



Writing at the Center



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FRESNO STATE

Discovery. Diversity. Distinction.

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PREFACE

Welcome to our publication! We create one every spring to give tutors an opportunity to reflect on what they've learned, how they worked with student writers, and also to serve as a chronicle of all the cool people who have tutored at our Writing Center. What follows are pieces by each tutor working this semester. Here are a few things you need to know about how we run our shop to follow the tutors' narratives. One is that our Writing Center specializes in semester-long small writing groups; another, that we respond to writing and teach students to respond to writing with "lenses" we crafted over the years of practice.

Our small writing groups consist of three students and a tutor meeting twice a week for 50-minute sessions to work with students on readings, drafts, and prompts from any of their classes. Students voluntarily sign up for the small writing groups at the beginning of the semester and are not all from the same class. So, a group might have one member taking their first semester of our stretch composition course (English 5A/5B), they might have a member who is a junior taking a "W" class to fulfill the university's upper-division writing requirement, or they might have a member just doing a lot of writing in several of their courses.

The groups allow us to build relationships and rapport with our students in a way that is difficult to achieve in traditional 1-on-1 tutoring. We get students who are the first in their family to go to college, worried overachievers, transfer students from local community colleges, students whose first or heritage language isn't English. Many of them usually don't write, have been harshly judged for the writing they have done in the past, and will have to produce lots of writing at the university to succeed. We share these experiences in the groups with one another, and get to know our contexts and backgrounds through writing.

In our small groups, we *do* a lot of writing together—to generate and explore ideas, and to formulate and communicate responses to drafts as a way of "talking" about writing with one another. The default mode of communication about writing is through writing. We call it "live writing," i.e., writing that is produced in the presence of others, instantly shared with others to pass around ideas in order to start or develop a conversation. We engage writing both as a noun (drafts, prompts, readings) and, more importantly, as a verb. We call it "writing-as-a-verb," and do lots of it. By the end of the semester our students are more comfortable with and capable of producing and responding to writing, as well as using writing as a thinking tool and means of communicating and interacting with ideas and with others. They also become much more aware of the audiences they write to, and also more conscious *as* an audience of their responses to a piece of writing. What's more, this practice makes visible the social aspect of writing and communicating through writing. Our 1-on-1 tutoring is largely shaped by the same practices.

For formulating responses to drafts or readings, we use centering questions we crafted over the years and gathered in our Lens Booklet (which you can find on our website and use yourself). These lenses allow the readers to zoom in on a specific aspect of writing. All group members write their responses to the centering question and then take turns reading their responses aloud. From there, the group (or pair in 1-on-1 tutoring) can reflect on and discuss the responses verbally and decide what questions or topics they would like to explore further in writing and conversation. Some of the lenses you will see mentioned here are Sayback, Play-by-Play, Reply, Conversation Map, etc.

We hope that this background information will allow you to get a full picture of what happens at our Writing Center as you read the tutors' narratives in this year's collection.



Keolani (Kaye) Jensen

A YEAR IN REVIEW: THE MUSINGS OF A NEWBIE TUTOR (LENSES AND WRITING AND COVID-19, OH MY)

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” This is how cool, scholarly people start their essays, right? I’ll admit I’ve never read *A Tale of Two Cities* (am I even an English major?) but it has one of the most memorable opening lines. If it’s all right with you Mr. Dickens, I’m going to borrow it because I feel like it’s a pretty relevant description of my first year working at the Fresno State Writing Center. Last fall, I was hired at the beginning of my senior year at Fresno State. I knew that I wanted to become a teacher, so I figured that tutoring was a good way for me to get my feet wet. A few years ago, I tutored at another Writing Center (I won’t name names) and to be honest it wasn’t a great experience. This may have been due to many reasons the most important of which was that I was pursuing another major at the time and my heart just wasn’t in it. So, I honestly did not know what to expect.

One thing that has stood out to me the most in my time as a Writing Center tutor is how differently writing is treated here. I mean, what a novel concept, a writing center that actually focuses on writing... Alert the media! It seems like an obvious concept but that has not been my experience with writing centers. The Writing Center at Fresno State treats writing like: another form of conversation, a way to preserve thoughts, something that can be edited, revised, and changed. In other words, writing does not have to flow out of you in the most perfect, elegant way, it is a tough process in which you write and write and write until you slowly start to chip away at your unformed, mess of ideas until something great emerges. Kind of like what I’m doing in this essay. One of the best things I’ve learned at the Writing Center that I will carry with me forever, and that I hope the students I’ve tutored will as well, is that if you just start writing something will come out. **Sometimes, I’ll just write around in circles for a good while and then reread what I’ve written. Most of it is nonsense but some of it will be good and then I can build off of that.** You can’t build off of nothing, so just start writing and something will happen, I promise.

Another thing that I think is great about the Writing Center is the wonderful, beautiful lenses that we use to give feedback to writing. I remember that when I worked at the unnamed writing center I just didn’t have the language to give constructive feedback to the students that came in for help. They always wanted to know if their writing was “good” and I would be tongue-tied trying to figure out the best way to help without saying the wrong thing. The lenses create a great framework to build off of and provide the tutors and students with the language to give constructive feedback. My personal favorite lens as a tutor is “More About.” A lot of students come to the

Writing Center asking how they can expand their writing. They feel as if they've written all they can and there's nothing more to add. Boy, are they wrong. By doing "More About," the responder to the text can write everything that they want to know more about, and this almost always sparks new ideas for the writer. I think it's a lens that students can pick up quickly and get immediate feedback. But really any of the lenses used at the Writing Center are great and I love the way that they can lead to a richer conversation—I think a lot of students are surprised too.

This year ended on an unexpected note with the closure of in-person instruction and the implementation of Zoom meetings galore. It completely changed the way we tutor at the Writing Center, but I was also surprised at how much stayed the same. After about a week of figuring out various technical difficulties and getting used to the online format, I found myself getting into a groove. I think the COVID-19 situation just proved that the Writing Center's methods are tried and true. Even online, there can still be meaningful conversations about writing and useful feedback can still be given to students seeking help from the Writing Center.

All in all, I have learned so much this past year and have grown so much as a writer. I started the year off as a writer who was scared of writing. I have metamorphosed into one who is (still scared but) willing to write a bunch of nonsense first. To write drafts. To get help from others. To be open to feedback. Most importantly, to take what I've learned and use it when I teach in the future. I want students to know that writing doesn't have to be scary—a lesson that I learned from the Writing Center. Put simply, writing is nothing more than a beautiful expression of our ideas, hopes, dreams, and thoughts.

Works Cited:

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Zeyda Romero

HOW THE WRITING CENTER MESSED UP MY WRITING (FOR THE BETTER)

Before I moved into this beautiful, succulent-filled center--my writing process tended to be dominated by anxiety, frustration, and mild aggression. It looked something like this:

I, a procrastinator from birth, would sit down at my computer-- on the morning of the essay's due date. Sweat dripping off my anxiety-ridden brows, I would type sentences at the pace of a turtle in high heels. I would let the coffee-induced adrenaline fuel every precise calculation in my finger tips. Without blinking, I would arrange sentences in my head, thinking about the audience, syntax, and content all at the same time. After five minutes of mulling over whether or not I should use a semicolon, I would, finally, end my sentence.

Over and over, I would re-read the entire paragraph with the added sentence--until I finally decided that I hated what I just wrote. I'd delete about a third of that time-consuming sentence, just to go back to the beginning of this long and drawn out method of sentence construction. This continued until I somehow produced an eight page research paper.

As I got further into my papers, and closer to the midnight deadline, the sentences would begin to be less precise and more syntactically choppy. Instead of using the last hour to revise what I wrote, I used it to make my works cited page. I would never reread any of my work. As soon as I turned it in--roughly five minutes before the deadline--it was lost to the grading abyss, never to meet my eyes again.

Hungry, tired, and needing to shit--I then staggered to my bedroom. I would skip the next day of school to not only regain my strength, but to mull over why I decided to pursue higher education. My decision, however, was always reaffirmed by the grades I received on these essays--always As.

So, like me, you may be wondering: where did this unhealthy process of writing come from?

Well, it started out in my younger years, as a naive student with poor time management and no motivation whatsoever. Furthermore, I was never taught how to start an essay--or even how to talk about writing. In fact, the only time I talked about writing with any of my peers was when I wanted to ask them what grade they got.

Never getting less than an A on my papers, the reward system--located somewhere in my brain--taught me that procrastinating on essays, even with the unhealthy side effects, was worth it.

I'll admit it: I haven't kicked the habit entirely. Even today, I find myself wanting to put things off until the last minute to avoid my adult responsibilities. In fact, my first semester of working here did not drastically change my writing. I still procrastinated just as much as I did before--except now I was being paid to be a hypocrite, feverently encouraging students to start on their assignments early. In fact, it wasn't until I became more familiar with *why* we do what we do that I began to take my own advice about writing.

It wasn't an easy transition, but since then writing for me has become a lot messier--in a good way, of course.

Whenever I get a prompt, I don't wait until the day it's due to read it. I read it as soon as it's given/assigned to us. The Writing Center's sloppy bucket lens makes the process way more fun--and it gives me an excuse to break out my expensive highlighters. After reading the prompt, I immediately brainstorm what I'm going to write about. I'll make messy lists of articles, websites, and short writes to engage with. I'll let the information digest in my system by means of writing.

Once I write more on the topic, I am able to easily make my way out of the metaphorical maze of my assignment. When someone is trying to find their way around a maze, they are exploring what is familiar and what isn't; that is exactly my goal with writing before I get to the actual draft. Have I encountered this topic before? What do I already know about this topic? Where can I find more information about this topic? What do others say about it? I write about anything and everything. If the Writing Center has taught me anything: it is that I need to set aside time to write something--anything--down.

The Writing Center has also blessed me with this realization: the best way to build articulation in writing is *to write*. So, in order to discover what I want to articulate, I write about it! What am I trying to say overall? What would people want to hear more about? Who am I writing to? These are all questions I have learned to ask about my--and others--drafts because of the WC.

Figuring out what I want to say overall is often the hardest process. It's easier to alter my words to fit a particular audience, but being able to convey the ideas in my noggin is what I find difficult. How can we convey our ideas to a professor if we ourselves cannot articulate it to a fellow student? Or even more frightening, how can we articulate anything without first articulating it to ourselves? This is why, once I have a shitty first draft in place, I find it helpful to schedule my own 1-on-1 appointments with tutors, as it provides a live audience--an experience I cannot replicate with merely myself.

I keep repeating this process with my drafts until I get closer to a more finished product. Sometimes this stage is filled with a frenzy of cutting and pasting--from various short writes, paragraphs, or other bits of writing lying around--and using them as pieces to build and rearrange my essay.

Sometimes these bits and pieces of writing can even turn into something completely different--acting as a seed to plant even further writing. I mean, often, my own poems sprout while trying to hammer out essays. However, this process of writing--anywhere, anytime, about anything--is uncommon--especially in the classroom.

I--sure as hell--that I was never taught what the perfect writing process is; honestly, I don't think there really is a *perfect* process, but I know the one that the Writing Center instilled in me gets the job done. I have not only developed my time management skills, but I have developed a greater appreciation for writing. Even when writing dull papers on books I may or may not have read--I still learn something new every time I sit down to write. Although it may take more time, I find this new process even more rewarding--and most importantly, healthier--than my old, defunct process.

So, thank you, Writing Center, for what you have done--and continue to do--for myself, for others, and, most importantly, for writing.





Graciela Sierra-Moreno

FIRST YEAR FEAR

When I walked into the Writing Center for the first time I was a second semester sophomore looking for “grammar help” on a paper for an intimidating English class. I did not know what to expect, but I was mostly concentrating on holding it together for my appointment (a **WHOLE** fifty minutes). I was so afraid of having to read my own paper out loud, and write my own thoughts on the spot. And then read them. **OUT LOUD**. Needless to say, I survived. But I never went back.

The **Second Time™** I walked in was for my interview, which I was deathly afraid of. At my interview I shook hands with Magda, Kirk, and one of the student supervisors and felt a little better. I didn’t start breathing again, however, until I was speed walking to my car **CERTAIN** that I had bombed the interview. I was sure that I would never be able to show my face in the Kremen building again.

When I heard that I was hired as a Tutor at the Writing Center I was ecstatic. I was so happy to be able to be part of such a cool part of the writing community. And then I read the email about orientation. **O R I E N T A T I O N**.

I was so afraid for the entire two days. While we were being introduced to the Writing Center’s philosophy I was reminding myself to breathe. The student supervisors were kind and caring students who were making sure that all the new people (with scared looks on our faces) understood how and why we did certain things, including reading our papers out loud and writing on the spot.

I also survived orientation, it was really cold though. Like, Really Cold. Finally, the first week of tutoring rolled around, and I got my first group assigned. I did not know what terrifying was until I saw three new people intentionally walking towards me. I was going to have to **INTRODUCE** myself to them. I had borrowed icebreakers from another tutor, and instantly forgot them all. Thankfully, the first few days of tutoring are outlined as part of the Writing Center’s philosophy. By the end of the week I couldn’t believe I went a **Whole Week** of doing intros and icebreakers.

I had a great first week and after all this time of being afraid I realized: I was most scared of not being able to help people. When students started bringing in their drafts I started sweating in the offensively cold room. I don’t know why I was scared, after all I had my trusty lens booklet with me and most students were more than willing to participate and engage with the group (there were a few shy students but everyone had a chance to speak up when we shared our live writes).

Finally, I was comfortable and unafraid. I had an entire semester of tutoring experience with small groups under my belt and I was looking forward to this Spring semester. Then I remembered that I was going to learn to tutor one-on-one.

The newer tutors also had a one-on-one orientation, which I found less intimidating now that I knew all of the other tutors and supervisors. For the first few weeks of one-on-one tutoring I did not have any appointments scheduled (we run on a 50 minute appointment schedule which is updated every Wednesday morning). When I finally did get an appointment I was terrified. I knew that the session could go in one of two ways, luckily the student I had had already been to the Writing Center and chose to do the More About lens on a draft. The session went well, I did not pass out at all and I was able to give the student the kind of help they needed. I relaxed after that session was over, but I still get a small rush of fear before every session. However, the first-year fear has not stopped me from working with others and their writing, and I am very much looking forward to next semester.





Katherine Lathos

NEW PERSPECTIVES AS A TUTOR

My decisions after being a tutor for two semesters has shown me many new ways to grow as a writer and learner. Making decisions now as a writer I am more organized in how I start my essay and putting all of my ideas on paper even if they seem they do not belong. The act of putting my thoughts on paper and seeing all of the ideas together has helped me to think more clearly on what I want to say. In my outside activities, I was a small leader group facilitator, but I never thought it would be like that at the writing center. Expectations I thought were to be able to make every person that walked through the door come out of the writing center with a good paper, but we do more than that. As tutors, we think of the future, writing in the future, ways to learn how to conduct starting a paper and so much more. This has changed my perspective on the writing center and how I view writing.

Something I have learned that it is a key thing for a successful group is the importance of new perspectives. There is a positivity of not pointing out that something is not particularly wrong, just offering a new way of doing things. Something that makes small writing groups so effective is having three different people with different perspectives, ways of writing and how they go about decision making in the groups. The 1-on-1 perspectives are only two people so as a tutor I think focusing on even having one new perspective on a work is beneficial, so having 3 others would be even more valuable.

A new perspective on writing is that no one is necessarily wrong. Maybe an answer is a little off topic or doesn't fit the exact layout of one of the lenses, I have learned that it is more about the content. An example comparing it to a lens we use at the writing center is, More About, when a student replies with more about the start of the response usually starts with, "I want to know more about..." and one of the members in the group says, "I'd like to know this..", which is not the format given to use. Define and remind is something the writing center has taught all of the tutors, not telling the students don't do that but suggesting next time maybe do this instead. The word wrong is associated with failure, and I think one of the values here is to be comfortable with putting out ideas that are all correct, but some are just more along the lines of what is more beneficial to a tutee or draft or looking at prompts and readings.

I am not an English major, or a major that writes papers on the regular. This semester is the first semester I have had to do actual writing mockups of usability testing with pages of writing in my major which I Graphic Design. I have finally connected myself to thinking of writing differently as a process, a way of questioning writing and seeing it as a peer tutor and now as a teacher correcting for errors. Questions are accepted. Always. This is something that I have learned at the writing center as a tutor, questions are helpful. Another value I have learned as a tutor is to always make the students feel comfortable questioning and throwing out an idea that could be completely off topic but having those questions and thoughts are never frowned upon. This is important for me as a learner because it helps me put more ideas on paper and not be as afraid to write thinking I would be wrong but thinking of writing as something that has many perspectives and is a process of learning.

The writing center, filled with helpful tutors that are here to help students in ways they never thought, and learn that writing is a process.





Alea Droker

MOVING AWAY FROM CRITICISM

Just the other day, a supe and I were talking about one-on-ones. Being a second-semester tutor, I have just recently begun working with students in these types of sessions. I was telling her how I felt a bit anxious, not only because tutoring one-on-ones was a newer experience of mine, but because I felt isolated and was nervous about “critiquing” their paper. “Critiquing” was the exact word I used. The supe stopped me and asked me, “Are we critiquing or are we giving feedback?”

She asked me a very valuable question because I realized what I had said, what I had labeled a tutor’s responsibility, was an incorrect representation of what we truly do. There is, in fact, a very large difference between criticism and feedback.

Critiquing, the act of giving criticism, is by technical definition a neutral word, meaning there can be “good” and “bad” criticism (one which favors the writing and one which does not), but in reality the word implicates judgment. When someone *critiques* an essay, they create a hierarchical relationship between themselves (as a reader and responder, but more accurately here, they are ‘the critic’) and the writer (the author of the text). The critic establishes themselves, when critiquing a paper, as someone who knows more than the writer, and someone who knows what good and bad writing is. By doing this they create false and loaded terms, and thus *judge* the paper as if it has some sort of subjective worth, unfairly determining the value of it by ‘examining’ (or rather, adjudicating) its content and errors. The result of a critic judging a paper may lead to a subjectively better *text* in some very specific instances, but usually it does not.

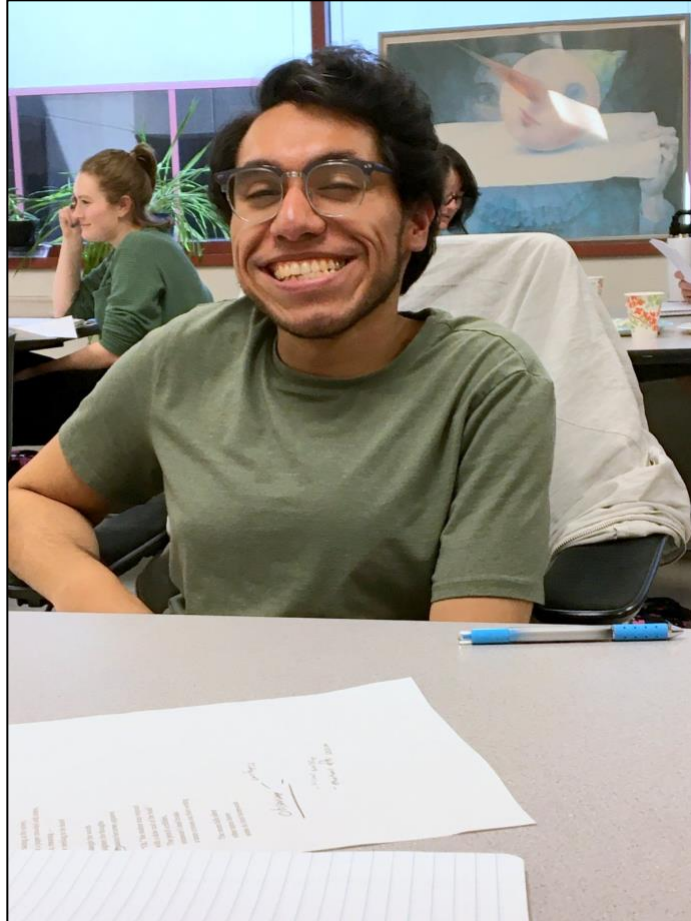
This... isn’t at all what we do at the Fresno State Writing Center.

We give feedback. Feedback, unlike critique, does not establish a hierarchical relationship, but gives way to equilibrium in a one-on-one or group setting. It establishes three roles: a reader, a responder (which are paired together, and one person may take on these two roles together), and a writer. When a reader/responder gives *feedback*, they ask questions about the writing to the writer and they tell the writer what stood out to them in the text. From there, readers/responders and writers may enter a conversation that utilizes both the written and verbal forms of communication where they talk about the text, together. Giving feedback completely deconstructs the idea of critique because not only does a writer learn about new perspectives and ideas, they learn how to actually become better at writing. Unlike the act of critiquing, which aims to produce a singular, “better” text, giving feedback helps writers improve the process by which they write and how they think about writing.

I have found, since working at the Writing Center, I have learned to change the way I read, respond to, and write papers. In some classes, students are dogmatically taught to see writing as a text-by-text sort of thing instead of a process. I wholeheartedly believe that if academia chose to present writing as a process, we would see many more students who want to write, talk about writing, and who would be confident in presenting their own texts. I see the

Fresno State Writing Center as very successful because we are one of the few places within academia that does choose to present writing this way. I have seen even my most shy and nervous tutees blossom and produce some of the most fruitful conversations about writing, more fruitful than some of my own English Major peers and colleagues. Seeing this with my own eyes, I emphasize the importance of feedback and its separation from criticism.





Noel Castillon

PRACTICE, PEDAGOGY, AND PURPOSE: WHAT I'VE LEARNED IN THE WC

When I applied to work at the writing center, I thought I was signing up for a job—plain and simple. I thought I was gonna come in for my hours, maybe help a few students here and there, and maybe pick up a few pointers on how to interact with learners, and that would be it. End of transaction. When I came into summer orientation and we were put into our groups, I was thrown for a bit of a loop. I didn't get it immediately. I understood Sloppy Buckets and Center-of-Gravity, but I didn't quite get it. "What's all this for?", I thought, "What good does it do to Reply with my personal experience? Why should I come up with open-ended questions? How does that even tie into what we just read?" Of course, I wasn't so belligerent outside my head, I just did what I was told and waited for it to make sense. I had faith in the process, it just took me a bit to connect the dots.

I did my first semester of tutoring, and through application and experience, these things started to come together. I began to see how important it was to see the act of writing as one of fluidity and I liked the idea that I could show my tutees all the methods we had to make writing more of a process of reconstruction and reflection rather than a colossal undertaking. It was exciting! I really enjoyed my groups and all the conversations we had about writing and revision. I ended my first semester excited to work with a new batch of tutees and to dive into 1-on-1 tutoring.

As an English Ed. major, they make me take a lot of pedagogy classes. Over the winter intercession, I enrolled in my very last course on teaching before completing my degree. I did not think much of it going in. I thought it would be business as usual: I would do the work, learn a couple of things, get the grade, and peace out. But in this class, I had a moment of realization: the Writing Center had completely reworked the ways I approached

writing and reading. In the course, I had to come up with what activities and assignments I would implement in my own high school English classes. I found that pretty much everything I planned traced itself to what I learned in the blindingly green walls of this space. I came to realize that the lenses, the group conversations, and the art of talking through writing just made sense. I came to realize how poorly writing was taught to me in high school, where I recited parts of a text and the teacher told me if my regurgitation captured what they thought was important. I saw how the lenses acted as a vehicle for the students to say, “Hey, this is what I’ve observed, what do other people think?” How could I not choose this over what I sat through for four years? Why wouldn’t I pass this down? By the end of the course, I developed a tentative curriculum where I unashamedly stole most of practices put in place in the Writing Center. Did I feel like a fraud? Yes. Just a little bit. But I won’t apologize for it.

We talk about how we think of lenses as tools for students to carry forward into as they develop on their own as writers and thinkers. I feel absolutely privileged that I can have the chance to do so in an educational environment where so many learners are just getting their feet in the water with putting their ideas on paper. I am excited to show them all these cool and interesting ways of looking at writing, and I hope that I can inspire them to also look at writing as personal and living texts.





Erin Chavez

USING WRITING CENTER ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM: A NEW TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE

Last year's publication piece was a reflection on my first year of tutoring. Now, one year later, I am reflecting on another year of new experiences. This school year, I was given the opportunity to teach English 5A in the fall and English 5B in the spring at Fresno State. Though I had been taking classes in rhetoric and writing studies, I still felt intimidated by the prospect of teaching a whole class on my own. Though teaching was challenging, I quickly discovered that I had a set of tools that would be invaluable in the classroom. These came from the Writing Center. My year of tutoring had provided me with procedures and strategies that addressed many of my students' needs. I started implementing some of these tools right away, and they have served me well. I am grateful that I tutored for a year before I taught a class of my own. Though I have had a few hiccups along the way, I have found that adapting Writing Center activities and practices for the composition classroom benefits the class by streamlining group activities and enhancing students' writing development.

I started using Writing Center activities for group work very early in the semester. On the second class meeting, which was held in the writing center because I had brought them in for a small group spiel, I asked my students to respond to a reading in groups. I decided to teach my class the group norms we use in the Writing Center. Many students find group work intimidating and unpleasant, but I have found that the Writing Center group norms eliminate a lot of these feelings because they deal with problems before they occur. Having everyone read their responses straight from the page not only helps students connect with their writing, but also prevents extroverted students from taking over the conversation and encourages shyer students to speak out. Requiring students to remain silent until everyone has read their responses aloud allows them to notice similarities and differences within their responses and fosters fruitful discussions. I quickly learned, though, that running a small group is much different than running six groups simultaneously. I was not there to "define and remind" when things went awry. Since there was no tutor sitting with each group, I had to pay close attention to make sure the groups were operating the way they should. This was difficult because often students will stop reading from the page and start talking. Though I did my best, I could never be sure that this was not happening because I could not be in six places at once. Still, the students eventually got it, and I believe that our group work flowed much more smoothly because of this protocol. It also set them up nicely to learn the lenses when I implemented them later.

We did not begin working with lenses until about halfway through the semester. Once my students had drafts, we began workshopping. I did not use a lens for the first workshop, and I was unsatisfied with the feedback

that students were giving each other. I decided to simplify the next workshop and simply had them do “More About.” I wish I could report that this lens worked well in this setting, but I still felt like my students were not responding with enough care. They seemed to rush through the lens and did not take time to provide thoughtful responses to their peers. In hindsight, I think the fault lied with me, though. As with the group norms, teaching a lens is a completely different process in the classroom. Though we did do some work together to learn the lens, I think I failed to provide enough instruction, and I should have circulated more to make sure that everyone understood what they were supposed to be doing. I believe this lens can be used successfully in my classroom, and I am looking forward to trying it again next year, now that I have a better idea of how to make it work. I still think that this workshop with the lens was more successful than the previous one, in which we did not use a lens at all.

Though I had problems implementing More About, I had success with another writing center activity: the prompt exercise known as Sloppy Buckets. Since Sloppy Buckets is a time-consuming exercise, I had initially decided not to teach it to my class, but I became frustrated with students who constantly questioned me about items that were clearly stated in the writing prompts. When it came time for final portfolios, I imagined all of the confusion and questions I would receive and decided that enough was enough. Time for Sloppy Buckets! The last prompt of the semester was divided into two sections- instructions for the portfolio and instructions for the accompanying reflection. I broadcasted the reflection prompt on the projector and asked students to point out the action items on the prompt. When they called one out, I wrote the direction on the white board and crossed the corresponding direction off with the pen feature on my computer. This way, the students were able to see the underlining. Once we were done, I made a big three-column Sloppy Buckets on the white board and had students take turns writing the items in the appropriate columns. The students were required to make a paper copy as we went along, so they would have directions for completing the prompt on their own. This exercise really helped the students slow down and pay attention to the different elements in the prompt. A bonus was that they had fun! One student even came up to me after class and asked if we were going to do it again because he had enjoyed it so much. In the following class, I had the students do Sloppy Buckets for the portfolio section of the prompt- this time they were able to do it on their own within their own groups. I noticed that students paid closer attention to the prompt requirements when it came time to grade their final portfolios, so I think it was a wise use of class time.

This semester, I decided to try another lens with my class. The students were assigned to write an evaluation of a trade publication article, but many of them were struggling. One day, after several weeks of trying to teach my students how to write evaluations, I realized that Play-by-Play would be the perfect exercise to encourage the type of critical thinking that was needed for this genre. I asked my students to do a Play-by-Play of the article they had chosen to evaluate, as a homework assignment. This was a turning point. This exercise really helped them understand how to evaluate work on a paragraph level and gave them a useful document that they could pull from to write their evaluation essays. Some students told me that it was this exercise that helped them finally understand what they were supposed to do. **One class session with Play-by-Play turned out to be more useful than several weeks of discussion.**

After finishing the evaluation genre, we moved on to argument writing. It was about this time that our campus shut down due to Covid-19 and our classes were moved online. I had planned to teach my students Conversation Map, which is great for helping students understand how to use sources effectively, but I was not sure how feasible this would be under the circumstances. Though I chose to table that activity for the moment, I fully plan to brainstorm some ways to make it work for my classes next semester, even if we only meet through the internet. Chances are, we may be online again, though at the time of this writing, nothing official has been announced. This situation has caused all of us tutors to seek ways of making the lenses accessible for our small groups, which we now meet with on Zoom. This has been a challenge but has been mostly successful. I believe that with some extra planning, these activities can also be used on Zoom with a full class. Because they are so beneficial, I think it is worth spending some extra time and energy to adapt them for online classroom use. I also encourage other composition teachers to give these exercises a try with their own classes, whether physical or virtual, because I truly feel that these strategies were an integral component of my students’ writing development over this past year. I will continue to use these valuable tools for the rest of my teaching career.



Liliana Perez

DURING A PANDEMIC, WHAT BECOMES OF THE WRITING CENTER?

I started writing this publication as a “farewell piece,” but I think it would be silly to ignore the fact that the 2020 coronavirus outbreak has largely affected the way we tutor. I have worked at this Writing Center for almost three years now, and I never would have expected that one day we would be taking our tutoring to the digital realm. Of course, this was prompted by the fact that university classes were cancelled, and the Fresno State campus shut down, which led to one question, among many others: *What becomes of the Writing Center?* What becomes of an institution that had, literally, relied on pen and paper and person-to-person interaction to assist students on their writing assignments? The idea of sitting in close proximity with a student and sharing paper and highlighters seems unimaginable now, in May of 2020, but it worked for us! It had worked for a very long time and, in my opinion and own experience, I think our tutors were able to successfully get students to think more critically about their composing process as college writers and see beyond the textual product in front of them. And these accomplishments had come a long way in the making.

Having been a supervisor for three semesters, I’ve heard plenty of horror stories about the times when our Writing Center offered 25-minute appointments, distributed grammar worksheets, and provided online tutoring (basically editing). The way Magda and Kirk had talked about online tutoring made it seem like it was something that we needed to stay away from and not take into consideration, at least for the time being, since we had seen how effective our face-to-face methods were in helping students. Put simply, there was no *need* to figure out what a Writing Center would look like *online*, what Skeleton Feedback would look like on a Google Doc, or how group dynamics would play out in a video conference room. I don’t know if our lack of digital infrastructure could be read as a lack of preparedness or simply a surplus of confidence in our own tutoring practices. In retrospect, I think it was a bit of both.

For the last few weeks, which have seemed more like months, all of the tutors have gotten a taste of how online writing tutoring functions during a pandemic, and it has not been the most joyful endeavor, as one would imagine. We’ve encountered an array of problems, from technology issues, to multiple tutee absences, to forgotten Google Drive passwords, to, worst of all, not being able to get out of our pajamas. With a lot of effort on our part, some of these problems have been resolved, while others are a merely a side effect of the challenging times we

currently live in. As hard as it has been to tutor at times, I am sure it was a lot harder to rethink and rebuild the way we tutor groups and 1-on-1. I want to take a moment to thank the supervisors this semester, as well as Kirk and Magda, for taking the time out of their chaotic lives to help our e-Writing Center run as smoothly as it can. They had to discuss and answer a lot of questions in a short amount of time, and I'm sure that they didn't have an answer to all of the questions we had. However, they did their best given the unfortunate circumstances, and they deserve all the protective masks and hand sanitizer in the world. My biggest kudos.

Looking at the bright side of things, as a tutor, I've certainly learned a lot about the nature of online tutoring, specifically Writing Center tutoring, in the last few weeks. I think that kind of specific knowledge and experience will come in handy in the near future. This fall, I'm headed to The Ohio State University to pursue an MA/PhD program in Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy. My decision to pursue this kind of work and career has largely been due to my tutoring experiences at our Writing Center, of course. I wish to continue studying Writing Centers and explore what they accomplish for college students, especially for freshmen, first generation students, and historically underrepresented student populations. However, since the Writing Center went virtual, I find myself wondering about different "manifestations" of university writing centers, and the ways in which space (physical or digital) influences how people teach, tutor, learn, and write. I'm wondering about how different arrangements of "space" transform the tutoring process and, ultimately, the writing process. Can one still treat writing as social and collaborative, through a screen, lacking immediacy? I'm assuming the answer is *yes*, but at what cost? What should one (or many) do to ensure that a Writing Center can live up to its values when it becomes virtual? It's going to take a lot of live writing to figure this out, but I'm up for the challenge. I really have grown as a person, student, and writer during the last three years working at our Writing Center, and I am thankful that I ran into this place while looking for a job in Spring of 2017. This "place," in whatever form it manifests, has truly shaped my personal and professional ambitions. Because of the WC, I now know what I want to do with my life, more or less. Wild, huh?!? But what's dearest to my heart is the wonderful community of people that I was able to meet while working here, and I will remember all of the laughs, the cries, and the potlucks very fondly. Kirk and Magda helped build an awesome team, and I know they will continue to create community. Hopefully, with enough time, patience, and learning, I will direct my *own* Writing Center someday, and pay tribute to the "place" that started it all for me.





Tony Vang

NAVIGATING DIGITAL WRITING LABYRINTHS

“Tutoring in the time of Coronavirus,” as Magda would put it. If I’m to tell the truth, online tutoring hasn’t really changed the way I tutor. Granted, everything feels a lot slower and more roundabout because technological connections are often faulty and I can’t have that face-to-face action and immediate response, and students who come in for tutoring are a lot more adamant about “fixing grammar,” but aside from those little things, there’s nothing out of the ordinary. Our job is still the same: we’re there to just help students realize what they can write about. Maybe they could expand on this topic, or maybe they could provide more details on that topic, or maybe those 3-5 pages finally got them to what they want to talk about and they need to practically start from scratch again.

I would say that my personal struggle so far is on 1-on-1 tutoring: trying to get the student to be active and participative in their own writing process. What is it about the Internet that it gives people the strength to be their true selves demanding the tutor to do their work for them, I’ll never understand. I mean, normally in-person I can encourage a person to at least write down their thoughts and show them that they’re more capable than they realize. But that process...way more difficult over an Internet connection. Might be that writing is easier to show than tell, easier to do than discuss. Or it might be that trying to mix artificial interactions with organic writing just doesn’t work out all that well. I feel like online tutoring needs a lot more structure, or at least a lot more pre-generated questions that could serve as guidelines to ensure that there’s more writing than conversation. Part of me wishes we could continue online tutoring so that I could better study how to improve this particular interaction, and part of me can’t wait for things to get back to normal. Sadly, I might get my wish for future research and improvement of online tutoring, what with the way this pandemic keeps worsening.

As for groups, it’s been a give and take dynamic. I’ll say one thing is for certain: never let your tutees stay on mobile devices while conducting online sessions. One: there are a handful of technological problems that follow mobile devices because the software and hardware differs from laptops and computers. Two: students on mobile devices are too often easily distracted by their surroundings or too busy doing something else. And three: more often than not you’ll see the student typing on their computer; they have a computer, but they won’t use Zoom on a browser or as an actual program because...I don’t know, they’re teenagers who need more than one screen to remain engaged? But the good news is that I have to be a more directive tutor. I get to directly ask a student for more input, to expand on what they wrote, and maybe the virtual presence gives them more courage to talk. It actually depends on the student in the end, but these Zoom sessions produce a strange fluctuation in group dynamics that could make or break a group.



Emily Washburn

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

The year 2020, the year of the plague, has been tough on everyone. Students, faculty, parents, essential workers, the country. I was a second semester tutor, still green, just barely gaining full confidence in the one-on-one sessions, when suddenly the Writing Center had to switch to online tutoring, and even the veteran tutors seemed nervous. My strategy: approach this like I approach everything in my life, fake confidence and hope that something good comes from it. The tutors rallied, the supervisors kept close contact with the whole group. Encouraging emails were sent during the week long Transition: “we’ll figure this out together,” “stay healthy,” “we believe in you guys.” And in this way, the tutors of the Writing Center took a deep breath and made the plunge into Zoom tutoring.

Going online with groups wasn’t as bad as everyone feared. The first half of the semester in person allowed for everyone to feel comfortable together, so there were fewer struggles. I only had one group for the semester, and honestly, they really helped to keep me sane. They seemed confident in my abilities, and that made it easier to be the tutor they expected me to be. Even with losing a week to the Transition wouldn’t stop them from learning, from writing, from growing. Other tutors weren’t so lucky. They struggled with keeping their groups engaged, getting them to show up, getting them acclimated to the new format. All the tutors who struggled compared notes during meetings and brainstormed ways to deal. Those of us who couldn’t relate offered as much support as we could.

One-on-ones were a different level of difficulty for me. The first one I had after the Transition was unique, to say the least. The tutee and I both were uncomfortable with the technology before us, her more so than me, resulting in me talking to a blank screen when she couldn’t figure out how to turn on her camera. Most of the session was mired in me trying to remain patient while explaining how to use Zoom, how to navigate Word, and even how to attach a file to an email. It felt more like tech support than tutoring. This was further complicated by the broken power dynamic. Sitting in my kitchen didn’t give me the same authority that the Writing Center gave me. In the Writing Center I had home field advantage, with a team of grizzled, experienced tutors at my back. On more neutral ground, the tutee was a little too comfortable, commenting on how young I looked and brushing off any suggestions

I had on where to take the session, instead only listening to my answers to her direct questions. She seemed to be happy with the results, but I had no pride in how the session turned out.

This session rattled me, my already shaky confidence crumbled. I took comfort when the more experienced tutors encouraged me to be more assertive when explaining what is appropriate and what isn't, and reassuring me that my next one-on-one would be better. Without the community of the Writing Center persisting through virtual group huddles and the once a week classes, I likely would have been tempted to quit right there. But I forged onward. That's what we all had to do in the face of uncertain times. And, they were right. The second one was easier, and the third one was even better.

When you're a student, people are always asking what you learned. "Oh, you took a class on Medieval literature? What did you learn from that?" They always ask like they expect something profound or infinitely interesting. If someone asks what I learned of the Spring Semester of 2020, my last semester as undergraduate, semester of the plague, I know what I'll say. I learned that I'm stronger than I think I am, especially when I have a community of like-minded individuals around. Individuals like I found in the writing center.



QUARANTINAVILLE

(In the style of Margaritaville by Jimmy Buffet)

Livin' on corn flakes
Feel like I might break
Locked up in my house with nowhere to go
It's Covid-19
That's forced Zoom meetings
I'm cooped up and ready to blow

Losin' my mind again in Quarantinaville
Searchin' for my last coherent thought
Some people claim that there's the Chinese to blame
But I know, it's our own damn fault

There ain't no ending
To Amazon spending
Started a garden in my backyard too
Lost half my tutees
But not my devotees
We made it work with so much to do

Losin' my mind again in Quarantinaville
Searchin' for my last coherent thought
Some people claim that there's the Chinese to blame
But I know, it's our own damn fault

Lost all motivation
'Cept my vocation
Couldn't let all my poor colleagues down
And I can't wait to go back
Tired of this mask
That I have to wear when I go into town

Losin' my mind again in Quarantinaville
Searchin' for my last coherent thought
Some people claim that there's the Chinese to blame
But I know, it's our own damn fault
Yes, and some people claim
That there's the Chinese to blame
But I know, it's our own damn fault





Mary Sosa & Carli Álvarez

WE DID THE BEST WE COULD WITH WHAT WE HAD: THE WOES OF SUPING DURING THE APOCALYPSE

In this co-authored piece, we wanted to document our raw experiences as supervisors, tutors, and students during the online transition brought on by COVID-19.

Memorable Moments Before the Apocalypse

~ Mary ~

The first moment that stands out to me looking back before this whole mess started was when I was supervising. I remember Carli, my friend and fellow supervisor (supe for short) came up to me and said, “Magda wants us to come up with a contingency plan, we need to brainstorm ideas for the next supe meeting.” I remember thinking, “sure we can do that, just I doubt we need to put much effort in it. I mean what are the odds that the school would shut down or go online halfway into the semester?” I miss the me that used to think this wasn’t a big deal.

Before I knew it, it was our Thursday tutor class and I could tell our bosses were feeling overwhelmed when we got the news and that immediately made me worried too. If they didn’t know what we were going to do, what would next several weeks look like? All the uncertainty made me stressed and scared. I felt sick to my stomach hearing how groups might get cut if there was no way to conduct them online. That class talked more about the unfolding events of the pandemic and, for me, it started to make the pandemic feel real and it gave me anxiety. Will I have a job? Is it possible that the Writing Center would just shut down in the middle of March? Although there was talk about possibly having less hours to work and that we shouldn’t worry about losing our jobs, I was an overachiever and worried about that anyway.

Not even a week later, I was having midterm conferences with my English 5B students, telling them that we are going online, but should return in a month. My student had asked, “did you know we were going online before us?” and the truth was I didn’t. We were told to make rough contingency plans, but I found out we were going online the same day as my students. I felt underprepared, worried about my students’ success online, I worried about my success online, and what does this mean for the Writing Center?



~ Carli ~

It’s so funny--I remember literally one week before it was announced that school was closing that one of my students in my Tuesday/Thursday group came into our group, kind of freaking out about coronavirus; we didn’t even do a Private Write that day (I’m bad I know) because she was so scared and kept talking about it with our group members. I wanted to help assure her it was okay, and I told her that her feelings were valid--because they were--but when she asked if I was scared, I told her I didn’t think coronavirus was that big of deal. In fact, I told her that I kinda felt the media had blown it out of proportion.

Because, at the time, I did! I remember thinking that so much of what we'd seen in the media about Coronavirus was super blatant fear-mongering. I even told my student that even if I were to get sick, I'd be irritated, but not scared. I assumed that since I'm young, this would have literally no effect on my life whatsoever. How silly.

That same week, Magda had even mentioned coming up with contingency plans in case the Writing Center was to go online, along with the rest of school. Again, I felt that was silly; to be honest, I was willing to take some time to talk about what we could do, but I was so skeptical of it happening that I genuinely felt it'd be a waste of our time to try coming up with contingency plans. The furthest I got, in terms of online planning, was that we could probably use ZOOM to host the Small Writing Groups, but I didn't think much past that. I didn't see the point in devoting time to something I didn't think would happen.

7 days after my student talked to our group about her fears regarding Coronavirus, we received an email from President Castro that school was shutting down. Or "moving to online instruction." Which is dumb. As far as I'm concerned, Fresno State shut down that day. And in a way, so did my life. Not only am I a full-time student, but I literally spend all my time in the Writing Center when I'm on campus, whether I'm off the clock or not. The only other place on campus I sometimes go is the library. Basically, my entire life was lived at Fresno State. And then, suddenly, my life was uprooted.

On that day we received the email, I printed out two copies of it and read it aloud with that same Tuesday/Thursday group at the start of the session, again in place of a Private Write. I wanted to revisit this Coronavirus topic with my students, not only because the email came out just an hour or two before our group, but I also felt kinda bad for dismissing the impact of coronavirus when my student initially brought it up to us a week prior. And now that COVID-19 was directly impacting my life, I also started to become scared and started taking it way more seriously. It legit altered the course of my life for the remainder of the semester.

Hell Week

~ Carli ~

The email President Castro sent about transitioning to online instruction also stated that instructors and campus offices would have a week to figure out how they'd function online. At the Writing Center, we super decided that we'd meet in person on Monday (the Monday after the email had been sent) to figure out how we'd make the transition to online tutoring. I'll be honest--I felt super overwhelmed right from the get-go. I tend to panic hardcore when there's big life changes, and a large part of my panic was fueled by the fact that our entire pedagogy, up until this point, had been exclusively designed for in-person instruction/tutoring. Other tutoring centers on campus already had online tutoring services; ours did not. Everything we did relied on us being in person. I honestly had no idea how we'd work online.



The Sunday before we were scheduled to go into the WC to figure out the online transition, Mary and I met up to study together. One of the best parts of this semester was Mary and me becoming outside-of-work friends, and prior to the world ending, we would meet up on the weekends to do homework together at the library. That Sunday though--it was super eerie being on campus. At the time, campus was still "open," so students could still go to the library and into buildings, but hardly anyone was on campus that day. When we got to the 3rd floor of the library, I noticed how few students were there.

I tried working on some assignment, but I couldn't stop thinking about all we had to do this upcoming week at the WC. I was so

overwhelmed. I've always loved being a supervisor, but I was filled with so much dread and anxiety; I didn't want to have to figure out all of this online tutoring stuff. But I had to. I couldn't stop thinking about it.

After bringing my concerns up to Mary, we both realized we weren't going to get any homework done, so we decided we should use our time to get a head start on planning for online tutoring. A few days earlier, after we found out we had to figure out how to do everything online, the supes realized that none of us really had a solid idea for how we could tutor online. Keeping that in mind, Mary and I spent the next couple of hours playing around on ZOOM and more or less figured out how the Small Writing Groups would work online. I'm still proud of us for being proactive that day. I would not have felt as confident going into work the next day without our time spent tinkering around with ZOOM.

However, whatever semblance of assurance I'd felt quickly disappeared once we were at the WC that week. I'll be honest--a lot of that week is kind of a blur for me. As I said before, I do tend to get incredibly overwhelmed and anxious at any sign of adversity, and I was suddenly faced with a lot ton of adversity.

I can't say this enough--had it not been for Mary and Tony, the Writing Center wouldn't exist right now. During this week, Mary and Tony completely stepped up and figured out the majority of the technological kinks we'd run into, they came up with clever ways for us to do some things online that we, initially, didn't know how to transfer into a virtual environment, and--most importantly--they kept us on track. They always did their best to make sure every supe had a designated task, and they kept each meeting moving as best as they could.

Unlike them, I was basically no help that week. I did what they told me to do, which I know is helpful, but I didn't come up with any solutions to any problems. I was basically along for the ride. Suping during Hell Week was completely different than suping pre-apocalypse. I think I was a pretty decent supe prior to the world ending. I was never the best--I wasn't the most on top of things, I rarely went above and beyond on tasks or projects, and I often waited til the last minute to get things done. Worst of all, there were times I'd let things slide, like tutors not following our practices or people saying problematic things aloud in the WC. But I will say that I did a pretty good job communicating things clearly to tutors, students, and other supes. I was always super enthusiastic when it came to planning the tutor training course. And I feel like I was capable of making very rational decisions, particularly when it seemed like others struggled to do so.

But none of these traits were evident during Hell Week. Especially my ability to problem solve and make rational decisions, which I always prided myself on. Instead, I allowed myself to become extremely overwhelmed. There were long stretches of time, during Hell Week, where I just sat in front of my computer screen, trying to talk myself into staying at the WC, rather than coming up for some excuse to leave. I just felt like there was so much expected of us supes that week. And, I mean, it's no one's fault. No one predicted we'd be in this situation. No one expected we'd have to figure out how to put the WC online within a week, especially not in the middle of the semester. But still. It felt like we had so much to do in so little time. I felt like this tremendous responsibility had been thrown onto me.

The Writing Center has so many components--it's a class. It's a workplace. It's a student service. It's a tutor training facility. It's a place people come to get help. It's a place people come to get extra credit. It's a place students come to learn. It's a place students come to get their paper 100% fixed 20 minutes before its due. Some of us work here to gain teaching experience. It's some people's only source of income. It's just a side hustle for others. Regardless of your reasons for stepping into the WC, it's obviously an important resource to several different people. And it felt like an absolutely, gargantuan, overwhelming task to keep this place alive online.

Eventually, I caved into my anxiety and had a massive panic attack on the Friday afternoon of that week, and dipped out of the WC an hour earlier than I had planned.



~ *Mary* ~

The University gave us a week to prepare for the online transition. I felt that I had to focus on getting the Writing Center on track before I could cope as a student and before I could transition my English 5B class. Although there were three other student supervisors and that the Writing Center's online transition was no one person's worry, I felt like I had to do everything in my power to help the WC, because I felt (and still do) that the WC is one of the most important resources for students. We heard that everyone will be using Zoom, so Carli and I had played around with its capabilities before we brought it up to other supervisors. Honestly, we tried to study at the library, but we couldn't focus on anything else and we decided we would both feel better if we had a clear plan of attack to make sure the Writing Center was on track, or at least that we could run groups online similar enough to what we do in person. There was also a lot of anxiety from all of us when thinking about having to convert our WC practices to an

online space. We believed that the online environment does not support our writing center values, which we later found out is to some extent true.

During our transition week, we regularly came to the Writing Center, our HQ, to figure out what to do and how to tutor online. We figured out that we would somehow have groups via Zoom and that there would be some kinks to iron out. It was a pretty big comfort that we found that Zoom allowed for us to run our small writing groups (a point of our WC pride), although it was still a pain trying to figure out best practices and directions for our tutors to follow when setting up the groups via Zoom. It also posed an interesting challenge when we found out that Zoom functioned differently and could have less capabilities, depending on what kind of device the tutor or student was using, such as laptop, tablet, chromebook, phone, etc. A lot of little things like that would pile up, making it harder to transition in a single week which played wonders with my own stress and anxiety.

Our biggest hurdle then became how to schedule and tutor one-on-one online. Other tutoring services on campus, such as the Graduate Writing Studio and The Learning Center already had one-on-one tutoring online, so this was a non-issue for them, but for us, it was one of the biggest headaches. It was actually something we were proud of, not having online tutoring, it was almost a point of rebellion, sticking it to the man, showing that we care more about working with students in person than having students rely on having technology to get help with their writing. But this meant that unlike the other services, we had to start from scratch and work out how to tutor online and find a scheduling software that worked best for us on top of training tutors and knowing how to navigate the groups online.



The first step in figuring out what software to use was to at least see what the other tutoring resources were using and if they could even apply to what we do and our values. The Learning Center used Bulldog Connect, which required us to submit permission for accessed for all of our tutors (which would have taken a more time than we had to get the system off the ground and online) and that the students would have to log into their myfresnostate accounts to schedule a tutoring session. Bulldog Connect also, as it had been explained to me, keeps track of a breadth of student data. The software kept track of the students' demographic information, their majors, how many times they have used the service, and etc. It felt kinda creepy how much information it kept track of and I remember reading an article about how students of color are often faced with "hyper-documentation," how they always have a robust paper trail to justify if they are worthy enough for aid or programs. I know that systems are keeping data of all students and that the goal is usually to improve practices and retention, but I know who their gaze is fixed upon and as a POC myself, I hate being essentialized by part of my identity or seen as a statistic. The information about this software seemed additionally jarring since we used a Google Form that asked for a student's, major, year, and if they had been to the WC before and it never kept tabs on how many times that student had attended or what their gender, ethnic background, or income was.

The Graduate Writing Studio used a scheduling system called "Setmore" and I played around and made a fake appointment for myself and it seemed very user-friendly on my end. I knew that we try to be as welcoming to students as possible, so this software seemed like a notable option thus far, plus it didn't document student information to the degree that other software did. I was excited that we were making progress, because at this point, about 3 days from our week had passed and all of my time and energy was being devoted to the online transition for the Writing Center and we were so close to having something tangible to tell our tutors and I was ready for it.

Although we seemed to make some progress with each day we worked, it was still painfully slow progress and although Setmore was promising, there still had to be further exploration of other software. It was fair and sensible want to explore other options, but with each passing day it became increasingly stressful that a decision was not made on what software to go with and Tony and I were beginning to worry more and more about how long it would take to set up the software and then make sure we were all okay enough to use it on our own would take.

The rest of that week happened in a blur, but here are the main bits. We did not get set up with the scheduling software as quickly as it should have been, we went around and around about systems until Monday after we were supposed to be fully transitioned. We did end up going with the Setmore system, but after having to explain how and why it was the best option for multiple days. I remember feeling the most stressed I ever felt as a student. I remember feeling overworked and I felt like all the effort I was putting forth wasn't getting us anywhere. I remember the last day of that week I went to the grocery store with my husband and aisles upon aisles were empty. I remember feeling scared.

Life Online

~ Mary ~

The first two weeks online were the most difficult. I had focused so much on getting the Writing Center online with my colleagues, that I did not give myself a chance to cope with the situation as a student and I didn't have a chance to convert my English 5B class online. I remember scrambling to prepare a whole week's worth of lesson planning and Canvas assignments Sunday night. Halfway into the second week I had a panic attack at 1:00 in the morning. I remember I was exhausted, but I could not sleep after lying in bed for hours, because I was too stressed and anxious. I could not stop thinking about everything I needed to do in my classes and how I was unable to transition between my roles as a student, TA, tutor, and supervisor while being in the same physical space all day.

Being a supervisor online was not the same, it felt like all of the magic had been sucked out. I was no longer there for support or to interact with students and to answer their questions, I felt like I was just monitoring tutors to see if they were online. Before the online transition, there was a mutual trust, my presence in the office was enough for tutors to come and ask questions and I could see if they needed help. I also trusted that by the tutors being present, that they were doing fine in their groups. Whereas online, it felt like I had to check-up and make sure the tutors were tutoring. We started doing "huddle calls" with tutors at the end of each of their groups and they were brief group calls to prevent the tutors from feeling isolated. In the beginning, the huddle calls were helpful, because when some tutors had technical difficulties, others were able to offer support, but as the semester progressed, there wasn't anything left to talk about and some tutors just wanted to get them over with so they could go to the bathroom before attending their next group.

Being a supervisor online was more work. When I was working, I would switch from the Zoom hub, (to make sure the tutors were online and that they had not sent me any questions through the chat), I had my email open (to make sure no one had emailed they were absent), I had Setmore open (to see if there were appointments booked), and I had the master schedule open to see which tutors were working at which hours. I thought that because I was supervising at home and with my laptop in front of me, that I could catch up on grading or work on homework, but I found that I only switched between the various tabs I had and I could not focus on anything else. After working my normal long days for the Writing Center, I was exhausted and had migraines. I could not stand the thought of spending another second at my computer. The Writing Center was where I got to unplug, I could focus on being a tutor or mentor new tutors as a supervisor, but now I am constantly plugged in and supervising became a large part of my screen time.

I only had one group and from my experience, a little of the magic and fun was not the same after going online, but it still ran fairly smoothly and my tutees really appreciated having support and a reason to think about their writing assignments. My tutees and I had reflected around the end of the semester and we talked about how much being able to see and hear others around us that contributed to the experience of being in the small writing groups, it helped us to be productive when the room fell silent with writing and it gave us fun moments when we would overhear what other groups were talking about.

Under normal circumstances, the last day of tutoring was a huge potluck, we would push tables together and all the students and tutors would bring something. The groups got to celebrate all of their hard work and enjoy their time together while eating and playing board games. Sometimes the groups would stay how they were and play games in their own groups and other times, groups merged, and we would play Cards Against Humanity. I remember wanting to celebrate the last day with my group, especially since we had been through so much together with the online transition. I ended up finding an online version of Cards Against Humanity and we got to play it while on Zoom and talk about our plans for next semester. The best moments, or probably the only great moments for me while being online was when I was with my group. Even though I was the tutor, I found that we had all leaned on each other emotionally and complained about our struggles equally. Being able to create a small version

of the last day of tutoring was nice and I hope that it gave my tutees a nice reprieve from their struggles and worries during finals.

Supervising online became work and less of an act of love for the Writing Center. Honestly, it was a little soul crushing, I felt like I had worked harder than ever, I felt isolated and if it wasn't for my fellow supes Tony and Carli, I don't know how I would have got through this transition. I knew they had taken on the workload the same as I had and I knew I could trust and lean on them. It almost feels like we are all old war buddies now and while the online transition had brought out the best and worst from everyone, it was great to know that under extreme pressure, how much Tony and Carli were able to shine and pull everyone through.



~ Carli ~

God. I don't even remember much about the first day online. Other than being stressed beyond belief. I usually supe from 10 until 2 or 3 Monday-Thursday with only a few breaks. I actually liked my schedule a lot when we were in person. But online--god! It just dragged on. And on. And on.

And I hated how my bedroom became my bedroom, my classroom, and my workplace. Not only that, it became the place I supe'd from, tutored from, and took breaks in. In the real WC, I would tutor and supe in different rooms, in different chairs, and I could take my breaks in the lounge. But online, this was all happening in the same place. At the same desk. In the same goddamn chair, which I have since grown to resent.

The first week or two, I'd get super bad headaches from staring at my screens all day. I have two computer screens, and used them both while I was on the clock. The smaller screen is the one I used when making ZOOM calls; when I wasn't making calls, the smaller screen displayed my Fresno State Gmail account. I always had to have it open in case a tutor emailed me a question. On my larger screen, I had the ZOOM hub--I needed this to be as big as possible so I could always make sure tutors were actually online or in video meetings when they were scheduled to be. I also wanted to make sure I wouldn't miss any DMs a tutor or supe might send me. At the bottom of my screen, I had an internet browser minimized that had Setmore--our tutoring appointment scheduling software--in one tab, the tutor contact list from the database in another, and a third tab displayed the WC master schedule. Or it did, until the database suddenly decided to stop working properly a few weeks into online tutoring; when that happened, I also had a PDF version of the schedule minimized at the bottom of my smaller computer screen. My computer's volume was always up, just to make sure I'd hear any notifications.

The first couple of weeks, I sat in my chair--sometimes for 5 hours straight--just to make sure I didn't miss anything that happened while I was on the clock. I didn't feel right stepping away. While this is just an hourly job, I really cared a lot about the Writing Center. If anything had gone awry while I was the scheduled supervisor, I would have felt 100% responsible for it. To prevent feeling that way, I made sure my eyes were always glued to the screen, ready to resolve any issue that presented itself.

I know that no one asked me to devote so much of myself to my supervisor duties during that time. I wish I hadn't devoted so much of myself, because--looking back--it was completely unnecessary. There were very few issues during that time, and even the ones that came up were super easy fixes. But I just felt so fucking responsible.



Knowing that questions would be directed at me made me feel like I had to be super present. And I felt like I had to devote so much of myself to my supe hours because I felt like I hadn't been useful during Hell Week.

After the second week, I downloaded the ZOOM app onto my phone. This way, I wouldn't have to be glued to my computer screens. It relieved some of the pressure I felt in the beginning, but I still felt like I was taking my work with me wherever I went (in my house). I couldn't get a healthy work-life separation. Not like how I could in person.

This led to my enthusiasm for the job significantly dropping. I felt like I was relegated to being a fucking micromanager. I had to stare at my screens and make sure everyone's little icons were red or green, but not grey--if they were grey, that meant they weren't online when they should have been. Which adds to additional stressors--like, do I message them on ZOOM despite them not being online? Do I email them? Which is super formal and not that speedy--and I need them to respond quickly because they're supposed to be with students right now. Or do I text them? Which is super fucking personal, micromanage-y, and frankly over-the-top. But what choice did I have? They're literally not with their students when they're supposed to be. And subbing is such a hassle now--what're their students email addresses? Have the students even been showing up to this group? Is that tutor actually gonna get back to me when I message them? Will they think I'm being controlling or overstepping my bounds by texting them? Will they think I'm uptight for taking my hourly, part-time job too seriously?

Look at that last paragraph. That's basically what went through my head several times during these last few weeks. I hated it.

It's soul crushing. There's so much. And everyone's enthusiasm dropped. Not just mine. Everyone's. Tutors--I see you. And I get it. I could tell so many people's enthusiasm plummeted. And I'm not mad. I'm just saying that I could *tell*. And I know the enthusiasm of my fellow supes dropped too. Again, I'm not mad. I fucking felt it too. But it all added up and dragged me down further and further. Worst of all, it completely impacted my tutoring.

My students' enthusiasm had visibly dropped as well. In some sessions, we had conversations about how stressed we were. When we tried doing group stuff, it often felt so forced. It felt like we were playing pretend--it felt like we were trying to maintain this false sense of normalcy. We all knew there was serious stuff lurking outside of our computer screens. But we all pretended to ignore it. We pretended that this was still the same, normal Small Writing Group we had been in all semester. I appreciate my students who tried really hard to remain engaged. I thank them so much for their patience. But I apologize to them for these online sessions becoming such a drag.

It was an obligation. None of us wanted to be there. And because I take this job too seriously, I felt like a failure when their enthusiasm dropped. Like, I acted as if it was a failure on my part that they weren't as engaged. It wasn't. But that's the pressure I put on myself. Like I've said before, I'm not the best supe ever. But I'm a fucking great tutor--I would never say or think otherwise. I loved tutoring, especially here since our 1-unit class gave me a small taste of what it might be like to be a college instructor. I love working with students, especially in the groups because I get to see them grow and become more comfortable with writing as the semester progresses.

But during this online portion of the semester, my tutoring skills really suffered. Part of me feels like I did my students a huge disservice with my poor job performance; another part of me is constantly reminding myself to not be hard on myself, and that I was experiencing what everyone else was experiencing. Still, I'm sad that I didn't tutor as well as I usually do. If I wasn't a supe, I wonder how much my enthusiasm for tutoring would have dropped. I wonder if I'd be as sad about working at the Writing Center as I am right now.

Wrapping Up and Looking Back

~ Mary ~

Wrapping up the semester, pre-apocalypse was a semi-stressful, but generally good time. We would meet during Dead Days with the two newly appointed supes (we have two new supes rotate in every semester and two supes who had served for a year rotate out) and we would introduce the new supes to the roles of being a supe and which roles they would like to take on. We would then have the seasoned supes mentor the new supes in their new roles (such as payroll or hour scheduling) and read the evaluflections that had been collected near the end of the semester. The evaluflections were written responses from tutees from the small writing groups on their experiences in the groups, what lenses they would use in the future, what feedback did they have for us or their tutors, and etc. It was a nice time where new and old supes came together, we reflected on what it means to be a supervisor and read the evaluflections to see how students were experiencing the Writing Center. Post-apocalypse, this precious moment in the natural cycle of the Writing Center was just not the same in this transition and I regret to say that I kinda dreaded it.



As this semester is coming to a close my fellow supes and I had brought up who we would ask to be the new supes in the fall during our weekly supe meetings, and although other topics were addressed, this was one that often fell to the wayside. The old feelings from Hell Week all started to come back, I felt more stressed than I should have for the sake of the Writing Center and there was not much acknowledgement that I was being heard, although it was also harder to read nonverbals and backchanneling via Zoom. For our last official supe meeting for the semester, there was finally some discussion of new supes, but similar to the software ordeal, I was nervous and worried that the lateness of coming to a decision would leave us all scrambling to prepare the new supes last minute. I almost wanted to panic, because I was still feeling the effects of the extreme stress and pressure that had been put on me, mostly from myself, and we were approaching another uncertain period of where we would have to start from scratch again (hiring, training new tutors, and starting groups while being 100% online). I remember feeling most supported from Carli and Tony during this transition and Carli had graduated this semester and will not return in the fall and I started to worry if that meant I would feel just as stressed as during Hell Week, but without my friend.

I remember we went through great lengths to make sure the students and tutors were adjusting well and to make sure they were managing their stress, but we never checked in with ourselves as supervisors. It seemed like we took on 10x the stress and workload and neglected the fact that we were also students and tutors. Looking back, I don't even think I had the language to articulate what I was feeling or willing to acknowledge it and I now wonder if the other supes were going through the same thing. I just knew that my being a control freak and worrier intensified and that I was not handling being online as well as I would have liked.

Towards the end of the semester and I don't know if it was the stress of finals or "Zoom Gloom," but I started to dread the supe meetings, the huddles became evermore tedious and the tutors did not want to be in them, the meetings felt less productive online, and it became more and more difficult to focus on the meetings.

I used to think that leaving the Writing Center would be the hardest thing I would eventually have to do as I moved on in my professional career. I used to think that because I loved it so much that I would feel sad and have this big emotional goodbye. As this semester comes to an end, I got an email congratulating me for getting the Assistant to the Director of Composition (ADC) position at Fresno State. A position where I would work with the director of composition and work to improve the first-year writing program and to improve the learning experience for the TA's. I had a Zoom call with the first-year writing program's coordinator and I talked about all the ideas I had and the kinds of resources we could provide for the new TA's and I remember being excited when I talked about giving a powerpoint or a lecture to new TA's on activities to do in the classroom via Zoom and what to expect with online teaching and she was also excited about my ideas. It was an amazing feeling that I had something to contribute again. The act of just getting the ADC position was the most validating experience and it felt great to feel useful and that I had something to contribute. As a supe online, I felt useless. It seemed harder to bring up issues and solutions because we were all exhausted and couldn't focus, I was also overworking myself and putting more responsibility on me that was really unnecessary, and I did not feel like I was valued at the end. Now thinking about going into the fall, I just feel tired. This semester is ending and I am not excited looking forward with the new supes and I am not particularly happy looking back either.



~ Carli ~

I'm sad that this is how my time at the Writing Center ends. I've worked here for 4 years. I've never worked at one place for this many years straight. My 1st day at the Writing Center--during New Tutor Orientation--back in 2016, was my first day of living full-time as a woman (for those of you who don't know me, I'm a transwoman). The Writing Center was my spot on campus; I've often referred to it as my "home base." It's where I spent my time when I had nothing to do before class. I took naps in the lounge. I made a few real, outside-of-work friends here. I often tell people that the Writing Center is "where I get my healthy amount of weekly social interaction." I had intellectual conversations at the WC. I've had countless fun, dumb, laugh-out-loud conversations at the WC. I realized I wanted to be a college instructor here. And I used to always think that the WC would be the hardest part of Fresno State to say "bye" to once I graduated in 2020.

But now--and it pains me to say this--I can't wait for it to be over. I love the Writing Center, I do. I don't blame anyone for how I'm feeling right now. COVID-19 is nobody's fault. But being a supervisor online has been so soul crushing. I'm defeated. I have no doubt the supes next semester will do a great job--I'm beyond happy with our returning supes and the new supes we've promoted. But I'm so glad I don't have to worry about giving spiels about the Small Writing Groups to online classes, and I'm glad I don't have to worry about training a new crop of tutors via ZOOM so that they know how to run our groups via ZOOM. I'm so glad I don't have to worry if new tutors are actually doing what we want them to do in their groups since we're not in-person to monitor them. I'm glad.

But I'm not happy with how I feel right now. I'm not happy with how my time at the Writing Center ended. When this school year started, I honestly thought I'd weep on my last day at the WC. I thought it'd be so hard to leave behind. The only good thing about online suping was that it was so miserable, I no longer have to worry about the heartache I'd have felt leaving the Writing Center in person.

O, THE WRITING CENTER, O, THE HUMANITY

I recall those 50 minute sessions.
The student would exclaim, “Yes!”
while reaching for a pen and some paper.

At times the student sits nervously —
fidgety — while scanning the room
and digging through belongings.

I hear highlighters, pens, granola
bar wrappers — exhaustion —
some occasional ringing and vibrating.

I ponder as I stare at a paper crowded
with letters, symbols, Meaning —
a voice seeking to be heard.

After untangling the words and
straightening out the thoughts
an argument becomes apparent.

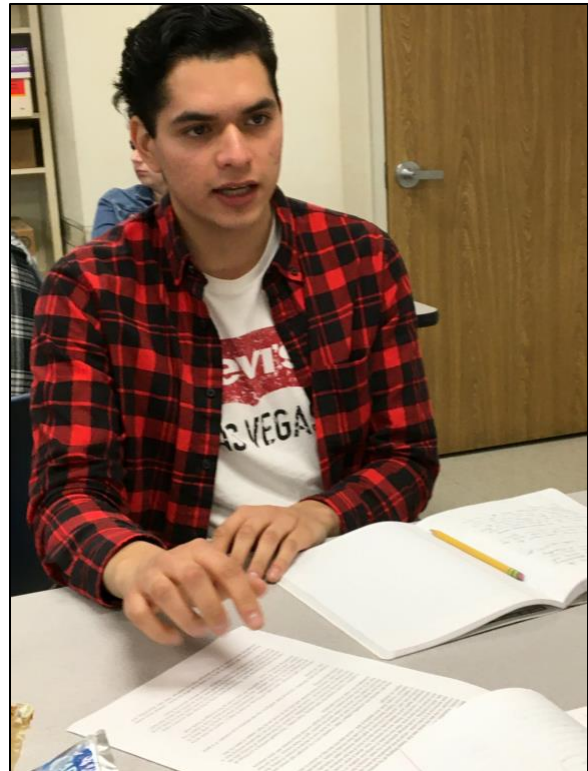
“Ok,” the student may curiously
respond with an eager nod.
The printer might beep.

Pencils scribble, someone’s lead
breaks and a tutor crosses out some
writing with two sudden scratches.

Now I must stare at my screen
to see another student buffer
and speak with a Transformer voice.

The ambience of my room is not
tantamount to the those three rooms
without the mesmerizing paintings.

There’s something about the way
light shines through those windows.
I’ll sure miss that place.





Aidan Castro

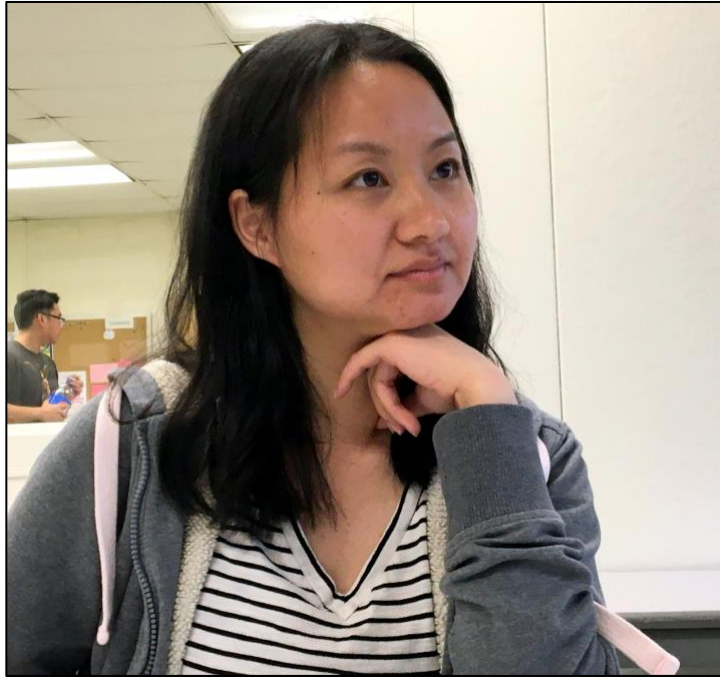
TUTORING: EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED

My first year of tutoring at the writing center has been a learning process filled with unique experiences. A few weeks before Fresno State shut the schools down due to COVID-19, an elderly woman showed up to the writing center seeking assistance. She wanted help with her personal statement for her application to rejoin Fresno State. I sat down with her and began the normal process of a 1-on-1 appointment.

There was something different about this appointment, nothing I was doing was working. The woman had obvious memory issues and was unable to remember what she was writing when I had given her live writes. I had to think on my feet. What could I do in order to help this woman? She obviously was passionate about her education enough to seek out help through the writing center. In this situation I stepped outside of the writing center norms and took a more directive approach with her.

I had her tell me the story of struggles and hardships since she was able to keep her train of thought while speaking. I ended up writing my own bullet points of what she was saying. When she was ready to write her personal statement, I talked her through her story. Whenever she would lose her train of thought, I would point to my bullet point list. She would then continue where she left off. We managed to get through one paragraph before our 50 minute session was up.

She returned again the next day and had unfortunately lost all the work we had done the day before. That was when we decided to create a folder with all the work various tutors would do with her during the 1-on-1 appointments. We would photocopy what we would go over and give her the originals. I was fortunate enough to work with her one more time, and my job was to help ghost write her final draft of her personal statement. She had eye issues and was unable to see the writing on the computer screen. At the end of it all, we photocopied her final draft and sent her on her way. It was a very rewarding experience. Helping others is what the writing center is all about. When she left, I was reminded that this is not the usual approach to take with a student. But when you are a tutor, you have no idea who is going to walk through those doors. Being able to think of solutions on the fly, having a smile on your face, and an understanding demeanor can go a long way with others.



Yia Lee

LITTLE TABLE OF MISFIT TUTEES

Today I will be talking about one of my groups from my very first semester, let's call them Don (a freshmen with better hair than me), Dawn (a sophomore who hated Fresno), and Donatello (not one of the teenaged mutant ninja turtles, but she did like karate). I am going to be talking about this group because, more than any of the groups I've had, they formed a tight bond and made sharing their writings and readings an interesting, interactive event.

To begin with, this group was awkward and did not mesh well until the middle of the semester. The reason for this was, they all took turns being absent (not on purpose) and so we never actually met up as a complete group until they each ran out of their allotted absences by mid-semester. It was when they had no choice but to come that they started gelling better. I was relieved.

As it turned out, once they bothered to show up, they really got along well. They started talking more, and that was great. They were also a bunch of oddballs.

Dawn, for example, was a freshmen who hated Fresno because she was allergic to everything. She was allergic to the grass, the pollen, the air. Sometimes, she would show up with red eyes like she was crying, but when I asked her she said it was her allergies. And also, she hated Fresno. Once, she shared with us her poetry. That day, things got dark real fast.

Donatello might have been the most normal one of the group, but once you got to know her you realized that she was also oddly obsessed with hating organized religion, the government, the court systems, and other establishments of institutional power. And she loved horoscopes and fortune telling.

This group formed an unlikely trio. Donatello was a junior. Dawn was a sophomore, and Don was a freshman. I do not think they were interested in learning the lenses—not at first—but as they got to know each other better and got the hang of doing the lenses, they looked forward to responding to each other's' writings. They always made fun of me because my favorite lens was More About, but they really enjoyed More About, too.

In particular, they were always interested in the drafts that Don brought in. This is because Don would, in the middle of a very serious draft about gun control or 18th century warfare, suddenly insert a random excerpt about Pokémon or his magic card tricks or his dog. He had done this ever since high school, he later explained, to test if his teachers actually read his stuff.

When this first happened, I paused. Why, I asked, did you insert these three lines about Thorn here? Who is Thorn?

Oh, Thorn is my dog.

But why did you write about your dog in the middle of your essay about Napoleonic infantry squares?

Dunno. Felt like it. It wasn't a very good essay anyway. My dog made it better.

I don't know—

Donatello chimed in with, I want to know more about Thorn.

Dawn said, Me too. I also want to know more about how your dog is related to infantry rectangles.

Squares, corrected Don.

Rectangles ARE squares, said Dawn.

No, said Donatello. That's all wrong. *Squares* are rectangles.

I don't remember how this brief detour ended, but I do know **they actually liked incorporating the lenses into their real conversations in the Writing Center. They would get talking about something, and in the middle of the conversation Donatello would go, "So are you saying overall that...?"** It was very interesting to see. I think the camaraderie at our little group table helped foster an environment where they could joke around but still apply the lenses even to their verbal conversations.





Rachel Greenmyer

.doc

-after Anne Lamott

open in my mind
opaque phrases wait
on the cusp of origin
fluorescent idling
 beached under
moonbeam eye strain
seconds spin & everything
feels said so much
 more soundly than
my hands can mouth
unprompted I drift
to empty coffee cup
caffeine in swallows
 of vowels start

to write	what it ever
means & ends	contained unabridged
& anchor again to	rooms & receptacles
floor or bed	in reflection I think
everything's only original	once it's been made
if it lives	I'll make it