P Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

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Do We Really Need That? Choosing Technology for the Writing Center

Spring 2005 / Focus

by Michele Eodice

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Michele Eodice

> More and more, we have assumed roles of technological pioneers, discovering better ways to integrate writing, teaching, scholarship, *and* computing.
> - Major Hugh Burns, Human Resources Laboratory, Lowry Air Force Base (1984)

> The world I enter each day when I unlock my office door seems to be comprised about equally of three parts: face-to-face meetings with students and colleagues, an electronic community where I read and write in email and the World Wide Web, and the discursive world of academic texts disseminated through traditional print media. But the electronic meeting place and texts seem to be impinging more and more on the other realms.
> - Alice Trupe, Writing Center Director and Director of Composition at Bridgewater College of Virginia (1997)

I think we are getting to a place in the proliferation of technologies in our writing centers where, not unlike that forty-four minute mark in a very intense writing consulting session, there is a need for reflection, for sitting back and looking around and determining what is working and why and what we should buy into and why.

What does *technology* mean to you? Is it simply a transparent tool, something

that you rely on for convenience, to use when needed and think about only when you want to cuss it out? The broad range of current technologies for writing centers--from PCs, to assistive software, to PDA downloads of FAQs on grammar, to ReadPlease **[1]**, to a threaded discussion board for tutors, to virtual peer tutoring **[2]**--promises an equally wide range of fixes, problems, and unforeseen costs. I beg you not to be overwhelmed; my hope is to provide a problem-posing approach as you wend your way through a tangle of cables and spreadsheets.

What's your vision?

The editors of *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* asked me to contribute something that would reflect my presentation at the **International Writing Centers Association 2004 Summer Institute**. Among the several workshops I was involved in as a leader, I led a discussion on new technologies for writing centers. I should say up front that I don't consider myself the most qualified of our writing center professionals in this area **[3]**, nor do I take credit for introducing any particular "bleeding edge" technological device or practice at the Summer Institute. I simply asked a bunch of questions.

In the daily message to **WCenter** summing up our Summer Institute activities for those who could not be there, Janet Swenson reported on the breakout session. I offer her post here for you to try as an exercise at your writing center:

> First, participants wrote in response to the following two prompts:
>
> 1. Name two things you would like your writing center to be able to do or do better in the next 5 years.
>
> 2. Identify the technologies that would be needed or would aid in reaching those two goals.
>
> We shared responses to those prompts in small groups. Michele suggested that in order to avoid adopting new technologies simply because they are available, we ask ourselves these questions: (1) Is learning happening here? Does this new technology scaffold new learning? And/or (2) Does adopting this new technology allow me to show that I care? Michele also invited us to consider whether the use of technology is sustainable and whether it supports collaborations.

At what price?

As program administrators, many of us have to choose carefully how to spend down our budgets. I offer the following questions to help determine the best solutions for your context. Thinking about "cost" in the broadest sense is not leaving out the human element; to the contrary, the cost of any service, whether virtual, outsourced, or face-to-face (f2f), should be set next to the return on investment in our students. For example, deciding to buy four laptops for your writing center rather than seven desktop PCs might *cost* the same when you get the invoice, but your choice might be (as it is for me) based on which option might make the environment work better for students, promote multiple uses, support multiple locations, improve aesthetics, and address space concerns.

Does this technology address or improve access? Does this program promote collaboration or contribute to an invasion of privacy? . . . Is learning happening?

In addition, we have a particular audience: Generation Y. These students come to us with expectations for faster, more effective connectivity in all areas of their lives: shopping, enrolling, chatting, and learning. Howard Rheingold, in his book *Smart Mobs*, reveals his amazement at the digital activity at one intersection in Tokyo: "I discovered that Shibuya Crossing was the most mobile phone-dense neighborhood in the world: 80 percent of the 1,500 people who traverse that madcap plaza at each light carry a mobile phone," text-messaging and talking with the connectivity we can only imagine as we sit plugged in at our desks. More and more schools are offering laptops to incoming freshmen. Currently at the University of Kansas (KU) we are piloting a response tool for students: holding a small PDA-like device, students answer questions in class by sending an infrared coded message to the instructor's computer, thereby allowing for immediate feedback and assessment of learning.

Some key questions, then, are the following: Does this technology address or improve access? Does this program promote collaboration or contribute to an invasion of privacy? And finally, the most important question to ask, perhaps, when assessing the technologies at work in your writing center is this: Is learning happening?

Kara Blond **[4]**, at Stanford, challenges us to think about online writing labs (OWLs) in relation to our theories of how we teach and learn:

> A theoretical perspective on OWLs must consider two angles. One, what pedagogical theories inform the effective teaching of writing? How have these changed as a result of technology? And then, two, how do those theories fit into those about communities of practice?

We consider our **KU Writing Center website** an OWL. Most writing centers, and most OWLs, ideally embrace some facet of all three of Andrea Lunsford's writing center models: the garret, the storehouse, and the collaborative or Burkean parlor environment. Our webpages include writing guides, the static handout of the storehouse writing center. We also include activities and routes for the individual writer to work through in her own time and space, as she would in a garret model. But the interactive element that promises a conversation with other writers, the Burkean parlor, is what online environments have the potential to do best and are, to date, most challenging to create effectively. While we don't MOO yet at KU, we do have an online consultation feature, e-consultation if you will, that offers feedback on texts up to twelve pages long within forty-eight hours. I welcome you to try it out: **KU Writing Center website**.

Last year we conducted an assessment of the service, surveying about 150 users. A few things we learned from that assessment have stuck with me: students who were satisfied with the online service were equally likely to have worked with a student consultant f2f and been satisfied with that method as well. And second, the text memo students receive (we do not mark on papers; we do not even return the paper at all) is valued as an important artifact, allowing students the luxury of time to re-read and really think about revision based on the comments provided by our consultants. Nancy Byam, a communications researcher at KU, recently found similar results: while students

regarded online, f2f, and phone interactions as equally important for maintaining their social networking, the quality of Internet relationships was rated slightly lower than f2f encounters.[5]

The Just do it generation. Just because we can?

My friends and family think I am a gadget junkie. It is true: I am always grazing for the next new thing, but I often regret my purchases. You may be less enamored of gadgets–-more skeptical, more in control of your shopping impulses. That is the healthy approach. Limited writing center budgets may actually keep us safe from feeding our appetite so uncritically. But even with a pot of money to spend, we should be wondering if we should do something or buy something *just because we can*.

We need to determine what bringing this shiny and new thing to student users *means* to their experiences in a writing center.

Programmer turned novelist, Ellen Ullman, tells of a CEO so excited by the potential of his new sophisticated networking system that he asks Ullman to set up computer surveillance on employees. He even wants the ability to count the keyboard strokes of one woman who had been with his company for 20 years and was a family friend. When Ullman asks why in the world he would want to do that, he answers plainly: "Because I can."[6]

We need to determine what bringing this shiny and new thing to student users *means* to their experiences in a writing center.

We purchased a Tablet PC [7] for our writing center recently, and after piloting several uses we found some aspects disappointing. We had predicted that after purchasing this first one we would run out and grab up a few more. But just this one might serve the purposes we have found it doing best. So, really cool stuff is really only as cool as its uses.

Whether you have techies around to design a custom program or need to outsource your tracking software with TutorTrac, the size of your program, the needs of your students (access, convenience, and enhanced learning opportunities), and the culture of assessment at your institution should point the way. The participants in the **2004 IWCA Summer Institute** represented a range of school types and comfort levels with technology. Many felt pressure from the administration to get on board; in order to take responsible action (which includes knowing what to say "no" to), they will want to get up to speed on the current technology for writing centers. Others had wishes bigger than their budgets. Janet Swenson, from Michigan State, is a great example of someone who has harnessed the talents of many people and the potential of technologies to develop online flash productions on special topics, such as *Analytical Writing in the Humanities*.[8]

I was an early adopter and remain a risk taker with technology, but I have also learned to be deliberate in my choices that determine the direction our writing center might take. Any writing center director today can find online examples, resources, important research findings, and friendly consultants among their professional colleagues. I urge you to take time to talk with your own staff and students and beyond in order to develop a vision of technology use for your writing center. And just one final thing: It really ain't about the size of your toys…and yes, *Dreamweaver* rules!

Notes

[1] **ReadPlease** is text-to-speech conversion software. The free download version can provide a "read back" for the individual student (especially helpful for those with visual impairments or reading challenges) or can be used in a tutorial session as an alternative to the typical reading aloud done by the student writer or tutor.

[2] I recommend *Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning About Writing in Online Environments* by Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch (SUNY Press 2004).

If you have yet to launch an online tutorial service, consider looking at two very helpful articles in the **Praxis archives**: Beth Hewett, a former leader in SmartThinking, asks, "How Do You Feel? Attitudes About Online Tutoring" (spring 2004) and Zachary Dobbins, Heidi Juel, Sue Mendelsohn, Roger Rouland, and Eliana Shoenberg (spring 2004) have developed a helpful piece called "Training on the Edge: Centers Discover New Ways to Train Consultants," which takes into account the question of how to orient our in-house writing consultants to online work.

[3] Like most things I get kudos for, I can't take sole credit. I thank my own savvy staff and students and recommend you consult with those at your schools, and in our field, who are steeped in learning and teaching about and with technology. I can think of a few people off the top of my head you could contact: James Inman, Nick Carbone, Eric Crump, and Cindy Selfe.

[4] Kara Blond, **"Online Writing Labs: Conditions Ripe for Community"**.

[5] Baym, Nancy K., Yan Bing Shang and Mei-Chen Lin. "Social Interactions Across Media: Interpersonal Communication on the Internet, Telephone and Face-to-Face." *New Media and Society.* 6.3 (2004) 299-318.

[6] See *Close to the Machine: Technophilia and Its Discontents* by Ellen Ullman (City Lights, San Francisco,1997). and see an interview with Ullman at **http://archive.salon.com/21st/feature/1997/10/09interview.html**

[7] "The Tablet PC," *Pen Computing Magazine* July 2001. **http://pencomputing.com/frames/tablet_pc.html**.

[8] The Michigan State University Writing Center, in cooperation with the WIDE project, has developed an online module to help writers learn the dynamics of developing a thesis statement in the humanities: ***Getting Started: Analytical Writing in the Humanities***.

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Community Building in Online Writing Centers

Spring 2005 / Focus

by Beth Godbee

Beth Godbee considers how OWLs promote equity and collaboration.

Beth Godbee

Being without power for over eight hours (and counting), I am acutely aware of the impact of technology upon my life. Aside from my general apprehensions about the loss of heat, the upcoming cold shower, and the possibility that my food may spoil, I miss my computer the most. Composing by hand is a task too unfamiliar to describe; yet, I find comfort in its possibilities. When all else fails, I can still write. With the simple tools of pen, paper, and sunlight, I settle down to record my thoughts. I know that writing by hand will endure because while computers provide one method for composition, they do not replace the practical process of handwriting.

Similarly, I do not worry that online writing environments will make writing centers obsolete. When we think of online tutorials, we must remember they are a related but separate entity from the face-to-face conferencing that characterizes writing center work. Certainly online tutorials can enhance and expand current writing center work, but only if we promote new tutoring practices that encourage composition, collaboration, and most importantly, community. The idea of online community resembles what M. Jimmie Killingsworth calls "global communities"—-networks of people stretching across time and space to locate writers with shared "special interests," or similar views. Online Writing Labs (OWLs) can create global communities by helping writers connect with one another to form networks of people. In an effort to promote online community building, this article describes community-centered reasons for establishing electronic writing environments and then proposes tutoring practices that may better facilitate online, or global, communities.

We must consider not only how and when to use technology but also why to use it. With reflective and critical use, we can ensure that computer conferencing promotes democratic means for education. Our goal, as with all tutoring practice, must be "to extend privilege to communication over isolation,

collaboration over competition, and change over tradition" (Selfe 120). We can extend privilege by using online tutorials to promote equity, blur the lines between producers and consumers of text, encourage the social nature of composition, and decentralize writing centers. Online writing environments may provide for more equitable education as they allow a diverse student population to access their services and give voice to students who are traditionally marginalized or silenced in class discussions.

We can extend privilege by using online tutorials to promote equity, blur the lines between producers and consumers of text, encourage the social nature of composition, and decentralize writing centers.

If OWLs increase student access (Selfe), participation (Lanham), collaboration (Hobson), and diversity (Flores), then they may provide opportunities for more egalitarian educational practices. Increased access and equity lead to a broader community of involved participants who speak online even as they are silenced elsewhere. By "filtering out the customary clues of social and sexual hierarchy" (Lanham xiv), electronic spaces can allow for more balanced contributions by all students, especially those ignored because of race, class, gender, or other identity markers. Online environments, therefore, allow marginalized groups the opportunity to make cultural and intellectual contributions to their writing communities, contributions that require dominant groups to think more broadly and inclusively.

While promoting equity, online writing environments might also minimize the difference between producers and consumers of text. By inviting more people to write and then critique online texts, "computers may help us broaden our notions of authorship, readership, and interpretation" (Selfe 122). The online composition process, then, makes the text mutable, invites change, and allows writing to be shaped by readers and writers alike (Selfe 128; Handa 128-129). In comparison to readers of traditional documents, readers of electronic text feel more deeply connected with the writing because it is changing and changeable.

Also, in contradiction to the Romantic idea of the solitary writer composing alone, electronic writing environments acknowledge the way students learn from and write with one another as well as with and against other texts. The goal of online tutorials, then, resembles the goal of broader neighborhood communities: opportunity for members (writers or citizens) to form networks for collaborative work. As writers work together to produce socially constructed texts, they engage in conversation and make meaning together. Perhaps this has always been the intention of academic research and writing. Peter Carino looks into the Latin roots of the word "citation" and finds "city" and "citizen" at the center of what we do (191). Composition efforts that allow students to cite each other's ideas further the notion of community that is evoked in the academic language we use still today.

As writing centers move online, they become "places without walls" that allow conferencing and conversation about writing to occur anywhere and anytime writing actually takes place (Gardner 75). Historically, the issue of physical space—-where the writing center is located on campus-—has created much debate. These debates continue over whether the center should have one location or many, how the physical space should be arranged , and how environments can be made more conducive to composition and community

(Healy 542; Burmester). OWLs help writing centers move beyond a single sense of location and "makes the 'Your place or mine?' question obsolete" (Healy 544).

Simultaneously, by decentralizing writing centers, we acknowledge students' multiple community memberships. We recognize that many students are also concerned with paying taxes, working full-time, supporting their families, and participating in neighborhood or work communities (Gardner 75). Online tutoring extends academic services to populations otherwise disenfranchised by traditional locations and times of operation.

Computer conferencing has the potential to be open-ended and student-centered. We, therefore, must envision formats for online conferencing that will allow every student a voice to engage in dialogue with others. Flexibility and adaptability, which are fundamental to writing center work, should allow us to conceive of new conferencing arrangements; learning should be constructed "one-on-one, group-to-group, and case-by-case" (Cummins 203).

With that said, it is not enough to replicate conference structures from face-to-face tutorials. Writers cannot simply ask questions and wait at their computer terminals for tutors to give directions. Synchronous chat systems, which are interactive and real-time, allow "students and tutors [to] converse electronically, view a draft onscreen, and/or share files and references with one another as they collaborate" (Harris and Pemberton 532). It makes sense for conferencing to happen synchronously. Yet, we must design methods for students and tutors to view drafts and make collaborative modifications. We must move away from the current model that limits interactions to one writer and one tutor.

Online conferencing should allow groups of students to huddle around computer terminals, talking about ideas as they type out responses.

Irene Clark offers new ways to think about collaborative online tutoring when she considers how tutors can assume active roles in helping students identify and interact with quality electronic resources. By functioning as larger workshops or small-group sessions, online conferences help students learn keyboarding, research skills, and database navigation. OWLs can provide students the opportunity to "navigate various information sources" with multiple tutors and writers evaluating sources and proposing ideas synchronously (Clark 566). Tutors and students can meet in libraries, collaborate on Internet searches, and mutually learn from the research process. Online conferencing should allow groups of students to huddle around computer terminals, talking about ideas as they type out responses. Likewise, groups of tutors might work together as they electronically interact with students.

It is easier to envision how communities of online writers form when we conceive of online conferencing as larger groups working together. Chat rooms facilitate multiple, simultaneous conversations about writing. Tutors and students remain anonymous to blur the distinction of tutors providing knowledge and students asking the questions. All members of the online writing community engage in dialogue and make suggestions. Writers could develop new texts collaboratively and then cite these electronic texts in their papers. Perhaps electronic composition will even change the types of assignments teachers currently assign. We could move toward composition that is more

collaboratively and socially constructed and that will likely challenge the status quo.

Just as people fear that computers will replace handwritten text, tutors and directors worry that technology will threaten the community we seek to develop in writing centers. Electronic resources can, however, help to create community among writing center folk in the same way that we can create new and more equitable communities among writers in our colleges and universities. Activities such as posting to the Wcenter listserv, attending online conferences, and chatting on MOOs with other tutors and directors increase the interconnectedness among people who work in writing centers (Inman and Sewell xxvii).

Moreover, the various electronic forums for discussing and composing text accomplish the basic goal of tutoring--engaging with writers in their process (i.e., we must write to talk online). To make online tutoring effective, we should develop new practices that match the environment and context of conferencing. Creating group tutorials and space for collaborative writing is the beginning of work in this direction, so that we can continue to network our OWLs in ways that promote community building.

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Beth Godbee is a graduate student at Georgia State University, where she serves as Assistant Director of **The Writing Studio**, a position that follows her earlier work as a tutor and coordinator at **Agnes Scott College's Center for Writing and Speaking**. After teaching in secondary schools, she returned to one-on-one tutoring and has focused her research on tutoring practice. Her thesis "Outside the Center and Inside the Home" received an IWCA Graduate Research Grant. Beth has published in *Southern Discourse*, *IWCA Update*, and *The Writing Lab Newsletter*.

Editor login

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

From the Editors: Why Wire the Writing Center?

Spring 2005 / Columns

We are finding more writing centers plugging in, booting up, and logging on. *Praxis* takes a look at the benefits and liabilities awaiting us among the circuits and out in cyberspace.

As February's lively discussion on **WCenter** about online consulting reveals, there exists a spectrum of proposed answers to the myriad questions about the role technology should play in our professional lives. This issue of *Praxis* contributes to that discussion by exploring the benefits and liabilities of using technology in the center. Our featured writers and columnists reflect on some of the philosophical, pedagogical, and budgetary issues writing practitioners face when confronted with choices about incorporating technology into their centers' consulting, training, and culture.

In her article "Do We Really Need That?" Michele Eodice urges writing center administrators to deliberate carefully about the site-specific needs of their writing centers when they choose from among burgeoning technologies. Beth Godbee explores how online writing labs (OWLs) extend academic conversation beyond the particular time and place of the classroom, building new and unexpected communities in the process. **The Writing Lab at Purdue**, this issue's featured center and home of one of the most famous OWLs, shares their philosophy of serving and enriching the diversity of intellectual life across the university. And Mary Stanley and her students Shari Clevenger, Kendra Haggard, and Jeanne Urie discuss how online learning fosters collaboration and allows students more time to reflect on their responses to their work and to each other. Central to each of these pieces is this important question: How does technology facilitate learning?

Outside this issue's focus, we also feature some new undergraduate consultant perspectives in our Consulting and Training sections. Reflecting on his consultation with a hearing-impaired student, Daniel Groner reminds us that tutor training is ongoing and that as consultants we must be ever ready to improvise. And Kalie Chamberlain transforms her consulting experiences into opportunities to assist English tutors who face certain challenges in their consultations with students whose driving passions happen not to be English.

This issue of *Praxis* includes a new feature in our Training section: What Were They Thinking? Inspired by the *New York Times's* popular feature, we take a snapshot of a writing consultation in action and then video interview both the consultant and consultee, asking each to discuss, well, what they were thinking during the consulation. We are also pleased to introduce some other great interviews and book and software reviews in this issue. Elizabeth Rodacker conducts an engaging and enlightening interview with Beth Boquet, author of the critically acclaimed *Noise from the Writing Center*. *Praxis* chats online with students in Mary Stanley's online writing center administration course at Northeastern State University. From undergraduate and graduate writing

consultants at the University of Kansas, we feature reviews of two books: Lynn Truss's bestseller, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, and Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth's anthology, *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*. And we also share with our readers a review of Accutrack appointment-making software.

Please keep your suggestions and submissions coming. You can reach the co-managing editors of *Praxis*, Eileen Abrahams and Zachary Dobbins, at **praxis@uwc.fac.utexas.edu**.

Praxis is a project of the **Undergraduate Writing Center** at the University of Texas at Austin

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Chicken Soup for the Anal Retentive Soul

Spring 2005 / Columns

by Nate Barbarick

A review of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*.
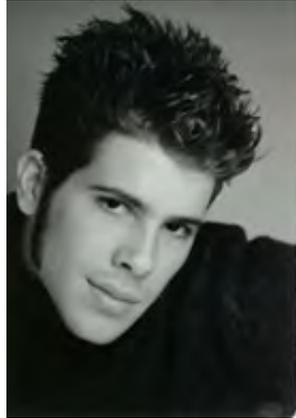
Nate Barbarick

Somewhere in the middle of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, Lynne Truss cites the 1916 trial of Sir Roger Casement, who, when charged with treason, argued the definition of a British law on the basis of an absent comma. Casement made a last-ditch effort in plea of his innocence by referring to the Treason Act of 1351, a Middle English text, insufficiently punctuated. In essence, a man put his fate into the hands of punctuation. Following his death that same year, posterity labeled him a man "hanged on a comma," and Casement turned from political dissident to punctuation martyr.

But the deeper point of interest is what happened to Casement after his death. Could his desperate soul have been restocked into the universe, reborn as Lynne Truss, and have taken a more altruistic approach to punctuation in debt to its previous life? If so, Truss's historical reference would be rather eerie, but even if not, the indelible tie between the two remains. Announcing the approaching death of punctuation in the modern age of both Internet and Apathy, Truss argues not merely on behalf of proper punctuation for its own sake but also for the betterment of mankind; her one basic motto is "Sticklers Unite!"

[A]nnouncing the approaching death of punctuation in the modern age of both Internet and Apathy, Truss argues not merely on behalf of proper punctuation for its own sake but for the betterment of mankind.

But *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* is not only an overt manifesto on behalf of punctuation; it's an appeal to the everyday logic and consideration with which we use the written word. "Isn't the analogy of good manners perfect?" she

writes in her introduction, "Truly good manners are invisible: they ease the way for others, without drawing attention to themselves" (7). Just as our good manners should come naturally in our interactions with people, proper punctuation should seem transparent in good writing, making speech flow without hitches and life that much better. It is in the application of these conscientious formalities and rules of proper punctuation that Truss revels.

And regarding those rules, *Eats*, is quite helpful. Much of the book is devoted to explaining the five or six most common punctuation marks, not for mere exposition, but ultimately for appreciation. It's Truss's assumption that if we understand these rules the way that they're meant to be understood, the task of properly punctuating our words won't be a dreaded chore, but will become another subtle harmony in the world. How could any of us learn the origin and rules of the semi-colon and not appreciate them? Well, maybe that's an unfair question; not everyone in the English speaking universe could say they genuinely care for the mark to begin with. But they're not really who the book is for. The demographic aim of the book, Truss says in her preface, is the "tiny minority of British people who love punctuation and don't like to see it mucked about with" (xviii).

Though Truss may appear fanatical, she's really more devotional than anything else, steadily championing punctuation "so disregarded when it is self-evidently so useful in preventing enormous mix-ups" (13). Truss is, therefore, an advocate for preservation in an age where rampant self-publishing and the explosion of the Internet leave the laws and mechanics of language by the wayside. But really, the "mix-ups" she speaks of aren't specific to twenty-first century communication. In her breathtaking chapter about the comma, Truss recounts the little-known travesty where a single comma in Luke 23.43 splits the divide between Protestants and Catholics, obscuring the existence of purgatory. But aside from the more esoteric implications of bad punctuation skills, Truss advises us on comma-usage with one simple rule: "don't use commas like a stupid person" (96).

On the battlefield of punctuation, consultants could be the medics, thanklessly skipping between the wounded, mending the damage done by errant apostrophes or friendly-fire exclamation points.

But only those prepared for total immersion in punctuation should even bother with this book. Truss's humorous style makes for an entertaining read, but the book's subject matter may altogether drive away those seeking answers to life's questions. In hindsight, the book seems more like a stickler's field manual or anarchist's style guide than like mere musings on punctuation. When describing the scenario of unnecessary commas in store signage, Truss seems to lose it a bit. Her revolution could possibly turn quite violent.

But would that be such a bad thing? Could the Stickler Movement, armed with such exotic knowledge as the historical origins of the exclamation mark, take on illiteracy and carelessness in this day and age? Truss seems to think so. But even punctuation philistines would have to agree: well, she does have a point. The dilemma basically boils down to this: if some people don't care for correct punctuation enough to use it themselves, a mistake here or there in the world would probably go unnoticed. Conversely, sticklers scrutinizing everything they read would find themselves the only people on the planet who notice or care much for the punctuation faux pas found in everyday life.

In terms of writing consultation, a firm grasp of the rules that direct our language when to stop, slow down, or veer in either direction is essential for effective tutoring. On the battlefield of punctuation, consultants could be the medics, thanklessly skipping between the wounded, mending the damage done by errant apostrophes or friendly-fire exclamation points. Acting as a Switzerland of sorts, but implicitly agreeing with the ideology of the Stickler Cause, peer tutors would move swiftly to defeat the decline of language, not with weapons, but by spreading an understanding of words and the mechanisms we use to control them. Therefore, we must admit, some measure of Sticklerism is a prerequisite for effective consultation.

Though "Stickler" might not be the job title you want to embrace, we find a rationale in Truss's question: "Doesn't it feel good to know this, though?" (204). Well, yes, Ms. Truss. It feels very good.

Nate Barbarick is an undergraduate creative writing major at the University of Kansas.
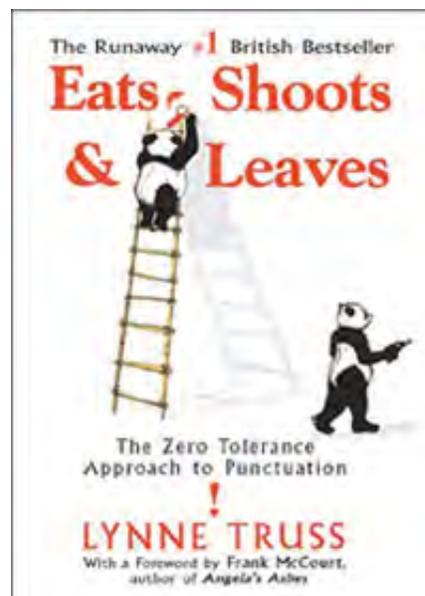
Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation
Lynne Truss
New York: Gotham Books, 2004
209 pp.

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003–2011)

The ESL Experience in the Writing Center

Spring 2005 / Columns

by Kellie Feuerbacher, Jenny Hagen, Hye-Kyung Kim, Craig Sweets, and Hye-Mi Yeom

A Review of *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*.

Jenny Hagen, Hye-Mi Yeom, Craig Sweets, Kellie Feuerbacher, and Hye-Kyung Kim

As five writing center novices who meet the challenges of assisting ESL students, we are pleased to have the new release, Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth's *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, a corpus of practical guidance for writing center consultants. For accomplishing the complicated task of selecting excellent contributors from among the many different ESL specialists, Bruce and Rafoth deserve to be praised. Like many other essential references on a writing center bookshelf, ESL tutors will welcome this book as an indispensable resource.

In the first chapter, Nancy Hayward states, "cultural expectations have everything to do with the success or failure of any tutoring session" (Bruce and Rafoth 1). That is because there could be miscommunication or misunderstanding between tutors and students from other countries when the tutors are unfamiliar with cultural values the students have in their societies. In order for tutors to recognize important cultural differences, Nancy Hayward suggests they pay attention to the six following areas in their interactions with ESL students: 1) patterns of perceptions and thinking, 2) language and nonverbal behavior, 3) forms of activity, 4) forms of social relationships, 5) perceptions of the world, 6) perceptions of the self.

Since many ESL writers have trouble with "writing in correct word order," "choosing the right word," and "making the same errors continually," tutors want to know how to advise ESL writers more easily. In the second chapter, the author discusses the four major theories for second language acquisition so that tutors better understand that the process of second language acquisition is "never a linear, smooth manner"(27).

One of the most practical pieces of advice one can give beginning tutors is to be aware of potential traps they may fall into and to suggest ways to avoid those traps. In "Reading an ESL Writer's Text," we learn the possible stances we might take when reading an ESL writer's paper, including the "assimilationist stance." Many tutors adopt this stance because they feel responsible for helping to make the paper as "perfect" as possible. Authors Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox tell why this is not always beneficial to ESL students, and remind us that "it's important to realize that differences are not necessarily signs of deficiency"(40).

We would recommend this chapter especially to tutors and to anyone who has ever wondered, "how much is too much?".

Carol Severino gives suggestions on how to avoid falling into another type of trap–-appropriation. Writing instructors and tutors alike are often tempted to change the writer's text so much that it no longer reflects the voice and linguistic abilities of the writer but rather that of the instructor or tutor. Severino speaks from personal experience on what it feels like to have a text appropriated by someone who meant well but ended up "reformulating" the text. We would recommend this chapter especially to tutors and to anyone who has ever wondered, "how much is too much?".

One of the most interesting ideas we took away from chapter 6, written by Amy Jo Minett, was that each culture has its own way of organizing an essay. In Standard American English we usually follow a very linear pattern. We like to be told at the beginning what we can expect to read about in the essay. Then, we like to read an orderly body that includes plenty of transitions so we don't get lost, and then we like to be reminded of the contents once again in the conclusion. However, some Asian writers may seem much more indirect, often leaving the thesis statement for the end. If we don't understand this, we might think that the ESL student with whom we are working is a bad writer, when the student might simply be organizing the text the way he or she has been taught since childhood.

The chapter co-authored by Jennifer Staben and Kathyrn Dempsey Nordhaus helps tutors to see how to look beyond sentence-level concerns, such as grammar, to view the text holistically and contextually. In chapter 8, Cynthia Linville explores tutoring strategies for working with ESL papers at the word- and sentence-level. And in chapter 9, tutors can learn some effective strategies and lessons from one writing center director's online experience with ESL students.

In chapter 10, "Raising Questions about Plagiarism," Kurt Bouman claims that plagiarism is something very common with ESL students for three possible reasons: either the student does not understand plagiarism, or in the student's native country the idea of plagiarism does not exist, or the student does not know how to paraphrase correctly (106-109). Bouman explains that many cultures do not value individuality as strongly as Americans, so they do not cite their sources, and therefore do not have any concept of plagiarism. For this reason, it is the tutor's job to explain the cultural significance of citing sources and to make sure the ESL student understands the concept of plagiarism. Overall, the essay is exceptional in relaying the conflicts and resolutions related to plagiarism with ESL students. However, personal experiences from tutors, both good and bad, would have made Bouman's essay more helpful.

Chapter 11, Paula Gillespie's "Is this my Job?" is another exceptional essay showing the flexibility and understanding a tutor needs when working with an ESL student. Quoting from Beth Boquet's *Noise From the Writing Center*, Gillespie encourages tutors to be flexible when helping an ESL student, since many sessions might involve the tutor helping the student not only with writing, but also with reading and pronunciation. Gillespie uses actual writings from peer tutors to show that as long as learning and sharing is taking place, it could be more productive for sessions with ESL students to be unconventional.

Although this book provides much practical advice, it inevitably also has a few shortcomings. In the introduction, the editors define the intended readers of this book as tutors who are native speakers of English. However, even within the U.S. context, the reality is that there are many ESL tutors who are non-native English speakers. In fact, two of the authors of this book review, both future writing consultants at our university writing center, are non-native speakers of English studying to teach English as a second language. If this book were to embrace non-native English speaking tutors as readers, contributors could extend the coverage of their discussion further.

If this book were to embrace non-native English speaking tutors as readers, contributors could extend the coverage of their discussion further.

In Kevin Dvorak's essay, he suggests ways of constructing a writing workshop for ESL students. Dvorak does well at showing different creative writing activities for ESL students, but fails to include any information on the effectiveness of these activities. Some actual opinions from ESL students and the tutors who plan these events would have been beneficial to those who want a feel for what needs to be accomplished in such a workshop and what to avoid in the planning process.

Shanti Bruce concludes the book with first-hand accounts of ESL students' experiences in the tutoring room. The students, from as far away as Saudi Arabia, Uganda, Korea and Japan, brought with them certain cultural expectations. The most common complaint was that they would be perceived as weak. Jung-jun complained about the age of tutors, their amount of schooling, and their personalities. Zahara had a positive experience; she talked about how helpful the people in the writing center were, and liked how the tutor read her paper aloud.

It is fitting that the work should end with the students, since helping students is ultimately what writing centers are about. At its best, the writing center is a forum for discussion of writing and reading and learning about one another's cultures. Because the book provides certain examples based on real experiences, the reader comes to realize the importance of understanding cultural differences for effective tutoring.

One of the book's biggest strengths is that it can be used as a guidebook for tutors. The index is especially convenient, allowing tutors to look up different subjects and find an essay addressing a specific topic. However, in the future we would like to see the authors of these essays get together and collectively write one collaborative text, thereby giving readers a chance to read through the text without hearing repetitious comments mentioned by multiple authors.

Overall, we are pleased with this book. This is the first book-length attempt to deal with how the writing center's mission of providing writers with

collaborative assistance might be better realized for ESL students. With a few changes this book will be considered a cornerstone in the ESL writing field.

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Kellie Feuerbacher is earning her Master's degree from the University of Kansas in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in teaching English as a Second Language. Kellie works with international students as a conversation leader and as a volunteer teacher for a local ESL program.

Jennifer Hagen is an undergraduate at the University of Kansas. She is studying English and Pre-Law and working as a Resident Assistant in Ellsworth Hall. In her spare time she enjoys singing, reading, and spending time with her friends.

HyeKyung Kim is a Master's student in TESOL in Teaching and Leadership at the University of Kansas. She hopes to be an English teacher in Korea in the near future.

Craig Sweets graduated with a degree in English from the University of Kansas in 2002. He is an editor of *Change of Heart*, a local street paper for and by the homeless.

Hye-Mi Yeom is earning her Master's degree in English as a Second Language from the University of Kansas. She wants to teach English in Korea.

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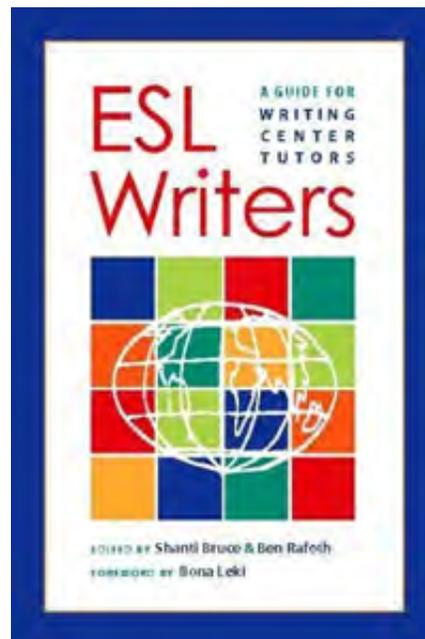
ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors
Shanti Bruce & Ben Rafoth, eds.

Praxis is a project of the **Undergraduate Writing Center** at the University of Texas at Austin

Editor login

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Technology Review

Spring 2005 / Columns

by Elisa Benson

Elisa Benson reviews Accutrack appointment-making software.

Elisa Benson

Every writing center deals with the perpetually defensive writer, the appointment-hungry visitor, and the shy first-year who just needs a pep talk. To prepare consultants for these students on repeat visits, every writing center needs software that allows consultants to easily record appointment case notes. With Accutrack software, consultants can quickly access this feedback by using the session log "search" feature. By reading another consultant's view of a previous appointment, we can streamline our interactions to focus on concerns unique to a writer. Accutrack also prevents potential writing center abuse by limiting a visitor's per-week log-ins.

The automatic survey that pops up when visitors sign out generates valuable feedback for consultants. This customizable mini-evaluation can feature multiple choice or open answer questions. At the end of every semester, we love perusing the list of anonymous ratings and comments.

Although the appointment wizard prevents us from overloading time slots, it can be difficult to navigate. Because users must click through several screens to set an appointment, and because we can schedule appointments only for writers already entered into the computer database, we often access several screens only to discover a caller is a first time visitor. Appointments also default to the first consultant in alphabetical order, so if a staffer does not consciously select someone else, the consultants at the beginning of the alphabet may end up with busier schedules. Despite the learned art of appointment-making, perhaps the most appreciated feature of Accutrack software is the automatic appointment confirmation e-mailed to both writer and consultant.

Like any software program, Accutrack will pose some difficulties to new users. Once learned, however, the features simplify appointment-making and increase

access to session feedback among consultants.

Elisa Benson is a junior Art & Art History concentrator at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. She serves as the student coordinator for the **Colgate Writing Center** and also works at the Office of Communications, where she writes press releases for the university website. This summer she co-wrote her first book, *Colgate University: Off the Record*.

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All the Noise That's Fit to Print

Spring 2005 / Consulting

Interview conducted by Elizabeth Rodacker and Luis Rivera. Introduction by Elizabeth Rodacker

Elizabeth Rodacker and Luis Rivas interview Beth Boquet, author of *Noise from the Writing Center*.

Elizabeth Rodacker

Writing center practitioners and graduate students often feel as if the scholars they read are so far removed from the actual day-to-day happenings of consultants that they dismiss it all as just "theory." So as a reader, I'm always looking for a glimpse of something in a text to humanize the writers and find evidence of actual teaching/learning in the texts. I found these qualities in Elizabeth Boquet's *Noise from the Writing Center*.

In April of 2003 Luis Rivas and I interviewed Elizabeth Boquet via e-mail to learn about what kind of writing center director this is who allows us to view more of her than merely her academic persona. We learn in *Noise* that Boquet is a musician, a fellow colleague who struggles with other colleagues, and a professor who endures preparing a "box of blood" for tenure. She tells us her philosophy as a writing center director and as an educator as well. Boquet's passion spoke to me: passion for her students, her job, and writing centers in general. I wanted to talk to this woman who cares so deeply and is willing to take risks for her students. She isn't special because she is so different; she is special because she is so much like many of the thousands of other great English teachers I know.

The Interview

Rodacker and Rivas: What drew you to English studies?

Boquet: Honestly, my draw to English studies is probably that my English professors were the first ones who ever took my ideas seriously, who asked questions that they didn't seem to know the answer to, and who facilitated mutual discovery in a classroom. Had that happened for me in biology, I might well have studied science. Once I began tutoring in the Writing Center, I

became really interested in questions of access (though I didn't know to call them that then). The process of figuring out how to get answers to those questions was not straightforward at the time--of course, it's still not--but it seemed that linguistics was one route to go, which led to my master's degree. While studying for my master's, I found a program more explicitly focused on teaching (which I had decided I desperately needed help with) that also addressed those questions of access and equity. So that's how I wound up in my Ph.D. program.

Beth Boquet

Rodacker and Rivas: You discuss tutors so much in *Noise*, especially the tutors at the **Rhode Island College Writing Center**. How would you characterize your relationship with your own tutors at Fairfield University?

Boquet: I guess, most of all, I remember being a tutor, and I remember--as much as is possible and as trustworthy as memory is--what I felt like I needed, what all learners need, which is support and encouragement. So I think that my tutors know that I will go to the wall for them, and I often do. Not only on things related to their writing center work, but on things related to their academic work--scheduling problems, academic difficulties, strategies for dealing with difficult professors of their own, etc. As much as I love my classes, being with my tutors is really the best part of any day.

Rodacker and Rivas: Who was your intended audience while writing *Noise*? What kind of people actually read your text today? Administrators? Faculty? Or people involved with writing centers?

Boquet: I felt that a lot of the work I was reading on writing centers really

didn't address what someone would actually "enjoy" about being in a writing center--or particularly about directing a writing center. And, as I said, compared to the other things I do in a day--much of which I also enjoy--working with the tutors and watching the tutors work with each other and with other students is far and away the best thing about this job.

When I set out to write a book, in my mind, I was clearly writing for directors of writing centers. But *Noise* is not the book I set out to write. *Noise* is the book I wrote accidentally. I was blocked with the book I was writing, which was much more traditionally academic and read more like the 1999 College Composition and Communication article that I wrote. So I started another file on my computer that was really for brainstorming, thinking that if I just got some ideas out of my head, I could import them into the book. By the end of the summer, the "journal" I had been keeping was much more interesting than the book I was trying to write in parallel, so I just gradually started spending more and more time with the "journal" and less and less time with the book. But, if anyone had told me initially that I was going to eventually publish those thoughts that I set down in the journal, I think I would have protested rather vehemently.

One of the most pleasant surprises about *Noise* has been that tutors and directors seem to be reading it together, and that is not something I had anticipated in the beginning. I am so happy about that, though.

Rodacker and Rivas: Most in academia realize that there is so much more to an academic experience, particularly concerning writing, than "getting the grade." Nevertheless, grades are important, and students especially realize this. So how do you handle this dichotomy in the writing center? Students feel pressured to perform well, but tutors aren't supposed to merely help tutees increase their GPAs. How do tutors handle this and aid their tutees to get better marks?

[T]here is a fundamental disconnect between linear time and epochal time in the writing center...

Boquet: The grade issue is a vexing one, I'll admit. I went to a really interesting session last week at the CCC Convention where Anne Geller gave a talk with the general theme of time in the writing center [1]. She used drawings that members of her staff had done, and in those drawings Anne noticed that many of the tutors had in some way incorporated a clock. Using the tutors' observations about the pictures they had drawn, Anne talked about the concept of linear time and the concept of epochal time--linear time being the time that ticks off minute-by-minute and epochal time being the time that gets measured by the passing of events. So, for example, as I respond to you, I have to be aware of linear time because I am meeting a friend for lunch at noon, but in epochal time my response to you will be complete when I have answered your questions as best I can. Does this make sense? Anne's point is that there is a fundamental disconnect between linear time and epochal time in the writing center to the extent that students come in focused on linear time (this paper is due next week, tomorrow, this afternoon, next period) and tutors are taught to focus on epochal time (which would be how we would mark a real shift in someone's writing ability). This comes to bear on the grade issue, I think, because grades are part of that linear equation, and, as a result, they are to some extent in conflict with the more epochal time that we like to think of as elapsing in the writing center.

Anyway, that's a long way around to your question, mainly because I want to think more about Anne's point. But, in general, just as composition should resist a service orientation to writing, I think writing centers can resist a service orientation to writing as well. I don't know that we always make that clear to tutors. But I try to remind the tutors that there are two people in a session who have to get their needs met--the student and the tutor--and it is fair to negotiate that. So it is fair and right to take the student's concern about time pressure or grade pressure into consideration when formulating a strategy for spending the hour, but it is also fair and right to take the tutor's need for a different sort of unfolding into consideration as well. Too often, I think tutors are positioned as having no needs--or at least they're not "supposed" to have needs--that they bring to the table. But that is wrong. Why would you keep doing that job if you weren't able to be a full-fledged participant at that table?

Too often, I think tutors are positioned as having no needs--or at least they're not "supposed" to have needs--that they bring to the table.

Rodacker and Rivas: If you were to pick out one or two sentences (or paragraphs) from each chapter, what would they be and why? If you were a writing center director or graduate student who read *Noise* what would your thoughts be? Where would you be annoyed and why?

Boquet: There are some passages that stand out even in my own head--most of them not written by me. I love the last image of students coming in with writing close to their hearts and of the need to think of feedback as the sympathetic vibrations to that writing. I love the Trinh-Minh Ha quotes about sounds as bubbles on the surface of silence.

I love a lot of the tutors' words in the last chapter, especially Mike's description of the writing center from abroad. And Donna's observations about pain being part of the picture. Jimi Hendrix's observation that he wants to get color into music. Those images move me so much, even now, that I have tears in my eyes summarizing them for you.

I hate the first chapter, though. I wish it weren't in the book--or at the very least, I wish it were substantially different. It seems so derivative, and I'm embarrassed by it. I think I hadn't fully let go at that point--I was still writing with an eye toward that other book--and it shows. So it's hard to say, if I were just a reader encountering this text--or a grad student, as you asked--what I might think, but I always assume that people will perceive some sort of fundamental disconnect between that first chapter and the rest of the book. And they would be right to perceive that.

At the same time, I think I would have been really happy to have encountered a book like *Noise* as a grad student, just because it would have given me hope that somebody somewhere was having fun with this academic stuff.

I attribute a lot of that to Michael Spooner, my editor at **Utah State University Press**, who really never demanded that it resemble other books that were being published elsewhere--or even that he was publishing.

Rodacker and Rivas: It seems like your main ideas can be summed up, at least partially, with the phrase, "Think outside the box." Do you agree with this statement? If not, why? If so, how do we help administrators (and/or students) to think "outside the box"?

I really think those of us who direct writing centers have to gain more institutional power.

Boquet: Well, my first thought is, why a box? Is there a box? We're so drawn to those locational metaphors, aren't we? I know you're using the expression in its most colloquial sense, but in its literal sense, it brings us right back to the issue of space. I really think those of us who direct writing centers have to gain more institutional power. And there's a part of me that hates to say that because it is such a disciplinary answer, and I think of *Noise* as such an anti-disciplinary book. But we can't be timid about claiming expertise on our campuses and acting on that expertise. We can't think about our programs to the exclusion of our individual scholarly development, for example; the two are inextricably linked. I have been pretty outspoken in lots of forums about my commitment to the idea that writing center positions should be tenurable faculty positions and that writing center directors need to do what is expected to get themselves tenured. It's not easy. It means sometimes staying home for a quiet day of writing rather than attending another string of meetings on campus or putting together handouts for students using the writing center. But that decision has paid off, in my experience, in both personal and institutional ways. So, instead of thinking about boxes, how about this: Let's make a distinction between being strategic and being tactical. Strategies involve attention to long-range goals, even occasionally at the expense of short-term payoffs. Tactics involve an awareness of opportunity, capitalizing on moments. In *Noise*, readers probably saw more tactical moments and fewer strategic ones, but both tactics and strategies are necessary for long-term success in our centers, I think.

Well, that's all the (linear) time I have at this moment. Tonight I'm doing a set at the Acoustic CafÃ© with my friend Dave (who appears in the book). We're doing a tribute to Stevie Ray Vaughan (who was decidedly "not" acoustic and who definitely should have made it into *Noise*).

Notes

[1]Anne Geller has recently published a version of this talk, entitled "Tick-Tock, Next: Creating Epochal Time in the Writing Center," in the winter 2005 issue of *The Writing Center Journal*.

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Beth Boquet is an associate professor of English and director of the **Writing Center at Fairfield University** in Fairfield, Connecticut. She has been there for 10 years. Prior to arriving at Fairfield, she completed her Ph.D. in rhetoric and linguistics at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Boquet's master's degree is in English (with an emphasis in linguistics) from the University of Southern Mississippi, and her bachelor's degree is in English from Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana.

Elizabeth K. Rodacker is an associate professor of English as a Second Language and Composition at **Union College**, in Lincoln, Nebraska. Rodacker received both her master's and bachelor's degrees from California State University, Stanislaus in Turlock, California. Before Rodacker's tenure at Union College, she taught composition in California and English in Kagoshima, Japan.

Rodacker has taken classes at University of Nebraska, Lincoln toward her Ph.D. in English.

Praxis is a project of the **Undergraduate Writing Center** at the University of Texas at Austin

Editor login

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Spring 2005 / Featured Center

Spring 2005 / Consulting

Visit the award-winning Writing Lab at Purdue, home of *The Writing Lab Newsletter* and one of the most highly-regarded OWLs.

The Writing Lab at Purdue
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN

The Writing Lab at Purdue

Web address:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/writinglab/

Director:
Linda Bergmann

Assistant Director:
Tammy Conard-Salvo

Year opened:
1976

History:

Please see **http://owl.english.purdue.edu/writinglab/topic/facts** for a history of the Writing Lab.

Recent Awards:

In November 2004, the Writing Lab was granted a **Certificate of Writing**

Program Excellence by the Conference on College Composition and Communication in the first round of competition for this distinction. According to a Purdue University press release:

> The Purdue Writing Lab was cited for its excellent work, successfully demonstrating that their program meets the following criteria: it imaginatively addresses the needs and opportunities of its students, instructors, and locale; offers exemplary ongoing professional development for faculty of all ranks, including adjunct/contingent faculty; treats contingent faculty respectfully, humanely, and professionally; uses current best practices in the field; uses effective, ongoing assessment and placement procedures; models diversity and/or serves diverse communities; has appropriate class size; and has an administrator (chair, director, coordinator, etc.) with academic credentials in writing. In particular, the Purdue program was noted for its OWL and Writing Lab, together providing innovative and quality writing instruction to local, national, and international communities.

Sponsoring department, school, or organization:
English Department

Number of consultations in the last year:

5,411 students used the Writing Lab 6,727 times for tutorials, workshops, and conversation groups (We had 4,036 tutorials alone).

Square footage:
Unknown. (We have 3 connected rooms, converted from classrooms.)

Services offered online:

OWL (digital repository of writing handouts and resources) and OWL Mail (respond to brief questions about writing anything but whole papers).

Staff:

Director: Linda S. Bergmann, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English

Assistant Director: Tammy Conard-Salvo, M.A., Administrative/Professional (salaried)

Fifteen graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), trained in a one-hour in-service practicum. Graduate tutors are funded by the English Department, as part of assistantship package; all of them have taught at least one year of first-year composition. GTAs hold the following administrative positions:

- Business Writing Coordinator
- English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinator
- Workshop Coordinator
- OWL-mail Coordinator

Writing Lab/Introductory Writing Program Liaison (funded by the English Department, part of assistantship package): one GTA, with experience as a graduate tutor in the Writing Lab.

Graduate student OWL staff (salaried through a Purdue University Grant):

- OWL Technical Coordinator
- OWL Coordinator
- Hourly workers who develop electronic instructional materials

Undergraduate tutors, trained in 2-3 hour pre-service practicum courses. UTAs are funded hourly, primarily by the English Department.:

- Eleven undergraduate teaching assistants to tutor students in first year composition courses (hourly employee)
- Six undergraduate business writing consultants to assist students with résumés and other job-related writing (hourly employee)

Support staff:

- Office Manager (full-time hourly employee)
- Administrative Manager (full-time hourly employee)
- Six student clerical assistants (work study employees)

Clientele:

We see students from all disciplines and from all levels of their academic career. During the last academic year, we saw 5,411 students, including undergraduates and graduates, native and non-native speakers. Non-native speakers of English constitute 33% of our clientele. Please see the chart [[[create link to chart below--link to "Breakdown of use"]]] below for more information.

Money Matters:

While we're not comfortable disclosing our actual budget, we will note that we receive support from the English department, the School of Liberal Arts, as well as support from university intramural grants.

Current events/programs concerning technology

We are currently in the process of redesigning and re-imagining the OWL site, and by the end of the academic year, we should have a new site in place. We're going through the process of usability testing in various stages with various users to create a more effective and interactive site for distributing writing resources. The new site will make a clearer distinction between the Writing Lab (for local users) and the **OWL**, and provide a searchable archive of *The Writing Lab Newsletter*.

We continue to research new ways of incorporating technology in tutorials, and we are exploring options with various software programs and hoping to bring laptops or tablet PCs for use in tutorials sometime in the near future.

Do you track online users?

Yes. We received 23,000,000 hits during 2003, and our workshops and handouts were downloaded more than 7,000,000 times.

Considering the writing center as a whole, what percentage of your services is online?

If you consider the number of hits we receive on OWL and the number of downloads, our online service exceeds our face-to-face tutorial service. However, we do not tutor entire papers online, and our tutorials are open to Purdue students only.

What are some differences between online services and consultations in person?

We only offer consultations to Purdue students, but OWL Mail is open to anyone from anywhere. We accept only brief questions about writing (related to thesis statements, citations, grammar) via email, not whole papers.

Philosophy:

The Writing Lab within the Intellectual Life and Programs of the English Department and Across Purdue University

The Writing Lab, founded by Muriel Harris and directed by her for over twenty-five years, aims to carry on the high quality of one-to-one tutoring for which it has been known throughout its existence. The Lab seeks to serve a diverse population of students and give students access to the resources they need. Diversity can be defined in terms of ethnicity and personal background, level of writing expertise, disciplinary differences, or learning styles.

The Writing Lab is considered an important function of the English Department in four ways. The Lab provides:

> 1. Support for students in and instructors of Introductory Composition, Professional Writing, and various upper-level courses.

2. Meaningful work for GTAs, of particular interest to but not limited to students in Rhetoric and Composition.

3. Positive early teaching experiences for undergraduate students. Moreover, because of the interactions with instructors that are fostered here, tutoring serves many undergraduates as a means of exploring whether to pursue graduate studies.

4. A site for implementing and demonstrating composing practices and for research into teaching writing and learning to write.

The Writing Lab courses and other services are a clear outgrowth of the traditions and priorities of the Purdue English Department, particularly its commitments to research, professional development, and active mentoring. The department has actively worked to make the Writing Lab integral to its purpose and mission, and the Lab, in turn, works to maintain that interaction. The Writing Lab is considered an important element in the Rhetoric and Composition Program, and seriously endeavors to maintain tutoring practices informed by sound disciplinary knowledge.

The Writing Lab also actively helps classroom teachers across the disciplines develop and improve writing activities in their courses. In addition to ongoing work with faculty developing writing projects and providing access to instructional materials on site or on the OWL, recent work has included:

1. Workshops adapted for specific courses in Education, History, Industrial Engineering, Child Development and Family Studies, and upper-level literature courses in English.

2. Development of a Digital Resource Repository, in collaboration with faculty from the Department of Child Development and Family Studies.

3. Summer 2003 Writing Across the Curriculum Workshop for the School of Liberal Arts, co-directed by Professor Bergmann.

4. OWL demonstrations for the university-wide Teaching and Technology Seminar Series, Teaching and Learning with Technology Showcase, and the Discovery Park Learning Center Education Forum, as well as for the English Department Brownbag Discussion Series.

5. Workshops for local high schools, including a day-long WAC workshop.

Where do you see your center going in the future?

The Writing Lab is committed to responding to expressions of need for writing support and instruction from the English Department and from faculty and students across the university. We invite suggestions continually, during orientation sessions and workshops, in our end-of-semester surveys of instructors, and in occasional focus groups and other institutional research projects. Our attempts to collaborate more fully with the Introductory Composition, Creative Writing, and Professional Writing programs are current innovations that are outgrowths of these expressed needs.

Some other projects being researched or begun at the present time include:

> 1. Researching and assessing ESL conversation groups across campus, with the intention of evaluating the need for and appropriateness of this activity as a Writing Lab service.

> 2. Implementing a satellite Writing Lab to extend tutoring to dorms and to expand the hours tutoring is available, particularly to students in the new Introductory Composition Program.

> 3. Assessing needs of graduate students for more sustained Writing Lab support, including a pilot project in intensive tutoring and the development of a workshop introducing academic discourse to graduate students, and considering the feasibility of starting writing groups or other support services for these students.

What else should people know about your center?

The Writing Lab at Purdue is committed to the professional development of its staff and to the ongoing research mission ("Discovery" is the local term) of the English Department and the University.

In addition to 23 conference presentations in the 2003-2004 school year that were derived from Writing Lab work, we can point to such demonstrations of success as honors earned by our staff and ongoing research projects they are pursuing.

Staff Honors:

- Jessica Clark (GTA), Outstanding Tutor of the Year Award, East Central

Writing Centers Association
- Serkan Gorkemli (GTA), Outstanding Leader of the Year Award, East Central Writing Centers Association
- Laura Beadling (GTA), Outstanding Tutor of the Year Award, Purdue English Department
- Scott Peters (UTA), Honorable Mention in 2004 English Department Literary Awards (for a research paper written for the undergraduate tutoring practicum)

Ongoing In-Lab Research Projects:

Writing Lab staff initiated several research projects intended both to improve Writing Lab services and to investigate new theories and practices of writing instruction in writing center environments:

- Jessica Clark (GTA), "An Investigation of the Quality and Quantity of Collaboration in Writing Lab Tutorials" (dissertation project, directed by Professor Bergmann; prospectus has been defended): an empirical study of the extent to which graduate teaching assistants' tutorials are collaborative vs. directive, correlating measured collaboration with students' and tutors' evaluations of tutorials.
- Sarah Johnson (GTA), "The Purdue Writing Lab and Local Educational Communities": interviews with seven local high school teachers, to examine community perceptions of the function of the Writing Lab and local educators' experiences with it, and to ascertain the kinds of writing expected of students, teachers' goals for that writing, and communication issues they emphasize.
- Tammy Conard-Salvo and Serkan Gorkemli (GTA), an assessment of e-book technology use in undergraduate tutor training courses and the relationship of this technology to genre-specific tutoring.
- Tammy Conard-Salvo, "Beyond Disabilities: Text-to-Speech Software in the Writing Center": a formal study of the impact of speech synthesis software (adaptive technology) on face-to-face writing center tutorials.
- Linda Bergmann, Sarah Johnson (GTA), Deborah Rankin (GTA), Gigi Taylor (GTA), and Laurel Reinking, article on the Writing Lab as a site for project-oriented research in a recent graduate Seminar in the theory and practice of writing center administration.

Breakdown of Use

Campus Writing Lab Services	Times Used	Individual Users
Tutorials	4036	2762
Workshops		
In-class Workshops	18	415
In-lab Workshops	52	128
Resources		
Handouts for Students	149	134
Grammar Hotline	733	N/A
Conversation Groups and ESL	530	253

Online Writing Lab (OWL) Services	Times Used
Website	16,268,120
E-mail Tutoring	1,565

Praxis is a project of the **Undergraduate Writing Center** at the University of Texas at Austin

Editor login

P Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

What Were They Thinking?

Spring 2005 / Consulting

Interviews and videography by Jeff Tabares; concept, Sue Mendelsohn.

Video interviews with a writer and a consultant take you inside their consultation.

Consultant Sue Mendelsohn (left) and undergraduate Natalie Lyons talk about Natalie's English paper

Writing consultants have a lot on their minds. So do writers. Most of their thoughts don't get expressed aloud, but those thoughts do dictate their interaction during the consultation. The video linked below contains two short interviews with undergraduate English major Natalie Lyons and graduate writing consultant Sue Mendelsohn, both students at The University of Texas at Austin. They give you the backstory of their meeting together and reflect on the consultation from their own perspectives.

Click the eye image to view the video interviews.

Editor login

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003–2011)

Home

Speaking up in the Writing Center

Daniel Groner shares how a challenging consultation can remind us that tutor training is a process ongoing.

by Daniel Groner

The dreaded grammar exam, year in and out, stands as the greatest fear of many first year students at Yeshiva University. The University requires all students to perform at the highest possible level, and their course grade in their Composition and Rhetoric class depends in large part on how well they perform on this twenty question exam. That's where the Writing Center comes in. Mid-way through each semester, an abundance of students demand the necessary help from us to prepare for this often frustrating exam The test is, for the most part, seen as an enemy they must defeat to pass the course so they can eventually focus their academic efforts elsewhere. For many, this will be their first and last visit to our nearby location. Tuesday brought me Chaim.

I always begin my appointments by asking the tutees to define their short-term goals, a question they tend to answer with a general response. Clenching a practice exam in his hand, Chaim responded that he wanted to work on his grammar: "I want to improve my speech." Upon hearing him speak, I noticed larger issues with his speech, chiefly an impairment in vocalizing, a condition that doctors had evidently prescribed hearing aids to assist him. As a writing center tutor I was qualified to address language by pointing out mistakes on the page, but definitely not to teach speech to someone with such disabilities. However, despite my training limitations, I was willing to learn. "Let's give it a shot," I replied as I sat down beside him and eyed the grammar exam on the table between us.

At our bi-annual Writing Center orientation earlier in the semester, we had reviewed how to conduct sessions. I had been trained to encourage students to read their work out loud at the beginning of each session. Many of the grammatical and mechanical errors students make in their own writing can be rectified through careful listening; the mistakes become highlighted in the sound of the words inside the sentences, the sentences inside the paragraphs. For the grammar exam, I require students to read the practice sentences aloud before we can start to focus on repairing them. Each sentence is grammatically wrong, and the student's job is to determine exactly how. For all intents and purposes, it is less important to me that these students know why the sentences are wrong than that they are able to identify them as wrong. Students don't frequently enjoy being educated about wacky rules involving terms like "antecedents" and "gerunds" they will probably never need to know again.

"Read the first sentence out loud," I requested. No response. He turned toward me donning a look that instantly told me that he knew I had spoken but couldn't make out the words. I repeated my request, this time his eyes purposefully observing my face. I then realized that Chaim depended on his ability to read lips to compensate for his disability. His hearing aids primarily

functioned as a form of announcement, alerting him to someone speaking in his general direction, thereby summoning his attention. By the second time around he was poised and eager to reply to my requests. I understood, then, that this wouldn't be like my regular sessions. I wasn't trained for this kind of consultation.

In music, there is a difference between a note and a sound. Our ears recognize harmony between notes and piece them together melodiously. Chaim, however, sang to the tune of a fractured English sentence. He staggered through the first few sentences, mumbling periodically between heavy breaths. It became apparent that, for him, there was no benefit to this reading aloud exercise. Realizing that many of the exam's grammar mistakes could more easily be heard than seen, I opted to read the sentences out loud myself, hoping he would hear more clearly the errors in the sentences. Translating the words off my lips, he stopped me mid-sentence, at times, to guess what the problem was. Often he was incorrect, but his enthusiasm persisted.

Halfway through the session, we were cruising smoothly until we reached a sample run-on sentence. I usually explain to my students that a run-on is a sentence that tries to say too much and would better be split into two sentences or separated by some sort of punctuation. After repeated attempts, I ran out of ways to lead Chaim in the right direction. To him, nothing in the example seemed incorrect. "Listen closely. Does it sound like something is wrong?" I encouraged. "I can't hear it," he quickly replied. Under the circumstances, I decided to consult Diana Hacker's A Writer's Reference, and we spent our remaining time going over what technically composes a run-on sentence, a practice I will only perform in the direst of conditions. Finally, he got it. I did as well.

His words "I can't hear it" made me realize that we essentially divide English into two different languages: one heard and one read. For instance, if you never saw the words "a lot" in print, you might assume them to be one word pushed together (as Chaim had). Yet, on paper, it would seem the playing field evens because Chaim reads at the same rate as anyone else. However, if you spent much of your life observing the colloquial use of the English language merely as words constructed off peoples' lips, you could possibly become confused about basic rules of grammar. We speak so quickly and efficiently that there is often no indication we have verbally punctuated our sentences with pauses and inflection–as Chaim reminded me with his problems concerning comma usage.

Working with Chaim, I was forced to accept a more active role than I was accustomed to. I had to be willing to step outside of my advisors' recommended protocol of reading aloud, one that cannot possibly foresee all the different types of students who will utilize the center. Our roles, it seems, extend beyond simple peer tutors; in the first moments of each session, we must diagnose each student's individual needs and cater the session to those needs. We are teachers with ever-changing methods who require everlasting sensitivity and patience. We must treat each student individually, regularly re-creating our roles to meet tutees' needs, while also remembering not to highlight their differences.

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Spring 2005 / Training

by Mary Stanley

Designing a center from scratch with Mary Stanley in her online writing center administration course.

Mary Stanley

A year ago, teaching writing center administration for Northeastern State University (NSU) through an online approach was just a warm but rather vague and fuzzy idea in my head. This fall, though, the course became a reality with twenty students turning in super performances from across the northeastern corner of Oklahoma (the "Green Country").

There are two, well, two and-a-half, major reasons for putting this course online. One of these is that NSU, with its three major campuses, serves a large geographical area of Oklahoma. There are students in this online course who would have had to travel 75 miles or more one way had the course been held onsite here in Tahlequah. A second major reason is that we are working to develop a complete online Master's of English option, and this course, along with the other three in writing program administration, fits into that area of our graduate program. The other reason, the "half" one, is that I direct our **University Writing Center**, coordinate developmental English studies, and teach three courses each semester. Teaching at least two courses online leaves me free most of the day to deal with problems and crises that arise with the first two responsibilities.

The decision, then, to put the course online was a "no brainer," but how to structure and teach it online was a major challenge. When all the reading assignments had been gathered, I knew the reading load for this course would be heavy, but that the selected items would provide the theory and philosophical background the students needed. However, even with these extensive readings, I realized in reviewing the literature for this course that

while most of the articles would be extremely helpful, there were major areas that the curriculum did not cover in detail. The missing items included such things as the designing of a center and the "nitty-gritty" administrative and management details and duties that a center director needs to know to keep a center operating.

Since I wanted the students completing this course to be able to walk in and assume duties and responsibilities in a writing center or design one from scratch, I decided to base the course on a term project that would force the students to apply their theoretical learning and go beyond it in a real-life simulation of designing and planning all aspects of a writing center.

After the introductory post of "who I am and why I am taking this course" by students, I asked them to describe their ideal writing centers. They came up with neat, creative, and workable ideas--and some ideas that were less practical. The activity, though, caused them to focus and verbalize their thoughts on what a writing center should be. Next, we read, and read, and then read some more until it was time to start the term project. Students were faced with the following task:

Seven Steps to Create a Writing Center (or Lab)

Your educational institution received a $60,000 grant from an external foundation. These funds, however, can be used only for establishing a writing lab or center, and to do so, your college/high school will have to cover additional costs incurred. You have been assigned the task of designing the center and its services and estimating all costs. A 30x30 room has been designated as the location for the center, so this is the space you must plan for. In it, you must house the electronic systems needed and the people functions.

Working definitions: a *lab* serves one discipline; a *center* serves many disciplines, usually campus-wide.

Designing:

Step 1. Generate a list of questions, such as: Who will use the facility? Will classes be held in it? Will it be a department lab or a campus center? And so on. Set these parameters, and then begin planning.

Step 2. Designing the computer space: In course documents, you will find an article by Tony O'seland on equipment planning to help you with this phase. In addition, there are two files attached that contain a grid and templates you can use for planning layout. One of these is in GIF format, and the other is in PDF.

Step 3. Overall room arrangements: What will be in the lab/center other than the computers? For instance, tables for tutoring? How will the room be decorated and furnished? Will there be storage areas? What about chairs? Where will tutoring occur? And so on.

Step 4. Services: Besides the primary mission of tutoring, what services will be offered?

- a. A tutor training program must be designed, and you will find ample resources for this task in our textbooks and course documents. What should this training include? Are there ESL and learning-disabled students to be considered?
- b. Orientations/Workshops: What kinds will be offered, if any? When will they be offered? Who will teach them? Plan for this. For example, audio-

- c. Online tutoring: How will this be accomplished? Draw up a plan.
- d. Other services planned? Community outreach service is another possibility, and you may think of others.
- e. Handouts? Will your facility provide paper goods for students? If so, what kind and how many?

Step 5. Operations Management and Budgeting: Who will be director? How many tutors will be needed? What other workers will be needed? Estimate costs for people, supplies, maintenance, replacement, and so on. Draw up a tentative annual budget. See course documents also for a sample real-life WC annual report and budget.

Step 6. Promotion: How will the lab/center be promoted to the academic community? Externally? Through community service?

Step 7. Due dates: See schedule. We will post drafts for review and comment; you can help one another on this one. The term project will be due on December 15. When you have completed all your designs and written your report, write a proposal letter to your instructor recommending that your plan be accepted. Attach all plans for lab/center. (If you have spent the $60,000, list a ballpark figure the institution would have to come up with to make the lab/center a reality.)

***

The project began with students answering these questions for the writing center of their choice. Then, they began work on the physical arrangements that would fit a 30x 30 room. At midterm, they posted their floor plans and a draft of the report on information written or gathered to date. This included designated equipment, hardware and software, furniture, etc., along with estimated costs to furnish the room. The floor plans proved to be a real challenge, not only in designing but also in posting the design on the web. Although we furnished them with a template of furniture shapes, many students used software such as Microsoft Paint or Smart Draw for the room layout.

Near the end of the semester, we read about tutor training programs and online tutoring approaches. As the students read, they gathered specifics that would fit into their selected theoretical approach to tutor training. They also continued to work on finalizing their reports. When we reached the unit on serving a diverse student population, however, one student realized she had not allowed for wheelchair access to one or more computers. Her post on the discussion board sent the rest of the class back to their floor plans to be certain that some of the stations would accommodate students with physical disabilities and that appropriate software was chosen for those with visual impairments.

Their model writing center reports and proposals for acceptance served to cap the course, and every one of them was good. I encouraged students to include the report in their interview portfolios. This finished project is concrete evidence that they can design a writing center from A to Z, and if they can design one, they are then better equipped to walk in and direct or manage one already in operation.

The course succeeded beyond my expectations, possibly because of the practical "real-life" assignment but also because it was online. I honestly believe that the level of collaboration that occurred in this class would not be

reached in the regular classroom. The online format allows students the time to read, reflect, and respond, which results in excellent discussion posts. This ongoing exchange of reflections and ideas has allowed them to learn not only from texts and instructor but also from each other.

The writing center administration course is one of four in a Writing Program Administration specialty within our Rhetoric/Composition track of the English Master's program. The other courses include Introduction to Writing Program Administration, which deals mainly with curriculum development, scheduling, and instructor training; Evaluation of Writing, which surveys the history of writing instruction and evaluation and includes writing across the curriculum design and evaluation; and Technology in English Studies, which deals with the various technological methods for instruction, including online classes. The design of each of these courses was based on the **Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) Portland Resolution** section that describes possible responsibilities and duties of writing program administrators. Beginning spring 2005, rhetoric and composition students completing the four courses will receive a Northeastern State University certification that they are trained for the administrative duties of a writing program administrator.

———————————————

Dr. Mary Stanley is an Assistant English Professor at Northeastern State University (NSU), Tahlequah, Oklahoma. In her position there, she teaches both undergraduate and graduate English classes, coordinates developmental English studies, and serves as director of the **University Writing Lab**. She holds a B. A., English, and a M. Ed., Curriculum and Instruction, from the University of Texas at Austin and a Ph. D., Humanities with English and linguistic foci, from the University of Texas at Arlington; thus, she describes herself as a misplaced Texan who somehow wandered too far north. Her current research agendas include writing program development and administration instruction at the graduate level and the development of a five-year assessment and retention program for NSU developmental studies students.

Praxis is a project of the **Undergraduate Writing Center** at the University of Texas at Austin

Editor login

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

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Communities Anonymous

Spring 2005 / Training

Interview conducted by members of the Praxis Editorial Board: Eileen Abrahams, Sue Mendelsohn, and Melissa Miller.

Shari Clevenger, Kendra Haggard, and Jeanne Urie--all students in Mary Stanley's writing center administration course at Northeastern State University--chat with Praxis about the pros and cons of online instruction.

This issue of *Praxis* explores how writing centers use technology. We had the good fortune of learning about Dr. Mary Stanley's graduate course in writing center administration at Northeastern State University (NSU). The course, which takes place entirely online, walks students through the process of designing a writing center from the ground up (see Stanley's article in this issue of *Praxis*). Three students from the course–Shari Clevenger, Kendra Haggard, and Jeanne Urie–sat down for an instant message (IM) chat with Praxis to give us a students' eye view of learning about writing centers online. While our chosen interview format reveals perhaps both the possibilities and limitations of technology, we do hope to have captured some of the interactive spirit this particular method of wired communication offers.

The Interview

Praxis:

Can you tell us a bit about yourselves?

Shari:

I am a graduate teaching assistant at NSU on the literature track. I am also senior writing center coordinator and teach a developmental English class. I am a non-traditional student; I started college at age 46, and I am able to study and work at what I consider my heart's desire. Even though I am on the literature track, I have been very interested in writing center administration and in tutoring students. I will be working in the NSU writing center, teaching two classes, and working on my thesis in the spring.

Kendra:

I am a developmental English instructor. I recently graduated from NSU with my MA. I decided to finish the Writing Program Administration Program, which has four components . I was a non-traditional student. I worked various jobs before returning to school. I was 25 when I started back, and I knew that I wanted to teach higher-ed. I became interested in the writing center when I did my capstone experience here.

Praxis:

Why did you choose to study writing center administration online? Did your being nontraditional students play a role in this decision?

Shari:

I think that it did for me in the beginning. It seemed as though more non-traditional students utilized the Writing Center because they had been out of school for so long. Then, after teaching Developmental English and working with Comp I students, I realized how vital a writing center was to the university. An online class works perfectly with my schedule and allows me to be more flexible.

Kendra:

As a new faculty member with five courses at various times of the day, the online Writing Center Administration course was very convenient for me. I knew I wanted to complete the certification, and it would have been impossible had the course not been offered online. As for being non-traditional, I do like online courses. When I was a student--grad and undergrad--I took online courses. I often had two jobs. I am also married, and online courses allowed me to spend more time with my husband.

Shari:

Also, I started out at a two-year college in Arizona, near the Navajo reservation. I think that the writing center concept would work well there, and want to learn all that I can.

Praxis:

Shari, had you ever taken an online course before? And did either of you have any initial trepidation about it?

Shari:

I have taken several online courses. Initially, I felt a little insecure about this course, as with every course that I take. The beauty of an online course though is that more students seem to respond and participate in discussions because there is a feeling of anonymity as well as community.

Kendra:

I was very comfortable with the aspect of an online course. I have taken a total of eight online courses. At first, I was not sure I would know how to do it because I am not computer savvy, but it was not a problem.

Praxis:

Could you talk a little bit about that simultaneous anonymity and community? What was that dynamic like?

Shari:

I know it probably sounds strange. The anonymity seems to allow students who might otherwise not join in discussions to start sharing ideas and opinions. I was a little shy because I felt so intimidated by what I perceived as everyone else's intelligence. After reading other's responses, I realized that they were all starting from the beginning. We all shared from our individual perspectives and understanding; therefore, we became a group or community of students that

related to one another in a more personal, responsive, and respectful manner.

Kendra:

Students in an online course are able to respond to each other and everyone has the opportunity to speak what is on his or her mind.

Shari:

It was easier to share ideas after the initial moments of fear and anxiety.

Praxis:

It sounds like the online environment helps to mitigate some of the common anxieties of graduate students.

Shari:

True. It also allows students to interpret other student's thoughts and ideas from a more relaxed perspective. If I read your post on a certain topic, I might understand it better. If I hear you say that same thing in a typical classroom setting, I might not be as receptive to your ideas.

Praxis:

How did the Writing Center Administration course differ from traditional classroom courses? Could you describe it a bit? How was it structured? Did you have a meeting time? What technology did you use (Bulletin boards? MOOs? Instant messaging? E-mail?)?

Shari:

We used BlackBoard for our WCA course. Dr. Stanley had a syllabus with the required texts, and then posted assignments for each week. She would then, on a weekly basis, post questions or issues that might arise in a writing center and, based on the reading material for that week, we were supposed to respond with our ideas.

Kendra:

The Writing Center Administration course was different from classroom courses because we were able to see everyone else's work. We commented on each other's assignments, so we all received feedback.

Praxis:

Do you want to say more about how the collaboration with your classmates was different in the online environment? If so, how? What did you gain? What did you lose?

Shari:

The gain from the online collaboration came from the participation of every member of the class. We made suggestions to one another about our designs for a writing center, about the budgets that we proposed to operate the writing centers, and the tutor training programs that we wanted to implement. We always seemed to get almost instant feedback. Although we weren't in a face-to-face environment, I don't feel that I lost anything.

Kendra:

I gain so much more from an online environment. I am often quiet in class, so in an online environment I am more talkative and more comfortable voicing my opinion. I do not think that I have lost anything from having this class in an online form. It has only been gain for me. I learn so much from my classmates, and it also prompts me to think more about the assigned readings. I have learned so much from this course about writing center design, budgeting, and all of the planning it entails.

Praxis:

How was getting to know your classmates and instructor different from how it is in traditional classrooms? Is the rapport you've developed different than it would be in the traditional classroom?

Shari:

Well, thankfully, I have taken many classes with Dr. Stanley and work with her on campus, so I know what she looks like; I have heard her voice and seen her facial expressions, so I get a 'feel' for what she expects. Maybe that is what might be missing from an online class. Reading a post from another student lacks inflections and other expressive hints that might help us understand each other better. I am still meeting students in person that are in my online class. It is a treat to see what they look like, and it is also good that I feel that I have known them for a long time, even though I have just 'officially' met them. I don't think that the rapport is very different.

[Jeanne Urie, another student in the online Writing Center Administration class, has joined the conversation.]

Jeanne:

I agree with Shari. I am pretty timid in person, but I feel much more comfortable online getting to know other people.

Praxis:

Hi Jeanne, feel free to join in where you like. Jeanne, could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

Jeanne:

Sure, I am a second-year graduate student. I previously taught high school English for seven years, and I now teach Composition I at a community college. I will graduate (hopefully) in May with my MA.

Praxis:

What was the hardest part about taking an online class?

Jeanne:

The hardest part for me was knowing that if I did the assignment wrong, everyone else could see it. However, I got over that early on when I realized how supportive everyone was.

Praxis:

Do you think that certain subjects are better suited for online learning than others? In your own professional futures, do you see yourselves doing online courses or online writing center work? Why?

Jeanne:

I can definitely see myself teaching an online writing course. Writing courses are so easily converted to online courses because of the nature of the courses. Obviously, skill-specific courses such as family consumer sciences and lab sciences would be difficult online, but with a little flexibility, most classes could work online.

Shari:

I am not sure if there is a class that I would not be able to teach online. I plan to teach online because I am hoping to get a job at a smaller college in Arizona that has several satellite campuses, and I know they offer many online courses. The writing center that I am designing for the Writing Center Administration course includes online tutoring since most of the students commute and would not be able to access the writing center otherwise.

Kendra:

I am not opposed to teaching online in the future or running a writing center; however, right now I am happy teaching developmental students in the classroom.

Praxis:

How do you think learning writing center administration online changed the nature of what you learned?

Kendra:

Writing Center Administration online helped me to spend more time with the readings because we were able to cover more material than we would have been able to cover if the course had been offered in the classroom. We read an average of two hundred pages of material per week, along with designing our writing center, budget, and tutor training program. We were able to discuss every bit of it, and we were able to read and respond to
every student in the course. Dr. Stanley was able to see what we were learning and comment on it.

Shari:

The Writing Center Administration online course was enhanced because we had exposure to so many different student perspectives and because we were working with the major tools in writing center administration (computers, software, word processing), and sort of honing our skills at the same time.

Jeanne:

Having the class online gave me the opportunity not only to learn from the lectures and readings, but also to learn and benefit from every other student's ideas and experiences. The class is all working toward one goal, which is an ideal writing center. I benefited from hearing what has worked and not worked for others. I was also able to see their projects in process. Traditional classes seem not to allow for that much sharing.

Praxis:

Jeanne, that's interesting, because the notion of process is so central to writing consultations.

Jeanne:

True, I suppose I have learned to value the process more than the product.

Praxis:

Kendra, Jeanne, and Shari, does that mean you spent more time working on this course than you would a typical in-class graduate seminar?

Kendra:

Yes, I would say that an online course takes just as much, if not more, time than an in-class course.

Jeanne:

I did or at least it seemed I did. I was able to use the three hours I would have normally been in class working on the projects, discussions, etc. I am not sure if I spent more time, but it was more quality time. In a normal classroom, it seems there is almost always dead time. That is not the case in this course.

Shari:

Not necessarily. In a graduate seminar you either attend class for an hour three times a week or for three hours once a week, and then there is homework, reading, writing essays, etc. So, I do not believe that it is necessary to spend more time with an online writing center administration course.

Praxis:

Okay, be honest, did you ever "go to class" in your pajamas?

Kendra:

Yes.

Shari:

Never.

Kendra:

Not in person, only online.

———————————————

Shari Clevenger is a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Northeastern State University, President of the Graduate Association, teaches Composition and Fundamentals of English classes, and works as senior coordinator of the **University Writing Center**. A non-traditional student, Shari hopes to move back to her home state of Arizona when she graduates to be closer to her five adorable grandchildren.

Kendra Haggard is a full-time faculty member at **Northeastern State University**. She is also the Developmental English Coordinator at NSU. Not only does Kendra teach Developmental English courses, she also teaches Fundamentals of Reading. Even though she graduated from NSU with her M.A. in May of 2004, she is still taking classes to further her education.

Jeanne Urie is a second-year graduate student at Northeastern State University.

She received her BA in Education in 1997 from Northeastern State University. She previously taught high school English for eight years, and currently teaches composition at **Tulsa Community College**. After completing her Masters, she plans to pursue a PhD in rhetoric and composition. Jeanne is married and has a three-year-old daughter.

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The English Tutor's FAQs

Spring 2005 / Training

by Kalie Chamberlain

Kalie Chamberlain asks and answers some of the tougher questions English tutors face in writing consultations.

Kalie Chamberlain

In response to a change in University status, the **English Department at Southern Utah University** in Cedar City, Utah, has recently instituted a supplemental workshop for students taking the required English 1010, Introduction to Academic Writing. Students whose English subscore on the ACT/SAT falls below a certain number are now required to take the Introduction to Academic Writing Workshop (ENGL 1000) concurrently. The class meets twice a week, taught by a certified Professional Discussion Leader who reviews grammar and other elements of writing that cannot be sufficiently covered by English 1010 professors. The class also provides small group tutoring sessions for students throughout the course of the semester. English majors and minors are trained as small group facilitators, conducting bi-weekly sessions with three to five students on the papers they have written for their English 1010 classes. All of these English students also work in the **SUU Writing Center**.

These English students have had in-depth, continuous tutoring experiences twice a week with specific students over a period of time. Most of the students they tutor struggle with English to some degree. Because of these experiences and extensive research, their discoveries have been expanded into a list of Tutors' Frequently Asked Questions, which provide their answers to some of the most fundamental issues in tutoring. Meant as a guide for new tutors entering the SUU Basic Writing and Writing Center programs, these FAQs will also be useful to other writing center communities and the tutors who both confront these issues and want to improve as writing consultants.

After almost three years of tutoring in the Writing Center and Basic Writing Programs, I am one of these students. My own conclusions have been strengthened by experiences with my students. For each of the following questions, I have one of my specific students in mind. And, as all students are

different, this exciting process is still continuing for me. I hope that the issues I've addressed below will remind tutors that either in groups or one-on-one, assisting writers can be a difficult but ultimately rewarding discovery process.

What do I do when the student I'm tutoring has a negative attitude toward English?

Realizing that some students will never love English can be tough for a tutor to accept-–we are English majors and minors, after all! Get students interested by drawing analogies with things that appeal to them. Use their writing to build them up and they will respond positively in most situations. And always remember that your enthusiasm is the most effective aspect of a session. Tutors shouldn't feel like they have failed if the student still hates English by the end of the session, because the job of a tutor is to help students gain the life-long communication skills they need to succeed.

How do I build trust while still remaining on the side of the teacher when questions or frustrations arise?

Let your students know that you are empathetic; you've been in their shoes. However, as a tutor, you have to be loyal to the teacher because it is the teacher who hands out the grade. Encourage students to visit their professors during office hours to clarify questions. Explain the reasons for English grammatical conventions or a professor's methods of grading. Since instruction cannot take place when students are frustrated, these issues must be addressed. I don't deal with their frustrations in a flippant way, but I don't coddle them either.

What do I do with a student who won't read out loud?

Always provide the student with the opportunity to read aloud every time you begin an appointment, if reading aloud is part of the process you use in your writing center consultations. If the student does not want to read, don't force her or him. Encouragement and continued opportunities over a period of time can lead to greater confidence in reading aloud. This works especially well when students gain trust with tutors or confidence in their writing. Also, some students are self-conscious about hearing their work read aloud in a public consultation, where other students may overhear. In other cases, the content of the paper might be something the student doesn't want to hear aloud. Be as accommodating as possible to a student's individual needs, shyness, or lack of confidence.

How do I handle negative or disruptive behavior?

If you don't feel comfortable dealing with a student, you don't have to continue. Many issues of harassment or embarrassment might arise when you continue in a potentially negative situation. It's important not to let anyone take advantage of you in a tutoring situation. Approach your Writing Center director or supervisor and let her or him handle the problem.

What do I do with tutees whose reading and writing problems seem to suggest that they may be dealing with cognitive challenges?

In my experience, some students' desire to read or write might have been hindered by teachers who have told the student they couldn't, or, in other words, weren't, capable. These students often use this as an excuse for poor

production and writing skills. On the other hand, some students truly do suffer from challenges in reading or writing. Don't back down or let the students use a disability as a crutch; encourage students by using appropriate praise and then work patiently with them on strengthening specific skills. Often, students who struggle will want to continue to work with you for a period of time, so you may have the reward of seeing some growth or progress over time. In cases of need, additional advice and services (and often separate tutoring services) are available at Student Support Centers located on university campuses.

How can I help beginning writers learn to shift focus from grammar and sentence structure to issues of content and organization?

This is a major concern of tutors, especially because many beginning writers see us as editors, not writing assistants. Spend some time at the beginning of the appointment explaining why grammar is important, but also emphasize that it is a lower-level concern when other structural issues are present. Use specific questions dealing with higher-order concerns to lead students away from wanting you to "bleed" (in red pen) all over their paper. Another preventative method involves removing the grammatical evidence and reading aloud to the student: when your students doesn't have a copy of their paper in front of them, they can't play the editor; they are forced to listen and make genuine responses as an audience. So, for this reason, sometimes not having drafts in front of the student you are tutoring can produce higher-level discussion.

How can I help the tutee develop a greater understanding of what it means to respond to the needs of an audience?

Reading aloud is the best technique here. After the paper has been read aloud, I try not to dive right in on their mistakes or even on their strengths. I let them direct the appointment by asking the student, "Well, what did you think? Where were you confused? Where was the flow very smooth?" When students read out loud and then actively talk about where their favorite parts are and where the more confusing parts are in the paper, they begin to discuss organization, structure, and the thesis without realizing it. Helping to pinpoint these communication issues will lead to productive discussion. By allowing the student to direct the session, the tutor can simply ask guiding questions and give responses when clarification is needed or when the student is really stumped.

How can I help students move from dependence on me (their tutor) and lack of confidence to independence and confidence?

The PIE principle[1] may sound like a cop-out answer, but it is actually a device that works magic! Tutors should remember that most of the students who use writing center services know that they need the help (or are sent there by professors who also know these students need the help). Tutors can make great strides in building confident writers. Once students have been praised in an area in which they initially feel weak, they are more likely to take confident steps forward. Keep a positive environment–don't let attitude or frustration get in the way, whether it is yours or the students'. I also find that many students get lost in grandiose explanations, so to avoid further confusion, I actually model the writing skill for my students, whether it is constructing a correct thesis or fixing a comma splice. Then I follow that up by having the student rehearse the skill with an issue or a sentence from their own paper. I find that this helps them practice the skill, and suddenly they've become more independent in that area. Of course, practice makes perfect, so always

encourage your students to return to the writing center. Remember, you want to convince them that writing is a long but very rewarding and productive process.

Notes

[1] PIE stands for Praise, Instruct, and Encourage. These three steps in motivating students during a tutoring session are based on principles developed by Ed J. Pinegar, an instructor of religion at Brigham Young University in Provo, UT.

———————————————

Kalie Chamberlain is a senior at Southern Utah University, completing her Bachelor of Arts degree in English Education. Kalie is the **Braithwaite Writing Center** Office Manager and a Master Tutor, innovating changes in Writing Center management and record keeping. She will be a panel presenter at the **2005 Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference** in March.

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Spring 2005 / The Merciless Grammarian

Spring 2005 / Training

The Merciless Grammarian spews his wrath on nasty problems of grammar, mechanics, and style.

Drawing by Nathan Baran

Most Merciless of Grammarians,

A coworker of mine and I are at loggerheads over a simple punctuation problem. In a recent company memo she wrote:

> Please arrive early, so we can begin on time.

I don't think the comma belongs there. What do you think?

Obediently,
Thuringia Spackle

Ah, my dear Miss Spackle:

Have I been reduced to settling petty office squabbles? I, who hold such great mastery of the language in my cruel grasp? Never mind, alas–such are the times.

How I delight to see so many different aspects of grammar and punctuation swirling around at once. You see, what you and your erstwhile coworker have stumbled upon is not merely "a simple punctuation problem" but a swirling linguistic vortex sucking you helplessly into its maw.

Like our language's other patient workhorses *it*, *that*, and *do*, the word *so* serves many different purposes. When it connects clauses, *so* can do so in two different ways. As a coordinating conjunction, *so* indicates a simple consequence:

> The fluids had congealed, so we started stuffing the casings.

Here the two word groups each carry their own weight; both are independent clauses.

Another use of *so*, however, makes one clause subordinate to the next:

> We kept the casings moist so they wouldn't desiccate.

I am being uncharacteristically informal here. If my language were wearing its customary spiked epaulets and codpiece, I would write "so *that* they wouldn't desiccate." Now the second clause is subordinate to the first, and the relationship between the two is one of purpose: Why did we keep the casings moist? So they wouldn't desiccate. (Try this little test with the first example and brace yourself for a semantic disjunction of the most debilitating sort. Don't say I didn't warn you.)

We normally place commas before coordinating conjunctions that join independent clauses. Your coworker is obviously of the benighted impression that she is dealing with such an instance. So very, very wrong, Thuringia. Little *so* is a subordinator in your pedestrian memo sentence. Comma, begone!

To avoid this sort of strife in the future, I suggest using *so that* so that (there it is) similarly misguided souls will not chide you for leaving out the comma.

Yours in splendor,
The Merciless One

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