

WRITING AT THE CENTER

TUTORS AS LEARNERS 2015



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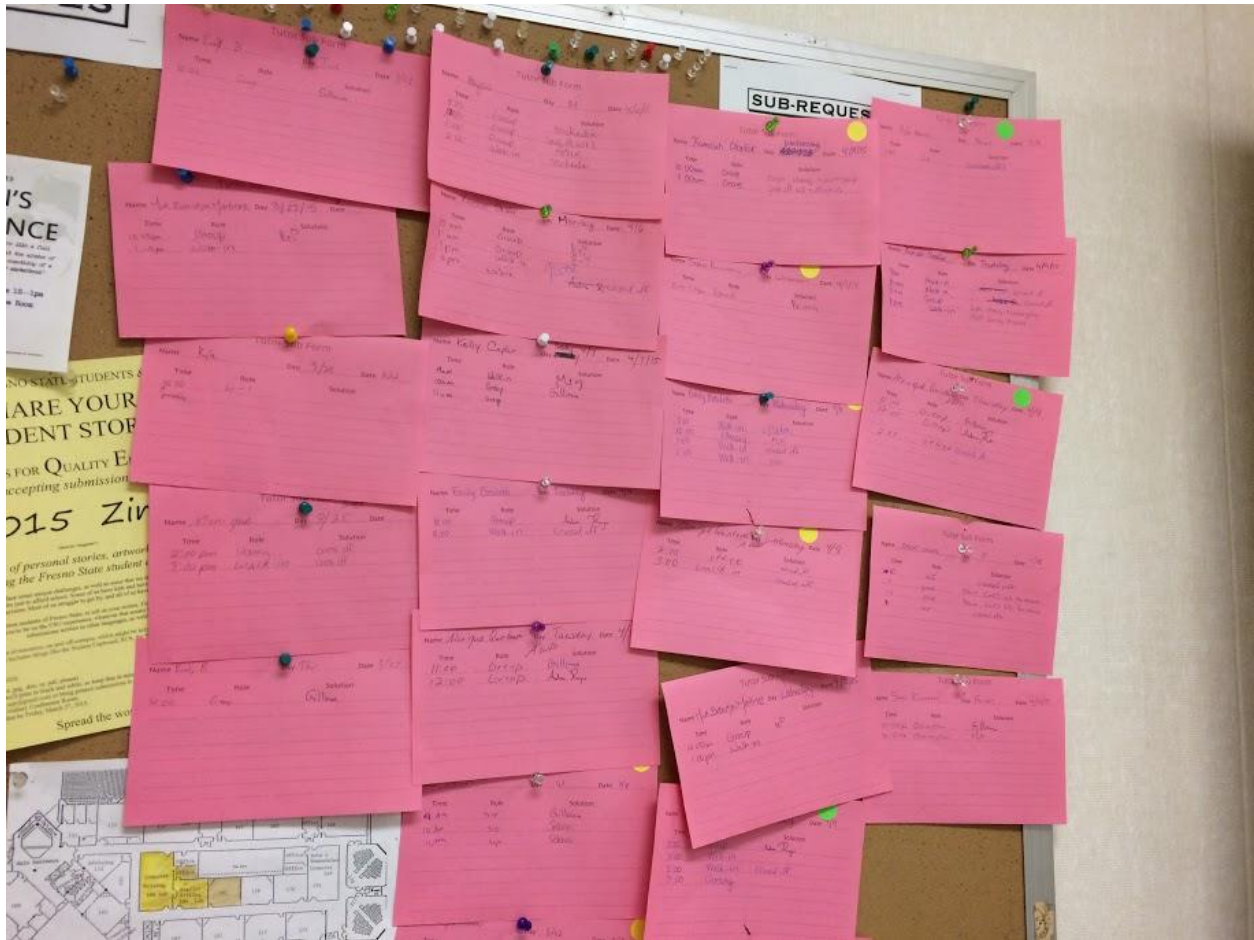
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Andres Rojas

THE VOYAGE TO THE ELIXIR OF KNOWLEDGE

Life is a voyage that may take us to a world of endless possibilities; it may take us to wander the seven seas, through raging storms and hideous sea monsters from our most feared nightmares. Other times it may be different and we may sail peacefully across oceans in search of ways of becoming enviously rich; in search of those lost treasures that would make any man powerful beyond his wildest dream. All explorers before me were seeking precious stones, exquisite silks, and exuberant metals; I sailed off with a different goal in mind. My goal was to find the elixir of knowledge. This was my ultimate goal to find this ultimate source of knowledge and absorb its wisdom.

I traveled endlessly for years until one day I came across an individual that preached of a place where knowledge could be attained. He described a place where the gods of wisdom would shower knowledge to anyone that was willing to put the time and effort. He spoke of a place of learning, a place where there's no right or wrong answers, a place where reading, writing, and discussions enlighten

“I began to understand writing not as a paper but as a collection of changing ideas.”

people with wisdom. After listening to such discourse and blasphemy I had to discover this place for myself. This is how the voyage landed me in this place known as the Fresno State's Writing Center.

It all began one sunny day when I came through the door; I was welcomed by a large sign that read tutor interviews. At that precise moment fear and anxiety clouded my judgment, yet a sense of confidence surged from within. I was told to read a piece of writing; I cannot recall the name, however I do recall it being something about the KKK. I read the piece of writing, then wrote for a few minutes. I began to understand writing not as a paper but as a collection of changing ideas. I took some notes down, and proceeded to the interview. It was here where time seemed to stop, the seconds turned into minutes, the minutes into hours, and the hours into days. As the river of questions flowed I began thinking at writing differently, for the ideas that were present were new. It was here where I began to realize that the individual that spoke of such a place was right.

Through the weeks that passed life continued its monotonous routine, until training knocked at my front door. Gladly I was enthusiastic and curious to see what it was going to be like. I'm not going to blow it out of proportions and say it was all great; we didn't sit around in a circle and play Simon says. The days were long; we were bombarded by information and procedures. At the end of the day I began to question if my brain had the mental capacity and enough grey matter to absorb all the elements that were being presented to us. Although most of it was procedure, one question really stood out from everything, one simple question that despite it being so simple sparked interest. It made me think differently. The question was: Who am I as a Writer?

I have traveled to different lands and examined learning at its core, but never have I visualized it in such way. I began to write, but for some strange reason this idea felt weird, alienated. The pen wouldn't move, I was actually stuck in front of a door that was decorated with elegant designs with the combination in my hand and somehow I could not open it. It took me a few minutes to take my mind into retrospect to actually think about the question and I began to write, but this writing was different it made me explore writing not a laborious or excruciating task, but rather a pleasing and welcoming task. It seems that the match of

knowledge was lit and I was ready to start tutoring students.

The First time we do everything we get nervous, our palms begin to sweat, and begin to think of the worst case scenario of everything that might go wrong. This is what crossed my mind the first day of actual tutoring. Suddenly, a gentle soothing voice reminded me to stay calm told me that it was going to be all right. I listened to that voice and I relaxed and continued with the session. Before I knew it the weeks were done and I had tutored 14 groups. A sense of accomplishment filed my lungs.

As the days and tutoring sessions passed I began to understand writing not as a paper but as an over of changing ideas that can be molded and destroyed and molded again. My mentality had changed. I began to look at drafts of writing as pieces of a larger puzzle rather than a completed product. I began to think that the horizon was not the edge of the world it was only the beginning to expand to new ideas that I never believed possible. This voyage would have not been possible without our writing lenses. These lenses are a new pair of eyes to view the world of writing.

That precise moment I realized I had experienced enlightenment. I have found what I had been searching for: I had found the elixir of knowledge, but instead of absorbing its knowledge I will share it with the world in every tutoring lesson and every class I'll teach.





Kamilah Okafor

SHITTY FIRST DRAFTS ALLOWED: HOW MY WRITING GOT ITS GROOVE BACK

When I first considered working at the Writing Center, I thought it would be a great opportunity to help students with their writing. And yet, there was always that voice in the back of my head that thought otherwise:

“You? Being responsible for the education of a student? Are you sure you can handle that?”

The thought nagged at me for a long time. I always knew how to take care of my own writing, but helping someone else with their papers? For a while, I held back on the tutor position, thinking maybe I should read some book on tutoring before I take a stab at teaching anyone how to write right. But after a while, I decided the best way to learn how to tutor is to get out there and get hands on experience.

I was a nervous wreck as the first day of tutoring sessions slowly approached. However, during tutor orientation training, we read an

essay that eased my panicking heart: “Shitty First Drafts”. The name alone was enough to form a big question mark over your head, but the material was golden. The author of this essay, Anne Lamott, was telling her audience, telling me, it’s okay to write a shitty first draft: a draft full of cheesy lines, plot holes, dropped sentences, etc. I could write silly. I could write dramatically. I could write however I wanted, I just had to write. Write first, fix it later; that’s what the second, third, and fourth drafts are for. Reading this essay and discussing it with my fellow tutors made me realize that there is no such thing as perfection when it comes to writing. This essay helped me as a creative writer. I found myself not worrying about the perfect first line for my fiction stories, and weakened my worries about writing poetry or nonfiction.

Aside from helping me as a writer, Lamott's essay reminded me of my nervous beginnings as a tutor when I felt like I had to know everything before I could tutor students. The essay helped me realize that just as there is no such thing as the perfect draft, there is no such thing as the perfect tutor. A tutor does not have to be an expert on everything and that is okay. The tutor comes in to learn, to make mistakes, and to grow from them. The tutors are, in a way, their own first draft, which will be revised over and over again, improving at each revision.

This also applies to my experiences with my tutees in our group sessions. Some of my tutees were quiet, and hesitant to participate in conversations. I realized they had the same nervous energy that I did. However, reading "Shitty First Drafts" with my tutees brought

"The tutor comes in to learn, to make mistakes, and to grow from them"

them out of their shells. I think they could all relate to that desire of wanting their essays or other writing assignments to be perfect the first time around. Lamott's essay was an ice-breaker that helped my tutees realize that not only was it okay to write bad first drafts, but that my tutees were not alone in their concerns for the perfect paper. Over time, my tutees were writing longer private writes and short writes, asking questions, and helping their fellow tutees with their writing assignments. They were transforming as writers.

Now, in my second semester as a tutor, I can say I have more confidence and my concerns about being the perfect tutor are out the window. Reading "Shitty First Drafts" has not only evolved myself as writer, but a tutor: a tutor who is revising herself everyday.





Kelly Caplan

HEART ON: LETTING IT ALL HANG OUT ON THE PAGE

Writing is sexy. It is enticing, encapsulating, and liberating. At least, I think it should be. The most exciting writing rustles my bones and quenches my arid veins; in my experience, practicing this craft can produce the same sensations. At the same time, the practice might seem more like bloodletting and not all writing occasions are worthy of hyperbolic metaphor, but it is fun. I certainly have experienced quite a bit of heartbreak during this journey; I am not afraid to express my frustration. As a tutor at the Fresno State Writing Center, I can confirm the frequency of this sentiment. The disdain I sense from students discourages me. I feel for them, but not because I agree that writing generally sucks. I feel for them because I know what it is like to crumble amid colleges' institutional expectations. I know what it is like to not feel valued, and therefore not value myself. I also believe writing can serve as an act of self-

reclamation; if utilized the proper way, it can give students the "heart on" required to navigate academia's intimidating corridors. This commitment to enfranchising students stems from my own pilgrimage.

I graduated high school feeling pretty secure. Kind of. Honestly, I was wildly insecure, as young 18-year-olds so often are. If I felt secure about anything, it was my perceived ability to write. Before graduating, I loved to write and wrote whenever I could. I spent several lunch periods writing in my water-damaged composition book and I sometimes avoided my closest friends to bask in it. Hymns of teenage curiosity bled through my pen; a glorious, hot-n-bothered hunger permeated my youthful utterances and I was proud of it. I did not care how awkwardly romantic my protestations were, because I spoke my truth. I relished it; I could not wait to share my pieces with beloved

classmates and friends (after my bouts of Thoreauvian isolation, of course). Rarely did anyone criticize what I shared, which elated me. I was not necessarily afraid of it, but I did not see it so much. This made sense in my mind after spending hours revising my brainchildren.

Either way, “negative” feedback rarely crossed my path and because of this, I pictured my talents engrained in the flesh. I felt like a natural and I felt so connected; the journey was like extracting my marrow’s manifesto. I adored the creative revision process and spent countless hours fearlessly revising my work. It is a wonder I ever finished any class assignments. In retrospect, I recall fond memories of desperately chipping away at a poem while in Algebra 2, during my sophomore year. My bloodlust was extravagant and the craft was my sacrificial lamb. Indeed, there was much to sacrifice.

During this time, I sensed the divide between the works I wanted to compose and the work I had to produce for a grade. The latter was, to me, much like staring down the barrel of a loaded gun, cocked and ready to obliterate any chances of getting into college without proper consideration. It was obvious what brand of writing on which I should have focused, but it was uncomfortable to peer into the barrel at a world so foreign. Do not get me wrong, I navigated that world fairly well, but it was all concrete jungles and sterile, white walls. I wanted to pistol-whip MLA and works cited. Screw this restrictive mumbo jumbo, I often thought to myself. Critical feedback was plentiful here and I did not want anything to do with it. Whether I wanted to or not, I had to come to terms with it.

I started working at the Fresno State Writing Center Spring of 2012 and was hesitant to sit down in the training room; it was my second year in college and while I did feel comfortable with my ability to adapt to academic writing, something still stung my guts; academic writing scared me and I did not feel like the proper foot soldier in this battle to create “good” writing. My residency here has since changed my perception.

We simulate group tutoring while training; our supervisors act as “tutor,” and we act as “tutees,” or students. For those RPG fanatics out there, this is the way to go. At nearly every

group table, it is three students to every tutor. You learn simply by doing, and you understand the writing process more thoroughly by participating. During these training sessions, I experienced exactly what my students experience on a daily basis.

During tutoring sessions, when we look at essays or other pieces of writing, we employ response mechanisms called “lenses,” which are based on pedagogy developed by Peter Elbow (see Sharing and Responding). Each lens serves as a tool for reading and responding to writing more explicitly and allows us to view the paper in a specific manner. Instead of becoming overwhelmed by the myriad qualities of a draft, we focus on what we want to hear “more about,” what the draft might be “saying overall,” or how the sources/speakers are (or are not) conversing with each other. It seems simple and some say

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it’s not true tutoring; in reality, these lenses provide anxious (or if you’re like me, neurotic) writers a way to zoom in on phenomenon that are silenced in normalized acts of “editing” or “proofreading.” I put those words in quotations because I do not trust them and find them value-

laden (I mean, what does it mean to “proofread” anyway? Are we talking about grammar or content? Or both? Now I feel really anxious...and suspicious. In the quotations you go, silly words).

The responses to these lenses, of course, are through writing. When we respond to what we want to hear “more about” in a draft, we first write it down and share exactly what we’ve written. The conversation starts with the writing. Coupled with vocal discussions, we build ourselves a savory stew of feedback. And when you are doing this in a group of four that meets twice a week for 18 weeks, you build a community. A writing community. A community where writing happens so frequently – so easily – we embrace the practice. You are just doin’ it a bunch, it is no big deal, and your voice is constantly heard. Even if you are one of the quiet ones, you have a chance to express your opinions. Everybody shares, everybody responds, at least through writing. It is brilliant and it saved my life. When we are discussing a student’s writing, we do something very fresh. We are not talking about what will make it

better, or what we think the writer should do. Hell, the responding we do may not directly influence the decisions writers will make in their revisions, but the conversation can get us pretty damn close to that.

When we write in this low-stakes and communal way, we release ourselves from the initial, soul-crushing pressures of academic writing. Sometimes we refrain from checking to see if our on-the-spot utterances make sense. Sometimes I get real frisky and write so vigorously, I can barely read what I've written. We just do it. We get it out of our heads, we let the hymns of our insides bleed out of our pens, and we let them breathe on the page in all their chaotic, awkward glory. Yes, our short writes are more focused than simple "free writing," but it is just enough structure to guide the writer to the road; which direction they traverse is their call, and tripping over rubble is not a worry. This is so unlike that 2:00am moment when we are scrambling to "produce" something sensible, while trying to figure out the MLA or APA business. That experience is painful, and many folks I know succumb to it, myself included. Every "trip" I have in this context usually produces a moment of self-flagellation, stretching into more hours of frustrating procrastination. I am rarely proud of writing that is born out of this scenario.

Experiences like the above, of which I have many, scar me. When I think of them, it makes the pen look more like an electric shock collar than an expressive tool. This embittered me so much, I was afraid to write voluntarily for most of my collegiate career. I worked hard to complete required assignments, while also being resentful of them because of how little they mirrored the writing I adored. I kept the wall dividing these two worlds high and strong.

“We just do it. We get it out of our heads, we let the hymns of our insides bleed out of our pens, and we let them breathe on the page in all their chaotic, awkward glory.”

The Writing Center, in so many ways, helps us see that wall for what it is: a crippling illusion. There is no doubt that academia, depending on the subject, field, or instructor, has a set of conventions we cannot avoid. That is reality. At the same time, those conventions need not frighten us anymore. Getting something "wrong" does not mean we inherently suck. It does not mean we are not fit for college. It means we are learning the rules of the game, because there is nothing innate about writing. Writing is not natural. Like gender, race, and class, normalized writing conventions are constructed. These rules are human-made, and while abiding by them does better ensure our enfranchisement in many facets of the academy, walking through the doors without completely understanding these rules should not disenfranchise people. It should not turn people away. Ultimately, it should not make a person feel like they are an inherently "bad writer" (which is how too many students describe themselves during the first weeks of our semester-long tutorials). At the Writing Center, it is our mission to undo this sentiment. To rip it up and start again.

As both a student and a tutor, this sacred space gave me the opportunity to reconnect with the spirit of the writing process. Our sessions present writing as a self-actualizing activity, rather than a competitive measurement of our self-worth; we speak our truths and we validate our experiences through focused feedback. We empower ourselves. Since I started my residency here, I have witnessed countless students deconstruct the self-deprecating habits our institutions beat into them. Every semester, we breathe humanity back into this sterile world. We get our hearts back on the page.



Kyle Hoover

INTIMACY, VULNERABILITY, AND WRITING AT THE TABLE: THE WRITING CENTER AS A SPACE OF DISCOURSE NEGOTIATION

I've seen a lot of students come into our writing center who tell me that their teacher had them come because their writing is *so* bad, who were told they really needed help. They were told, essentially, that they are crappy writers. This is the mindset a lot of people have when we help them. Of course, the problem is not that they actually are bad writers. Most of the time, the problem is that many of these students have trouble acclimating to the often overwhelming

conflict between the different expectations and demands of the varied discourses they encounter in the university (the habits of mind and language of the academy)—and on top of that, the sometimes frustrating idiosyncrasies of specific teachers' writing instructions (some teachers simply don't teach writing well). Often these are working class students, students of color, or international students: students who are not from a privileged background. Since these

are the students who, a lot of the time, are the ones recommended to visit writing centers for help, the tutoring they are given provides a crucial role in their adjustment to the discourse of the academy.

I think that one of the best ways to help students navigate these discourse-conflicts (or teacher-conflicts) is by writing at the table with them. Writing is where most of the communication in academia and in public discourse happens, so if we are trying to get students to think like writers and communicators, we need to be writing with them and communicating in that way.

Oftentimes, academic discourses are inaccessible to students because of the language of the academy, which can be confusing and foreign to those outside of that discourse. All students are capable of complex thought, but the language is a huge barrier to learning the kinds of academic thinking valued in the discourse, what are called “academic habits of mind.” I believe low-stakes writing with the tutor at the table can help students tap into their existing repertoire of language skills and translate them into academic discourse. Taking a cue from Peter Elbow, who calls this “speaking onto the page,” I argue that we promote language-use at the table that, in a way, defies the language of the academy, language that is personal, maybe even imprecise—in other words, student language. This not only helps students become more comfortable with writing, but it also helps them learn habits of mind that are expected of them in the university.

If, as writing tutors or as writing teachers, we want students to do hard thinking, then we need to let them do it. I think the Writing Center is one of the best places for that. At the Writing Center, students can do writing and thinking and then test it without the worry of grades, like in the classroom. When we have tutees writing at the table, they are doing something much more powerful than just talking. Low-stakes writing (such as focused short writes) provides a space for complex thought with the immediacy of speech, a middle ground between student and academic discourses. This is a space useful for negotiating disparities in university discourses and idiosyncrasies in

writing instruction, because it is a space of translation, of bordering two discourses, something many students of color and international students struggle with in the university.

This space is the Writing Center table. It is a space of shared attention. It is a temporary space, where writers come together and lend themselves to each other. Two, three, four of us sit together in the same physical space, yes—but somewhere else as well, somewhere beyond the material world. Pictures of this somewhere come through on notebook pages, residue of the energy of the exchange. You feel that energy when you’re writing and sharing. You don’t get as strong a hit of it when the tutoring is one-sided, when the tutor is telling the tutee what she sees or what to do. It’s the same in the classroom—it takes a really powerful lecturer to get students to

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enter a kind of shared space, but even then it’s not the same kind of space you find in the intimacy of the tutoring session. And it is intimate. It’s as intimate as it is vulnerable. You’re putting parts of yourself onto paper and showing them to strangers. But, that vulnerability is where the learning and the thinking happens. It’s where the translation is. Everybody is offering up pieces of their minds, their experiences, their lives, and together they are figuring something out. I think that kind of vulnerability is essential to what writing is, even academic writing—it is us opening ourselves up and letting others look in. The more we do it, the more comfortable we are with it, the better we become as writers.

I don’t think this could happen as naturally if not for a space like the Writing Center table, where the tutor and the tutee(s) write and share. Talk tends to skirt around issues, to touch lightly and then move on. Writing dwells on things. Writing questions and pushes. But writing also gives a lot of people anxiety, because it is writing, and writing is so often something to be judged and graded by. It becomes something that is a measure of who you are as a person. Writing at the table, then, is a middle space that takes the benefits of both: it lets us sit with something in terms we know without being judged for it.



Oscar Chavez

LOW STAKES AT THE TABULA

I want to discuss low-stakes and high-stakes writing, but before we go on to discuss how writing happens in our group, we have to establish some kind of common language on what low-stakes and high-stakes writing is. If we consider the kinds of pressures our students have (pressure due to school, work, everyday life, etc.) and, specifically, the pressures of writing, then we have to consider what writing means to them. Writing is what determines their grade here at the university and, unfortunately, there are professors who view writing as a product and therefore place heavy weight on the product as opposed to what was learned (the process). This product can often be the determining factor between passing or failing a course; thus, it makes academic writing a very high-stakes act.

What I mean by high-stakes writing is that the students' success in the university and their ability to be enculturated into their academic discourse community is dependent on writing. If students' writing is deemed "good enough," or a better academic term would be "effective," then students are allowed to be a part of the university community. These students must adopt the discourse practices here at the university. However, those discourse practices they adopt vary. They might be writing as a first-year writing student and then shift to writing with the discourse practices in their respective majors. Bartholomae discusses writing and gives insight into high-stakes writing in different areas. He states:

The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on peculiar

ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community...the student must learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes -- to write, for example, as a literary critic one day and as an experimental psychologist the next. (Bartholomae 3)

Students are asked to write in different discourse communities as Bartholomae tells us. They are forced to make particular choices with their writing that might get in the way of what they want to say and how they want to say it. A technique in which students can “learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes” (Bartholomae 3) is through private writing. They can attempt to write as if they were a business person or a physicist and use their language in a way that will not put their reputation at stake. Also, this low-stakes free writing will allow students to transition into their chosen discourse communities with much less pressure, since they are not writing to members of that particular discourse community.

We have been discussing “low-stakes” writing, but have not yet clearly defined it. Peter Elbow gives us some insight into what low-stakes writing is. He states, “low-stakes writing assignments are typically frequent and informal and designed to make students regularly spend time reflecting in written language on what they are learning from discussions, readings, lectures, and their own thinking” (Elbow 353). Low-stakes assignment objectives encourage students to get their thinking down on the page. When this thinking is down on the page, they are able to reflect and this is where they are doing significant learning. Private writing that is done during group tutorials here in our writing center allows for this kind of low-stakes writing.

One of the things we do here at the writing center is begin our group sessions with a private

write. This private write is very low-stakes in that it falls under what Elbow deems the goal of low-stakes writing. Elbow states, “low-stakes writing is usually informal and tends to be graded informally. In a sense, we get to throw away the low-stakes writing itself, but keep the neural changes it produced in students’ heads” (Elbow 851). This low-stakes assignment might be the only opportunity students get to put their thoughts down on paper and learn through reflection.

“Low-stakes writing allows students to transfer into the academic discourse”

Low-stakes writing allows students to transfer into the academic discourse (what we have been calling high-stakes writing).

Additionally, low-stakes writing gives students the opportunity to think of things in their own language. This is important, as our students all bring in different discourse language. We might not be able to understand all of the various aspects of their discourse communities, but low-stakes writing certainly helps students begin to think about the meaning they will be conveying through writing. What I mean by is that students get a chance to test the waters with their thinking by writing privately and then they can go on to consider how their low-stakes writing will transition into high-stakes writing.

Elbow states that low-stakes writing “helps them [students] find their own language for the issues of the course; they stumble into their own analogies and metaphors for academic concepts” (Elbow 353). In practice, the low-stakes writing we do in the Writing Center with students really allows students to begin thinking about their language practices and how those practices connect with those in academia.

In order to get a better understanding of how all of this theory works at a pragmatic level, we can turn into explaining how writing functions in our writing groups.



Adam Kunkleman

USING TALK AT THE WRITING CENTER

The set up we have for the group tutoring really lends itself to the self-serving tutor. I guess that might sound awful, but hear me out on this one. Most tutoring centers will only hold sessions one-on-one with their tutees, but at Fresno State we conduct group sessions with a few main goals in mind. Among these is building group rapport and creating equality between the tutor and the tutees. The idea is to create a climate where topics are discussed without one person standing out as the expert. This sounds simple but actually accomplishing this while still acting as a facilitator of the discussion can be difficult.

I personally have found that small groups of people (about 4-8) give me the most anxiety in social situations. After working at the Writing Center for a few semesters, I've found that the dynamic of the tutoring group has given me greater confidence in other groups that don't

really have anything to do with academia. Essentially I've been getting paid to shake my social trepidations and build a skillset that can be applied to any small group situation.

I know that throughout my life I'll be expected to perform in small groups both in a professional and a social capacity. While, as I mentioned before, the tutor is not an *authority* at the group table, the tutor does act as a *facilitator* during group meetings. This really opened my eyes to the kinds of social cues necessary to involve everybody in a conversation and not just the people who care to throw their opinion out there without being prompted. Although the best way to get around the issue of tutees not wanting to divulge their thoughts is to base the conversation in mandatory short-writes, I've found that during the spoken portions of our sessions the quieter tutees can be coaxed out of their silence.

While I argue that spoken conversation can get tutees more comfortable with sharing their opinions at the group sessions, these conversations are not a replacement for written discussion. The danger in talking lies in how difficult it can be to keep everyone equally involved in the conversation. People tend to keep their mouth shut if they are shy, disinterested, or ignorant toward a topic. It's important that we use the written responses to lenses and open-ended discussion questions because they act as mini prompts for the tutees to put their two cents into the discussion. At Fresno State, we don't care if tutees think they don't know about something. Even if the response they give revolves around their lack of knowledge in a topic the fact that the tutee practiced writing thoughts down on paper as they occurred serves our ends as a writing center. Ultimately, we just want our tutees to gain confidence in their writing by making them write. It's as simple as that.

Typically, I can rely on asking them a direct question and they will respond to it, but it's not always as easy as that. While people are often reticent to share their opinions on a topic, they will almost certainly be interested in talking about their own experiences, both triumphs and failures, when it comes to almost any given topic. Again, here at the Fresno State Writing Center we pride ourselves on our reliance on written responses, but written responses, I think, is not what builds the kind of rapport that I've come to love in our small writing tutorial groups. The more personal I can be with what I share about myself the more I can expect my fellows at the table to share when it comes to personal, and at times sensitive, subject matter.

I've learned that at the Writing Center, and in almost all group situations, the conversation benefits from one or more of the members being conscious how much other people are contributing. If I notice that the tutees' written responses are becoming scant and they don't seem to be interested in talking about the subject, I'll turn my attention to the personal, the experiential, instead of the abstract or observational. This usually provides a rich place to launch open-ended discussion questions, and gives everybody something they talk about with confidence. I think the issue that comes up is discomfort in feeling like a fool. Nobody wants to feel like they're out of their depth. But if I can

coax a personal account out of one of the tutees while speaking, I can usually get another one out of a different tutee. At this point coming up with a written discussion question feels as natural as talking and everybody at the table can usually take a little inspiration out of the verbal responses given by a couple of people just before.

One easy trap to fall into as a tutor is not giving all the tutees equal attention during a session. One way this happens is by physically blocking off one of the tutees. The group sessions at Fresno State are conducted around rectangular tables that comfortably seat four but could feasibly hold six. The tutor sits across from two of the tutees and next to the third. In order to engage everyone in the session I suggest facing the table at a diagonal (pointing toward the tutee beside the tutor). If the tutor can keep their face toward the whole table rather than just straight in front of them it's easier to establish eye contact and specifically address each tutee individually.

I use these same techniques in casual conversation if I happen to be put in a group of people that I don't know very well. This is especially useful when I find myself surrounded by friends that I've come to know barring one or two newcomers. Some people, even in the context of the tutorial, have absolutely no problem jumping in, but I think that most people find it difficult when they don't have the advantage of knowing everybody else in the group.

The level playing field, the peer relationship, which we build between tutor and tutee is another component of the social dynamic that is necessary for the openness I prefer at the table. I think that a little bit of humor can open a lot of doors when engaging in any group discussion. At the Writing Center, I try to take a couple of shots at myself. I am slightly self-deprecating when it comes to my writing ability, my personal life, and even my ability as a facilitator because I think that people respond well to modesty as long as they feel it's genuine. I also don't hold back my opinion while tutoring except, of course, in cases where my initial reaction is to say something snide or backhanded. I feel free to take issue with things that the tutees say, but it's a problem if I start to rail on and on or if I make it seem as though I think the tutee is stupid.

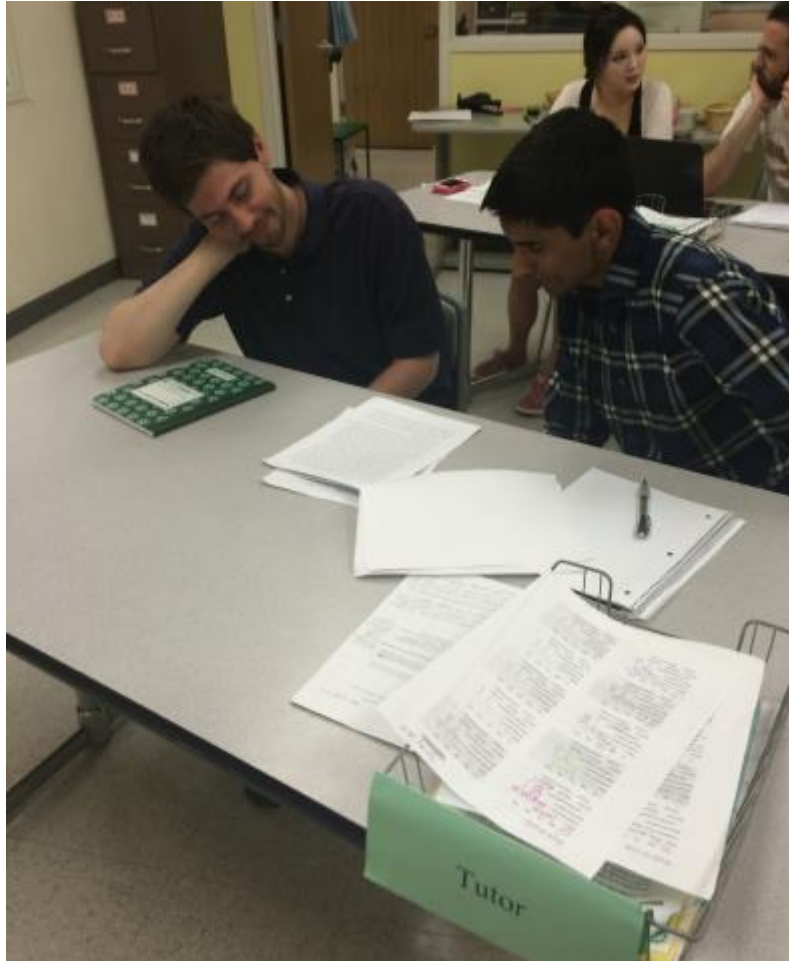
“The danger in talking lies in how difficult it can be to keep everyone equally involved in the conversation.”

I don't want it to sound like I'm walking on eggshells while tutoring, because I try my best to steer the discussion into places where we'll have different opinions and as a result fruitful conversations. It's just about tact...well not tact because that makes it sound too sneaky or politic. It's more about civility and respect. These things don't come naturally to a lot of people, me least of all, but the skill of not being an asshole has really come in handy while

participating in classroom discussions and general conversations with any ol' person.

Working at the Fresno State Writing Center has lead me to become a better person in general, and the skills that I've accrued are not just academic but can be universally applied. I think that a tutee, if they are willing to engage in the conversation, will walk away with a similar skillset that they too can use in their class discussions and far beyond.





Kevin Jensen

THE COMFORT OF REPLY

When me and my colleagues were looking at the handbook from which many of our lenses were adapted, we found that the “Reply” lens hadn’t been revised at all, really, whereas many of the others had been changed in some way over time. I think the reason why this lens hasn’t been revised is because it is so incredibly simple. And it is that simple because, like so many of the other lenses we use, it is based on conversational techniques that we use in our everyday lives. When talking with someone most of us are thinking about how the words coming out of the other person’s mouth relate to our own lives, our own personal experiences. So then, I guess it’s actually a cognitive process which the conversational technique is founded on. So

perhaps “Reply” has not been revised because it does not need to be revised; it was born out of something so completely naturally human that most of us never even think about it. There have been studies done by Andrew N. Meltzoff which show that when we look at each other our brains tell us, starting in infancy, that we are seeing reflections of ourselves; this leads to the phenomenon of empathy. But, one of the strange magical things about us humans is that we can also experience empathy by reading something.

This lens can’t be separated from the human emotions involved in it. In order to even to get to the practical uses of the lens we must first discuss the abstract ideas of empathy and human connection that the whole concept of the lens is

founded on. There have been numerous studies done over the last forty years or so on the subject of mimesis. The concept was brought to prominence by Rene Girard in his 1972 book, *Violence and the Sacred*. Most who know Girard's work usually tend to focus on the violent side of it (there is plenty of that to go around and it shouldn't be ignored) however half of his theory is actually based on human connection and empathy. One of the many facets of mimesis is the inherent connection that we feel toward each other merely as human beings, as demonstrated by Meltzoff's studies among others, as well as the more complex relationship that we have to the stories we tell through writing.

Any kind of writing is about connection on some level, even academic writing. Yet writing is often talked about as if it isn't even taking place in the real world; students are even told to not use the word "I" in their papers as though it were written by some sort of disembodied spirit. But we also don't treat academic writing like it's about relating to other writers, other people. When we talk about entering into the academic conversation we are talking about relating to other writers through their work and through ours. Yet we still talk about writing as a solitary

“One of the most important things that the “Reply” lens teaches us is that it’s okay, and even important for us to relate to each other’s writing.”

act, taking place in a vacuum. One of the most important things that the “Reply” lens teaches us is that it's okay, and even important for us to relate to each other's writing. Because our writing does contain us within it; otherwise what are we relating to when we read something? It is the words but it's not just the squiggles and lines that we put on the page by themselves. It's what we say those squiggles and lines mean which is a reflection of the writers, and in turn, a reflection of the audience.

One of the reasons why this lens is most helpful in the early stages of writing a draft is, I think, because it makes students feel more comfortable with their writing. And I think this is because it makes them feel more comfortable with themselves in an academic setting. Not to keep beating up on academia but, again, the way writing is usually taught makes students feel like the way they think and speak is not valid. That it is not as “smart” as academic thoughts and speech are supposed to be. So the students often try to write in some elevated style that they do not even understand themselves which only confuses them and thus their readers as well. We should try to make our students feel valid; like their thoughts and speech are absolutely worth writing down.





Zoyer Zyndel

TRANS*CENDING THE CONVERSATION

One thing the Writing Center has helped me with is crafting my own perception of my identity as a writer. Prior to working at the Writing Center, or any tutoring center for that matter, I was under the misconception that there was such a thing as good writing and bad writing, but my reeducation has led me to respect – and embrace – that quality of writing is relative, and a matter of perspective and audience. With this said, over time I’ve become much more confident in calling myself a writer, even though I have not written any books yet. While this evolution in thinking and growth improved the way I thought of writing and tutoring, working at the Writing Center also did something I did not initially expect it would – it helped me embrace my identity as a social worker and also to see how the skills I’ve learned as a writing tutor can help me as a social worker.

The reason I gravitated to the field of social work is due to my 10 years of experience doing grassroots organizing with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. I enjoy the volunteer work I do, planning various events and actions, and would like to create a profession for myself out of what I already enjoy doing for free. I work with an organization that provides support, advocacy, and education for and about the transgender community and their allies. We offer monthly support groups, where transgender individuals and their loved ones can be part of a safe space to discuss their experiences and listen to the experiences of others.

I had the bright idea to incorporate writing as a part of one of our support groups, more as an experiment, but also because I fervently believe in writing as a means of healing from social oppression. Working with groups at the Writing Center has shown me how students truly

can open up and critically discuss their opinions about social issues; not only does this generate great discussions but it also opens the students' eyes to various points of views on a single topic. I wanted this to happen for the attendees of our support group. I had wanted to do this for a while, but two things happened that prompted me to move from "wanting," to do it, to "planning" to do it. The first was when Sean Dorsey from San Francisco's dance group, Fresh Meat Productions, came to Fresno and held a beginners' dance workshop for the members of our organization. I was pleasantly surprised when I saw how writing was incorporated into the workshop. When I saw how receptive our members were to the writing – and how much they were willing to disclose in that writing – I knew this was something I wanted to integrate into our support groups, even if only in some of them. The second motivation to use writing in our support groups came when I saw the documentary "At-Risk Summer," which details the experiences of a queer activist and author who visited various parts of the country to hold workshops on writing for youth. The idea was to help at-risk youths find their importance and ways to heal through writing. I was very inspired when I saw this and considered all the possibilities writing would have for our support groups.

When I brought this up to the group a few weeks prior to trying it, I had no expectations with respect to how it would be received. I feared they would not be receptive, or even resistant, but I still wanted to try. So when I timidly asked "...so is this something you all would like to do...?" I was very pleased and encouraged to hear their enthusiasm. They were willing to try it, and some were even looking forward to it. I was looking forward to seeing how writing would change the social dynamic in the support group, and hopefully, even improve it.

The day finally came to try writing in one of our support groups. I brought plenty of pens and paper so attendees would not need to provide anything. At the time of this group, our turnout was so large for that particular location that we had to split attendees up into three different groups with three different facilitators. I facilitated the largest group that day, made up primarily of individuals who identify themselves as male or masculine overall (also called "transmasculine"). There were a few present in

the group who did not identify as male but wanted to support those who did, along with a few Fresno State students who observed the group as part of a class assignment.

After introductions and reviewing the guidelines, I reminded the group that this was the day we would try out writing in our group. First, we began with verbal discussion, as I did not want the experience to appear too formal or academic. Some members shared information related to "coming out" as a transgender person, while others shared information about family dynamics and lack of job opportunities. The discussion eventually drifted into the topic of how mainstream society's view of one's gender can shape the way they feel about themselves. This is when I saw a golden opportunity to write! The group giggled as I declared, "well this looks like a wonderful opportunity to write." Inspired by a scene in the "At-Risk Summer" documentary, I asked members to write a series of statements about themselves, beginning with "I am." I figured this would be a good way to begin, since I was not necessarily asking for large paragraphs to be written. The outcome

"I fervently believe in writing as a means of healing from social oppression."

was intriguing. Some members took longer than others, but all group members were respectful in allowing everyone enough time to write without making noise. The room was silent. Even the Fresno State Students were writing. I asked if anyone wanted to read and I quickly got a volunteer. After each person read, the rest of the group clapped, which I noticed added validation and affirmation to this process. There were roughly 15-20 people in the room and I was warmed by watching just how many volunteered to read. When I prompted the group to reflect, one member mentioned that it was difficult to think of nice things to say about himself, but writing about who he is encouraged him to begin thinking of the positive things he brings into the world.

I offered a break, and once we resumed, I asked that we begin with another short write. Normally, I would not give this level of direction, but since it was our first time writing together – and since I was still feeling inspired by a certain scene in the documentary – I asked that we write a series of statements together beginning with "If you only knew..." The members of the group took longer to write this time, and I was curious to see what they would say. What came from the short writes amazed

and moved me. I noticed that this time, group members were even more eager to share, and seemed to have a sincere need to be heard. The level of disclosure resonated with me and though I cannot describe in detail what was said, due to confidentiality, I can say that the disclosures were deeper than they had been in past groups, when there was no writing element involved. Group members shared information about past traumas and abuse. Several members even cried, and as with the last short write, whenever one member finished reading, the group clapped for them. The students from Fresno State who were just there to observe wrote with us and shared; one became emotional as they shared information they had not shared with anyone prior to that day. It was so heartwarming to see, and I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that this could not have happened – and this level of trust probably would not have been maintained – if writing were absent from the dynamic of the group.

We held more discussion before we did our last write. For our last write, I read a poem I wrote (though I did not tell them who wrote it) called “I Drew the Purple Card,” relating to the theme of trans* pride, and our identities as transgender individuals being something to celebrate. After I read the poem, I asked members to write a reply to the poem. The general response I got from the group was of hope and inspiration. They appeared to be uplifted from this experience. It became very clear to me that the outcome of the support group that day would not have been as enlightening for everyone had it not been for the aspect of writing within the group. In their replies, topics ranged from the members’ own personal experiences in their social transition (from presenting as one gender to another), to the state of the transgender movement today; a few members said they felt empowered by the content of the poem and felt a new sense of hope about their identity and social progression that they did not have prior to attending the group that day. I became more and more inspired as each member read and received the subsequent applause when they finished.

I think one of the reasons writing compelled the support group attendees to allow themselves to be more vulnerable by disclosing more was that the very act of writing helps trigger ideas about what more to write about. Writing tends to generate more writing and it certainly did in the

support group that day. I also noticed a difference in the vibe of the room that day versus when we would simply talk without writing being integrated into the group. Oftentimes, in the beginning of support group sessions when the group is asked if there is anything they would like to discuss to begin the group, everyone gets stone silent. I always assumed that this was because many people, especially the shy ones, need to warm up to the conversation before diving into disclosing personal matters about their lives to a group of people. However, once we wrote a short write, the members of the support group seemed far more willing to share, as they had used the time during which they wrote to also warm up to the subject matter; the act of writing also helped them organize their thoughts on what they wanted to share with the group. The writing itself helped to create content for the group, and the act of sharing each other’s writing aloud helped to build that trust and also

show that the group was a safe space to be vulnerable.

I noticed that this level of vulnerability helped to also build strength within the group, and writing about struggles showed some members how resilient they

have been and could be, despite social oppression and transphobia.

After the group session, I asked the members if writing is something they would like to do more often in our support groups. The answer was an overwhelming yes. To say this experience empowered them is an understatement. I always knew writing would enhance the support group, but I had no idea that the experience would be this liberating for both the members of the group and for myself. Furthermore, our organization is now putting together a monthly writing group, with the purpose of helping transgender individuals to heal and maintain resilience against social oppression through the act of writing and sharing. I am working with another member of our organization to promote this.

This experience has increased the faith I have in the effects of writing communally and how sharing and responding helps to build strength and support between group members. This experience showed me how group writing can empower a community to believe in the prospects of achieving equality and social justice.

“The act of sharing each other’s writing aloud helped to build that trust and also show that the group was a safe space to be vulnerable.”



Erika Loera

THE VALUE OF IDEA SHARING IN GROUPS

One of the most valuable things that I learned this past semester is how beneficial simple idea sharing can be in a learning environment. For example, in some of my small writing groups when the author of the draft seemed confused on a certain topic, I always tried to guide them in a positive direction for a short write for their topic. I feel as if the tutees did not find a true purpose in the short writes until they discovered how many ideas we collaboratively created by simply verbally expressing them to one another. The idea sharing process is truly powerful and notably beneficial to the drafting process. It allows the tutees to share their initial, unfiltered thoughts and ideas

in a way that could only help the writer implement new creative ideas in their own writing.

It should come as no surprise that building this kind of rapport, where the group feels comfortable and connected in a way that allows for them to share their ideas freely without fear of judgment or rejection, takes time. First students must overcome that initial awkward phase of uncertainty and unfamiliarity by engaging in small talk before sessions, expressing their ideas, and gaining the confidence to comment on each other's input in constructive ways. However, once this unique level of rapport has finally been reached, there

truly is no going back. From my experience, this is the point where the tutees come into the session enthusiastically and typically requests the infamous “More About,” lens. In an ideal setting this lens will spark up a conversation that is difficult to stop, in the most enlightening way.

As a tutor, I truly enjoyed sitting back and watching this entire process unfold. It is always genuinely refreshing to see so many intelligent, creative

“The writing center serves as a creative outlet not only for the tutees, but for myself as well.”

minds come together in a place free of judgments or restrictions. In this sense, the writing center serves as a creative outlet not only for the tutees, but for myself as well. I feel the most comfortable when I am with my groups just bouncing ideas off of one another, or simply sharing my thoughts without the underlying fear of criticism. I believe this achieved level

of comfort is essential for a group; good rapport and group trust is key in the idea sharing process.





Sandip Roy

FACT-BASED ANALYSIS OF A HUMOROUS EXPERIENCE

I remember my first day of college. Back in August of 2008 (don't worry, I am not some sort of super senior who refuses to move on), I entered Fresno State and was really intimidated by everything. I don't know if every freshman feels this way, but I was really unaware of, well, everything. Part of it could be attributed to the fact that I was a complete foreigner, a stranger to the customs, etc. Now, let me stop myself before this turns into a story about personal struggles and obstacles and all that stuff that will inspire you to be the best you that you can be today. This is not one of those stories. What I was getting at was that I was really intimidated when I walked into my first university class. In India, universities are sort of a formal business, with long lectures, and teachers dressed in formal attire quoting from the old books of wisdom. So, imagine my surprise when I find a guy walk into

the class in shorts and a Hawaiian shirt, and he, astonishingly, was our professor. It all makes sense in retrospect, after all it was a hot summer day in Fresno.

The reason behind me telling the story was my impression of American universities and how it would go on to shape my education. I remember the aforementioned professor very well, mainly because of his sense of humor. It was sadly an intro to Computer Engineering class, and anyone familiar with the subject would know that it is as fun as it sounds like. But his sense of humor kept me interested and was one of the many reasons that I did not drop the class, even though I decided within few weeks that I was not going to major in computer science.

I have come across many professors since then who were not only witty but knew how to use it to make the materials they were teaching

even more interesting. Overall, my education in American universities, for both my undergrad and now graduate school has been a lesson in a pedagogical style that I was unaware of before coming here. The humor and the overall informality of affairs usually has always seemed to me to be a tool that helps in lowering the power distance. Why is that important, you may ask? It's important because it ultimately leads to higher student participation and engagement.

As a tutor I have strived to model the behaviors and styles of some of my favorite professors. The Writing Center in general has always seemed to me to be a place where democracy is celebrated. We create a welcoming environment for the tutees to feel comfortable in (while promoting world-peace on the side). I have often seen tutees who are as intimidated as I was when they walk in the Writing Center. Humor usually helps in diffusing the tension and leads to laughter that helps in facilitating a more democratic and participatory conversation.

I can usually feel the nervous energy, especially from first semester students. I have been there, so I know. They are not sure what they are doing here, and they are not even sure if they should be here. Some are probably wondering how a guy in red cargo pants can have anything to tutor them. I probably would

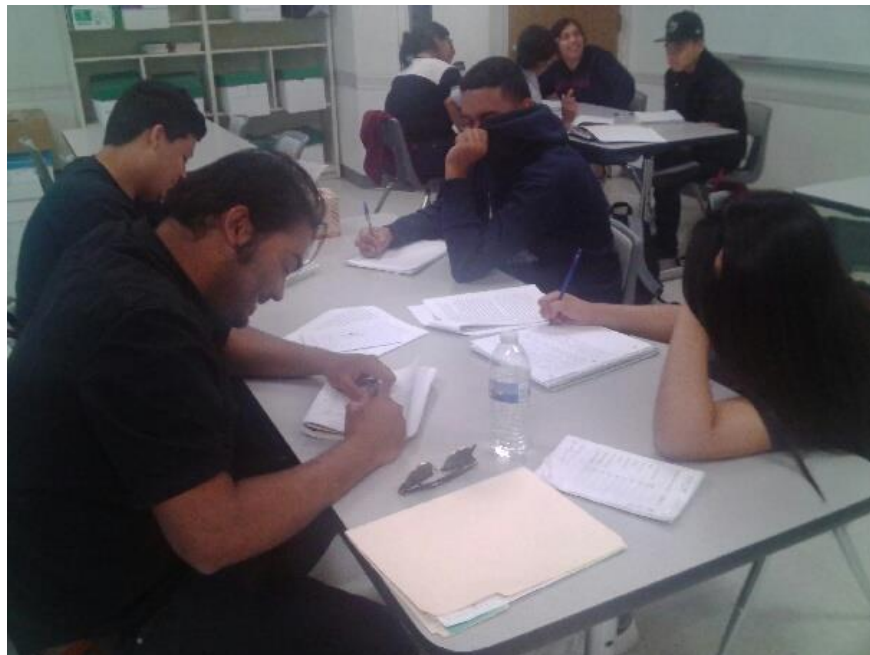
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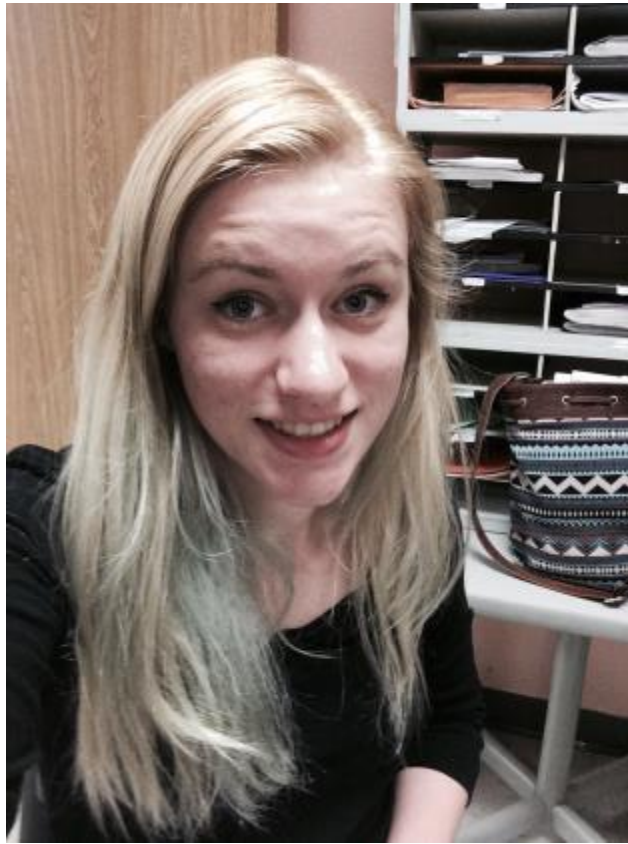
have thought the same way. I remember last semester, when I started tutoring, I was just as nervous and saw the awkwardness as my personal failure. So, I went to speak with one of my marketing professors. He reminded me of a task he had us do in my undergraduate marketing class. In his undergraduate class we had to

present marketing concepts with a theme such as Star Wars. You have to dress-up, decorate the classes, and present these serious concepts while acting out a scene from Star-Wars. I, being

me, of course used the Daily Show as my theme and impersonated Stewart. He assured me that it's pretty normal and well, advised me to laugh a bit, even if it's at my own expense. So next week, in most of my sessions I had us all write about our most embarrassing moments. Surprisingly, the group became more and more friendly and the group dynamics seemed more fluid afterwards. As if a great weight had been lifted off of the group's collective shoulder.

Working at the Writing Center has been a blast, where humorous conversations fill the time in between classes. A conversation could range from 90's hip-hop to cannibalism in a matter of few minutes. We try to take this enthusiasm and overall humor to our groups. From my experience, this works!





Selena Edin

YOU MUST BE AN ENGLISH MAJOR: BREAKING STEREOTYPES AND PROMOTING DIVERSITY

When I came to work at the Writing Center, it never occurred to me that being a non-English major would be particularly noteworthy, or even a problem. I applied because I wanted an on-campus job and this place seemed as good as any.

When I started working here, I was always surprised by the responses I got from students asking about my major.

“Anthropology,” I’d say immediately. As a college student, you get used to hearing this question and don’t give it much thought.

I’m also used to people asking what the heck Anthropology is and what I want to do with my degree. So it throws me off when students here react differently.

“Wow! Do you just love writing, then? You must be really good at it!”

I still haven’t quite figured out how to respond to these exclamations. It’s not something I’ve really thought about before, to be honest. Sure, I am well aware of the fact that I’m a lone Anthropology major in a world of English and MFA students. But I don’t consider it to be an anomaly, or taboo, or in any way shocking. Apparently it’s common knowledge to everyone else that you can only work as a writing tutor if you’re an English major.

Then I realized I’ve seen this attitude before in other settings. In G.E. classes, I always hear complaints about there being no point in taking a class in a subject that has nothing to do with your major. In one of my Anthropology classes, we

had to split into groups for an activity that involved drawing. One of the girls in my group declared right away, "I'm not an art major, so don't ask me what to do." When I did a research project that required a psychology component, I was told by many to talk with So-And-So because they're a psych major. Even outside of academic settings, there's this mentality of needing to "stick to the stuff you know" (yes, I quoted a High School Musical song, get over it), meaning stick to whatever field or line of work you're in.

I kind of get where this is coming from. When you're sick, you go to a doctor, not a lawyer. If you need a nice flower arrangement, you go to a florist, not a plumber. We turn to certain people because they are the experts, the specialists. They've spent a lot of time in their field, gathering knowledge and acquiring skills. Rather than being okay at a lot of things, they've chosen to be really good at just a few. And that's kind of the point of a university: to give you the knowledge and skills to become, well, specialized.

But writing does not require specialized knowledge or skill sets. Writing, I believe, is much more universal. You can pick any job, any career, any major, and there will be writing of some kind involved. It is a tool, a life skill. You can know how to write without going into the English field, just like you can know how to cook without being a chef, or how to drive without being a racecar driver. You can also be good at it (whatever "good" means) without having to necessarily like it. So while it's fine and dandy to have universities be places of expert training, it's not so good that we put writing into the pile of specialization, too. Unfortunately though, that's how we've structured our education. And the result includes me being put on the spot at the tutoring table.

It's not just with students that I'm reminded I shouldn't belong, either. As I've mentioned, and as is probably obvious, most of my coworkers *are* English majors (or MFA-ers, or whatever). Pop in on the tutor lounge chit-chat, and you'll hear all about the classes they're taking, the books they're reading, the conferences they're going to attend. They use specific terminology and draw off of certain perspectives that are very particular to their field. I just can't engage in these kinds of conversations, because I don't have context for

anything they're talking about, nor the audacity to make them explain things every time. There are a few other non-English majors working here, too, but the overall environment at the Writing Center is exactly like an outside student would expect: English-y.

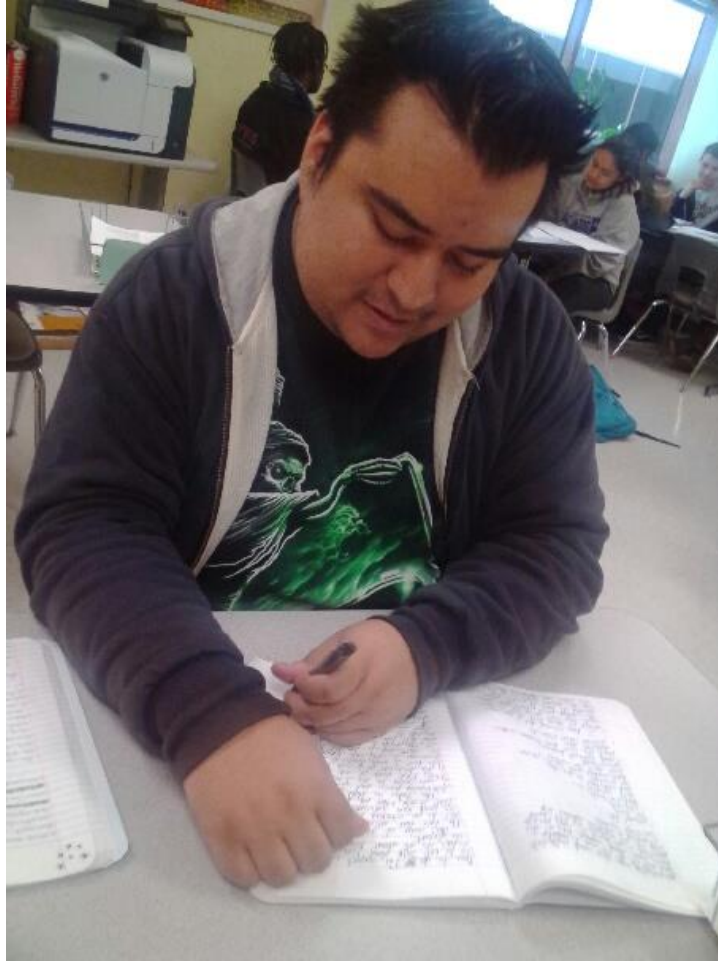
But I digress. Whiny-emo-teenager-with-no-friends moment aside, I love working here. If I'm still being completely honest, this is the most tight-knit work community I've ever been a part of, and I think allowing students from other majors and fields to work here has helped it grow in that way. I enjoy being able to interact with people who are on a different path than

mine. If I had just found a job in the Anthropology office or something, I wouldn't have had opportunities to meet different kinds of people, or to expand my academic

horizons beyond my major, or to know what goes on in other departments at this university. Maybe it's just my homeschool upbringing coming into play here, but I really don't think you should limit yourself when it comes to learning. I came to college *excited* to take G.E. classes in subjects that were not in my specialized area. I saw an opportunity to work at a college Writing Center and thought, "this seems cool." And when I'm able to keep up with some of the foreign-sounding English major talks, I learn something I wouldn't have learned in, say, the Anthropology office.

It's my hope that the Writing Center can someday soon become a place with tutors from a variety of majors and disciplines. The students coming in here for help don't all come from English classes. I've seen papers from biology, history, nutrition, music, etc. When I've happened to sit down with students working on a paper related to culture, it's been great to share my knowledge in that area, in addition to my knowledge of writing. Imagine how cool it would be to have many tutors here with that outside knowledge, experience, and different perspectives. For me, it wouldn't just help make things less awkward among co-workers, but it'd also - even more importantly - start showing through to the students that come in here. Changing a cultural mindset is no easy task, but it always starts with some small change somewhere. So if we can get even more non-English majors in here to tutor, then maybe we can show all students the universal importance of writing.

"Writing does not require specialized knowledge or skill sets. Writing, I believe, is much more universal."



Alex Porraz

ALL I KNOW

“Trust me, I am a tutor!” I have said that before, but what does it really mean? I don’t think I have ever really considered what it means to be a tutor, or how that implies that I seem to know everything there is about writing. I certainly do not wish to come off as feeling superior to anyone else. In fact, I feel my attitude towards being a tutor is just the opposite. As a tutor still learning the dynamics of tutoring, I cannot pretend to know everything. However, I have noticed a few things and observed the learning process up close. As a tutor, I am still learning and learning how to learn. For purposes

of this writing, I feel I need to explore this idea further. Exactly how does a tutor learn along with a tutee? What do I learn? What do they learn? Are they the same or are they different? Are there any environmental factors that go into helping this learning process? So many questions, and so few answers, but that is what makes the idea of learning, which is the goal of all schools, so exciting. I feel like much of it is the willingness to try the entire process. Giving our methods and lenses a shot opens the door for improvement over time through practice with these lenses. Lenses are the foundation of our

entire tutoring process, which makes them a critical component in learning how to write better. Making tutees feel comfortable with this process and getting them to understand that they will not be judged or graded for what they write down in our sessions is key. I have learned that they the more comfortable they are, the more apt they will be to open up, be willing to try new things, and eventually learn new writing skills.

Everyone in the group should feel comfortable. As a tutor, I like to use humor to achieve this effect. Making people laugh helps them to relax, and I have learned that when people relax they are more willing to express themselves through writing. This leads to another key point, which is ensuring that nobody will be judged for what they say in our sessions. I always emphasize the point that we will not evaluate their writing; rather, we simply talk about it. There are no grades attached and no tests given, which is crucial in creating a stress free environment. One last point to be made as far as making the group feel comfortable is the importance of creating a collaborative learning space. I started my job as a tutor stating that I definitely cannot pretend to know everything, and this is the same attitude I bring to my groups tutorials. Quite often, I will engage in deep discussions with the groups, but I always find that, rather than act like I know the answer to everything, it is better to ask the group what questions they would like to write about. These discussions do not have a single correct answer, viewpoint, opinion, etc. However, through this writing, each of us comes up with our own answer or thoughts on a particular topic, and the most important part is being comfortable enough to share that opinion through writing with everyone in the group.

Probably the single most difficult thing to get a tutee to do is try out the lens that the group is learning on any given day. Lenses allow us to see various aspects of a piece of writing, which gives us the ability to focus on things that maybe the writer had never focused on before. This leads to an unparalleled adventure into the unknown realm of writing practices for most people, and such practices can seem scary at first. This can sometimes lead to a certain level of resistance for those who have not tried a particular lens yet. Most of this stems from the lack of faith students have in their ability to progress as writers, the view that the lenses will

not help them become better writers. “How is this going to help at all?” they ask me. The answer may not seem clear at the time, but there is always a method to my madness (most of the time). Oftentimes, they do not see the purpose of doing such an activity, because they cannot see how it will directly fix the piece of writing they brought in. I feel this is a common misconception many people when it comes to writing and tutoring in general. I feel that they believe we are here to fix the writing and do not see that even more could be achieved by fixing the writer. It is not that the writer even necessarily needs fixing, but, rather, they need to be introduced to the lenses we tutors have learned. It is these lenses that will change the

way students view writing, and in turn, the way the writer approaches future writing. However, I go back to the initial statement of this paragraph when I say that getting the tutee to try the

lens can be the most difficult aspect of tutoring. If they are not willing to give the lens an honest try, then they are not going to get the most out of the tutorial, and I have found this to be quite problematic.

Persistence is the key to success in many things, and being borderline annoyingly persistent when trying to get tutees to try out new lenses is key, in my opinion. It is not the most difficult thing to get them to try, mostly because I can always pull the “Have I ever steered you wrong? Trust me!” card. This is a slight variation on the “Trust me, I am a tutor!” statement, with the subtle but significant difference of not using my status as a tutor in the actual phrase itself. Rather, I choose to speak as a fellow learner, one who has been down this road before and practiced this particular lens. However, if I am in a one-on-one session with a tutee whom I have just met, it is very difficult to appeal to trust, seeing as how trust is something that develops over time. Just like in relationships, if you do not have trust, you do not have anything, which presents a rather large problem in this situation. So rather than try to become the best friend of each and every tutee who walks into the room, as such would be a herculean task, I simply remain persistent in getting them to try the lens. By persistent, I do not mean shoving a pen and paper in their faces and saying, “Do this or feel the wrath of the tutors!” but, rather, I mention that this particular

“I’m aware that I will never know everything, and, like I said, I will never pretend to.”

lens will help a great deal. They are usually on board until I mention anything about writing something down, and if I can manage to get them comfortable with that, they are even more resistant to sharing. Persistence, combined with reassurance that nothing they say will be judged in any way, is very important in the Writing Center, and is something I constantly try to do. I have learned this from experience, and have also learned that they are very grateful after having learned the lens that initially they were so resistant to trying.

These are just a few of the obstacles, goals, and important aspects of tutoring that I have noticed in my first year as a tutor. I have learned so much about myself, about being a better writer, and about being a better tutor in this small amount of time, that it makes me excited to see what awaits me on the horizon. I'm aware that I

will never know everything, and, like I said, I will never pretend to. All I can say right now is what I know so far, and even that is subject to change in the future. Perhaps one day I will come to know what it truly means to be a tutor, but for now, I am more than happy to take each day as a new opportunity to find that answer. The more I learn, the more I realize I know nothing at all. The more I learn, the more I realize just how much is still out there waiting to be discovered. Nobody will ever know everything there is to know about tutoring, school, writing, etc. and that is what makes being a tutor so exciting to me. It is not about what I have already learned, but what is still yet to be learned. There is so much more out there, and I look forward to going on this journey with my fellow tutors and tutees.





Briana Lucas

IN DUE TIME

I like the idea that life will never get boring and that there will always be something for me to discover. There will always be new things for me to learn, and that is both a fear and a comfort. Last semester, I tutored for the first time in a subject that I eventually want my career to be in. While I wouldn't say that I was scared, I was nervous in a new way. I felt like my failure to be an effective tutor would ultimately mean that I was failing in the lives of students who were seeking help. I figured that as time progressed the fear of failure would go away, but the feeling persisted a lot longer than I'm willing to admit. As I continued to tutor, I continued to wonder if I was any good. There wasn't really a way for me to evaluate myself. If I asked any of the students in my groups how I was doing, I knew that regardless of what they really thought,

I would get a relatively nice answer and I expected my co-workers to respond similarly.

Amidst the angst and worries I had, I finally found myself immersed in the very scenario I dreaded: a student brought in a paper for a second revision, and wasn't too happy about the grade on it. They couldn't understand how even though they had put so much effort into the paper, they had still managed to fail. I took their failure to mean that I had failed them. This wasn't my first time failing, of course, but this time my failure wasn't just affecting myself, it was affecting others as well. Mentally, I panicked. I had to fight the urge to just start pointing out all of the revisions I would make if the paper were mine. I'd tighten the grammar in one area and shift around and detail the content in another, but I didn't. I didn't become this sort of revision dictator and I'm glad for that. Had I

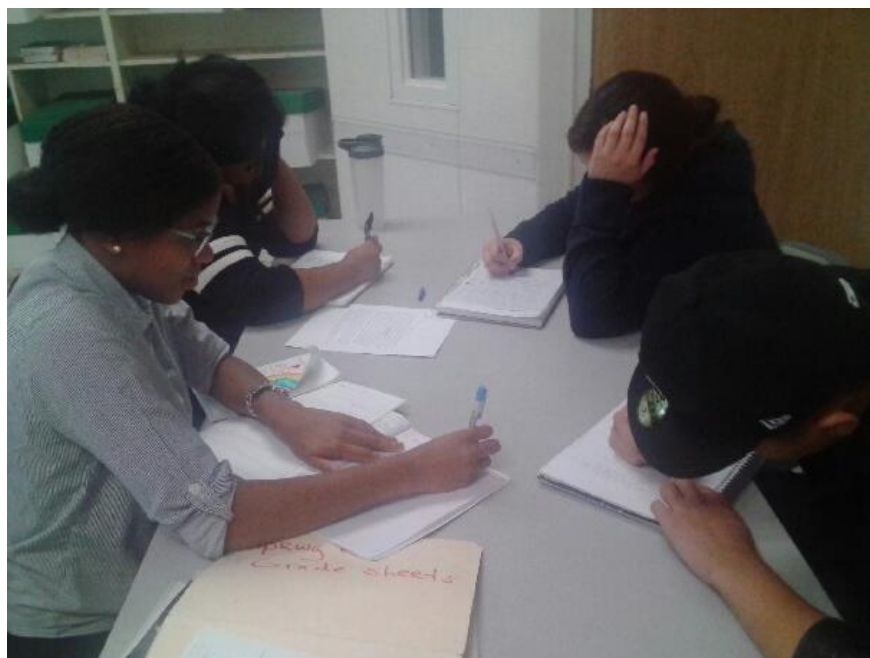
given in to the feelings, I really would have failed because what good is a tutor if the student isn't being taught to eventually self-correct and self-instruct?

After letting the student fully explain their concerns and their situation, I calmly proceeded to use the tools of the lens book. Even though I felt like I had failed the student, I chose to realize that there is no shame in failing as long as I use the failure as a way to bolster future successes. As a group, the students and I began to work on the paper. We read, used a lens, and were able to find a productive short write topic all without me having to unnecessarily micromanage. We approached the paper from a new angle using a new lens. We made a conscious decision not to let the grade on the paper influence the way we thought about its contents. At the end of the session, everything was fine. The student felt more confident about their paper and I no longer felt like I had to take the weight of that undesirable grade on my shoulders. I looked at the confidence in their eyes and that's when I knew that it was possible to fail with style and flair. In all honesty, the situation could have turned for the worse. I could have tried to write the paper myself or the

“I figured that as time progressed the fear of failure would go away, but the feeling persisted a lot longer than I'm willing to admit.”

student could have continued to complain until I felt as if the grade was my fault. Instead, the student was wholly cooperative and willing to overcome the failure they experienced.

That student rose from the ashes like a phoenix born anew and I was a silent bystander marveling over the transformation. It was great for me to be a part of that moment because I know that I will feel like I'm failing many more times before I'm done being a tutor. I know there will be another day where I feel helpless and distraught. I just hope that I'll remember that first moment where I was sure I failed, but didn't. I want to be strong enough to pick myself up and keep walking, ready for the next thing life throws at me. Above all, I want students to know that a grade isn't the end-all for assignments and papers. It's just a starting point from which to build, if anything. Maybe it isn't comfortable to be at the bottom, but the struggle of attaining knowledge is always worth it. As a tutor, I'm okay with knowing that I'm human and that I might fail because I also know that with work, patience, and a little time, I can help someone else revel in the light of success, maybe not the first time, but in due time surely.





Michaela Jones

LEARNING TO TEACH AS A TUTOR

As an English Education major, I'm constantly learning in my classes about what I'll need to consider and practice as I teach my future students. We talk, talk, *talk* about complex theory, curriculum, and pedagogy. We read, we write, and we talk about teaching reading and writing. We do all of this, hoping that if we talk and read and write enough, we'll be able to walk into a classroom in the near future – full of real readers and writers and thinkers – and teach as professional educators.

Yet, we rarely have actual students to make these abstract ideas concrete and real for us. It's difficult to fully understand how I'll teach when I have no idea *who* I'll be teaching. At times, I

feel so unprepared. After all, talking, reading and writing (and talking about reading and writing) do very little to prepare one to *teach* how to read, how to write, or how to think. However hard I try to think with the mindset of a teacher, my anxieties, insecurities, and lack of experience overwhelm me. *Who are my future students? Will I be able to teach them? Will they understand me? What do they know already? What do they need to know? How do they learn?*

When I joined the team of tutors at the Writing Center in Fall of 2014, however, some of these questions began to fade away. Through hours and hours of training, and then days and weeks of actual tutoring in groups, I've come to

realize that the Writing Center is a sort of practicum for me. I've learned so much about teaching, about reading, about writing, and about responding to writing while tutoring than I have in years of talking about those things in class. The theory that we so frequently discuss in our classes is made real in what we do at the Writing Center. By tutoring, we understand what theory we agree with, what we're confused by, and what we actually care about. A lot of discovery takes place here just because we're willing to try different strategies and approaches. Sometimes we feel successful, and sometimes we feel overwhelmed. Learning happens all around us, all the time.

While working in our small writing groups, I've learned what young readers and writers look like, sound like, write like, and read like. I've learned the kinds of mistakes that they make, and I've learned what they do really well. I've learned what they like to talk and write about, what totally bores them, and what they feel is helpful or not helpful at all. We work together to sort through confusion and write our way toward understanding.

“I’ve become more acquainted with how I read, and how I write, and that has allowed me to talk about reading and writing with greater facility.”

Perhaps most importantly, in my groups and in one-on-one tutoring, I've become more acquainted with how *I* read, and how *I* write, and that has allowed me to talk about reading and writing with greater facility. I've become familiar with the assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs I hold about English and education in general, and that's helped me understand what I'll really value and advocate for one day in my future classroom.

Suddenly – or gradually, because learning is a gradual slope – the Writing Center groups helped me feel more capable of working with students, and with other people in general. I didn't feel as alone, because I wasn't; there were always other readers and writers at the table, ready and willing to listen and share and read and write with me. They showed me how silly and weird my insecurities were in those twice a week, 50-minute sessions. They reminded me that no one's really a perfect tutor or teacher or reader or writer at the end of the day, but that there's goodness and growth in seeking to be a better version of all of those things. The Writing Center – for me and for many – is a space to learn, and a place to grow as a learner.





Greta Bell

APPLYING WRITING CENTER METHODOLOGY

I was really excited when I heard that the theme of this year's journal was going to be "Tutors as Learners" because I feel I have learned something new every time I have walked into the Writing Center. Working as a tutor has been an eye-opening experience for me, and I have learned so much more than just how to tutor writing. Many of the skills and insights I have gained will help me as I graduate and hopeful start teaching. During my first semester tutoring at the Writing Center I also worked as a graduate teaching assistant in the History Department, leading class discussions for a

lower division history course. Holding both positions concurrently gave me a wonderful opportunity to theorize, discuss, and explore how the skills I was learning as a tutor could be applied to my activities in the classroom.

Tutors at the writing center are taught to direct as much of the conversation we are having with our tutees as possible back to the page. What makes this so beneficial is that the writing we do while tutoring is then shared, which leads the tutoring session to the next topic for writing. This not only helps our tutees develop and clarify the ideas they are sharing in their writing,

it also gives them a non-evaluative space to practice writing. I have seen first-hand how big of an impact this practice can have on a tutee's confidence in their written voice. I feel that all students could benefit from getting this kind of writing practice, and with a few modifications, non-evaluative writing could be very easily incorporated into class discussions. My experiences over the past two semesters have influenced my ideas on teaching history, and I plan on adopting the methodology I have learned at the Writing Center within classroom discussions.

Abby Reisman, a Senior Researcher at UCLA's National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, & Student Testing, identified three outcome goals for classroom discussions of historical documents. The first goal Reisman identified is reinforcing the connection between speech and academic writing. Her argument is that students who, "observe and participate in discussions where they are expected to substantiate their claims with textual evidence are better prepared to do so in their writing."¹ The second goal she identified is simulating the work of professional historians, who frequently engage with each other either through conversation or through writing. The last outcome goal Reisman identified for classroom discussions is to empower students by shifting them from being passive recipients of knowledge to producers of knowledge.² All three of these learning outcomes can be improved through the use of non-evaluative writing in class.

All three of Reisman's outcome goals mirror the expectations I have had for my own classroom discussions. However, from my experiences leading classroom discussions, I feel that the biggest stumbling block in reaching these goals is getting students to move beyond reciting facts, and actually share their interpretation of the texts. It is always easier to get students to share a fact, like the date something was written, than make a more abstract connection, like connecting the assigned

readings to the most recent lecture. Incorporating non-evaluative writing, then, becomes a powerful tool for improving the learning outcomes of in-class discussion. Having students write at the beginning of class discussions, especially if they are prompted to answer a question that requires them to think past just the facts of an assigned reading, gets them thinking and making connections. It is also a great way to make sure that every student in the room has a composed thought they can share. This is particularly helpful for shy students, who often choose to not participate in discussions.

My time as a tutor at the Writing Center has helped me learn that non-evaluative writing has many applications outside of tutoring, past just improving in-class discussions. At their core,

“Having students produce writing in class gets them writing more frequently, which gives them more opportunities to improve their writing and gain confidence in their written voice.”

class discussions are a practical exercise in the kind of analysis students are required to do to produce successful history papers. Having students produce writing in class gets them writing more frequently, which gives

them more opportunities to improve their writing and gain confidence in their written voice. It also means that students have material written about the various documents that are assigned for discussion, which students can pull out later to refresh their memory about the discussions, utilize when writing papers, or help them when studying for exams.

There is considerable research available that examines the academic benefits of incorporating in-class writing assignments. Tutoring at the Writing Center encouraged me to explore that body of research, which has helped me grow as a future educator. I think that understanding the benefit of utilizing in-class writing is one of the most valuable things I will take with me from my time working at the Writing Center.

¹ Abby Reisman, "Document-Based Whole Class Discussions," TeachingHistory.org: National History Education Clearing House, <http://teachinghistory.org/>

² Reisman.



Deanna Halliday

FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND BETTER WRITING

I have a confession. I lived a double life while I worked here at the Writing Center. I was just like Clark Kent taking off his glasses to suddenly become Superman, or Batman taking off his cowl to become Bruce Wayne. Once I'd leave the writing center, I'd put away my notebook, cease to be a Writing Center Tutor, and become... an introductory psychology essay grader. I know—the transformation is shocking.

In the Writing Center groups, we're not encouraged to combat the Gruesome Grammar (and its henchmen: Run-on Sentence and Fragment), or even contradict the Painful Prompts that seem intentionally (and perhaps maliciously) confusing. As a psychology tutor, I gained certain powers. My red pen would slay common grammar mistakes and I was the sole interpreter of my own confusing prompt. I'll admit, it's a bit of a power trip.

“In the Writing Center groups, we're not encouraged to combat the Gruesome Grammar (and its henchmen: Run-on Sentence and Fragment)”

In the Writing Center, I was fighting with the tutees against common foes (“Of course the More About lens can help you think of more to write before your essay is due at midnight!”), but as a psychology essay grader, it almost felt as though I were fighting against my own students (“This essay would have been much better if you hadn't left it to the last minute: 12/20”). Although I had my mighty red pen, I was using it to judge the students' finished writing products rather than helping them build their own abilities.

I lacked the power to determine the grades of my writing center tutees, but instead, the lens booklet became my utility belt. If I were able to recognize that the Tutee ran out of things to write about, I could use the power of Reply to get the group to generate ideas that relate to the paper topic. Sayback could help them better understand what they were saying to their audience. As I taught the tutees the lenses, they

were able to soon level-up their own abilities. While I had considerable influence on the rough draft process in the Writing Center, that was where I lacked power in my Psychology role. I saw their paper only after there was nothing else I could do for the students. The battle was already won or lost. With great power, came great frustration.

Kirk, the Jor-El of the writing center, imparted a lot of wisdom to the writing tutors, but the idea that stuck with me most was the idea of “tutors as learners.” We were pushed to consider how this writing center training would be useful outside of the Kremen Building’s Hallowed Halls. Here, I was a tutor instead of a teacher. The tutees were not my students, but more like sidekicks in training. We’d work as a team to combat any foe. This mindset followed me over to the psychology department. I was no longer just grading the papers, I was learning how to effectively correct students’ mistakes so that they wouldn’t fall victim to the same errors again and again. I learned that although grammar

was easier to mark with my mighty red pen, I would be serving my students better by giving more feedback on their ideas and cohesion of their argument. If I was forcing them to respond to my own confusing writing prompt, my goal should be to foster their own writing abilities.

Because the power dynamic is different in a student-teacher role, it is easy to seem more like a villain to the students than a hero. Giving them the tools of the lenses and grading with the mindset of skill building helps foster a team-like relationship where we work together towards the Common Good of better writing.

Many of the tutors here are going on to be teachers, and they too will have to navigate their new powers and abilities. Our time at the Writing Center prepares us to be students’ heroes, not their archenemies. Of course, we’ll need to grade and sometimes wield our mighty red pens, but we’ll do it with the goal of building students’ powers instead of punishing their evil deeds.





Alyssa Martinez

CREATING THE IDEAL CLASSROOM: WRITING GROUPS IN PERSPECTIVE

Within my educational career, I have had my fair share of different classroom experiences. My ability to learn and be engaged with the material has been dependent on the classroom environment. The first type of classroom I have experienced is that which is one-sided and is very competitive. In these classes, students are merely listeners and not participants. The teacher is more controlling and leaves little room for opinions. The atmosphere of these classes stifles learning and is completely boring for students in that they are unable to contribute anything besides their presence.

The other type of classroom experience, which is the one I prefer, is that which is student-centered. Within this class, there is an ongoing collaboration between students and teachers. A teacher is not merely a lecturer, but is a facilitator of discussion and critical thinking. Students feel engaged with the material at hand

and have the desire and ability to express their opinions. The classroom becomes more of a center of peers learning from each other, while challenging one another with different perspectives. There is a sense of respect and a level of comfort that students feel that allows them to be more open to critique and complicated ideas.

“It is the student-centered classroom environment that I feel is mirrored within the group sessions at the Writing Center.”

It is the student-centered classroom environment that I feel is mirrored within the group sessions at the Writing Center. A tutor is a facilitator of discussion and

engages with students in written and verbal communication. As tutors, we don't tell students what to think or simply go over writing strategies. We learn new writing approaches by collaborating on ideas and discussing writing together. We use lenses to have students respond to writing in a language and at a pace with which they are comfortable. The lenses are

specifically structured in a way that allows a student to communicate what they already know in the language they already have. The lenses merely work as a bridge in challenging students to reach the level of critical analysis that is necessary in academic writing, by having student take the steps themselves.

Another aspect of the effective classroom I think our tutoring groups model is that of the relationship dynamics between students and their peers and also the student-teacher dynamic. In our groups, we promote respect through the language we use to respond to student writing. Things are phrased in a way that allows people to share their ideas in constructive ways, which enables people to get help without feeling bad about their writing. As a rule, in the first few sessions we also take time getting to know each other and that helps create an environment where students feel comfortable enough around each other to share and participate. Another rule is that everyone gets to share his or her written response to a draft before we discuss said draft; this is to allow each member of the group the opportunity to contribute to the discussion and be heard. This helps other students be open to new ideas and shows them that what they say matters. Finally, having tutors participate in these exercises with the students creates this idea that everyone can share and learn in the sessions and that tutors are only informed helpers in writing and not experts. This level of equal

participation and contribution, along with other aspects of a tutoring session, helps students learn and grow as writers, for they feel understood by their tutor.

This type of learning atmosphere is something I hope I can create in my own English classroom when I become a teacher. As a tutor, every time I go into a group session I am learning how to create that student-centered ideal classroom. Every success and every failure helps me learn what to and what not to do when I facilitate writing and discussion in my classroom. I want to be able to continue to learn and grow just as much as my students.

Of course, I know that the feelings of power and control will not go away, because it is necessary when in a teaching position. A teacher must enforce rules in a classroom, assign grades and assignments, and be the final say in all of the academic aspects of the classroom. I do not want to compromise my position as a teacher by leveling myself with my students to the point where I take away my authority. What I do want, though, is the practice and knowledge about creating a challenging and engaging learning environment in my classroom. I want the learning community and facilitation of discussion on aspects of reading and writing to mirror the values and skills we develop and prize within our writing groups at the writing center. I want to be a teacher who is less of a dictator and more of a partner in my students' education.





Mia Barraza Martinez

LET ME SEE YOU 1, 2 STEP

Teaching and tutoring first-year writing while simultaneously entering a graduate program for poetry seemed like a paradox at first, an oxymoron at worst. Composition and creative writing as academic disciplines seem unnecessarily detached from each other. Being able to cross genres in this way has become increasingly productive for my own growth as a writer. I was surprised to learn that some of the lenses we have learned in the Writing Center meant to provide our tutoring groups with productive feedback easily translated into providing feedback to the work of my peers in my Master's program's poetry workshops.

On a day that none of my tutees brought in their own drafts to work on, I asked if it was ok for all of us to look at one of my poems that was to be workshopped that night in one of my graduate classes. My students were excited to read something other than an essay, and I took that opportunity to introduce a new lens to them. We used Two-Step Summary to look at my poem as a group. I felt like this was a good lens to use on a poem because it helps the reader to look at what is literally on the page before trying to make meaning from it right away. We read the poem stanza by stanza (instead of paragraph by paragraph) and made lists of the things we read

in the poem. Then we tried to create a sentence about what we thought that stanza was saying about those things, and shared our ideas.

Initially, all three of my students started their responses with the same disclaimer: “I don’t know how to read poetry! I just don’t get it.” After sharing our responses, we saw where we all agreed on what we thought was going on in the poem and where we differed or disagreed. We were able to discuss as a group what we thought was on the page for us and what was not.

After our discussions, I explained to my students what my intentions were in writing my poem. We then talked about some ways that the poem could be more effective in expressing its intended message. For students who felt initially tentative talking about the poem with the writer as part of their group, they were surprisingly specific in brainstorming lines they thought were missing, or even suggesting structural changes.

“Two-Step Summary allows for an initial literal consideration of what is actually happening or being said. Then the reader can move toward what the parts of the poem might mean all together.”

After our session, I asked my students to write a response about what they thought about using that particular lens. Did they find Two-Step Summary useful? How might it be different when using it to look at an academic essay? Unanimously, my tutees explained that reading paragraph by paragraph and responding in this more focused way would allow them to see what the writer was really trying to say throughout their essay. They also expressed that maybe poetry isn’t as enigmatic as they initially felt, it just took a closer reading to help them figure it out.

Two-Step Summary allows for an initial literal consideration of what is actually happening or being said. Then the reader can move toward what the parts of the poem might mean all together. This kind of close reading is imperative when trying to provide useful feedback to my peers in the creative writing program.





*Monique Quintana
& Sean Kineen*

CREATIVE FEEDBACK IN THE WC

The writers have been friends for several years. As colleagues in the Creative Writing Program at Fresno State, and tutors at the Writing Center, they are both interested in exploring how these two discourses can work together. They have decided to give each other feedback for their creative writing pieces to reveal how the Writing Center can foster growth amongst creative writers. Sean is a poet and Monique writes fiction.

Creative Writers as Tutors

Sean on the WC:

As a writer I've learned to be more comfortable with the act of writing itself. We do

tons of responses at the writing center like those in this paper, along with tons of short- and private- writes, so that when I sit down to write something, anything, I can really just let it all spill out, stress free. Previously writing a first draft of something had been almost physically painful. I'd get headaches; my scalp would hurt from pulling my hair out. I'd write a line over and over again, making stupid little tweaks here and there until I just scrapped it all together out of sheer frustration. Now my process has changed. I get all of it out like vomit until I'm just dry heaving. Then I mess around with that, revise what I've got. And I really feel that kind of comfort, that kind of knowledge that a first draft is supposed to be a terrible mess has come

directly from the writing center's process. It's what we're teaching our tutees, and it's what I've learned.

Monique on the WC:

Since graduating as an English Major, and entering the Creative Writing Program at Fresno State, I have struggled to bridge these two discourse communities. While tutoring at the Writing Center, I have learned reading response lenses that have helped me to do this. Rooted in the pedagogical philosophies of Peter Elbow, these response lenses seek to explore the act of writing as a process, something that is organic and occurring over time. As a creative writer, I have visited the Writing Center several times to receive feedback from these lenses. Using the lenses as both a tutor and creative writer has been a pivotal learning experience for me because it has helped me to give feedback and ask for feedback in a way that is both helpful and encouraging. The writers select a response lens that will best address their needs at their current stage in the writing process. This validates the intention of the writer, and helps cultivate the vision of what they want the writing to be.

Monique: "The writers select a response lens that will best address their needs at their current stage in the writing process. This validates the intention of the writer, and helps cultivate the vision of what they want the writing to be."

A Closer Look at Feedback

Sean:

Monique has written a story about a group of adolescent girls who perform community service because they have been charged with shoplifting. In the course of a day, the girls reflect on their crimes and the psychology of their intimate relationships with both men and women. Monique is interested in developing the narrative that already exists on the page, so she has asked me to use the More About lens when I respond to her work.

In general, More About lets the writer know what her/his reader want in order to be satisfied with the piece, in order to be fulfilled and engaged and invigorated. Personally I often confuse my reader because my poem drafts are too elliptical, too compressed, so I felt like this would help me to know where my poem isn't giving enough. Ultimately it would be my decision when going through the revision process what questions to explore or what ideas,

images and details to add.

Sean's More About Response to Monique's Draft:

- I want to hear more about Maggie's mom. What does she do when Maggie's home? In fact what is their relationship like?
- I want to know about the process of the "chain gang." How do they meet up in the morning? How do they get started? What about time? I feel like I don't have a good idea of how long they're at this.
- I want to hear more about why the sister didn't want to go on a beer run. Has something like this happened before for her to be reticent?

Monique's Reflection on More About Feedback:

From the response, it seems that the two prevailing issues my story has are character development and clarity about time in the story. I've been having trouble figuring out which character I should develop, so it's helpful to know that Sean has questions about two specific characters, Maggie's mother and Cindy. Now I can see how the mother/daughter dynamic could add an additional layer to the story, especially since, ultimately the story is about the intimate relationships between women.

Monique:

Sean has written a poem called "Out of the Balcony" in which an unnamed narrator reflects on a series of images to relay his individual experience. He has asked me to respond to the piece using the Sayback Response. Sayback is a lens that functions as a soundboard between writer and reader. Essentially the writing is asking the reader, "What do you here me saying overall?" It checks with the writer to see if we are understanding what they intend to say.

Monique Sayback Response to Sean's Poem

- Is the speaking saying overall that you are watching a family in your neighborhood respond to misfortune? Is the taco mess alluding to these small misfortunes?

- Is the speaker saying overall that your own mother cannot give you any soils and resolution about this kind of misfortune?
- Is the speaker saying overall that you feel guilty about feel dissatisfied with life?
- Is the speaker saying overall that the weeds are speaking to your disappointment? Are you saying they are telling you to escape?
- Is the speaker saying overall that life is full of many small disappointments, and this makes life unsatisfying?
- Is the speaker saying overall that the empty water bottle speaks to destitution and dissatisfaction about life?

Sean’s Reflection on Sayback Response:

This response was very helpful, because I have had a difficult time discerning which elements of the poem I should emphasize. There were a few instances where Monique’s response pointed out things that I didn’t realize were there, so that will help me when I am revising. As of right now, this response is making think about issues of clarity, especially in terms of space. It’s also making me think about how I’m using imagery.

Sean: “Previously writing a first draft of something had been almost physically painful.”

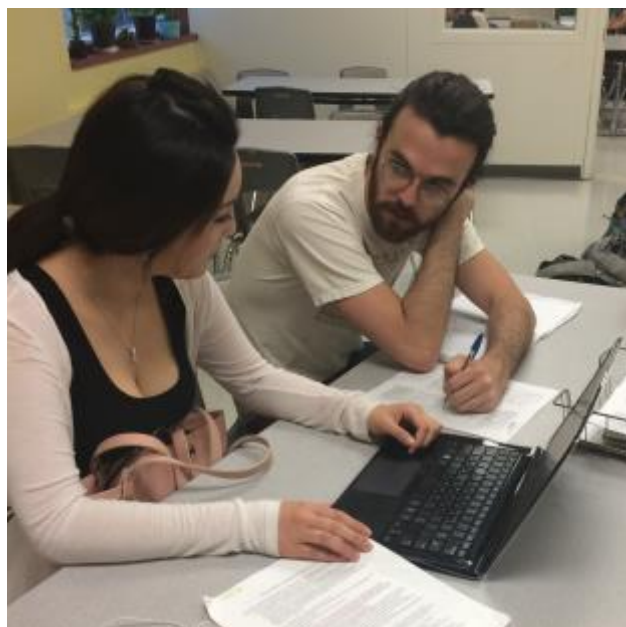
Closing Thoughts

Sean:

In this paper we’ve only reviewed two response lenses. There certainly are more that the writing center uses, and even more that could be developed specifically for creative writing. What we want to emphasize here is that these lenses are not just for academic writing, though they are quite good for that, but are for plenty of other kinds of writing as well, because in the end they start a discussion between the reader and the writer, make that relationship visible and ultimately create a work that is much more communal and really much nicer than that written in solitude.

Monique

Writing centers are often perceived as a place where one goes to get their paper proofread right before they send it on its way to its next destination. The Fresno State Writing Center is constantly working against this paradigm because it simply doesn’t help us evolve as writers. Using the response lenses, we are able to create a conversation about writing through writing. They helped me to recognize that conversation is something that is essential to all forms of writing. Whether I am writing an academic essay, or a story, this feedback has helped me to exist as a writer in many different spaces.





Nou Her

LEARN WRITING THROUGH EACH OTHER

“Reading is the pathway to writing.”
“If you want to be a better writer, read.”
“You can write better if you read more.”
“Great writers read a lot.”

I remember hearing such things for the first time in high school, and since then I’ve heard it probably around six times more. Is that a lot? I don’t know. It doesn’t sound like a lot of times. I remember thinking to myself that this was just another way for English professors to con me into wanting to read the books and stories they assigned. I was already an avid reader myself in high school, but since majority of the stuff I was reading around that time consisted of romance

novels and mangas how could reading those make me a better, or even just a good, writer? How were those supposed to help me? Yet, they were.

After reading so much of a genre I began to notice the clichés and the typical path that it follows. I was developing an awareness of genre and form. You know how they have you map out a story in elementary school with beginning, middle, climax, resolution and ending, and then

in high school they add in words like moments of foreshadowing and irony and other such big 3+ syllable words? The more I read my romances and mangas, the more I was able to pinpoint those. Ah, this is the crucial moment or uh-oh; this is not a good sign. The familiarity I gained about this genre through reading multiples of it made me more attuned to it. Being familiar with a genre made it seem less scary (and sometimes kind of boring, lol) to deal with, whether that genre was the Harlequin romance or the classics.

So I read and read and was able to predict the story's outcome and so forth. Did that mean I was able to become a better writer? I'm not too sure, but I'd like to think so. After all, once I became aware of how one genre works, I began noticing the patterns of certain authors in that genre and then I began noticing which authors I preferred and why. I believe being able to answer "why do I like this author better than this other author?" was the key to my writing changing. Why did I like this author better? Did I like how they ended their stories? Was I attracted to how this author portrayed their female leads as first weak at the beginning and then stronger? I was no longer aware of just the story, but the writer of that story.

I began incorporating different styles of different authors in my own writing. Author X uses long sentences, I want to try that. Author Y uses dashes quite a bit, I want to see if I can do that. Author Z of this manga always has nice dialogue between characters; I want to try something like that. How did Author G make me feel so disgusted? Why am I not affected by Author M's story? What started off as awareness of a writer became attempted imitation of that writer and through this imitation, I began finding out what I preferred and didn't prefer in my own writing. I was beginning to develop a sense of myself as an actual writer that wanted to evoke the same feelings I had from reading XYZ, in others who read my writings.

Working in the writing center has only contributed to more of this growth. Seeing drafts of tutees is always an exciting thing I think. I'm able to see various peers and their styles of

writing, and if they bring in revised drafts of a previous draft, I find myself checking out how they've revised it. Even if it's not a revised draft and just a new one, it can be a learning experience to see what a tutee is doing with his or her draft. Should I find myself imitating them, or using some of their ways of writing here and there, I find myself thanking them for crossing paths with me and allowing me to read their writing.

In my college experience so far, it's not often that I get to read another peer's draft, at any stage of the writing process, unless the professor has mandatory peer workshop days. Working in the writing center now and being able to see at least 18 drafts a semester if I am given a group (since each group has three tutees who are required to bring at least 6 drafts each to get credit for this one unit tutorial they signed up

"Seeing drafts of tutees is always an exciting thing I think. I'm able to see various peers and their styles of writing."

for), I find myself quite giddy. Perhaps I'm just a weird person for getting excited about reading others' drafts (but maybe this budding feeling of mine is due to the fact that I've yet to

experience being bombarded with multitudes of essays from students like a teacher would, lol).

Nevertheless, there's something humbling about reading an actual peer's draft versus reading essays or articles assigned for a particular class. I realize that such essays or articles were written by somebody, but that somebody can be so far removed from me at times that he or she sometimes just ends up being, and remaining, a name. With a peer's draft I can see the actual person; I can talk to them if I want to, have an actual conversation face to face and so when I find myself learning from them and their ways of writing, it makes my learning even more...how should I describe it...it makes my learning more realistic, more connected. I learned from someone who is also in a similar context as me, someone else who is on my campus and perhaps someone who has had similar experiences as me. I'm hoping tutees themselves are taking advantage of being able to read another peer's work and learn, and connect, from each other's writing, and writing styles, as I have from theirs.



Megan Bronson

TAKING THE WRITING CENTER WITH US: AN APPLICATION OF ENGLISH

Students who walk into our writing center doors do not usually realize that they have a voice. They sit in the blue chairs, nervous that we as tutors are here to judge their work, their mind, or even their entire being. Tutors are viewed as authority figures, judges, or even perfect writers. Here at the Fresno WC we are trying to break down those barriers and give students a voice. We do so by implementing semester long small group sessions where

students meet with the same tutor and students twice a week. As the semester grows, so does the rapport between members of the group. Students slowly find a voice within the group, and it is our goal as tutors to help them move that voice into the larger conversations within their disciplines. As well as helping students discover a voice, tutors are also discovering new things. We have learned how to facilitate groups, how to manage obstinate students, challenge ourselves, and

become better writers in the process. Because of these learning outcomes, I have come to a better understanding of how I will run an English class when it is my turn to be a teacher.

One of the techniques I intend to take with me is the Reply lens. Reply is first and foremost a personal response. It invites readers to comment back about what they just read. Taking this lens and asking tutees to voice their own thoughts, feelings, and interpretations is beneficial in a multitude of ways. Chiefly, it makes tutees aware that they have a voice. Their voice is not only important as a writer, but as a reader and an audience. They too get to have a voice just by listening and understanding the content of someone else's text. Asking them to reply to a text tells the tutee that they are trusted to have understood the text, and important enough to respond to it.

Tutees often feel that what they say is not important enough, or does not matter. They are doubtful of their own voice in academia. This lens let's tutees

know that their voice and experiences are just as important as the tutor's, as the writer's, and as the current academics in their fields. Entering into these conversations based on other group member's ideas and opinions gives a launch pad of new information for the writer within the group.

One example of this was in a group I facilitated last semester. I had three tutees, Jasmin, Elder, and Shifa. Elder brought in a persuasive essay on why America should drop bombs on Syria to solve some of the conflict in The Middle East. Elder did not know that Shifa had family in Syria. As a group we then decided to read Elder's draft and approach it using the Reply lens. While Elder's reply seemed concerned about going to war, Shifa gave an angry reply about the loss of life already caused by American intervention. After everyone had read, Jasmin and Elder swiftly verbally ganged up on Shifa, and called her "un-American." Rather than let Shifa be backed into a corner, I asked everyone to do the Reply lens again, but this time, do it on everyone else's last comments. This is how we navigated the rest of class. Writing our replies to each other, and reading them aloud. There was no speaking that was not already written. Our class had a discussion on a topic completely on paper. Asking them to write about it cooled the tension at the table. Shifa was

allowed to speak without being insulted, Elder was allowed to voice his fear about going to war. By the end of the class, everyone at the table had learned something about one another, and about the complex situation in The Middle East. Elder brought that draft in two more times, and this is how we handled it each time. Doing the Reply lens, and then collecting experiences and opinions from group members. Elder's last revision was a completely different paper that weighed the pros and cons of invading other countries. As a group, we had all learned something about the world, and we all were given the opportunity to have a voice about a global issue. Elder gained a new perspective about a topic that he was interested in, and the feedback he received changed his view of the world.

“Tutors are viewed as authority figures, judges, or even perfect writers. Here at the Fresno WC we are trying to break down those barriers and give students a voice.”

While using this lens in a university setting on freshman is a wonderful tutoring tool, I think it could be implemented in High school, or even middle school. As common

core education is being implemented, the Reply lens could easily be implemented in an English or Language Arts setting while still adhering to common core. This has replaced Bloom's Taxonomy in Education is Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge levels. It is a four-leveled wheel where every level is a skill set required for cognitive understanding and application. In his essay "Depth-of-Knowledge Levels for Four Content Areas" published in 2002,

1. Level one is to recall information, where we support ideas by reference to a text. Reply has us do this by reading a draft together, knowing that each of us has completed the task at hand.
2. Level two is about skill and concepts, where we respond to the text, either by summarization or interpretation. Reply literally asks us to take this information and make a response to it.
3. Level three is about strategic thinking, where we take it beyond the text and make connections within other texts or conversations. We do this in Reply by making the connections to other things we have experienced, read, or learned. We connect the ideas from the text into our own worlds.
4. Level four is about extended thinking, where we can give different perspectives and find common themes. This is what happens most times in Reply, especially when you are dealing with a hotly debated topic. Students give

differing positions and learn new perspectives together.

Reply could be integrated into the classroom as a reading technique in a small group setting to increase cognitive understanding of a text. After reading a poem or short story, students could be grouped and asked to make a response starting with the prompt of “this makes me think of” and let them read their work aloud to each other to facilitate a comprehensive discussion on the text at hand. By placing the students in small groups rather than making this a class wide project, you give opportunities to students who maybe didn’t understand the text at the level of others, the opportunity to see how other people responded,

and help them understand the text as a whole. Using small groups is also more beneficial than using one-on-one replies because this lens really focuses on gaining more than one perspective. Having an ideal group of four or five, you boost the chances that students will have multiple perspectives to learn from, and create a space where students can discuss their similarities or differences without running out of discussion topics and switching back to non-academic chatter. Reply could be modified from a college setting tutorial to a 7th grade reading and writing comprehension technique to keep students engaged, and give them a voice earlier on in their education.





Matthew Kenerly

TRUSTING AND ADJUSTING THE TUTORING PROCESS

“Oh, man, there he is again.”

I leaned forward to gaze out of the Writing Center's office window. The student of interest sat hunched over the table, backpack at his side, as if a black cloud might form over his dour frame at any moment. I'd never worked with him personally, but I'd heard stories. His relentlessly negative attitude tested even the savviest tutor, I'd been told, a wall of obstinacy that weathered everyone's patience.

“Man, it's like... He keeps coming back week after week, and that's cool and all, but he always looks like he doesn't even want to *be* here.”

That surprised me some, because everyone knows that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results, but I guessed it wasn't a lack of understanding that held him back. In spite of the self-doubt, he benefitted from our work, which meant the real question was how to capitalize on that foundation and create some confidence.

“Well, hey, I'll give it a shot,” I said. I wanted a challenge like that. I set my messenger bag at the side of the table, sat down next to him, shook his hand, and went to work.

He peered at me suspiciously as I took down his information. When I asked him what he and I would be looking over, he drawled a cavalcade

of pessimism. *Well, I'm not an English major like you are. Well, I'm just not very good at writing. Well, why can't you just tell me what to do and I'll go fix my paper.* I'd heard these laments before, albeit not in such a concentration. It became clear that I needed to wear a different hat, to step outside of the usual responsibilities of my job. I would need to listen, to empathize, before I could tutor, and if I could make that connection, I suspected I could do just about anything.

I'd need to adjust.

Flexibility isn't something we as tutors often think about, given that the lenses and the theoretical process by which they're taught are meant to be applied uniformly to any paper thrust in front of us. The reality, however, is that every tutor develops their own approach. We all have our little idiosyncrasies. In groups, for instance, I sit in the same chair every hour, one that enables me to look at the student in front of me and then look to my right toward the others. I end every private write the same way: "let's wrap this up and get things started." When I ask students to read, it's always clockwise around the group, though I work counter-clockwise with each subsequent set of responses. These are the little things that enable me to feel as though I can effectively teach.

It is also our reality that there's nothing uniform about the highly diverse population that we teach. When one of them disrupts that process, it can be hard to modify what comes naturally on the fly. Consider the innocuous comment that our fearless leader, Kirk, once made about the word "guys". It's a throwaway semantic crutch, and yet it's more significant than that. How often do we sit down with a group and say something like, "How are you guys doing", even when the group is comprised solely of female students?

Don't say it. Simple enough, right, but what do you say instead? You'll discover, much like I have, that other expressions sound awkward at first.

Now think of all of the other hurdles we have to overcome at some point or another. What do you do when a group suddenly becomes a one-on-one because of absences? What do you

do when you run out of lenses to teach and no one brought in a draft? What do you do when you try to work with someone for whom English is their second language?

I had a revelation once, attempting to deal with that last scenario. It took me all of two minutes to realize that my style of teaching wasn't going to fly, because it occurred to me that my inclination is to talk fast and expect students to keep up with the pace that I set, which I suspect is fairly brisk among my peers. It proved to be a struggle to consciously slow down, but it was more so when I realized that I had no tools to bridge the language divide between the two of us. Succeeding in the former meant nothing without the latter, and we ended up talking past each other for the entire session.

The lesson proved invaluable. You can't dismantle your entire method of tutoring every time you face a new obstacle, but I believe you can be more effective if you develop a modicum of self-awareness. If a student is content to bury themselves before the two of you even begin to work on their paper, have a proverbial shovel at the ready to help dig them out. Being a tutor means being an active listener, a cheerleader,

any number of informal roles. If you recognize this, you can reach even the most notoriously difficult student, and if you can reach that student...well, you can work with anyone.

"Alright," I said, "Well, I know you've been in here before, right?"

"Erm, yeah."

"Then you know I won't sit here and do everything for you, but believe me, I feel your pain. I mean, just because I'm an English Ed major doesn't mean I don't want to put my head on my desk sometimes. Really rough drafts happen to the best of us, man."

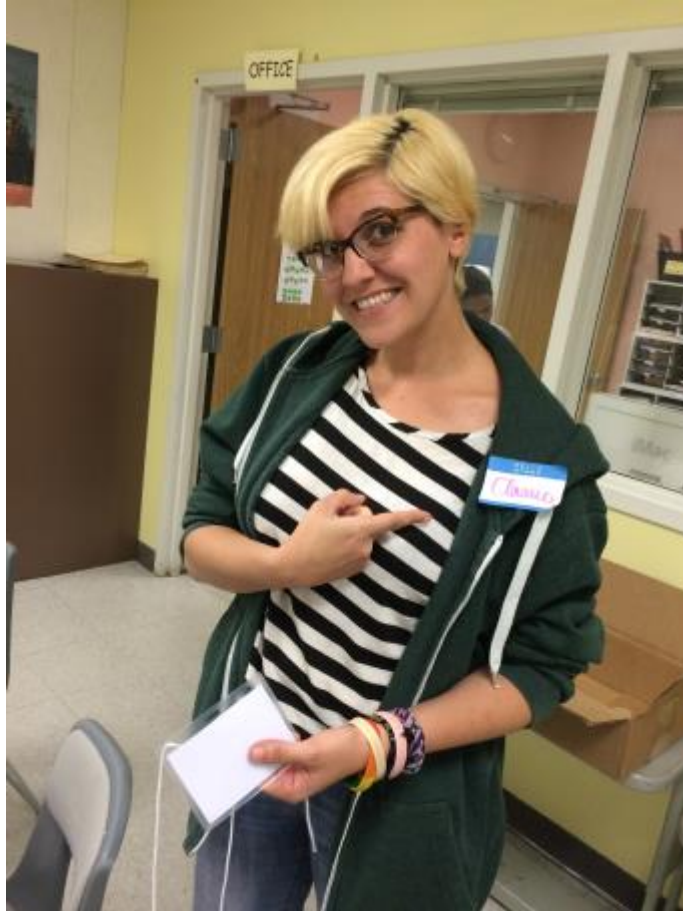
"Yeah, it's just that--" he inhaled before he continued the thought, "My writing's never really been that great, which is why I come here all the time."

"No worries, that's why they pay us the big bucks. It's always a process, yeah?"

"Hmm, true."

"We'll see what we see, then, and then I'll help you sort it out as best as I can. Don't worry, I've got your back."

"You can't dismantle your entire method of tutoring every time you face a new obstacle, but I believe you can be more effective if you develop a modicum of self-awareness."



Gilliann Hensley

THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING TO LEARN, EVEN IF YOU DON'T REALIZE IT

There have been times, in the not too distant past, where I've asked myself some serious questions. Questions like:

I've been a tutor for so long now...what could possibly be left for me to learn?

Why do we keep doing the same things in training all the time? What's the point?

I used to be excited about training...what the hell happened?

And I admit that, for a while, I couldn't really answer them. Or perhaps, had no idea how to answer them, because everything just seemed to repetitive to me. However, getting the chance to work in the role of tutor and supervisor has allowed me to see that there is still a lot of

learning to be done, and that there is indeed a method to the madness of what we do here at the Writing Center—realizations that have helped me to find enjoyment again as a member in the community that we have fostered here.

One of the most significant things that I have come to see in my few months working as a supervisor is that the very act of running a writing center is a process in and of itself—a process of both revising and refining. Of rethinking what it is that we do and how we do it, whether that relates to the training of tutors (both new and experienced), or the lenses that we use and how we use them, and the things that we do in both the group and one-on-one

environment. Though sometimes we may get tired, as tutors, of the repetitive nature of some of the things that occur in training, this does not mean that there is not valuable learning that can happen, especially in the service of refining how and what we want students to take away from tutorial sessions.

And I think that this realization—of writing-center-as-process itself—has really helped me to not only *want* to be a better tutor, but to *actively strive* to be one.

Allow me to explain.

I can admit that I haven't always been the most dedicated, enthusiastic of tutors. That I've let things from my personal and academic lives affect my general attitude toward things in a rather negative way. And I realize that this can happen—but it struck me that I was headed down a bad road. I'd started to no longer enjoy things that I once did,

and I was really putting in a minimal effort, and in some ways isolating myself from other tutors at the writing center.

However, much of that has changed. Becoming a supervisor has really helped me to see tutoring in a different light—has helped me to remember what it was that I originally loved so much about working here. I've found that I am now thinking more actively about what it is that we do. And I've found that I care quite a lot about this community, and can see that it is a special place that fosters many long-lasting relationships.

I've also come to see, in general, that it takes a lot to run a writing center, and that there is a lot

more going on beyond what we are exposed to as tutors—more beyond the training aspect, or the day-to-day business of groups and one-on-ones. While some of the things that get done may seem menial—keeping up the database, scheduling, doing paperwork, interacting with the public, to name a few—they are all necessary. However, it isn't all menial by any means. In my brief experience so far as a supervisor, I've been able to begin to gain an understanding of how to conceptualize tutor training, for example, which is something that plays a vital role in how our center functions, especially in relationship to other writing centers. And I think that engaging in these kinds of activities has given me a much greater appreciation for what it is that we do overall.

It is clear to me that being in a supervisor position is a valuable experience—an experience

that I think any tutor could benefit from. Seeing the ins and outs of how a writing center functions can be a learning experience that we can take

with us into our futures—particularly our professional futures, whether that be dealing with administrative aspects, or with communicating with the public, or even perhaps running a writing center ourselves. There is much of value to be found, and I know now that my continued learning has only really begun. I am no longer plagued by the same jaded questions that once ran through my mind.

“Though sometimes we may get tired, as tutors, of the repetitive nature of some of the things that occur in training, this does not mean that there is not valuable learning that can happen,”

