

IN THE POCKETS OF YESTERDAY'S PANTS:

Theory, practice, theory



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Editor's Note

by Evan Harmon

Editing the journal this year was a new experience for me. Although it was more difficult and time-consuming than I predicted, it was definitely worth the effort because I learned a great deal. Being used to the hands-off, writer-directed approach of peer tutoring, I found it challenging to find the right balance between the sanctity of the writer's text and my input as editor. In peer tutoring situations authorship ultimately rests with the writer, but introducing an editor muddies the water. Though even an overbearing editor won't equal the writer's ownership of an article, I discovered that editing results in an authorship that is not quite singular and not quite dualistic either. The complexity of bidirectional collaboration on an article loses the simplicity of authorship attribution down a rabbit hole and instead makes authorship an irreducible unification of collaborators, however dominant one writer may be. Though the majority of writing is done in relative isolation, I learned that editing rarely can be. In many cases when I attempted even a simple edit, I later found that it conflicted with a higher-order logic of the article or it didn't mesh with outside research I was previously unaware of. As such, I found that editing should always occur in conjunction with an in-depth understanding of the article, at least a tacit familiarity with the relevant outside research, and most importantly, an open and collaborative dialogue with the writer.

However minuscule my role as editor was for each article, I felt a great deal of responsibility to each writer and article because I was consistently impressed by the effort everyone put into their articles, the many insights they made, and the quality of the writing itself. There's a little something for everyone in this year's issue. Brendan discusses the connection between the cultural values of Arabic and Japanese writers and their style of reasoning (both being quite different from Western logical standards). Kate explores her experiences with revising and just what exactly that entails in a tutoring context. Daniel looks at how learning styles manifest in tutoring sessions and how familiarity with research in this area can result in more effective tutoring sessions. Betsy

shares a meaningful experience she had as a peer tutor and how her time in the Writing Center would change her forever. Amy considers the common but often challenging issues in tutoring continuing education writers. Aaron and Ehsan write about psychological research on personality types and how that has played a part in their tutoring experiences. Brandon reflects on his long stay at the Writing Center and just how important a peer tutor can sometimes be. Luke synthesizes his research on linguistics and non-native speakers as well as showing his poetic talents in his original poem/textual composition, "The Feline." Maria discusses her personal experiences with writing apprehension as well as research on that subject. Morgan summarizes her time as a tutor in the college's new Supplemental Instruction initiative and how the program might best proceed in the future. Ondrej writes about his fateful trip to the library in which he encountered an unconscious man and resuscitated him by performing CPR – a day in the life of a JCCC peer tutor and a metaphor perhaps for students with writer's block. Tess highlights the many issues involved in tutoring deaf writers. And finally, Erynne and I analyze value systems in the Writing Center and what an ideal Writing Center value system might look like. But personally, I learned the most by editing this issue and talking about the various articles and research with my fellow tutors. There's a lot to dig into and I hope you learn as much as I did.





Personality Type Profiling

Ehsan Avazpour and Aaron Limoges

Dr. Jack Truschel, author of “Using the Myers-Briggs in Tutoring: Understanding Type,” states,

The Myers-Briggs does not “tell” a person what to do or be and provide strengths and weaknesses associated with each profile type. Remember, it is a self-reporting instrument which can be manipulated and therefore should be used to support the manner in which you interact with others.

If a tutor is to use personality trait theories to improve his/her methods for improving information retention in writers, the tutor should first begin with assessing his/her own personality. Though a complete psychoanalysis may not be required, psychological theories on personality traits can help both the tutor and the writer have a more productive tutoring session.

Although we believe that identifying all personality traits in a writer would be ideal, we recognize that the time tutors have with the writer is very limited. With this in mind, we concur that the identification of a writer as an introvert or extrovert is the most important and easiest dimension for us to distinguish. Knowing if a writer is an introvert or an extrovert opens the door for a myriad of different approaches that the tutor can then choose according to the particularities of the session.

Recognizing introversion and extroversion is far from difficult. In fact, many

people do it naturally on a regular basis. However, to do this objectively, we must know what specific traits to look for. An introvert is someone who is generally quiet and reserved; they often prefer to be alone or in small groups. Some people might believe that introverts are found isolated in dark, damp rooms, either tearing their hair out or viciously scratching the walls like Hannibal Lecter. But though they may seem difficult to talk to at times, this is usually because they are internalizing and processing information. However, most people tend to be extroverts. And while some might find extroverts overbearing and manipulative – think Jim Jones (Don't drink the Kool-Aid in the Writing Center) – most are outgoing, sociable and nonmurderous.

For a tutor, knowing one's own personality profile and motivators is invaluable. This helpful information can be a tutor's map, telling them where to go in order to reach their preferred location. For example, if you are at a certain point with an introverted writer, how do you get him or her to be more comfortable? Making a writer feel relaxed is a major part of getting him or her to enjoy writing. When learners are relaxed the creativeness flows freely, ideas come quickly, and the stress of an assignment can turn to feelings of enjoyment and accomplishment. Additionally, identifying the writer as an introvert or extrovert can help both the tutor and writer avoid the dreaded "awkward silence."

Truschel describes different personality profiles and some motivational theories. He explains that knowing our own proclivities pertaining to personality can be beneficial when tutoring. This is important because "[u]sing the Myers-Briggs can provide us with a method to gain valuable insight into personality, reduce defensiveness, and enhance our ability to appreciate differences and improve our ability to work with others, and perhaps ourselves" (Truschel). Equally important to understanding personality traits is knowing what motivates. Some are motivated intrinsically, and some are motivated extrinsically. Determining the motivation of a writer is useful information to have when setting goals for the assignment that a writer is working on.

Recently I (Avazpour) worked with a very introverted writer who appeared worried about his assignment and who seemed uncomfortable discussing his paper with someone he didn't know. This being very apparent from the beginning of the session, I tried to relax the writer by asking questions that I knew he could easily answer, just to get him talking. Once I felt he was unwound enough to be comfortable with me – a normally loud and talkative person – I continued to gather information about his assignment. Knowing that conversing with an extrovert can be stressful for an introvert, I kept my conversation to a minimum, focusing strictly on the assignment. This writer was to read an article from his textbook and write a short summary/response paper. He explained that he was having difficulties finding the

main points of the article and would like help interpreting the author. Continuing to focus on the assignment, we read through the article, paragraph by paragraph, highlighting the main points and categorizing them into three groups: pathos, logos, and ethos. This would later be helpful to him in order to summarize the article and meet the assignment goals. We read a paragraph at a time and described what the author was trying to get across to the reader, but I could have improved by asking his opinion on each main point and there by further engaged the writer. This questioning technique could have also given him ideas and material that he could have incorporated into his response. Assisting an introverted writer in being more vocal when brainstorming or creating an outline for a paper could prove to be helpful. The writing would provide them with many good ideas. With the limited experience we have tutoring, we find that it is more effective to ask questions that concentrate on the assignment, rather than ones that are personal in nature. Additionally, many introverts do not enjoy being asked questions about themselves, even if they directly relate to the assignment.

The interactions between introverts and extroverts can be quite difficult to overcome; just look at Michael and Fredo Corleone in the 1972 classic *The Godfather*. Michael is clearly an introvert, while Fredo is obviously an extrovert. Michael disapproves of Fredo's outgoing behavior in Las Vegas, and this leads to disagreement. Eventually, in the sequel, *The Godfather Part II*, Fredo's activities result in an attempt on Michael's life. Michael discovers this and gives the order to leave Fredo floating downstream. Although experiences like this are at least somewhat uncommon in the Writing Center, tension on a much lesser scale still occurs between introverts and extroverts. If we recognize our own personalities, we can make an effort to adapt to the writer's needs without getting "wacked." Truschel clarifies:

Knowing our own type can assist us with understanding our strengths, what works for us, how we think through issues and problems, and resolve the question of why we behave as we do, rather than criticize our own behaviors. We can use MBTI to better understand people and provide some rationale for the manner in which they interface with us.

We fully agree with Dr. Truschel in respect to understanding ourselves. If we do not know ourselves, how are we to know others? We believe that the insight given to us by understanding our own motivators and personality traits can be used to understand those around us, thus catering to the writer in a more effective way and creating a comfortable and relaxed environment where the writer may willfully and happily retain the knowledge to improve their writing. In the process, they may also learn the most valuable lesson that we try writing.

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Learning Styles and Tutoring

Daniel Revard

Working in a Writing Center exposes peer writing tutors to many different kinds of writers. The Writing Center at Johnson County Community College helps writers of varying age, personality, language proficiency, motivation level, and background. The Writing Center staff is required to adapt to all of these variables while helping writers in the best way possible. Experienced tutors know that not all sessions go smoothly; maybe an ESL student becomes frustrated while trying to understand confusing grammar rules. Or a writer, in a procrastination-induced panic, might attempt to start and finish an essay three hours before the deadline. Or perhaps, the tutor and the writer just don't seem to click. One approach to help accommodate all kinds of writers involves understanding how they learn. Several articles and books on learning styles define different types of learners, show how to identify them by their behavior, and explain useful tips for tutoring them. *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* outlines three types of learners: visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli suggest specific strategies for the different learning styles. For example, "Have student writers point to material as you talk about it" (visual), "Read instructions, notes, or other material aloud" (auditory), "Write sentences or sections of a paper on self-stick removable notes" (kinesthetic) (60-61). Other articles identify more specific groups of learners. In an article published in *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, Libby Miles,

et. al. describe seven different “intelligences” that writers possess and how they affect their preferred learning style. She goes into detail about the behaviorisms and clues that help tutors identify writers of each dominant style. This article consolidates writers into neat, separate groups with instructions on how to handle them. Although this plan looks wonderful on paper, as always, reality is far more complicated. While tutoring I have noticed a few things about trying to figure out writers’ learning types. Kathryn Byrne, director of the Johnson County Community College Writing Center, requires all tutors to videotape their sessions multiple times during the semester to give us an idea of how we are tutoring and to help us improve. My videotaped tutoring sessions revealed my judgment of writers’ learning preferences to be skewed. For example, on one occasion, I tutored a writer who was seeking help on a speech. During the session I began to think that the writer was a dominant kinesthetic learner based on his gestures and the topic of his paper. However, after reviewing the video, I noticed that he portrayed strong visual learner characteristics, but also responded well to my explanations and brainstorming suggestions. My initial conclusion during the session was not complete, but, gratefully, without realizing it, I had used techniques for tutoring all types of learners – visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Evaluating writers’ learning preferences is difficult for at least two reasons. On average, tutors spend about thirty minutes with writers in a tutoring session. With this short window of time to observe a person’s body language and responses, how can tutors make a conclusion about a writer’s learning style? “Instant ‘diagnoses’ are neither possible nor desirable (what if we ‘diagnose’ incorrectly?),” Miles explains (2). Unless the tutor personally knows the writer, or they had worked together previously, determining a definitive learning style is unlikely. Another factor that makes analyzing writers difficult is that learning styles often overlap. Not surprisingly, people almost always express strengths in multiple areas. “Although learners may possess strong preferences, many exhibit preferences for two styles,” Brown states (2). The fact that writers use a mixture of learning methods makes pinpointing dominant preferences difficult, but at the same time, it also takes pressure off the tutor. Since the world overflows with visual, auditory and kinesthetic stimuli, if people leaned heavily on only one learning style,

their learning potential would be quite limited in such a multimodal world as today. Thankfully, people are very adaptive. Writers who come to the Writing Center seeking help are generally willing to adjust. In order to accept guidance on writing, writers require a certain amount of flexibility to expand ideas, learn new concepts, and adopt different viewpoints. Tutors must also be accommodating simply because their job requires working with a large variety of people. To effectively help learners of all kinds, tutors should be familiar with learning styles and have the skills to tutor with different approaches. Rather than categorizing a writer, the tutor should observe their behavior and response and adjust tutoring strategies to maximize the comfort and success of the session. Focusing on writers' specific learning styles is unnecessary because tutors and writers can adapt to each other, creating a collaborative, working relationship, an environment especially conducive to learning and one of the main goals of the Writing Center.

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The Effects of Cultural Differences on Writing Style

Brendan Light



A week before the fall 2010 semester began, the Writing Center tutors got together and went to a training program at the Diastole house in Kansas City, Missouri. During the afternoon half of the session, we participated in a forum – Ask A Tutor – where inexperienced tutors submitted anonymous questions on notecards. The leaders of the forum read the questions out loud and then let the experienced tutors respond providing their tutoring knowledge and experiences. Many of the questions asked revolved around tutoring sessions with ESL writers. Before that day, I had never really thought about how I would work with ESL writers. I suddenly became worried. What if I can't tutor ESL writers? After having my first few tutoring sessions with ESL writers, the fear quickly faded. ESL writers are often in the Writing Center because they are eager and willing to learn English. Also, tutors can learn quite a lot of information about the writers' cultures, customs, traditions, religions, and languages. All of these different aspects of culture are important for a tutor's knowledge because it can not only affect how an ESL writes, but also the tutoring session in general.

In the first article I researched, "Politeness in the Writing Center: An Analysis of NS Tutor and NNS Writer Discourse," Gail Nash explored how politeness varies from culture to culture. Actions deemed polite by tutors may be deemed impolite to writers coming from different cultures. But different research yields different results. For example, Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's research proposes a theory based on five basic strategies (qtd. in

Nash). When their theories were tested in Nash's Writing Center with international writers, Nash found that Brown and Levinson's least offensive strategy, "off record," was the most offensive strategy to international writers. The "off record" communication strategy is characterized by the indirectness of the speaker and implicit messages. The writers did not appreciate the indirectness of the tutor and the lack of clarity (Nash). This same reversal took place when Brown and Levinson's most offensive strategy, "bald on record," was tested. The "bald on record" strategy is characterized by the bluntness and directness of the speaker. However, foreign writers appreciated the clarity of the tutor. Based on the research of Nalini Ambady, Eastern cultures pay more attention to cues based on the personal relationship and interpersonal relationship as opposed to the words being said (Nash). Additionally, some cultures determine appropriate social distance differently than people from the United States. For example, Koreans perceive less social distance than native U.S. English speakers (Nash) which leads a Korean student to find "bald on record" statements more acceptable than other cultures.

I can confirm these findings with my experience in the Writing Center. I often worked with a Korean writer who used "bald on record" statements when she communicated with tutors. Our interactions were based on the relationship between a tutor and a writer. Furthermore, she saw little distance between us and was comfortable using "bald on record" communication. However, tutors should not be expected to understand every aspect of politeness from every culture. But based on these findings two major points should be remembered when working with ESL and International writers: focus on clarity when communicating and awareness that ESL writers may come from a culture that values a different style of communication (Nash).

The second article I researched, "Influence of Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds on the Writing of Arabic and Japanese Writers of English," by Bouchra Moujtahid, explored the writing of Arabic and Japanese writers. Moujtahid's focus was on how Zen Buddhism affects the writing of Japanese writers. Writers from Arabic nations and Japan have been shown to exhibit

two distinct language patterns. These two patterns present two common communication styles in their writing. Arab writing tends to be more emotional and embellished, whereas Japanese writing tends to be more simple and understated. Arabic culture values rhetoric and writing that focuses on exaggeration of words and ideas, as opposed to the Western emphasis on logic and reasoning. Arabic language is focused on exaggeration and relaxed realism because the language reflects the hopes of the Arab speaker or writer instead of the reality of the situation. Emphasis is also required in Arabic culture to prove a strong point (Moujtahid).

This greatly contrasts with the writing of Japanese writers. The logic and organizational structure of the West is not a valued structure in Japanese culture. Moujtahid claims Japanese culture values simple observations in writing because of the influence of Zen Buddhism. The culture recognizes that the use of verbal language itself has the tendency to misrepresent a fundamental reality that cannot be fully expressed in words. Japanese writing therefore tends to eschew the logical and reductive analysis common in the West in favor of short and simple observations about the subject – “flash insights” – that are intended to evoke an intuitive understanding from the reader. When a Japanese writer comes to the U.S. he or she can have difficulty writing because of this skepticism about the ability of language and logic to penetrate reality coupled to the common feeling among Japanese writers that writing point by point logical argument is overly mechanical and boring (Moujtahid).

In one session with a Chinese student I found this research to be very helpful. This writer wrote a profile paper for her *Composition I* course. During the tutoring session, one of the concerns we focused on was brainstorming and finding clear topic sentences for each paragraph. Sometimes her topic sentence was at the bottom of the paragraph after she had made all of her observations on the topic, an example of the “flash insight” writing attributed to Zen Buddhism. All of her observations and reasoning came before the topic sentence. Although she did spend time making sure each of her sentences within each paragraph clearly connected with her topic sentence for that paragraph.

An international writer's culture influences how he or she writes as well as how he or she interacts with a tutor. Although a tutor cannot be expected to be an expert on every culture's definition of politeness, understanding that different cultures have different definitions is beneficial for tutors. If tutors at least understand that, then he or she can experiment during the tutoring session and figure out which strategy of communication works best for that writer. And similarly, tutors need not be familiar with the underlying philosophies of every culture and how that influences their thought processes and writing to have a positive tutoring session. As the research comparing Arabic writing to Japanese writing shows, some writers might be operating from a very different perspective and value system than what is common in the West. One doesn't need to be an expert on Arabic culture or Zen Buddhism to be aware of this and to know that awareness and specificity is beneficial and to approach tutoring with an open mind.

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Deaf Writers in the Writing Center

Tess Neely



Working in the Writing Center this year has been an amazing experience for me. It was fairly spectacular knowing that I was able to help different people from all walks of life with their writing, even if the writing task was small. I particularly enjoyed working with the Deaf writers that came in for help. So, I chose to research Deaf writers compared to non-Deaf writers. I was even able to videotape one of my sessions with a Deaf writer that I have worked with several times to further my research.

Most important in understanding Deaf writers is that Standard English is different from the language that Deaf writers use, which is American Sign Language, or ASL. ASL has drastic differences because it is a visual language, such as unconventional subject-verb order, no verb tenses, no "to be" verbs, no possessive markers, no plural markers, nor articles which with no surprise are the most common issues within the written work of a Deaf writer. Deaf writers don't generally have any problems with organization unless they are beginning writers.

The session that I recorded is a great example of this. I had worked with this writer before, so I had previous experience with her writing. In this particular session, her paper was a continuation of one of her other papers that we had worked on. We sat together, and I moved the cursor across the words like a pointer, so we were, in essence, reading the paper together. We were basically just looking for the particular errors listed above, especially missing articles.

Other than those common errors, her paper was organized well. If I noticed an error, I would spell out the main error using the sign language alphabet, and she could usually tell immediately what she had missed before I had even finished spelling it. When a deaf person is given a correction, usually, they can identify it. They are so used to their own language that constant translation of Deaf into English is hard for them and it changes the way they portray certain ideas – they sometimes try to remain true to the meaning in their language by keeping the written word in original phrasing. Writing in English, they can still get the idea across; it just comes across differently. Many people falsely believe that Deaf means limited comprehension, but it is not true. I feel that this particular fact is very important. Their writing differences are similar to ESL writers, not to those with low language or cognitive ability. And even still, many people immediately assume that Deaf writers are not very intelligent; they do not realize that the many errors Deaf writers make are language acquisition differences. Plus, they don't use all of the extra words that we do.

I think that understanding how sign language is structured is a major step in understanding the thought processes of a Deaf writer and key to effectively communicating with them. Even if a tutor does not know sign language (I only know the alphabet and a few other common signs), understanding its particular structure is just as important as recognizing that many foreign language speakers reverse their adjectives and nouns.

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Reflecting on Revising Writing

Kate Claus



When I write, I enjoy the revision process, and I often end up with at least five or six versions of the same paper before I consider it complete. As a tutor in the Writing Center at Johnson County Community College (JCCC), I struggle to define what exactly “revision” means and to help writers not only revise their work but learn to revise beyond the tutoring session. By reflecting on my tutoring sessions, I now realize that I have developed skills to help writers learn to revise their work.

Defining what “revising” means varies from resource to resource. For example, Dictionary.com defines “revise” as “to alter something already written or printed, in order to make corrections, improve, or update: to revise a manuscript” (“Revise”). Just about everything tutors do during a tutoring session could fall into that definition, from pointing out a comma splice to making suggestions about generalities in a thesis statement. The textbook, *The Norton Field Guide to Writing with Readings*, further refines the role of revising in writing. The textbook dedicates several chapters to revising and even includes a separate chapter on the editing and proofreading process. Before editing and proofreading, writers should revise work in order to improve the focus, clarity and organization of their work (Bullock 236-246).

In the JCCC Writing Center, we have our hierarchy of concerns to help prioritize what should be revised first. From top priority to lowest priority, the hierarchy includes assignment goals, clear focus, organization, paragraphs, sentences,

words and style. In an ideal tutoring session, tutors would guide writers through the revision process by first looking at the entire essay and helping the writer assess the focus, structure and clarity of ideas in the paper.

However, life rarely goes according to plan, and that holds true for my experience in the Writing Center too. At first, I found it a struggle to both convey the depth of a good revision as well as impart ways to revise. I also encountered situations that made it difficult to focus on higher-level revision issues. In my second videotaped tutoring session, the writer, Ashley*, had exactly an hour to revise her paper, including the time for the tutoring session. In this situation, I realized that any major issues with thesis statement, support of thesis and conclusion would be hard to complete within the timeframe. Instead, I tailored the tutoring session to areas Ashley could easily fix during the remaining time, such as adding needed commas and replacing some of the “to be” verbs in her paper. However, I did mention the importance of tying the conclusion back into the introduction and thesis statement. Reflecting on this situation, I realized that imparting revision skills sometimes involves the conversation during the session. Ashley may not have had time to make any needed major revisions to her current paper, but she may be able to take some of my suggestions for revision and apply them to the next paper.

Another “less-than-ideal” situation that I encountered happened during the videotaping of my third reflection. In that tutoring session, Lisa* only cared about her grammatical mistakes. Instead of focusing on issues higher up on the revision checklist, we stuck to grammatical issues, specifically subject-verb agreement, pronouns and articles. Although we didn’t focus on higher level concerns, I did try to take the conversation to other topics in revision, such as her supporting paragraphs. For me, this tutoring session illustrates the balance that I face as a tutor. Lisa did need help with her grammar, which was her main concern, and while I strive to focus on higher-level revision issues, sometimes the best thing is to focus on the lower-level issues instead.

On the other hand, sometimes writers are more open to working on larger-scale issues. Lee* came into the Writing Center for help with a research paper. When I asked what his main concerns were, he actually went straight to

higher-level concerns. Specifically, he said that he wanted to make sure that his arguments were clear and that the evidence supported his paper. I read his paper aloud, and we worked on smaller-hierarchy issues as we read through the paper. After reading through it, we focused on the higher-level issues. Overall, his paper was well-articulated. We paid attention to his introduction because I found that a quote he used to support his argument was actually confusing and possibly conflicted with his thesis statement. I suggested that he go back to his source material to double check the meaning and to consider revising that section.

In another recent tutoring session, I worked with Anne* on higher-level revision concerns, from ensuring the paper met assignment goals to strengthening her introduction and conclusion. Anne's paper contained excellent information, but some of the information seemed out of place or too long. We talked about how often a paper will contain material that can be rearranged to clarify a writer's message and to help strengthen introductions and conclusions. In this case, she moved a quote from the middle of her paper, where it was lost, to the conclusion. With both Anne and Lee, I felt like the tutoring sessions mirrored the more ideal situation where a tutor helps a writer examine the clarity, organization, and focus of their ideas.

Over the course of tutoring, I have found several tactics that can help student writers think about revising beyond the tutoring session. First, I point out the Hierarchy of Concerns signs that we have in the Writing Center. It's a tangible artifact that people can see and touch. I also discuss some of the other tools we have in the Writing Center, such as the Editor software. Additionally, I mention strategies that work for me, such as reading the paper out loud or going sentence by sentence to see if each one makes sense. I will also stress the importance of a strong thesis statement and how each paragraph and the conclusion should work to support that thesis.

In summary, for me to get caught editing a paper and avoiding the higher-level revision conversations is easy, especially when grammatical mistakes overwhelm a paper or the writer has a tight deadline. To focus on the higher-level revision elements, I refer to the Writing Center's Hierarchy of Concerns signs

in a tutoring session, I ask the writer about their specific concerns in the paper, and I point to the thesis statement and talk through whether the main points and conclusion all support the thesis. Over the months of tutoring, I feel more comfortable working with writers on higher-level revision issues.

*All names have been changed.

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Writing Apprehension: The Secret Side of Writing Center Tutors

Maria Regidor Carvajal



As peer tutors at the Johnson County Community College Writing Center, we are asked to deal with hundreds of different assignments every semester. No matter what the assignment is, we should always help those who visit the Writing Center become better writers; but what happens when we encounter a specific assignment that we are not particularly good at ourselves? In other words, what should we do when we find that we have writing apprehension with the type of writing we're supposed to be helping others? As I researched writing apprehension, I came across some interesting sources that looked at peer tutors' writing apprehension and ways in which it can affect tutoring sessions. I came to the realization that, while it is important to understand why the people I tutor can sometimes be apprehensive, it is also important to know what types of writing make me apprehensive. By figuring out when and why I become apprehensive about my own writing and how to overcome this, I can help other students do the same.

As a student, I have noticed that I have some apprehension writing research papers. The idea of not only researching, but of using the work of experts in my own papers is usually a daunting one, and it becomes even more stressful when I have to use more than two sources. Research papers take hard work. It is easy to get stuck and hard to continue on when stuck happens. If picking a topic isn't the hard part, then finding good, credible sources is. If those two aren't a problem, then the task of sitting down and putting all the sources together in a way that is understandable, informative and creative

is. One method that has helped me deal with this seemingly overwhelming feeling is to think of the research paper as a task that can only be tackled in small steps: first, pick a good topic; second, do research; third, write an outline; fourth, write a rough draft; finally, revise that rough draft several times. This way I don't get bogged down by thinking about the immensity of the task in front of me. I never really saw my apprehension towards research papers as needing more thought; I just figured it was a process we all went through and that research papers just weren't my forte. Early in the fall 2010 semester, I sat down at a tutoring session with a writer who made a comment that bothered me for some time. As we talked about his assignment, he told me that he thought the assignment was too difficult for a *Composition I* class. He added, "That's not something you would know anything about though; you're a writing tutor." I didn't quite know how to respond to this. I thought his statement was unfair because I felt he believed that writing just came to me easily, naturally, and that I never had to worry about a difficult assignment. As I explained above, some assignments for me are always difficult to do, and tutors can have as much trouble with them as the writers they tutor. This experience with him made me realize that many writers come into the Writing Center and expect tutors to be perfect writers that never have trouble writing. After I got over my original hurt, if we can call it that, I also realized that writing anxiety was a topic from which more knowledge could come in handy, both as a student and as a peer tutor.

In an article titled "The Effects of Writing Apprehension on the Teaching Behaviors of Writing Center Tutors," Patrick Bizzaro and Hope Toler explain that, "writing apprehension seems to arise among all writers in all fields, regardless of their abilities and successes as writers, not because they lack skill ... but because of their past experiences as writers" (38). Bizzaro and Toler set out to determine if the writing apprehension of tutors had any relationship to the styles they use to tutor (40). They discovered that "there is a correspondence between dimensions of writing apprehension and specific teaching behaviors" (Bizzaro and Toler 43). For example, if a tutor doesn't believe she can write clearly and doesn't like to have her writing evaluated, she is more likely to simply fix a writer's errors instead of looking for the cause

of the errors. She won't usually wait for the writer to make discoveries about her own writing (Bizzaro and Toler 43). Their research shows that it is important for tutors to be aware of their own apprehensions so that they can deal with them and make sure that they are not passed on to the writers they tutor.

I often work with writers who find themselves experiencing writing apprehension, and I feel it is up to me to help these writers overcome those feelings. One of the best feelings I get as a peer writing tutor is when I help my peers get one step closer to overcoming their writing anxieties. I usually start out by telling the writer that I know it is not easy and by giving them some suggestions that have helped me overcome my own apprehension. I usually tell them about how helpful it has been for me to think of research papers as being a process and to give myself plenty of time to finish my assignment. Or I might tell the writer how writing just for fun and not for a grade helps me figure out where and when putting my ideas down on paper is best. When Nina* came in to the Writing Center saying she needed help starting a paper, I jumped at the opportunity to help her. She had to write a research paper for her *Introduction to Early Education* class, and she needed help figuring out how to format her paper using APA style. She told me at the start of our session that she wouldn't have a problem using the article she found in one of the databases to write her paper, but she was really stressed about how to format her paper. She told me she couldn't start her paper because she was too anxious about following the rules of APA style. As I worked with Nina, I saw that she exhibited some characteristics of an apprehensive writer. McLeod explains that an apprehensive writer may work hard at the task at hand but may be too anxious to concentrate (428). She also explains that a writer may try to find excuses for not writing, rather than sit down and write (McLeod 429). Nina showed both of these traits in our tutoring session. She mentioned a few times that she wouldn't have a problem writing the paper once she learned how it should be formatted; this showed that she just could not concentrate on writing the paper because she was apprehensive about the part she didn't know how to do. She had also procrastinated and waited until two days before her paper was due to come into the Writing Center and get some help. I made sure I gave Nina some

advice on how to overcome her anxiety, but since she didn't want help with the actual paper, only with the format, I concentrated on telling her that I knew how frustrating using APA or MLA for the first time could be. I told her about the first time I used APA for a psychology research paper and about how nervous I felt at first. I pointed out that when I looked at the handout and started writing my essay it became a lot easier. I hoped that by telling her my own experiences I could help her realize that as she went through the writing process writing her paper would become easier. After talking a little more about her topic, going through the APA handout, and going over her assignment sheet, Nina told me she was ready to get started. She told me the information I had given her about using APA to write her paper was very helpful. I feel that my previous experience with learning how to use APA on my own really helped me ease her anxieties about having to learn a new way of formatting and citing her work. I was happy I could show her through my own experience. Even though APA formatting may seem hard at first, once a writer knows what he or she is doing, it becomes a lot easier. I also believe that knowing our own apprehensions towards writing is very important when it comes to tutoring (Bishop 38). Knowing I feel apprehension when writing research papers helps me decide how I want to use that knowledge of apprehension in my tutoring sessions – either to tell the writer that can be worked out or by making sure that I don't transfer my apprehension to him or her. I know that instead of telling the writer that I hate to write research papers because they make me anxious, I can give them the tools they need to overcome their own anxieties and improve their writing.

*Name has been changed.

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Linguistics and Non-Native Speakers in the Writing Center

Luke Patrick



As tutors, the importance of a basic understanding of the linguistic sciences should not be underestimated. Its usefulness is not limited to only understanding English better. Every day numerous writers from other countries come in asking for help with their writing skills. These writers are working incredibly hard toward gaining a better understanding of English. Because of this, having at least some understanding of another language is important. If I can truly understand where a writer is coming from, I can help him or her that much more. Linguistics is a valuable asset to the Writing Center because it improves the understanding between tutor and writer due to the frequent evocation of problem-solving thought processes.

Linguistics is not just a word that rolls nicely off the tongue. It is the science of language. Language itself is more than what we speak, more than the rules of grammar and phonemes. It also consists of how we think. In 2005, George Lakoff, professor of cognitive science and linguistics at UC Berkeley, gave a fascinating lecture on how language is used in politics. While not dealing with second language acquisition, Lakoff's lecture focused on how words shape our thinking as well as our brain. He explained that when we hear or read words or phrases we make automatic connections to other words, phrases, ideas or objects. So, a simple phrase like "You are now breathing manually" will make an audience instantaneously focus on their own lungs. Lakoff also mentioned that the word in German for "guilt" and "debt" are the same. The direct association between these two words involves

a moral balance to German speakers. Lakoff's lecture demonstrates how the words we use frame our thought, and how we make connections.

In her book, *Decoding ESL*, Amy Tucker explains that the sense of time in the Chinese language is rather different than in the English language. In English, if the scene happened in the past, every verb must be past tense. Yet, in Chinese, the writer would simply start off their statement with an explanation of the time frame and go from there with the understanding that everything is past tense. Tucker uses a rather apt observation from Charles Thompson who states that "... the English speaker's version of time is 'an ever-rolling stream' with the Chinese speaker's sense of time as a series of discontinuous units occurring in succession" This is important to keep in mind when tutoring Chinese writers. They tend to have difficulty dealing with verb tenses, and as such, need extra focus on them.

Yet, no clear-cut rules arise when tutoring someone who is studying English as a second language. So, while lines like "Korean students have trouble with articles" may be useful in some cases, the claim has only limited use on the whole. To be a supportive tutor, helping writers understand grammatical concepts, takes proper framing of the mind. This framing is especially true if the tutor in question is a non-native speaker who is unsure of some of the grammar rules and terminology when helping ESL. If a sentence or phrase does not look or sound right, I think of the correct phrasing, compare the two, and then decide what the difference is. Remember, tutors can explain grammar issues in their own words, without using terminology the writer might not know. So, do not be afraid to explain something differently, using simpler terms, or a useful metaphor. For instance, if the introduction on a writer's paper is abrupt and jarring, the tutor should say something like, "Think of the introduction like a pool. You don't want to throw your reader in head first. Ease them into the water, one leg at a time." All a proper explanation needs is a useful frame of mind and sometimes a different angle if the first framing does not work. This linguistic framing is a valuable asset in the Writing Center. It allows a tutor to connect with writers and ultimately help them learn.

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Supplemental Instruction in Learning Communities: A Semester of Trials, Successes and Reflections

Morgan Daigneault



In the fall of 2009, I was honored with the opportunity to become a tutor in the Johnson County Community College Writing Center. For three semesters I worked in the Writing Center, assisting a wide variety of students on a walk-in basis. However, beginning in spring 2011, English Instructor Beth Gulley and Reading instructor Dianne Rottinghaus launched a Learning Community (LCOM) course, which combined ENGL 102 (*Writing Strategies*) and RDG 125 (*Fundamentals of Reading*). After they had discussed possible applicants with Kathryn Byrne, JCCC's Writing Center director, I was invited to become an SI tutor. At the core of the LCOM strategy lays the concept of Supplemental Instruction (SI), which aims to increase academic performance and retention in "high-risk" classes. At JCCC, both ENGL 102 and RDG 125 historically have higher attrition rates and lower performance levels, which made them good candidates for the SI approach. Other colleges define SI implementation differently; some colleges use SI for gateway classes to upper division coursework; some use it for upper-level coursework with low persistence and success rates. Some SI programs use SI tutors as "model students" in class, while others do not. An SI model student attends every class and mimics good student behavior by raising his or her hand when students become confused during lecture, bringing necessary materials (books, pens, paper) to class, storing handouts and notes appropriately, and keeping track of all due and graded work. The purpose of the SI tutor in class is to show students "how

school is done.”

SI tutors also provide regularly scheduled, peer-facilitated study sessions outside of class. SI tutors lead study sessions as a way to engage students in the material introduced in class before too much time has passed and to reinforce understanding of concepts while helping students learn the value of study groups. I was the first SI tutor hired for the burgeoning Learning Communities program and these were the basic job duties. Additionally, I worked closely with the two course instructors. At the end of this first semester, I have discovered significant differences between SI and Writing Center tutoring while encountering both success and frustration along the way.

Before the semester began, I was anxious. Neither I nor the teachers I worked with had any prior experience in dealing specifically with SI, but thankfully Kathryn Byrne was able to provide guidance throughout the process. Kathryn used to be an SI tutor herself, so she was a good resource for questions and concerns. She provided us with literature about SI tutoring as well as research articles so we could familiarize ourselves with the world of SI. After our initial meetings, we made tentative plans, set our expectations, and dove right into the semester. One of the first changes for me was interacting with the same students every weekday. Arendale states, “the SI leader’s attendance at each class meeting is considered essential to SI effectiveness” (1994). Based on my time with SI, I found this to be true, and one of the key differences between SI tutoring and Writing Center tutoring. In the Writing Center, the assistance tutors provide often relies on the writer’s perception of what was covered in class and the assignment guidelines. Often these ideas of what occurred in class and what the assignment actually entails are distorted to some degree. SI tutors, on the other hand, engage in the classroom experience along with the very students they are assisting, which allows them to bring a fuller understanding of the concepts and assignments to the tutoring table. Due to my participation in the classroom, I definitely felt more involved with the students and better able to assist them in study sessions because of my awareness of assignments and upcoming exams.

As an SI tutor, I am also in the unique position to communicate directly with

the instructors to discuss student progress or any other issues that may arise. In the Writing Center, interaction occurs only with the writer seeking assistance. When a writer states they don't understand a concept or assignment, they will often claim that the instructor did not adequately discuss the assignment guidelines or concepts to be studied. As tutors, this can impair our ability to help students and ensure that the assignment is heading in the right direction. On the other hand, in SI, if some sort of communication breakdown occurs or if the students are simply having a hard time with an assignment/concept, such concerns can be discussed directly with the instructor(s). In this way, an SI acts as a liaison between student and teacher. "... [A]s the SI leader seeks the instructor's counsel in dealing with student concerns, the instructor gains the kinds of information necessary to make instructional changes, or to add new dimensions to the course," state Blanc, DeBuhr, and Martin (1983). Being able to discuss issues with the instructors and seek clarification on concepts proved to be a very useful complement to my tutoring. I feel that the instructors also benefited from these exchanges and enjoyed being "in the loop" about what was working and what wasn't. SI not only improves the tutor-student relationship, it can also improve students' relationships with their peers. Many courses provide a classroom experience focused largely on individual student learning, and the Writing Center tutors focus on individual interaction with students rather than group collaboration. Some classes do have more of an interactive element, such as group discussion or cooperative projects, but SI in particular has shown potential to increase the level of student engagement with their peers, even outside of the classroom and without supervision. A North Carolina State University study found "substantial evidence that a community college can offer supplemental instruction to enable ... students to independently interact with each other in their studies and coursework outside the classroom" (Maxwell, 1998). The evidence was gathered by collecting opinions expressed by students and subsequent surveys of study habits. The students I worked with were at an introductory level as far as study habits, so I felt part of my duty was to show them how to work together and help each other out. I often encouraged them to study together outside of our scheduled sessions, though I am unaware that this ever occurred except for at the very end of

the semester. As with all new endeavors, sometimes the road to success becomes fraught with bumps and detours. My first semester as an SI tutor was no exception. I maintained a blog to keep track of assignments, happenings, and concerns. Occasionally, I would use the blog as an outlet for my own frustrated thoughts: Did my daily presence have any impact? Why were the students not turning in their assignments? Was I helping at all, with anything? One of the biggest issues, by far, was attendance. At the beginning of the semester, the students were informed of the unique attendance policy associated with the LCOM section: if a student is absent six times, an instructor can drop them from the class and from all classes in which they are currently enrolled. Out of the original five students enrolled in the class, two were dropped for attendance. The remaining three completed the course but were each absent well above the "maximum" outlined in the syllabi and were tardy nearly every day. This was perhaps the most frustrating aspect of my experience as an SI tutor as I often wondered how I could have a positive impact if the students were not around enough to benefit from the presence of an SI. Since the class size was so small, even one student's absence would make the classroom feel empty. On one occasion, no students showed up to class at all, and after twenty minutes of waiting, we decided to leave and try again the next day. These instances really affected my and the instructors' morale, as we wondered how we could motivate the students to show up to class.

Outside of attendance, I had to learn from and adapt to other situations. Conducting study sessions in a group format was new to me as I was used to the one-on-one tutoring experience of the Writing Center. However, I found the transition fairly easy as I managed to establish and maintain a good rapport with the students early on. My original approach was to ask the students what they wanted to focus on, and the answer was almost inevitably "homework." Both instructors would regularly assign out-of-class work to be done on various software and website platforms, such as Glencoe and Advancer, and these software programs were often what the students chose to do. I eventually came to feel that in doing this I was not helping the students learn concepts or develop their writing skills, but rather was acting

more as a “standby” to assist them when they had trouble with a single question on their homework. I brought up my concern with the instructors, and we agreed that prior to an SI session I would discuss with them any material or assignments they would like me to work on with the students. Instead of letting the students simply do their homework, which they could work on in their own time, I would be more active in keeping the session focused on whatever topic was previously agreed upon by the instructors. After implementing this change in strategy, I immediately noticed that the sessions felt more productive and meaningful to me and the students. A particularly memorable study session resulting from this change involved starting a rough draft for an upcoming paragraph essay. The students had not yet started their drafts, so I led them in a brainstorming session. I showed them different ways to get their ideas down on paper and narrow down the options to their topic of choice. Overall, the session was a success, and the students left with focus and good attitudes. Beginning an assignment can be the hardest part of the writing process for students, and I was happy to teach them a skill they could carry on to future assignments.

At the end of the semester, I was pleased to learn that, according to a comparison of test results, the students had made marked improvements in their reading skills. At the beginning of the semester, the students were reading at the fourth and fifth grade level, and by the end of the semester, each student had made a leap of three or four grade levels. This news made me feel very proud; at last, some concrete evidence that their experience with the LCOM and SI had helped after all! The students’ writing skills had also improved over the semester as they had learned to recognize some of their common errors with grammar and punctuation. The students even managed to coordinate meeting times outside of class and scheduled SI sessions to complete a collaborative *Grammar Handbook* at the end of the semester. The handbook was their final project for the writing component of the LCOM section, for which they received an “A.” In addition to improved skill level, the students also frequently spoke favorably of the class structure and SI sessions and seemed to have developed a sense of camaraderie due to the smaller class size and the time spent together. Though the act of tutoring can

feel very personal in nature – after all, students are looking to us for help, and we are doing our best to share our knowledge – I feel more invested in the students as an SI than I felt previously as a tutor in the Writing Center, perhaps a natural consequence of helping the students outside of class and experiencing the class along with them; I am there every day in class, I am doing all of the same assignments, and I am taking all of the same tests.

This position is unique in that I get to not only be seen as someone who is able to help, but to also be seen as a peer and, to some extent, as a friend. I grew to care very much about the students in the class and wanted to see them succeed, and in some ways I felt responsible for helping them to make progress and disappointed when reality did not meet my optimistic expectations. That being said, one of the most important lessons I learned from my first semester of SI is that tutoring can't be taken too personally. Though helping students is certainly a part of my function as an SI, there are times when one must step back and not take personal issue with lack of attendance or poor performance. A part of this job is learning how to make students realize that they are ultimately in charge of their own success and that SI is only one of many steps paving their path to success. In the end, I can help point students in the right direction, but they each get to decide which way they would like to go.

My first semester of SI provided valuable learning experiences for me as a tutor, and I will use my observations and lessons learned to provide an even more productive and helpful experience to students in the coming semesters. Classes will now meet only a few times a week for longer periods, rather than much shorter periods every single day, a change which I feel can have only a positive impact on attendance. Through feedback received from the instructors, I now know that my presence in the classroom does have an impact on student behavior, and I will continue to remain engaged enough to encourage questions and discussion without doing the students' work for them. I also have a better grasp of how to maintain control over the group study sessions and will continue to collaborate with the instructors to remain focused and improve my methods. Additionally, I resolve to do a better job keeping my blog updated so that I can keep track of my own

thoughts, student progress and class activities. Despite the occasional stumble I encountered along the way, the differences between tutoring in the Writing Center and tutoring as an SI are more clear to me, and I look toward the next semester with renewed, informed optimism.

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Toward a Value System of Writing Centers

Evan Harmon

Erynne Daigneault

Just what is it that we try to accomplish in the Writing Center? What exactly do we value? What should we value? In many ways it is difficult to answer these fundamental questions. Yet, it is crucial we answer them well because poorly constructed value systems can harm both the Writing Center in addition to anyone who walks through its door. So why is this basic question of value a difficult one to answer? One reason is that the Writing Center is a relatively new entity compared to the university from which it arose, and it can sometimes take decades before anything approaching a foundational philosophy can develop. An additional complication is that the very nature of the Writing Center is at odds with the historical and pervasive values of the university. The traditional university has ideals of self-reliance, autonomy, discipline, individual achievement and consistent objectivity (Trachsel). In addition to that, the university expects these attributes to already be present in students. The classroom has evolved to become an environment in which these attributes are presupposed and any deficiency in them must be learned outside the classroom. Instead of the university meeting the needs of students, these traditional

qualities are the prereqs, the price of admission.

The Writing Center, on the other hand, being a student service, presupposes deficiency, and so it tends to operate according to values of collaboration, nurturance, sensitivity, subjectivity and supportiveness (Trachsel). The university as an institution has had a millennium to develop and perpetuate its value system, but the Writing Center, and similar domains where student support is the focus, has had much less time to develop a value system and therefore is still undergoing significant fluctuations. Further, it must develop its fundamentally distinct value system from within and as a part of the university that encompasses it. The development of a Writing Center value system is particularly difficult because of this codependent and hierarchical relationship with the university. Though it may be possible to independently push forward a change of value from either the domain of the university or the domain of the Writing Center, pushing too far and too independently tends to result in a backlash from the other domain which makes the relationship oppositional instead of cooperative. Further, for either domain to operate as an island and with a value system that is not compatible with the other is not only unpreferable, but results in a fundamentally incomplete value system that suffers both from theoretical deficiencies and from a lack of reinforcement and application – a when-in-Rome philosophy that ignores the fact that students must operate in the domain of both the Writing Center and the university as a whole. Both domains should actively strive to take positive steps in bettering their respective domain's value system, but meaningful progress is only achieved when the length and direction of a stride is taken with the realization that you can get farther by using both legs instead of just one. Both the Writing Center and the university must realize that their fate is mutual, that any value system of the Writing Center must be a value system in light of the university and vice versa. The difference between these two domains, insofar as it relates to developing a value system of the Writing Center, might best be understood with a feminist perspective. The philosophy of feminism claims that history has been dominated by traditionally masculine values of power, individuality, objectivity and an overemphasis on reason at the expense of traditionally feminine values of nurturance, relatedness, subjectivity and emotion. The relative youth of the rise of feminist values out of the long history of masculine values corresponds to the

recent rise of democratized student bodies and student-focused institutions out of the historically elitist and product-focused university and illustrates the difficulty that both feminism and the Writing Center must face and the patience required before a satisfactory reconciliation can be achieved. But we must not simply understand the mechanics of this situation through mere distinction and analysis and then dust off our hands. Rather, we must continue on and use our analysis of the varying parts of academia to build an understanding of how the parts work together and how they might work together best. Professor Mary Trachsel writes, "It would be unfortunate indeed if the so-called feminization of teaching simply reinforced a dichotomy that aligns a feminine ethos with teaching and a masculine ethos with scholarship. Such a system holds little hope for those of us who are struggling to discover a unified academic self" (42). The error of our male-dominated history was not its masculine values, but its oppression of feminine values. To idealize one over the other is to caricature humanity as well as the self to the detriment of both. There is no wholly feminine female and there is no wholly masculine male, and neither the university nor the Writing Center should choose one over the other or place either at the center of its value system. Unfortunately, the present nature of the value system in higher education is the oppositional duality illustrated above in which each value system is being pushed out into the other domain as an attempt at a singular, all-encompassing and universal value system. This has resulted in some domains, like the Writing Center, teaching, and other student-focused organizations, having a value system more in line with a feminine ethos and other domains like scholarship and research having a value system more in line with a masculine ethos with no real unification in any particular domain. The manner in which value systems are put forth in academia results in an essentially either/or answer on a domain-by-domain basis. In this environment, Trachsel's "unified academic self" remains perpetually out of reach. One is still free to operate according to either a feminine or a masculine value system, but when one operates according to only one value system, he or she loses a dimension of one's self, and he or she does not operate as well in domains that operate on the opposing value system. Alternatively, one can choose to operate according to a particular value system on a domain-by-domain basis, but then he or she must suffer the schizophrenia of continually switching between

incompatible value systems which can never result in a unified self. Or one can embrace both value systems as a unified self regardless of the liabilities one must suffer in non-unified domains. However, doing so is only possible in a sort of Nietzschean defiance of the social contexts in which the self attempts to express itself. This is an amputated self in whom subjective qualities remain internal and unable to express themselves in an environment that can give them meaning. A truly unified self is not just the unification of subjectively-held values, but the expression of those unified values in a conducive environment. Searching for a unified academic self in the university is like the plight of a young child of divorced, immature, vitriolic parents that is forced to operate according to one set of rules and values in one household, only to have to quickly and painfully transition to another incompatible and oppositional set of rules and values in the other. One can learn to function in such a situation, but he or she is forced to do so with the limitations of either a monolithic self, a fragmented self, or an isolated self. Solving this problematic situation (as universities are attempting) by universalizing either feminine values (the Writing Center) or masculine values (the traditional university) as the encompassing value system of all domains makes functioning easier by removing the discord inherent in a segregated self, but this can only be accomplished through forced amputation which results in a unified self because nothing is left to unify if one only exists as an expression of one value system. This is the monolithic self. Solving the problem by switching value systems on and off depending on a given domain's prevailing value system as one travels through different domains, results in value schizophrenia. This is the fragmented self. And finally, independently unifying the self irrespective of the value systems in which one dwells rips the self from its inherently social domicile, limiting its potential to the self alone or to the similarly repressed pastiche community of those that march to the beat of a different drummer. This is the isolated self. Apparently, we are stuck – and we are – until the value system on which we operate changes to allow for the possibility of a fully unified and fully expressed self. But a unified self in the Writing Center requires not just a unified Writing Center, but a university that is unified with the Writing Center. So, any change in the value system in the Writing Center must always be considered in light of the university in which it exists. Further, the

Writing Center must not operate according to only a feminine or masculine value system, but instead operate as a unified environment that allows for the expression of a fully unified self. Yet the value system of the Writing Center should not be understood as a particular idealized balance between masculine and feminine values, though this is often seen as the solution to this kind of conflict. A caricature of the self results when an idealized balance is formulated and sought after as the standard – balance for balance’s sake. And the same problem exists at the institutional level. Rather, a reconciliation between these opposing value systems should be sought only in terms of what will or will not make the Writing Center (or an individual) better. No acts of altruism are required if one understands how and why both an individual and an institution function better and with a higher potential when unified. This unification in the self and the Writing Center does not require a perfect balance between opposing value systems. The standard for an ideal disposition of the two value systems should be based on a given disposition’s effects in a given context; the ideal disposition of value systems in an individual should be based on how well that particular disposition functions for that individual in a given context; and the ideal disposition in an institution like the Writing Center should be based on how well a given disposition functions for that institution in a given context. When the fully unified expression of feminine and masculine values is sought as an altruistic moral project instead of as a desired quality it implicitly degrades the respective benefits of feminine and masculine values because female/male traits are then treated as if they need to be tolerated for purposes of social equality instead of desired for their inherent benefits. As long as this moral perspective on feminine and masculine values is maintained, a true unification of the self and of an institution is impossible. One need not complicate the value system of the Writing Center with moral projects. To put forth the prescription of equal feminine and masculine values as a moral project is not only harmful, it is entirely unnecessary, even for achieving social equality, if it is understood that an institution that functions in the best way possible is one that is fully unified. It is through this understanding in combination with the simple desire for an effective Writing Center that organically defines a Writing Center value system as one that creates an ever-evolving and pragmatically-focused environment that remains encouraging and conducive to the possibility of a

fully expressed and unified self within an analogously unified university.

Afterword:

We do not conceive of the self as a whole that is subsequently diminished in certain scenarios. Rather, the self emerges out of and as part of a social environment which in turn can place boundaries on the potential of the individual's flourishing. That is, no idealized whole or essence of self exists that is to be defined or sought after. The standard is in the positive or negative interaction of the self and one's social environment which is why we do not use the language of half or whole, etc. And similarly, we do not think the standard for an institution should be idealized toward a particular balance of equal value systems so again there is no whole for there to be a half of. It was misleading of us to use the word balance in our prescription for a Writing Center value system because though it is conceptually possible for two differing things to balance each other out, the straight-forward interpretation of balance tends to invoke equality of the items being balanced as well, so we changed the word balance to disposition when we made the prescription. Whenever an issue of formulating a value system is brought up, moral implications arise – some will flourish under certain systems and others won't. Value system prescriptions beget moral consideration (think Marx as in how he claims that the value system of a society is of the empowered class extended to all other classes). But regardless, our prescription does not rely on moral pleas, only on understanding of what makes a good value system for an institution and an individual. That is, we can be egoists and still create the best possible Writing Center for everyone. Monolithic is just meant in the normal sense – one-dimensional. That is, one value system nullifies the other.

Works Cited

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So Long, Farewell, Auf Wiedersehen, Adieu: A Love Letter to the Writing Center

Betsy Overesch



Once upon a time, a college sophomore was desperate for employment. After (what could have been but was not) decades of searching, she meandered through websites until she came to the job listings page at her school. At the top were two words: Writing Tutor. She applied, got the job, worked for two years, and, as all stories go, lived happily ever after ... except that something rather remarkable had occurred. This girl had changed.

When I first began working at the Writing Center, I made the assumption that this job would not have any grand impact on my life. I knew that I would change as I grew older and gained knowledge, would form different opinions about the world as I became more aware of my own axiology. After all, part of a college education is to discover who I am and what stance I am willing to take. Now, regretfully having to depart from this post, I may only attempt to explain what tutoring in LIB 308 has done for me.

I am ashamed to admit to the person I was before I came to work at the Writing Center. My nineteen-year-old self was narrow-minded, uninformed, and did not want to take the time to understand life from another's perspective. I had yet to see or welcome diversity into my sphere of existence; in accordance, I seldom used empathy for others. I did see beyond my own way of life. What good was it to try to feel for someone with whom I had nothing in common? My world was made up of people who looked and believed as I did; people I could easily understand. I thought, as so many college students do, that I knew all I needed

to know and I was comfortable in the reality I had created for myself. So, when I began tutoring, I was certain that my job would be straightforward and I would carry on in the manner I always had. Along came tutoring sessions, and what I had knitted together began, thread by thread, to unravel.

The fifth paper that I heard was authored by a Muslim woman in a *Composition* /class. She was older, in her thirties, soft spoken, and very different from the four prior student writers I had helped. Apparently, she was as nervous as I was, and I silently prayed that this session went well. She began to read her paper, hesitating a bit before starting. She described the gas station her husband owned, and how he worked late one night. She had come to see him, and then a group of young men entered the store. They had guns, and when her husband went to call for the police – she stopped and looked up at me. I ached for her, knew that pain, knew what losing someone was like, but knew I could not speak. I shook my head, afraid to open my mouth because I did not want to break down a week into the job. Then she patted my hand. “You understand,” she whispered, “why I cannot keep reading.”

That moment was the mental equivalent of the dam breaking. I sat for several minutes afterward, silent, thinking about what she had said. “You understand.” You understand. I had connected to a complete stranger, name forgotten, in a manner that I thought only my closest relationships capable of. Here was this woman, older than me, of different race, of different religious views, but in that moment we were not individuals with divergent life paths. We were humans with the same emotions, the same experience, and for the first time in my life I understood how closed-minded I had been. I understood I had to change, had changed, would never be the same, and that if not for the Writing Center, my outlook would have remained stagnant.

In the last edition of this journal, the article I wrote described laughter and its use as a means of connecting tutors and tutees. I stated that “laughter is such an abrupt shattering of the invisible boundary between the student and me, one action that lets me reach out to them in a very emotional way.” This session had nothing to do with jokes about misplaced modifiers, connecting with others through humor and smiles, or delighting in amusing phrases tucked into

otherwise dull research papers. The laughter would come later in my tutoring career; in this moment, however, the same effect was present. Two women were looking at each other, thoughts aligned, all barriers dissolved by the pain of what it is to grieve. I understood her. I did not feel uncomfortable around a person I would have normally been desperate to move past. Thirty seconds and two words had me struggling for air underneath the weight of the written word and my own blindness to others. Laughter did not break my boundaries but the realization that for one moment, she and I were more alike than different.

The number of students I have worked with is unknown, and the ones I have actually helped I am even less certain about. During my time at the Writing Center, I have read about shoplifting arrests, abortions, people stumbling across lifeless bodies, sex changes, marriages, childbirth, and U.F.O.s. I have laughed with people, reassured those who said they could not write, handed Kleenex to others. I have high-fived, congratulated, hugged, celebrated, and I have been frustrated, angry, overwhelmed. Nevertheless, even on the worst days, even on the days when I wonder if what we are doing has a point, I understand that I am lucky, blessed, fortunate beyond belief to have been part of this community, to have had this job become a part of me and create a human being that allows herself to engage with anyone because she knows all of us, in the end, come down to the same core components. I have learned that tutoring is much more than helping fix comma splices and writing thesis statements. Aiding students with their writing is about understanding the power of three pages of white printer paper, and how twenty minutes with a complete stranger can make life take on new meaning. I am indebted to this job: so long, farewell, auf wiedersehen, thank you.

Reflecting Pool: on the Art of Staying Power

Brandon True



For many students, especially those who are members of a community college, a job like a writing tutor is a profession that never really seems permanent. Very few Peer Writing Tutors have made this job into a career like I have. I've got staying power; or, at the very least, I refuse to leave. Now that I can count my time here in years, rather than semesters like some of my peers, I've had a chance to see that the faces of students – are like ocean waves. An individual surges in, stays for just a moment and then retreats, dragging whatever grains of knowledge we could give, back into the sea of countless faces, semester after semester he or she waves in and then goes. However, if we're lucky some tides carry students back in – some for just a few more visits, others for years and years. I am not the only one with staying power.

One Tuesday night, I received a phone call from a student who I had worked with almost as long as I have been at the Writing Center. She is a nontraditional student who I have worked with many times (enjoyably I might add). The student writer seems distraught while she tells me that she is going to ask for an unusual way of tutoring; she wonders if she could leave her paper with me so I could look over it then sit down with her again on Friday to discuss it? I tell her that this is not usually the way our Writing Center works, but she is insistent (a rare trait for her gentle nature) and says she will be in later tonight. So I prepare myself, thinking I will suggest we go over her paper in sections over a few days rather than do drop-off service, something the Writing Center has

always railed against.

Later that night just as she had promised (consistency – also her nature), my student writer does come by the center. She sits down beside me at the tutor table. She comes bearing a 20-page report/argument paper in which her teacher has asked students to find a health-related cause and debate the points on why it was worth being researched. I was ready to offer my suggestions but first gave her a chance to explain why she needed this done so urgently. She instead explained the assignment to me, so of course, my next question, a question that any tutor asks when a student seeks a quick tutoring session: “Well . . . when is this paper due?” Knowing her, I was not surprised to hear her say the paper was not due for weeks to come (An over-achiever? Yes, as is her nature). So, I ask her why she is burning to get this done. Her voice quiets. She takes a serious tone – a tone that tries to mask gravity with forced ease. “Well I know that the paper isn’t due for a couple of weeks, but the due date is a bit soon for me.” I wait while she gathers herself. “I went to the doctors and he told me that I am diagnosed with breast cancer.”

First, before I explain my reaction, let me just say that I have never been good with emotions. Mine seem to flow like raging water – a riptide, unpredictable and damn hard for me to control when having one or more of them. What I have learned about myself is that if I remain calm, there’s a chance I’ll float to the surface. But in that exact moment, I felt an odd, tidal pull of adrenaline; maybe it kept my heart from stopping dead in its tracks. I sensed a slight loss of color as blood drained from my face . . . Man overboard. Here’s what happened next: I pause, choke a bit, and am only able to muster enough sense to say “I’m sorry.” I still kick myself for falling out on that one. I kick myself for being afraid to cry. She, being a very sympathetic woman, sees me flailing about in my whirlpool of emotion and quickly recovers me by saying that the cancer is in its early stage. “They seem to have caught it in time.” She brightens up again, smiling; luckily, her mood crests and washes over me. But I, still distracted and confused, I try to understand the aftermath of news like that. I cannot help but wonder what her life has been like for the last few days. I collect myself and we discuss the assignment.

Just as the tide rushes in, it must rush back out; she must leave early for a class. The end of the semester is nearing, so time with every student (and every teacher) is limited. I take the stack of papers and let her know that I will look through her essay over the next few days. She checks out at the front desk and I stay seated at the tutor table, a still empty and calm place, like a reflecting pool. Writing this now, looking back at that moment, I can't really recall what I was thinking with any real accuracy. But, I have had time to float on the surface of it and am left with a sense of honor. It's an amazing feeling to know that someone came in as a student, and over time by working together, a mutual trust formed which slowly became friendship. I, not being good with emotions remember, am always shocked when I can truly call someone a friend. Adamantly, it's a small list; I even made me wait outside the breakwater for years. So when a trust forms, it most definitely is a cause for celebration (my mother's words, not mine).

As a consequence of all this interaction, the line between tutor and student calls me to examination. The line itself is much thinner than say the teacher/student border, even while a sense of authority still lingers. From the get-go, tutors are instructed that we are peers not teachers: we don't give grades; we don't give homework and we don't get tenure. Still, we assess and give feedback on another student's writing, which in essence touches on one part of the job of a teacher. So, I feel that certain constraints are broken by talking to a fellow writer about his or her paper. I think, I hope, student writers see us as peers, able to sympathize with their hectic lives, because we do. That sense of authority, perhaps, manifests as just a side effect of them trusting that we are coming to the table (literally) with the knowledge and skills they do not yet have.

Nevertheless, once some student writers find a tutor that they feel comfortable with, one that helps them yield better writing results, they start requesting the tutor by name. Students can come back regularly with revised or different papers and the tutor becomes familiar with the writer's style and common mistakes. From that understanding, students and tutors form a sort of bond that eradicates shyness and discomfort. The student writer can begin to approach a wider variety of topics through their writing, while still seeking help from the tutor without fear of ridicule. With time, the writer begins to correct his

or her own mistakes with alacrity while reading through the essay and is able to articulate topics never before discussed: "Is it my verb tense?" "How about my structure?" "Do you think major claim strong enough?" The student writer comes back to the Writing Center because she feels herself growing as a writer, and without even knowing it, a sort of friendship has formed. Thus, the revision process lives through student-tutor interaction, revision for writing, revision for defining who our friends are. Maybe the friendship is not a conventional one, but one strong enough for a student in crisis to ask for help outside of a tutor's occupational obligation. Knowing this makes my job very satisfying – far from the days of retail when I was landlocked on a sandy dune of boredom.

Later that Friday, my student came back in and we reviewed her paper in front of a video camera as part of my professionalization. Videotaping a session and then reflecting on it has helped me to be a better tutor. This videotape caused me to reflect that I have known my current student writer for two years; she came into the Writing Center at the start of her Composition journey (and that can be a tumultuous ride in itself). However, she has grown immensely as a writer. All this is evidenced by the fact that most of the markings we have made on her paper are now only suggestions. She has broken free from the chains of grammar and has learned the importance of style. As a tutor, getting to help the writer with style is far more challenging but proves more gratifying, because at the end, I feel as though I helped the writer find his or her own voice.

Even more amazing, this paper she has brought for us to work on is going to be embedded within an anthology of her other papers that she has written throughout her academic journey here at JCCC to comprise a book. The pages are bound now together by a single spiral and under an ornate design on the cover reads "A New Door and Fresh Air," a title which shows the pride and gratitude she has for the chance to further her knowledge. She hopes the book will be a legacy of inspiration for her own children – and maybe with a little tender love and care, the second generational wave, her grandchildren. In the first few pages, she wrote a prologue to give the reader a sense of how she felt writing these papers. Near the end, she had crafted a small passage about a tutor at the Writing Center who helped her through her educational excursion. How wonderful to know I have staying power . . . in the life of at least one student writer.

Tragedy Amid Literature

Ondrej Pazdirek



I have never had the slightest intention to follow in my parent's footsteps. They would come home from the hospital and recount the daily numbers during dinner – survivors on the left hand, those who did not make it on the right. Their occupation became especially annoying during family vacations. Whether it was a victim of a car wreck, a heart attack, or alcohol poisoning, there always seemed to be someone in desperate need of saving. The Hippocratic Oath bound my parents (despite my father's frequent complaints) to provide at least temporary help in case of an absence of a trained medical professional. These dramatic events left a gloomy stain on our retreats. I soon started ignoring their work-related conversations altogether. Until the summer of 2010, I had successfully avoided all medical traumas.

I had spent those two summer months before my 20th birthday working as a peer tutor at the Johnson County Community College Writing Center. July 14th was a slow evening shift. On such nights, we tutors would customarily discuss literature and movies, or read in silence, waiting for a student's request for assistance. It was sort of an unspoken rule there to carry a book to work. That day I brought China Miéville's *The City & the City* which bored me. Instead, I found myself in a mood for one of the Harry Potter books. The college library happened to be in the same building, so I decided to disappear for a couple minutes.

The library was living up to its reputation as one of the quietest places on

campus. Two librarians at the checkout desk greeted me with only their eyes. As I walked toward the fiction section, I paid little attention to a man lying on the floor in the middle of two aisles. Seeing only his blue jeans and big brown shoes, I believed he was a repairman. With a copy of Harry Potter in hand, I strolled back to the checkout when one of the librarians ran into me, frantic.

"There is a man lying on the floor," she said and hurried away.

A heavy man with a bushy gray beard lay stiffly on his back amid rows of books. He wore a stained white shirt and blue washed-out overalls. He was alone.

A moment of silence passed. Unsure of what to do, I gradually returned to the checkout. After all, I thought, I have already been away from my job longer than intended. At the desk, the librarian from our previous encounter was now trying to reach 9-1-1. The other one, apathetic to the happening, leisurely signed off on my book.

I left the library but took only a couple steps before curiosity forced me to come back. Meanwhile, spectators surrounded the body. The man's face slowly turned from bluish to dark purple. They stood in shock, staring at him. I felt rather indifferent, having seen this before.

"Do you think he is breathing?" said one.

"I think he's dead." None of the bystanders dared to touch the man. Seconds went by.

What a beautiful, surreal death, I thought, distant. And for a brief moment, I wished his simple life would end there, poetically, amid peaceful books.

All the repulsive memories of our family summers in Italy and Croatia suddenly flooded my mind; memories of old drowning men, overdosed teenage girls, drunk drivers choking on their own blood. The family tradition carried on. But so did the sense to help.

I grabbed the man's wrist. No pulse.

Now I wished I listened to some of my parent's advice. How was it? Push

twenty times, breathe once, and again? I crossed my hands and searched the man's giant chest for the most probable location of his heart. Right before I pressed, I lingered in a small prayer: "This better work, because I am not breathing in you." I then leaned on my hands and pushed. Twenty times, pause, and again.

My world ceased to exist for what couldn't have been more than 90 seconds, but seemed much longer. Just when I started questioning my actions, the man caught a breath, a single gurgling attempt to live. I massaged his chest a couple more times before I was able to locate a weak and inconsistent pulse, only to lose it a few moments later.

Two nurses visiting the library that night rushed onto the scene. Trusting in them, I stepped back. The man continued to battle for survival.

The older nurse approached the man with beginner's insecurity. Shaking, tears in her eyes, she started to perform mouth-to-mouth breathing. The only effect was that the air forced into the man's lungs came out of his once-more unresponsive body, giving the confusing impression that the man was breathing on his own. The younger nurse watched. I pondered whether to mention the uselessness of breathing oxygen into someone without a beating heart. Before I made up my mind, one of the college's police officers spoke my thoughts. It took four more minutes before the paramedics arrived. They hooked the man up to monitors and kept him breathing artificially from then on.

Soon, more police officers added to the uproar and began questioning the participants. Not wanting to deal with the police, having played the small part that I did, I walked away in the midst of the post-trauma chaos. My mood for Harry Potter vanished. I left the book on a shelf and returned to the safe calm of the Writing Center.



The Feline

Luke Patrick

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary, over many a curious and quaint essay of synthesis yore, while I typed, hardly caring, there came a tapping, a rapping at the center door. Then I rose, and walked hither, "Tis some student at the center door."

I went forth with great weariness and indignation. For it was late, we were closed, and greatly I wanted to make haste to mine domicile. "Sir," said I, "Or madam, I was quietly typing, writing, and did not hear you gently knocking.

"Your forgiveness I implore, the Writing Center has ceased operation, you must return tomorrow more." Thusly I returned to my seat, so continued my works, and so did the sound repeat. "'Tis the caretaker," I muttered, "nothing more."

Thrice there came the tapping, the rapping at the center door. At this I took pause, and whispered back, "We are closed, I deplore." At this I threw open the center door, into the gloom peering, nothing hearing, fearing what might be in store.

Yet the anteroom was empty, merely this and nothing more.

Shaken, I retreated, returned to my seat once more. Attempting to write, over the keyboard did I pour. Yet I could not focus, fearing a knock on the center door. Whom could be out at such an hour? My countenance dour, hither and yon I strode, and at my mind did the gloom erode; so oppressive the silence, how consuming the darkness, that the feeble light could not

throw them back.

Once again did there come that damned rapping at the center door. With great trepidation and excruciating suspense, I unsealed the auxiliary portal, that unused door. To my dismay did an obsidian feline stalk through the center door. A creature of the night itself intruded upon my sanctuary.

My heart brimming with purest terror did I stammer, "From whence have you came, oh hated beast?" Eyes aflame, the sinuous creature perched itself upon the bust of Asator. "What be you, feral wretch?"

Quoth the feline, "Underscore."

Such a riposte left me aghast, what sort of thing might give acknowledgment, and go by Underscore? Yet surely it must not last. On the morrow the ebony creature will return, to never again cause me such sorrow. "Very well Underscore. Leave me be and return nevermore." Ultimately such discourse had little import, nonsensical, and I returned to my work, to go cite my source.

Yet the feline remained, remained within the center door, to stare with unblinking eyes, above the center floor. His presence constantly distracting, my eye attracting, to his murky self above the bust of Asator.

Quoth the feline, "Underscore."

Surely must this cursed creature be, to utter but one such word. I could merely hazard a guess upon which former master taught it such, or if the blame should be directed towards some snide ploy by devious fates, or perhaps, I dread to say, that the beast was wrought by powers far more nefarious, hailing from places most sinister. I could only whisper, "From whence have you came?"

It only replied, "Underscore."

Abruptly my patience worn, with frayed nerves torn, I stood and bellowed, "Out! Out I say! Get thee from this place; leave me in peace. Make your exit and never again show your hateful face." Yet the creature remained, infuriatingly placid, resting upon the bust of Asator.

Quoth the feline, "Underscore."

With haste I made to clutch at the foul beast, to grapple with its fluid shape, so ultimately to cast it from my place of work and be free from the thing's dreadful clasp. It evaded mostly swiftly, dodged mostly deftly, to remain free of my grasp. It took but a moment to find a perch, far from reach. There it remained to stare back, languid, listless, without speech. And it was there that those smoldering ember eyes regarded, appraised me as the wretch it undoubtedly perceived.

This brought forth such a fury I had never known. That anger tore a bestial howl from my lips I scarcely thought myself able to utter. "Leave me be! I wish freedom from you and your vile hatefulness! Leave! Leave to never again return!" Yet all I received in kind was an apathetic look, devoid of human warmth, that shook my very core.

Quoth the feline, "Underscore."

That last utterance was the final note for my overburdened mind. With those words I dashed, fleeing through the Center's door, my heart brimming with rancor. As fast as my feet would carry me, I made haste from that place, all the while never looking back.

Yes friends, it has been many a year since I have removed myself from that foul thing. I vowed never again to set foot upon that diabolical floor. Kept that vow I have, but my mind still echoes with the sound of "Underscore." I know with every fiber of my being that that demon kin still resides upon the bust of Asator. Effectively barring, so that I return nevermore.

Only this, and nothing more.

Another ZPD

Anonymous 2010

This guy's walking down the street when he falls in a hole. The walls are so steep he can't get out, even though he tries several times before giving up. A doctor passes by and the guy shouts up, "Hey! Can you help me out?" the doctor writes a prescription, throws it down in the hole and moves on.

Then a priest comes along and the guy shouts up, "Father, I'm down in this hole, can you help me out?" The priest writes out a prayer, throws it down in the hole and moves on.

Then a teacher walks by. Our guy calls out, "Hey teach! I'm down in this hole and I can't figure my way out. The teacher, with all his training and knowledge, throws down a syllabus full of scheduled assignments. As the paper floats down, our guy can hear the teacher say before moving on, "Practice makes perfect!"

Then a tutor walks by. "Hey Vygotsky. It's me. Can you help me out?" And the tutor jumps down in the hole. Our guy says, "Are you stupid? Now we're both down here." The tutor says, "Yeah, but I've been here before and I know the way out."



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/wcjjournal/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/>