

W|C|S

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

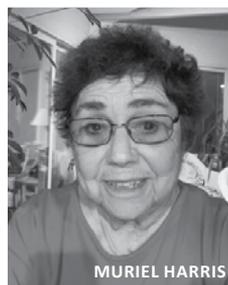
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Editor's Note

Muriel Harris

We often assess practices or theories in terms of being *effective* or *useful* or *valid*, but not whether they are *powerful*. Instead, power is often viewed in a less positive light as a state to be *overturned*, *mitigated*, or *denied*. Both the negative and positive aspects of power are aptly demonstrated in Lauren DiPaula's article about the power of stories. After sharing a story of how she made sense of what she heard at a faculty meeting, DiPaula helps us understand the power of stories and the need to generate counterstories when negative stories harm communication.



There is also a power hierarchy in the choice of media we use when tutoring, with some media choices, such as the phone, being viewed as less powerful than others. However, Amy Nejezchleb argues for the value of phone tutorials, reinforcing this power by summarizing the comments of her students who explain why they prefer the phone. To help those not currently offering phone tutorials, Nejezchleb details how and why telephone tutoring was adopted as an option in her writing center. Phone use in writing centers is an especially timely option during this pandemic when some students have returned to homes where internet connections are weak to non-existent.

The next two authors draw on the power of analogies to improve consulting strategies. Focusing on the topic of transfer, Bonnie Devet distinguishes between near and far transfer. To help her tutors understand far transfer, Devet asks tutors to analyze how analogies call upon prior knowledge and can be used for future situations. In another demonstration of the power of analogies, Maya Kuang calls upon the "speedometer method" analogy to illustrate the differing speeds during the writing process. For fellow tutors who want to add this comparison to their tutoring strategies, Kuang breaks down the various stages and the speeds needed as writers move along through composing papers.

For those of us wondering how others in writing centers are coping with the pandemic, the COVID-19 section of the WLN blog has dozens of responses: www.wlnjournal.org/blog.

Writing a Conflict Counterstory: Why and How

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In the fall of 2015, the faculty body at my small, public institution gathered to see a demonstration of a web-based tutoring program the administration had newly purchased. We learned that students could not only get help in a variety of courses, but they could also submit papers online for asynchronous critique late into the night from professional tutors who were specialists in their fields. I was, at that time, beginning my fourth year as director of the Writing Center. I had worked hard to build relationships across campus so that my center might be an integral part of the university. We were doing everything we could to make ourselves relevant: we offered writing workshops in courses in Sociology, gave presentations on APA style in Exercise Science and Psychology, implemented a small studio-style supplemental instruction program, made plans to officially embed tutors in courses, and developed and hosted community Write Nights and creative writing groups. Even more encouraging, other areas of campus, such as the School of Business Administration and the Division of Student Affairs, had supported us financially. Because of them, we had our own online tutoring system, a graduate student tutor paid at a higher rate, and the funding to take the tutors to our yearly regional conference. By the fall of 2015, we even had our own small but very useful budget.

At that demonstration of the new system, though, I learned from the company's representative that *my* writing center could very well be replaced by his own. Worse, as he spoke, the faculty seemed to throw their support his way, with a friend of mine even announcing that *my* writing center could not help her students with discipline-specific writing. I panicked. If I lost faculty buy-in across the curriculum, my numbers would drop, and then what? I argued with the representative in front of everyone, and then, as people were exiting the room, I lashed out at the administrator who brought him to campus. After speaking with her, I knew that my response was accusatory, passionate, and impulsive, and it left me feeling

stranded and isolated from continued conversation and possible negotiation with key stakeholders. I just didn't know what to do about it. In retrospect, I had shut down communication because I did not have insight into how stories affect communication, particularly when emotions run high. And I think such an insight can help us all, especially those of us in writing centers who are struggling to communicate and negotiate with key stakeholders.

HOW STORIES WORK

The above story is as basic, objective, and straightforward as I can make it—and yet it is, still, not at all basic, objective, or straightforward. It is a story, but not in the sense of something fabricated or in the sense that it is *just* my perspective. It is a story in a much more complex and powerful way. Narrative theorists tell us that we use stories to help us understand our lives. We use stories to explain to ourselves what happens so that what happens makes sense to us, especially when conflict is involved. Jerome Bruner, in particular, tells us that narrative is “one of the principal forms of peacekeeping” in that it enables us to understand what happens in a conflict, even if it doesn't make the conflict go away (95).

In fact, a story may explain a conflict, but it may also entrench us in it in complicated ways. To begin, what we tell doesn't come from scratch. John Winslade and Gerald Monk write that the stories we tell about our own lives come from larger stories about many lives, from cultural stories (4). We take elements from cultural stories, overarching stories we agree on, however implicitly. These stories provide plotlines, characterizations, themes, and more. The availability of these pre-made elements makes creating our own stories easier than it would be to make up new stories entirely (Winslade and Monk 4). But we are also so constrained by the cultural stories around us that these elements can be said to be “forced on us” (Cobb, *Speaking* 23). By making our own stories feel true, sealed off, and impermeable, cultural stories function in both useful and insidious ways. On one hand, they give us a sense of belonging because we are telling similar stories as others. On the other hand, cultural stories can reinforce stories that cause or encourage harm or, sometimes, violence.¹ Take, for example, characters in a story. If a specific cultural story positions a particular country as full of “bad” people, people from that country would most likely be figured as “bad” in my personal story, and I wouldn't have to work to justify it to my listeners because, more than likely, my audience would already agree. And they'd probably support me in my assertions.

Our cultural stories, also known as grand narratives, and our personal stories are practically invisible to us most of the time,

which makes it so that we aren't aware enough to do anything about them. Often stories must be brought to the foreground in order that we can see them as stories. Then, if we think of them as stories, we can analyze them, and we can create counterstories—stories that go against, that counter, the helpful or harmful stories we tell. This isn't easy to do, but sometimes it can change the way we see to move forward, just as it would for me.

HOW TO FIND COUNTERSTORIES

In writing center scholarship, the confluence of grand narratives, belonging, and counterstories was first explored by Jackie Grutsch McKinney in *Peripheral Visions*. Grutsch McKinney names the grand narrative of writing centers as “comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing” (3). This overarching storyline dictates how we think about what we do. It functions in the useful way of giving us a sense of belonging (89). We could say that if we fit into that narrative, we feel we are part of something larger. But it functions in a not-so-useful way in that it narrows what we believe writing centers do, and this could have pretty bad consequences (5). In fact, Grutsch McKinney warns us, “If we don't dislodge the writing center grand narrative, what we now conceive of as writing center studies is going to fracture” (90). In response to the possibility of fracture, she suggests finding counterstories: “Instead of telling the story of writing centers based on what we imagine is there based on our communal habits of storying writing centers, maybe we should study closely what we do see and trace the negative space around that so we get a sense of what writing centers are not” (88). She refers to telling counterstories as “writing transgressions into the narrative” (88).

The search for counterstories is also the focus of a kind of conflict resolution called narrative mediation. Narrative mediators use strategies to help conflicting parties find stories that make it possible for them to listen and work together when their personal stories don't allow them to. In addition to writing transgressions, then, we might also use the tools of narrative mediators to make sure we hear both ourselves and each other. Their strategies, which I explain here, can aid in our own self-reflection so that we can put ourselves in a better position to communicate effectively with our stakeholders, or—at the very least—with others in our lives with whom we want to communicate.

The first strategy is to simply recognize the power of stories, especially conflict stories, because, as conflict theorist Sara Cobb emphasizes in her work, conflict stories tend to be resistant to change and counterstory, “not because persons are unwilling to resolve conflicts,” but instead because no other alternate

interpretation of the situation seems plausible (“A Narrative Perspective” 54). It is, then, not always the case that we don’t want to find or listen to another story, but that we simply can’t.

Still, finding counterstories is possible because there are many storylines both within and between individuals. Narrative mediators help disputants find counterstories by engaging in double listening, or listening for what is *not* being said. Monk and Winslade give this example of double listening: “The story that I am not happy about something that exists is one version of events. If we flip this story over, there is always something that I would prefer to what I am frustrated by” (Ch 3). Flipping the story, then, can have a tremendous impact on what seems unchangeable, especially in terms of emotion. For example, returning to my story, if my version of events is that the representative was out to ruin my writing center, which angered me, I could flip that anger to reveal my sense of rejection and loss of agency—and my hope to make the situation better.

Finding alternate storylines involves recognizing that stories have characters in them, and when real individuals become characters in our stories, we explain them as less dynamic than they really are as our story becomes more rigid and concise. We might even start to *essentialize* them, which is to say we begin to believe that they are, at essence, a certain way due to nature or inborn personality (Winslade and Monk 6). For example, if a writer comes into the writing center late and stays on her cell phone, the tutor might believe that the writer is a rude person. And, if the tutor thinks the writer is a rude person, that tutor will not, therefore, be able to imagine a plausible scenario in which the two of them could work productively together.

What we say also impacts how a person can respond to what we say. Winslade and Monk describe a process called position calling. Boiled down, position calling involves how our choice of what we say affects or even limits the discourse the other person can take up, what they can say. In a situation in which we want to be able to negotiate with someone with whom we are in conflict, we must pay attention to whether what we say leaves room for the other party to respond. Conflict strongly entrenches us in our stories and makes avoiding position calling more difficult because “people frequently resort to totalizing accusations directed at each other. Accusatory discourse accords room for only denial or capitulation. It leaves little room for negotiation” (Winslade and Monk 49). In our work, a director accusing an administrator of attempting to shut down the writing center leaves the administrator fewer options for responding and leaves both of them fewer counterstories to

uncover. If we want to keep the lines of communication open, we must be careful not to silence someone, or curb their options for responding, by our stance.

WHY I COULDN'T FIND COUNTERSTORIES

My initial story tells of my center and, by extension, my livelihood being threatened. It tells of me first realizing that I had not figured out the secret to effective communication with stakeholders across campus. I felt as if the administration intended to replace the writing center regardless of all the progress I thought I had made. Those feelings demotivated me and made it difficult to see any way in which the center and my relationships across campus could come out unscathed. I didn't know how to proceed.

But then I saw my story in the writing center grand narrative: "writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing" (Grutsch McKinney 3). The writing center grand narrative made my story sticky for me. For one, in *my* story, writing centers are also places where *all* students go, and so I felt supported in thinking that all students at my institution should be going to the writing center. Second, in *my* story, my writing center was iconoclastic and non-traditional in its approach to education: we didn't just correct papers like the corporate-style tutoring system that was being brought in. We wanted to see results, but not of the speed or kind that the corporate-style tutoring system could produce. Because the writing center community tells some similar stories, my story contributed to a feeling of belonging to that community, just as Grutsch McKinney indicates it does. Because my story had some elements of the grand narrative, I did not have to work hard to get many others to support me when I told it, and their agreement further strengthened my story's power over me.

Paradoxically, when alternate storylines did emerge from writing center colleagues, I ruled out their applicability to my situation. After sharing my story with another director, he maintained that having the same corporate tutoring system actually worked in tandem with his center to increase usage; however, I saw his experience as an exception rather than a plausible, possible storyline for myself. Although getting someone else's perspective might help reveal a storyline, stories sometimes become "closed" for a variety of reasons, despite one's efforts to see beyond them (Cobb, "A Narrative Perspective" 54).

COUNTERSTORY AND ACTION

A counterstory had to emerge for me to act, and for it to emerge, I needed at least a new plotline and characters. An awareness

of how stories function in combination with double listening, an avoidance of essentializing, and a reconsideration of my acts of position calling helped me. Seeing what I was saying as a part of a story that is reinforced by another, more powerful story was a beginning. In my new story, I did not have to concentrate on numbers above all else. I realized I had taken comfort in the fact that we were nontraditional and, therefore, similar to other writing centers, but that this comfort did not work to move me forward. How to move onward past a story that was reinforced by a grand narrative and therefore sticky, though, was not clear yet. Then, using double listening—flipping my story of rejection and loss of agency—opened up another storyline centered on what I most wanted rather than on what I felt I had lost. And what I wanted, more than anything else, was the Writing Center to belong to everyone, not just me. Rather than blame the administrator and my friend for not seeing it the way I wanted them to, I would need to continue to work at just that: to continue to build the center and continue to reach out to stakeholders.

By paying attention to essentializing and position calling, too, I changed how I saw the characters involved, including myself. I tried very hard not to ascribe one way of being to a person, not to flatten in my mind their personhood into a character. I had to stop essentializing *myself* as impulsive and overly dogmatic to see even myself in a better light. I had to stop essentializing the administrator so as to see her as someone with whom I could negotiate. I could see that I had called the representative and administrator into defensive positions, limiting what they could say back. Even though I couldn't go back and change my accusatory language, with my administrator I could move forward knowing better for the next time. I had also called the representative into a defensive position, but that was something I had to stop worrying about.

Engaging in these actions allowed my new counterstory to emerge: I was a director who needed to place her focus on how we were helping students. My new goals were about trying to educate the tutors in better ways and about establishing better relationships with other stakeholders. Other characters in my story were trying to get me to see that they wanted more than we offered, and that I needed to build better and new relationships with them in order to work more effectively together—a realization that later made a collaboration with a move to the library (and away from other tutoring services) seem natural. I apologized to the administrator I had been so upset with, and I tried to make things right. Thus, my counterstory became an emergence of what is possible, what might happen next.

WHAT WE CAN DO

In order for us to effectively communicate with others on our campuses, especially those whose partnerships are essential, we need to be aware as much as possible of our own stories and the stories around us. We need to recognize simultaneously that we cannot always see our own story as a story, and that larger stories, like the writing center grand narrative, can entrench us, even if there is no outright conflict. We might ask ourselves, what about my story lines up with bigger cultural stories or grand narratives, such as those Grutsch McKinney has made visible? Am I essentializing another person or myself? How am I positioning the other person in my story and how are they reacting to that position? What possible stories of my own or of others might my story silence? And how might I listen to my own discourse to allow for these silenced stories? In asking these questions, we might reshape all of the stories by which we live and work.

NOTE

1. Sara Cobb, in *Speaking of Violence*, demonstrates the ways narrative perpetuates conflict and violence.



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Answer if You Have Callers: Phone Tutoring in the Writing Center

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In discussions of writing center technology, one tool is not much mentioned but is waiting on the desks of all professionals: the telephone. How many specialists remember this old staple in the midst of emerging digital technologies? In 2019, Joseph Cheatle and David Sheridan revisited John Trimbur’s work in writing centers, underscoring how the digital age’s communication practices “transformed [...] literacy” and stressing the supportive role of writing centers in multiliteracy (3). Writing centers should buttress emerging technologies with sound supports; for example, while some students create slide decks of integrated media (Cheatle and Sheridan 3), others prefer analogue equipment like the telephone, or its contemporary equivalent, voice conversation via cellphone. Such students are often remote learners at regional comprehensive institutions, metropolitan universities, and community colleges.



In writing center scholarship, attention to phone tutoring has been primarily related to grammar hotlines (for example, Devet). More recently, scholars like David Coogan, Barbara Monroe, Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch and Sam J. Racine, Stephen Neaderhiser and Joanna Woolfe, and Joanna Wolfe and Jo Ann Griffin have focused more on videoconferencing, chatrooms, and the online writing review. As these technologies become more common, some writing centers have chosen to eliminate phone tutoring. For example, a writing center professional interviewed in *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors* eliminated phone tutoring at her residential institution because she found it “egregious”; instead, the director chose to emphasize her center’s online tutoring (Caswell et al. 33). Yet some writing centers do still understand the benefit of tutoring over the phone for particular populations. For example, writing on the WCenter listserv in October 2017, Josh Hutchison admits, “After years of trying to push videoconferencing and/or using chat apps, I have found that most of my distance students

really just want to talk on the phone ... [,] a technology everyone understands and can access.”

Outside of writing center studies, research has been conducted on video conversations and application sharing in information technology and organizational performance. Erin Bradner and Gloria Mark discovered that collaboration improves when using video and application sharing; but as a person feels observed, they become less productive. Productivity suffers from the perceived effects of social presence, whether one is on camera or is simply watching another on camera (para. 7). Conversely, Melanie Yergeau et al. describe how synchronous technologies at times dematerialize when a heated discussion occurs, with reference to these technologies' similarities to the telephone:

The transparency of the [audiovisual technology] interface exists inasmuch as student and tutor become engrossed or heated in the content of their dialogue, much like persons are wont to do while conversing via telephone: moments where one might feel like the other is *really physically there*, moments that, [...] are brief, intervallic, and hallucinatory. (3)

Notwithstanding productivity issues, videoconferencing is designed to overcome the presence of the technology or to work in ways that are similar to the phone when talking to someone synchronously, although few individuals experience telekinesis in a Zoom meeting.

Incidentally, how many of us have ignored phone technology while engaged in numerous audio-visual conversations since the Coronavirus outbreak? Often the speaker's voice stutters, lags, or skips because of higher user activity on a wireless connection. Students at my institution continually have bypassed digital technology, reaching out via the phone. Because more students are selecting this simple tool, more writing centers might make better use of it. Amongst emerging changes amid Covid-19,¹ students are calling in over the phone, particularly when libraries have closed and many are left with poor or nonexistent connectivity or without access altogether.

In what follows, I will show how phone tutoring was adopted in my writing center before the pandemic as an integral way to reach native English speakers (NSEs) and non-native English speakers (NNSEs) who learn at a distance and are also nontraditional students. The data will show why, when paired with other forms of working together online, phone tutoring offers distinct advantages to distance learners and allows remote students to form a writing center connection better than videoconference or asynchronous

tutoring alone.

I will present data from a preliminary 2018-19 study born out of students' preferring phone calls to videoconference at my institution. I noticed that distance-learning students continued to call in via phone despite requests for them to schedule videoconference appointments. Based on my work with students, I sought answers to two questions in the study: 1) which students were choosing to be tutored over the phone; and 2) why were they choosing the phone over videoconferencing?

THE TECHNOLOGY

Alternatives to the in-person approach are adopted according to what is suitable for each institution. In asynchronous sessions, one person provides comments to another offline and sends the feedback through an application or email. In contrast, synchronous sessions require both student and consultant to be present for the appointment. Videoconferencing uses audiovisual technology to host a virtual conference. Applications have options for a chatbox when a computer microphone is unavailable, or for one-way video, one-way audio, or two-way audio as substitutions when a computer camera is absent. When students do not use the camera, tutors do not know if it is because the student lacks the application on their smartphone or computer, if their internet is unstable, or if they don't want to be seen.

Another synchronous method, the phone format, allows students to easily call in and ask for help. At my institution, students can choose "telephone" on the appointment form, and WCONLINE settings display a separate color on the schedule. They can opt for a videoconference on the same schedule, but the phone often becomes the default format when technology fails during a videoconference or when students are uncomfortable with the video platform. Students attach their papers to the appointment in advance, send their papers to the center email account at the start, or work on the fly while brainstorming ideas for an assignment. With the document on their devices, students follow along while a consultant reads, freeing the student to make changes. We accept multiple file types (Word, Google Drive, PowerPoint) to remain flexible for students and maximize their learning.

METHODS

The study took place at Bellevue University, which offers writing assistance in person, asynchronously, and synchronously to undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of disciplines. Students can earn their degrees in person residentially or online; they are located in the Omaha metropolitan area, in all fifty states,

and internationally. In 2018-19, 530 in-person, 236 telephone, 217 videoconference, and 1,232 asynchronous online appointments were scheduled with three part-time consultants who tutored across the four formats. Before data analysis, duplicate names from 236 telephone appointments were removed, and ninety-six students were recruited for the IRB-approved study. Candidates qualified if 1) they had scheduled a telephone appointment between 2018-19, and 2) they had not consulted formally with me on the phone.

Fifteen candidates responded to my recruitment email that requested participation, twelve individuals qualified, and nine participants who completed the survey were each interviewed for an hour. All students identified as nontraditional students seeking online education at the university. Two were NNSEs and seven were NSEs. Six identified as Caucasian, two as African American, and one as South American-Canadian. All were aged thirty-five or older: two were in their thirties, three were in their forties, two were in their fifties, one was in his sixties, and one individual did not comment. Three were graduate students and six were undergraduate students. Participants resided on both U.S. coasts, in the Midwest, and in Toronto, Canada. They self-identified as representing several economic groups, including the lowest income poverty level (\$31,000 or less) and higher income (\$188,000 or more).

To generate the interview questions, I thought of possible reasons why students use the phone. These comprised sets, including motivations for pursuing an online education and parents' education levels. An additional set was based on the ways that students come to the writing center and their knowledge and use of technology formats. Geography and demographics made up a number of questions as well as schedules and workplace dynamics. Finally, I asked questions pertaining to parenthood and internet reliability.

I analyzed all interview notes through *in vivo* coding methods, allowing patterns to emerge from the participants' quoted words (Auerbach and Silverstein 31-66). I had no preconceived theory for the data, which is consistent with open coding, and I identified repeating patterns in each interview text before creating a master list of consistent ideas. As themes emerged, I subsumed the selected codes into broader themes until core categories of repeat findings appeared.

RESULTS

Participants shared common attributes, including coming to college from unconventional paths, choosing online class offerings

out of necessity, and desiring a college degree to be promoted or to help their career paths. Unlike residential 18-21 year olds, these phone users arrived at college while engaged in other pursuits, hence being described as nontraditional students. For them, “college was a sideshow” at times due to “unpredictable, ridiculous work schedules.” Many participants came from families where either parent had some or little education. Many reported “updating skillsets” to remain “relevant to the modern professional environment,” “to advance with the company,” or “to provide more for [...] family.”

Finding One: Phone tutoring allows for mobility and cuts down on misunderstanding. Students’ perception was that the phone allows for interaction and “lead[s] to more collaboration than the online review.” The phone “was the simplest” format; “it was easy to follow along.” Strong agreement existed regarding the ability to ask questions: “You might walk through the document, and [...] drill down on it and find out what is good or bad about the specific [...] writing.”

For one NNSE learning at a distance, the phone did not “require any of the rules with writing:” “you just can explain what your point is.” When writing via asynchronous review, one had “to take [their] time to finish writing,” and there was “a lot less opportunity for misunderstanding when [...] talking to someone verbally.”

Four participants reported that the phone was preferable to asynchronous and other forms of synchronous tutoring, that “the ease of it even compared to the in-person format.” The videoconference posed problems when students were unfamiliar with the camera or became sidetracked by the video. Other reported advantages of the phone were its freedom and mobility; the phone call “would be better than the video and you can move around with the phone.”

Finding Two: A combination of the phone format with the asynchronous review is useful. The phone helped two participants to understand asynchronous comments. For example, one stated, “There are times when there are 92 comments, and I am like, ‘Oh my God!’ One would want to check in on the phone.” Admittedly, the asynchronous review provided good written feedback, “but it is no substitute for the phone call from time to time, especially when [one is] uncertain on a paper.” A review may have left things open to interpretation; “you may not get your questions addressed [...]. You can move fast with a telephone appointment.”

Finding Three: The phone works as well as videoconferencing. For three of the nine participants, there were no clear benefits to

videoconferencing: “I am not really sure [what the difference is] other than you can see each other.” In a videoconference, one “can use the [white]board” and “message text” (chatbox). As participants felt more capable, they were open to the videoconference as well as the phone: “As the weeks went on in the class, it didn’t matter which one [was used].” The consultant mattered more than the technology: “At one point, it no longer mattered which format because [one] was able to work with the same person.” Two even emphasized that preference was based on context: “it depends on what you are asking for help with.”

DISCUSSION

An important discovery from this study is that the backgrounds of students who use the phone are as important as their insights and preferences. Participants’ work schedules are often responsible for them preferring the phone. Consultant availability is another factor; one’s schedule largely determines when one makes an appointment, with whom, and in what format.

Nevertheless, three observations result from this study. The older technology of the phone is preferred: students selected it as an appointment option more often than newer tutoring methods like videoconference. Second, phone conversations can be used in tandem with other tutoring methods. Some participants’ limited access to strong Internet connection, whether because of lower income, disenfranchisement, or rural geography, resulted in their phone preference. Many participants hedged when I asked about their comfort level with technology, but they eventually stated that technology had no bearing on their tutoring preferences. They chose the phone although video also offers two-way audio, suggesting to me that unfamiliar technology is a likely factor. This is particularly true when one weighs unfamiliar technology with busy work schedules; there is less time to learn the new technology in addition to managing coursework.

Third, video technology can be inconsistent, but LAN-based or VoIP technology is less so. When time or resources are precious, it may be more efficient to tutor via phone. Given this third finding, the mode of technology matters while students become confident writers, particularly when the phone is more mobile and reliable. It allows the consultant and student to get work done.

LIMITATIONS

The differences between videoconference and phone did not emerge until after I interviewed five participants. I added three questions for the next four participants to help clarify what students thought of the phone and the videoconference technologies, and

this may limit these findings. Observer bias may have played a small role in this study because the writing center consists entirely of three part-time professional consultants and one full-time coordinator. When students call the writing center on the fly, it is expected that some might have asked me informal questions given that I answer the phone during business hours. Some of the interviewees had informally chatted with me on the phone before, during, or after the recruitment process.

CONCLUSION

Writing centers must entertain other forms of synchronous tutoring, particularly when distance-learning students are requesting a simple tool. Younger students from rural regions or of lower incomes may be as receptive to phone tutoring as the older adults in this study because of the challenges of newer technology and Internet connectivity. We may think older students (30+) have established patterns with the familiar technology of the telephone, making it easy to bring the tool on board, yet cell phones are ubiquitous and convenient to use. Younger students live with their cell phones at hand and could especially benefit from phone tutoring. Having completed this small study, I invite additional discussion on its results and on the subject of whether tutoring by phone is a viable form of synchronous tutoring. What does training look like for traditional-age populations (18-29) who may be less used to or comfortable with phone conversations? Will younger students default to texting? How will trained consultants negotiate the habit? Is texting suitable for immediate, uncomplicated, and on-call writing assistance? What other training is needed once the initial read-and-respond approach has been adopted? Phone tutoring is not a cure-all but an effective format in situations (like the pandemic) when students are not located on campus. I invite others to try it too.

NOTE

1. To see how writing centers are responding to the challenges of Covid-19, view the collection of posts on the *WLN* Blog: www.wlnjournal.org/blog/covid-19/.



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A Systematic Method for Engaging Writing Center Consultants in Far Transfer

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Writing centers are a nexus for transfer of learning. At its simplest, *transfer of learning* means that “[t]he experience or performance on one task influences performance on some subsequent task” (Ellis 3). If you can drive a car, you can learn to drive a truck (Perkins and Salomon, “Teaching” 22). The mind, recognizing similarities to what is already known, extends what is similar to another activity (Devet 119). Clients engage in transfer when they realize, for example, that the rhetorical concepts of occasion, audience, and purpose apply to every writing situation. But, writing center consultants, too, use transfer. As consultants reflect on and discuss their consultations with fellow workers, they “detect, elect, connect” (Perkins and Salomon, “Cognitive” 250) what they have learned to their next sessions, such as realizing that encouraging a student writer to relax and to enter a productive mindset is a valuable strategy for future sessions. Such transfer helps account for how consultants evolve.



When reflecting on their sessions with clients and transferring what they have learned, consultants undergo two basic types of transfer: *near* and *far*. *Near* transfer refers to consultants’ recognizing connections for contexts that are roughly similar or closely related, such as assisting clients in identifying a comma splice in different parts of an essay. *Far* transfer, though, more appropriately describes how consultants begin to grow *as consultants*. In far transfer, the mind connects situations or concepts that seem distant and unrelated (Devet 122), abstracting from one and applying it to another (Perkins and Salomon, “Teaching” 26). A key example of this type of transfer is the invention of the WeedEater by George Ballas, who conceived of his ubiquitous garden device by watching the whirling nylon brushes glide around his car as it passed through a car wash (“Inventor” A-10). Ballas’ mind linked the brushes’ motions to the removal of weeds around trees and shrubs so that gardeners could protect tree bark.

Consultants undergo similar cognitive leaps between different circumstances when they closely examine a context to link it with previous knowledge. For instance, sessions with a recalcitrant client (“I don’t need to visit the writing center. I like the way my paper is written now.”) and with a crying student (“I can’t write. I never made bad grades in high school.”) may, ostensibly, appear dissimilar. One client resists the center’s help by projecting surety and confidence, while the other one exudes an air of inadequacy. Although each client’s situation is unique, in far transfer, consultants can look for the connections between seemingly dissimilar writing center sessions. Here, what links these two different types of clients is that both sound as if they are seeking some acknowledgment of their feelings. In the words of the playwright Arthur Miller, “Attention must be paid” (Act I). Consultants can show they recognize the recalcitrant writer’s concerns with “I understand that you may not want to talk to a consultant, but while you are here, let’s use this opportunity to look at your paper.” Consultants can also apply this strategy to the crying student by referring to the writer’s fears about adjusting to college (“It is tough to do college writing right out of high school.”) and by acknowledging the writer’s reaction to a low grade (“I know how you feel about receiving a ‘D’, but, together, we can look over the paper to see what needs work.”). In far transfer, then, consultants see connections between dissimilar situations so that their prior experience helps them deal with seemingly different types of clients. Such a connection or far transfer is exactly the type of development that directors want to foster in consultants.

To help consultants “detect, elect, connect” (Perkins and Salomon, “Cognitive” 250) their experiences, directors often encourage their staffs to craft a type of far transfer—an analogy—in order to describe the consultants’ work (Nordstrom). Writing such analogies is useful since far transfer is fundamental to metaphorical or creative thinking (Haskell 301). However, even more beneficial is to use analogies in order to encourage consultants to draw on their prior knowledge (experience as consultants) and carry it from one type of consultation to another, making them more conscious of what they are doing unconsciously. To carry out far transfer, consultants need explicit guidance, especially because far transfer is not automatic. It must be deliberate or an “extended cognitive effort and hence require[s] significant motivation and dispositional drivers” (Salomon and Perkins, “Knowledge” 251) so that consultants can examine their own “mental processes” (Perkins and Salomon, “Teaching” 31) and “sense the similarities and differences between learning situations” (Hill 79).

For far transfer to be deliberate, consultants should engage in

what Lauren Marshall Bowen and Matthew Davis call “multi-dimensional reflective approaches.” Drawing on Kara Taczak and Liane Robertson’s work, Bowen and Davis stress that consultants should look backward (review prior knowledge of working with clients and their own experience with writing), look forward (apply what’s currently learned to other contexts), look inward (examine the current situation to see how it affects the consultants’ development), and look outward (theorize concepts about being consultants and present their ideas to others). Crafting analogies can achieve such cognitive development if directors ask consultants a series of structured questions about the consultants’ analogies. Intentional analysis of analogies lets consultants reflect metacognitively (backward, forward, inward, outward), seeing links between dissimilar topics and abstracting from those contexts. In other words, monitoring one’s mental processes helps consultants understand that their comparisons (far transfer) use their prior knowledge (Perkins and Salomon, “Teaching” 31) about being consultants so that they can apply such knowledge to future situations. What follows, then, is a *systematic* method for fostering far transfer: crafting an analogy, analyzing the analogy, answering follow-up questions, and using the analogies in group discussions. Consultants who are thus “cued, primed, and guided” (Perkins and Salomon, “Cognitive” 19) can grow and develop.

SYSTEMATIC STEPS FOR ENCOURAGING FAR TRANSFER

After receiving IRB-approval,¹ I asked fifteen consultants, with one-to-three years experience, to fill out index cards, doing the following:

STEP 1: CRAFTING AN ANALOGY

“Write a metaphor, simile, or analogy about consulting in the Writing Center by completing the following: ‘Consulting in the Writing Center is like. . . .’” Here is a consultant’s analogy: “Consulting in the Writing Lab is analogous to a single stair on an immense grand staircase.”

STEP 2: ANALYZING THE ANALOGY

Consultants analyze their analogies by answering two questions. First, “How is this analogy useful for characterizing your work?” A consultant explains his staircase image: “You, as a consultant, can only see the student along one leg of their journey. But with your help and by joining together with your fellow consultants, you provide a much needed boost that is essential for the student to reach newer, greater heights all on their own.”

The second question is “How is this analogy *not* useful for characterizing your work?” By describing how the analogy falls

short of encapsulating their work, consultants experience “not” talk (Nowacek 117-21; Reiff and Bawarshi 315). “Not” talk—telling what something is not—leads consultants to abstract from their prior experiences in order to realize their analogies’ limitations. For the staircase analogy, the consultant writes, “It underutilizes the role of the consultant, implying we have a more passive role in the educational experience, when our function in aiding clients along their academic journey is much more *active*.” Using “not” talk poses another advantage. It addresses the objection that metaphors—like the ever famous “lab,” “clinic” (Carino), “storehouse,” “Burkean parlor,” or “garret” (Lunsford)—“oversimplif[y] the work of the [center] and by extension the complexity of writing” (Boquet 9). Using “not” talk forestalls the reductive quality inherent in crafting analogies because consultants are considering where their analogies fall short of encompassing their writing center experiences.

STEP 3: ANSWERING FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Although having consultants explain how their analogy does and does not work is useful for fostering far transfer, directors can encourage consultants to engage in another cognitive component of far transfer: *mindful* abstraction (Perkins and Salomon, “Knowledge”), where consultants are attentive to their actions “with an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance” (Niemiec). That is, they are aware of their “immediate, real-time experience” (Featherstone et al.). Directors foster such mindfulness—a key part of all training—by asking, “What was most useful to you as a consultant from completing this exercise?” Seeing the connection between the analogy and future consultations, a consultant answered, “This exercise allowed me to step back and assess my consulting style and practice as a whole, rather than focus on the nitty-gritty of individual consultations” (looking backward and outward). Another consultant theorizes, “My analogy solidifies the idea that we are here to guide our clients in the right direction so they can learn, not just memorize the answer or fix one thing. We should help clients with their writing forever not just in the moment” (looking outward).

Consultants also address another follow-up question: “What was difficult when you had to explain how your analogy falls short of describing your work?” A consultant who compared her work to that of a personal trainer explains the inadequacies inherent in her far transfer: “It doesn’t acknowledge the back and forth or two-way input that occurs in a consultation; thus, I had to start comparing the two components of my analogy on a deeper level so that I could begin to figure out where the disconnects were” (looking inward and backward). Answering questions about their

far transfers encourages consultants to consider modifying their present circumstances (Haskell 32), thus, grasping the depth of their work.

AN EXAMPLE OF FAR TRANSFER WITH FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

The cognitive process of far transfer is evident in a consultant's analogy about the multiple roles that she plays during a consultation: "It is like working in a hat shop." The consultant then analyzes this far transfer by answering, "How is this analogy useful for characterizing your work?" The consultant states, "We wear all kinds of hats while working. Sometimes we are encouragers, or teachers or simply listeners or commentators. It is good that we are prepared to play the most appropriate role for our clients."

Then, "How is this analogy *not* useful for training?" Further analyzing the far transfer, the consultant states, "It implies clients cannot put on their own hats as they advance in their skills and knowledge, but rather they may only borrow the hats of the Center for a short time. This is not the type of learning the Center seeks to foster in students, but rather one of self-motivated, independent learning." Her "not" talk lets the consultant abstract from her prior knowledge (looking backward) and theorize about her writing center work (looking outward).

To gain more insight into her analogy, the consultant next answers the follow-up question: "What was most useful to you as a consultant from completing this exercise?" The consultant explains, "This exercise made me think more like a teacher and articulate where the pitfalls in my choice of an analogy were." Judging her far transfer, the consultant evaluates herself (looking inward), draws on prior knowledge (looking backward), and projects into the future (looking forward), all reflective practices that allow consultants to mature in their work.

Finally, the last follow-up question, "What was difficult when you had to explain how your analogy falls short of describing your work?" reveals the consultant is again engaging in self-evaluation:

It was much more challenging to pick apart my comparison (because what could be wrong with my beautiful hat analogy?!). It was not enough to simply say, 'One hat was blue and another green, and it was too bad that Student A didn't like the green hat; therefore, it didn't work for them.' No, I had to think about it from a student's and a consultant's perspective, and then figure out how I might feel and/or interpret the analogy just posed to me. As a writer and a consultant, I had to step out of my own shoes

as best as I could and into the shoes of the person working with me at the table.

Her thoughtful reflection shows she has transferred across dissimilar contexts (hats and consulting) and abstracted principles from the contexts to anticipate how her knowledge and skills may be applied to other sessions (Driscoll). She has, in short, experienced mindful abstraction and far transfer.

USING ANALOGIES IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS

During a training session, the consultants' analogies were read aloud so that all consultants could comment and elaborate on them, with small prizes (clip-on reading lights, phone chargers) awarded for the analogies that consultants thought were most original. As can be anticipated, consultants' examples of far transfer varied. Hearing a range of analogies gave them insight into the multiplicity of roles they play in a center. One consultant, for instance, described the center's work as "doing a jig-saw puzzle. You just want the pieces of the puzzle to fit together," while another compared a consultant's work to "that of a 9-1-1 dispatcher who has to calm the client down and assess quickly the situation (i.e., the writing style) before we can offer suggestions," or "It's like driving a car. We must concentrate and stay in the present (in our lane) to give a full range of help to clients, or there could be an accident." By hearing all these themes generated by far transfer, consultants were engaging in "public reflection" and "shared metacognition" (Gardner and Korth), abstracting insights about their work.

CONCLUSION

This systematic method for fostering far transfer does ask consultants to be imaginative, an activity a consultant resisted, saying, "I found this exercise to be fairly difficult because I am not the best at creative writing." Most comments from the consultants, though, were positive: "I had the freedom to be creative in comparing something else to what I had already experienced, and this helped me to come up with my simile." While being creative is vital, far transfer—as presented with guiding questions—offers another benefit. It lets consultants learn more about their work and about how they are developing as consultants. A consultant explains: "Having to really put some thought into what I have gained through this job gave me some insight into how beneficial it has been to me." The act of far transfer, then, through a systematic set of questions, aids directors in their training and lets consultants flourish in the center.

NOTE

1. Consultants granted permission to quote all responses.



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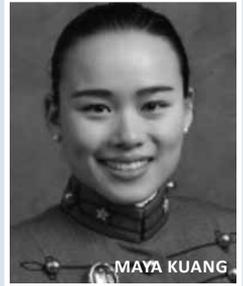
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Tutors' Column: "Speedometers in the Writing Process and Writing Center"

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For many students it is a rite of passage: professors repeatedly urge, “start earlier, so you have time to write a solid draft; finish earlier, so you have time to revise and edit.” Despite such well-intentioned advice, cadets with whom I have consulted as a peer consultant at West Point’s Mounger Writing Center continue to recount anxiety-laden struggles meeting deadlines. Reiterating advice they already get from their teachers on when to start and finish papers is no longer enough; I have found that what often helps them more is breaking down the inherently varied rhythms of the writing process. By helping students internalize the reality that writers can pace their work differently according to the context and stage of their writing process, we can better support their quests to find their own optimal writing speeds.



How can we talk about the different rhythms of the writing process in ways that speak to student writers? In my consulting, I’ve recommended what I call the “speedometer method.” My method uses a familiar object—a speedometer—as an analogy to help students understand what a more alien object—a yet-to-be-written essay—requires in terms of the composition process. A slow start, quick bursts of speed, and deliberate deceleration are elements that sport cars and the writing process share. With consultants helping to gauge effective paces—much like radar speed signs—for writer-drivers at each stage of the process, students can learn to diversify their rhythm in ways that mirror the practices of more experienced writers.

ENGINE WARM-UPS / BRAINSTORMING AND MUSING

Our cars require slow starts so as not to damage their engines; sometimes writers can benefit from informal brainstorming or musing sessions in order to avoid feeling overwhelmed. As writing center consultants, we can help them first mull over their ideas, deliberately form connections, and develop more complex concepts before plunging into drafting. In doing so, we help reassure writers

that a “slow start” is not only a feasible but often an optimal way to begin the writing process.

Accordingly, consultants are wise to exercise restraint in the beginning of a session, especially when writers bring in nothing but a prompt. Enthusiastic tutors may see this as an opportunity to share their ideas with ostensibly empty-handed writers, perpetuating misguided understandings of writing centers as ‘storehouses’—places where ideas flow unidirectionally from consultant to writers, rather than interactively between them (Lunsford 2). Ideally, however, writing centers are sites for dialogue. Especially at the initial stage, we can help set a slower, more reflective pace. During one of my recent consultations, the writer confessed that he expected our writing center to be just as quickly paced as his college lifestyle. Therefore, he almost expected that he could and *would* rapidly, decisively generate the essay’s final outline during our forty-five minute consultation. However, I explained that such haste would not be conducive to quality work; instead of immediately piecing together an outline from the scattered, inchoate notes he brought in, I facilitated a meaningful conversation related to his essay topic. I also shared brainstorming techniques he could use outside of the center. For instance, the doodling he does as he waits for his next class could be transformed into a brainstorming web that could serve as the basis for an outline for his next paper. After proper warm-ups, writers are ready to speed off to the races.

QUICK BURSTS OF SPEED / FAST DRAFTING

Law enforcement officers disapprove of cars flying down the road, but drivers find speed exhilarating. I tell my writers that speedy drafting can thrust them through moments where they lack motivation or the drought periods that frequently follow outlining. Even as planning is essential for academic writing, over-planning may lead to over-thinking and over-inflated concerns; it risks paralysis for the writer. The drafting stage is not the time to scour for more precise language—save that for the revision stage. Writing center consultants can remind peers that generating a draft is supposed to be rough and at times frightening; this stage does not have to be slow and deliberate, lest stagnation occur. Rather, students in the drafting phase can benefit from exercises such as focused freewriting. As Peter Elbow reminds us, “Freewriting exercises are push-ups in withholding judgment as you produce so that afterwards you can judge better” (14).

So, I advise students to write fast: the writing center is just the place to support the need for speed. By encouraging writers to consider drafting quickly, we can help them realize they have more ideas than they give themselves credit for. I once had a writer who hesitated

during the drafting stage. I encouraged her to loosen her judgment and write with momentum, giving her pockets of time between our conversation to simply write (which consultants often do in our writing center). It did the trick. While dialogue predominates in my consultations, I have found that bursts of writing between conversations help writers adjust to the faster tempo of the drafting stage. Although freewriting is often connected to prewriting, during the drafting stage this fast-paced approach can be an efficient way to get important ideas written down.

DELIBERATE DECELERATION / REVISION AND FINAL PROOFREADING

Eventually other factors—whether sirens blaring from behind, deadlines or roadblocks ahead, or simply the driver’s own adrenaline wearing away—lead writer-drivers to decelerate and gradually come to a stop. At this point in the writing process, speed no longer equals success. As Elbow states about the revision stage, “If you haven’t found your main point during the writing process, now you must demand it. This is often a crucial, delicate, frustrating process” (129). Revision requires intensive care. The looser language that we sped through in the drafting stage should be acknowledged here. Writers must spot and deal with such concerns purposefully; although it may seem like a daunting task, this is where consultants can act as the second set of eyes for our writers and provide valuable feedback.

Emphasizing deceleration during the revision stage reminds our writers to allow themselves enough writing time to come in to the center and benefit from our collaboration and pointers. In a recent session of mine, a writer who had just finished his paper admitted that the main reason he shared his paper with me was that he did not want to read over his draft, for fear of disappointing himself. Because he was still thrilled and relieved, in equal measure, at his perceived victory in completing the ‘race’ of drafting, he was especially vulnerable to the frustration Elbow mentions. I have found that easing writers into the deceleration of the revision stage is key to helping them overcome such fears and frustrations. During sessions when my writers are revising drafts that they will soon turn in, I aim to structure discussions on higher order concerns in ways that writers coming to a stop can manage; for example, rather than suggest an entirely new lens through which to view their subject, I might point out a comparatively minor but unacknowledged counterargument. Such tactics at once avoid adding more stress and encourage writers to bring their work methodically to completion. Additionally, by asking clarification questions about their language and mirroring my thought process to them as I read their draft, I

assist them in tightening up their language and focusing their main points for the homestretch. Giving writers some time to shift gears helps them feel more comfortable and empowered to revisit their drafts and to move deliberately across the finish line.

Writing center consultants who work with writers throughout their writing processes can serve as changing radar speed signs or driving coaches, essentially informing students of the various writing speeds they can use. We can alter the posted speed and vary our guidance, depending on conditions. We can help students find the optimal writing speed to attain their key insights, the momentum to complete a draft, and the time to decelerate, revise, and come to a satisfying stop. And we can help assure them that unfamiliar challenges are to be expected: the speedometer method challenges the notion that every stage of the writing process should be travelled at the same pace. Slowing down and speeding up at different junctions of the road can help writers complete papers and experience journeys they never before thought possible.



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Conference Announcements

Southeastern Writing Centers Association

February 11-13, 2020

Online Conference

“Trauma and Transformation: Writing Centers in an Era of Change”

For details of the conference and a link to submitting a proposal, go to: southeasternwritingcenter.wildapricot.org/conference. Deadline for proposals is Dec. 1, 2020. For questions, contact the SWCA President, Janine Morris: jmorris@nova.edu.

Secondary School Writing Centers Association

March 12-19, 2021

Virtual Conference

“From Crisis to Creation”

See the conference website for the proposal form and other conference information: sswca.org/conference/sswca-2021-virtual-from-crisis-to-creation/. Proposal deadline: November 20 (the new, extended deadline). Please email conference co-chairs Stacey Hahn, Jenny Goransson, and Vivian Blair at sswca.board@gmail.com with any questions about presentations.

South Central Writing Centers Association

March 5-7, 2021

Virtual conference

Hosted by Southwestern University and Abilene Christian University
“Collaboration, Confidence, and Compromise: The Interrelational Work of Writing Centers”

Keynotes: Scott Widdon and Rusty Carpenter

Conference website: scwca.net/scwca-conference-2021.

Conference chairs: Jennifer Marciniak: marcinij@southwestern.edu; and Cole Bennett: cole.bennett@acu.edu.

Announcements & Updates

A NEW DIGITAL EDITED COLLECTION COMING SOON

In early 2021, the third Digital Edited Collection (DEC), *Wellness and Care*, edited by Genie Giaimo, will be uploaded to the WLN website. This DEC has a wide-ranging set of pedagogical and scholarly chapters on wellness explored through labor studies, social movements, anti-racism, critical theory, and lived experience. This collection features authors such as Yanar Hashlamon, who rightly resituates wellness in community care models developed during the Civil Rights Movement, and Lauren Brentnell, Elise Dixon, and Rachel Robinson, who discuss vulnerability, empathy, and their social justice-oriented approach to writing center work. Other chapters focus on imposter syndrome, stress, emotional labor, emotional intelligence, and site-specific wellness research.

COVID RESPONSES AND BLOG REDESIGN

Visit our redesigned WLN blog, *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders*, at wlnjournal.org/blog. The blog offers a space for writing center people across the globe to interact, exchange ideas, and find community.

During the summer dozens of contributors from Lebanon, South Africa, England, Denmark, China, Germany, Norway, Kuwait, and the U.S. all shared strategies they are using as they adapt to online tutoring, stories about how writing centers are surviving and thriving during the pandemic, and efforts to reckon with linguistic diversity and equity issues. These responses were uploaded into a section of the blog, COVID-19 responses, for you to read and find more ways for your writing center to continue online.

We invite you to comment on the blog articles and to subscribe to the blog and its newsletter. For general inquiries or ideas for articles, please email us at: writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com

Anna Sophia Habib, Esther Namubiru, and Weijia Li
WLN Blog Editors

SPECIAL ISSUES ON LIBRARY/WRITING CENTER COLLABORATIONS

We currently have in process special issues related to library/writing center collaborations. Such collaborations are often productive if not always comfortable, and they can offer opportunities for writing center professionals to reconsider common writing center praxis. For example, what happens when writing center practitioners' understanding of protecting writers' confidentiality and engaging in social activism seem almost fundamentally at odds with the understandings of the library professionals with whom they work?

WANT TO SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS? CHECK THE *WLN* BLOG: CONNECTING WRITING CENTERS ACROSS BORDERS.

WLN's CW CAB blog is a great way to quickly share and connect with colleagues directing or working in writing centers around the world. Post questions, find advice and recommendations, and share ideas and scholarship in one place: www.wlnjournal.org/blog. Help grow our community and enhance our global virtual conversation, ideally both in English and in other languages.

*Please join by **subscribing to the blog***. You can do so on the blog homepage in the right-hand column. When you subscribe, you will receive a post notification every time we post new content.

The *WLN* blog also has a newsletter you can receive at the end of each academic semester. It's a great way to get highlights of your colleagues' contributions on the blog. **Subscribe to the blog newsletter** by visiting: www.wlnjournal.org/blog/our-newsletter.

Do you want to post an article on the blog? You don't need to be a member to share something. You can include photos, pictures of your writing center, and other visuals. Email our *WLN* blog editor, Anna Habib, at writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com for more details.

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Interested in contributing news, announcements, or accounts of work in your writing center to the Blog (photos welcomed)? Contact the Blog Editors (writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com).

Interested in guest editing a special issue on a topic of your choice? Contact Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu).

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WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship

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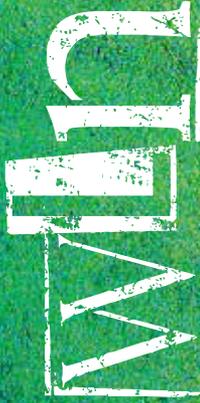
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