IN THE POCKETS OF YESTERDAY’S PANTS: Theory, practice, theory
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**From the Editor**

You may have noticed that in the past two years ITPOYP has been quiet. We have been diligent about our research and all other efforts at continuing our professionalization but compiling the publication fell to the wayside as I struggled to complete my dissertation. Forgive me. This issue is a combination of issues 5 and 6 in an effort to get back on track. As always, the tutors’ exploration into subjects that will help them be the best that they can be does not fail to show how much they care about student success and how strong a part tutoring plays in student success.

Enjoy!
Multimodal Learning for Multimodal Brains

Jasmine Broz

Nine o’ clock in the evening, a young student stares at the keyboard and word document on the monitor and dreads the words about to flow out. This student checks Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Instagram, and any other social media device while the stove cooks leftovers from the previous night, yet that paper has not become an essay. In the age of technology, our brains are so enamored with all of the mixed media around us that it has become an ordeal to concentrate on one task at a time. Now, imagine a situation without the advantage of Google or the World Wide Web. When a citation appears wrong, how could we research this? Think of how it was, spending countless hours with books, making sure each detail is correct. The rise of technology helps save time and space, but this rise has also accumulated a different breed of problems: too many distractions. Social media consumes our brains and we constantly check to see if someone “liked” or commented on something we posted. Even though we are constantly distracted, these distractions can be used to push forward multimodal learning. What is multimodal learning? Put simply, multimodal learning is learning a concept more than one way, such as through both a lecture and a visual aid (Lazear).
Encouraging different types of media while tutoring, especially at the research stage, helps emphasize the power of multimodal learning. As multimodal learning and the use of multimedia in writing becomes more mainstream, exploring all the options and benefits of the multimodal movement has become a necessity, especially within the Writing Center.

Social media, computers, tablets, smartphones, emails, PowerPoints and even more are all outlets for multimodal learning. Even though we think of multimodal learning as all of these digital outlets, “multimodal does not necessarily mean digital” (Arola, et. al). Any type of visual or oral aid for a presentation or report is multimodal. How can we use multimodal learning to further educate students?

With the busy lives surrounding all of us, educators are on the lookout for more effective ways to deliver study material and encourage students in the classroom setting (Turner 45). Interactive media engages learners, giving them not only a sense of ownership, but creative license on the projects they work on. Teachers have found that digital videos or projects that use multiple forms of presenting information helped student participation in the project, both mentally and physically (Miller 63). This new media allows the students to have a sense of working in a community and be more engaged, thus creating a more suitable learning environment for the students (Miller 75). Multimodal learning can create a sense of belonging to a larger community and the feeling that we matter.

So, how can students use multimodal learning? By using features such as Desire2Learn and Blackboard learning, professors can create fun presentations and still get the course material out. Desire2Learn and Blackboard are both online learning management systems used to organize course materials and able to keep track of grades, and different schools use different online learning management systems. Additionally, offering students alternatives to presentation, such as videos, PowerPoint and audio recordings can inspire students to report information and research without actually writing an essay and helps them become motivated. Giving students the opportunity to use Google Drive can allow them to have their peers read and review their document and help start the process of multimodal
learning. This way, the students become used to the technology and can receive immediate feedback from peers, tutors and professors alike. Schools are beginning to urge professors to explore different means of presenting written material to cater to the changing brains of the new generation.

*Instances of tutoring while looking at a computer screen – helps with immediate access to sources and information, as well as live editing on a document.*

So what does multimedia and multimodal entail for the Writing Center? We offer a wide variety of multimodal tools, such as Audacity and Microsoft PowerPoint, available for use on our computers, and we also love to see students working on an essay on the computer. When students work on a computer for an essay, research and information online is easily accessible. We are here to help them go through the vast internet sources, and we encourage using multimedia to help students research or work on their essays or any other written material. Also with the use of our Online Writing Lab, using Google Drive, we support students’ practice with multimodal and multimedia tools. Even when a student is uncomfortable with technology, we will help within that student’s comfort zone. The Writing Center tutors help writers navigate through the confusing technology.

We are surrounded by media every waking hour of every waking day, and our brains have adapted to have a short attention span. Seeing the same message in different forms of media helps the brain grasp and understand the concept. Images, music, words, videos – all of these combined make multimodal learning useful (Miller 63). Multimodal learning helps students process the same information in different types of formats, thus allowing information to process differently. Prezi or PowerPoint essays can trigger a new way of understanding, either by isolating or grouping ideas. Each
of these mediums can spark a new creation in the brain, and that ensure a writer’s deep involvement in a project. This claim seems self-evident since we all know that technology consumes our brains. While all this new technology seems distracting or overwhelming, it can appeal to multimodal learning. Each step to implementing multimodal learning starts with the professors and ends with the students. This movement leading to a growing interest in the usage of multimodal learning can only move forward with the combined effort of this generation of scholars and students alike.

Works Cited


For my second year of tutoring, I switched my research focus to working with deaf students. Previous experiences from other tutors at the JCCC Writing Center had made me aware of the expansive population of students who consider American Sign Language (ASL) their first language. Although I initially felt a disadvantage because I had never tutored a deaf student, the experts in the articles that I read all agreed that working with deaf students requires only changing tutoring methods, not emphasis. As Richardson and Woodley observe, for deaf students, “the major obstacles to academic success will be difficulties of communication rather than the demands of the courses” (62). Some deaf students may be fluent in ASL and prefer to use interpreters, while others may ask the tutor to communicate the entire session in back-and-forth writing. Whatever the student prefers, the tutor’s first job is to let the student establish the ground rule for communication in the tutorial; from there, the tutor can proceed with the time-tested mantra of the hierarchy of concerns.
In Richardson and Woodley’s extensive surveys of deaf students in college, they discovered that “deaf students obtained significantly higher scores than the hearing students on the subscale concerned with comprehension learning” (70). The deaf students that I have had the privilege to tutor certainly reflected both aptitude and engagement. Having missed a session with an interpreter, the first student with whom I worked asked for someone just to look over his paper with him and show him what was wrong. He was completely deaf, he told me, but he could speak a little English, his second language. He started the session by writing, “You read the paper and tell me what’s wrong.” So I started by asking him (in writing) how he wanted us to communicate in this session. Did he prefer writing back and forth on paper, as he was already doing? He readily agreed to this and gave me a thumbs-up. I then told him that I would move my pen along the paper, so we could read his essay together, and, with his approval, I would also make notations on parts to discuss. “What are your primary concerns for this essay?” I wrote on the paper. He wrote in response, “I want to make sure it matches the assignment and makes sense.” Fortunately for both of us, this student implicitly understood the hierarchy of concerns, so I knew that we were off to a good start.

As we read the paper together, I noted a few parts that I thought were especially strong, and made some marks to return to other areas later. I pointed out that he had a strong thesis, but that a couple other areas needed more development. He wrote, “How do I do that?” and I directed him back to the earlier, stronger part of his essay. “See how you developed your general topic sentence in the rest of this paragraph? Could you consider doing that here?” I wrote. He got confused and actually tried to move that part of his paper to a later section, but I wrote, again, that I did not want him to move the section, but rather to model the rest of his paper on that section’s organization and expression. Only then did he realize what I meant. I realized here one of the inherent difficulties of written tutorials. In spoken language, tutors and tutees can go back and forth rather quickly when one of them misunderstands, and the situation can usually be cleared up quickly. Written tutorials, however, require the student and the tutor to have a little more patience; these tutorials also demand even more willingness to repeat explanations until the student fully understands. As author Rochelle Barlow comments, though, this patience is well worth the effort; not making sure that a deaf person truly
understands what another person says to them is the “number one ‘don’t’ of every single Deaf and Hard of Hearing person” (Barlow). In my particular situation, I probably should have used more precise words in the first place to avoid confusion, but the important point is that I did not give up trying to make myself understood.

Since not all deaf students prefer the paper-and-pen method, I was fortunate to have a tutorial with a deaf student who preferred an interpreter. As the student and I were communicating verbally this time, the tutorial did not require such distinct changes as my other session, although I still had to make modifications. When tutoring with an interpreter, the tutor’s first focus is just to keep attention on the student. The deaf student who works with an interpreter signs her ideas to that interpreter and then the interpreter speaks aloud the response to the tutor. The tutor’s primary concern here is to listen and keep eye contact on the student, not the interpreter, since the student is the one being tutored. The interpreter understands his or her role as the intermediary (Storme).

As in the previous tutorial, I started by asking the student what she wanted to discuss. She then told me the problem areas in her paper, and again we silently read it together, as I led my pen along the paper line by line. Since this was quite a long research paper, I asked her if I could identify the topic sentence of each paragraph in the margin as we read. She agreed readily, and I found that this small technique kept me on track to understand the paper, since I lacked the benefit of hearing it read aloud.

After that, the session was no different than any other tutorial. I pointed out a couple areas where she had not sufficiently explained her argument and another spot where she lacked some organization. We then discussed how she might fix those areas, and she made some notes. The session ended easily after that, and the student and I both felt that our communication had worked well. As Bruffee observes, often, “what peer tutor and tutee do together is not write or edit, or least of all proofread. What they do together is converse”; with the aid of the interpreter, the student and I had found another way to “talk” productively about her paper (qtd. in Weaver 241).
As a final point, successful tutorials with deaf students involve a special consideration of body language. Although body language is important in all tutorials, with deaf students, a tutor must have even greater awareness of mannerisms and gestures since deaf students naturally focus on visual cues. As Weaver writes about her own experiences with deaf students, “We watched each other’s facial expressions, we read each other’s written words, and we observed each other’s nonverbal gestures. These methods of communication allowed [us] to have productive tutoring sessions without speaking or hearing” (241). The first deaf student that I worked with was very good-natured and accompanied most of his responses with a thumbs-up when he understood me, a gesture that we both repeated frequently. For the rest of that particular session, I made sure to keep my hand movements non-distracting, since I was frequently pointing to the paper, and the student and I were writing back and forth to each other. Similarly, in sessions with interpreters, tutors must realize that students cannot watch the interpreter while the tutor points to and comments on a section of the paper, so they must make sure to give students enough time to look at the paper, and then the interpreter, for full understanding (Storme). These conscious considerations of body language and hand movements meaningfully support tutorials with deaf students.

Tutoring deaf students is not an esoteric exercise that only tutors fluent in ASL can do effectively. Working with deaf students simply requires tutors to be willing to adjust their tutoring style and to respond generously to deaf students’ particular needs. Combined with a basic knowledge of different communication methods, such approaches will support willing tutors in effectively communicating writing techniques to deaf students.
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The Power of Not Knowing

Megan Gladbach

Not so long ago, I was the student who was in desperate need of a writing tutor. I would never have thought I would someday become the tutor rather than the student. That said, on my first day as a tutor, I was extremely nervous. Thousands of worst-case scenarios ran through my head: What if I hurt the writer’s feelings? What if I make the student angry? What if I don’t understand the teacher’s rubric and fail to help the student? However, my greatest fear: What if I give the writer the wrong information? Grammar and paper guidelines have so many rules to remember. “How in the world do you guys all remember this stuff?” I asked one of the tutors the first week on the job.

“We don’t,” he replied.

“What? You don’t?” I responded.

“No, if you don’t remember something, just look it up with the student,” he answered. Those are the words of wisdom I have lived by ever since.

This simple piece of guidance has dramatically improved how I approach tutoring sessions. Now, I am always prepared, even if I do not know every answer. This strategy has not only helped me develop into a confident tutor during sessions, but, more importantly, it has also helped the writer develop into a confident student. By taking advice from A Training Guide for College
Tutors and Peer Educators, which discourages tutors from giving away answers, I encourage students to find their own answers (Lipsky 67). Rather than relying on me or their teachers to know the answers, the students rely on themselves. In addition, by showing the writer how I solve problems, I set an example for him or her and fulfill the purpose of the Writing Center: to develop “independent and capable individuals who can use written language to articulate what it is they think” (Ammirati 4). I teach the writer something greater than just the answer to an initial grammar question; I teach the writer how to teach him or herself. In other words, I “offer a tutoring approach that lets writers learn to help themselves” (Ammirati 1). Experts do not become experts overnight. They become experts by finding answers to questions through exploration. Everyone starts as a novice before he or she becomes an expert. The fine line between the novice student and the expert student is that the expert student knows how to solve problems.

When I do not know the answer to a writer’s question, I tell the writer that I do not know the answer. This act of honesty is incredibly humbling, and therefore, makes the tutee feel more comfortable because the writer is able to see that I am no different from anyone else; I do not know all the answers. However, what sets me apart from others is that when I do not know the answer, I let the student see how I learn the answer. This approach ensures that I never give a student false information, and also helps in the long run because, after all, a tutor’s most important goal should be to set an example for the tutee, to demonstrate for the tutee how to teach themselves.

Works Cited


He told me
the first Sudanese
refugees in Kansas City
spent their first night
in the dark
because they’d never seen
a light switch before.

He told me
he had been a soldier,
so getting refugee status
at the UN in Egypt
with his mother
almost didn’t happen
for him.
He told me
he worked hard
overnights
stocking shelves
to buy a crib
and food for his precious
baby girls.

I told him
where to put
his commas.
Confidence Building – Knowing Strengths as a Tutor

Jasmine Broz

During the time I have been employed at the Writing Center, I have grown as a tutor. I feel more comfortable and open in talking with the students, and overall I am not ashamed to admit when I do not know something. Being a tutor does not mean being a master, but rather a role model, a friend and a helper. While there are still many aspects of writing that I do not know or understand, my confidence as a tutor has not wavered as a result because of this lack of knowledge. As a tutor, I have learned four important aspects to building confidence: being friendly, being interested, knowing limits and roles, and identifying student satisfaction.

When starting a tutoring session, it is the tutor’s privilege to make the tutee feel welcome and to always be friendly toward the student. This can be accomplished simply by being oneself. Tutoring should be a connection between the tutor and the student, and keeping that contact should be an important part of the session. During the first five minutes of a session, tutors should get to know the writer and provide a comfortable atmosphere, as well as set an agenda for the session. I believe that the most important guideline of a session is that a tutor should not cover all the problems a
writer may have in one session, as mentioned in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, by Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli (20-21). If the writer comes with a number of problems, the tutor should focus on the most important one first. If the tutor were to focus on every single problem, then the writer would not be able to gather much information because the tutor provided too much at one time (Ryan and Zimmerelli 20). Structure and content, such as what the paper is about, are at the top of the hierarchy of tutor concerns, with grammar and punctuation at the bottom. The reason for this hierarchy is that a paper that is logically structured will make more sense than a paper that is not, no matter what the grammar level is. Once the writer and tutor have come to an agreement on what should be addressed first, the session should focus on that problem. If there is no agreement to a session, the tutor may have to improvise and provide mere suggestions according to the hierarchy of concerns. Of course, being friendly and setting an agenda are just part of the first step to having a confident and successful session.

Another very important part of tutoring is passion. Having passion for the subject that one is tutoring, as well as an aptitude for helping and understanding people, is essential to being an effective tutor (Sulcic 203). If a tutor does not have a desire to help others, then this lack of interest becomes obvious to the tutee and they may be unwilling to listen to the advice of someone who seems apathetic to the subject. Even if the student is uninterested, the tutor can help create a comfortable atmosphere by becoming immersed in the student’s work, thus creating a happier learning environment. While passion is an important aspect of tutoring, tutors must understand their own skills; they must also become aware of what they can or cannot do (Sulcic 208). Tutors do not have to be masters; they should know their limits.

Knowing and understanding limits is important, as well as understanding the three main roles a tutor has. One of the most important roles is for a tutor to maintain a friendly atmosphere, also titled a “social tutor” (Sulcic 203). Maintaining that friendly atmosphere is vital to having a successful session, since the tutee should feel comfortable and not overwhelmed.
Having that friendly atmosphere can help confidence grow in both the tutor and the student. The other two roles can be similar, as they involve providing instruction and progress on the tutee’s work (Sulcic 203). Managing and tracking what a tutee has accomplished in a session, and sessions thereafter, is vital to a tutor’s work. Here at the Writing Center, tutors can successfully track what a student has done in previous meetings by using the tutoring session sheets, and they can see whether a conference was successful or not.

Even if the tutor does not feel satisfied with the results of a meeting, what matters is how the tutee feels. If the student is pleased with the results, then that radiates an air of success that should find its way to the tutor, which means that the tutor will usually be pleased after knowing how the tutee felt about the conference (Sulcic 208). After this happens, a tutor’s confidence will rise and that tutor will feel more willing to help others. Having confidence can also help a tutor out when a session turns sour. If a tutoring session starts to become unbearable, it is always best to be patient and not to rush the tutee. Remember, the student has been working on these assignments for a long time and is probably tired. A good indicator to tell if a session may not be going well is if the student appears to be disinterested and disregards the tutor’s advice. When this happens, it is a good idea for a tutor to politely excuse oneself and suggest that sometimes it’s best to take a few hours, or even a whole day off, from the writing assignment. That way, when the student looks back at the paper that student will have a fresh view and can see new errors. This maintains a tutor’s confidence, even if the session appeared to have ended badly.

Offering more tutor sessions is encouraged, and being friendly will help encourage the writer to come back for more tutoring. Some sessions may appear unsuccessful, but don’t let that be discouraging. Dwelling on a sour session will only cause the tutor to be discouraged. Instead, focus on the successful sessions and understand why they were successful. Tutors should be able to understand their own limits and be confident in what they know, but they should not be afraid to admit that they do not know something. Tutoring is nothing like I expected it would be. In fact, it is a much more
rewarding experience than I would have ever imagined, and I realize that each tutoring session is different depending on the tutee, subject, and where they are at in the writing process.

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Self-Efficacy: Implications for Supplemental Instruction

Jane Blakeley

A year ago, I began running again. I’d never been a fast runner; I did slow three or four mile jaunts and felt exhausted afterward, silently reprimanding myself for not going longer and faster. In short, I believed that I was a poor runner and couldn’t run for extended periods of time. But after several months of practicing my four mile loop and a push from the better runners in my life, I worked my way up to eight, then 10, now 13 miles at a time. By improving my sense of self-efficacy, my “beliefs about [my] capabilities to produce effects,” I was able to become a better runner (“Self-Efficacy” 2). I was performing at the level I judged myself incapable, but when I increased mastery, my sense of self-efficacy improved too.

This example also has implications for tutoring, and supplemental instruction (SI) in particular. Holding ability constant, performance is highly correlated with a learner’s belief that he or she can or cannot perform a task – their sense of self-efficacy (“Reflections of Nonability” 315). Those who believe they are highly capable of completing an activity (i.e.-has a high sense of self-efficacy), “approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered ... [set] challenging goals
and maintain a strong commitment to them ... quickly recover sense of efficacy after failures ... and attribute failure to insufficient effort” (“Self-Efficacy” 2). Conversely, if a learner has a weak sense of self-efficacy, he or she may “shy away from difficult tasks ... have low aspirations and weak commitment...dwell on personal deficiencies ... give up quickly...[be] slow to recover... [and is often] victim to stress and depression” (2). Consequently, it is important that tutors pay attention to a tutee’s sense of self-efficacy and work to raise it when possible.

Self-efficacy is influenced by four factors: mastery experiences, social models, social persuasion, and emotional and physical states (“Self-Efficacy” 2-4). A tutor cannot necessarily influence an attendee’s physical or emotional state (though one can provide snacks and a supportive environment) but can influence other factors. SI provides an ideal opportunity to influence a student’s sense of self-efficacy via mastery experiences, social models, social persuasion, which contributes to providing a path to academic integration.

MASTERY EXPERIENCES

Mastery experiences are perhaps the most influential factor for a student’s sense of self-efficacy because they are based on repeated evidence (successful completion of a task or not) from the student’s life (“Self-Efficacy” 2; “Reflections of Nonability” 327). As is true of many classrooms, SI sessions are an ideal place to boost attendees’ self-efficacy (SE) by engineering small successes. A tutor can accomplish this in several ways, but one particularly effective strategy is to scaffold a more challenging activity and break the activity down into subtasks (“Self-Efficacy” 6). The tutor and any able attendees can model the task, perform the task with the student(s) (guide), and finally have students perform the task on their own (release) (Fetner 8). By providing a support structure for a task, a tutee experiences small, repetitive success and is unlikely to fail or stop prematurely. For example, one activity I have enjoyed doing with ENG 102 SI groups (especially very small groups of two or three) is to create sentences with index cards using parts of speech. I color code several sets of index cards for each part of speech before session, and we run through the parts of speech before beginning the activity. If there is confusion, I provide examples and model
the task by writing the parts of speech on my set of index cards. Next, I would go through the task with attendees having each attendee write their own examples on their notecards. Finally, we create sentences and practice identifying and cresting sentence types with the notecards, often using the same patterns of model, guide, repeat. Using this method, attendees almost always had a good success rate, any “errors” (mislabeling a part of speech, for example) were quickly and easily corrected, and we were able to practice a good deal of class information in a short time.

SOCIAL MODELS
The second most effective strategy to boost SE is via social models (“Self-Efficacy” 3). Modeling is when the expert performs the task with the learner observing. The activity is done purposefully, with deliberate movement. Because the group contains students with varying abilities and talents, the classroom and SI sessions can be an optimal place to “[see peers] succeed by sustained effort [and] raise observers’ beliefs that they too possess the capabilities for mastering comparable activities and succeeding (3). As an SI, I use any additional opportunity to help strengthen an attendee’s sense of self-efficacy by pairing mismatched efficacies within the group. It’s important to note that the groups are self-selected (because SI is a voluntary program), but in my two years of experience, those students who attend sessions usually vary in ability and self-belief. In writing courses, “verbal self-guidance has been shown to enhance perceived self-efficacy” (Zimmerman 846). I have often employed group collaborative problem solving for writing assignments. Those who are confident about their writing are more likely to ask questions about their writing which helps demonstrate and demystify writing (assumption that good writers just write) (Russell). Perhaps just as important however, is getting attendees to articulate their metacognitive language when they provide writing solutions. This allows students to model, imitate and practice verbal self-guidance. Modeling then can be a physical action, verbal behaviors made auditory, and collective negotiation.
SOCIAL PERSUASION
Social persuasion is the positive influence the group or I may exert verbally and is the most fragile tactic to influence a student’s beliefs about their abilities because social persuasion is not based on evidence (repeated successes or failures), “and unrealistic boosts in efficacy are quickly disconfirmed” (“Self-Efficacy” 3). When we are nervous about our abilities, our egos are fragile, unstable things. Thus, influencing self-efficacy via social persuasion requires careful and deliberate application (“Reflections of Nonability” 317-18). According to Bandura, “Skilled efficacy builders do more than simply convey positive appraisals … they [also] structure situations for [learners] in ways that bring success and avoid placing them prematurely in situations where they are likely to experience repeated failure” (327). Further, this “success is measured in terms of self-improvement rather than triumphs over others” (327). So, in addition to employing unconditional positive regard, I also try to structure either competitive team activities or collaborative writing activities. For example, one of my favorite activities to do with students in ENG 102 is to play a version of exquisite corpses, a Surrealist technique in which participants collaborate to create a “collective collage of words or images” by “writ[ing] a phrase on a sheet of paper, fold[ing] the paper to conceal [the phrase], and pass[ing] it on to the next player for contribution” (“About Exquisite”). In SI, we first review the parts of speech, phrases, or clauses taught in class. Next, each attendee writes down a part of speech, phrase, or clause (which the SI directs), folds their paper, and passes it to the next person. This process is repeated until the sentence or short work is completed, and each attendee reads the work in its entirety. The results are often silly and slightly ridiculous — “Vestor runs through blue Jello, and a giraffe jumps over the fence” — but the activity provides (hopefully) a low-pressure opportunity to experience small successes and persist through “failures.”

CONCLUSION
Student success depends on innumerable factors; ability, stress, academic and social integration all play a role in any student’s success in college (Napoli 418-19). But an SI tutor aware of and actively working to boost students’ sense of self-efficacy can make a huge difference in performance, regardless of ability
(“Reflections of Nonability” 315). Thus, it is important that tutors pay attention to a tutee’s sense of self-efficacy and try to provide as many opportunities for mastery as possible. By engineering small successes, providing encouragement, modeling and nurturing good cognitive and behavioral models, he or she may help boost student performance.

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Validating Writers with Low Self-Efficacy

Shannon Barclift

When first given the daunting task of picking a research topic related to tutoring and writing an article about it, I felt inadequate. My mind began frantically searching for a topic that was big enough to research and write about that had not been done before, yet was small enough to explain in detail in an article of appropriate length for this newsletter. My self-doubt was crippling me before I could begin to search for a topic to write about, much less begin writing. At the time, I never would have guessed that the course of my research and writing of this article would be guided by another who felt inadequate in her abilities to write – Macy*, a young lady who walked into the Writing Center in need of validation for each step of her writing because of low self-efficacy.

In the beginning of my session with Macy, I explained what generally happens in a tutoring session. I expected her to pull out a paper to discuss with me, but I soon discovered that she had not yet begun writing. To help her get started, I suggested that we do some brainstorming. Macy agreed at first, but she soon began anxiously typing because she wanted
to begin drafting. She began writing sentences, though she did not know what she wanted to say. Each time she finished one, she asked me, “Does that sound okay?” Macy’s need for validation challenged me, as I had not experienced that before. I did not know exactly how to help her, so I went over the assignment guidelines with her and encouraged her to brainstorm information for each of the points she wanted to address in her body paragraphs. Once I felt confident that she had enough ideas to begin developing her paper, I told her that I was going to let her work alone for a while. Before I left the table, I recommended that she ask for another tutoring session once she had some material.

Because of Macy’s inability to write without approval, I finally found the topic I wanted to research and write my article about. I knew I needed to research how to act in these types of situations because I felt frustrated that she wanted to write each sentence with me sitting next to her nodding yes or shaking no. It almost seemed as though she was hoping I would interject ideas so she would not have to do as much work. The negative feelings that I had at the end of our session were partly because of my ignorance of how to help her and my ignorance of the role that self-efficacy has in writing, self-efficacy affects a person’s belief in his or her ability to do a particular task or perform in a specific way (Carey and Forsyth). Macy’s low self-efficacy inspired me to research why we as tutors need to validate tutees and how to effectively go about it.

The first step of validating writers is understanding why they need validation. Often, their need is rooted in low self-efficacy in their writing abilities. According to Emily Bullock, “people may have low self-efficacy in writing because of failure in past English classes, limited past writing opportunities, and the belief that one is either born a skilled writer or not (”Addressing Apprehension” 14). The influences of these factors on self-efficacy cause some writers to crave validation so they feel like their work is valuable and adheres to the goals of their assignment. Understanding the craving for validation allows tutors to realize that low-self efficacy stems from many sources, often dating from when the writer was in high school or possibly before. Self-efficacy is a complex issue, but tutors can encourage higher
levels of it in writers by offering positive reinforcement with each piece of criticism that we give (Bullock 14).

After tutors understand how self-efficacy relates to the need for validation, we can formulate techniques to help these people. When working with writers who have low self-efficacy, it is important to realize that they are not lazy (Bullock 14). Recall that in my session with Macy, I thought she was hoping that I would add my ideas to her writing so she would not have to work as hard. My assumption was incorrect. At the time, I did not realize that she had low self-efficacy, which caused her to fear writing; she did not want my words or ideas but strongly wanted not to write something that did not “sound okay.” A technique that tutors can use to boost self-efficacy is to provide encouragement for small achievements (Bullock 15). This shows writers that they are capable of writing worthy material that fulfills their assignment guidelines.

Once tutors know how to promote high self-efficacy, we can learn methods to use while validating writers, especially the ones who ask, “Does that sound okay?” Writer Kim Nolt describes a series of tutoring sessions she had with a tutee. Each time the tutee finished a sentence she asked, “Can I say that?” At first, Nolt responded every time with, “Of course.” Nolt had many sessions with Angie and through the experience she gained, she learned how to help Angie more effectively. When the tutee asked if she could say something, Nolt began asking her, rather than “of course,” “Is that what you want to say?” This shifted the tutee’s dependence on Nolt to herself, which in turn developed a sense of self-efficacy by causing the tutee to realize that she can write adequate material. Nolt reminds us that as tutors, it is our job to help writers help themselves instead of allowing them to rely on us (“Can I Say That?” 14-5).

Nolt’s article, as well as Bullock’s, have helped shape the way I tutor. For example, I tutored a gentleman working on a descriptive paper about a place on campus where
he likes to study. I told him, “You do a nice job describing the hill.” My response for this nice clear sentence followed Bullock’s advice in which we must provide encouragement for all achievements. Another example of how I have put my research to use is when I was working with a lady who asked me, “Do I need that comma there?” I responded with “Do you think it would make sense without it?” because asking questions requires writers to think about what they want to say (Nolt).

As tutors, we encounter a broad spectrum of students with a range of abilities. Some of the writers we encounter challenge us more than others, such as Macy. In my session with Macy, I helped her brainstorm ideas so she could begin writing; she helped me do much more. She helped me learn how to be a better tutor by understanding that students who need validation are not lazy writers: they have low self-efficacy. I now understand how important it is to try to foster high self-efficacy in all the writers I tutor, as well as the importance of responding to questions with questions. I am grateful for Macy because without her, I would not have researched this topic, nor would I be able to tutor as effectively as I do. The best part of my job are times when I learn more from tutees than they learn from me.

*Name has been changed

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Expectations and Realities of Peer Tutoring

Deeanna Kelly

When I first applied to become a peer tutor, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I assumed that through the meetings and training sessions I would somehow become an expert on writing and grammar, and that I would be expected to have all the answers. However, I soon learned that not knowing the answers is okay so long as I know how to look them up, and that asking for help is acceptable if I cannot find an answer on my own. When I began tutoring, I found that many first time tutees do not know what they are getting themselves into when they ask for a tutoring session any more than I knew what my job as a peer tutor would entail when I applied. I frequented the Writing Center as a student and appreciated the feedback and encouragement that I received, so my desire as a peer tutor was and is to provide that positive experience for other students.

One of the first people I ever tutored came in with a 12-page personal narrative, no assignment guidelines, and no idea of what to expect from a tutoring session. As we proceeded through the session, I pointed out some strong points in her paper, had her clarify some confusing parts, referred her
back to her professor for clarification on the issue of whether or not to use
citations, and encouraged her to bring the paper back after she had received
feedback from her professor and/or peers in class. In this case, I was not
entirely sure whether the tutee left feeling that the session was successful,
but this experience led me to research what makes a successful tutoring
session. According to my research, the four main aspects of a successful
tutoring session are: assistance with creating a thesis statement, help
clarifying the thesis, tutor emphasis of tutee ownership of his or her
writing, and referring a tutee back to the professor for further clarification
(Thonus “Tutor” 125). My research
also indicated that many tutees are unsure of what to expect when they come
into the writing center for the first time; they are used to the title “tutor”
being used in other circles to imply authority (Thonus “Triangulation”). In
the writing center setting, however, the tutoring session should be more of
a peer review than an evaluation of the work for a grade (Thonus “Tutor”
111), and many recommendations that tutors make are merely suggestions,
which are up to the tutee to accept or discard. Although having a tutor edit
a paper so that a student gets a better grade may appear helpful, having a
tutor model good writing and research practices will be more beneficial in
the long run.

I was able to apply some of the information I learned from my research when
a student came to the Writing Center for the first time this spring. She seemed
a bit nervous, so I tried to make her more comfortable before we began. I
told her a little bit about what a tutoring session entails, since discussing the
session before it begins helps clear up any misguided expectations the tutee
may have (Thonus “Triangulation”). In this particular session, we went over
the assignment guidelines together, and I let her know that it is helpful
to bring the guidelines each time she
comes to the writing center so that the tutor knows what the professor is expecting. Towards the end of the session, there was still some confusion about what her professor wanted for the introduction and conclusion. Since another aspect of a successful tutoring session involves sending the student back to the professor for further clarification (Thonus “Tutor” 125), I recommended that she email the revised paper to her professor with her questions about what was expected.

Later this spring, another student came in who did not have her assignment guidelines with her, and the copy of her paper that we read through was not her complete paper – she had the rest of her work saved on her computer at home but had forgotten to save it to her flash drive. However, I felt that my research allowed me to help her despite these setbacks. After she read the paper aloud, we worked on her thesis for a while, which is one aspect of a successful tutoring session (Thonus “Tutor” 125). We also worked on her article usage – a, an and the – and clarified some of her sentences throughout the session. Russian was her native language, and she said that they do not have articles in Russian. I gave her a handout on articles at the end of the session, so that she would have a resource to refer to when she revised her paper. It sounded as though she had a lot of knowledge about how to fix her grammar errors, but that she did not stop to think about it while she was writing. I told her this and recommended that she go through her paper carefully during her final revision to look for places where articles should go, as well as other aspects of grammar that she knew she struggled with. By doing so, I hoped to emphasize her ownership of her own work (Thonus “Tutor” 125).

Ultimately, every tutor is going to find his or her own tutoring style over time, just as every writer eventually finds his or her own writing style. There is not a cookie-cutter style of tutoring that is guaranteed to be successful, because individual personalities as well as strengths and weaknesses when
it comes to writing will have an impact on every session. As a tutor, I do the best I can to implement what research has shown that tutees find most helpful in tutoring sessions, but I also try to tailor my approach to each individual writer that I sit down with. The more I tutor, the more I realize I have a lot to learn about both writing and tutoring. Not every session appears successful to me, but watching a tutee’s face light up when they figure something out and seeing his or her confidence level increase over time makes every session worth it. When it comes to helping the writers who come to us each day, maybe the most important thing we can do is try to make a connection with them and encourage them to keep pursuing writing, however imperfect it seems at the moment, so that they, too, can share their voices with the world.

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Write, revise, repeat. In theory, the process of writing works in two stages, repeating until the writer reaches satisfaction or scraps his work. Most would think this process should apply to the two most general types of writing, creative and technical. However, in practice, we find that “the linear model of prewriting, writing and revising is inadequate (Ryan and Zimerelli 7).” The majority of people simply do not sit down and start outlining. We brainstorm ideas, daydream possibilities, and browse libraries and databases. In order to understand how we actually begin writing, we must “recognize that writing is a process of discovery – of exploring, testing and refining ideas, then figuring out the most effective way to communicate those ideas to an audience (Ryan and Zimerelli 7).” As soon as we begin to write anything, our ideas start to coalesce and compel us to revise or continue research. In this way, “we continually return to earlier portions of a draft, generating new ideas and deleting others, writing and rewriting in order to move forward” (Ryan and Zimerelli 7). As we stutter along, we eventually end up with a final product. To help streamline the process, however, we should consider the merits and faults of both technical and creative writing, the shared characteristics of all effective writing, and how we can use these skills.

To illustrate how I learned to blend technical and creative writing, allow me to present my story. When I began to love writing, I wasn’t in a classroom surrounded by my fellow high school peers, and I hadn’t even joined a writing group yet. I was sitting on the round chair in my room surrounded by drawings of my characters taped to the walls. My laptop rested on my crisscrossed legs, glowing with my first novel as it developed in the font
type Comic Sans MS with bulletpoints. In school, like all other students my age, I learned about grammar mechanics and how to create a five-paragraph essay, the brickwork of technical writing. And like my peers, I struggled to understand why these things were important. When I worked on my novels, the words came naturally. I thought I knew how to write by instinct, so I didn’t need to know the difference between a subject and a direct object. However, my ease with creative writing likely stemmed from the fact that most students “can write narrative and description fairly well, because both depend upon an internal mental structure that is well developed” (Santelmann 68). During our everyday conversations, we develop this mental structure as we practice the use of narrative and description to describe the current events in our lives. Yet when we try to translate our skill in verbal storytelling to the written word, we often find it difficult to clearly present our thoughts.

After I had begun writing, it was only after I began sharing my work that I learned that I also had trouble describing my ideas. My friends and family couldn’t seem to understand the stories I was trying to tell. To make them understand, I learned to revise and finally started to appreciate “how egregious failures in grammatical appropriateness can undermine and destroy the effectiveness” of my writing (Mills 25). Studying grammar became the first major stepping stone for me to become better at writing, both creatively and academically. As I continued learning, I discovered more universal characteristics of effective writing and found:

… all writing is creative, [and] that the qualities of good writing transcend genre. Clarity, accuracy, honesty and vitality should prevail, whether the product is a short story or a lab report, a personal memoir or a personal proposal. (Hoffman 59)

Regarding clarity, accuracy and honesty, their importance in technical writing comes as no surprise. In creative writing too, we often say ‘write what you know’ and ‘show, don’t tell.’ These aphorisms imply that writers must be able to ‘show’ what they know in their writing by recreating scenes and situations in description, rather than simply ‘telling’ the facts. Conversely, to give writing vitality may seem odd in technical writing. By loose definition, technical writing should “have only one interpretation,” which leads many
people to assume that technical writing must be lifeless (Weber 64). This is not to say that technical writing must have colorful description or tell a story; vitality simply means every word used must serve the writer’s purpose.

Superfluous prose has no place in any kind of writing. To bog down sentences and stretch out paragraphs deadens the energy given by a strong purpose. Therefore, all parts of writing must serve a strong purpose. Even “punctuation, and to some extent grammar, depend upon the intention of the writer” (Santelmann 70). In the Writing Center, that is why tutoring sessions must focus on organization and content before mechanics. We know “that purpose and material and organization and expression are the really functional elements in a piece of writing and that grammatical purity without these other elements can achieve nothing” (Mills 25). That said, the Writing Center can do more to help incorporate universal and traditionally creative elements of writing into the academic essays students bring for tutoring.

To compose well-written essays that accomplish more than just the requirements, students should delve deep into their topics. For example, “when we say of a communication that its content is ‘thin’ or ‘weak,’ we mean that the writer has failed to find enough material genuinely relevant to his purpose” (Mills 20). Much like in our word choice, our purpose should define how and what we research. When we work with students in the actual act of writing, if we can help them “decide what his purpose in writing is, what he wants to say, and the order in which he wants to say it, the problems of diction, idiom and phrasing will become more meaningful and less confusing” (Mills 24). Once students are able to appreciate the mechanics of grammar, they can start to play with the English language to make their writing more interesting to read. As they experiment in writing, they will find new ways to improve the vitality in their work.

In order to help every word accomplish the writer’s purpose, thereby improving vitality, writers should practice using the traditionally creative writing technique of ‘show, don’t tell.’ To show means using vivid description and active rather than passive voice. The reason to use vivid description should be obvious, but simply put, it allows writing to become more concrete and easier for readers to follow. Any time a writer can use an example or
additional description to further his point, his credibility increases. Likewise, when writers use active voice, meaning they avoid using forms of ‘to be,’ their writing becomes leaner and more concise. Passive voice only facilitates superfluous prose, which as aforementioned deadens the purpose’s energy.

By combining the eloquence and vitality of creative writing with the clarity and strong purpose of technical writing, students and writers alike can improve their writing greatly. Creative writers benefit from studying technical writing because it can give them more authority in their work, and students writing essays can benefit from practicing creative writing because it can make a tedious essay spark with new life. With all these facets of writing to explore, the possibilities are endless.

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The Session

Sophia Kali

I.

It was not a typical tutoring session,
The man turned to exclaim, “Oh my God!
What happened to you?!”
his gaze fixed, mouth slightly ajar.

Hypertrophic skin always begs the question.

I had been careless.
I thought 7 years had been long enough.
Seven years to make them fade.

I discounted him, pretending to have not heard the shock in his voice.
I pointed to the computer screen with proper poise,
“Try re-writing the sentence by
removing the unnecessary information.”

Truthfully, I do not understand the astonishment behind people’s questions.
Isolated animals placed in extremely stressful and unnatural conditions have been known to violently and impulsively attack themselves.
Constituent parts no longer recognizing the self…
I am in a way,
no different.

People forget,
We humans are animals, too.

II.
While looking at my arms, my older brother once said,
“We should look into finding a plastic surgeon.”
His embarrassment was as apparent as the well-intentioned actor fumbling for grace.

III.
Grace is lacking amongst strangers,
sometimes, even friends.
I have been highly informed:
“It’s not across the street, it’s down the street.”

IV.
It so happens I can walk down the street, just fine, thank you.
I am not your typical tutor.
 Associations
International Writing Center Association
http://writingcenters.org/
Midwest Writing Center Association
http://pages.usiouxfalls.edu/mwca/
National Association on Peer Tutoring in Writing
http://www.ncptw.chicagolandwritingcenters.org/
CRLA (College Reading and Learning Association)
http://www.crla.net/

Helpful Links
Grammar Bytes
http://www.chompchomp.com/exercises.htm
ONELook.com (dictionary resource)
http://www.onelook.com/

Journals and References
Kairos: a multimedia journal
http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/
College Composition and Communication (JCCC link)
http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublication?journalCode=collcompcomm&
CompPile (resource for Peer Writing Tutors)
http://compfaqs.org/WritingCenters/WritingCenters
Writing Center Journal
http://casebuilder.rhet.ualr.edu/wcrp/wcjournal/search.cfm
Praxis: A Writing Center Journal
http://projects.uwc.utexas.edu/praxis/
Writing Lab Newsletter
http://www.writinglabnewsletter.org/

BLOGS
Friends of the Writing Center Journal
http://writingcenterjournal.blogspot.com/
IWCA Discussion Forum
http://www.writingcenters.org/board/index.php
Peer Centered
http://www.peercentered.org/