

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E E T T E R

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Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing

November, 2009

— FROM THE EDITOR —

Now that the frenzy of starting a new academic year is over, the authors whose articles appear in this issue of *WLN* offer new challenges for us and our tutors to contemplate. Sue Dinitz and Jean Kiedaisch report on the results of their research into how past tutors consider the benefits of their work in a writing center. As these tutors think about how tutoring influenced their professional and personal skills, they have varied and positive comments to offer current tutors.

In need of more ways to support student writers, Theresa Bell recounts for us how, as a one-person writing center, she built an online site of resources that students have appreciated. She also provides suggestions for how to structure such a website.

For those of us who have been following the WCenter discussion on the various problems with the American Psychological Association's new edition of their manual, Susan Mueller's article should help considerably. Her review summarizes some of what's new in this sixth edition and notes documentation problems she puzzled over. The visual enhancement she notes as evident in this edition should help to calm those of us who are perplexed by some of the new manual's guidelines.

Finally, Adam Houser calls upon the motto of the Marine Corps to offer tutors some advice when coping with students' questions that don't have immediate answers.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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TUTORING WRITING AS CAREER DEVELOPMENT

◆ Sue Dinitz and Jean Kiedaisch
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT

Writing center directors have long claimed that tutors acquire valuable skills and abilities through tutoring, but they have often lacked the specifics to make their claims convincing. Exactly what abilities do tutors acquire? And do those abilities serve them well in their personal and professional lives? Harvey Kail, Paula Gillespie, and Brad Hughes provided a way to answer these questions when they created the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Project and invited others to participate in their research. Their questionnaire, designed to gauge the effects of peer tutoring as reported by the tutors themselves, consists of ten questions, four of which include Likert-scale responses, and a request for demographic information. Having individually or together directed the University of Vermont Writing Center since 1983, we were eager to take advantage of this opportunity to connect with former tutors, hear their stories, and learn more about how tutoring has shaped their lives. So we searched for addresses and sent out about 300 questionnaires. We believe just over 200 reached former tutors; we heard back from 135 of them, for a response rate of 66%. While the tutors had fascinating things to say about how tutoring influenced their college experience and personal relationships, we focus here on tutoring writing as career development.

HOW TUTORING ENHANCES KEY SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Tutors were asked to list the most significant abilities, values, or skills that they developed through tutoring
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Editor: Muriel Harris
(harrism@purdue.edu)
Assoc. Editors: Michael Mattison
(mmattison@wittenberg.edu)
Janet Auten
(jauten@american.edu)

Managed and Produced by
The RiCH Company, LLC
Richard C. Hay, Founder and CEO
260 E. Highland Ave. MH700
Milwaukee, WI 53202
www.therichco.com
1-888-348-6182

<www.writinglabnewsletter.org>
support@writinglabnewsletter.org

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ing. Most responses can be grouped into four abilities central to tutoring: 92 respondents (71%) listed interpersonal skills, 76 (58%) various writing skills, 74 (57%) mentoring or teaching skills, and 40 (31%) general thinking skills. Fifty respondents listed two of these, 37 mentioned three, and 8 included all four.

Interpersonal Skills: Tutors placed the highest value on the interpersonal skills developed through tutoring, as evidenced not only in the numbers above but also in responses to subsequent questions. Mike, an English major working as a systems engineer, comments, "It wasn't so much, for me, the writing that helped me develop as a student and later as a person; rather it is the people skills that have really made all the difference." The survey allows us to identify the specific interpersonal skills tutors feel were strengthened through tutoring; they are listed below, each clarified through a quotation selected from one tutor.

- **Empathizing:** "[I acquired] the ability and skill to meet people where they are, not where I wanted them to be or thought they should be." (Megan, high school teacher)
- **Listening:** "The most important skill I learned as a tutor is how to work with people and listen to them—as opposed to just lecturing or talking at them." (Carly, journalist)
- **Asking good questions:** "I believe the ability to ask good questions of the students to elicit their thoughts verbally so that they can then place them on paper is the most meaningful skill I learned as a tutor." (Leslie, Federal law enforcement)
- **Giving constructive criticism:** "I learned to help others without making them feel unsuccessful and to praise while offering assistance and suggestions." (Julie, management consultant)
- **Diplomacy, tact, sensitivity to difference:** "[I learned] 1) how to adopt multiple perspectives, 2) how to soften and relay criticism so it is received with equanimity . . . , 3) how to ask better questions. Being a writing tutor forced me to recognize how very differently people can see what appears to be the same thing and put me in the position of having to communicate effectively in wildly varying circumstances." (Mike, systems engineer)
- **Patience:** "My boss at work has told me I never seem rattled and nothing gets me very upset, and it makes me smile because I can reflect back to a troubling session with a student who made me want to pull my hair out, but learning to control that to make sure the tutee got the most out of the session." (John, sales)
- **Being in a leadership role:** "Overall, I learned how to be in a position of knowledge (power) and not let that take over my experience or let it go to my head. I had a skill I could offer to others as assistance and did not treat that skill as something superior. This helped me to develop my mentoring as a university student, orientation leader, and team project leader and move into my professional career." (Julie, financial services)

Writing Skills: While we would expect tutoring to enhance tutors' writing abilities, what the responses show is how, specifically, being a tutor leads to being a better writer. For one, tutors developed a better writing process. Many commented that they became more aware of their writing habits—of the pre-writing and revision strategies they employed—and this allowed them to change or elaborate upon the process. In addition, their understanding of revision became more complex. Brandon, an attorney, says, "Before peer tutoring, I considered revision merely a second-chance to do what I should have done right the first time. But as peer tutoring taught me, that's just the cheapest way to revise." Some talked about more careful editing, a more craftsman-like approach to language. Amanda, who writes for university publications, perhaps sums up best the kind of change that occurs: "I think I had good instincts as a writer when I was a student, but being a tutor taught me how to systematically approach my writing so that I didn't (and don't) have to rely on instinct alone."

In addition, tutors learned how to read their own texts more critically. Holley, a graduate student in mathematics, describes how she learned to look at her writing as a reader instead of a writer: "Being able to pull yourself back from a piece of writing and look at it from an outside perspective is difficult.

I'm more able to do that now." Tutors also learned the importance of getting feedback as part of the process. John, a Ph.D. candidate, comments that "[Tutoring] has given me a positive example of how feedback can work, helping to improve a project or develop ideas." The former tutors described their own writing as benefiting from exposure to more styles, forms, approaches: "Working as a tutor allowed me to experience many different types of papers as well as writers. I was able to glean tactics and styles from tutees that allowed me to develop into a more well-rounded writer" (another John, in sales). And finally, they gained confidence as writers, a point mentioned by many, many tutors, including Caleb, a journalist: "Being part of the Writing Center instilled a confidence in my writing and in my choices. I became more daring in writing for other classes, and it usually paid off."

Mentoring/Teaching Skills: Perhaps the skill most directly related to tutoring is mentoring/teaching. Tutors who went into teaching as a profession said tutoring led them to value a one-to-one approach to teaching, to read student texts attentively, to set realistic goals, and to adopt active learning pedagogies, allowing students to arrive at their own conclusions. Many tutors in other professions also mentioned the value of the mentoring skills they developed through tutoring. They learned that process is more important than product. Laura, who worked in an after-school program in the Peace Corps, observes that "whenever we learned new skills, I was always very concerned that they learn 'how' rather than focus on the specific outcome. I learned how to focus on 'how' by being a tutor." They discovered that learning happens best when the dynamic is collaborative. Wendy, in marketing, notes that "critique or 'teaching' is more appreciated when it evolves through mutual discussion, rather than by just making suggestions from my point of view." Similarly, as a member of the National Guard, Carrie tries to "ask questions of those I'm teaching or leading—giving them some ownership of the learning process." Tutors learned to be comfortable giving up the role of "expert." Pam, a psychologist who works with interns, finds very useful "the confidence I developed regarding not needing to be an expert, yet having something to offer as a consultant in the process."

Thinking Skills: Many tutors mentioned developing more general thinking skills through tutoring. Their responses include an impressive range of types of thinking, as listed below, again with an explanatory quotation.

- *Organization:* "[I] learned to organize people and information." (Laurie, university development)
- *Time Management:* "[I learned about] breaking down and prioritizing steps to accomplishing a goal in a short amount of time." (Amanda, university publications)
- *Decision-making:* "I learned to . . . make quick decisions about uncertain and sometimes difficult situations." (Julie, management consultant)
- *Creative thinking:* "Gaining confidence while learning how to think creatively on my feet . . . is essential in a lot of professions and is the type of skill I rely on day to day." (Jill, United Nations)
- *Critical thinking:* The experience forced me to use my ingenuity to critically assess a variety of situations." (Bonnie, naturalist)
- *Holistic thinking:* "Look at the whole and then work on the parts. . . . Learning to look at the whole piece of writing first applies to life as well. Learning to look at big picture items, not just the small pieces, helps with both my social and family relations." (Melissa, elementary school teacher)
- *Analysis:* "[I became better at] reading the situation to assess what some problems may be; listening thoroughly and looking for a pattern or clues to understand/decipher the matter." (Dania, engineering consultant in a law office)
- *Problem-solving:* "[I gained] the ability to dismantle a complex problem into smaller problems, the ability to convert a series of problems into actionable steps toward a solution, the ability to articulate the steps to others in a way that they can solve the problem on their own." (Chris, software designer)

HOW TUTORING PREPARES STUDENTS FOR CAREERS

Did tutoring influence the tutors' career choices? When asked "Did those abilities, values, or skills that you developed as a peer tutor seem to be a factor in your choice of job or graduate work," 94 of the 128 tutors who responded, or 73%, replied "yes." Amy, a minister, comments, "I loved my work at the Writing Center and sought to duplicate parts of it in any new position. In many ways, the Writing Center provided a template for my future work."

Did writing center experience help tutors get their first job? When asked to rate the importance of their tutoring experience in the interviewing or hiring process for their first job, 66% gave a 4 or 5 rating, with 5 being "very influential." Those giving lower ratings often noted that their first job had little to do with their eventual profession. Many tutors commented on how tutoring helped them in the hiring process, explaining that their writing expertise came in handy in writing resumes, cover letters, and application essays, while their tutoring experience prepared them for interviews. Sarah explains, "Tutoring sessions helped me become accustomed to having semi-formal conversations with people I'd never met and being prepared with answers to all of their questions. This skill . . . made me feel much more at ease in front of potential employers." Others described how including their tutoring experience on their resumes makes them look well-rounded and offers proof of their writing, communication, and mentoring skills. Ben remembers that "while interviewing for a job with the Peace Corps as a recruiter, I mentioned that I had been a writing tutor. I think this helped assure my supervisor that my writing skills would be up to snuff, but also that I had the interpersonal skills needed to interview people for Peace Corps positions." And Mary Kate writes, "I believe that being a writing tutor helped me gain admission and scholarships in law school, as well as my job for after law school (a federal clerkship). People assume that tutors have good writing skills. Also, I can work in groups without being offensive or too dominating."

As they moved beyond their first jobs, tutors found the abilities they developed as tutors were crucial assets in their careers. When asked to rank "the importance for your occupation of the skills, qualities, or values you developed as a tutor," 90% gave a 4 or 5 rating, with 5 being "Highly Important"; the average rating was 4.5. What occupations did tutors pursue? Though only five were undergraduate education majors, 46, or 35%, went on to become educators— at all levels, from elementary to higher education, and in many venues, from outdoor education to working with at-risk populations. Many attributed their interest in education to their experiences tutoring. A smaller but still substantial group, 15%, went into the fields of professional writing and editing: for newspapers or magazines, publishing houses, businesses, professional organizations, radio, television, and film. As the connections between teaching, writing, editing, and tutoring are fairly direct, we'll focus on jobs where the connections are not so obvious.

Although only eight of the students were business majors, 33, about 25%, went into business, in a wide range of capacities, from cabinet making to marketing to management. These former tutors wrote about the relevance and importance of the abilities they developed, articulating the connections they see between tutoring and their success in business. For example, a VP/Team Leader for L'Oreal Paris writes:

Since I work from a home office and travel often, my written communication skills are critical. I need to communicate broadly to various groups and insure that next steps are clear to everyone. One of my strengths in my role is my ability to organize teams and lead projects (verbally and in writing), which I believe is an outcome of the tutoring/writing training. Also, in terms of helping people, I often use my tutoring background. It's amazing how many educated people . . . cannot cohesively communicate in writing. I work on this skill often with my team.

And a salesperson for Frito Lay observes, "Customers can be a real hassle at times, so the patience that grew out of tutoring has been a godsend in that regard. The ability to communicate has allowed me to deal with customers to increase my business by gaining more sales space in their establishments for our products."

Of the remaining tutors, 12% went into other professions, including doctor, nurse, lawyer, minister, psychologist, pilot, and chef; and 9% went to work for governmental or non-profit agencies. Again, tutors from all these fields said the abilities developed through tutoring—specifically in writing, communicating, and mentoring—were key to their success. Here are a few of the interesting connections they drew:

- *Victims' Advocate*: I took on a position at a non-profit that required me to explain to Portuguese-American domestic violence victims the rights they had for protection and social welfare in our complex and flawed legal system. Through assessing each person in the same delicate way that I had developed during my tutoring sessions, I was able to provide each victim with the resources and information that were most suitable for her/his particular need.
- *Lawyer*: Everything I learned as a tutor helped me in law school and in the legal profession. Lawyering is all about making someone understand your point of view. You need to communicate well. You need to be patient. Above all, you need to have a desire to help.
- *Physician*: Often students would come into the WC thinking all they needed was to have the grammar checked in their paper. After reading the paper I would find major problems with the structure or logical flow of the paper. At that point, it became an effort on my part to find a common goal of making the paper better and communicating that to students in a non-threatening manner that would engage them. I use these skills every day now with patients who come in for one reason, but after reviewing all their risk factors with them, I find they may be more at risk of another disease. I see the genesis of my collaborative communication skills with patients in what I learned tutoring at the WC.

Finally, we were impressed by how many former tutors continue tutoring, literally, at work. A writer for Comedy Central, for example, was asked to tutor a fellow writer. He explains, “my bosses wanted me to work closely with another writer to help him with his structural problems. He was a really smart and funny guy when it came to jokes, but his stories never really escalated or ‘went anywhere.’ It was a matter of helping him without seeming condescending, a skill that I learned in the Writing Center.” Jill, who works at the UN, finds herself “tutoring writing at work on a regular basis. Perhaps it is an ability one will never outgrow. Just yesterday I heard echoes of my former self explaining to our junior consultants how to write a professional document.”

In considering the profound effect of tutoring writing on tutors’ careers, we are struck by what now seems obvious: that while tutoring and writing, independently, help students develop skills with wide relevance in the work world, practicing them in combination—tutoring writing—allows for a mutual reinforcement of these skills. Writing tutors use a wide set of communication skills in the service of helping others to develop communication skills. And a wide set of communication skills is central to success in almost any profession. We hope this realization of ours will be of practical use to current tutors. Looking at the language used by past tutors to describe the skills and abilities gained through tutoring may enable tutors to represent their experience more effectively in their resumes, cover letters, and interviews. More importantly, seeing the connections past tutors have made between tutoring skills and professional success can broaden tutors’ ideas of their possible career paths and give them confidence to go into areas that seem, on the surface, to be unfamiliar territory. ♦

Notes

¹ Please see <<http://www.marquette.edu/writingcenter/PeerTutorAlumniPage.htm>>. See also Gillespie, Paula, Bradley Hughes, and Harvey Kail, “Nothing Marginal About This Writing Center Experience: Using Research About Peer Tutor Alumni to Educate Others.” *Marginal Words, Marginal Work?: Tutoring the Academy In The Work Of Writing Centers*, Ed. William J. Macauley, Jr., and Nicholas Mauriello. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton P, 2007. 35-52. Print. ♦

NOT JUST A PRETTY (INTER)FACE: ONLINE WRITING CENTER SUPPORT AT ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY

◆ Theresa Bell
Royal Roads University
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

The Writing Centre at Royal Roads University (RRU) relies on a flexible online writing lab (OWL) to support our students' academic writing efforts. As a one-person center that supports approximately 2000 full-time equivalents, the Writing Centre website is a front-line service, not only to provide information and resources, but also to facilitate conversations between students, instructors, and me, the Writing Centre Coordinator. Like many other OWLs, the goal of the website is to provide information in a timely, self-serve fashion, but the RRU Writing Centre website also strives for an interactive delivery model that supports different learning styles and preferences for a student body that works at a distance from campus. The success of the website also suggests a cost-effective and manageable solution for other writing centers that are looking to expand services or augment tutor support in a time of limited budgets. To borrow from the Rolling Stones, while you can't always get what you want when it comes to more staff and resources, if you're willing to give online writing support a try, you might find you get what you need.

The need for nimble, interactive, and online writing support at RRU is clear when considering that our student population consists primarily of adult learners who are returning to school while in the midst of an advancing career. RRU's mission statement is "to excel at the provision of continuous learning for people in the workforce," and we meet this mandate through our applied degree programs. Accordingly, we have degrees that focus on areas such as Disaster and Emergency Management, Professional Communication, Environment and Management, and Human Security and Peacebuilding. The majority of our programs use a blended learning model with short residencies and collaborative online learning, though we have six undergraduate completion programs that we deliver through an intensive 12-month model on campus in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. In the 2007/2008 academic year, we had 813 undergraduate students, and 1,229 graduate students. Of those students, only 230 studied in full-time on-campus classes, while the rest completed programs via the blended learning model. As might be expected with a university that provides programs for working professionals, the average age of our students is higher than the norm: 31 for our undergraduates, and 41 for our graduate learners. Our students have widely varying experiences, backgrounds, interests, skills, and goals. While all these factors lead to highly individualized needs and demands, there are common threads throughout:

- School is only one part of their lives, and often, their academic pursuits are not their most important priority when compared with family, careers, and/or military deployment.
- Many students have found great success in their careers before coming to RRU, and many have done so without a previous academic degree.
- Many students are used to having an extensive support staff for activities such as writing reports.
- Across all programs and all levels of degrees, students experience high levels of anxiety about academic writing because it is an unfamiliar task.

Given RRU's dispersed adult student population, I faced some interesting challenges when I established the Writing Centre in March 2007. I was a novice writing center coordinator, although I had taught writing skills to RRU students in an informal capacity for four years. During that time, I had pursued opportunities to provide writing support to our students, and so I made myself available as an instructor, writing coach, and editor to limited numbers of students. When the opportunity arose to create an official writing center, I was thrilled with the prospect of putting into place the services and support I had identified as being necessary for our students. First, I needed to provide an equivalent level of support to both our on-campus and online students. Next, I wanted that support to take into account varying levels of writing expertise; some of our students are proficient writers, but it is also common for students to have more limited experience. For example, some students have not written an academic paper for 30 years, and since RRU accepts students using flexible admission, some students may have never written an academic paper. Therefore, support was needed to address both the lower- and higher-order writing concerns that students face throughout their programs. Another challenge came by way of RRU's academic calendar, which has programs starting at staggered dates throughout

the year. Accordingly, support needs to be available year-round, but since I am the sole staff member in the center, basing support on my availability to students located throughout the world, in all time zones, 365 days a year, was simply not feasible. Finally, it was also important the services be approachable and user-friendly, because while the prospect of academic writing terrifies many of our students, for some, the prospect of asking for help is equally nerve-wracking. As Dr. Raymond Wlodkowski, author of *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, states,

Every learning environment is constantly influenced by the normal emotional reactions of its participants. Also, because adult learning so often deals with success and failure in achievement and accomplishment activities, the personal feelings of these learners are continually rampant as they react to their progress or lack of it. The emotional state of an adult at a particular instance of learning is a significant influence. (53)

Therefore, recognizing the dominant role emotion has in adult motivation and learning, I wanted to provide welcoming, stigma-free assistance that respected students' existing knowledge and allowed them to feel in control of their learning experience. I decided that while traditional instruction (both classroom and individual) would factor strongly in the Writing Centre's services, the Writing Centre needed an interactive online presence in order to serve the needs of all our students.

Royal Roads University launched the Writing Centre and its website in April 2007, and since then, the website has become the first level of just-in-time writing support for our students. That is, when a student needs writing help, the website provides information in the moment the student needs it, rather than the student having to wait for my availability. While the Writing Centre offers many different kinds of support, ranging from class-wide instruction to one-to-one instructional sessions (either face-to-face or by phone), the website consistently receives a significant amount of traffic. In the first year of operation (April 2007-March 2008), 9,032 visitors viewed 50,268 pages on the site. In the second year of operation (April 2008-March 2009), 9,183 visitors viewed 50,092 pages. On average, 700-900 visitors view 4000-5000 pages per month. When these numbers are compared to RRU's 2042 full-time equivalents for the 2007/2008 academic year, they represent tremendous student usage. If each visit to the site takes the place of a phone call or an e-mail to my office, it is clear that without the website, I would not be able to manage the demand for support. However, because of the website, I can focus my attention on students who need one-to-one instruction and still meet the needs of all our students.

A number of design factors contribute to the success of the website. Royal Roads University uses a password-protected, customized version of Moodle as the online platform for all of our courses. It therefore made sense to also use Moodle for the Writing Centre website since all students, whether at a distance or on-campus, use the online platform for their programs. In addition, all students have automatic access to the website, which means the link to the site appears on every student's list of online courses. When RRU first launched the website, students had to 'find' the site, and though I advertised widely throughout campus and by e-mail, traffic was slow at six to fifteen visits per day. However, when the automatic access began, the number of visitors on the site jumped by more than 50%, and since then, traffic has been consistently high, with a regular range of thirty to fifty visitors per day. Next, due to an easy navigational structure, students can find the information they need with a minimum number of mouse clicks, thereby avoiding frustrations relating to time and function. When considering this ease of use along with students' pre-existing familiarity with the learning platform's layout and tools, the result is a reduced learning curve. When students can use the website effectively on the first visit, they are more likely to return with confidence. In addition, the website includes information on a variety of writing topics (e.g., spelling, sentence structure, writing in teams, writing a literature review, APA style), and each topic contains information that is presented in a number of formats to address different learning preferences. Again, the website is password protected, so students feel safe using the site. They know that no one outside the RRU community can view their questions and navigation destinations. Considering the fear that many students feel when accessing writing support, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for our students is a key factor for success.

Moodle has many tools that enable students to learn using different approaches, but the book and the discussion forum are two of the most popular modules. We use the book module to present core learning materials within a course, and I have used books for the same purpose on the website.

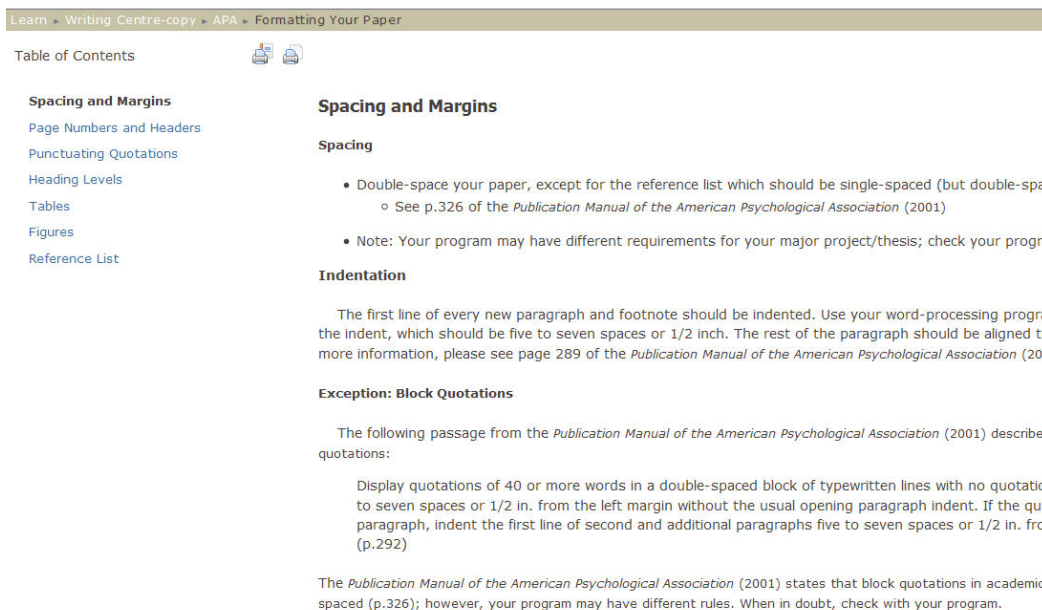


Fig. 1. Sample book page

As with an actual book, students can browse a table of contents that links them directly to sections within the resource, short bits of content display on ‘pages’ that students can navigate forward or backward to read the next or previous piece of content. Students can also print either single pages or the entire book. The book module breaks complex content into manageable chunks for readers, and it allows readers to decide how much content they will read in one sitting. Another module used throughout the website is the discussion forum, which gives students the opportunity to ask questions directly on the website without having to leave the site to send an e-mail.

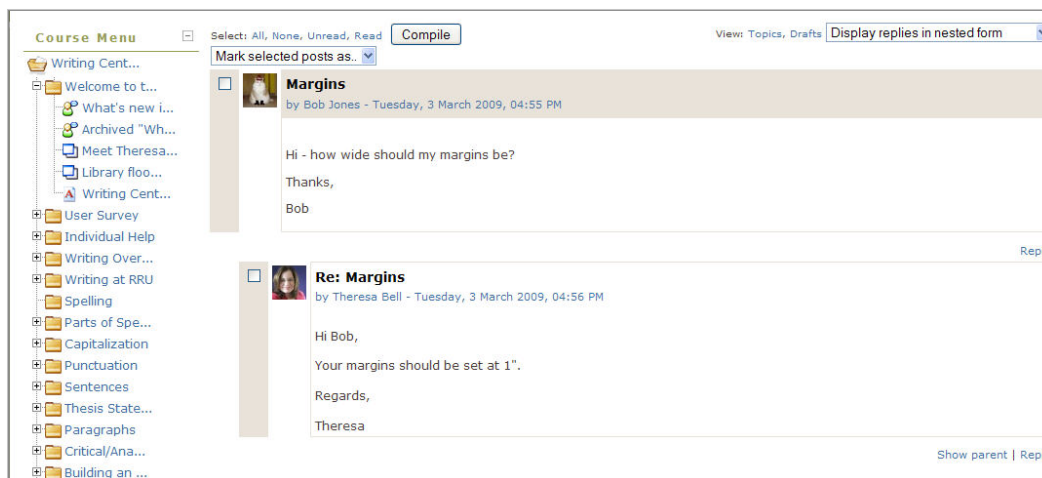


Fig. 2. Sample discussion forum posting

The forum also permits conversation about a topic, and it is common for students to “piggy-back” on the postings of other students, either to add information, or to expand the question. Rather than the questioner and I being the only two participants in the conversation (as in the case of e-mail), anyone can be a participant in the forums, either actively by posting questions, or passively by reading and learning from the conversations. If students have privacy concerns, they can e-mail me directly; however, I strongly encourage students to use the forums because they also act as an information repository of questions and answers. For example, due to the popularity of the discussion forum in the section on

the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, there is the current active forum as well as ten archived forums of past questions that are organized by topic and searchable by keyword.

Other modules on the site include the glossary of terms, a questionnaire tool, and a polling module that enables quick snapshots of student feedback. Finally, the site incorporates many different resources such as PDF documents, audio files, and links to external websites. By using the inherent flexibility of Moodle, I can incorporate resources and exercises that accommodate a wide range of learning interests and styles.

Student feedback regarding the effectiveness of the site corroborates the importance of these design points. In April 2008, using the questionnaire tool, I invited students to submit feedback regarding the website. Students expressed appreciation for:

- Easy and quick access to a wide range of information that is relevant, easy to understand, and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Discussion forums that provide the opportunity to ask questions, search by topic, and learn from others' questions
- A balance between tutorials, essays, guides, etc., to accommodate different learning styles
- New materials that are added quickly to respond to student needs

From an administrative perspective, the success of the website has obvious benefits: 700-900 students per month receive just-in-time assistance without requiring my attention. Students who are feeling shy about asking for help can access "anonymous" assistance, which means that more students receive help. Finally, due to the flexibility and easy use of Moodle, I can quickly post new materials on the website in response to student needs or questions, and I can archive older information. Consequently, the website remains a current and relevant resource for students.

Online writing support is not new, and there are many universities with fantastic sites. What stands out on the RRU writing center website is its interactive usability, which is facilitated by Moodle open-source software. Students depend on the website for just-in-time writing support, which allows me to use the site to manage writing center traffic and sustain high levels of support to our students. My experience suggests the benefits that can result from having a nimble, responsive writing website, especially for universities that are looking to augment current staff with a cost-effective solution. In a time where universities are asking writing centers to do much more with greatly limited budgets, we are all looking to find scalable solutions that are easy to implement and maintain. My experience at a small university that uses a blended delivery model is that as a one-person unit with a fully developed OWL, I can manage all the demands of the writing center—whether online or in-person—and still have time for instruction, administrative responsibilities, and assorted other tasks. As writing centers continue to adapt to the increasing and flexible demands of students, online writing support can be more than just a pretty (inter)face; indeed, online writing support is well suited to be a primary service point of a writing center. ♦

I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions from Writing Lab Newsletter readers; please feel free to contact me at <rruwritingcentre@royalroads.ca>.

♦
Notes

¹ Most of our students are not engaged in full-time studies but are working off-campus and continuing in full-time employment while pursuing their degrees. Accordingly, we think of our student numbers in terms of full-time equivalents, rather than full-time students.

² Moodle is an open-source course management system that offers the capability for both static resource postings as well as rich interactive learning activities. For more information, see <<http://moodle.org>>.

³ The Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison: <<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/>>; The OWL at Purdue: <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>>; Advice on Academic Writing at the University of Toronto Writing Centre: <<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice>>.

Work Cited

Wlodkowski, Raymond J. *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Guide to Improving Instruction and Increasing Learner Achievement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993. Print.

TAKE NOTE

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
February 6, 2010
Burlingame, CA 94010
Theme: “*The Sustainable Writing Center*”
Keynote speaker: Ben Rafoth

Proposal formats include presentations of 20 minutes; panels of 3 presenters (20 minutes per presenter); roundtable or panel discussion sessions of 10 minutes per presenter; workshops of 60 minutes (with audience participation).

In addition, NCWCA 2010 will feature a “Poster Potluck” during which all presenters are invited to share a poster (with handouts to share) featuring exciting thing(s) going on in their writing center! Presenters will be able to give their presentation as well as participate in the “Poster Potluck.”

Proposal Submission: Please submit a description of your proposed presentation/panel/roundtable/workshop as an MS Word doc. or RTF doc. by December 15 to NCWCA2010@gmail.com. Acceptance notices will be sent by January 1. Conference NING: <http://norcalwca.ning.com/>. The conference is co-sponsored by Mercy High School Burlingame and the University of San Francisco.

For detailed information about proposals, suggested topics, and information to include in the proposal, contact Jennifer Wells at jwells@mercyhsb.com. Please use the subject line “NCWCA2010”.

REVIEW OF *THE PUBLICATION MANUAL OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION*, 6TH EDITION

(Soft cover: \$28.95; hard cover: \$39.95; spiral bound: \$36.95; Order from APA, 750 First St., NE, Washington, D.C.; 800-374-2721; order online: <http://www.apastyle.org/manual/index.aspx>).

◆ Susan Mueller

St. Louis College of Pharmacy
St. Louis, MO

Following closely on the heels of MLA's revisions to its scholarly and student guides, APA released the sixth edition of its *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* this July. Visually, it presents a striking contrast to the previous edition. The effect of the book's design was undoubtedly deliberate: with its cover in two lovely shades of blue interrupted only by a touch of lime green and white type, this tall, slender volume seems elegant and peaceful. The contrast to the drama of the fifth edition's screaming red on a black background suggests that APA wants to calm our concerns, answer our questions, and envision with us an enlightened future for both student users and researchers. This idea is carried into the volume's new and bolder use of headings, more use of examples, and a radically reorganized structure. However, with some noteworthy changes, this is the same APA style we have come to know, complete with contradictions, difficult language, and ambiguity about its audience. This edition is improved in many ways, but APA style is still not easy to master, no matter what kind of user you are.

The reorganized edition follows the writing process itself. The reorganized version begins with the planning stage and then describes types of articles, ethical standards, and issues about dealing with research results and participants. It goes on to discuss writing issues, such as bias-free language and mechanics, before it moves to documentation. This approach makes finding a particular example or issue easier than in the past, both if you are embarking on writing an article or if you are simply trying to cite one.

The influence of the Web and current readers' online sophistication influenced new and streamlined headings at all levels and expanded sections on graphics and electronic presentation of data. The new hierarchy of headings is similar to Web headings, so these will be familiar to readers and users alike. In concert with this, there are many more visuals—charts, graphs, and figures—included in this edition to illustrate the points the text is making. This too adds to the usability of the book. These visual updates are a nice improvement.

Along with that, APA's website (www.apastyle.org) includes some supplemental materials and tutorials. Some charts and graphics not shown in the actual guide are online. In addition, two tutorials are available, one on APA basics and one on changes in the sixth edition. The tutorial on APA basics provides a helpful introduction for brand-new users of APA. It gives an overview of the salient characteristics of APA style, which a tutor could then expand upon one-to-one with the student. It takes about 25 minutes. This is not a substitute for the manual or for tutor assistance. The examples are sometimes faint and hard to read, and the voiceover doesn't always match the print that is shown. The tutorial on changes in the sixth edition presents the same overview that is given in the foreword and the introduction to the manual. It is helpful in terms of pointing out where to look, but once again it is no substitute for perusing the manual.

Another change in the sixth edition is an appeal to a wider audience. In the foreword, publisher Gary R. VandenBos tells us that APA is now used “by students and researchers in education, social work,

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Writing Center Director Drew University

Drew University, a highly selective liberal arts college located 30 miles outside New York City, seeks a tenure-track Writing Center Director for a thriving University Writing Center, which serves students in the College of Liberal Arts, the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies, and the Theological School. In addition to directing the Writing Center, the successful candidate will teach a reduced 2-2 course load, predominantly composition courses, and work with existing composition faculty to implement a vertical writing curriculum as part of a revised General Education Program.

Applicants should have writing center experience and training. Experience training tutors and conducting outcomes assessment preferred. Experience with writing across the curriculum an advantage. Ability to teach linguistics courses also an advantage. Applicants should have a strong record of teaching and evidence of an established research program in writing centers or rhetoric and composition. To apply, please submit a letter of application including writing center philosophy, a CV, three letters of recommendation, and a writing sample to Sandra Jamieson, English Department, Drew University, Madison NJ 07940 by November 30. Drew University is an AA/EQ employer. Pending budget approval.

nursing, business, and many other behavioral and social sciences" (xiv). APA has migrated information pertinent to APA journals to the Web (<www.apa.org/journals/>), partially in deference to the new audience who is far removed from these concerns. Given that APA has historically been used broadly in the social sciences and in social work, the shift in focus is most noteworthy with regard to users in nursing and other medical fields. Indeed, many of the examples used are from medical literature. This shift explains the references throughout the text to scientific writing rather than social science writing.

One addition to this edition is a section on self-plagiarism. Authors are prohibited from presenting their own published material as if it were new scholarship. The guide gives the parameters for including this scholarship in other writing. This is timely given that there has been some discussion of this topic on writing listservs in the last few months.

One of the difficulties inherent in this new edition is that many of the changes are so subtle as to be easily overlooked. One such example concerns paraphrases. The fifth (previous) edition's treatment is here: "When paraphrasing or referring to an idea contained in another work, authors are not required to provide a location reference (e.g., a page or paragraph number). Nevertheless, authors are encouraged to do so . . ." (121). Compare that to the sixth edition: "When paraphrasing or referring to an idea contained in another work, you are encouraged to provide a page or paragraph number . . ." (171). By omitting the first part but stopping short of requiring a location for paraphrases, the new edition leaves the reader in limbo. APA has apparently not changed the rule, but clearly leans strongly toward citing page numbers. This subtle shift may split faculty, traditionalists maintaining page numbers shouldn't be used and progressives requiring that they should. Students will be confused by these non-guidelines. Writing center folk, tutors and administrators alike, can only be aware of this potential problem and counsel students to ask their instructors which approach to take.

Writing center folk should also be aware of the errors rife in the sixth edition, as described in a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article (Epstein). The errors largely seem the result of poor mindfulness: vestiges of fifth edition formatting uncorrected, commas instead of periods, and volume numbers not italicized. APA has put an errata sheet online at <<http://supp.apa.org/style/pubman-reprint-corrections-for-2e.pdf>>. Tutors should be alert for students and faculty who are unaware of these errors and are confused by the examples they see. Having copies of the errata sheets available in your writing center could generate significant good will for you, if not for APA. (The errors are in the July, 2009 printing. The second printing of the sixth edition corrected them.)

A shift with regard to URLs, databases, and DOIs is also problematic. In a section entitled "Electronic Sources and Locator Information" (sect. 6.31), the manual carefully explains what URLs actually refer to and why they are poor tools for finding particular articles. It goes on to explain in articulate detail what DOIs, or digital object identifiers, are and why they are preferable to URLs. An article has a unique DOI assigned to it at publication. A DOI is string of numbers beginning with 10 and including a prefix, which designates an organization, and a suffix given by the article's publisher. Since DOIs are unique to each article and do not change, they are stable keys to locating articles, even long after their publication. DOIs have been in use by medical databases such as PubMed and medical documentation styles for some time. This section explains where to find the DOI for any given article, and how to use it to locate the article. After this long, persuasive description of how valuable and important DOIs are, the manual says this: "We recommend that when DOIs are available, you include them for both print and electronic sources" (189). However, in the bulleted directions for

citing online journal articles, providing DOIs is listed as a step. It would seem to be a requirement, but it is described as a recommendation.

Along with these larger issues are a number of the smaller details we have come to expect with new editions. Among the most important of those changes are the formats for listing multiple authors, magazine issue numbers, non-consecutive page numbers in periodicals, and full URLs for articles in online reference materials and for pages in Web sites. Specifics are below:

- All authors up to and including seven must be listed in the References entry. If there are more than seven authors, the first six are listed, followed by an ellipsis and the last author's name.
- Magazines that are paginated by issue must now include both the volume and the issue numbers.
- All page numbers for periodical articles printed on non-consecutive pages must be included in the References citation.
- Full URLs are now required for pages within Web sites, as opposed to just the URL for the home page.
- Full URLs are also now required for works included in online reference materials. Dates of retrieval are no longer necessary.
- Two spaces are required after a period.

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, sixth edition, gives a welcoming nod to twenty-first century academic life. It is more inclusive of its wider audience than previous editions and more thoughtful with regard to its online environment. Its new structure and visual cues make it easier to use than ever before. Even given that it is sometimes murky, it is a strong move toward a more positive, more understandable, and therefore more usable documentation style. Envision calming blue, and welcome this new blue text into your spaces. It doesn't answer everything, but it does come closer.



Works Cited

- American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 5th ed. Washington: APA, 2001. Print.
- American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington: APA, 2010. Print.
- Epstein, Jennifer. "Correcting a Style Guide." *Inside Higher Education*. Oct. 13, 2009. Online. 15 Oct. 2009.



(Editor's note: The APA's website includes a blog where users of the 6th edition of the Manual can post questions and get answers: <<http://blog.apastyle.org/>>.)



Writing Center Coordinator Penn State Berks

The Professional Writing Program at Penn State Berks seeks to hire a tenure-track Assistant Professor to serve as Writing Center Coordinator beginning Fall 2010. The successful candidate will develop and maintain the Writing Center; teach two courses per semester including a peer tutoring course; recruit, train, and supervise undergraduate Writing Fellows; engage in department and university service; and maintain a commitment to scholarly publication.

Qualifications: Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition or related field by August 2010, evidence of strong research, teaching, and service achievements. Preference will be given to candidates with experience in writing center administration and demonstrated scholarly activity in writing center research and theory.

Please e-mail by Word attachment (1) letter of application, (2) curriculum vitae, (3) scholarly writing sample, and (4) names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of three references to Ms. Lisa Cecchini, lmc5248@psu.edu. Review will begin immediately with priority given to applications received before Dec. 1, 2009. Interviews will be available at MLA Convention or other mutually suitable venue. Penn State is committed to Affirmative Action, equal opportunity, and the diversity of its workforce.

For more information about the Professional Writing Program, visit <<http://berks.psu.edu/prowriting>>. Inquiries and questions may be directed to Christian Weisser at crw17@psu.edu.

Writing Center Associate Director University of Oklahoma

Applications are invited for this full-time (12 month), ranked renewable term position in a dynamic writing center serving undergraduate and graduate students. Requirements: A Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition and at least three years of writing center administrative experience, preferably in a research-based university setting; a demonstrated understanding of 21st century literacies and experience with learning technologies; direct experience working with English language learners. The Associate Director will also serve on program-related committees, develop new initiatives for the center, and assist with assessment projects. The person hired will be responsible for recruiting and mentoring the student staff of writing consultants, developing and facilitating writing center activities, and expanding technology-supported pedagogies. In addition, the AD will be a liaison to academic departments across the university in representing our Learning, Teaching, and Writing initiatives.

Preferred candidates will demonstrate a commitment to scholarly work/research in related areas, such as writing in the disciplines, community engagement with writing, multimodal and digital communication, or global Englishes. OU and the OU Writing Center are committed to prioritizing diversity and inclusion in recruitment and hiring.

Required Applicant Documents: Cover Letter, CV, Academic Transcripts, List of 3-5 References/contact information. Send materials directly to Tara Nielsen, AD Search Coordinator, 1005 Asp Ave., room 280, Norman OK 73019, First review of applicants: October 30, 2009, Closing Date: Open until filled. Starting date: July 1, 2010. The University of Oklahoma is an EO/AA employer.

Writing Center Related Sessions, NCTE Conference, Nov. 19-22, 2009, Philadelphia, PA (For further information: <<http://www.ncte.org/annual>>)

- *"Crafting Writing to Deepen Reading Comprehension."* A.51, Fri., 11/20/09. A.51 9:30 a.m.—10:45 a.m. Marriott/Franklin 11, 4th fl.
This interactive workshop provides teachers with effective strategies that develop students' abilities and improve reading comprehension. Presenters will share their experiences, including how to set up a writing center for the reading-writing connection.
- *"Getting Inside Media Getting Inside Me: Analytical Approaches for Teachers and Tutors."* A.56 Fri., 11/20, 9:30 a.m.—10:45 a.m., Marriott/Franklin 13, 4th fl.
As the alphabet and reading expanded how we perceive, think, and know, the emergence of digital communication and media have rearranged ways of knowing. This panel will explore how students can analyze underlying ideologies in advertisements, how audiences interact with media, and how writing centers adapt to visual literacy assignments.
- *"Creating Collaborative and Authentic Teaching Experiences: Developing Field Placements that Offer Substance and Stimulation Instead of Sitting and Staring."* J.57, Sat., Nov. 21, 2:45 — 4 p.m., Marriott, Rm. 409, 4th fl.
English/Language Arts pre-service teachers participate in field experiences that aren't always successful. This presentation focuses on changing these less-than-ideal situations and making the most of field experiences through a variety of settings: analyzing teaching through a collaborative lesson study, leading writing activities through poetry workshops, coaching students through a secondary writing center, and leading discussions in a Brown Bag Young Adult Literature Book Club.
- *IWCA SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP "Using Writing Centers to Advance Literacy."* SIG.06, Sat., 11/21, 5:45-7:00 p.m., Marriot, Franklin 9, 4th fl.
Special Interest Group meeting for those interested in advancing literacy through writing centers. The meeting will focus on ways the International Writing Centers Association can support writing centers at all levels, especially those in secondary settings.
- *"Reaching Outward to Parents of Adolescents: Collaborating to Advance Literacy Education."* L47, Sun., 11/22/, 8:30—9:45 a.m., Marriot, Gr. Ballrm. Salon J, 5th fl.
How can we help parents both understand what college writing is really like and support their teens as they move from high school to college writing? Learn about the workshop we've developed for parents of adolescents through collaborations among our National Writing Project site, University Writing Center, and 826michigan.
- *"Using Writing Centers to Advance Literacy."* MN.01, Sun., 11/22, 11:30 a.m. — 2:45 p.m., Convention Center, Rm. 204C, Level 2
This roundtable supports teachers hoping to initiate and sustain writing center programs in their K-12 settings. Writing center directors experienced in mentoring the process of establishing centers will facilitate a working session in which participants may workshop their questions and concerns.

TUTOR'S COLUMN

IMPROVISING, ADAPTING, AND OVERCOMING IN THE WRITING CENTER

◆ Adam Houser
The University of Findlay
Findlay, OH

I have worked with many different writers during my time at the writing center, from accomplished essayists to prodigious procrastinators to students with rough drafts scrawled on napkins. Though I have gained a substantial amount of experience in tutoring these writers, I am still sometimes left with questions I cannot immediately answer. What will work for this student? How should I approach this unique situation? For tutoring inspiration, I turn to a seemingly unlikely place: the United States Marine Corps.

“Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome” is the unofficial mantra used today by the United States Marine Corps both in and out of conflict zones. Marines are encouraged to improvise, adapt, and overcome to solve seemingly impossible situations. Though the writing center is far from any battlefield, this Marine Corps thinking can be applied there as well. We tutors are equipped to assist with all parts of the writing process, from brainstorming to finishing touches on MLA citations. We are trained to be ready for almost anything, including emotional students, angry students, and medical emergencies. However, even the best training can prepare tutors for only a finite number of events. What happens when a student comes in with something unexpected? Ultimately, I find that most unique situations can be overcome with just a little improvisation and adaptation.

To fully understand what this means for the tutoring process, imagine that every tutoring session is a sort of collaborative battle in which students and tutors work to overcome obstacles. These battles cannot be won alone; the tutor and the writer must work together to find a solution for the problem at hand. For victory to be achieved, a plan must be made and carried out successfully. Rephrasing this statement in light of the Marine Corps mantra, we find that to overcome an obstacle in the writing center, tutors must first improvise and then adapt successfully. Improvisation is the development of a plan to help the writer; adaptation is the execution of the plan; overcoming is winning the battle and successfully addressing the writer's challenge. Through this process, many problems faced in the writing center can be successfully resolved.

According to the Marine Corps mantra, the first thing we must do is improvise. This step can encompass many different things, such as finding ways to articulate arguments and devising plans for essay completion. For instance, during my sophomore year, a frustrated writer came to the writing center in need of a plan to help her complete her essay on time. Agreeing to help her devise a plan, I suggested our first step was to improvise a checkpoint system to facilitate step-by-step progress with the essay. This plan asked that the writer complete a small portion of her essay every night and then come to the writing center to briefly review the progress made. I found that this checkpoint system resulted in reduced stress for the writer and worked to remind her of the daily progress being made. This “progress meter” boosted the writer's confidence and encouraged her to continue forward with the assignment.

The next step we took was to adapt to the difficult writing circumstances the writer was facing. During this second stage, we used the plan we improvised—along with available writing center materials—to help the writer adapt to the situation at hand. I found that a second difficulty that the writer was experiencing was a lack of direction: she was unclear about how to move forward with the assignment. Furthermore, the writer had only written bits of the essay over the past few evenings and did not yet have a complete draft. Essentially without a paper or other material to review, where was I to begin? Initially, this session seemed to be on a one-way train ride to “Unproductive Junction,” with a population of two (the writer and me). However, I remembered that a great deal could be done with a minimal amount of resources. If the Marines can adapt, I thought, writing tutors can as well.

What the writer and I adapted was the practice of brainstorming. Often, tutors are taught in training classes that brainstorming can be a powerful tool; however, it seems that traditional methods of brainstorming, such as freewriting and brainstorming in groups, all seem to function in a very linear manner: the ideas are only organized relative to when they are conceived. Furthermore, the flow of the writer's thought processes can be jeopardized because ideas written in an "idea web" cannot be easily manipulated without much scribbling and erasing. Accordingly, the resulting selection of solutions could be compromised and possibly hinder the writer's developmental process. Sometimes unique situations require us to use the resources of the writing center and apply our static training in dynamic methods. One way I have found that this can be accomplished is through the use of index cards.

In my session with this writer, I asked her to jot down everything she could think of that pertained to her essay on individual index cards (grouping multiple thoughts on cards may be handy, but it defeats the purpose of this exercise: free manipulation of ideas). After five or ten minutes, I asked her to put the cards in an "idea stack" off to the side. I then asked the writer to write out (on different cards) the points she wanted to discuss in her paper and to put these "category cards" at the top of the desk, arranged so that columns could be made below them. Then I asked her to go through the "idea stack" and put the idea cards below the category that they best fit under. If the idea did not fit with any category, she set it off to the side in an "extra ideas" pile. When all of the ideas were sorted, the writer browsed through them and distilled the best ideas from the rest based upon what she wanted to say. Once she was finished, the writer could begin to see a paper emerging from what was once a tumultuous and unorganized sea of thought.

More could be done with this index card system, though. If specific counterarguments are required, one could venture back to the "extra ideas" stack. Somewhere in this pile of index cards could be the beginnings of effective counter-arguments; the writer will (we can hope) be writing down everything that she is thinking of, not merely ideas that reinforce her own position. If the writer does find the key "detractor statements" that counter-arguments can be built around, a tutor might take the opportunity to offer a bit of assistance to help the writer flesh them out. However, keep in mind that this process may not be so simple; finding effective counterarguments in the "extra ideas" stack depends largely upon the thought processes of the writer and how thoroughly she chooses to expound upon her thoughts. If this is the case, simply use the original index card method over again to find those elusive counterarguments.

After improvising and adapting, we saw that our labor allowed the writer to overcome the adversity that was once daunting. This final step, though, is the most ethereal of the three; successfully overcoming difficult situations in the writing center is entirely subjective. On the surface, one might say that the embodiment of "the overcome step" is the tangible reward of earning a good grade on the piece. However, success can mean much more than a tepee-shaped pen mark. Our role as a tutor is not to "give the writer an 'A.'" Rather, our role is to help equip students with the skills to write more effectively—in brief, to help writers help themselves. While grades are indeed important for writing assignments, the student's internal development into a more effective writer is an equally worthy victory for all parties involved. The grade my tutee received may have been lower than she desired (I never heard from her afterward), but we found a way to help her finish a tough essay and learn a great deal about tackling future writing assignments. As a tutor I consider this a victory, and this victory was partly facilitated by the method I used. We both overcame through improvisation and adaptation.

The Marine Corps' "Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome" mantra can be a powerful tool in the writing center. When things do not work out quite as expected, we simply need to get a little creative. Tutors know that many situations in the writing center are unique and may present novel challenges; the improvise, adapt, and overcome method is flexible enough to be applied to those challenges. We can use this method, the materials around us, and the knowledge that we have been given to successfully surmount many obstacles that we will surely face in a writing center.





Muriel Harris, editor
The RiCH Company, LLC
260 E. Highland Ave. MH700
Milwaukee, WI 53202
Address Service Requested

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

February 6, 2010: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Burlingame, CA

Contact: Jennifer Wells, jwells@mercyhsb.com; conference NING: <http://norcalwca.ning.com/>.

April 8-10, 2010: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Lansing, MI

Contact: E-mail ecwca2010questions@gmail.com; conference website: <http://writing.msu.edu/ecwca>.

April 9-10, 2010: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Newark, DE

Contact: Melissa Ianetta and Barbara Gaal Lutz. E-mail: MAWCAconference2010@english.udel.edu.

May 25-28, 2010: European Writing Centers Association, in Paris, France

Contact: Ann Mott: amott@aup.fr. EWCA website: <http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/eng/>.

November 3-6, 2010. International Writing Centers Association, in Baltimore, MD

Contact: Barb Lutz and John Nordlof. E-mail: IWCAconference2010@english.udel.edu.