CAPS, or the selective use of punctuation and spacing to draw emphasis. An example of this might be, “The main issue of me being suspended was ALSO not looked

into properly, and if people just use their GODDAMN brains to look at the bigger picture in life, you would have not caused what might happen in the future because of this.”

*Sub-factor E.2: Unrequited Romantic Entanglements:* Does the writer discuss past romantic relationships that ended in frustrated outcomes, with the writer or protagonist alone and isolated? Often, the nature of the writing is focused on the person’s Herculean efforts to attain a relationship or love interest and the resulting rejection and frustration that accompany those feelings.

*Sub-factor E.3: Desperation, Hopelessness, and Suicide Ideation/Attempt:* Does the story or email have a quality of sadness, isolation, and a lack of positive outcomes or options for either the writer or the main character? Here, we may see a tendency on the author’s part to embrace the gloom and focus on a lack of options or choices. It is as if the author or main character is convincing him/herself that there is no better way to resolve the conflict and no other way out. This also includes the writer mentioning, directly or indirectly, a plan to commit suicide. This may be an idea, thought, or actively described plan.

*Sub-factor E.4: Amplification/Narrowing:* Is there language that amplifies and narrows the focus of anger and threat to a particular target? This could include the use of CAPS, emoji, or color/highlighting. Is there a narrowing and organization of the threat toward a single individual, department, or group?

*Sub-factor E.5: Threats to Create Justice:* Does the writer offer an explanation of how ultimate justice, karma, or payback will be sought, or a narrative on how things will be made “right?” This often includes a veiled threat that could be read as either a threat of physical harm or a punishment related to the person who wronged the writer, such as losing a job or otherwise “getting what is coming to him/her.” The injustice collector begins to develop fantasies about finally righting the wrongs s/he has been subjected to over the years. This can involve writing, creation of social media posts, development of a website, creation of a manifesto, or increased conflict with others. The action is often the result of wrestling with insolvable problems.

### Conclusion

The VRAW<sup>2</sup> provides campus BITs, law enforcement, student conduct administrators, and counseling staff a starting place to review disturbing emails, letters, or stories written by students, faculty, and staff. Any structured, thematic analysis of narrative content should be conducted with an awareness of threat and violence risk assessment principles. Elevated scores should lead to further assessment through a Structured Professional Judgment process parallel to a student conduct, BIT or law enforcement intervention, if warranted.

## Appendix A: 2015 Embry-Riddle Threat

On April 1, Konstantinos Kostakis, left a threatening note under the door of the assistant professor of commercial space operations at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He wanted his grade changed from a D to an A, because his GPA was 1.9, which put him at risk for being suspended in school, according to the report. He also said he did poorly on his exams, even after studying all night and receiving tutoring. The note is replicated below:

“TO DIANE HOWARD, THERE ARE TWO SNIPERS WHO ARE ALSO STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS AND THEY ARE BOTH HEAVILY ARMED WITH THEIR GUNS, RIFLES, AND BOMBS. THEY ARE BOTH 100% READY WITH THEIR FIREARMS TO ASSASSINATE YOU AMBUSH STYLE. IF YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE DYING IN YOUR OWN BLOOD BY SURPRISE, THEN RESIGN YOURSELF FROM TEACHING YOUR CLASSES IMMEDIATELY BEFORE YOUR DEATH HAPPENS BY YOUR ASSASSINS. WE AS MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE ROTC PROGRAM WILL NOT TOLERATE HYPOCRITES AT THIS UNIVERSITY AND WE WILL ALSO DEFINITELY NOT LET YOU STEAL OUR MONEY BY FAILING US FOR THE CLASSES. YOU AND OTHER PEOPLE ABSOLUTELY DO NOT HAVE ANY POWER OVER US.

YOU WILL BE TAKING A BIG RISK WITH YOUR LIFE IF YOU DECIDE TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM WITH THE STUDENTS. YOU [SIC] STUDENTS DIDN'T GO THROUGH METAL DETECTORS TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM, SO GET READY TO BE SLAUGHTERED. WE AS STUDENTS WILL DO ANYTHING THE FUCK WE WANT AT THIS UNIVERSITY WITH OUR FIREARMS AND BOMBS SO YOU ARE FIRED BY THE STUDENTS FROM EMBRY RIDDLE AERONAUTICAL UNIVERSITY AND GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE YOU SCUM ON EARTH. AND IF YOU THINK THIS IS A SCHEME THEN BRING IT ON. WE AS STUDENTS ARE READY TO DEFEAT YOU AND EVERYBODY ELSE IN THIS WAR WITH OUR ARSENAL AMMUNITION. DON'T TURN THIS INTO A SEUNG-HUI CHO AND ADAM LANZA SITUATION BECAUSE THERE IS A FIREARMS AND STUDENTS FOR CONCEALED CARRY ORGANIZATIONS BY THE STUDENTS AT THIS UNIVERSITY. FROM THE PENTAGON”

— (*Bay 9 News*, 2015, p.1).

**FACTOR A: Fixation and Focus. Score 10, Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor A.1: Naming of Target:* "TO DIANE HOWARD," Score 2
2. *Sub-factor A.2: Repetition of the Target:* "YOU WILL BE TAKING A BIG RISK WITH YOUR LIFE IF YOU DECIDE TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM WITH THE STUDENTS." Score 2
3. *Sub-factor A.3: Objectification of Target:* "WILL NOT TOLERATE HYPOCRITES AT THIS UNIVERSITY AND WE WILL ALSO DEFINITELY NOT LET YOU STEAL OUR MONEY BY FAILING US FOR THE CLASSES." Score 2
4. *Sub-factor A.4: Emphasis of Target:* Letter in all CAPS. Score 2
5. *Sub-factor A.5: Graphic Language:* "SO GET READY TO BE SLAUGHTERED," "GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE YOU SCUM ON EARTH," and "IF YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE DYING IN YOUR OWN BLOOD BY SURPRISE." Score 2

**FACTOR B: Hierarchical Thematic Content. Score 10, Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor B.1: Disempowering Language:* "GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE YOU SCUM ON EARTH." Score 2
2. *Sub-factor B.2: Glorified Avenger:* "WE AS STUDENTS ARE READY TO DEFEAT YOU," "YOU AND OTHER PEOPLE ABSOLUTELY DO NOT HAVE ANY POWER OVER US," and "WE AS MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE ROTC PROGRAM WILL NOT TOLERATE HYPOCRITES." Score 2
3. *Sub-factor B.3: Reality Crossover:* "DON'T TURN THIS INTO A SEUNG-HUI CHO AND ADAM LANZA SITUATION BECAUSE THERE IS A FIREARMS AND STUDENTS FOR CONCEALED CARRY ORGANIZATIONS BY THE STUDENTS AT THIS UNIVERSITY." Score 2
4. *Sub-factor B.4: Militaristic Language:* "THERE ARE TWO SNIPERS WHO ARE ALSO STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS AND THEY ARE BOTH HEAVILY ARMED WITH THEIR GUNS, RIFLES, AND BOMBS," and "WE AS MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE ROTC PROGRAM..." Score 2
5. *Sub-factor B.5: Paranoid Content:* "WE WILL ALSO DEFINITELY NOT LET YOU STEAL OUR MONEY BY FAILING US FOR THE CLASSES." Score 2

**FACTOR C: Action and Time Imperative. Score 10, Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor C.1: Location of the Attack:* "THEY ARE BOTH 100% READY WITH THEIR FIREARMS TO ASSASSINATE YOU AMBUSH STYLE." Score 2
2. *Sub-factor C.2: Time of the Attack:* "RESIGN YOURSELF FROM TEACHING YOUR CLASSES IMMEDIATELY BEFORE YOUR DEATH HAPPENS BY YOUR ASSASSINS." Score 2
3. *Sub-factor C.3: Weapons and Materials to be Used:* "THEY ARE BOTH HEAVILY ARMED WITH THEIR GUNS, RIFLES, AND BOMBS," and "WILL DO ANYTHING THE FUCK WE WANT AT THIS UNIVERSITY WITH OUR FIREARMS AND BOMBS..." Score 2
4. *Sub-factor C.4: Overcoming Obstacles:* "YOU STUDENTS DIDN'T GO THROUGH METAL DETECTORS TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM," and "GET READY TO BE SLAUGHTERED." Score 2
5. *Sub-factor C.5: Conditional Ultimatum:* "THEN RESIGN YOURSELF FROM TEACHING YOUR CLASSES IMMEDIATELY BEFORE YOUR DEATH HAPPENS BY YOUR ASSASSINS." Score 2

**FACTOR D: Pre-Attack Planning. Score 8, Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor D.1: Discussion and Acquisition of Weapons:* "THEY ARE BOTH HEAVILY ARMED WITH THEIR GUNS, RIFLES, AND BOMBS," and "WILL DO ANYTHING THE FUCK WE WANT AT THIS UNIVERSITY WITH OUR FIREARMS AND BOMBS." Score 2
2. *Sub-factor D.2: Evidence or Researching or Stalking the Target:* "YOU WILL BE TAKING A BIG RISK WITH YOUR LIFE IF YOU DECIDE TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM WITH THE STUDENTS," and "YOU STUDENTS DIDN'T GO THROUGH METAL DETECTORS TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM, SO GET READY TO BE SLAUGHTERED." Score 2
3. *Sub-factor D.3: Details Concerning Target:* "THEY ARE BOTH 100% READY WITH THEIR FIREARMS TO ASSASSINATE YOU AMBUSH STYLE." Score 2
4. *Sub-factor D.4: Fantasy Rehearsal for Attack:* "WE AS STUDENTS ARE READY TO DEFEAT YOU AND EVERYBODY ELSE." Score 1
5. *Sub-factor D.5: Costuming Description:* "WE AS MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE ROTC PROGRAM..." Score 1


**FACTOR E: Injustice Collecting. Score 4, Not Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor E.1: Perseverating on Past Wrongs:* "WE WILL ALSO DEFINITELY NOT LET YOU STEAL OUR MONEY BY FAILING US FOR THE CLASSES," and "WE AS MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE ROTC PROGRAM WILL NOT TOLERATE HYPOCRITES AT THIS UNIVERSITY." Score 2
2. *Sub-factor E.2: Unrequited Romantic Entanglements:* No evidence. Score 0
3. *Sub-factor E.3: Desperation, Hopelessness, and Suicide Ideation/Attempt:* No evidence. Score 0
4. *Sub-factor E.4: Amplification/Narrowing:* No evidence. Score 0
5. *Sub-factor E.5: Threats to Create Justice:* "GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE YOU SCUM ON EARTH," and "IF YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE DYING IN YOUR OWN BLOOD BY SURPRISE, THEN RESIGN YOURSELF FROM TEACHING YOUR CLASSES IMMEDIATELY BEFORE YOUR DEATH HAPPENS BY YOUR ASSASSINS." Score 2



## Appendix B: 2015 Philadelphia Threat

In early October, 2015, the website 4chan revealed a post concerning an impending violent attack in the Philadelphia area. The threat referenced the fatal shooting at Umpqua Community College in Oregon at the hands of Chris Harper Mercer: “On October 5, 2015, at 1:00 PM CT, a fellow robot will take up arms against a university near Philadelphia. His cries will be heard, his victims will cower in fear, and the strength of the Union will decay a little more” (Craig, 2015, p1).



**The Beta Rebellion has begun Anonymous** Fri 02 Oct 2015 10:16:06 No.22859387 [View](#) [Reply](#) [Original](#) [Report](#)  
 Quoted By: >>22859507 >>22859533 >>22859568 >>22859574 >>22859609 >>22859620 >>22859643 >>22859665 >>22859671 >>22859674 >>22859679 >>22859703 >>22859722 >>22859761 >>22859872 >>22859901 >>22859977 >>22859991 >>22860079 >>22860099 >>22860131 >>22860143 >>22860159 >>22860165 >>22860203

The first of our kind has struck fear into the hearts of America. His cries have been heard, even by the President.

This is only the beginning. The Beta Rebellion has begun. Soon, more of our brothers will take up arms to become martyrs to this revolution.

On October 5, 2015 at 1:00 PM CT, a fellow robot will take up arms against a university near Philadelphia. His cries will be heard, his victims will cower in fear, and the strength of the Union will decay a little more.

If you are in that area, you are encouraged to stay at home and watch the news as the chaos unfolds. His sacrifice will echo throughout the nation.

I plead to thee, brothers! We only have but one chance, one spark, for our revolution. The United States will soon condemn us to the status quo forever, and soon after, the United Nations. Don't let our one chance at writing history slip away. Martyr yourself for the cause or support those who have the courage to do so. We have the chance to make the world a better place for betas everywhere.

Hiro have mercy on us all. Lend us your strength to fight this evil.

A transcription of the above graphic follows:

The first of our kind has struck fear into the hearts of America. His cries have been heard, even by the President. This is only the beginning. The Beta Rebellion has begun. Soon, more of our brothers will take up arms to become martyrs to this revelation. On October, 5 2015 at 1:00 PM CT, a fellow robot will take up arms against a University near Philadelphia. His cries will be heard, his victims will cower in fear and the strength of the Union will decay a little more. If you are in that area, you are encouraged to stay at home and watch the news as the chaos unfolds. His sacrifice will echo throughout the nation. I plead to thee, brothers! We only have but one chance, one spark, for our revolution. The United States will soon condemn us to the status quo forever, and soon after, the United Nations. Don't let our one chance at writing history slip away. Martyr yourself for the cause or support those who have the courage to do so. We will make the world a better place for betas everywhere. Hiro have mercy on us all. Lend your strength to fight this evil.

**FACTOR A: Fixation and Focus. Score 6, Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor A.1: Naming of Target:* University near Philadelphia. Score 2
2. *Sub-factor A.2: Repetition of the Target:* "Lend us your strength," and "take up arms..." Score 2
3. *Sub-factor A.3: Objectification of Target:* "Victims will cower..." Score 2
4. *Sub-factor A.4: Emphasis of Target:* Not present. Score 0
5. *Sub-factor A.5: Graphic Language:* Not present. Score 0

**FACTOR B: Hierarchical Thematic Content. Score 8, Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor B.1: Disempowering Language:* "victims will cower..." Score 1
2. *Sub-factor B.2: Glorified Avenger:* "Martyr yourself for the cause," "beta revolution," and "Don't let our one chance at writing history slip away." Score 2
3. *Sub-factor B.3: Reality Crossover:* Attack in Oregon the week prior. Score 2
4. *Sub-factor B.4: Militaristic Language:* "take up arms..." Score 1
5. *Sub-factor B.5: Paranoid Content:* "struck fear into the hearts of America," and "We only have but one chance, one spark, for our revolution." Score 2

**FACTOR C: Action and Time Imperative. Factor 4, Not Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor C.1: Location of the Attack:* University outside of Philadelphia. Score 2
2. *Sub-factor C.2: Time of the Attack:* At 1 p.m. Central Time. Score 2
3. *Sub-factor C.3: Weapons and Materials to be Used:* No evidence. Score 0
4. *Sub-factor C.4: Overcoming Obstacles:* "Don't let our one chance at writing history slip away," and "If you are in that area, you are encouraged to stay at home and watch the news as the chaos unfolds." Score 2
5. *Sub-factor C.5: Conditional Ultimatum.* No evidence. Score 0

**FACTOR D: Pre-Attack Planning. Score 4, Not Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor D.1: Discussion and Acquisition of Weapons:* No evidence. Score 0
2. *Sub-factor D.2: Evidence or Researching or Stalking the Target:* Research may be implied given the mention of a school in Philadelphia. Score 1
3. *Sub-factor D.3: Details Concerning Target:* Specific location of school. Score 1
4. *Sub-factor D.4: Fantasy Rehearsal for Attack:* "beta rebellion..." Score 2
5. *Sub-factor D.5: Costuming Description:* No evidence. Score 0

**FACTOR E: Injustice Collecting. Score 4, Not Endorsed**

1. *Sub-factor E.1: Perseverating on Past Wrongs:* "make the world a better place..." Score 2
2. *Sub-factor E.2: Unrequited Romantic Entanglements:* No evidence. Score 0
3. *Sub-factor E.3: Desperation, Hopelessness, and Suicide Ideation/Attempt:* No evidence. Score 0
4. *Sub-factor E.4: Suicide Ideation/Attempt:* No evidence, Score 0
5. *Sub-factor E.5: Threats to Create Justice:* "make the world a better place," and "martyrs to this revelation." Score 2



# VIOLENCE RISK ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN WORD

## FACTOR A: FIXATION AND FOCUS

*This factor is based on the concept of a specific target being identified in the writing sample. This is a target in real life and the target is identified specifically.*

**Sub-factor A.1 Naming of Target:** Is the person, place, or system being targeted identified clearly in the writing sample?

**Sub-factor A.2 Repetition of the Target:** Is the target mentioned more than once? Is the target identified and then repeated multiple times for emphasis?

**Sub-factor A.3 Objectification of Target:** Is there language that indicates a negative view or dehumanizing of the target?

**Sub-factor A.4 Emphasis of Target:** Does the writer use capital letters, quotes, color changes, graphics, parenthetical inserts, or emoji to emphasize the target? This becomes more concerning if related to a theme of retaliation, blaming others, or wounded self-image (my life is over).

**Sub-factor A.5 Graphic Language:** Does the writer describe what s/he wants to do to the target in a graphic or detailed manner?

## FACTOR B: HIERARCHICAL THEMATIC CONTENT

*This factor is based on the concept of the writer or protagonist in the story being identified in the writing sample as superior or in an avenging or punishing role. This can occur through the anti-hero of the story or writer being seen as all-powerful and giving out judgment for past wrongs or the proletariat or targets in the story being seen as weak, stupid, or naive.*

**Sub-factor B.1 Disempowering Language:** Is the person, place, or system being targeted described as a sheep, lemming, cattle, retarded, or something similar?

**Sub-factor B.2 Glorified Avenger:** Is the writer or protagonist described as an all-powerful figure or someone who is smart, knowledgeable, and able to punish those who have wronged him/her? There may also be a tendency to use the gun or weapon to enhance the attacker's gender status to present him/herself as all powerful or superior.

**Sub-factor B.3 Reality Crossover:** For fiction pieces, is there a cross-over between fiction and reality? Additionally, does the writer reference an ideology or historical figure such as Hitler/Nazis or previous mass murderer as a role model or someone to emulate or copy?

**Sub-factor B.4 Militaristic Language:** Does the writer use military language around tactical or strategic attacks on a target?

**Sub-factor B.5 Paranoid Content:** Does the story structure give a sense of paranoia or worry beyond what would be considered normal?

## FACTOR C: ACTION AND TIME IMPERATIVE

*This factor is concerned with writing content that conveys a sense of impending movement toward action. This may be communicated by mentioning a specific time, location, or event such as a graduation, academic admission, or results of a conduct meeting.*

**Sub-factor C.1 Location of the Attack:** Is the location of a potential attack site mentioned in detail?

**Sub-factor C.2 Time of the Attack:** Is there a time/date given for the attack?

**Sub-factor C.3 Weapons and Materials to be Used:** Are specific weapons or materials mentioned in the writing that will be used in the attack?

**Sub-factor C.4 Overcoming Obstacles:** Does the writing sample include examples of obstacles that must be first overcome in order to carry out an attack?

**Sub-factor C.5 Conditional Ultimatum:** Is there an ultimatum attached to the time and the location of the attack?



# VIOLENCE RISK ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN WORD (CONT.)

## FACTOR D: PRE-ATTACK PLANNING

*Many who move forward with violent attacks write and plan in detail prior to these attacks. Sometimes, this pre-attack planning is boastful and can be described as a “howling” behavior designed to intimidate others towards compliance. Other times the pre-attack planning is unintentionally leaked prior to the attack and discovered by a third party.*

**Sub-factor D.1 Discussion and Acquisition of Weapons:** Does the writing contain evidence of discussion about potential weapons or materials that may be used to carry out an attack?

**Sub-factor D.2 Evidence of Researching or Stalking the Target:** Does the writing give evidence the author has conducted detailed research concerning the potential target?

**Sub-factor D.3 Details Concerning Target:** Has the writer given evidence of studying the details of a particular location to attack?

**Sub-factor D.4 Fantasy Rehearsal for Attack:** Is there evidence of a fantasy rehearsal concerning a potential attack?

**Sub-factor D.5 Costuming Description:** In fiction writing, is there a discussion of elaborate, dark costuming worn by the anti-hero prior to or during the attack?

## FACTOR E: INJUSTICE COLLECTING

*The term “injustice collector” was coined by Mary Ellen O’Toole as a risk factor in the first prong of the threat assessment approach: the personality of the student. The injustice collector keeps track of his/her past wrongs and is often upset in a manner beyond what would typically be expected.*

**Sub-factor E.1 Perseverating on Past Wrongs:** Does the writer give evidence of being wronged by others?

**Sub-factor E.2 Unrequited Romantic Entanglements:** Does the writer discuss past romantic relationships that ended in frustrated outcomes with the writer or protagonist alone and isolated?

**Sub-factor E.3 Desperation, Hopelessness or Suicide Ideation/Attempt:** Does the story or email have a quality of sadness, isolation, and a lack of positive outcomes or options for either the writer or the main character? Did the writer express an idea, thought, or description of a plan to kill him/herself?

**Sub-factor E.4 Amplification/Narrowing:** Is there language that amplifies (use of CAPS, emoji, or color/highlighting) or narrows the focus of anger and threat to a particular individual, department, or group?

**Sub-factor E.5 Threats to Create Justice:** Does the writer offer an explanation of how s/he will seek ultimate justice, karma, payback, or a narrative on how the individual will “make things right?”

## SCORING

To score the VRAW<sup>2</sup>, the writing sample should be read through carefully several times and areas of concern highlighted. Staff using the VRAW<sup>2</sup> then makes a decision surrounding each of the main five factors to determine if it is present. This is determined by rating each of the five sub-factors as 0 for not present, 1 for unsure, and 2 for present. The sub-factors are then added up. Scores of 5 or more indicated the overall factor is endorsed.

Factors Endorsed	NaBITA Tool	SIVRA-35
5 Factors	Extreme	High
4 Factors	Severe	High
3 Factors	Elevated	Moderate
2 Factors	Moderate	Moderate
1 Factor	Mild	Low



# VIOLENCE RISK ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN WORD

Rate each of the five sub-factors either 0 for not present, 1 for unsure, and 2 for present, then add up all points. Scores of 5 or more indicated the overall factor is endorsed.

FACTORS	POINTS	NOTES
<b>FACTOR A: Fixation and Focus</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Endorsed <input type="checkbox"/> Not Endorsed	
Sub-factor A.1 Naming of Target	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor A.2 Repetition of the Target	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor A.3 Objectification of Target	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor A.4 Emphasis of Target	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor A.5 Graphic Language	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
<b>FACTOR B: Hierarchical Thematic Content</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Endorsed <input type="checkbox"/> Not Endorsed	
Sub-factor B.1 Disempowering Language	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor B.2 Glorified Avenger	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor B.3 Reality Crossover	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor B.4 Militaristic Language	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor B.5 Paranoid Content	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
<b>FACTOR C: Action and Time Imperative</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Endorsed <input type="checkbox"/> Not Endorsed	
Sub-factor C.1 Location of the Attack	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor C.2 Time of the Attack	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor C.3 Weapons and Materials to be Used	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor C.4 Overcoming Obstacles	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor C.5 Conditional Ultimatum	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
<b>FACTOR D: Pre-Attack Planning</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Endorsed <input type="checkbox"/> Not Endorsed	
Sub-factor D.1 Discussion and Acquisition of Weapons	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor D.2 Evidence of Researching or Stalking the Target	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor D.3 Details Concerning Target	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor D.4 Fantasy Rehearsal for Attack	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor D.5 Costuming Description	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
<b>FACTOR E: Injustice Collecting</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Endorsed <input type="checkbox"/> Not Endorsed	
Sub-factor E.1 Perseverating on Past Wrongs	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor E.2 Unrequited Romantic Entanglements	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor E.3 Desperation, Hopelessness, Suicide Ideation/Attempt	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor E.4 Amplification/Narrowing:	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
Sub-factor E.5 Threats to Create Justice:	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2	

*Note: Dangerousness and violence, from a student, faculty, or staff member is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately predict. This training topic offers research-based techniques and theories to provide a foundational understanding and improved awareness of the potential risk. The training or tool should not be seen as a guarantee or offer any assurance that violence will be prevented.*



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