

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E W T T E R

Volume 36, Number 1-2

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

Sept./Oct., 2011

— FROM THE EDITOR —

This first issue of Volume 36 of *WLN* includes a hearty “welcome back.” Despite the temptation to relax in an overheated summer, some of us have managed to complete some impressive preparations for the coming year, as evident in all the announcements and calls for proposals for conferences that are crowding this issue. And thanks to the extensive work of the authors of articles, editors, and reviewers we also have an excellent collection of articles waiting to appear this year.

To start off this issue, Tabettha Adkins shares her efforts to change the campus perception of the work of their writing center; in particular, she details their workshop services. Jo Koster reviews David Sheridan and James Inman’s *Multiliteracy Centers: Writing Center Work, New Media, and Multimodal Rhetoric*, an exploration of the implications of multimodal composing for writing centers.

While we can look forward to the future of multimodal writing, Ellen Carillo asks us to consider the importance of style as we tutor students. She offers pedagogical strategies for tutors to use when working with writers on style. And for our tutor’s voice in this issue, Alexandria Janney reflects on her use of body language to influence the success of the tutorial.

Also, please note that we have posted a list of this year’s reviewers on our website, and as *WLN* expands its reach, we invite applicants for a new position of Development Editor (see p.7).

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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THE (UN)IMPORTANCE OF A PREPOSITION: HOW WE DEFINE AND DEFEND WRITING CENTER WORK

◆ Tabettha Adkins

Texas A&M University—Commerce
Commerce, TX

Last fall I became the new director of the Writing Center at Texas A&M University—Commerce. My first real experience as the director occurred at new faculty orientation in August during a discussion of resources available for students on campus when an experienced faculty member commented: “The Writing Center is available for students, but they don’t help them with grammar.” Ready for my official introduction to my new position, I stood up and said, “Hi everybody, I’m Tabettha Adkins, the new director of the Writing Center, and I’d just like to say that we help students with all elements of writing: planning, brainstorming, outlining, drafting, organization, thesis statements, transitions, proof-reading, and grammar. We do not believe that grammar is the most important element of writing or the marker of good or bad writing, but we do believe that it is one element of writing, and we will help students learn to identify and correct grammatical errors in their papers.”

The room suddenly came alive with the sounds of shuffling paper, plundering through bags to find pens, and hushed questioning amongst individuals. The words “will help students with grammar” seemed to send the room into frenzy. I rattled off the location and hours of operation for my new colleagues and sat down. On my way out that evening,

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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.

several folks approached me to say how happy they were to hear about the Writing Center. I heard the subtext: "We are so happy we can send students somewhere for help with grammar." I soon realized that this incident would be among the many where I would find myself explaining the purpose of the Writing Center for cross-disciplinary colleagues who do not understand it. I asked the experienced tutors in the Writing Center why so many faculty members were under the impression that the Writing Center would not help students with grammar. One tutor explained: "it's a low order concern, so sometimes we don't get to work on grammar with a student—especially if they come in an hour before their assignment is due." I was relieved that the existing attitude in the Writing Center matched my own—that grammar is one element of writing but not the most important.

A few months later, I received an e-mail from a colleague across campus in a science-related field stating that she would like to speak to me on the telephone about a response one of her students had received from the Online Writing Center. We set up the time for our conversation, and the professor forwarded the Online Writing Center response in question. The student wrote to the Online Writing Center asking for help because his professor docked his grade thirty points for writing incomplete sentences and ending many sentences with prepositions.¹ Upon reading the initial message, I prepared to defend the tutor and give the "we are not an editing service or 'fix-it shop,' you shouldn't ever expect the Writing Center to give your student a perfect paper, et cetera" talk. I suspected I would need to explain that, as George Cooper, Kara Bui, and Linda Riker show, the "principles of face-to-face tutoring do not transfer completely to online tutoring" (310) or, to borrow from Stephen North, that "we are not here to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum" (79). Because the professor's complaint was that the student had ended many sentences with prepositions and left many sentences incomplete, I carefully read the six-page paper and underlined subjects and verbs in each sentence. I circled the last word of every sentence. Like the online writing tutor who had read this paper before me, I found no incomplete sentences and no sentences that ended in prepositions.

When the time for the phone call came and the professor called as promised, I started the conversation by thanking her for her feedback and saying "I'm new here, so I'm always so happy to meet and talk with fellow faculty members. We take our charge to help all students in all disciplines very seriously, so I'm grateful for your feedback." Then she told me that she was disappointed that the writing tutor didn't help the student. She explained that she is "really picky" about grammar and regularly consults with a colleague in her department who is similarly "picky" about grammar. I asked for her to point to a specific place where she felt the tutor could have been more thorough. She said, "Okay, this second sentence in the first paragraph ends with a preposition." She read the sentence, which ended with the word *them*.

I was not sure how to begin with my explanation. I carefully said, "That's actually not a preposition. That's a pronoun. Prepositions are words like *in*, *of*, and *on*. It helps me to remember by thinking of prepositional phrases like 'on the moon,' 'in the school,' or 'of the world.'"

Her answer: "Ah."

I decided to spare her any further explanation that it was actually a stylistic preference and not an explicit rule that forbids writers from ending sentences with prepositions. I soon realized that when she said "incomplete sentences," she meant that the essay was composed of a series of simple sentences that made the paper stylistically choppy—exactly what the writing tutor addressed in the online consultation. Feeling slightly smug about the quality of the response the Writing Center tutor had given this professor's student, I ended the conversation politely, and she sent a follow-up e-mail a few hours

later thanking me for my time and asking if I could point her to any links for writing related websites for her students.

Immediately following this incident, I thought back to the scene at orientation when a senior faculty member claimed that the Writing Center did not help with grammar. It now seems that the question should have been: whose grammar? The academy's grammar? This professor's grammar? But more importantly, what was my responsibility in this case? Was I in the position to give a grammar lesson to my colleague in the sciences? I did not believe I was, nor was I in the position to tell her what I thought of her docking a student's grade thirty points for a "grammar mistake" that was actually a stylistic preference—and one that she did not understand.

Often, as writing center professionals, we find that educating others about our purpose and mission to be one of the major responsibilities of the job. I am sure many of you have found yourselves reciting North's famous explanation that writing centers aim "to make better writers, not necessarily—or immediately—better texts" (80). Writing centers, throughout their history, have been misunderstood, hence the reams of scholarship defining writing centers, their work, and their function in the university and communities in which they exist.

I urge the tutors who work in our Writing Center not to be afraid of their expertise, but I point out that a degree of hedging is required whenever we are forced to defend the Writing Center and the work we do. How can we explain our work in productive ways? Here are some practices I find helpful: First, if your writing center does not already have a mission statement, create one as soon as possible. Post this statement in public places like the writing center's website, the writing center itself, and on any promotional materials the writing center distributes. Our mission statement, created by our former writing center director, Shannon Carter, reads:

The Writing Center is dedicated to helping writers take advantage of all opportunities for learning inherent in the writing process; to that end, we can assist writers at any stage of the writing process.

By working with students one-on-one or in small groups, tutors can help writers analyze the rhetorical demands of the writing task, generate and focus ideas at the prewriting stage, ensure they are addressing the writing assignment directly and effectively, elaborate and rework a rough draft after hearing the writer read the draft aloud, discover their strengths and weaknesses in a particular rhetorical context, strengthen arguments, spot weak rhetorical choices and make more effective choices, and address formatting or other surface-level concerns.²

At no point do our tutors write these papers for the students. All writers working in the Writing Center maintain control of their essays; we simply offer support and feedback and ask questions they may not have been asking themselves (or may not have even known to ask themselves).²

I think this mission statement is especially useful because it explains who our Writing Center can help, the methods to the work that goes on in the Writing Center, why we use those methods, and what the Writing Center explicitly does not do. Our website also contains information about scheduling class tours of the Writing Center; details for requesting a tutor to visit classes to share information about the Writing Center; resources for writing including links to style guides and YouTube tutorials

“I received a wealth of positive feedback [on our faculty workshops] from my cross-campus colleagues and administrators who told me that the Writing Center provides an important service to students.”

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Asst. Director, Center for Excellence in Writing (Faculty Administrator) Florida International University

Deadline: position will be open until filled.

Minimum Qualifications: Requires a terminal degree (MFA or PhD) in Rhetoric and Composition, English or closely related field; experience training consultants in a Writing Center; experience with and knowledge of the needs of second language learners and graduate student writers; knowledge of and experience with writing center practice and theory; online tutorial practices; teaching experience in writing courses; and ability to work closely with a range of campus constituencies. Assistant director must be free to move between campus locations.

Responsibilities: The Writing Center assistant director will be a full-time employee with some teaching duties on a twelve-month contract. Working closely with the Director of the Center for Excellence in Writing (CEW), the Writing Center assistant director will provide leadership in all aspects of developing and administering a growing Writing Center; will assist in establishing CEW policies and procedures; will recruit, train and supervise all Writing Center staff; will develop Writing Center services for the branch campuses; and will develop and provide outreach services to support students at all levels and faculty involved in Writing Across the Curriculum efforts. The Coordinator will assist the director with purchasing, budgeting, payroll, grant writing, and public relations.

Apply online at <www.fiujobs.org>. [Job posting 45207]. Please send any supplementary materials to:

Gisela Casines

Arts & Sciences Dean's Office

Florida International University

11200 SW 8th st

Miami, FL 33199

Review of applications began on July 27, 2011.

for using new media tools like Audacity, iMovie, and Picassa (I added these links to emphasize that our Writing Center helps students with all kinds of texts); answers to frequently asked questions like “what can the Writing Center do for me?” and “who will help me when I come into the Writing Center?”; and general contact information. The mission statement, though, is front and center on the first page; I wanted to emphasize that all of our work is guided by the basic ideas laid out by the mission statement.

If you revise or create a mission statement from scratch, I suggest writing this statement collaboratively with input from tutors, students who visit your writing center, and colleagues who teach both in and outside of the discipline of writing studies. Ask your collaborators: what do we want students, faculty, and administrators to know about our work here? What myths do we want to dispel? How do we want to portray what we do here? I imagine the audience of this text as professors across campus who are considering our Writing Center as a useful resource for their students and students who are considering the Writing Center as a useful resource for themselves. With that audience in mind, it is easier to imagine what information they would need from a writing center mission statement, such as “what will I get from this place?” or “what will my students get from this place?” “What happens in a writing center?” “What will this tutoring look like?” “What will they not do for me in the Writing Center?” Also, writing center directors may look at the mission statement as an opportunity to educate administrators and cross-campus colleagues about the work of the writing center, writing studies, and writers. But, as Jeanne Simpson smartly reminds us in her recent *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, “[w]e need to understand that we can only influence, not control, the way others see our missions, goals, and methods” (4). In other words, mission statements can and should be revised according to the needs of students and faculty at your institution.

A second helpful practice would be to create workshops about what a writing center does and does not do, and invite faculty to attend. I hosted, with my department head, a workshop last fall called “What Goes On in the Writing Center—It May Not Be What You Think!” This workshop was the first in a series organized by the campus faculty development committee who voted that year to focus all workshops on improving student writing. The committee, which at that time was chaired by a faculty member in my department, advertised the workshops and provided snacks and coffee to attendees. In this workshop, I gave a (very) brief history of writing centers in the United States and talked about the research that informs writing center pedagogy. I felt it important for faculty across campus to understand that our practice is informed by years of scholarship, and this research continues today, even here in our own Writing Center. The highlight of the workshop was a mock tutorial session put on by two of our tutors. The tutors showed how we greet students, how sessions begin, the kinds of questions tutors regularly ask students, and how we deal with issues like organization, understanding the assignment, grammar, and style. The faculty members in attendance loved seeing what our tutors do when their students visit the Writing Center.

The workshop was well attended by faculty members from several different disciplines across campus. The workshop accomplished a few important goals. First, it allowed us to put faces with our name. Faculty members who attended came into the Writing Center, saw our space, and saw the friendly and knowledgeable staff at work. Secondly, the attendees were able to see how eager we are to help students and that there is a clear and proven method to the work we do. Finally, by contextualizing the mock tutorial session within a history of scholarship, we were able to establish ourselves as authorities on writing on campus. I received a wealth of positive feedback from my cross-campus colleagues and administrators who told me that the Writing Center provides an important service to students.

Whenever I am challenged to explain our work to my colleagues in other disciplines, it helps me to remember that above all else, the Writing Center's mission is to serve students. I do my best to portray to my colleagues across campus that in the Writing Center it is, as a group of professionals, our pleasure to serve students toward the important mission of creating better writers. ♦

Notes:

¹ Linguists and grammarians generally agree today that the "rule" that restricts writers from ending a sentence with a preposition is more of a stylistic preference. Edgar Schuster, who refers to stylistic "rules" like this as "mythrules" claims that "many textbooks maintain that prepositions are always followed by their objects, but it is much harder to find one that explicitly forbids ending sentences with prepositions. [...] [T]he best 'rule' is to forget about this one" (74).

² Shannon wrote this mission statement several years ago and says that she does not remember how much of the text is hers and how much she adapted from the previous director's mission statement. Like many texts we create for teaching and administration, the Mission Statement is a text with shared authors, and the source of each part of the text is unknown, confused, and forgotten.

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MID-ATLANTIC WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

March 30-31, 2012
Shippensburg, Pennsylvania

Contact: Karen Johnson: kgjohnson@ship.edu

NORTHEAST WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

April 13—15, 2012
St. John's University
New York, NY
Keynote speaker: Deborah Brandt

For further details, see <www.northeast-wca.org>.

MIDWEST WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

October 20-22, 2011
Madison, Wisconsin
Hosts: U. of Wisconsin-Madison and
Edgewood College
"On the Isthmus"

Keynote speaker: Eric Darnell
Pritchard
Featured closing speaker: Michele
Eodice

Travel grant applications are due Sept. 30. Additional information can be found via the MWCA conference website at <writing.wisc.edu/mwca2011/index.html>.

TAKE NOTE

IWCA CONFERENCE

Call for Proposals
October 25-27, 2012
San Diego, CA
“Lines in the Sand”

Like lines drawn in the sand, writing center work is continuously recast by ever-changing policies in higher education, innovations in technology, outsourced alternatives to student services, increased diversity of student populations, and progressions in writing center praxis. With the tides, we must be willing to shift within our philosophies and our policies in order to best support the communities with whom we work.

For our 2012 International Writing Centers Association conference in San Diego, we invite you to consider the centers where you work and write: What lines do you draw? How do those lines shift? How do shifting lines provide a chance for new definitions of yourselves and your work? How do the disappearing lines of work that you thought finished reappear as issues you must revisit and re-vision? How can the writing center community adapt to the tide so that it is second nature for us to live with the shifting sands? And how do we encourage others within our institutions to shore up student writing for/in the 21st century?

The URL for the conference website is www.socalwritingcenters.org/iwca2012/index.html.

The proposal deadline for the 2012 IWCA Conference is April 23, 2012.

BOOK REVIEW

David M. Sheridan and James A. Inman, eds. *Multiliteracy Centers: Writing Center Work, New Media, and Multimodal Rhetoric*. New Dimensions in Computers and Composition Series. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton P, 2010. (248 pp.). \$55 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

◆ Jo Koster
Winthrop University
Rock Hill, SC

Have any campus institutions or services had to transform themselves as often, or as much, as writing centers have in the last three decades? From their initial creation as writing skills labs to tutorial centers to nodes and nexuses of literacy, writing centers on college campuses have struggled to expand their reach in the face of changing student needs and behaviors, while at the same time maintaining their identities as sites for writers to talk to other writers about improving their writing. In their new collection, David M. Sheridan and James A. Inman have gathered ten essays that address the changing place of the writing center on increasingly high-tech campuses. They call this technology-rich, semiotically- and rhetorically-focused space “the multiliteracy center,” placing it on a continuum that exists somewhere between the traditional writing center and a full-featured computer lab.

After the editors’ introduction, the collection is divided into five sections: Space, Operations and Practice, Connections, Production, and (appropriately) Reality Check. In “Space,” Inman contributes “Designing Multiliteracy Centers: A Zoning Approach,” in which he argues for a flexible design approach that allows a multiliteracy center to operate, apply technologies, grow, and change to meet its users’ changing needs without expensive or controversial renovation. Morgan Gresham moves from theory to practice in “Composing Multiple Spaces,” describing the design of Clemson University’s Class of ’41 Studio, a multiliteracy center that provides its users with rhetorical tools for composing in a variety of circumstances. This essay neatly segues into the first essay of “Operations and Practice,” Teddi Fishman’s “When It Isn’t Even on the Page: Peer Consulting in Multimedia Environments,” which describes the training process for peer consultants in the Clemson Class of ’41 Studio. Her essay is followed by David M. Sheridan’s “All Things to All People: Multiliteracy Consulting and the Materiality of Rhetoric,” which focuses on the training of digital writing consultants for Michigan State University’s Writing Center. This essay, part theoretical and part practical, is accompanied by a number of exhibits, handouts, and heuristics for training consultants, and may perhaps become the most-consulted essay in the text. The section on “Operations and Practice” concludes with Dickie Selfe’s “Anticipating the Momentum of Cyborg Communicative Events,” in which he argues that while writing centers can choose to remain focused on “alphabetic modalities” of composing, they might do better to plan for the modalities of composing that will emerge in the next decade, so that they are poised to capitalize on changing educational trends. This, perhaps, is the most controversial essay in the volume, calling for center professionals to transform themselves into “advanced literacy professionals” and essentially remake the notion of a writing center.

The collection next moves to “Connections,” what was once called community outreach or service learning. First, in “Writing Ain’t What It Used to Be: An Exercise in College Multiliteracy,” George Cooper describes the benefits and complexities of his work with the Michigan Community Scholars Program, which takes multiliteracy consultants from the University of Michigan into the surrounding community to work with nonprofit organizations on website design and electronic communication. Then Troy Hicks describes interactions between the Central Michigan writing center and the school’s

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WLN Development Editor Call for Applications

The *Writing Lab Newsletter* is seeking applications from our readership for a new position, titled *Writing Lab Newsletter* Development Editor. The Development Editor will help broaden WLN's reader base and also strengthen its online presence, including orchestrating new interactive features, facilitating community spaces, and engaging in outreach to readers and writing center practitioners. This new editorial position will give the successful candidate a chance to be part of an established publication in our field while helping to shape the future of WLN and writing center scholarship.

Applicants should have knowledge of social media, Web 2.0 applications, usability and accessibility, technology and writing, and be knowledgeable about writing center work.

Applicants should submit a CV and 2-page statement describing their vision for encouraging wider readership and enlarging the web presence of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. Deadline for applications: Dec. 1, 2011. Send materials (and questions) by e-mail (subject heading: Development Ed. Application) to Muriel Harris: harrism@purdue.edu

National Writing Project workshops in "Multiliteracies Across Lifetimes: Engaging K-12 Students and Teachers through Technology-Based Outreach," again focused largely on the creation of web pages.

The two essays that make up the section "Production" attempt to imagine what the potential of such multiliteracy centers might be. In "The Future of Multiliteracy Centers in the E-World: An Exploration of Cultural Narratives and Cultural Transformations," Christina Murphy and Lory Hawkes theorize a paradigm shift in which writing center consultants are transformed into "digital content specialists who are adept at using technology and who understand the implications of technology for knowledge creation" (184). These specialists would help faculty as well as students, creating instructional materials as well as coaching individual clients on using these new literacies effectively. While Murphy and Hawkes argue for "a new historicism" to drive this change, David M. Sheridan in "Multiliteracy Centers as Content Producers: Designing Online Learning Experiences for Writers" tries to imagine ways in which centers can use new modalities of composing without abandoning the traditional dialogic strategies that are so essential to writing center identities. He delineates the development of Michigan State's Composing and Teaching in Digital Environments Program, which includes online, video, interactive modules that attempt to simulate a face-to-face encounter between writer and consultant.

Finally, in "The New Media (R)Evolution: Multiple Models for Multiliteracies," Jackie Grutsch McKinney provides what the editors call a "Reality Check" for the development of multiliteracy centers. Examining the scholarly work on multiliteracies and the center that have emerged in the last half-decade, she attempts to assess the emerging consensus about what these changing pedagogies and literacies will mean for center work. She discusses the strengths and weaknesses of what she calls "the All-in-One model," and, while conceding that not all centers will wish to or are equipped to become multiliteracy centers, strongly encourages them, for political reasons, to step into this role before other campus entities do, potentially drawing away resources and support from existing centers. Her cautionary warning is timely in these days of budget crises in higher education.

While these ten essays are valuable for helping us imagine what writing centers might look like in a world of multimodal composing, there are some obvious gaps. First, most of the examples are drawn from large, high-tech institutions, with well-funded centers and strong institutional support. No thoughtful consideration is given to centers at smaller schools, community colleges, or campuses that are severely economically challenged. Only McKinney provides a model budget for a multiliteracy center's startup costs—and that budget provides only for limited physical equipment, not training, staffing, or development time. In addition, only a few essays discuss the roles of the faculty members who direct or staff such centers, largely looking at their training; there is no discussion of what doing multiliteracy center work might mean for tenure and promotion, for questions of faculty versus staff appointments in the center, or related administrative and professional issues. Nor is there much discussion of the roles social media might play in both emerging literacies and as tools for consulting work; as I have learned from my own students, holding office hours on Facebook is often more effective than sitting in my physical office for today's learners. (In fact, most of the multimodal composing discussed in these essays is limited to the creation of web pages, which is only one of the types of literacies these centers presumably will address.)

Finally, there is very little attention given to the cost of transforming a writing center into a multiliteracy center in terms of institutional and academic identity: by becoming more of a service-provider, a computer lab with rhetorical flourishes, what does a writing center become? The contributors and editors see the benefits of such a paradigm shift, but don't really examine the counter-arguments thoroughly and thoughtfully. That conversation needs to take place, and take place soon; meanwhile, *Multiliteracy Centers: Writing Center Work, New Media, and Multimodal Rhetoric* presents us with intriguing possibilities of what center work may become in a future increasingly dominated by digital composition. It is a book well worth reflecting on, even if its arguments, at this point, are not entirely convincing. ♦

TAKE NOTE

SOUTHEASTERN WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals

Feb. 16-18, 2012

Richmond, KY

Eastern Kentucky University

"Next-Gen WC: Composing Spaces, Exploring Ideas"

Keynote speaker: Cynthia L. Selfe

The conference theme encourages us, as individuals and as a field, to think generatively about writing center spaces and the compositions that create and shape them. Let's reconsider familiar conversations—staffing, budget, and perception—while composing next-generation spaces and exploring new ideas in writing center theory and practice. In true writing center fashion, we encourage a variety of submissions with broad interpretations of the theme.

For further information, contact Russell Carpenter: russell.carpenter@eku.edu; conference website: www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TUTORING STYLE IN THE WRITING CENTER

Ellen C. Carillo

University of Connecticut

Waterbury, CT

Despite composition's current interest in reinvigorating the study of style, the role that writing centers and their tutors might play in this resurgence has been largely ignored. I will argue that devoting time within tutor training to style would benefit both tutors and tutees in writing center sessions. Moreover, such a shift in tutor training would ultimately enable our tutors to engage with the larger composition community on issues surrounding the teaching of style.

WHAT HAPPENED TO STYLE?

Serious attention to style in composition research, theory, and pedagogy waned, according to Paul Butler, because of its association with current-traditional rhetoric and its "emphasis on the formal written product, prescriptive rules, and static language practices" (56). In his revisionist study, *Out of Style*, Butler argues that style was an integral part of the process movement (roughly from the 1960s through the 1980s) and was connected to invention. Since then, though, style has become an afterthought linked to product-based theories. Throughout this piece, I will be using Butler's definition, which describes style as the "deployment of rhetorical resources in written discourse to create and express meaning" (3). This definition expands more traditional notions of style by addressing style's connection to meaning.

Style has become synonymous with grammar and usage, and discussions of style have been largely relegated to the pages of handbooks. However, as Nate Kreuter points out, handbooks consistently oversimplify the very notion of style and favor prescriptive rules. Kreuter's survey of contemporary writing handbooks demonstrates that these texts "equate style, or at least the only widely acceptable style, with 'clarity' and correctness. . . . On the rare occasions when students even hear the subject of prose style addressed," writes Kreuter, "it is often through rules—reductive, preachy, and sometimes even hypocritical rules" that comprise these handbooks. Because of style's more recent association with rules-based pedagogy, product-based pedagogy, and ultimately with prescriptive and directive pedagogies, it is not surprising that tutoring students in style has not been central to tutor training. In fact, a look at some of the most widely-circulating tutoring guides¹ underscores this very point.

Ryan and Zimmerelli's *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, now in its fifth edition, uses the term "sentence-level" to encompass stylistic issues. The guide describes what could be called stylistic concerns in terms of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. All of these issues are contextualized within a discourse of error as tutors are advised to ask writers to "indicate which sentences they feel uncomfortable with," to have writers read their papers aloud to make corrections in grammar and punctuation, as well as to point to an error and ask the writer if she sees a problem (54). Like the *Bedford Guide*, Lerner and Gillespie's *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring* does not use the term "style" in its discussion of writing. Elements that may fall under the umbrella of stylistic study can be located in the sections on editing and proofreading wherein tutors are instructed to help writers focus on "later order concerns" such as mechanics. The reading aloud strategy is again described as a means to help writers "hear [their] language and see errors" (18).

Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood's *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* is divided into three sections, with only the first section focusing on the tutoring process. Sections two and three include readings and resources for further inquiry, including Sharon A. Myers's essay "Reassessing the

TAKE NOTE

Proofreading Trap: ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction.” Despite Myers’s more complicated notion of sentence-level errors and their relationship to language acquisition, she, too, discusses these writing issues within standards of correctness. In fact, you would be hard-pressed to locate a widely circulating tutoring handbook that uses the term “style” within a more complicated context or, for that matter, uses the term at all. None of these guides includes the term “style” in their indices or in the titles of their chapters. Only *The Bedford Guide* (fourth edition) and *A Tutor’s Guide* (by Ben Rafoth) use the term “style” and both do so rather narrowly. This refusal to use the very word “style” may speak to the term’s vagueness, a point that Edward P. J. Corbett made in the 1970s when he proclaimed—and many agreed—that there simply is no “comprehensive” or “coherent” theory of style (“Approaches” 95). Especially interesting, however, is that many of the guides do address writing issues that would fall under the umbrella of stylistic issues, but they are not named as such. Instead, they are dubbed “sentence-level errors,” “later order concerns,” “lower order concerns,” or “local” (as opposed to global) issues. Attention to style, therefore, gets subsumed into these other categories.²

I certainly do not mean to imply that because tutoring handbooks do not use the term “style” that style is not being discussed in tutor training. In fact, I would argue the opposite: Just as style is discussed in composition classrooms even if instructors are not using the technical vocabulary associated with classical rhetoric, style is likely addressed in tutor training even if the handbooks or writing center directors don’t call it such. Style can be taught and used to a range of rhetorical ends. In what follows, I will describe ways these directors and other instructors of the tutor training seminars can (re)contextualize discussions of style to benefit tutors and tutees.

While the handbooks do not discuss ways of teaching style, we can look to Corbett, who has described the three major pedagogical approaches to style as analytical, imitative, and generative. The analytical approach, popularized by Martha Kolln’s scholarship and textbooks, traditionally involves analyzing others’ styles; imitative approaches, on the other hand, involve mimicking others’ styles. Generative approaches, such as sentence combining, emphasize the relationship between style and invention. Since writing centers are process-driven, it makes sense to consider how attention to style in tutor training can fit within this framework. While some might challenge the notion that tutors have any time during a session to spend on style (when there are other issues such as organization and development to which tutors must tend), there are ways that a rhetorically-centered approach to style—that draws on all three methodologies described above—would actually enhance attention to organization and development. The goal of all three approaches to teaching style remains the same—to give students (tutors and tutees alike) the opportunity to experience first-hand the relationship between style and meaning. Because many compositionists are currently thinking and writing about style, the time is ripe for adapting some of these theories and resources to writing center pedagogy.

One of the first steps toward integrating stylistic study into tutoring sessions includes dedicating a portion of tutor training to discussions of style. These discussions might involve reflecting on some age-old practices within the writing center (like drafting), while introducing some new approaches to tutoring such as tracking style, sentence combining, and imitation. In order to prepare tutors to do this work with tutees, we might ask tutors to complete these exercises with their own writing first and to reflect on this experience. While a student is drafting—a common practice in the writing center—tutors might ask the tutee to try out composing a sentence in several different ways and

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PEER TUTORING IN WRITING

Nov. 4-6, 2011

Miami, Florida

Florida International U.—Biscayne Bay

“Tutors, Tutoring, and the Teaching of Tutors”

Keynote speaker: Brian Fallon

The theme, a play on Pat Hartwell’s 1985 College English essay “Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar,” is an invitation to propose discussions about tutors, tutoring, and the teaching of tutors. Conference website: <ncptw.net/2011-conference.html>. Conference co-chairs: Paula Gillespie (pgillesp@fiu.edu), Kevin Dorak (kdvorak@stu.edu), Shanti Bruce (bshanti@nova.edu).

EAST CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals

March 30-31, 2012

Indiana University-Purdue University
Indianapolis

Indianapolis, IN

“It’s the End of the World As We Know It: Negotiating Change in a Writing Center Context”

We invite you to consider some of the ways you cope with change in your writing center.

Proposals should include a 50-word abstract and a 500-word narrative description that comments as specifically as possible on the role of the presenters, the participation of other attendees, and the contribution the session makes to writing center studies. For further information, consult <www.iupui.edu/~uwc/ecwca.html>.

TAKE NOTE

WRITING CENTERS IN THE 2-YEAR COLLEGE

Call for Proposals
A Free On-line Talk
Time Conference
Feb 6-10, 13-17, 2012
Sponsored by IWCA

Two-year college writing centers are distinct for many reasons: institutional missions, student bodies, administrative expectations, faculty involvement, and funding priorities. This live, interactive, on-line conference will amplify our voices in the discussions about writing center work, without the fees or travel expenses of traditional conferences. Presenters are encouraged to focus on one of five areas:

- Addressing diverse student populations
- Facilitating successful tutoring sessions
- Assessment and research
- Incorporating technology
- Peer tutoring in the 2-year college

Two-year college writing center directors, peer and professional tutors, and the writers who visit 2-year college writing centers are encouraged to present. Single presenters, panels, and special-interest-group discussions are all welcome; an accompanying Powerpoint component is strongly encouraged and will be made available in an archive through the IWCA.

Deadline for submissions: Oct. 31, 2011
Proposal Format:

- Title of presentation
- Name, institutions, and contact information of all presenters
- 150-250 word abstract

Send to: Larry Giddings, Pikes Peak Community College, CO: onlinetalktime@gmail.com

to reflect on which version best meets the tutee's aims and the audience's needs. This exercise allows tutees to see how meaning is at stake when one constructs and reconstructs sentences while also conveying the range of stylistic choices that writers have, including—but certainly not limited to—how changing a word or phrase or the sequence of these words and phrases affects meaning. Moreover, it allows tutees to recognize how style and meaning are related and also that meaning can be both denotative and connotative. Just as important, working with a tutor and taking into account the tutor's response reminds tutees that they are writing for an audience, for readers. Ultimately, tutoring drafting as stylistic experimentation would give tutors more chances to engage tutees in discussions about the possibilities of language.

In "Style: The New Grammar in Composition Studies?," Nicole Amare describes an example of what such a session might look like: "A misplaced modifier, instead of serving as an example of the student's failed knowledge of grammar, under style instruction becomes an element that the student can choose to move elsewhere in the sentence in order to improve the style quality of his or her writing" thereby creating "more effective writing for their target audience" (163). Amare's example illustrates the relationship between style and meaning, since changing the location of the modifier both "improves the style quality" and creates "more effective writing." In other words, effectiveness (the ability to communicate one's meaning successfully) is tied to the writer's style. Although Amare's example comes from the classroom, the practice becomes even more powerful within the context of tutoring sessions, where it makes visible the range of choices tutees have before them as they write.

TRACKING ONE'S STYLE

One way to make use of an analytical approach to stylistic study in the writing center is not to observe the stylistic features in others' writing—the more traditional approach—but to observe them in one's own writing. For example, a tutor might ask the student to track instances of repetition of words or phrases to point out that she is simply repeating the same idea, but not developing it. First-hand experience tracking this repetition—and having tutors connect that stylistic feature to a lack of development—will help tutees to recognize this issue in their own writing. Although Corbett primarily writes about his experiences teaching students how to gather data about other writers' styles, including syntactic patterns and word choice, he also advocates students "studying specimens of their own prose," which allows them to "discover some surprising features about their style—some felicitous characteristics and some regrettable mannerisms" ("Teaching Style" 216). We might ask tutors to document the patterns in their own writing: the words they use most often, the ways they begin their paragraphs, the punctuation marks on which they rely most heavily.

As is becoming clear, this reconnecting of style to thought in tutor training and tutoring sessions challenges the categories that writing center discourse and pedagogy have relied on for years, a point Jesse Kavaldo has made: "The binaries that characterize writing center pedagogy, such as higher order and lower order concerns, global and local questions, or process and product ultimately break down, since any discussion of the paper's actual language must always, at some level, involve both style and content" (225). This is a complication that should not be ignored in tutor training, as it creates the opportunity to have complex discussions about the difficulties of separating and categorizing writing issues. Once style, often considered a strictly formal issue and, therefore, "a lower order concern" is connected to "higher order concerns" such as meaning and development, tutors can begin to think more deeply about this complex process they are studying and teaching.

SENTENCE-COMBINING TO GENERATE IDEAS

While it may seem an antiquated approach to teaching writing, sentence-combining can be a useful way for tutors to help tutees imagine the relationships among their ideas and experiment with these different relationships. Within this context, sentence-combining is not just about developing longer, more complex sentences, but also about generating new ideas by juxtaposing them in various ways. In his revisionist study, Butler reminds us that “style studies actually flourished during the process era, when many scholars linked the two canons [of invention and style] in mutually productive ways” (61). Butler’s reminder that style is not simply the dressing or adornment it has come to represent is valuable because it links style to invention and thus to the expansion of and reflection on ideas. To reestablish this link between style and invention by preparing tutors to do sentence-combining exercises with their tutees would help emphasize how style is related to content and give tutors access to difficulties that their tutees are having, difficulties that otherwise masquerade as what are traditionally called “sentence-level” or “lower order issues”: “Run-ons and comma splices frequently show a student who is struggling to weigh and measure contrasting or contradictory—yet sophisticated and significant—ideas” (Kavaldo 224). Treating style as nothing more than a surface-level issue potentially disables tutors from recognizing these important moments in student writing. As Gary A. Olsen points out, “when we utilize sentence combining we are helping students learn a process—the process of embedding information into sentences while attaining effectiveness, clarity, and stylistic variety” (122). As tutors work with tutees in order to help them both think and write in more complex ways, sentence combining exercises offer a means by which tutees can reflect on all of the elements that one must take into account when constructing sentences and the relationships among their components.

IMITATING WITH STYLE

As Frank M. Farmer and Phillip K. Arrington explore in “Apologies and Accommodations: Imitation and the Writing Process,” imitation exercises wherein students mimic the formal characteristics of model sentences or paragraphs have fallen into disrepute because of “attitudes inherited from our not too distant Romantic past” (71), including those surrounding originality and individuality. Although I have not yet had the opportunity to integrate into tutor training the sort of stylistic study I describe, I have introduced imitation exercises in the composition classroom with success. A classroom imitation exercise that produced significant, thoughtful, and critical work could be adapted to tutor training by having tutors imitate sentences that do critical work (e.g., make connections, synthesize ideas, complicate arguments, consider implications) in order to give them a feel for how these sentences differ from those that simply narrate or summarize. This exercise would not impede students’ individuality or creativity but would help them to develop their own voices and ideas.

Although style did go out of favor, recent work in composition has pointed to the benefits of reinvigorating stylistic study. Reintroducing the term “style” within writing center pedagogy and disconnecting it from associations with error while reconnecting the term to the construction of meaning would give tutors a more sophisticated way of thinking about the role of style in the composing process. Attending to style is a means of making writers more aware of the techniques, resources, and devices they have at their disposal and the potential effects of these. As T. R. Johnson notes, “When a writer works with style, she relaxes her concern for rules, goals, and grades” (281) and ends up in a “place of dazzling freedom, where possibilities are endlessly put into play” (281). What better place could there be? ♦

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tweet WLN? “Like” WLN?

If your writing center and/or tutors have Twitter accounts and/or Facebook pages, we invite you to “follow,” “tweet,” “like,” and/or “post” on our Twitter account and Facebook wall. We occasionally post photos from writing center websites for everyone else to enjoy, so if you have a photo or maybe a particularly useful resource on your website (e.g., an online tutor’s manual, a Powerpoint, etc.), let us know. We also invite you to post occasional comments about what’s going on in your writing center and also links that other writing center folk would be interested in.



@WLNNewsletter



Writing Lab Newsletter

2010—2011 WLN Reviewers

We offer heartfelt gratitude to our reviewers, who take time from their overloaded schedules to read submissions sent to *WLN* and, drawing on their scholarship as they read, respond with thoughtful reviews designed to help writers and ensure that the articles meet *WLN* standards. With thanks and appreciation, we list the names of this year’s reviewers on the *WLN* website: <www.writinglab-newsletter.org/new/submissions_reviewers.php>.

TAKE NOTE

COWLLC & IWCA "GATHERING" @ NCTE

"Revising the Present"

November 17, 2011

Chicago, IL

For more details: <www.cowllc.org>.

To inspire participants in re-visionary thinking, we will gather at a unique venue. A renovated meatpacking plant, the Catalyst Ranch is a dynamic and funky space where modern meeting necessities meet your mom's glorious '70s kitchen! Check out their website (<www.catalystranch.com/>) and be inspired to think differently about working with your peers! From possible kitchen table conversations about 21st Century missions to round-hammock workshops on re-imagining use of space, this venue will allow us to come together to deeply and thoroughly consider the notions of revision through conversations, workshops, presentations, panel discussions, or possibly some new format we haven't even dreamed of yet.

To view the unique space where The Gathering will be held: tinyurl.com/5rzc9h. For information and questions, contact Andrew Jeter: andjet@d219.org

NEWS

IWCA TASK FORCE AND COMMITTEE WORK REPORT

Roberta Kjesrud, IWCA President, has prepared a brief screencast updating the work of IWCA's task force and committee work. The screencast is available at: <tinyurl.com/3jgfx2e>.

Notes

¹ All of these tutoring guides have seen more than one edition. In all cases, I am working with the most recent edition.

² Butler describes a similar phenomenon regarding style within English. Butler notes that despite its "apparent invisibility," style has "migrated to various areas of the field where it is not called style but functions under different theories and practices, including genre theory, rhetorical analysis, personal writing, and studies of race, class, gender, and cultural difference" (153).



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

• GERMAN PROGRAM OF ADVANCED STUDY ON WRITING CENTER WORK AND LITERACY MANAGEMENT

*Katrin Girgensobn (girgensobn@schreibreisen.de)
and
Gerd Bräuer (braeuer@ph-freiburg.de)*

The Writing Center at the Europe University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder is delighted to announce the start of a certificate of advanced studies in "Writing Center Work and Literacy Management." This continuing education program is part of an international network of similar courses under the roof of the International Literacy Management Consortium (www.international-literacy-management.org). A few months ago, this course network started at the University of Applied Sciences in Winterthur (Switzerland) where the focus is mostly on developing writing programs and other facilities for literacy management such as e-portfolio systems in educational institutions, companies, and organizations. This course is mainly organized through an e-learning platform and can also be taken in English.

In Frankfurt/Oder the main focus of the continuing education course will be on writing center work in higher and secondary education as an integrated part of literacy management in institutions. The course consists of five on-site workshops (taught in German only) with a 2-day duration for each workshop. The certificate will be finished with a self-learning unit located on an e-learning platform where the participants from Frankfurt and Winterthur will be collaborating. Please feel invited to join one of our training programs in Frankfurt/Oder (Germany) or Winterthur (Switzerland). Further information can be obtained in German at <www.europa-uni.de/schreibzentrum> and in English at <www.international-literacy-management.org>.

• ROCKY MOUNTAIN WCA IS SURVEYING MEMBERS

The Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association is surveying members to identify ways of strengthening the organization and of planning for future events. If you work in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, or Wyoming, please take a moment to complete the survey at <tinyurl.com/RMWCAsurvey>.

• SURVEY ON PLAGIARISM AND SOURCE USE

*Zuzana Tomas
University of Utah Writing Center
(zuzana.tomas@yahoo.com)*

Tutors and writing center/lab users are invited to participate in a research project on plagiarism and source use. Participation requires a completion of an electronic survey that is completely anonymous and should not take longer than fifteen minutes to complete. The deadline for survey completion is September 20, 2011. Thank you for distributing the survey links to

- tutors: <<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PBMQCRM>>.
 - writing center users/writers: <<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6HP2JSV>>.
-

TUTOR'S COLUMN

FLEXING NONVERBAL MUSCLES: THE ROLE OF BODY LANGUAGE IN THE WRITING CENTER

◆ Alexandria Janney

California State University, Stanislaus
Turlock, CA

When I began tutoring, I always sat across from the students I tutored. While this worked for some, others were more prone to say things like, “You’re the tutor. That is why I am asking you for help” in response to my probing questions. Verbally, I emphasized my equal role as often as I could, saying things like, “I am a peer tutor,” stressing “peer” as if the word were a winning lottery ticket. I would let students know that we were working together, teammates in the world of writing, and that I was there to work with them, not for them. Yet no matter how many times I tried to verbally express my intentions, my body language betrayed me.

As I continued tutoring, I discovered the fault in my initial tutoring approach; I was not sitting next to the students. As Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli explain, “Sit side by side. Such a setup is the best arrangement for tutoring; it suggests that you are an ally, not an authoritarian figure who dispenses advice from behind a desk” (18). Inadvertently, I had become the very authoritarian figure they refer to. I was like Donald Trump in *The Apprentice* without the bad hair, creating an implied dominant role that made the students I tutored feel as though I could say “You’re fired” at a moment’s notice. I had missed a surefire way to develop rapport with students.

Once I began to sit next to students, I found that my role as a peer tutor became clearer to them. I have rarely been asked “Why don’t you tell me the answer? You’re the tutor,” and I have found students more willing to provide their input, rather than becoming silent and expecting me to take over. A simple change of my body position made a big difference.

But where a tutor sits is not the only element that makes a difference; how a tutor sits does as well. I once met with a student right before his football practice. He showed up with his paper, dressed in his grass-stained practice clothes, water bottle in hand, ready to get in and get out of our meeting. As I began with the usual pleasantries, I noticed his knee start to bounce, as if there was a baby sitting on top of it crying and he wanted it to stop. When I started to ask about his paper, he jiggled a pencil between his fingers—like a magic wand that would cast a spell and make the session speed up. It was his body language that told me: “I have someplace to be. Can you please hurry up?” Tutors can send this same message to students in an identical way. While some people constantly fidget by nature and do not mean anything negative by fidgeting, students are not always aware of this. As Virginia Bower points out in the section “The Student/Tutor Relationship,” from *Tutor.edu: A Manual for Writing Center Tutors*, “If you are in a state of movement, your body expresses a desire to leave the present situation; do not subconsciously tell the student that you want to be somewhere else!” (Bower, Kiser, McMurtry, et al. 1). Of course, nodding your head in agreement or moving your hands for an explanation does not usually pose a problem; a tutor does not want to be a stiff corpse, but when the movement is rapid and offers a greater distraction than encouragement, such movement is probably best to avoid.

Once I became more tuned in to the influence movement can have on a tutoring session, I started to think of tutoring as a subconscious sort of dance; a dance that someone like myself, who has two left feet, can perform effortlessly. The dance just requires an

awareness of a couple of subtle moves that ensure students are receiving the right messages. According to Bower, the idea of accepting someone with open arms does not solely apply to greetings in airports but also pertains to sessions in writing centers; keeping arms opened, not crossed, will “convey a message of acceptance” (1). Similar to the stance of a dancer, the stance of a tutor is important: “avoid slumping and looking like a couch potato” (Bower, Kiser, McMurtry, et al. 1). We all want to be comfortable, but we don’t want to appear disinterested. Our moves aren’t the only ones that matter; tutors need to pay close attention to the implicit messages students send as well.

Making eye contact is a common strategy used by tutors to convey attentiveness and engagement to students, although for some students, especially those from other countries, eye contact may have a different meaning. As explained by Shanti Bruce, “Japanese show they are listening by averting their eyes. To make direct eye contact is a sign of disrespect, especially between Japanese males and females”; in contrast, “Most Middle Easterners feel uneasy unless they can clearly see the pupils of other eyes” (Bruce and Rafoth 10). Just because a student does not make eye contact does not necessarily mean that the student is not interested or paying attention. With cultural and personal variants creating discrepancies in the meaning of body language, I try to remember there is one form of communication that is the same in every language—a smile.

It’s important for tutors not to seem clown-like, smiling like the Joker from *Batman*, but we do want to seem friendly, to welcome students into our space. An occasional smile is an encouraging touch that can help students feel comfortable and accepted. When students are panicking about the paper due the next day or dealing with personal issues, a smile can often ease their negative emotions.

I recently tutored a student who decided to sit across from me before the session even began. She put her colorful canvas backpack, stuffed to the brim like an overfilled calzone, in the seat next to her as though it were a best friend. I had flashbacks to my beginning tutoring days, wondering how I could avoid reverting to my Donald Trump alter-ego. As quickly as she put the backpack down, I moved my seat next to hers, gracefully sliding the plastic turquoise chair as though it were a coin slipping into a slot machine. When she pulled her paper out of the backpack to set it on the desk, she slid a little closer to me so that we could both have a perfect view, and I knew that my body language was saying so much more than my words ever could. While some may see body language as a small blip on a student’s radar, such nonverbal communication can hold as much power, if not more, than the tutor’s words, even if that communication is as slight as the relocation of a chair. ♦

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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

October 20-22, 2011: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Madison, WI
Contact: Katie Levin: 612-624-7720; kslevin@umn.edu. Conference website: <writing.wisc.edu/mwca2011/index.html>.

February 16-18, 2012: Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in Richmond, KY
Contact: Russell Carpenter: russell.carpenter@eku.edu; conference website: <www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html>.

March 30-31, 2012: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Shippensburg, PA
Contact: Karen Johnson: kgjohnson@ship.edu.

March 30-31, 2012: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Indianapolis, IN
Contact: Conference website: <www.iupui.edu/~uwc/ecwca.html>.

April 13-15, 2012: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in New York, NY
Contact: Conference website: <www.northeastwca.org>.

October 25-27, 2012: International Writing Centers Conference, in San Diego, CA
Contact: Conference website: <www.socalwritingcenters.org/iwca2012/index.html>.