

# WJCI

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

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## Letter from the Guest Editor

Ellen C. Carillo



As guest editor of *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, I couldn't be more excited to introduce this special issue on reading, the first of its kind in a writing center studies journal. Although writing center professionals have undoubtedly found themselves working on reading with students during tutorials, writing center studies has not yet offered many resources for supporting this work. This special issue begins to fill this gap. Hopefully this issue will inspire other writing center publications to address reading—writing's counterpart in the construction of meaning—so that writing center professionals can provide more comprehensive literacy support to students and writing center studies can contribute to conversations about the importance of attending to reading alongside writing.

The pieces published in this special issue all focus on theoretically-informed practical ways of addressing reading in the writing center context. Alice Horning's article explores three strategies that can be used during writing center tutorials to help students critically read source material in order to develop fuller understandings and more careful syntheses of sources in their research-driven writing. Offering a director's perspective as well as a tutor's perspective, Amanda Greenwell's article and Amanda Fontaine-Iskra's column both explore how rhetorical reading guides are used in their writing center at a small liberal arts college. Finally, my own piece encourages writing center tutors to help students develop the habit of reading for purpose, one of the key aspects of reading that separates experienced readers from less experienced readers.

As you read this issue, I invite you to think about how reading is currently addressed in your own centers, how the ideas and strategies shared in these pieces might enhance that work, and what you might contribute to the conversation about the role of reading in writing centers and writing center studies.

# Reading: Securing Its Place in the Writing Center

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A quick look at the findings of Rebecca Moore Howard and Sandra Jamieson’s *The Citation Project*, a national study of a sample of 174 students’ actual citations in research writing done at sixteen different institutions, makes clear that students are reading less and less as they do “research” for college-level papers in writing courses and a variety of other subject areas. Similarly, concerns about a national epidemic of plagiarism suggests that if and when students do read source materials, they do not understand them well enough to use them effectively and ethically in their own work. These two trends, among others, point directly to the need for a concept aptly captured in Ellen Carillo’s recent book title, *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition*. But beyond the composition classes Carillo mentions, every discipline also needs to make a place for reading. And because writing centers serve every discipline, the need for a stronger focus on reading lives in our writing centers too, as G. Travis Adams pointed out in a recent special issue of *Pedagogy* that was devoted to reading. Specifically, writing center clients need our help with the reading they do to support their writing development. The national statistics from major studies, both quantitative and qualitative, make clear the need for such writing center assistance (see next section). Three strategies discussed here—the use of graphic organizers, an evaluation heuristic, and a summary strategy—are specific approaches writing center consultants can use with clients to improve their writing by helping them more effectively read their research sources. These approaches, though not exhaustive of reading strategies consultants can put to good use, can equip students with reading tools for use in every course and with many writing tasks.

## EVIDENCE OF STUDENTS’ READING PROBLEMS

Sometimes, people think that the “students can’t read these days” trope is over-used and inaccurate. After all, the widespread use

of smart phones, tablets, and social media suggests that young people are doing more reading and writing than ever. However, quantity and quality are not always related when considering the reading and writing abilities and practices of college students. The reading that students are asked to do in college and their careers generally involves more than the 140 characters allowed in a tweet. A number of recent studies, both quantitative and qualitative, point to students' substantial problems with college reading, so the kind of reading ability students in college need warrants careful appraisal.

On the quantitative side, large scale studies examine students' reading abilities in different ways. Perhaps the largest of these studies is ACT's annual summary of the results on the Reading portion of its test, which is used at many institutions for admission and placement. According to the 2015 report, 46% of the 1.9 million students who took the test that year scored at or above 22 on the Reading section. ACT argues that such a score in Reading is needed to be "successful" in college, which ACT defines as a student returning for a second year of study with at least a 2.0 GPA. It's worth noting that the 46% represents a decline from the 51% of ACT takers who scored at or below the cutoff score in 2006, when ACT did a major study of students' reading performance. Other large-scale quantitative studies on student reading have produced similar findings (cf. National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], Project SAILS, and the Citation Project). Writing center staff may consider the 2015 ACT results in this way: it's possible that half the students coming for help lack the reading skills to do effective and ethical research and to write about their findings appropriately.

It's easy to criticize these large-scale studies for many reasons: they use short passages to assess students' reading abilities through multiple choice questions, are usually time-limited, and do not measure students' abilities to read and analyze an extended argument such as might appear in a scholarly article or a book. These assessments also do not look closely at what students are able to do. For that, qualitative studies are useful, but they produce essentially the same findings. Daniel Keller's *Chasing Literacy*, which looks at digital reading; David Jolliffe and Allison Harl's close look at all reading by twenty undergraduates; Charles Bazerman, Kelly Simon, and Patrick Pieng's work with graduate students; and Michael Bunn's classroom-based study of students' reading all offer detailed examinations of small groups of students working with reading and writing assignments. The message writ-

ing center staff can find in this research? Consultants should understand that students may have reading problems at the root of their writing problems. In helping students with their writing, particularly when sources are involved, consultants can be more effective if they know how to pay more explicit attention to the reading demands of all assignments. All the studies mentioned here and discussed elsewhere in this issue show that consultants need to know much more about effective reading and how to use this knowledge in their writing assistance work with students.

To increase writing center staff understanding of reading, writing center administrators have a number of options. One possibility is to turn to reading specialists who may be faculty in a school or department of education or psychology. Faculty members with expertise in reading who are willing to provide a training session for writing center consultants could explain the basic psycholinguistics of reading and may be able to facilitate a discussion of the role reading may have in tutoring writing students. If faculty members are not available to provide this kind of help, consultants may want to read at least two helpful books: Ken Goodman's *On Reading*, published in 1996, continues to provide a basic overview of the psycholinguistics of reading. Also, Stephen Kucer's *Dimensions of Literacy*, now in its 4th edition, although explicitly addressed to teachers, presents the essential features of reading and makes relevant reading/writing connections. Additionally, several journals in our field have published special issues on reading in the last few years, including *Reader* (vol. 65-66, 2013-2014), *ATD: Across the Disciplines* (vol. 10, 2013), and *Pedagogy* (vol. 16, January 2016), all of which might prove useful.<sup>1</sup> And, of course, if funding allows, bringing in an expert to talk and work with consultants on reading strategies that can be used in writing center sessions would be valuable. I have held such sessions at my own university's writing center, and the consultants reported they found the insights they gained immediately useful. Consultants who take a course on peer tutoring as a prerequisite to working in a writing center might also have the opportunity to learn about reading in such a course; the techniques discussed below could be offered in such a course or as part of on-going training or staff development.

### **MONDAY MORNING: USEFUL APPROACHES**

With an eye on a typical writing center session of 45 minutes or so, I offer three specific strategies that consultants can use with clients engaged in research writing to help the clients learn to think critically about their source material: graphic organizers,

an evaluation heuristic for any kind of source material, and a 25-word summary. When clients bring in research tasks, consultants may help them learn to apply these strategies in one session or in a series of sessions.

### **1) GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS**

This strategy asks clients to use a graphic to help them grapple with and understand a text's arguments. If the text a client is reading offers a comparison/contrast argument, for instance, the consultant and client can draw a line down the center of a sheet of paper and then list the different arguments offered in the text. They may also use a similar graphic to articulate and list the client's agreements or disagreements with the views expressed in the text. Another graphic, a flow chart, might work for a text that explores a process, while a timeline, yet another graphic, might be useful with historical material. Creating a visual, whether on paper or on a screen, can help clients recognize the structure of discussions in a text and may lead them to a better understanding of it. This strategy can be especially useful with English Language Learners, who may not be familiar with typical Western rhetorical arguments. William Grabe's research with second language readers, for example, shows how these students and many others can benefit from using graphic organizers.

### **2) AN EVALUATION HEURISTIC**

A recent study by the Stanford Education Group shows that many students have limited ability to evaluate materials they find as they search for sources. Using a heuristic—a structured insight-building strategy—to help writing center clients learn how to judge the quality of sources can be an extremely helpful approach to improving reading and writing. Shawn Lombardo, an Associate Dean of University Libraries at my institution, Oakland University, designed what I often say is one of the best handouts ever created for a text evaluation approach often mentioned in first-year writing texts. Although this particular heuristic is intended to help students evaluate websites, I find the questions associated with its six topics can effectively be applied to any kind of source material.

1. *Authority*: Who is the author/developer of the website? What qualifications does s/he have for creating this site/page? What organization/company/person hosts the page (i.e., where is it located)? (If you're unsure, try shortening the page's URL to determine the organization or company that's hosting the site.)

2. *Currency*: Is the page or site current? Maintained regularly? When was it last updated?
3. *Relevancy*: Is the information relevant to your topic?
4. *Accuracy*: What facts can you check to ensure that the information contained on this website is correct?
5. *Objectivity/Bias*: Is the information presented objectively? What kind of bias do you think the author(s) of this page may have?
6. *Appropriateness*: In your opinion, is this site a good source of information? Is it a scholarly source? Would you use it in a paper? Why or why not?

While consultants can hardly sit with clients to co-read a whole article or book, the heuristic (especially when altered to match the genre of a source) can guide clients and consultants to think about whether to include a particular source in the research for a written project and how to make such choices. A consultant might review a source or several sources with clients through the lens of such a heuristic, or the consultant may help clients determine additional work needed to evaluate the sources effectively after the writing center session.

With this heuristic, Topic 5 questions about bias and objectivity give students the most difficulty, so consultants need to be prepared to help clients understand bias and objectivity and ways to read critically to recognize both. Still, such a heuristic can provide writing center clients and consultants with an open-ended strategy for thinking about and discussing sources. Furthermore, once clients internalize the heuristic, they can continue to use it to make effective decisions about their sources, which will improve their reading significantly and should, in turn, improve their writing.

### **3) A 25-WORD SUMMARY**

This approach, outlined by Bazerman in a newly available version of *The Informed Writer*, requires that readers try to grasp and share the essence of a text by capturing it in only 25 words (cf. Chapter 3). Boiling down the content of a text's main ideas and details to a 25-word summary often proves difficult when students begin to try it out. However, this strategy encourages repeated readings and careful analysis of a text and ultimately can be a highly effective tool to improve students' reading of assigned material as well as their reading of materials for their own writing projects. In my classes, students often see the 25-word limit as

a challenge and will debate among themselves about whether a peer's summary captures the source's ideas accurately, which is exactly what effective reading should enable students to do.

Trained writing center consultants can help clients learn about writing from sources by supporting the reading (or rereading) of the material at hand to prepare for the summary and may want to excuse themselves or give clients some space as the clients work on an outline for the summary or draft and revise the summaries. If accompanied by insights about the source's rhetorical strategies, the summarizing strategy can lead, eventually, to appropriate synthesis of multiple sources and ethical (e.g., non-plagiarized) use of them in our clients' work. This strategy cannot be used easily when clients want help with a paper due in a day or a few hours, but it can be used effectively when students seek writing center help during the early stages of a research assignment.

Careful reading with the above strategies—making use of graphics, evaluation heuristics, and summaries—can lead clients to a fuller understanding of their material. Patchwriting, poor paraphrase, and inaccurate summary are less likely to occur, reducing plagiarism as well.

## **SECURING A PLACE FOR READING**

The writing center is an important resource at nearly every campus for helping students develop the critical literacy skills they will need to function effectively in their academic, personal, and professional lives. We know that effective academic writing entails the ability to read efficiently so that students can read source materials, news articles, web postings, and all kinds of other material critically. And there is plenty of quantitative and qualitative evidence that many of the students currently on our campuses don't have the skills to read in the ways they need for success during college and beyond graduation. Writing center consultants can play a key role in helping students develop their reading abilities, as demonstrated by the discussion of how graphic organizers, the evaluation heuristic, and the 25-word summary strategies can be incorporated rather easily into the writing center setting and consultation. Through such strategies, the writing center can help secure a place for reading in all college writing work and can help students develop their reading as well as their writing abilities.

### **NOTE**

1. Full disclosure: I was the guest editor for the ATD issue, and have an article in *Reader*.

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# Rhetorical Reading Guides, Readerly Experiences, and WID in the Writing Center

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Writing centers assist students who are in Writing in the Disciplines (WID) programs and classes in several ways. Regular writing center conference participants and avid readers of writing center scholarship and the WCenter listserv are familiar with strategies such as embedding tutors in content area classes (through Writing Associate or Fellow models), relying on tutors who bring or develop disciplinary expertise, and training tutors in genre theory and rhetoric. Some center staff also collect and annotate model papers of various genres (lab reports, memos, psychology papers, etc.) or make available what staff affectionately term “cheat sheets,” checklist-style references for writing in various genres and disciplines. But these materials, and many of the strategies listed above, rarely afford rich opportunities for writing center tutors and clients to focus their attention on the role of readership in the production of discipline-specific writing.

In their study of academic writers across disciplines, Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki report that “reading was frequently noted by students as an important factor in their development as writers in a discipline...[as it] helped them understand not only the subject matter of the discipline but also the ways in which it can be/should be presented” (128). This notion underpins a project we have launched in our writing center at the University of Saint Joseph: creating Rhetorical Reading Guides (RRGs) that can function as stand-alone resources, tutor training activities, and tutorial and workshop materials. In the margins of model papers from various disciplines, tutors are documenting rhetorical readings with an emphasis on readership—marking and explicating textual features that contribute to, and, in many cases, orchestrate a reader’s experience of its content. By engaging model texts as readers, tutors are both situating reading as a critical, generative act and foregrounding the significance of the awareness of audience—of one’s potential reader—in

text production. Because RRGs showcase explicit attention to a text's relationship with its implied reader, RRGs can strengthen the writing center as a site for fostering rhetorically aware readerly practices that promote dexterous genre-, discipline- and audience-aware tutoring and writing.

### **READERSHIP AS PARADIGM**

Ellen Carillo has argued for the rhetorical analysis of discipline-specific model texts in the composition classroom, where she “asks students to comment on the relationship between language, style, and meaning, which is relevant in all disciplines, particularly for students who are both learning to recognize and imitate how writers in [a] discipline write” (40). Likewise, Catherine Savini advocates for this practice in writing centers as a way to “avoid the pitfalls that accompany generalist or discipline-specific approaches” (5) to tutoring writing in the disciplines: “Working together to identify essential rhetorical moves...in a variety of genres,” Savini argues, does not require disciplinary content expertise (5), but does provide an avenue by which to “access...new disciplines” (3). Our RRGs also focus on writerly moves within discipline-specific model texts, but they make a crucial intervention by doing so via the lens of readership.

Our method of inquiry is less “what are the salient rhetorical features of this text”—a query often used to construct a student's first encounter with a particular genre or form of disciplinary writing—and more “how do the features of this text engineer the reader's experience of its content?” Mike Bunn's description of “reading like a writer” alludes to the significance of this approach: “when you read like a writer, you are trying to figure out how the text you are reading was constructed so that you learn how to ‘build’ one for yourself...[you] think about whether you want to make some of those same choices in your own writing, *and what the consequences might be for your readers if you do*” (74; emphasis added). Our paradigm, which focuses on these consequences, foregrounds a text's global and local rhetorical features as discursive prompts for its implied audience—that is, the implied or intended reader of a piece as constructed by its disciplinary and generic categories.

### **CONSTRUCTING RRGs**

Highlighting the way a text orchestrates a reader's experience of its content involves making a conscious effort to couch description of a text in the language of readerly moves. Rather than focusing exclusively on what a writer has done or should do (“clear

statement of topic and purpose” or “identify topic and explain scope early in the paper”), RRGs provide marginal commentary that focuses on what a text does for its intended audience: “this section helps us, as readers, understand the topic and scope of the piece, and so as we continue to read we expect to see x and y as they relate to z.”

Consider a comment RRG creator Amanda Fontaine-Iskra writes in the margin of a literature review for a psychology class. Next to a description of virtual reality exposure therapy in the second paragraph of the paper’s introduction, Fontaine-Iskra notes,

Here, the author is introducing a new type of therapy that has also been used in the treatment of agoraphobia. Given that virtual reality exposure therapy is discussed in the introduction of the essay, we, as readers, can expect that the author is not only drawing our attention to the fact that another therapy—beside cognitive-behavioral therapy [mentioned above]—has been used in the treatment of agoraphobia, but also suggesting that information regarding virtual reality exposure will continue to be expressed throughout the essay.

By focusing on the readerly moves the text prompts, Fontaine-Iskra’s comment highlights the way that the order of content manages a reader’s expectations—and also that effective rhetorical readers adjust expectations in response to signals encoded in the text.

RRG creator Tracie Romanik pays similar attention to an active reader’s experience of a text in her commentary on a history paper’s thesis statement: “We, as readers, use the author’s thesis to better understand where the paper is going. We use a thesis kind of like a road map. In this case, we [now expect to] read how the author specifically applies Jacobs’ idea of how sidewalks and bars created a safer city to 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century New York and 17<sup>th</sup> century New Orleans.” Casting the thesis statement as a signal to the reader rather than a mandate for the writer affirms its rhetorical purpose and foregrounds audience consideration in matters of focus, purpose, and organization.

In RRGs, we assume shared scholarly and composition values on the part of a piece’s implied audience—values related to genre, form, types of evidence, scope of analysis, and even syntactical constructions. On a paper in the discipline of pharmacy that analyzes research studies in order to suggest a pharmacological intervention, RRG creator Emily Wanczyk makes this note on a section describing a study’s methods and participants: “Including

information on study methodology lets us, as readers, better understand how these results were obtained. Study methods will impact overall meaning of results, and this way we can decide for ourselves if we agree or disagree with the study authors' or the paper author's interpretations." By linking authorial choice to critical readership, this comment makes overt the ways that a text's content serves a rhetorical purpose for its discipline-specific implied reader.

Phrase-level choices that impact discipline-specific readers can carry significant weight in an RRG. For instance, when the model history paper describes briefly the credentials of one of its sources, a feature marked by many historians as significant to discipline-savvy readers (Shanahan 77-79), Romanik notes, "the author is presenting Cohen in this particular way to help us understand that Cohen is a credible historian and author. [Presenting Cohen's focus and his approach] helps us know that the author of the paper is using valid support for her argument." In addition, Romanik highlights the way that hedging language can indicate to a reader that an author is using the tools of historical thinking to examine an historical event: "When we read the word 'could' we [can] understand that the author is using it to demonstrate that she does not have absolute knowledge. She can only make logical assumptions based on the evidence she has gathered." Such a comment indicates to novice writers in the discipline that discerning diction can convey the extent of analysis or argument—in essence, can distinguish between the reporting of evidence and the using of evidence to construct an interpretation.

RRGs can also elucidate the purpose of formal features of a text, making sense of genre- or discipline-specific structural elements that are often understood by uninitiated writers as merely prescribed—or even arbitrary—rules. For example, next to a bolded subheading (a common social science writing feature) in the psychology literature review, Fontaine-Iskra comments, "In this paragraph, the author is introducing the first conflict that will be addressed in this essay: duration of treatment. Including a distinct header and explaining which of the five articles held strong against this conflict allows the reader to get a better understanding of how this paper will be set up and what the following paragraphs will entail: the article assessment." In this explanation, section headings and subheadings take on a dynamic, narrative role rather than a static, formulaic one. Even citations can take on a more overt rhetorical purpose when cast as signals to readers. Wanczyk comments beside a parenthetical citation on the Pharmacy paper,

[The author] is the one who has compiled this research, and is putting it together in a unique way so that we, as readers, can understand the topic without having to read all the articles that the author read. As readers, we are able to tell that the information in a sentence preceding a citation comes from that source. If we want to learn more about it, then we can go directly to that source.

Citations often exist in the minds of novice writers as completely author-centered, perhaps because students have learned to understand them as ways to “give credit where credit is due” and, of course, to avoid plagiarizing. Here, however, the RRG clarifies how citations are also reader-oriented devices that signal author ethos and manage readerly awareness of sources.

By couching the effectiveness of writerly moves in the language of readerly moves, RRGs cast audience as neither a fully abstract concept nor a distant or idiosyncratic evaluator, but rather as a real discourse partner with whom the author communicates and for whom she makes considerations throughout the entirety of the written work. RRGs also model the ways attentive readership—that is, recognizing oneself as a discourse partner when reading—allows for the recognition (and integration into one’s own writing) of effective writerly moves.

### **APPLICATIONS TO WRITING CENTER PRAXIS**

RRGs can emphasize the roles of reader and reading in the writing center via several avenues, including digital resources, tutor training, live tutorials, and workshops during class visits.

***Stand-Alone Digital Resources:*** As digital resources made available by the writing center, RRGs in various genres and disciplines can exist alongside the instructional “cheat sheet” handouts mentioned in this article’s introduction. Offering rich explanations of readerly reactions to writerly moves, they invite writers to take a step back from their composing processes and situate themselves as readers experiencing the elements of a particular genre in action before returning to drafting or revision. Because the language of RRGs foregrounds readership, they invite students to read the model paper as well as their own potential work attentively, and to compose at the global and local levels with a general or discipline-specific audience in mind. RRGs can also be created in collaboration with a professor for a specific course delivered in any modality, wherein tutor and instructor collaborate to deliver precise, effective resources to students honing discipline-specific readerly and writerly considerations.

**Tutor Training:** A key finding for us has been that the creation of RRGs can be a significant training and professional development exercise for tutors. Although we had engaged in fairly in-depth conversation about the paradigm of the guides before tutors began creating them, many tutors struggled during their initial attempts. We recognized that two forces were at play. First, while many tutors did, indeed, learn to write in their home disciplines by reading in their fields, they also attributed much of their learning to directive, author-focused comments from their professors. Romanik notes in a reflection that shifting her phrasing in the marginal commentary of her RRG meant moving from proscriptive directions that rarely explain “the purpose behind each of the author’s choices” to descriptive comments that emphasize the results of an author’s choices for her reader (see more on this and its implications for “making audience visible” in Fontaine-Iskra’s column in this same issue). In other words, the creation of the RRG prompted Romanik to discuss discipline-specific writing in a non-directive way.

Second, while tutors had been trained to consider and discuss the intersections among audience, genre, and discipline with their students, their working understanding of the role of audience in this relationship seemed to operate on a global level with only fleeting or intuitive (and therefore inaccessible) considerations at the local level. Thus, while tutors had a conceptual understanding of readerly dynamics and often considered their readers during their own composing processes, they had less practice articulating the impact that discrete elements of a text have on a reader. As I mentored them through that articulation process, the RRGs became much more strongly focused on readerly moves. If, as Linda Flowers argues, “effective writers do not simply express thought but transform it in certain complex but describable ways for the needs of a reader” (19), then creating RRGs can give tutors facility with the language that does this describing, especially in relation to readerly responses to writerly moves within and across disciplines.

**Live Tutorials:** Tutors can cultivate this facility and the possibilities it creates during tutorials. Tutors might work through a model text with a student, prompting him to notice the interplay of textual and readerly dynamics in that composition before turning to consider his own in the same light. To scaffold that process tutors might consider a RRG as a meta-model, the comments in the margins becoming a secondary model text to prompt closer examination of the first. More advanced or discipline-specific writers might

benefit from examining documents from several genres or disciplines, the contrast generating a more precise, nuanced understanding of discursive differences employed to engage and direct readers. Thaiss and Zawacki explain that “when students are given more time to talk or write about writing expectations and the assignments that embody them in their majors, they achieve significantly greater specificity and insight” (102). Since “talk” is a key component of a writing center tutorial, writing centers are well positioned to foster such specificity and insight.

### **WORKSHOPS AND CLASS VISITS**

Each of these tutorial and training activities might occur during workshops and class visits, where reading rhetorically for a text’s engineering of its reader’s experience becomes the session’s conceptual basis and achieves similar outcomes to those discussed above. Engaging this practice in a group setting may be particularly important for naturalizing its use as a tool for reading and writing within the disciplines. James E. Warren notes that in more specialized genres in particular disciplines, students may “fail to consider how the text is geared toward a specific audience because they assume the meaning is explicit and available to any competent reader” (396), and therefore “believe academic texts are ‘over their heads,’ the exclusive domain of ‘smart’ people” rather than “thinking of academic discourse as something that can be learned” (397). If, as Warren argues, becoming well-versed in reading rhetorically in the disciplines is a gateway to deeper disciplinary literacy, then by modeling and focusing on readerly moves, we invite students into academic discourse by casting them as authentic audience members and discourse partners.

### **TOWARDS READER-WRITER IDENTITIES**

Such an invitation can have profound effects on identity. As Elizabeth Moje argues, “The practices involved in reading and writing in a given culture imbue the skilled individual with membership in the discourse community that perpetuates that culture. The practices are markers of one’s membership and identity and thus carry with them power and emotional investment” (257). Highlighting the way a text works on a readerly level widens our students’ access to academic and disciplinary literacy and positions them as reader-writers. By foregrounding attentive reading and awareness of attentive readership as avenues to effective writing, RRGs are both models and tools for helping students develop discursive identities primed for flexible, dexterous participation in various rhetorical situations, both in and outside of academia.



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# Reading With Purpose in the Writing Center

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Because most college writing assignments are accompanied by or draw on some type of reading, writing center tutors often find themselves supporting students' reading. In fact, despite the lack of scholarship and research on the role of reading in writing centers, G. Travis Adams has compellingly argued that writing centers are already reading-centered for this very reason. Similarly, W. Gary Griswold describes writing center tutors as working "on the 'front lines' with students who are struggling with college-level *reading* and writing" (60; emphasis added). Since tutors are being asked to engage in this work, why not give them tools to support a more comprehensive approach to literacy tutoring? With this goal in mind, I have developed preliminary recommendations for incorporating attention to reading in writing center sessions. I base these recommendations on composition, education, and psychology scholarship that suggests one of students' biggest obstacles to reading more deeply—and, therefore, writing better—is that they don't read with purpose (Horning, "Where;" Nilson; Jamieson; Perry). As background for these recommendations, I address the impetus for focusing on students' reading abilities.

## STUDENTS' READING ABILITIES

Recent studies have indicated that many current college students' reading abilities are rather weak. The SAT Verbal/Critical Reading Portion, for example, has shown a steep decline over the last several decades in students' reading abilities. Despite criticisms of the test, its long history allows for comparisons over time, comparisons that reveal that "in 2015, the average score on the SAT verbal test was near historic lows" ("Performance," par. 2).

Data from studies conducted by composition researchers corroborate these quantitative findings. For example, The Citation Project, a multi-institutional, empirical research project that

studies students' source use in their research-based writing, found that students wrote from sentences not from sources, relying on paraphrasing, copying, and what Rebecca Moore Howard calls patchwriting. "The absence of summary," Howard et al., write, "coupled with the exclusive engagement of text on the sentence level, means that readers have no assurance that the students did read and understand" (186). In Sandra Jamieson and Howard's follow-up study of students' writing from sixteen U. S. colleges and universities, only 6% of students' citations were to summary. In addition to suggesting that students may not have understood the sources, their "sear[ch] for 'good sentences'" (Howard et al. 189) also suggests that students did not know why they were reading except to retrieve quotes to include in their writing.

Similarly, the first-year writing students at the University of Arkansas in David Jolliffe and Allison Harl's study of students' transition from high school to college were unsure of why they were expected to read in a writing class. Jolliffe and Harl concluded that while students were passionate about reading in their personal lives and read quite a lot, they did not complete reading assigned for their writing class largely because their instructors did not make clear what the reading had to do with their writing, the course's subject.

To motivate students to complete assigned readings, researchers (Jolliffe and Harl; Jamieson; Horning, "Where;" Bunn; Carillo) encourage writing faculty members across the disciplines to overtly connect the practices of reading and writing in their classrooms. Writing center tutors can support this work in many ways. Studies have shown, for example, that writing center tutors can "enhance students' motivation to learn by generating rapport and solidarity with them" (Mackiewicz and Thompson 39), a strategy that can also be employed when students lack the motivation to read. Tutors are also positioned well to explore with students why they may be disengaged from assigned readings and, therefore, not completing them. By asking strategic questions, tutors might discover that students find the readings too difficult or object to the subject discussed and/or to the author's stance. This information can be crucial to facilitating a session that addresses these obstacles in order to overcome them. While helping students overcome these challenges, tutors can also give students tools they need to articulate and remain cognizant of the purposes of their reading. In fact, reading for purpose is something that expert readers do quite naturally, but that less experienced readers rarely do. Tutors can help students

develop the habit of reading for purpose in the ways outlined in the remainder of this article.

## READING WITH PURPOSE

Reading with purpose is a way of reading that emphasizes why one is reading. This approach allows the reader to read in thoughtful and deliberate ways to positively impact the related writing assignment. For example, some students who come to the writing center will need to read to write a summary of a reading; others will need to read to imitate an author's style; others still will need to read to synthesize several texts. This emphasis on purpose, described in more detail just below, responds to Jolliffe and Harl's as well as to Mike Bunn's findings that students are more motivated to read if that reading is overtly connected to a course's writing assignments. Tutors can motivate students to read and help them develop into better readers by focusing on why they are reading and—by extension—what they will do with that reading.

Linda Nilson's comparison between novice and expert readers lends some additional clarification. She points out that unlike "expert readers," students often don't read with a purpose. As experts read, they are "looking for something that's useful and important to [their] work. Students often tackle assigned readings with no purpose at all" (par. 6). Even if a student has, in fact, already completed the reading component of an assignment, her way of reading may not have been appropriate or sufficient to complete the related writing task. For example, students who have had success reading for content to write a summary are not likely to experience the same success if they are required to imitate a text's style, but read the original text only for content. Thus, the first step tutors can take to help students read with purpose is to:

1. *Ask students what the reading has to do with the written component of the assignment. Why are students being asked to read? What are they going to do with it?*

These related questions ask students to articulate connections between their reading and writing, and to begin to consider the best way to approach the assigned reading in terms of the writing assignment. Tutors can help students develop a repertoire of ways of reading that are connected to common writing assignments. For example, if completing assignments that ask for summary or memorization, students should be reading for content. Students should be reading for an author's techniques if they are expected to imitate it or describe the author's style. Students completing

synthesis assignments should be reading for connections among texts, and to complete personal response assignments students should be reading for personal connections. Tutors can help get students in the habit of asking themselves why they are reading and how the reading is related to the writing assignment. From there, students can choose the most productive way of reading based on the repertoire of ways of reading they have developed with support from tutors. The goal for tutors, then, is to help students recognize what these common assignments are asking for and which kinds of reading will help students complete the writing portion.

Tutors can also help students recognize the elements of a text that can provide insight into how to read. One way of doing this is by focusing on genre. According to Dana Driscoll's research, misunderstanding genre is fairly common, particularly among first-year writing students. She describes such lack of genre awareness as detrimental because of the "different assumptions that literary analysis and a rhetorical view of writing contain" ("Connected" par. 81). Whereas the tools of literary analysis are specific to interpreting and analyzing works of fiction, rhetoric is applicable across fields (Driscoll, "Connected" par. 81). Students who read a critical essay as though it is a story will, in effect, be applying an incongruous method of analysis since the tools of literary analysis are discipline-specific. Students will inevitably run into problems as they write about the piece since their reading practices ignored the text's genre. Thus, a second step tutors can take to help students read with purpose is to:

2. *Draw students' attention to genre as a guide for how to read.*

Tutors can intervene by drawing attention to the differences between reading literary and other texts. As David Jolliffe reminds us, students need help becoming "constructive, connective, active readers of *all the material* that comes their way—textbooks, reports, memoranda, and so on, as well as complicated, discursive essays" (Jolliffe 579, emphasis added). By helping students name the genre of the text, tutors can draw attention to how the type of text plays a role in how that text is read. Amy Devitt agrees that it is crucial for students to develop what she calls a "genre repertoire" throughout their experiences as readers and writers because it "serves as a resource for the writer when encountering an unfamiliar genre" (220). The same is true with reading—focusing on genre can provide important clues about how to read a text, clues that become part of that student's repertoire of reading knowledge.

Even the most basic introduction to genre theory can offer tutors the foundation they need to undertake this work. For example, Daniel Chandler describes genre as follows:

Genres are not simply features of texts, but are mediating frameworks between texts, makers and interpreters. . . . Recognition of a text as belonging to a particular genre can help, for instance, to enable judgements to be made about... whether it is fictional or non-fictional. Assigning a text to a genre sets up initial expectations...[and] enables readers to generate feasible predictions about events in a narrative. Drawing on their knowledge of other texts within the same genre helps readers to sort salient from nonsalient narrative information in an individual text.

Tutors can illustrate the role of genre by using the example of the fairy-tale. A text that begins with “Once upon a time” lets readers know that it is likely a fairy-tale. From there, all of the prior knowledge of and experiences readers have with fairy tales kick in, and the readers will expect to see fairy tale elements: the prince and princess; the castle; perhaps a dragon or some other ominous creature; and a happily-ever-after ending. Tutors can use this example and others like it to help students become aware of how they can use genre more consciously to help determine how to read the texts they encounter.

Tutors might begin tutorials by talking to students about two major genres, namely literary genres and informational genres. Because of the Common Core State Standards’ emphasis on “informational texts,” many students will already be comfortable with this terminology. From there, tutors may discuss the range of genres that fall within each of these larger genres. Poetry, fiction, drama, and literary nonfiction, for example, fall under literary genres while expository and persuasive prose, for example, fall under informational genres. Tutors can help students recognize defining features of these genres, as well as how these features provide insight into effective ways of reading these texts. Even if a tutor goes no further than separating out the two major genres, this alone can provide a useful heuristic for supporting students’ reading practices. After all, a student who reads a literary text for symbolism is not likely to have the same success if she reads an informational text that way. By providing this heuristic and by engaging students in discussions about genre with an eye not only toward writing but also toward reading, tutors can capitalize on the relationship between reading and writing.

These short, informal discussions about reading during tutorials

are crucial because they engage students in metacognitive work, the hinge upon which successful transfer of learning depends. Transfer of learning studies is an interdisciplinary field that uses research in educational and cognitive psychology to better understand instances in which “learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials” (Perkins and Salomon 3). Research has shown, though, that transfer is not automatic and, instead, needs to be fostered. Thus, a third step that tutors can take to help students read with purpose is to help them:

### *3. Think beyond the immediate session.*

Transfer has the potential to occur when students recognize and generalize something in one context in such a way that they are able to call upon that information in a different context (Perkins and Salomon). Because transfer does not happen automatically, tutors need to create opportunities for students to think about their thinking. Asking students to engage in metacognitive work positions students to take their newly constructed knowledge with them to their courses and beyond academia. Steps #1 and #2 above, wherein tutors are prompting students to consider their purpose for reading and the genre of what they are reading, are intended to help students construct this transferrable knowledge that has applications far beyond a single tutorial.

## **TUTOR PREPARATION**

If tutors are expected to engage in the work described above, they need to be prepared to do so. To this end, peer tutoring education courses can ask tutors to look at a series of writing assignments (real or mock) and discuss options for initiating a discussion with students about reading. Tutors can also brainstorm what they see as the purpose of the reading as it relates to the writing assignments. To prepare tutors to engage in discussions of genre and the transfer of learning, courses would also need to include some readings on transfer and genre research in writing centers (Driscoll, “Benefits;” Devet; Chandler). To help tutors understand how reading issues might masquerade as writing issues, tutors might also read Horning’s aptly titled “The Trouble with Writing is the Trouble with Reading.” With writing center studies scholars (Driscoll, “Benefits;” Hill; Stahr and Hahn) calling for transfer-focused peer education courses and many tutoring handbooks (Fitzgerald and lanetta’s *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors*; Rafoth’s *A Tutor’s Guide*; Gillespie and Lerner’s *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*) already including genre discussions (albeit from a writing standpoint), these important additions to peer

tutoring education courses may end up being more like tweaks than full-scale changes to already existing courses.

## CONCLUSION

I encourage others to extend the work I have described here and to develop more targeted methods of supporting reading during tutorials. Part of this work will involve garnering a better sense of how reading is already attended to during tutorials, which can be accomplished through empirical and ethnographic studies, as well as other forms of research. Meanwhile, though, asking tutors to support students' reading while simultaneously working on their writing can be a powerful route toward improving students' reading and writing abilities, and ultimately a more comprehensive approach to literacy tutoring.



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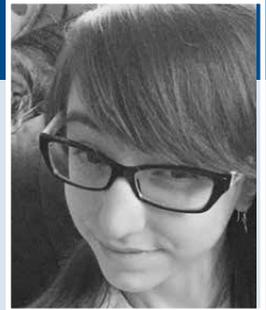
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# Tutors' Column: Making Audience Visible: Readership and Audience In Writing Centers

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Even though “writing” is usually in our job title, being a *writing* tutor requires a lot more *reading* than one might think. And while tutors serve as an *explicit* audience for student writers, how we help student writers become aware of their *implicit* audience is not so clear (“explicit audience” refers to an actual, physical presence, whereas “implicit audience” refers to notions about readers one has while writing). In order to help student writers understand the need to think about implicit audience while they are developing a text, our writing center has begun creating Rhetorical Reading Guides (RRGs) of model papers, guides that highlight a readerly experience by making audience visible. In her article in this same issue, our Writing Center Administrator, Amanda M. Greenwell, describes RRGs:

In the margins of model papers from various disciplines, tutors are documenting rhetorical readings with an emphasis on readership—marking and explicating textual features that contribute to, and, in many cases, orchestrate a reader’s experience of its content.

Our goal with RRGs is to make implicit audience *visible* as a way to strengthen audience awareness for students and tutors alike.

In our center, model papers are student-written essays faculty have deemed exemplary pieces of effective writing, and our copies often have professors’ comments in the margins. These comments may be shorthanded phrases such as “Nice wording” or “Effective transition”; however, many student writers are still working to understand the overall meaning of these phrases on both local (sentence structure) and global (logic and critical thinking) levels. Student writers may view such comments as complimenting properly written sentences, but how often will they consider the experience of the *reader* who encounters such sentences?

David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky in *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers* label the notion of writers thinking about readers the “social interaction” between reading and writing (1). In other words, despite the reader and writer being distanced from one another, effective writing should ultimately be able to communicate the writer’s ideas clearly and coherently to the reader. What students may forget (or fail to realize) when writing for a professor who knows their work and the context in which they write is that the only way for a reader to interact with the ideas being proposed is through the writer’s *writing*. A disconnect between reader and writer can occur when a writer neglects to acknowledge their audience, which leads to miscommunication. When we make audience visible through the marginal annotations within RRGs, we are acting as a bridge that can solidify communication—the “social interaction”—between reading and writing, and ultimately, between reader and writer.

Annotating a readerly experience requires nuanced language that calls attention to the reader. For example, when devising a RRG for a literature review of empirical research studies, next to a sentence where the author defines a term, I’ve noted:

Here, the author is defining the term “agoraphobia.” When readers read this definition, they gain a more accurate understanding of what the term means and how people who suffer from this disorder are affected. The author chose to use the term “agoraphobia” at the beginning of the introduction without necessarily going into specifics, and as readers, we now have a broad understanding of what this paper will be about.

Where some professors may have underlined the student’s definition of “agoraphobia” and marked “good” next to it, I explicitly state *why* presenting the definition is “good” by explaining what I gained as a reader from the definition. Later in the RRG, next to a concluding paragraph, I also explain how, as a reader, I felt supported by the writer’s choices:

In an essay as long and complex as this, this paragraph that draws the attention back to the overarching thesis is important. As readers, we can easily get caught up in each conflict as it is currently being addressed, which can cause us to forget what the overall purpose of the piece is. This all-inclusive assessment not only creates a conclusion to the conflict assessment, but it also prepares the reader for the next section of the paper.

By highlighting my thoughts as a reader and marking them explicitly, audience is made visible.

During tutorials in our center, we strive to implement the notion of readership. We believe that student writers using RRGs in a tutorial should take a step back from their position as “writer” and grab a front-row seat in the audience as “reader.” We tutors typically begin this process by determining who will read the text (student or tutor), and then begin listening for areas of effective and ineffective writing. If we come across an area that could leave readers feeling lost, we can turn to a RRG and show the student writer places in it where a reader might have responded to an effective handling of a similar issue. In this way, student writers are redirected to focus on audience and can be made aware of how their writing may impact a reader’s experience, be it positively or negatively.

I’ve found that RRGs have made it easier for me to place myself into what Robert Browne described as “Audience X” in *Representing Audiences in Writing Center Consultation*: “Tutors are regularly called upon to read and respond from the imagined perspective of the target audience,” and tutors often qualify themselves as “a reader, not *the* reader who will ultimately evaluate the work”. As a reader, my job is not to say whether student writers are “doing it right”; however, I can take note of areas within their writing where I feel supported as a reader or where I might need some clarification. I might begin a tutorial dialogue with a student writer by saying something like, “As a reader, I am able to follow your train of thought because of your explicit use of transitions.” I find that when I use this type of language—the same language used within RRGs—something often clicks. Student writers are often more responsive to feedback and often become aware (or more aware) of the aspect of audience.

However, the task of becoming a reader is difficult even for tutors. While creating my first RRG, I tended to slip into “instructional” comments rather than “readerly” ones. Now I’m able to see the distinction between a “how-to” comment and a “this is what your writing did for me” comment. For example, where I might have said, during an instructional moment, something along the lines of, “*Here, the author is introducing a new type of therapy that has also been used in the treatment of agoraphobia,*” I am now aware that such a comment does not express an aspect of readership. In her article in this issue, Greenwell discusses the readerly implications of this note in more detail. Here, I want to emphasize that even tutors may find it difficult to cast themselves as readers. We are hired, in large part, because we are effective writers; however, student writers do not need us to write their papers; they need us to *read* their papers effectively.

Seasoned writers use a variety of writerly-readerly moves to guide their readers through their texts, but many students don't understand what such writers are doing for readers. While I initially found the effort to shift my perspective from "writer" to "reader" a bit perplexing, I now view this shift as an "invisible step" that most effective writers make. Even without having an explicit audience present, experienced writers can consider an implicit audience as they craft pieces that are coherent on both local and global levels. In contrast, many student writers do not often consider audience as they write. However, by using RRGs and asking student writers readerly types of questions, we can help student writers make "invisible steps" visible, too. Through that process we can help student writers access the aforementioned implicit "social interaction" between reading and writing—we can help them make that notion explicit. Unless we are making a direct address to someone (as we do when writing e-mails or letters), how often do we forget that we are not writing in vacuums, or that our writing will be received and read by someone else? Unless writers address audience within their writing, their texts may end up being similar to a stage performance with the curtains still closed. Our writing center is determined to open those curtains. When the audience cheers, we'd like to know *why* they are cheering. In order to do this, we must speak out, cheer louder, and make our overall experience visible.



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## Announcements

### Iowa Writing Center Consortium

April 7, 2017

Pella, IA | Central College

“Negotiation and Adaption in the Writing Center”

For information, contact: Susan Pagnac <pagnacs@central.edu> or Cyndi Boertje <boertjec@central.edu>; Conference website: <iowawriting.wordpress.com>.

### Writing Centers Association of China

June 9-11, 2017

Suzhou, China

Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

“New Beginnings”

Keynote: Michelle Eodice

For the first writing center conference in China, conference presenters will investigate and question new approaches to writing center work throughout the world while paying close attention to how writing center work is initiated in local context. For conference information, contact Jessie Cannady: <Jessie.Cannady@xjtlu.edu.cn>; Conference website is <www.xjtlu.edu.cn/en/events/2017/07/writing-centers-association-of-china-symposium-2017>.

### WLN Blog to Include Creative Writing

Amy Hansen, at Appalachian State, has joined the team working on the WLN Blog (“Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders”), and for her first project, she’s soliciting and will share on the blog the creative writing of writing center tutors and administrators. Deadline for the first online creative writing feature is April 1. Guidelines for submission are on the blog: <www.wlnjournal.org/blog/2017/02/call-for-submissions-creative-writingcenter>.

### SI Announcement

The 15th annual IWCA Summer Institute will be held June 19-23, 2017, in Vancouver, Canada, at the Sheraton Wall Centre Hotel. The Summer Institute (SI) is an opportunity for both new and experienced writing center administrators, scholars, and practitioners to develop their practice. The SI registration fee of \$900 includes participation in all workshops and

presentations, receptions on Sunday, June 18, and Thursday, June 22; daily breakfast; and outside events. For information about the SI: <[www.iwcasummerinstitute.org](http://www.iwcasummerinstitute.org)>.

Participants must be IWCA members and can register through the IWCA members website: <[www.iwcamembers.org/welcome\\_conference.php](http://www.iwcamembers.org/welcome_conference.php)>. Please contact SI co-chairs Chris LeCluyse ([clecluyse@westminstercollege.edu](mailto:clecluyse@westminstercollege.edu)) or Stacia Watkins ([stacia.watkins@lipscomb.edu](mailto:stacia.watkins@lipscomb.edu)) with questions.

## WcORD

For those of you who use WcORD, the database for online resources for writing centers, we've temporarily moved it under the heading "Additional Resources" in the Archives section of the WLN website: <[wlnjournal.org/resources.php](http://wlnjournal.org/resources.php)>. Lee Ann Glowzinski is seeking someone to take on the job of WcORD Coordinator, to add more resources to the database and to promote it. If you are interested, please contact her: <[laglowzinski@gmail.com](mailto:laglowzinski@gmail.com)>.

### GET INVOLVED WITH WLN

**Interested in serving as a reviewer?** Contact Kim Ballard <[kim.ballard@wmich.edu](mailto:kim.ballard@wmich.edu)> and Lee Ann Glowzinski <[laglowzinski@gmail.com](mailto:laglowzinski@gmail.com)>.

**Interested in contributing news, announcements, or accounts of work in your writing center to the Blog (photos welcomed)?** Contact Josh Ambrose <[jambrose@mcdaniel.edu](mailto:jambrose@mcdaniel.edu)>.

**Interested in guest editing a special issue on a topic of your choice?** Contact Muriel Harris <[harrism@purdue.edu](mailto:harrism@purdue.edu)>.

**Interested in writing an article or Tutors' Column to submit to WLN?** Check the guidelines on the WLN website: <[wlnjournal.org/submit.php](http://wlnjournal.org/submit.php)>.

## Conference Calendar

**March 6, 2017:** Writing Centers of Japan, in Osaka, Japan

Contact: Conference website: <[goo.gl/2cWuKh](http://goo.gl/2cWuKh)>.

**March 23-25, 2017:** East Central Writing Centers Association, in Dowagiac, MI

Contact: Louis Noakes <[lnoakes@swmich.edu](mailto:lnoakes@swmich.edu)>.

**March 24-25, 2017:** Mississippi Writing Centers Association, in Jackson, MS

Contact: Liz Egan: <[eganee@millsaps.edu](mailto:eganee@millsaps.edu)>; conference website: <[drive.google.com/file/d/0Bw0rL8SqZt8DSHBpTk1XSmxxblk/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bw0rL8SqZt8DSHBpTk1XSmxxblk/view)>.

**March 31-April 1, 2017:** Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association, in Reading, PA

Contact: Holly Ryan: <[holly.ryan@psu.edu](mailto:holly.ryan@psu.edu)>; conference website: <[www.mawca.org/event-2299008](http://www.mawca.org/event-2299008)>.

**April 1-2, 2017:** Northeast Writing Center Association, in Pleasantville, NY

Contact: <[northeastwca.org](http://northeastwca.org)>; conference website: <[www.northeastwca.org/2017-conference](http://www.northeastwca.org/2017-conference)>.

**April 7, 2017:** Iowa Writing Center Consortium, in Pella, IA

Contact: Susan Pagnac <[pagnacs@central.edu](mailto:pagnacs@central.edu)> or Cyndi Boertje <[boertjec@central.edu](mailto:boertjec@central.edu)>; conference website: <https://iowawriting.wordpress.com/>>.

**April 21-22, 2017:** Colorado and Wyoming Writing Tutors Conference, in Greeley, CO

Contact: Crystal Brothe: <[Crystal.Brothe@unco.edu](mailto:Crystal.Brothe@unco.edu)>; conference website: <[www.cwwtc.org](http://www.cwwtc.org)>.

**May 24-26, 2017:** Latin American Network of Writing Centers and Programs, in Santiago, Chile.

Contact: <[discursoacademico@uc.cl](mailto:discursoacademico@uc.cl)>.

**May 25-27, 2017:** Canadian Writing Centres Association, in Toronto, Canada

Contact: Heather Fitzgerald: <hfitzgerald@ecuad.ca>; conference website: <cwcaaccr.com/2017-conference>.

**June 9-11, 2017:** Writing Centers Association of China, in Suzhou, China

Contact: Jessie Cannady: <Jessie.Cannady@xjtlu.edu.cn>; conference website: <www.xjtlu.edu.cn/en/events/2017/07/writing-centers-association-of-china-symposium-2017>.



## ***WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship***

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