

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E E T T E R

Volume 35, Number 1

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

September, 2009

— FROM THE EDITOR —

We begin our new volume and academic year with a new regular feature, Jackie Grutsch McKinney's "Geek in the Center" column, and an issue designed to challenge and inspire you to explore what's new in our field. Some of our colleagues introduce us to new ways to reach out beyond our writing centers: podcasting, blogging, and online tutoring. Annette Vee, Mike A. Shapiro, Nancy Linh Karls, and Brad Hughes lead us through the processes by which they began developing podcasts, and they offer useful suggestions for others interested in offering content in this new medium. Jackie Grutsch McKinney's column, looks at blogging and its many uses, and Joseph M. Rein reflects on his experience as an online tutor and offers advice to other tutors who are tutoring online.

Also new this fall is the next edition, the 7th, of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Susan Mueller guides us through major changes that have considerably altered bibliography format in MLA style. As we update all the MLA resources and handouts in our writing centers and on our websites, Susan Mueller's review is an excellent introduction to what you'll find in the new manual.

And now that *WLN* is available in searchable form in many databases, you'll find a listing of those on page 12. On page 13 is a public thank you to our many reviewers who served so admirably during 2008-2009. Finally, numerous writing center associations are getting forthcoming conferences organized for the year, and you'll find information on these throughout the issue.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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PODCASTING THE WRITING CENTER: NOTES ON DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

◆ Annette Vee, Mike A. Shapiro, Nancy Linh Karls, and Brad Hughes
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A few writing centers have recently begun producing podcasts, digital audio files that can be loaded onto an iPod or other audio player. Podcasts, like downloadable radio shows, vary in tone from spontaneous and unscripted to tightly produced and edited. You can hear this range in podcasts produced by the writing centers at Ohio State, Texas A&M, Arizona State, and Brigham Young University, among others. When we at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center dipped our feet into podcasting last year, we quickly realized just how deep the iPod goes. Podcasts stand out from the dizzying array of technologies competing for writing centers' limited time and budgets: they highlight the power of the human voice at the heart of our instruction, they invite an intimate connection between speaker and listener, and they teach us to compose and collaborate in an important new medium. This article charts some of the opportunities and hazards of podcast design, exploring the choices that have made podcasts an exciting new space for our writing center.

Podcasts respond to a central finding of one survey of technologies affecting higher education, *The 2009 Horizon Report*: colleges and universities face mounting expectations that they should "deliver services, content, and media to mobile devices" (6). *The Horizon Report* urges educators to treat this expect-

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Manuscripts: Before sending in submissions, please consult the guidelines on the *WLN* website. Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format. Please send as attached files in an e-mail to submission@writinglabnewsletter.org.

tation as “an opportunity for higher education to reach its constituents in new and compelling ways” (6). Doug Dangler, Ben McCorkle, and Time Barrow reach a similar conclusion in their 2007 survey of podcast use, challenging writing centers to capitalize on the distinct set of advantages podcasts offer. According to digital composition scholar Alex Reid, podcasts occupy “a connection point where media passes back and forth between formal and informal communications, between traditionally public and private spaces, between pedagogical and social discourses” in a way that is already integrated into the student’s life (75).

In our podcasts, we used the formal/informal and pedagogical/social hybridities Reid describes to inform practical design decisions about how to reach our audience in new ways. At the same time, we sought to broadcast our writing center’s ethos and emphasis on collaboration. There is some evidence that our experiments have been successful—in just the first few months we hosted podcasts on our website, we had several thousand downloads. We know that not every download translates to a dedicated listener; we are confident, however, that our podcasts have expanded the reach of our center in an innovative way. We have organized this article as a brief tour through three podcasts, each from a different category: instruction, publicity, and research. (You can listen to these podcasts—and more—at writing.wisc.edu/podcasts.) At the end of the tour, we offer some techniques we learned in the process of designing and producing these podcasts.

I. PODCASTING TO INSTRUCT (OR PODAGOGY)

Our instructional podcasts are intended to help writers better understand particular writing issues or complete specific writing tasks. So far, we’ve created podcasts that introduce common documentation styles, we’ve interviewed faculty from across the disciplines for their insights on conceptualizing and writing a dissertation, and we’re planning podcasts that address advanced writing topics such as the role of persuasion in scientific writing.

With a grant from our university’s IT department, we decided to enhance our online writers’ handbook by designing a podcast that would introduce undergraduate writers to MLA documentation. Although we had many questions about what form the podcast would take, we felt strongly that it should sound professional, have a distinct voice and brand, and showcase the instructional clarity our writing center offers. We kept returning to one central question: what could we do with audio that we couldn’t with text or in other ways online? We spent a long time discussing our approach, drafting our script, creating images, finding music, and editing our files . . . all for a 4-minute podcast!

Although we considered structuring our podcast as a tutor-student dialogue, we opted instead for an approach that seemed less contrived to us: a script with just one writing center professional who would guide the student writer through MLA documentation in a straightforward, but approachable way. Audio monologue is a difficult medium for explaining how to punctuate a works-cited entry, so we bypassed the gritty details with a conceptual introduction instead. We structured our podcast into three parts: an overview of the MLA system, an introduction to in-text citations, and an introduction to the Works Cited list.

We went through six drafts, moving toward a voice that was warm, friendly, and knowledgeable, and relying on shorter sentences and more contractions than in our text-based online and print materials. Composing for audio delivery also helped us think about creating a podcast that would be effective for multilingual writers as well as native English speakers. Throughout the process, we integrated feedback from our university’s IT staff, our writing center colleagues, and our target audience of students.

We wavered on whether to include images in our podcasts. Images could help illustrate certain documentation issues, yet we didn’t want to risk distracting (and potentially injuring) listeners who might

be driving or working out while listening to their iPods. As a compromise, we included only a few images to reinforce key concepts.

Throughout our collaboration, discussions of the ethos we wanted to project helped shape what became the intro and outro we use for each of our podcasts. Imagining our writing center's "brand," we negotiated issues like bumper music—judging samples as “too fast,” “too stuffy,” or “too much banjo”—and found ourselves reassessing and redefining our ethos in the process. The process of developing our first podcast pushed us to articulate what we value most about our writing center. It also enabled us to think creatively about how best to capture or voice those values in a podcast.

II. PODCASTING TO PUBLICIZE

We designed our publicity podcasts to promote our services through student and community voices. Publicity podcasts we've made or have in the works include publicity for the online writing center, our partnership with a community library branch, and our undergraduate writing fellows program. To demonstrate how student voices can be featured in podcasts and how this medium can be used to reach more students, we'll focus here on the podcast promoting our online writing center. This podcast highlights our synchronous chat conferences, which reach students where they are writing now: in the evenings, at home, while online.

Of the scenarios in which we imagined our students listening to podcasts, two connected specifically to our chat service: students might listen while they were on our website reading about our chat services, or when they were in the chat's online waiting room preparing for their conference. To highlight student voices in the podcast, Annette, the Coordinator of our Online Writing Center, had short interviews with one graduate student who was a non-native English speaker and one undergraduate who was a native English speaker. (We ask interviewees—students and colleagues alike—for written permission to incorporate their voices into our podcast. See the *Podcasting Legal Guide*, linked in section IV below, for more details.) Annette asked questions such as:

- You've been back to our chat conferencing several times. What keeps you coming back?
- How tech-savvy do you have to be to use chat conferencing?
- What kinds of feedback do you receive from your online tutors?

Our target time for the podcast was 4 to 6 minutes, and quick interviews were more likely to yield short soundbites as well as respect the students' generous offer of their time.

We edited the podcast to sound like a conversation foregrounding student voices. After our usual theme music and introduction, a first-year undergraduate describes how chat conferencing helps him meet his objectives in writing. Annette then gives an overview of the podcast and begins her interview with this student. Her brief directions on chat conferencing are followed by another student's voice, this time a doctoral student in education, describing her experiences conferencing online. Annette ends the podcast with a welcoming message to student listeners: “We hope to meet you online soon!”

Just as our MLA podcast distills documentation to its core principles, this podcast limits itself to the essential aspects of chat conferencing—to give students a tempting teaser to join us online. For instance, instead of the minute-long monologue it would take to explain exactly how to access the service, the podcast transitions from a student's description of the chatroom to Annette's brief directions for how to get there.

“The process of developing our first podcast pushed us to articulate what we value most about our writing center.”

One of the most rewarding aspects of producing this podcast was our collaboration with students: the voice of a student who uses chat conferencing may be more convincing publicity than our “official” voices. Rhetorically, podcasts excel at providing introductory or affective information, and through our collaboration with students we were able to use this medium to add voice to text-based conferences, project the usefulness of our services in a way that was consistent with our values, and reach out to more students.

III. PODCASTING TO SHARE RESEARCH AND TRENDS IN WRITING STUDIES

Our third category of podcasts explores research and professional issues in writing center studies and in the broader field of composition and rhetoric. Through these podcasts, we try to reach undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff who are interested (or potentially interested) in composition studies and writing center careers. Geared toward the specific interests of this audience, our research podcasts are much longer and engage with more complex issues than our podcasts intended for a more general listenership.

We’ve produced two podcasts for this audience. One features a discussion about writing center assessment with Jill Pennington, Neal Lerner, and Jason Mayland, taped during the 2008 IWCA Summer Institute at UW—Madison. The other draws from an extensive interview with literacy researcher and theorist Deborah Brandt. The Brandt podcast illustrates what’s involved in striking a good balance between the warmth of the human voice and the complexity of research. We chose to feature Brandt not only because she teaches here at the UW—Madison, but also because she has done groundbreaking research on literacy and is admired as a generous teacher and mentor. In fact, as we planned this interview, we asked Brandt’s former students to contribute questions. Brandt’s enthusiasm for her research and her powerful curiosity animate all of her conversation, so audio highlights just how awesome she is.

In these podcasts, Brandt discusses her award-winning *Literacy in American Lives*, shares her latest research into how writing is changing in the 21st century workplace, and discusses what this new history suggests about changing values in literacy. To balance natural conversation and polished script, we edited the podcast to preserve the spontaneity of natural speech while eliminating false starts and extraverbal clutter. We significantly reorganized material, reduced repetition, and excised less important information. We re-recorded a few short responses to clarify points and, in post-production, recorded new questions to serve as transitions within the new structure.

The power of Brandt’s voice and her enthusiasm for her research and teaching is immediately apparent in these podcasts. Commenting on the deep knowledge that writers in the workplace possess, Brandt exclaims, “We in universities are *not* the only ones who think about writing. There’s a *lot* of knowledge out there way beyond universities.” And from her research she says powerful things about how writing gets done in the workplace: “Writing in the workplace is sustained through the same ways that writing in the writing center and in the writing classroom is done. It’s through talk and sharing and support and teaching and learning”—practices that also align nicely with podcasts. This podcast provides a rare, behind-the-scenes look at research. What attracted Brandt to her current research topics? What values drive her research writing? The lively back-and-forth in this podcast gives colleagues as well as current and prospective students access to Brandt and her work, opens up an exciting new space for talk about and around research, and associates our writing center with innovative and current work in the field.

IV. SOLVING TWO PROBLEMS OF PODCASTING

For a writing center, podcasts have two great strengths. First, podcasts are well suited to delivering conceptual overviews. Second, podcasts convey affective information, like the enthusiasm you can hear from Deborah Brandt, in a way difficult to reproduce in text. The human voices of podcasts make audible the multivocal and multivalenced ethos of writing center work.



ASST. PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH/Writing
CENTER DIRECTOR
PITZER COLLEGE

Pitzer College, a member of the Claremont Colleges, invites applications for a tenure-track Asst. Professor of English to serve as Writing Center Director beginning fall 2010. The successful candidate will develop and maintain the Writing Center, have responsibility for supervising a part-time Administrative Coordinator and a staff of graduate and undergraduate student assistants. The person will serve as a resource for faculty teaching writing in the interdisciplinary First-Year Seminar program; and teach 3 writing courses, including academic writing, per academic year. A Ph.D. in English with preferred specialization in Composition or Rhetoric is required at the time of appointment.

Pitzer College has a strong institutional commitment to diversity in all areas and strongly encourages candidates from underrepresented social groups. We favor candidates who can contribute to the College's distinctive educational objectives, which promote interdisciplinary perspectives, intercultural understanding, and concern with social responsibility and the ethical implications of knowledge and action. Pitzer College is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer. For the successful applicant with the relevant interests, affiliations are possible with the intercollegiate departments of Asian American Studies, Black Studies, Chicano/Latino Studies, and/or Women's Studies.

To apply, send letter of application, curriculum vitae, selected evidence of excellence in teaching and research (course evaluations, writing sample, etc.), statement of teaching philosophy, a description of your research, and three letters of recommendation VIA E-MAIL to Writing_center_search@pitzer.edu. Electronic documents are required in MS Word or PDF formats. Applicants may, but are not required, to submit duplicate hard copies to: Alan Jones, Dean of Faculty, 1050 N. Mills Ave., Claremont, CA 91711. The deadline for applying is November 15, 2009 or until the position is filled.

Although every writing center will make choices based on their needs and context, we hope our discussion of some of the conceptual and editorial possibilities of podcasts can help you think through how best to carry your ethos to an online listenership. But how do you start? You can begin recording a podcast with nothing more than the microphone built into your laptop and a free audio editor. (We use Audacity—audacity.sourceforge.net.) If your budget allows, we recommend a good digital voice recorder (around \$200) and a microphone, though libraries and IT departments often loan this equipment. You can distribute podcasts via your writing center or school website, but one great way to reach a larger audience is to publish on Apple's (free) iTunes U—apple.com/itunesu.

Ultimately, the trick with introducing podcasts to your writing center is not the technology but the technique. In the early stages of designing our podcasts, we developed some techniques to get us past two obstacles—how to connect to and then engage the listener.

Obstacle 1: Connecting to the listener. It's hard to speak conversationally when you are alone with a mic. How can you record a podcast that has the tone of a friendly phone call?

- *Visualize your audience.* Are you speaking to a first-year student or to a senior faculty colleague? Is the listening voluntary or assigned? Is the listener focused on you or on cleaning the kitchen?
- *Speak to an audience of one.* Speaking to a crowd calls for slow, loud and clear intonation; however, even if thousands of listeners eventually hear your podcast, they'll hear it in the privacy of their own ears.
- *Avoid monologues.* If appropriate, build the podcast around a casual or natural conversation, although such podcasts will likely require more editing: listeners know canned dialogue when they hear it.
- *Record your podcast with a listener in the room.* Having a listener from your target audience around is one way to ensure your tone suits your audience.
- *Pay attention to speed.* Speak slowly, but not so slowly that your listener feels patronized. (Audiobook narrators demonstrate how quickly a reader can absorb sophisticated information. Try Doug Ordunio's reading of *Guns, Germs and Steel*.)

Obstacle 2: Engaging your listener. Horrible lecturers can botch presentations about important ideas while great marketers and newscasters can make useless junk sound essential. How can you help your listener pay attention?

- *Don't hesitate to promote the benefits of your podcast.* There's a reason infomercials work. For example: "Ever seen 'Awkward' written on your papers? This podcast gives you easy tips for writing sharper, clearer sentences. Follow them and you might never be 'Awkward' again."
- *Tell a story.* A well-told story can help any idea sound significant and can keep a listener interested and paying attention.

EXAMPLE: Podictionary (podictionary.com) hangs each day's etymology on a sometimes unrelated story about a figure associated with the day's word.

- *Keep it short.* You can say a lot in five minutes. Divide longer podcasts into subtopics, and make the transitions between subtopics audible with music or script cues.
- *Leave blank space.* You want your listener's mind to wander over the issues you raise. Because it's annoying to rewind a podcast, you should leave blank spaces that invite your listener to think about what you've said. Amusing or digressive stories can serve this purpose, but music is ideal.
- *Use music.* It gives your listener time to think, can help a longer podcast cohere, and can engage your listener emotionally and intellectually. For information about using music legally and to find repositories of "podsafe" music, visit the *Podcasting Legal Guide*: wiki.creativecommons.org/Podcasting_Legal_Guide.

TAKE NOTE

SAVE THESE DATES

INTERNATIONAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

hosted by the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association (MAWCA), Sheraton Baltimore City Center Hotel, Baltimore, Maryland. November 3 (reception) through November 6th, 2010. Conference Theme: "Safe Harbors or Open Seas? Navigating Currents in Writing Center Work"

Call for proposals, website and keynote speaker information forthcoming in the October issue of *WLN*. Conference co-chairs: John Nordlof, Eastern University, and Barbara Gaal Lutz, University of Delaware. E-mail: IWCAconference2010@english.udel.edu.



EUROPEAN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

May 25-28, 2010
Paris, France
Keynote speaker: Muriel Harris

The European Writing Centers Association 2010 conference will be hosted by the American University of Paris, and the EWCA is currently planning for their website announcement, to be posted at <http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/eng/>. The conference theme, Call for Proposals, registration details, and other information will soon be announced. Conference chair: Ann Mott (amott@aup.fr)



MID-ATLANTIC WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

University of Delaware's Clayton Hall
Newark, DE
April 9-10th, 2010
Conference Theme: "Individuals Shaping Writing Centers-Writing Centers Shaping Individuals"

New for 2010: Professional Development Workshop on April 9th. Stay tuned for more information! Call for proposals, website and keynote speaker information forthcoming in the October issue of *WLN*. Conference chairs: Melissa lanetta and Barbara Gaal Lutz. E-mail: MAWCAconference2010@english.udel.edu.

• **Develop characters.** Because it's easier to take in new material if you're not also taking in new personalities, successful long-term podcasts rely on the same speakers returning week after week.

Further listening.

- The YouTube series "Ira Glass on Storytelling" (four short episodes) exposes the narrative tricks behind the most successful show on public radio.
- The Slate Political Gabfest (slate.com/gabfest) is a popular weekly panel podcast that offers one model for a lively multivocal conversation.
- Fly with Me (joepodcaster.libsyn.com) is a long-running and hugely successful podcast that demonstrates nearly all of the techniques listed above.

Producing podcasts has been a technical and rhetorical challenge for us as we have imagined and re-imagined our audiences, learned techniques for editing audio, and agreed and disagreed on ways to present our ethos as a writing center. We have, however, also appreciated the opportunity to experiment with a new genre and to feel like students again: uncertainty (and insecurity) can be useful in reminding us what writers experience when they come to share their work with us. The collaborative and deliberative process of podcasting has been immensely rewarding to us and, we hope, to our students, who now have new ways to experience the work we do and can do with them. Ultimately, podcasts are about *talk*, and we believe that they can leverage the power of the human voice at the center of all the work writing centers do. ◆

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GEEK IN THE CENTER

◆ *Jackie Grutsch McKinney*
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One of my favorite moments in writing center scholarship is in Beth Boquet's article "Our Little Secret," where she asks, "What are we failing to imagine now for writing centers?" I think about this question often in my role as a writing center director, in my own research, and when I confront new technologies. One of my first thoughts is, "Wow, what could a writing center do with that?" This new column I'll be writing for the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, "Geek in the Center," starts from that impulse—an impulse to imagine. The general format of this column will be to introduce a technology (a program, web application, equipment, gadget, a practice) and point to research and current uses in writing center work in order to stir up conversations about possibilities. In this spirit, I hope you'll read these columns and not necessarily think, "This is what we should do," but rather ask, "What could we do?" If you have a topic you would like to see covered in this column or have an innovative use of technology you'd like me to showcase, just let me know at jrmckinney@bsu.edu; AIM or Twitter: [jrgmckinney](#).

BLOGGING

Just a few years back, in popular opinion, blogging was a sketchy web-based writing phenomenon for lonely, narcissistic conspiracy theorists or exhibitionists who were too young or too crazy to engage in the world like proper citizens. But this attitude has quickly changed: many of us now read and compose blogs. Between 2002 and 2008, Technorati indexed some 133 million blogs, and 77% of active Internet users now read blogs ("State of the Blogosphere"). Blogs are slowly making their way into writing center work as well. A 2009 survey of over one hundred writing center directors found that about 9% of writing centers are currently using blogs, and more are considering creating them in the near future (Grutsch McKinney & Jackson).

WHAT IS A BLOG EXACTLY?

A blog (shortened from the original "web log") is simply a web page that is organized in reverse chronological order by dated entries. Though primitive blogs began as early as the mid-1990s, blogging didn't really take off for another decade. As late as 2004, when Merriam-Webster made "blog" a word of the year, only about 27% of Internet users read blogs; 62% did not know what a blog was (Rainie). Despite early wariness about the character of bloggers, by 2008 three out of four bloggers were college graduates and close to half (42%) had attended graduate school ("State of the Blogosphere").

GETTING STARTED

The rapid rise in popularity of blogs can be partially attributed to the ease with which one can start one. There are several sites that enable would-be bloggers to begin a blog for free in less than ten minutes. Even with no web-composing know-how, most people with basic computer writing skills (e.g. knowing how to use a word processor) can blog. Good sites to consider when starting a blog are [blogger.com](#), [edublog.org](#), [tumblr.com](#), and [wordpress.com](#). All of these sites will host your blog for you for free on their domain. You'll be given choices about the design, layout, and privacy settings, and you'll receive a unique URL for your blog.

Each site has slightly different procedures for posting to blogs, but each provides a web-based editor for you to add text, links, and images to your blog right from your browser window. Some will allow for sound, slideshows, and video files as well. When you have finished drafting a post, you publish it with just a click of a button. The blog site that you use does nearly everything for you; you just keep adding the content. When

TAKE NOTE

EAST CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
April 8-10, 2010
Lansing, Michigan
"Converging at the Vanishing Point"

Writing centers are at an interesting time in our history. During the past two decades, many of us—in four-year and two-year institutions, and even secondary schools—have moved from the margins to the center as we become more professionalized, better funded, and more physically visible in well-designed spaces. In essence, we have converged with larger institutional structures and missions.

Proposals will be accepted for a variety of different formats or presentation styles, including presentations of 15-20 minutes in length; panels of 3 to 4 presenters; roundtables designed around a specific theme; workshops that are fully interactive; posters; and performances. We expect all sessions to be interactive and invite audience feedback and/or participation. Proposal deadline is October 31, 2009.

Co-chairs for the conference are Trixie Smith and Jill Pennington. Further discussion of the conference theme and information for sending proposals can be found on the Conference website: <<http://writing.msu.edu/ecwca>>. Contact e-mail is ecwca2010questions@gmail.com.

you add a new post, it will appear at the top of the page and your older posts will move down. Because of this, blogs are best for time-based correspondences, not for static information that you'll always want in reader's view.

Though blogging is as easy as typing in Microsoft Word, the style of blog posts is typically a bit different than essay or "academic" writing. For one thing, blog posts are typically shorter and more singular in purpose. Because you can create additional posts as needed, there is no pressing need to combine different ideas in one post. In fact, many bloggers try to attract more readers with more frequent posting rather than less-frequent, longer posts. Additionally, blog posts should take advantage of the multimodal and hypertext affordability of the web. This means linking to other web-based content and using images, sounds, and video to enhance your messages. Many blogs are written in a familiar tone directly to readers. Perhaps the best part of blogs, in fact, is that they are interactive. Readers are able to respond to your posts by adding a comment. Each blogging site will allow you to set your commenting preferences: you can moderate comments or require commenters to sign-in, for example, if you find inappropriate or spam comments a problem. Though it is possible to know how many people visit your blog by adding an analytic program (i.e. Google Analytics), the comments allow you to see what is engaging your readers and helps you shape future content.

Of course, with the amount of content already on the web, it will be rare to have a reader stumble upon your blog. If you want readers, you'll have to recruit them through e-mail, print advertising, or links on your website or Facebook page. If your aim for readers stretches beyond the local context, you will want to make sure that your blog settings reflect that by making your blog public, searchable, and indexed.

WRITING CENTERS BLOGGING

Writing centers have launched blogs with different purposes and authors, intended for different audiences. Some examples:

Center Blogs (Public)

One idea is to use a blog as a public platform for the center, linked prominently to one's writing center website. Several writing centers have launched public blogs geared towards providing advice, news, and links for student writers (LBJ Graduate Writing Center at University of Texas, West Virginia University, and Keene State College Center for Writing), for faculty (Texas A&M and Wright State), and for writers in the community (Portland State University Writing Center). Public blogs such as these create a new space for writing center work—new places for us to connect with new users.

Community Blog (Public)

Peercentered.org is a blog that anyone involved in writing centers, but especially peer tutors, can contribute to. Another group is using the blog antiracistwritingcenters.blogspot.com to convene on issues of race.

Staff Blogs (Private)

Some staffs have created internal, private blogs in order to collectively discuss and reflect on issues they face in the course of their writing center work. Frankie Condon says that her tutors at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Writing Center who use a private blog "seem to like writing into the blog in ways that they didn't like writing into a paper-based journal." On the other hand, Melinda Baer describes the staff at Northern Illinois University needing weekly posting requirements in order to get their blog going.

Class Blogs (Private or Public)

Another idea is to use a class blog for a tutor training (or any other) course (see Barrios; Brooke; and Krause). Here, students all sign on as authors to contribute to a blog that the instructor creates. If you pursue this, consider whether you'll make the blog public or not. I've come to prefer private course

blogs only because of the stickiness of the web: I don't want an offhand comment that a student makes to come back to haunt her later.

Individual Director or Tutor Blogs (Public or Private)

Though some directors and tutors compose public blogs on their research, views, and ideas on writing, which can raise the profile of the writer and center, private blogs can be equally valuable for individuals allowing one to easily maintain a digital writer's notebook, teaching journal, or administrative log. Deciding to make a blog public or private should be based on the content, purpose, and intended audience; Clancy Ratliff notes that some academic bloggers decide to write under a pseudonym in order to discuss their work with (some) anonymity (qtd. in Graupner & Denecker).

Personally, I believe blogs are teeming with possibilities for writing center work. Still, there are factors to be considered when using blogs. For one, because blogging is easy and free, there are blog carcasses all over the blogosphere—blogs that started and then fizzled out. A plan should be made for maintenance—weekly or at minimum bi-monthly posts are expected on blogs. Another issue that I've hinted at throughout is the issue of privacy. The decision about privacy settings should not be made hastily; the capabilities of search engines make public blogs readily findable by parents, students, faculty, administrators, and the general public. Though I don't think we should necessarily shy away from making writing centers more visible, we won't want to jeopardize our centers or careers either. With these caveats in mind, I do encourage us to think about what else we might be able to do with blogs in our writing center work. ♦

Notes

1. Try Google's blog search (blogsearch.google.com) to find these and other writing center blogs.



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TAKE NOTE

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Call for Proposals
May 20 - May 22, 2010
Bloomington, Indiana
Keynote Speakers: Art Young and Terry Myers Zawacki

The website for the WAC2010 Conference, co-sponsored by Indiana University and the University of Texas at Austin, is now open and accepting proposals: <<http://www.indiana.edu/~wac2010/>>. Deadline for proposals is October 19, 2009. Notification of acceptance will be no later than December 4, 2009. The deadline for conference registration is April 1, 2010 (those registering after this date will be charged a late fee).

Conference chairs Laura Plummer and Jo Ann Vogt welcome proposals for pre-conference workshops (3 hours), panels (60 minutes), and individual presentations (20 minutes) on topics of true interest and concern; there is no delimiting theme.

This biannual conference, the only U.S. conference dedicated exclusively to writing across the curriculum (WAC) and writing in the disciplines (WID), is typically of interest to people who are concerned with using writing to improve teaching and learning—faculty, administrators, and students from post-secondary institutions, as well as faculty and administrators from secondary schools.

For further information, e-mail: wac2010@indiana.edu; phone: 812-855-4928.

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION *MLA HANDBOOK FOR WRITERS OF RESEARCH PAPERS*, 7TH ED. NEW YORK: MLA, 2009. PAPERBACK, 292 PP. \$22. ISBN: 1603290249.

◆ *Reviewed by Susan Mueller (St. Louis College of Pharmacy, St. Louis, MO)*

The long-awaited seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* made its debut in April of this year. Given that MLA revises this book on a regular basis, it is surprising what a spectacular event this has turned out to be. As we all expected from the revision to the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* last fall, the handbook has made striking changes not only to its requirements for documentation but also in its vision of the audience it addresses and what that audience requires. This is not your father's Oldsmobile.

Like the preceding six editions, this edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* is focused on a student audience. Also like its predecessors, it assumes readers with limited experience writing research papers, but the assumed readers of this guide are far from the green freshmen of years gone by. These readers are seasoned veterans of computers, and their research experience online is perceived to be vast. The implications of this are in evidence everywhere: the book assumes an audience that is much more international in its makeup than previous audiences, but also more international in its exposure and expectations; an audience sophisticated in its life-long access to everything the World Wide Web provides, both with regard to surfing and with regard to computer functionality; and last but certainly not least, an audience with the shortened attention span that immediate access to the Web and all it has to offer has developed in its users.

It is not only access to the Web that has changed for this generation. The academic universe these students experience is different than it has been in the past. This handbook reflects a clear understanding that books are dimly on the radar for these users. Far from being the primary sources of information they once were, books reflect a universe of information that is all but unchanging, a quaint and old-fashioned notion for today's students. Their primary source of information is always their computers: electronic sources of all varieties, database as well as online. The article—shorter, more recent, more readily available—is the primary research document envisioned by this edition of *MLA*.

That shift in focus has driven the only major re-organization in this handbook. This edition does not start with the citation for a book with one author, then proceed to explanations for citing books. Instead, it begins with articles in Chapter 5, "Documentation: Preparing the List of Works Cited," the centerpiece of any *MLA* manual. While some of the changes in documentation are universal, the starkest changes apply to the online sources.

DOCUMENTATION NOTES

Though the overall form of documentation notes is familiar, readers will notice several small changes. Provenances, italics in place of underlining, required issue numbers, and elimination of URLs are each minor when viewed alone, but together they present a major revision to citation format. In addition, this edition of *MLA* gives writers discretion with regard to citation format they haven't had previously. The new citations look markedly different.

PROVENANCE

This edition of *MLA* requires each documentation note to include what it terms its provenance. That is, it requires citations to include not only the source, but the medium that source appeared in. Most often,

this means that a source must be designated as either Print or Web, but it can also be designated as Film, Transcript, E-mail, or Performance. Digital file are also designated: PDF, JPEG, Microsoft Word file. Given that even books now appear in online forms as well as in hard-copy and that many sources are not traditional library properties, this means every source in every documentation note must have its own provenance.

ITALICS

Although we have long told students that underlining and italics are equivalent, the fact remains that underlining has historically been *MLA's* style of choice. That is no longer true. This edition requires italics for designating titles of major sources, such as books, journals, and newspapers, as well as for words and letters used as words and letters and for foreign words. Underlining is no longer an acceptable option.

URLS

URLs are all but gone from MLA documentation notes. Citing the difficulties of using them to actually locate sources (e.g., they are very long and prone to errors when keyboarded; they are too often specific to an individual search), the handbook explains that URLs are useless and difficult. They state, probably correctly, that most users will use a search engine to locate a given article or author rather than wrestling with a URL. The handbook cautions readers to include URLs only when the source in question can't be located any other way.

ISSUE NUMBERS

Also gone now are long explanations to students about continuously paginated journals. The new MLA format requires an issue number be provided when citing all scholarly journals, whether they are continuously paginated or paginated by issue. The handbook asserts that having the issue number makes locating articles in databases easier; the page numbers alone aren't enough to navigate the modern computerized universe. The placement of issue numbers is unchanged.

Example: An Article from an Online Database. Note the word Web in the last line and the absence of a URL. Note also that all titles are italicized. The date of access is the last element shown. This example appears on page 193.

Chan, Evans. "Postmodernism and Hong Kong Cinema." *Postmodern Culture* 10.3 (2000): n. pag. Project Muse. Web. 5 June 2008.

WRITER'S DISCRETION

The new edition gives the writer more latitude in how sources are presented, particularly sources such as films, sound recordings, performances, and the like. Instead of having one correct method of presentation, this guide suggests that the writer's emphasis in the paper should dictate how the source is presented in the Works Cited section. In other words, if the emphasis is not on the source as a whole, but on the contribution of one person, that person's name should be dominant in the citation. It should be the first element mentioned.

Example: A Film: The first citation below appears on page 197. This example assumes the entire film was the source. However, if the paper focused on one particular aspect of this film, such as Frank Capra's work, the writer might present it differently, as in the second example. (Note also that the studio that produced the film is now included, but the distributor is not.) Film is the provenance in this case:

It's a Wonderful Life. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, and Thomas Mitchell. RKO, 1946. Film.

TAKE NOTE

NORTHEASTERN OHIO WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals

October 10, 2009

Wooster, Ohio

"Bring it! Activating the Writing Center for Tutors"

This year's conference theme celebrates writing centers' largest constituency: Peer Writing Tutors. This year's conference will also be a showcase for programs, efforts, practices, and experiences that tutors have found engaging and meaningful in their writing centers. Proposals will be accepted for interactive sessions focusing on but not limited to what you or your colleagues have brought to the writing center for tutors. Session options include 15-minute individual presentations (1 person); 45-minute panels or roundtables (3 people); 90-minute workshops (no more than 4 people). The proposal deadline is September 20, 2009.

For the CFP, proposal form, and registration form, please visit:

<http://fpdc.kent.edu/regionalcenter/lc_0607/w_matters/index.html> .

If you have questions, please contact:

Bill Macauley, Director of Writing

The College of Wooster

wmacauley@wooster.edu

330-263-2372

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SEARCHING ARTICLES IN WLN

Currently, back issues of *WLN* can be searched on the following websites:

- On the *WLN* website. <<http://writinglabnewsletter.org>>. Volumes are being redone into searchable PDF files. Currently, Vols. 21-33 are done, and the complete set will be redone soon.
- In CompFile. <<http://comppile.org/search/>>.
- In MLA. So far, volumes back to 1997 are indexed, thanks to the extensive amount of work done by Rebecca Babcock, who is continuing to work on indexing older volumes. MLA lists the following databases that include MLA.
 - CSA Illumina (from ProQuest)
 - EBSCOhost (from EBSCO)
 - FirstSearch (from OCLC)
 - InfoTrac (from Cengage Learning/Gale)
 - Literature Online (from ProQuest)
 - Literature Resource Center (from Cengage Learning/Gale)
 - MLA International Bibliography Standalone (from ProQuest/Chadwyck-Healey)
- The Gale/Cengage company has indexed the complete collection of *WLN*, which is now available in the following databases:
 - Academic OneFile
 - Expanded Academic ASAP
 - Literature Resource Center
 - LRC, Scribner Writers Series Online
 - Twayne's Authors Online

Capra, Frank, Dir. *It's a Wonderful Life*. Perf. James Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, and Thomas Mitchell. RKO, 1946. Film.

WEBSITE

One important new addition for the handbook is a companion website that includes the entire manual in searchable form, as well as some enhancements that are not in the text version. The site is accessible to those who purchase the book and provides many instructional aids that the print volume lacks.

One of these is examples, both global and specific. There are fewer examples of citation format throughout the print edition of the guide than there were in previous editions. However, the website has many additional examples for the user who needs them. Once again, putting these on the website focuses on this generation of users who go to the Internet to satisfy every need. In addition to the examples of individual citation formats, there are three global examples of research papers, each representing a different level of experience. These learning aids will be particularly useful to writing centers in teaching and demonstrating MLA documentation.

PLAGIARISM

For me, the most striking change to this edition is Section 2.2., entitled "Consequences of Plagiarism." The tone of this section is markedly different than it was in previous editions, gauging accurately the sensibilities of millennial students. It focuses on the necessity for information sharing and writing skills in virtually all professions and emphasizes how important individuals' ability to provide reliable information is to their perceived competence and good reputation. Plagiarism is presented less as a crime against an academic standard and more as a potential career-threatening danger: "Almost always, the course of a writer's career is permanently affected by a single act of plagiarism" (53). It is a compelling argument for any literate and ambitious student.

The seventh edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* moves MLA documentation smoothly and persuasively into the twenty-first century. It is like buying a brand new car: it does all the old and familiar things, but it does them in astonishing, new ways that make moving down the road much easier. This handbook promises to play an even more integral role in your writing center and in the lives of your students than it ever has before. ♦

Work Cited

Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: MLA, 2009. Print.



WLN REVIEWERS 2008-09

It is time again to thank our dedicated group of Reader/Reviewers for the 2008-2009 issue of *WLN*. All their names are posted on the *WLN* website in the "Submissions" section: <<http://writinglabnewsletter.org/>>, but we want to take a moment here to recognize their important contribution to maintaining high standards of scholarship in the articles and Tutor's Columns you read.

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TUTOR'S COLUMN

DO YOU UNDERSTAND? A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE TUTORING

◆ *Joseph M. Rein*

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Milwaukee, WI*

Last year our center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee added synchronous online tutoring. With the increase in distance learning in the academy and the resulting need for student services to go online, this step was inevitable. We use WOnline's Online Tutoring Module, which includes a large box on the screen in which the writer can upload and share documents and a smaller instant-messaging-style dialogue box in which most of the communication occurs.¹ This program is user-friendly and helps facilitate a dialogic atmosphere. I have noticed, however, that these online consultations present some unique challenges. Fortunately, none of these challenges are too difficult for tutors to overcome. By utilizing a few key tactics and by replicating as closely as possible a face-to-face session in cyberspace, we can make synchronous online tutoring sessions just as rewarding as our face-to-face sessions.

SETTING THE AGENDA

A common misconception of online tutoring is that sessions will accomplish considerably less than face-to-face consultations. As tutors we must not allow this mentality to dictate our sessions. When we say we will accomplish "half of" or "considerably less than" what we could in a face-to-face, we are using the same standards for two differing experiences. To me, any session succeeds 100% if the writer and I accomplish what we aim to do at the outset. Therefore, it becomes even more important in online sessions to ask what the writer is most concerned with and prioritize based on her answers. Generally, in a 30-minute online session, you can expect to cover shorter essays (3-4 pages) and one or two main ideas. For example, working on organization in a 4-page essay will probably cover your entire session. For longer essays you will want to break down the paper into sections and prioritize from there. It is important to watch the clock, particularly near the end of the session. Toward the end, you will want to say to the writer something along the lines of "I see we have about five minutes left. Is there anything else you're concerned with?" This allows her to refocus and make sure her most important concerns have been addressed. It also makes for a much more pleasant and fluid ending to the session.

BUILDING RAPPORT

As in our face-to-face sessions, building rapport is a crucial step towards good sessions. To do so, you should use the instant-message dialogue box early and often to engage the writer and establish a relationship. Because in writing our voices can more easily be perceived as stoic, authoritative, or harsh, developing a friendly cyber-voice is crucial. Introduce yourself, so that you are not just typed words but an actual person. Ask the writer how she is doing. When you start to ask questions about the assignment and the writer's concerns, take the time to insert brief but necessary personal touches like "I just finished writing my own personal statement" or "Introductions can be tricky, can't they?" The more the writer sees you as a real person, a peer, and a fellow writer, the better the session becomes.

READING THE PAPER

This may be one of the trickiest aspects of online tutoring. Though it is important to keep a conversation going in the dialogue box, at some point you must also get down to it and read the text the writer has uploaded. This can be done multiple ways, and ultimately whichever way you are comfortable with is best. You may find it easier to read during the breaks in conversation, but only if you are a fast reader and can continue conversing with the writer while you do so. I read this way because I find it leaves me more time for discussion with the writer. However, many tutors will specifically set apart time for reading during the session. If you go this route, it is important to consistently update the writer as to your progress. Brief messages like "I'm just finishing up the first paragraph and starting the second" assure the writer that you are engaged with her text and that any down time she may feel is time well spent.

WRITER ENGAGEMENT

For reasons that are somewhat unclear, it can feel easier to be directive online. Maybe it is because we have a more limited amount of exchanges. Maybe because of the relatively slow pace of the dialogue, we find it easier just to explain something than to work through it collaboratively.

But if we follow this instinct, inevitably we foster an atmosphere in which the writer's engagement suffers. She may begin to feel as though her voice is unnecessary to the conversation. In a medium where you may lean unintentionally toward direction, you must hold back from dominating the conversation in order keep the writer's concerns at the forefront. Not unlike all conversations, the chemistry you create relies heavily upon speaking neither too little nor too much.

CONVERSATION OVERLAP

Asking the right questions is, in many ways, the most important skill of tutoring. However, when we ask a question over the Internet, there may be a considerable amount of lag time between question and answer. Often, you may begin to feel as though the writer hasn't understood your question, and online you do not have the benefit of body language to tell you otherwise. Your instinct may be to clarify, to offer more feedback, to just say something to fill the void. But even asking simple questions like "Do you understand?" can disrupt the flow of the conversation. Suddenly the writer needs to address both the initial question and this arbitrary follow-up. When the dialogue shifts awkwardly between two or more trains of thought, the session may begin to feel jarring and disconnected.

Though online silence may feel unproductive at first, you should embrace it and allow it for as long as necessary. When we ask a writer a question in a face-to-face session, we allow her time to contemplate and formulate her thoughts. I can't imagine how overwhelmed she might feel if, instead, we compounded one question with another, forcing her to rethink and reformulate. Give the writer time to respond, and you'll find the flow of the conversation more than compensates for any time lost.

WORKING WITH GRAMMAR

Working with grammar can be one of the most difficult aspects of tutoring. Unfortunately, online tutoring only complicates this more. In face-to-face consultations we read aloud, which allows the writer to catch many of her own mistakes. Online we no longer have this option. When a grammatical issue arises in person, we take the time to explain the rule to the best of our knowledge and try to point out particular patterns. Through the online dialogue box this takes considerably longer to accomplish; in one of my first sessions, a simple comma splice took over ten minutes to explain. Since the online tutoring module allows us to physically alter the uploaded paper, we may feel tempted to edit or make corrections and move on to the next issue. However, as good tutors we must always resist this urge. One tactic I have concerning grammar is to try to answer the question quickly and efficiently and then follow up with a question regarding a higher-order concern. If you ask questions that move beyond simple sentence-level issues, online tutees will often respond with their larger concerns. They may also realize that, as a result of the clock, they would rather spend time working on their entire introduction than a few words within it. Of course, there are some writers who simply want you to fix the errors of their paper. If the writer wants to work specifically with sentence-level issues, you will want to say something like, "Just so you're aware, grammatical concerns are a little more difficult to work with online," so as to create reasonable expectations. Then do the best you can to highlight patterns and explain them in the time you have. If the session is too daunting or if the clock is winding down, you may want to simply ask if the writer can come in for a face-to-face consultation.

TUTORING IN CYBERSPACE

My rule of thumb for online sessions is to recreate the experience of face-to-face sessions as much as possible. In some cases this is doable, in others not. However, by paying attention to the subtle differences and adapting your own tutoring style to the medium, online sessions can be an enriching and rewarding experience for you and your tutees. ♦

Endnote

¹The Online Tutoring Module also offers audio/video webcam components; however, we have chosen not to incorporate these features for a number of reasons. Our main concern was that even if we obtained the appropriate resources, we could not guarantee online tutees would have similar access to microphones and webcams, and above all we wanted consistency in the online experience. However, these features are undoubtedly valuable, and ultimately it is up to each center to decide which aspects to include.





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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

October 10, 2009: Northeast Ohio Writing Centers Association, in Wooster, OH

Contact: Bill Macauley: wmacauley@wooster.edu; 330-263-2372. Conference website: http://fpdc.kent.edu/regionalcenter/lc_0607/w_matters/index.html.

October 22-24, 2009: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Rapid City, SD

Contact: Christopher Ervin (cervin@usd.edu) or Greg Dyer (greg.dyer@usiouxfalls.edu). Conference website: <http://pages.usiouxfalls.edu/mwca/mwca09/>.

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.