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Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



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A Note from the Editor: Editor as Tutor

Christine Cozzens, Agnes Scott College



Christine

As many of you know, Volume 18 is my last as editor of *Southern Discourse*, a job I have loved and enjoyed for almost two decades. I have a sabbatical coming up, and it seemed like the right time to pass along this wonderful, fulfilling work to someone else. I'm very happy that the next editor will be Sara Littlejohn of University of North Carolina Greensboro. I know you will enjoy working with her and reading the issues she produces.

Over the years, editing SD has allowed me the privilege of being in constant contact with writers shaping their research, insights, and words for the audience of our community, southeastern writing center people and friends and supporters in a wider circle, as well. Among other important lessons, my dialogues with these writers have taught me to approach editing as tutors approach tutoring—with respect for the integrity of the piece and the vision of the writer, but also with respect for the needs of the intended audience and for the standards of a published discourse. While some submissions come in ready for layout, others need a small or large amount of work; it has been SD policy to work with submitters to help them move towards publication by suggesting cuts, revisions, additional research, etc., when necessary. While some journals pride themselves on their “rejection rate” (some tenure and promotion committees even request this figure!), I would be happier being asked for SD’s “revision rate.” That is, after all, what we’re all about.

As in tutoring, when an issue of SD comes out, all credit goes to the writers, but it's very satisfying for me to have played even a tiny part in the evolution of a piece of writing. After nearly forty years in the “writing business,” I still believe what I tell Agnes Scott tutors every fall: there is no greater honor, no more important work than helping writers say what they want to say in the most effective and powerful way possible. ✨

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South Carolina Directors Meet

Bonnie Devet, College of Charleston



Courtesy of Bonnie Devet

Carolina came together for their 2nd annual directors' meeting of the South Carolina Writing Center Association (SCWCA), also fondly known as the Palmetto State Writing Center Association. This April 6, 2013 gathering, sponsored by the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA), was hosted by Dr. Scott Pleasant, coordinator of the CCU writing center.

The SWCA representative for South Carolina, Graham Stowe (University of South Carolina), opened the sessions by providing valuable information on what had occurred since the last meeting and offering insight into the next SWCA conference, scheduled for Greenville, NC. He also encouraged the directors to carpool and to bring their tutors to SWCA.

Then came the main topic of the meeting: "Tutor Training," with Jane Smith of Winthrop University (Rock Hill) delivering the keynote address on "From Self-Discovery to (Almost) Confident: Tutor Training at Winthrop University." Smith's address described her credit-bearing course "WRIT 500: The Theory and Practice of Tutoring Writing," which emphasizes six major, term-long threads for developing tutors:

- observing, interning, tutoring alone;
- analyzing student writing samples;
- role-playing;
- using "case-studies" games where students explain how they would handle various tutoring scenarios;

With azaleas blooming and an ever-so slight breeze ruffling a lake in between the academic buildings of Coastal Carolina University (CCU is in Myrtle Beach, SC), eighteen writing center directors from across South

- reviewing grammar by using the well-known *The Prentice Hall Reference Guide* (8th ed. Muriel Harris and Jennifer L. Kunka. Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011);
- understanding theory, practice, and writing whereby students do observations, free-write in class, compose reflective essays, and produce a formal research paper.

Her detailed syllabus, showing many resources and teaching techniques available to enhance any tutoring program, impressed the audience of her fellow directors.

After lunch, directors and tutors conducted concurrent sessions also devoted to tutor training. The topics covered included using metaphors for tutor training (Graham Stowe), employing humor as a management tool (Bonnie Devet, College of Charleston), utilizing video and self-reflection for ongoing training (Allan Nail, Columbia College), training tutors as learning experts (Diane Fulcher, Central Carolina Technical College), employing strategies for ongoing training sessions (Jennie Ariail, Medical University of South Carolina), and exploring topics that tutors themselves find important for training (Samantha Wright, Coastal Carolina University). Also featured were sessions on successful tutor training courses at Coker College (Jasna Shannon) Coker College) and CCU (Denise Paster).



Courtesy of Bonnie Devet

It was a full day of informative, innovative sessions, with all participants looking ahead to the next meeting that has been tentatively scheduled for September 2013 at Lander University (Greenwood, SC), hosted by Judy Bello. ✨

Getting All Interdisciplinary: A Guiding Business Principle for Writing Center Practice

J. Michael Rifenburg, University of Georgia

I greatly admire the slice of past and present writing center scholarship committed to interdisciplinary relations. This commitment is present in early publications like Muriel Harris's *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*, where she merges diverse fields such as psychology, cultural anthropology, and composition into a "how to" manual for the writing conference. I see this commitment in recent monographs such as Elizabeth H. Boquet's *Noise from the Writing Center* in which she riffs off Jimi Hendrix and late twentieth-century feminist theorists to make the argument about embracing chaos alongside order in the writing center (84). And so too in Anne Ellen Gellar et al.'s *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice*, which filters writing center theory and practice through the mythological and literary trope of Trickster figures. Or even Jennifer Johnson's fall 2011 *Southern Discourse* article in which she explores the connection between Michael Michalko's work on creativity and design practices in the writing center.

This interdisciplinary approach keeps us on our toes. Tapping into knowledge held by other disciplines invites us, may be even implores us, to work from an oftentimes different knowledge-production framework. How evidence is marshaled and presented in the hard sciences, for example, can look markedly different from evidence in the humanities. Diving into other fields forces us to question our assumptions, explore other alternatives and not lie stagnant. Other fields help us (re)imagine what we do when we sit down with a write—who would have ever imagined that a psychedelic guitarist from the 60s had

something to teach us about conferencing?

In what follows, I add to this slice of writing center scholarship which seeks to improve theory, practice, and research in our field through tapping into salient developments in other fields. Through looking at Jim Stengel's 2011 book *Grow: How Ideals Power Growth and Profit at the World's Greatest Companies*, I suggest that writing centers, like corporations, should adopt a brand ideal which governs their everyday practices. While I am sure Stengel imagined his book being used in a business class and not in writing centers, his focus on developing a core set of ideals which guide the development and daily activities of an organization connects well, I hope to show, to our work.



Courtesy of Mario Rosas

Though readers may cringe over viewing the writing center as a business or company; however, the benefits of adopting ideals to govern our individual writing center practices outweigh these potential downfalls.

After seven years as Proctor & Gamble's global marketing officer, Stengel left the multinational corporation in 2008 to create the Jim Stengel Corporation, a company devoted to consulting and propriety research. *Grow* comes out of Stengel's company's "ten-year-growth study of more than 50,000 brands around the world" (1). This study showed that "companies with ideals of improving people's lives" are "400 percent more profitable than an investment in the Standard & Poor's 500" (1). These outperforming companies are called the "Stengel 50."

Key for Stengel, and key for writing centers as I hope to demonstrate, is this emphasis on "improving people's lives." Stengel's data show that successful companies improve people's lives by tapping into one of five fundamental human values: "eliciting joy," "enabling connections," "inspiring exploration," "evoking pride," and "impacting society" (38). Once a company develops a brand ideal focused on one of these five values—Stengel doesn't consider a company tackling all five values—successful companies then build their

organization around the brand ideal, communicate this ideal to employees and customers, and “evaluate their progress and people against the brand ideal” (21).

So what are these brand ideal companies? Apple, Starbucks, and Google make appearances on the Stengel 50 list. As do other well-known companies like BlackBerry, Pampers, Coca-Cola, Red Bull, and Calvin Klein. But so do lesser-known international companies like Emirates, an air travel company headquartered in Dubai; Rakuten Ichiba, an e-commerce company based in Japan; and Petrobras, a multinational energy corporation located in Brazil.

Though there is a large body of literature speaking to the ills of higher education’s corporatization, writing centers are looking more and more like corporations. As such, Stengel has much to teach us. We, and here I am speaking directly to members of writing centers, adhere to capricious fluctuations of budgets. We hire, train, and even fire staff. We appeal to administrative suits for more funding, space, autonomy, or guidance, all while maintaining regular contact with an often demanding customer base. We advertise and promote ourselves. As I type this article, a pile of quantitative data sits on my desk waiting for me to mold it into a meaningful document which will report on our spring 2011 consultations (my father, a long-time government worker, talks of typing similar reports). Through years of practice, we have accumulated collective wisdom for what works well during a session and what does not; we hold annual conferences where we talk with like-minded people. Though we don’t have rivalries (hopefully!), like other companies, and though our end-goals are not lucrative (hopefully!), we seek to satisfy our customer base—the students, faculty, and community members who visit us.

So let’s say we are open to viewing the writing center as a company. If so, then Stengel invites us to reflect on our practices and consider how we are touching one of the five fundamental human values. Are we eliciting joy, enabling connections, inspiring exploration, evoking pride, or impacting society? Or are we performing an admixture of these? This is a key query to pose because it asks us to perform some sort of metacognition, to think about our daily practices.

Allow me to get more concrete. I work at the writing center at the University of Oklahoma (OU) where we are open to writers of all stripes: freshman,

seniors, faculty, adjuncts, and even community members. We operate from a statement of principles which, while admirable, measurable, and obtainable as such a statement should be, doesn’t cleanly link up with one of the five fundamental human values Stengel describes. So allow me to wonder in writing how my writing center would adopt one of these values. If we were to adopt a brand ideal à la Stengel, what fundamental value would we seek? Do we want writers who come to us to have joy in the writing process? Or do we want to inspire them to explore their text and their unconsciously held assumptions about the world they inhabit? Do we want them to leave feeling proud? Or is our goal to positively impact all members of the campus and community? Sure, it is almost impossible to say “let’s shoot for eliciting joy and forget about impacting society.” And I don’t think that a Stengel 50 company that elicits joy shuns the idea of impacting society. But the key for writing centers is to allow one of the five fundamental values to take precedence. We cannot allow ourselves to be stretched in myriad directions. So let’s say OU’s writing center shoots for impacting society. If it did this, I would assume eliciting joy and enabling connections, for example, could fall under this category. But the singular goal, the goal translated to the staff and to the writers who visit the writing center, and the goal that governs theory, practice, and research at the OU writing center, would be to impact society.

This fall I hope to implement some of Stengel’s idea in the writing center where I work. I believe these ideas will gain traction because of our commitment to interdisciplinary relations and our monthly practicum sessions. Through our executive director, Michele Eodice, our writing center has fostered an

interdisciplinary environment. One of our graduate students just received his Master’s focusing on postmodern poetry and religion and starts law school in the fall; one of our consultants is planning a career in dentistry. We have other



Courtesy of Mario Rosas

consultants focusing on geology, management information systems, mathematics, and African-American studies. Michele is a co-author of *The Everyday Writing Center* which explored the connection between mythological Tricksters and consulting. Our associate director, Moira Ozias, coauthored a piece which pulled from organizational theory to speak to antiracism work in the writing center. Michele and Moira have created a culture open to tapping into knowledge in other fields.

Additionally, our monthly practicum sessions provide us a time for introducing and playing with these new ideas. These are the times where, as was the case last semester, a drama major introduced new understandings of pedagogical scaffolding. These times, built into our consulting schedules, allow us a safe space for testing new ideas and seeing if something useful and practical could be gleaned from, say, the intriguing *Scientific America* July 2012 article providing a biologist's perspective on interspecies' cooperation. This practicum would be the time and space where we discuss Stengel's brand ideals and see how they could help us. We could discuss how our goal of impacting society would then manifest itself in our promotional materials, in the questions we ask potential consultants during an interview.

We would discuss how our brand ideal would manifest itself in how we consult with writers and how we interact with each other; how it would manifest itself in how we hold ourselves at local, regional, and national



Courtesy of Mario Rosas

conferences and manifest itself in the research and scholarship our writing center produces; how it would be the guiding principle for navigating the tricky waters of academe.

In short, our writing center's culture allows space for and even desires interdisciplinary ideas that push us in novel directions.

But your writing center doesn't need a track record of incorporating ideas from other fields or even a monthly practicum dedicated to fleshing out these interdisciplinary ideas for Stengel's concept of brand ideals to work for you. If nothing else, reading Stengel's *Grow* shows that all organizations need a singular guiding principle. My call at the close is for your writing center to consider crafting such a principle either by adopting one of Stengel's five fundamental human values or getting creative and arriving at your own. ✨

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Walking the Tightrope: Balancing Roles as Tutor and Teacher

Keith B. Vyvial, San Jacinto College South

Writing well is a skill that all people must possess to be successful in their educational and professional lives. Many college students struggle with mastering this ability. For this reason, the writing tutor provides help that cannot be afforded in the classroom. Writing center tutors and English instructors can actually be viewed as opposite ends of a tightrope. That tightrope is the means for a student to develop his writing and analytical skills on which a student walks, sometimes teetering, to understanding and mastery. Both ends are important in order to keep the rope taut and prevent the student from toppling over into failure. Many colleges utilize writing center tutors who are also instructors. This duality of roles can be advantageous; however, a number of conflicts can arise and must be identified as well. The roles of tutor and instructor do complement each other, sometimes they may overlap, sometimes they may even conflict, but they are not the same.

Few would argue that tutors and instructors should both make themselves for the sake of the students. However, when separating teacher from tutor, an obvious difference is that instructors work with a classroom full of students. Instructors may have students multiple days a week for only one to three hours, whereas tutors see students one-on-one in scheduled sessions as needed. Therefore, the level of approachability and the depth of assistance can differ dramatically, greatly affecting students who might need more guidance: “Tutorial instruction is very different from traditional classroom learning because it introduces into the educational setting a middle person, the tutor, who inhabits a world somewhere between the student and the teacher” (Harris 27-28); therefore, the tutoring experience is and must remain very different from the classroom experience.

Jan Bethany, an adjunct professor of English who also tutors, provides a further point of difference between these roles: “If [instructors] are consistent in OUR class[es], excellent. As tutors, we disregard some ‘consistencies’ – rules, habits and patterns – since we deal with students from other disciplines and educators.” In the classroom, such consistencies are necessary for the students

to understand expectations between assignments. Alternatively, it is necessary for tutors to disregard some consistencies, as expectations and requirements may change between instructors and between curricula (Lea and Street). It is not for the tutor to lay down steadfast rules of consistency. Sometimes, this may be a struggle for a tutor who also works as an English instructor; it is tempting for the tutor to set his own parameters as required of his classes. In addition to a consistency in expectations, instructors also work in a structured environment with a formal, standardized curriculum, designing lessons and assignments which expose students to specific academic standards (Lea and Street). The tutor’s job is to take those assignments and help the students better interpret what is expected.

Also, for many students, it can be difficult enough giving papers to their instructors; when a fear of writing ability exists, it is even worse to sit across from someone whose job is to critique their works in a one-on-one environment. Extra care should be taken by the tutor to put the student at ease (Gillespie and Lerner). The tutoring session should not just focus on the paper’s problems; positive aspects of the paper should be mentioned as well. Christina Putnam-Cox, a long-time adjunct English instructor and writing tutor, explains, “Making a student feel accepted and relaxed is...part of the successful tutoring session and allows for a give-and-take...allowing for a free exchange of information especially when students are shy or worried about revealing how much they don’t know.” She also believes that the most important role of a writing tutor is to “mak[e] students feel comfortable talking and discussing their own shortcomings.” However, if overdone, this positive reinforcement can cause additional problems. In the classroom setting, instructors evaluate the students through scores and feedback. It is important to always remember that tutors do not evaluate and predict grades.

Unfortunately, however, students will continue to hear what they want from sessions and will come into the writing centers with expectations that they will leave with perfect papers. As Bethany points out, conflict arises if the tutor is too positive, saying the paper overall is good when the paper may be “miles from average.” She adds, “I hear this a lot in class: ‘Ms. Bethany! I just got a 70 on my paper? I went to the writing center, and the tutor said my paper was good. What happened? You suggested that I go there.’” This is difficult when the tutor only intends the session to be a positive experience for the student, to not progress student insecurity. Perhaps the solution is for each

tutor to set a limitation on what positives he can say to the students, staying clear to the fact that he cannot evaluate the work as a whole, and focusing on feedback that is truly constructive. An instructor needs to be mindful of student critiquing in a different way. Too many marks on a paper and little to no positive feedback can result in a student withdrawing and losing confidence rather than accepting constructive criticism. Feedback must be given that is constructive and comprehensible for each student. The tutors and the instructors do not intend any misgivings; therefore, both should be ever-mindful of the feedback they provide.

Sometimes, the student's issues will involve less tangible factors, such as time management or organizational skills. These are items which are possibly touched on in the classroom, but without that one-on-one assistance, it is more difficult for a student to find what techniques work best for him, individually (Harris 32). The student may even be lacking basic writing skills which an instructor expects to already exist, and there is not enough time to cover them in class. This may be especially true for non-native speaking students. The instructor can recognize different issues in the various students and may acknowledge them on student papers, but even in an environment in which every student starts out the class on a different writing level, the lessons have to stay on focus and keep moving. Often, this means all but ignoring the personal, individual issues in the classroom. This is very frustrating for a teacher who wants to help in the best way possible. Individualization in teaching methods is absolutely necessary to optimally reach each student in the classroom. But, the nature of the beast does not afford such luxuries. Attempts by an instructor to try to address each student's individual issues in the classroom environment would become counterproductive for the class as a whole. One who serves as both instructor and tutor may have even more difficulty with this comprehension because he wants to pull his tutor role into the classroom. This is not wise because the instructor becomes bogged down in a job that already calls for hours of work outside of the classroom, potentially detracting from the intended lesson plan. An instructor simply does not have the means to provide individual help to all of his students. Therefore, in many cases, the best way to help is to direct the student to other sources for further educational assistance. The frustrated instructor needs to remember that this is the best option and not a sign of failure; a natural part of the teaching process is providing all tools necessary to develop those writing and critical thinking skills. The tutor is trained to work with those personal

issues. He has the opportunity to model a part of the writing process or guide the student along as he follows the process (Harris 33). An instructor, on the other hand, has to adjust his pace to compensate for the understanding of the class as a whole, or at least the majority of the class, leaving no opportunity for this luxury.

As an English and composition instructor myself, I balance my lesson plans between helping students develop their grammar and composition skills and teaching analysis and critical thinking. The emphasis is on how these skills will help each of the students as individuals, as college students, as members of society, and as potential careered workers (Lea and Street); however, English classes are not the only courses in which students are required to provide good, formal papers. As a tutor, this is reinforced as I see students coming in for help with papers in speech, government, history, psychology, dance, etc. I am given an advantage because my role as a tutor allows me to bring the experiences and understanding back to my own classroom, using these varied assignments as examples, and explaining the importance of writing to students' overall college success (Harris 27).

Because I tutor, I am also more mindful of my assignments, always adapting them to best clarify what I am looking for in the student papers. All too often as a tutor, I have seen an assignment sheet that was not entirely clear. When neither the student nor I understand the assignment, I might give my interpretation from my own experiences and expectations as an instructor, but that is given with a caveat. Students should ideally talk to the instructor and ask for more explanation. The last thing I want as a tutor is to have the student or even the instructor complaining that I gave bad advice and directly caused a student's bad grade. If the tutor suggests that the student seek more clarity, doing so could assist the whole class. Perhaps there are many students who did not fully understand the assignment; perhaps the instructor did not realize the lack of clarity.


Sometimes in tutoring sessions, I even get some good ideas for adapting into my own assignments. Unfortunately, I think that, because I am also an instructor, it is also a bit too easy to want to criticize a colleague's assignment because it does not coincide with my teaching style. I want to speak out to the student that I think his instructor's assignment is too confusing or even ridiculous. I want to say that this assignment is a bit advanced for the

student's current course level. This could not be a worse idea. I am not taking the role of that student's teacher. I am not assigning grades (Harris 29). My role there is to help interpret what the instructor expects of the student and help him understand it so that he can master the requirements on his own. As a tutor, I do not know if additional instruction was given in the classroom. The tutor should never criticize the instructor. The reputation of the tutor and the writing center are at stake. I would hate to think that my own assignments are being criticized by other tutors in sessions with my students.

Likewise, the instructor should not criticize the tutors in the writing center. I have worked at schools where I heard that a particular instructor told his students not to waste their time on seeking writing center assistance because it is worthless. This is irresponsible. Writing centers exist to provide supplemental help to students who need it. The instructor does not know what occurs in the tutoring sessions. That instructor needs to keep in mind the fundamental rule of writing centers: The staff will help with any part of the writing process, but will not write the paper for the student. The instructor should also be aware that the writing center is not there to step on his toes; the function of the tutor "is for fine tuning the knowledge learned from the teacher" (Sullivan). The tutor does not supersede the instructor; he reinforces what the instructor is covering in the classroom.

So, which role is more important to student success? That is a difficult one to answer, and certainly either answer would step on toes. Of course, the instructor creates the assignments, gives classroom instructions, and issues grades. However, we are talking about a classroom full of students in a semester filled with specific lessons, leaving limited time for anything extra. The instructor certainly wants to help, and will try to make himself as readily available as possible. He can recognize and point out specific issues in each student, but simply does not have the time to help each of them one-on-one. That is where the tutor becomes an important participant in student success, possibly even more important than the instructor.

In observing the differing roles of tutors and instructors and any conflicts which may result, it would seem that more communication should exist between the writing centers and the instructors. Perhaps the writing center coordinator or director, or another representative could hold meetings with the instructors of a particular concentration or curriculum. In those

meetings, the instructors can share their questions, concerns, and expectations of the tutors. The writing center representative can share his own questions or concerns. It is also helpful for the instructors to provide copies of the major assignments to the writing center each semester, allowing opportunity for clarification of any unclear points. This increased communication can make for better tutors and better teachers. Although the roles of instructor and tutor differ in numerous ways, sometimes even conflicting, both serve a very important function. Throughout the intended careers as well as required courses of a college student, writing and critical thinking are some of the most crucial abilities one must possess. Instructors and tutors both exist (and coexist) to provide different levels of assistance to enhance these necessary abilities, ensuring student success in college and beyond. They both serve to keep that tightrope up, allowing better student success. Teachers and tutors may not be the same, but, as Dr. Steven D'Alessandro, Senior Lecturer in Marketing at Macquarie University, states, "Not all good teachers are tutors. But all good tutors are great teachers." 

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Compass Points: Falling into Some Professional Development Ideas

**Pamela B. Childers, Caldwell Chair of Composition
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It is autumn, and many ideas are falling through our minds like the multi-colored leaves around us. We are worrying about lesson plans, grades for the marking period, meetings with colleagues, extra-duty assignments, deadlines, the curriculum, and Common Core State Standards. The semester may seem overwhelming, but what about our own professional development and personal growth? Instead of just worrying about our work demands and our students, we also need to think about what will make us better educators. Now is the time to plan for 2014. What I am suggesting is that we all go to links in this article, see what appeals to us, send for information, and check out deadlines. Each of us has an obligation to ourselves to make time to research and plan our own professional development by doing what excites us and will engage our students in learning. Any of the following suggestions can impact our growth as professional educators.

Most of us are aware of the myriad of opportunities including SWCA's own regional conference (<http://www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html>), and IWCA (<http://www.writingcenters.org>) offers information on the IWCA@CCCC, state, regional and international conferences, as well as updates on the IWCA Summer Institute. The June 2014 IWAC Conference (<http://www.cce.umn.edu/International-Writing-Across-the-Curriculum-Conference>) also provides great opportunities to interact with writing center and WAC people, talk about professional issues with other educators, and attend sessions to become better at what we do. Personally, as both a participant and

a workshop leader, I have developed professional and lifelong friendships with educators throughout the world; collaborated with many on teaching, writing and presentation projects; and applied what I have learned from others to my own work.

Besides these opportunities, there are also summer institutes at almost 200 National Writing Project sites throughout the US, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. Check the website regularly for updates and links to the nearest site at www.nwp.org. I remember participating in a NWP summer program at Virginia Tech in the 1980s that influenced how I teach writing as well as how I write. The other important part of these institutes is that they are co-directed by teachers of different academic levels, so professional partnerships develop among elementary, secondary and university people across disciplines. For another outstanding



Pamela B. Childers

summer opportunity, why not apply for an NEH institute, seminar or workshop for teachers and college/university educators at <http://www.neh.gov/divisions/education/summer-programs/>? Several colleagues in a variety of disciplines have been fortunate enough to participate in some of these wonderful learning opportunities. I have studied *Two Aesthetes: D.G. Rossetti, Oscar Wilde*, and *The Subversions of Art in London and Opera, Giving Voice to Culture: Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin* at University of New Mexico, while others participated in *Plato's Republic in Athens* or *Mozart's Music in Vienna*. Because of these experiences, I have been able to work with cross-disciplinary

classes in English, art, science and history, giving presentations and offering writing assignments. For instance, after my presentation to a European history class studying Russia, students understood life in 19th century Russia and the education of Russian young men in French and English schools, while girls studied at home. Students wrote about life as a "superfluous man," poet, or young woman living in the city or country during those times. I have also continued to study and appreciate the writings of Oscar Wilde (attending the world premiere of the opera *Oscar* at the Santa Fe Opera this summer), Pushkin's novel *Eugene Onegin*, and Tchaikovsky's opera (I will attend the Metropolitan

Opera production of Eugene Onegin in December!). My students have loved posting a daily Oscar Wilde quotation in the writing center, and I never had an interest in opera, but now I share these connections with my students. Other writing opportunities appear at the website of Peter Murphy, New Jersey teacher and poet, who offers his annual Poetry and Writing Getaways (<http://www.wintergetaway.com/>). Whether an experienced writer or not, take a risk with supportive writers and teachers at one of his workshops. Also, Peter will be posting his summer getaway soon for 2014, and it fills fast. After several years in Wales, he moved the getaway to Scotland last August. Will he be returning to Dundee next summer or somewhere else just as grand? Grants are available, so this would be a perfect opportunity to get away and try some writing in a perfectly situated location. Peter and I were Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Teacher/Consultants years ago and studied with Galway Kinnell; his students at Atlantic City High School and he have consistently won state and national poetry awards, and he continues to teach poetry at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey with Pulitzer-Prize winning poet Stephen Dunn. Working with our student writers becomes more rewarding after a personal experience at these getaways.

Finally, there are also educational opportunities to interact with colleagues through special ongoing programs. For instance, Harvard's School of Education offers a myriad of options through their WIDE World program at <https://learnweb.harvard.edu/wide/en/index.html>. They describe their program working with over 6,000 educators "to improve teaching practice and student performance. Through the power of online communication and learning, we intend to spread the goal of Teaching for Understanding to many more." I have seen the impact of this program on colleagues in English, science and art. Several years ago, I participated in a Critical Friends Group (<http://www.nsrffharmony.org/index.html>) for two years with colleagues. The protocols easily applied directly to my own classroom, and I found the one for text-based seminars particularly valuable with interdisciplinary classes. The program grew out of Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools (<http://www.essentialschools.org/>), which also offers some interesting programs.

So, time and space have limited what dreaming I can suggest; however, each of us has his/her own specific interests, level of risk taking and limitations. There's no time like today to search for some possibilities. Like our students, we can grow through the joy of learning. Happy surfing on the Internet! ✨

Tutor Training Techniques & Topics

Samantha C. Wright, Coastal Carolina University

The training of tutors is an integral part of the success of a university writing center. In January 2012, I created a survey to establish which tutor training techniques and topics are viewed by writing center employees to be the most effective. The results reveal that a diverse range of training methods used in conjunction with one another is the best way to encourage interactive tutor learning. In other words, there is not one specific topic or technique that should be used, but rather a combination of techniques is the most effective way to train well prepared tutors.

There are some commonalities that the majority of writing centers deem important. With regards to training techniques, Kenneth Bruffee, author of "Two Related Issues in Peer Tutoring," states, "the most complete and accurate way to train effective peer tutors is through a credit bearing course" (72). A course gives the tutor incentive to master the material and the chance to improve their own writing while they learn how to help each other. Also, since an entire semester can be dedicated to training, different methods of can be used such as mock sessions, self-evaluations, presentations, etc. (Bruffee 73). Kurt Schick, author of, "The Idea of a Writing Center Course," agrees with Bruffee and states that training courses should be offered, if not required, at all universities (Schick 54). Stephen North, author of "Training Tutors to Talk about Writing," also agrees with Bruffee; however, he acknowledges that student tutors may not have time in their schedules to take another course. He explains that the most realistic training technique is a



Courtesy of Samantha C. Wright

frequent lecture session, followed by a discussion. This gives the tutors a chance to learn a concept and then discuss its application (North 89). Since all tutors are different, these inter-tutor discussions allow them to share what they have found to be most effective.

Equally as important to the techniques are the topics. A common misconception is that tutors need to be trained in writing mechanics (i.e. grammar). While these are important, these are regarded as lower level concerns by authors Jim Bell and Muriel Harris. Sources agree that “Non-directive vs. Directive Tutoring” is the most important topic for tutors. According to Jim Bell, quoted in Muriel Harris’ “Using Tutorial Principles to Train Tutors,” a “tutor’s job is neither to tell the student what to do nor to write the paper, but to...help the writer learn the skills he or she needs to write successfully” (302). Telling students what to write will not make them better writers. They need to actively learn how to write for themselves (Hacker 107). If a tutor can get a student to discover the right answer, then the student gains confidence in their writing abilities (Fuchs 211).



Courtesy of Samantha C. Wright

Given the information that I gathered, I formed a survey that reveals what techniques and topics employees believe are the most important. After having the subjects state their role in their center (Director, Assistant Director, Full-time Non-student Tutor, Graduate Student Tutor, Undergraduate Student Tutor, or Other), I asked them to rate the importance of a series of fifteen training topics (one=not important, five=most important). The topics were as follows: Grammar/Punctuation, Documentation (MLA, APA, and Chicago), Other Formatting Techniques, Making the Most of Your Time with a Student, Paper Organization, Dealing with Difficult Students, Using Directive vs. Non-Directive Methods, English as a Second Language (ESL) Basics, Tutoring for

Various Dialects of English, Online Tutoring, Working with Students Who Don’t Have a Draft, Writing Effective Consultation Reports, and Tutoring for High Level vs. Low Level Concerns.

Next, I asked the subjects to rate a series of eight training methods (one=least effective, five=most effective). The methods were: Credit-bearing Tutor Training Courses, Interactive Discussions Led by the Director, Online Tutorials, “Straight” Lectures given by the Director, Sessions led by Graduate Student Tutors, Sessions Led by Undergraduate Student Tutors, Workshop Sessions Led by the Director, and Written Tests for Tutors. The survey was sent out to the “W Center” listserv and it received a total of 108 responses: sixty directors, eleven assistant directors, three full-time non-student tutors, eight graduate student tutors, twenty two undergraduate student tutors, and four listed as “other.” The most discrepancy occurred between the tutors and directors, so I focused my research on these roles.

Out of the sixty directors who responded, 72.9% agreed that the most important topic is “Tutoring for Higher Level vs. Lower Level Concerns.” This is contrary to what my researched suggested. “Using Directive vs. Non-Directive Methods,” which has historically been seen as the most important training topic, was ranked as the third most important according to directors. Less than half of directors (47.3%) said that it was the most important. These results are most likely due to the limited time that is allotted for each consultation (thirty minutes). Tutors have to focus on the broad issues first to ensure that students get as much out of the sessions as possible. Some disagreement occurs however, when we look at the results from the tutor responses.

While they agree with directors that “Tutoring for Higher Level vs. Lower Level Concerns” (54.5%) is the most important, “Using Directive vs. Non-Directive Tutoring” is ranked as fourth (33.3%). Ranked as second and third were “Essay Organization” (45.5%) and “Dealing with Difficult Students” (36.4%). The reason that “Using Directive vs. Non-Directive Tutoring” may not have made the top three amongst tutors is most likely due to the consultation time constraints. If a tutor is working with a difficult student and he or she does not know how to handle it, then the consultation won’t be beneficial. The topics which presented the most discrepancy were “APA Format,” “MLA Format,” “Grammar/Punctuation,” “Making the Most of Your Time with a Student,” and “Online Tutoring” (Figure 1). No tutors said that “Online

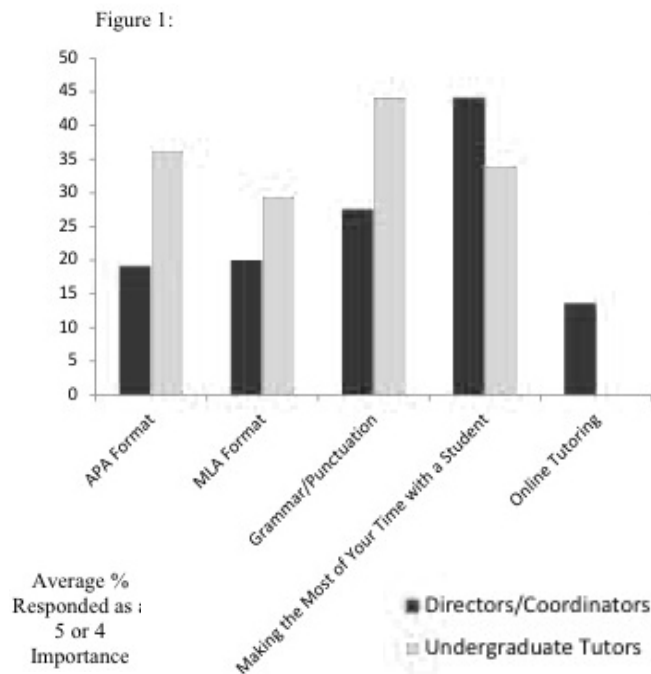
Tutoring” was important. This is most likely because they are already proficient in this topic because they have grown up with technology at their disposal. Despite this discrepancy between directors and tutors, there was much more consensus when it came to the most effective techniques.

The directors and tutors agreed that an “Interactive Discussion Led by the Director” is the best way for tutors to be trained. 51.7% of directors and 45.5% of tutors responded that they believed this to be the most effective training technique. Directors most likely believe this because they can control exactly what their tutors are learning. The reason that tutors

agree with the directors could be because they know that they are learning from a more experienced individual. Typically, “Credit Bearing Courses” and “Discussions Led by the Director” are viewed as the most effective training techniques and these results mirror that idea.

Future research should test the effectiveness of these topics and techniques through the success of the students who visit writing centers. For example, since this study revealed that “Interactive Discussions Led by the Director” and “Credit Bearing Courses” are believed to be the most effective training techniques, a set of tutors could receive only one of the above and another set of tutors could receive the other. Multiple consultations could be held and the grades of the students’ papers could be compared to determine which tech-

nique is quantitatively the most effective. Future studies will also benefit from giving the responders the chance to rank the effectiveness of each topic or technique against each other. For example, there were a total of fifteen topics listed in this study. It would be interesting if the responders were forced to give each topic a number from one to fifteen so that it would be obvious as to which topic is viewed as the most important. This study is an integral step towards determining the best way to train tutors so that students receive the best service when they visit a writing center. ✨



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The Sound of Transformation: Reestablishing a Writing Center at Florida A&M University

Veronica Adams Yon, Florida A&M University

Elizabeth Boquet begins her book *Noise* from the Writing Center by including correspondence between herself and a professor identified as “Dr. PC.” In his memorandum, PC complains to Boquet about the noise emanating from the writing center she directed, noise which he apparently did not consider appropriate for an academic environment.

To me, the exchange between the two professors is quite intriguing, not only because of its content but also because interestingly enough, shortly after having read Boquet’s response to PC some years ago, I found myself in the midst of an exchange with an instructor from another department. Although on the surface my situation seemed to address an entirely different topic, essentially it, too, points toward the ever emerging discord that surrounds the academy’s “misunderstanding” of writing center work (North 433).

In my case, Professor G had referred close to four hundred students to our writing center for assistance on a book review, without alerting the center or taking into account how we could assist this volume of students in such a short period of time. Since a major portion of their grades depended on their having the papers “reviewed” in the center, some students had become quite belligerent when they were unable to secure an appointment, and others had even attempted to bribe my staff by offering lunch in exchange for “proof” of their appointments.

The series of events leading up to email I eventually found myself sending this instructor some seven years ago is something we, in the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University’s Writing Resource Center (WRC), are still trying to reconcile. For while it is true that Professor G did mistakenly perceive the

WRC as a fix it shop, it is also true that his actions reflect an excitement about the transformation that had taken place within those walls. In order to fully appreciate that excitement, however, I must travel even further back through the years, to a time when an event of this magnitude could never have taken place because only two short years prior to my strategizing with Professor G on how we could better assist him and his students, a writing center did not exist on the campus of Florida A&M University (FAMU).

I. Historical Overview

“The FAMU Writing Center” was established in 1997 and was funded by a Title III grant. Conveniently located on the first floor of Tucker Hall, the building in which most of our English courses are taught, this center operated as a hub of academic activity, as students from our college preparatory and freshman composition courses attended primarily on a referred basis.

The three English professors who had written the grant proposal wanted to provide language skills support for the university’s students, many of whom

were first generation college students and/or had not been adequately prepared for college. Consequently, while the center did offer services to the entire student body, its objectives focused squarely on remediation and fundamental writing support for freshmen, a large percentage of the university’s enrollment.

Therefore, a huge outcry of disbelief rang across campus in the fall of 2002 when the three professors were informed that the writing center would not receive the funding it previously had been awarded. The public announcement came during our fall faculty planning conference when one of the grant writers utilized the question and answer period to inform our new president of this turn of events and to petition his intervention. Immediately following the meeting and the administration’s promise to investigate this situation, the English department launched a letter-writing campaign. Faculty members were encouraged to send letters to the president in support of the writing center, and they did.



Courtesy of Veronica Adams Yon

While I would love to say the campaign worked and the “noise” made by the department led to the center being granted the money it needed to operate, I cannot make this claim. Instead, as days turned into weeks, silence eventually settled in, and it became clear that the center would not be funded. Without the promise of a stable income for his growing family, the center’s full-time director quietly took a teaching position at our community college, the student tutors found other gainful employment, and the department closed the doors of the FAMU Writing Center indefinitely.

II. Efforts to Reopen

Once we realized the center’s closing was final, I began pitching ideas to members of the English department on how we could salvage our writing center. For instance, one of our instructors did not take the medical leave she had requested and, therefore, found herself without a course load for the semester; my suggestion was to appoint her to the center, limit services to specific courses, and muster up some volunteer help since we did not have the funds to hire anyone. I am not sure how this instructor may have felt about my suggesting how she should spend her semester, but, needless to say, this idea, wrought out of desperation, along with a few others were merely band-aid approaches toward healing the deeply rooted wound our students and faculty had suffered.

Throughout that first semester and the ones that followed, my mind constantly raced as I tried to figure out how we could revitalize our writing center. Yet none of these strategies could have contributed as much to the center’s reopening as what transpired during the two years in which our writing center was closed.

While the university made one change after another in leadership, recruitment efforts declined, making the weaknesses of the university’s base population even more noticeable in classroom and standardized test performance. Increasingly, professors throughout campus began to complain about the writing skills of their students. With no resource available for these students (or any students wanting to receive additional feedback on their writings), word began to trickle throughout the university that our students needed help. Consequently, when my department chair and I submitted a proposal to the Office of Title III Programs for 2004-2005 funding, we received a warm

reception. One agency coordinator even asked why we did not ask for more money. Evidently, the silence had been noticed!

III. The Grand Opening

On November 1, 2004, the renamed “FAMU Writing Resource Center” officially opened its doors. At the time, it was staffed by a director (me), an assistant director, and five part-time undergraduate tutors (the first five English majors I contacted who could work 10-15 hours per week). Because the center opened late in the term, with only six weeks remaining, and because the staff and I were forced to work around our pre-existing course schedules, we limited support to students who were enrolled in freshman composition courses and did our best to get the center up and running. In the spring of 2005, we hired two additional part-time tutors and one full-time secretary, and I began preparing to resign as director of composition studies, so I could focus on building the WRC brand. We were well on our way!



Courtesy of Veronica Adams Yon

That first year seems so long ago. And while I can say the years that followed have been quite fulfilling, I must also admit that they have not been easy. For early on, I recognized that if the WRC were to become a mainstay of academic support at our university, it could not exist quietly. The staff and I had to make some noise!

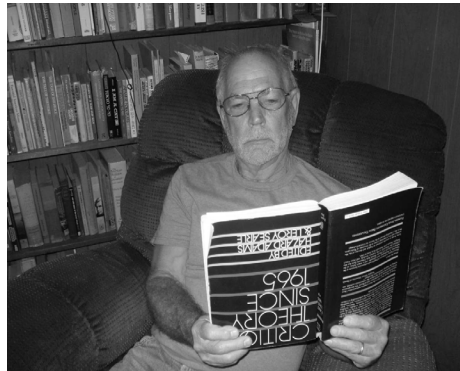
IV. Making Noise

Building upon the mission of the previous writing center, we continued to work closely with the college preparatory and freshman composition students who were referred by their professors, but we also extended our services to everyone, including graduate students, and instituted our motto: “Embracing [“The Sound of Transformation” continued on page 17](#)

What's the Point? Good, Better, Best—Not!

Peter M. Carriere, Georgia College and State University

Knowing that Christine wants her manuscripts in Calisto font, I looked for it in my Word program but couldn't find it. So on a hunch, I typed the word "calisto" into that little rectangle where the name of the font appears, and a message appeared saying, "Calisto is not available on your system. Do you



Peter Carriere

want to use it anyway?" Now what kind of logic is that, I thought to myself, bemused at the illogic of the base 2 computer I was using. Then I thought how cool it would be if the whole world worked that way: "Your check was returned for insufficient funds.

Do you want it paid anyway? Or "This car is \$35,000.00 and you only have \$150.00. Do you want to buy it anyway?"

In Calisto, then! (Maybe it's a ghost font.)

The slogan on the front of the Lesson Ten booklet entitled Practical English by Estelle Hunter, Ph.B., reads, "Language is the dress of thought, every time you talk your mind is on parade." Never mind the comma splice or the fact that anonymous said it, if the slogan is truly true, then the mind paraded before us by Estelle in her "lessons" should never be scrutinized. For example, she writes, "Errors in comparison are the crudest in the language. . . ." I actually do like "crudest," but I'm more fond of "most crude." In fact, I really enjoy "crudity" itself the most.

In comparing comparison to superlative, Estelle uses this illustration: "Helen is tall; "Ruth is taller than Helen; and Clarence is tallest of all. Though I never met her, I'd say that Helen is the best because I did know Ruth, who was kind of spindly tall with ganglia for arms, like an octopus, and Clarence walked around ego-tall with his head in the clouds. So Helen is obviously the best!

The words "perfect, dead, and empty," [sic] observes Estelle, express superlative ideas without the typical "er" or "est" endings. So nothing can be deader than plain dead, or deadest of all (except the atmosphere in my classroom when I discuss the semi-colon). I do think, however, that something can be perfectly dead or relatively empty, or even deadly empty, like the fuel tank in my car when I run out of gas. Poor Estelle, though. Even she realized that we can be too correct: "None of us would hesitate to say, 'This apple is more perfect than that,' because usage makes it sound correct." I agree. That's why Helen was the best choice over Ruth or Clarence and why I've never noticed whether or not one apple is more perfect than another. Pomegranates are another matter entirely, however.

"If we are discussing two diamonds," writes Estelle, "the word perfect [sic] does mean literally faultless, because we have definite standards for diamonds." But I have standards for apples, too, or pomegranates, for that matter, or even deadness, a perfect state of Buddhist emptiness attained by my students in early morning classes. "If two diamonds are not perfect," she continues, "and if one has fewer imperfections than the other, we may compare them by saying that one is more nearly perfect than the other. So I'd say "more nearly dead" is preferable to "dead" or even "perfectly dead." Wouldn't you?

In one of the exercises at the end of her lesson on comparative and superlative degree for adjectives, Estelle asks us to consider this sentence: "The elephant is larger than any animal in the world." In response to whether or not this construction is correct, Estelle asks, "Is the elephant larger than any animal in the world?" And then, answering her own question, she declares, "Many thoughtless persons would say, 'yes' because the elephant is an animal in the world, so we would have to say any other animal in the world." But she's missed the point entirely! If you're going to be trampled by an animal, it is not, in my opinion, thoughtless for the tramplee to avoid considerations of correctness in comparative or superlative degree, whether it's an elephant, a hippo, or even a camel!

In a discussion of comparative/superlative degree in adverbs, Estelle suggests that "conservative persons prefer to use "more loudly" as the adverbial form, and to reserve "louder" for use as an adjective only." But I don't agree. I've heard conservatives and liberals shouting at each other loudly without being able to determine which was most loud. Besides, who cares whether it's

a Democrat or Republican shouting; it's obnoxious in any case! Continuing with her political bias, Estelle declares that "swift, like loud, may be either an adjective or an adverb: in other words, Democrat or Republican. Thus the Democrat would say, "Trains move swifter than boats," while the Republican would say, "Trains move more swiftly than boats." In any case it's a no-brainer! Everyone knows that trains are faster than boats (except maybe those weirdo racing boats that flip over in a slight breeze). So it's a moot argument, in my opinion, which leads me to ask once again, in Calisto font, "what's the point?" ✨

["The Sound of Transformation" continued from page 15](#)

and empowering one writer at a time." In addition, we reconfigured the space, adding smaller, more intimate tables for tutorials, and purchased sixteen computers.

In order to communicate to the entire campus our commitment to writing, in the fall of 2005, we held an open house, with refreshments and door prizes provided by our friends at Pearson Custom Publishing, Allyn Bacon/Longman, and Prentice Hall. And to garner even more traffic, we began hosting workshops that focused on preparing students for the language skills and essay portions

of the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST), a state-mandated achievement test that has now been discontinued. At the time, however, this mandatory, high-stakes test brought many students to the WRC, resulting in a strong base of clients who were not sent by their professors but still recognized their need for assistance. For record-keeping purposes, we began noting these tutees, and any student who came on his/her own, as "non-referred" clients. Over the years, the number of non-referred tutees has steadily risen, as several of our previously referred students return for help on their cover letters, resumes, personal statements, speeches, and assignments in other classes, and as word continues to spread about the WRC.

To spread the word even further, we began hosting other workshops (on grammar, punctuation, and documentation styles) throughout the term and emailed a calendar of events to the university community at the beginning of each semester. Over the few years that followed, we began publishing our

newsletter, The Write Track, and adopted a blitz approach by moving all of our workshops to one particular week and simply calling it our "Week of Workshops." With the inspiration of one of our long-time tutors, this five day event soon morphed into our "Write Your Way Up" (WYWU) series, in which we illustrated the importance of writing in professional and personal arenas by featuring faculty as well as student organizations, like our spoken word troupes and Toastmasters chapter. Eventually, we moved the WYWU week to a later date, in order to coincide with that of the National Day on Writing, and encouraged everyone to celebrate the writing process by contributing to our online writing gallery. The WRC also became the drop off site for the English department's annual writing contest and the host site for the contest's awards ceremony, along with other departmental and organizational meetings.

During the early years, we recognized the importance of professional development, so in 2006, my department chair and I attended our first Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) conference; the following year, the WRC staff and I began not only attending various writing conferences but also presenting papers at them. Through everyday practice and considerable research and reflection, we developed a more formal training program (which now entails approximately twenty hours of instruction, observation, and evaluation) to assist our consultants in being prepared for their tutorials and to reassure faculty that we are committed to providing top-notch assistance to their students. And these efforts and more have paid off.

For instance, for 2011-2012, the WRC experienced a total of 8,076 visits compared to the 2,812 it received during its first year of operation. We also received more requests (62) than ever from professors for in-class workshops and received additional financial support from the university's retention office, resulting in the largest tutorial staff in our history: 19.

IV. Our Future

In September of 2012, the Writing Resource Center's five year grant ended, and fortunately, most constituents at our university have been convinced, at least to some extent, of our value. Consequently, the 2012-2017 funding proposal I submitted was subsumed by the newly formed Academic Success Institute (ASI), which is a collaborative effort between the Offices of Title III Programs, Student Affairs, Retention, and all of the academic support centers on campus.

["The Sound of Transformation" continued on page 19](#)

Popcorn and Newsreels: Chicken Cacciatore

Karl Fornes, University of South Carolina Aiken



Karl Fornes

Question: What did George Washington say to the soldier who was scared to attack British sympathizers during the Revolutionary War?

Answer: Chicken, catch a Tory!

Chicken cacciatore. Get it? Probably. It's just not funny, eh? Don't sweat it. It's a pretty bad little joke. I should know; I created it, in the fourth grade. And I've been repeating it at every opportunity ever since, much to the dismay of my friends and family.

This July 4, I whispered the joke to Jennifer Hall. "Chicken, catch a Tory," she whispered back before I could get to the punch line. "You know that joke will never be funny, don't you?"

Yep. I know. But the incident prompted me to find out how funny guys write funny stuff. And I'm pleased to report that I'm in good company. It seems that the great Jerry Seinfeld has some trouble writing certain jokes. In a recent New York Times interview, he explains that he has been working on a Pop Tart joke for a over two years. The joke attempts to place Pop Tarts as a savior for children trapped in the despair of 1960's breakfast options, including toast, concentrated orange juice, and shredded wheat (Seinfeld).

During the interview, Seinfeld sheds some light on his writing process. "Comedy writing is something you don't see people doing; it's a secretive thing" he shares. It turns out that he is stubbornly specific about his writing tools. He writes everything on yellow legal stock in the Bic clear plastic, blue ball-point pen of his childhood. In fact, he says he wrote every episode of Seinfeld with that pen (Seinfeld).

Seinfeld is meticulous about editing and revision. Not unlike a drop-in visit to the writing center, he schedules unannounced appearances at small night-clubs in and around New York City, practicing new material and reading the audience's response. "A laugh to me is not a laugh," he explains. "I can see it." Then, he uses the feedback to hone the joke for larger venues (Weiner, "Jerry Seinfeld").

Louis C. K., on the other hand, is your classic one-drafter. He told Rolling Stone magazine that he develops material "in pieces." When he gets on stage, he'll grab a piece and see where he can go with it. "I go down a road, and if I teeter off, OK. Other times it's, 'I found something.'" He doesn't even write his stand-up work, preferring to keep it "all in my head" (Weiner, "How Louis C.K.>").

Most television shows incorporate what's called a "writer's room"—a space where all of the writers gather and toss ideas around. Not surprisingly, Louis C.K. does not employ a writer's room for his hit show on FX. "I am the only writer," he told an interviewer in 2010. "That was a decision I made because I just wanted to write and make the show." Not unlike his stand-up process, he describes his writing process for television as almost stream of conscious. He develops an idea and "writes stuff incomplete and starts working on it." He will identify "a conversation he wants to see" and "throw it up there, work for it as long as it's good, and then toss it" (C. K.).

Similarly, Jim Gaffigan will grab a topic and "look at it from every angle." Unlike C.K., however, Gaffigan does not draft his material alone. He then "works" the topics over with his wife. "We write everything together," he explains ("The Reel Deal").

Ultimately, comedy, especially stand-up, is all about timing. In addition to the fact that it just isn't that funny, my chicken cacciatore joke lacks any sense of timing. The set-up is way too long, and the punch line is little more than a pun. Let's face it, it's a mess. As Gaffigan notes in another interview: "It's all about efficiently communicating ideas in a concise manner" ("Jim Gaffigan is Fat").

Seinfeld has a similar take: "I'm looking for the connective tissue that gives me the really tight, smooth link, like a jigsaw puzzle link. And if it's too long --just a split second too long--you will shave letters off of words. You count

syllables to get it just . . . it's more like songwriting" (Seinfeld).

Gaffigan notes that the process for writing stand-up and writing a book is very different. In a recent interview publicizing his book *Dad Is Fat*, he notes that the skills necessary for stand-up comedy do not translate directly into the printed word. "You develop a lot of habits in stand-up where you rely on vocal inflections, facial expressions and an applied point of view," he notes. "I struggled to get around that. I was surprised how much harder that was to do in an essay" ("Jim Gaffigan Is Fat").

We have three different comedians with three different writing processes that reflect their three different personalities—one very technical, one quasi-improvisational, and one in between. I guess the different processes shouldn't be much of a surprise. After all, comedy—especially stand-up comedy—relies on personality as much as, if not more than, other creative endeavors. As such, a comedian's writing process will naturally reflect the comedian's personality.

So what does my little joke say about me. Maybe I'm hungry? ✨

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"The Sound of Transformation" continued from page 17

While the full ramifications of this new structure, which officially began on October 1, 2012, will be revealed over time, the most obvious reality for me during the first year has been the fact that the WRC is no longer a free-standing unit with its own operating budget and a stronger sense of autonomy, especially regarding our budgetary allowances. Outside of office supplies, most of our requests, including staffing and travel, must be reviewed and even weighed against the wants and needs of the administrative office, academic advising unit, and five other tutorial labs that share the ASI's budget. I have been repeatedly reminded of this process.

Accordingly, the WRC staff and I have had to stretch ourselves and our reach to students via small focus groups and evening workshops just to make sure some of our students who may not be able to secure individualized tutorials can still receive WRC assistance and satisfy their program requirements. But even with all of the above challenges, the bright spot is that the WRC does have a measure of funding stability for at least five more years.

So to return to the scenario I alluded to earlier in this essay, perhaps now, one can better appreciate Professor G's excitement so many years ago. Given the tenuous history of the FAMU Writing Resource Center, any noise that emanates from room 124 of Tucker Hall is a sweet sound—a sound of life, a sound of renewal, a sound of transformation! ✨

SWCA Mission Statement

The Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) was founded in 1981 to advance literacy; to further the theoretical, practical, and political concerns of writing center professionals; and to serve as a forum for the writing concerns of students, faculty, staff, and writing professionals from both academic and nonacademic communities in the Southeastern region of the United States. A member of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), an NCTE Assembly, the SWCA includes in its designated region North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, and the American Virgin Islands.

Seven Strategies for Tutoring ESL Writers

Tim Hendrix, North Greenville University

Anyone who has tutored in a writing center understands the frantic questions of working with an ESL student: “Everything is a mess! What can I do? How much help can I give before it becomes plagiarism?” ESL sessions can be complicated, and many times tutors are not fully prepared to help their ESL clients. This weakness can become a problem for writing centers because of the need to keep ESL students both from seeing writing center professionals as proofreaders who “fix” their essays and from becoming discouraged because of a lack of results in their writing. An ESL session truly is a delicate balance of understanding the client’s needs and meeting those needs effectively. While the same practices for native-English-speaking sessions still apply (e.g. “Don’t mark everything,” “Don’t make corrections for the student,” etc.), the following guidelines can greatly assist in establishing the balance needed for successful ESL sessions.

1. Lower the “Affective Filter.”

Affective Filter (AF) is term coined by Stephen Krashen that is used often in the TESOL community. It refers to the impact of stress on a learner. If a learner is in a high-stress situation, the AF initiates, greatly inhibiting the learner’s access to the second language (Lightbown and Spada 37). The effect is similar to when a native English speaker is giving a speech in English—suddenly, the speaker cannot remember the material, despite the hours of preparation; if someone asks a question, the speaker finds she has to strain a great deal more than usual just to understand what is being asked, not to mention to formulate an educated response. Now imagine giving a public speech with the added stipulations that the audience gets to choose the topic and the length of the

speech; that at any point someone may interject new topics or challenge what is said; and that as soon as one of these speeches ends, another will begin. Even the most versatile public speaker would feel nervous about this prospect. ESL students’ Affective Filters are alert all the time. Even though they may have studied English for years, their language production becomes strained in routine conversations and situations.

The writing center should be a place that works to turn the AF down. Both the director and session tutors should make an effort to help ESL clients feel relaxed. To this end, the following maxims are helpful: Make conversation with them. If possible, help them make light of their own errors. Build rapport with them. If they struggle to find words to say, give them time to think; let them first say what they mean in their own language; keep them from feeling awkward. As they relax, they will have an easier time accessing language mentally and figuring out how to phrase their thoughts better in English. If a tutor enters a session stressed about misleading the client, the session will have unnecessary stress and tension. Keep the mood light, and the sessions will begin to be easier for both the tutor and the client.

2. Clarify the assignment.

Academic English is deliberately nuanced. University faculties use specialized words on assignments that often have hidden or misleading messages for an ESL student. Even directions that we would consider somewhat simple can be full of unwritten instructions that the ESL student will overlook. “Provide an analysis...” for example, asks for a different written product than “Discuss examples of...” Native speakers of English have to adjust as freshmen to the language used by the university, and the process can still be difficult for them; how much more difficult, then, is this adjustment for the ESL learner?



Courtesy of Tim Hendrix

The writing center tutor needs to anticipate some misunderstanding of terms and needs to make time in the session for clarification of the assignment. A good strategy is to start the session by asking the client to explain the requirements for the essay. If an assignment sheet or rubric is available, the tutor should review it to assess the client's understanding. Sometimes, the definition of terms such as "analysis" will help the client discern if the essay meets the assignment.

3. Let the client talk out the essay.

When learning a second language, a person has to figure out how it is that people "say things" in that language. Language learning is much more than just memorizing vocabulary because we use our vocabularies somewhat unscrupulously.

Think of the words "bad" and "evil"—the two are synonyms in our language, and the language learner tends to think we use them as such. But whenever we try to swap them, they are suddenly not so interchangeable. If we were to make mention of an "evil diet," there is a strange morality about our food habits—likewise, if we try to say a "bad alchemist," we seem to be offering commentary on his practice rather than a judgment about his behaviors.

Synonym confusion occurs frequently in ESL word choice and phrasing. Sometimes, this sort of problem will create sentences quite incomprehensible to tutors, too. The temptation for the tutor then becomes to skip entire sections because the text seems to have no clear solution. Instead, the tutor needs to be in the practice of asking the client to explain the essay, particularly words, phrases, or entire ideas that seem unintelligible, and coaching the client through the options that English provides. The tutor needs to be aware of what the author intends to say in order to clarify sections that do not make sense in the author's use of English.

4. Tackle grammar-based errors.

ESL students often approach English through its grammar. The errors that they have in their essays can also stem from a grammatical misunderstanding. For example, a construct that tutors see fairly regularly in ESL essays is one that is not commonly used in present-day academic English: "for" followed by an infinitive (such as "for to have," or "for to be"). The misunderstanding

is that they are trying to use an infinitive in the same place a gerund could be used as the object of the preposition, as the two verbals are often interchangeable ("for having" or "for being"). A brief grammatical discussion of the problem often ensures that the students do not make this mistake again in the future.

If a writing center is struggling to manage ESL sessions, a good starting point to consider is designating tutors who are able to recognize grammatical-based errors as the center's ESL specialists. ESL students expect language instruction to be grammatical, and they tend to distrust advice from people who cannot explain English to them in grammatical terms (Hilles 391).

5. Give them strategies for deciphering what is going on in the classroom.

One major reason why ESL essays are particularly troublesome is that the students do not always have the language skills to know what is being said in their classes about their topics. ESL students sometimes lose major points on essays for incorrectly contradicting conclusions that were reached in classroom discussions, merely because they do not have the ability to keep up with the discussions while taking relevant notes. Understand that this is a difficult process to manage in a second language.

If a student seems to struggle with classroom material or has difficulty explaining an assignment, help by offering some suggestions on how to keep up with the class or where to get further information. ESL students need to know that asking to copy someone else's notes, recording and reviewing lectures, meeting with or emailing professors, and asking questions in class are acceptable social practices for them to do in our culture, and they need basic suggestions as to how they could go about doing those things. While this assistance will not necessarily help in the immediate session, it should provide long-term clarity that will solve the same problems for future essays.

6. Encourage them.

One of the major obstacles to learning and using a second language as an adult is that everyone seems to be able to offer negative feedback. Adults are much more self-conscious language learners than children are, and they tend to focus on their own insecurities (Hilles 387). Negative feedback can cause them to stop producing, to second-guess all of their efforts, to "play it safe"

and only attempt language they know to be correct, or—worse—to give up entirely. Any word of encouragement makes a big difference for an ESL student.

A writing center tutor has a unique position at the university to spend time showing ESL clients what they do well. As a trusted, “official” source, the writing center can help ESL writers move from guesswork to confidence in their writing. Therefore, tutors should praise improvements they see. If an ESL client makes regular appointments, establish a practice of showing him the difference between old and new essays. Merely pointing out improvement

can recharge that client’s motivation. When the writing center can provide a positive source for ESL students, they will begin to provide marked progress in their writing and their confidence in approaching new assignments.

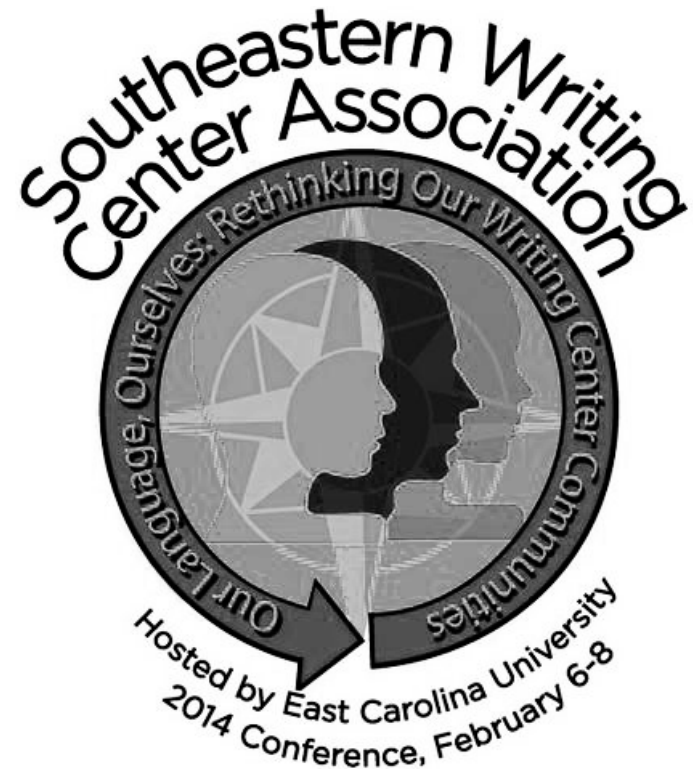
7. Train them not to need help.

During every session, keep in mind that the ultimate goal is that each client would become autonomous, able to manage classes and essays without the writing center’s help. In order to meet this goal, ESL sessions must be both involving and interactive. At the university level, tutors should utilize indirect feedback (prompting, underlining, circling, etc.) that will lead clients to make the corrections themselves. As Ferris points out, use of direct feedback (directly stating how to correct the error in question) can lead to the tutor’s shaping the student’s essay (65). This practice results in dependence on the tutor and can even result in valid claims of plagiarism. Ferris includes helpful guidelines for judging when direct feedback can be used: “(1) when students are at beginning levels of English language proficiency; (2) when errors are ‘nontreatable’; and (3) when the [tutor] wishes to focus student attention on particular error patterns and not others” (63). Writing center directors and tutors would benefit from discussing how these guidelines apply to their session practices.

Keep track of ESL clients’ progress—offer a client standing appointments with the same tutor who can monitor errors across multiple essays and classes. If necessary, give ESL students extended appointments. Help them learn to practice by editing previously-completed essays on their own. Direct them to outlets to practice language in low-stress scenarios like coffee shops or online discussion groups. If possible, explain their language development needs to

their course instructors.

Although ESL students can present a difficult case for many writing center tutors, they themselves provide valuable training for writing center tutors to learn how to be flexible, understanding, and above all useful to all clients. The writing center with a strong support base for international and second-language students is foundational to a diverse and globally-relevant institution. ✨



**2014 SWCA Conference Keynote Speaker:
Vershawn Ashanti Young**

Early Registration Deadline: Dec. 15

President's Letter

Laura Benton, Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute

I got a new writing center space the beginning of August, and the rest of the month was a blur. You may know I started the writing center at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute almost seven years ago. The college has been good to me, providing money for writing consultants and professional development. My supervisor values writing center work. She supports me and the center. The administration understands the importance of the work we do. However, the writing center has always been in an extra wide hallway that dead-ended into a small room; the hallway served as the entrance/exit to a few offices including my own.

We made the most out of the 300ish square feet we were allotted lining one side of the wall with narrow desks and computers, and plastic magazine racks for handouts. We grew to serve nearly 20 percent of the population offering over 3,000 consultations yearly. Overall, not too shabby for our hallway. But with this new space coming, I was feeling the pressure of making a statement, serving more students despite decreased enrollment, and—knowing faculty, students, and administrators would be just stopping by—making sure the new space gave the right first impression.

The Writing Lab Newsletter posts some great stuff on Facebook. (Friend them now if you have missed this online gem.) On July 24th, as I was anxiously anticipating the new writing center space, an article link popped up on my screen: “Why Stephen King Spends ‘Months and Even Years’ Writing Opening Sentences.” This is what I was dealing with, the stress of the first sentence impression. I own two copies of Stephen King’s *On Writing* yet didn’t recall his thoughts on opening lines. In the article, King reveals, “There’s one thing I’m sure about. An opening line should invite the reader to begin the story. It should say: Listen. Come in here. You want to know about this.” Was King talking about writing or writing centers? I convinced myself it was both.



Laura Benton

King proceeds to discuss how voice (not style) is what draws a reader into a book. “It’s a voice, and invitation, that’s very difficult for me to refuse.” Certainly my hallway writing center had a voice—calming, humble, intimate, safe nooks to lean against and hide. This center was comforting yet encouraging like grandma—a familiar hug, kind whisper, knowing nod. We knew how to be grandma.

But the new space is more open, vulnerable, in your face—a much different vibe. Same center, different personality. This center is a rebellious teenager with two-toned nail polish, too much mascara, and shorts that don’t pass the fingertip test. Would grandma feel comfortable in this teenager’s room? How could we ensure that she would? In an attempt to get back to the intimate safe zone of grandma’s house, we’ve created cozy workspaces and are relying more on verbal and non-verbal communication. Admittedly, it is a little more in your face, asking students who walk past if they need help. Are YOU looking for the writing center?

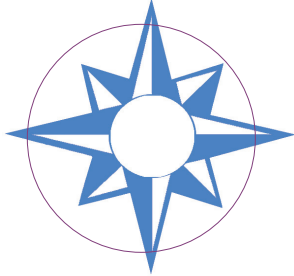
Before, we knew. When someone entered, he was looking for us. She wanted to come see what we were about. He wanted to sit, to talk, to write, to question. She wanted to think, to analyze, to get off-topic and find her way back.

I didn’t know I was in the seven year slump until I was forced out of it. I’ve realized that we used our space to help define our voice instead of our actual voice, amazing personality, and killer good looks. What a shame! I am grateful for a bigger writing center but more thankful I was forced to reevaluate how what we do and who we are comes across to writers. We know students stay once they’ve walked through the doors. We know students come back for more writing insight. We feel confident about the stories we create. However, this only works when writers, or readers according to King, walk through the door.

I’m absolutely certain King is talking about writing centers in the last sentences of this interview: “So there’s incredible power in it, when you say, come in here. You want to know about this. And someone begins to listen.” ✨

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A tutor training session at Florida A&M University. For more information about their writing center, see Veronica Yon's article on page 14.