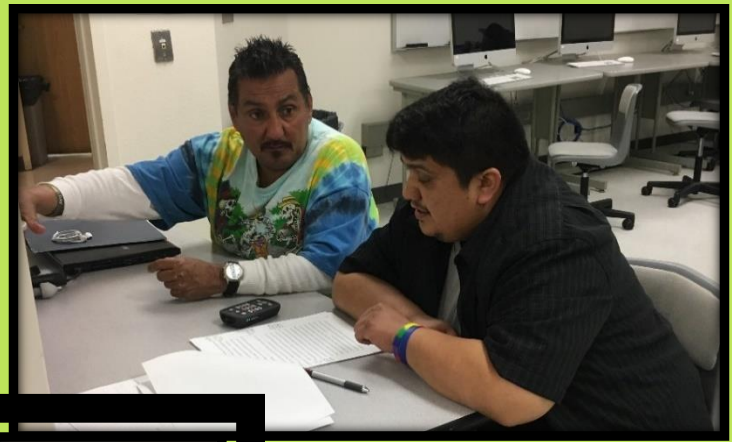


2017

# Writing Center



*Learning While  
Tutoring*



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# Learning While Tutoring

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*Tim Bird*

## AN OPEN LETTER TO INCOMING TUTORS

Dear incoming tutors,

I know you may be nervous about possibly tutoring in groups for the first time, or maybe even tutoring for the first time in general - I know I was. No matter what anyone told me, I didn't believe that everything was going to be fine, and I let my nerves get the best of me. Just know that it is natural to feel like this, and believe it or not, everything is going to be alright. Let me share my experience with you in order to calm your nerves and maybe quell some of the doubts you may have about yourself and your abilities.

I remember walking into the writing center on my first day of tutoring. I was so nervous. Even after the extensive training we had the Thursday and Friday before the semester started, I was still nervous. I had worked in a writing center before, but all of my experience was limited to one-on-one tutoring, and the thought of tutoring in groups was completely foreign to me. When I did my one-on-one tutoring in the past, I hadn't really used any

lenses, and I hadn't stuck to any kind of structure, so I was afraid I was going to mess up. I would just try to address concerns that students had with their papers. It had worked for me so far; however, upon working in the writing center here at Fresno State, I now realize that the things that we do in the groups makes the entire tutoring process easier than what I had been accustomed to in the past.

I remember sitting at my table in the writing center on the first day we were open for groups waiting for my first group to arrive. I had been through the training, and people told me I was going to be fine, but for some reason, I didn't want to believe them. My first group was directed to my table, and after brief introductions and going over the syllabus, we started to do our focused short writes. Before I knew it, the session was over and it was time to send them off to wherever they were going next. "One down," I thought to myself, "only six more groups to go." I was feeling pretty confident after the first week of tutoring until I got to the

first day that wasn't scripted. Then, my nerves got the best of me once again.

I wasn't sure how I would do when I didn't have the script to hide behind. My first group didn't bring anything, so I chose one of their long pieces at random so that I could teach them Center of Gravity. We did the lens, and we began talking about the things that stuck out to us.

Somehow the conversation got onto the topic of writing and reading short stories, and that "ah ha" moment hit me. "We could write about this," I thought to myself, so I asked the group what kinds of things they enjoyed reading, and we started writing. We ended up going from one topic to another doing our focused short writes, and again, before I knew it, the session was coming to a close.

Over the next few weeks, I became more and more comfortable. I learned that the lenses were not put in place to create some type of dogmatic structure that couldn't be deviated from, but rather they were a tool to give purpose to the sessions. They were put in place to give the students and myself a way of being able to respond to a text in ways that we never even thought of. Gone were the days of saying, "It's good," or "I don't know if it flows." Instead of using these words that we thought were the norm, we were asking questions to one another. We were telling each other how a text made us

feel and why. We were saying what we wanted to know more about. Ultimately, we were responding to the text instead of peer editing like we had been taught up until the point where we all decided to take the writing center adventure.

Things weren't perfect, of course, but I had been given tools to use when things began to go astray. If I found we didn't have anything to talk or write about, I employed a simple strategy that Kirk taught us in training. I would ask the students to come up with two non-binary questions based on what we read or our responses to what we read, and then we would choose one and write about it. In almost all

cases, conversation through writing just happened organically after that.

By the end of the semester, I realized that my fears at the beginning of the semester were somewhat unwarranted. I had been given the tools to be a successful writing tutor.

Everything was alright. Some mistakes were made, but what are mistakes other than opportunities to learn and grow as a person?

This is my open letter to all incoming tutors. If you are feeling nervous or scared about tutoring at the Fresno State writing center, just know that you are prepared. Whether you believe it right now or not, Magda and Kirk know what they are doing, and they have given you the tools that you need to be successful here. There is definitely a method to the madness.

**“This is my open letter to all incoming tutors. If you are feeling nervous or scared about tutoring at the Fresno State writing center, just know that you are prepared.”**



*Emily Phillips*

## WE RECOMMEND YOU BUY A NOTEBOOK

There have been many things about tutoring that have stuck with me, from the funny stories tutees tell to the bonds that we make with one another in such a short amount of time. I remember my first tutoring session - it felt like I'd completely lost everything I was ever taught and I was so scared to mess up. If I did, then my tutees lives would be ruined forever and I would always be known as "the tutor that couldn't tutor." I stumbled through the scripted first day worried that the tutees *knew* I had missed that bullet point with some important information or I had forgotten to mention that they may want to purchase their own notebook. However, like most things, with time you learn and you grow.

There have been many days where I've questioned my own abilities as a tutor. I remember one day in particular, I had only gotten four hours of sleep the previous night and was trying to work through a 9 a.m. group session. This group was one of my quiet groups, they didn't talk much and I usually had to practically force them to even say anything. We were working on a prompt, making

lists, doing Sloppy Buckets, brainstorming, the usual. When we were passing the paper around for Sloppy Buckets and the paper got to me, I was completely zoned out. I was staring at the whiteboard struggling to keep my eyes open. I don't know how long my tutees let me sit there, zoned out and half asleep. Eventually, they all started laughing and I looked around like, "What on earth is going on?" Then I realized I had totally zoned out and wasn't even paying attention.

This incident made me feel so, well plainly put, dumb. I knew that I was expected to be paying attention and on top of everything that was going on in the group. But this day, I just couldn't bring myself to be 100% there. There's a feeling that you get from your tutees that *you're* in charge and you run the whole show. And when you mess something up, it feels like they're judging you and your ability to do anything. However, I realized that everything about the group didn't exactly fall completely on me. It is important to remember that the group works together. We are not just a tutor and some tutees

listening to instructions. We need to work with each other, bounce ideas around, and have conversations. The tutees in the group are just as important as the tutor, and there's no need to feel like you're a complete failure because you're human and you're tired.

Which brings me to say, it is inevitable for mistakes to be made during a tutoring session. Sometimes, you may pick the wrong draft for Sayback and then realize that draft is actually used for Play-by-Play. It may make you feel like you've messed it all up, but in the end your tutees will never know. They won't know that you forgot a small step. What matters is that they grow and you see improvements in not only their writing, but also their confidence as a student. If you can tell that they've improved in some aspect of writing, then you know you've done something right.

At the end of it all, look for growth in yourself as well as your tutees. Small victories are the most important, the small mistakes don't need to be

**“It is important to remember that the group works together. We are not just a tutor and some tutees listening to instructions.”**

accounted for. Someday, when a tutee says to you, “Is writing really this easy?” you know you've done your job as a tutor. There will be days that you slip up or forget something. Don't be afraid to admit these mistakes; your tutees will understand. We are all students, and we all make mistakes. It's no big deal if you forget to tell them to buy a notebook, chances are they wouldn't have forgotten to buy one anyways.

I wouldn't say that now I'm the “perfect tutor” or that I never forget to mention the notebook thing to tutees, I mean come on, this is only my second time around the block. Tutoring is not a complicated math formula with one right equation and answer. Tutoring is a chance for you to learn and to grow alongside your tutees. There is no one perfect thing to say or a formula to follow. We are given tools, tools that give your tutees the confidence and knowledge to grow. Don't doubt your abilities or judge yourself too harshly. What matters at the end is the positive experience you gain from being a tutor and the changes you get to see tutees go through.





*Harrison Martin*

## DO DEGREES EQUAL EXPERTISE?

You would think as a graduate student holding a bachelor's degree in English Education, that I would've felt a lot more "prepared" to begin my journey here as a writing tutor, but in fact, that wasn't the case. I remember being just as nervous as my fellow incoming co-workers that first day, looking around at each of them as Kirk led the "fated groups" over to our tables one by one. Why did I feel that same anxiety? Don't I have a paper behind my name that magically deems me as a "professional" in doing exactly this? The answer is simple, no. At this point, most of us has had that one student come in for a one-on-one, where they expect and ask for a "graduate student" specifically for help. They're under that same misguided impression that I initially was, that in fact a degree did miraculously make a person more qualified to do the job we do. My hopes in writing this is to dispel this very belief. To go over my experiences starting here and how the practices of the Writing Center have shifted my perspective of writing and how it has helped me prepare for my future of becoming a professor myself.

Now don't let me get this wrong, I absolutely cherish my academic experiences, and I'm very proud of the collegiate work I accomplished, but I was never really given a chance to *apply* or even

*question* all those studies until I entered the universe of the Writing Center. It suddenly became a very real and truthfully speaking, intimidating, experience once I came to the realization that this was my first true test as a future collegiate educator. My initial reaction was to look back at all that I learned during my studies, but I realized that much of those skills didn't apply. Sure I could've thrown meaningless grammatical jargon at my tutees, or schooled them on the use of metonymy or pathos in a text, but I have found that those skills are not what lies at the core of teaching writing to students. Those are practices and terms that are used by academia to essentially specialize writing, to make writing into a practice only accessible to those "learned" enough. It's no wonder that people have this concept that graduate students are more prepared to engage in writing, since the one thing we do know for sure is how to maneuver around this convoluted language. What the Writing Center has done for me is illuminate these practices for what they're worth, and given me more applicable tools to work with writing as a whole. I think the best way to describe and illustrate these experiences of mine is to delineate the differences between the practices I've learned

previously and the methods we use in the Writing Center.

After having so many papers handed back to me, covered in red ink, I guess I saw the reader as a “corrector,” one who mixes their grammar feedback with their comments regarding clarification. Reflecting back on this, I realize that the process of reading and revising a paper seemed just as haphazard and chaotic as the writing process itself. I think this never clicked at the time of our draft workshops since it just seemed to be the status quo of what everybody else did, including our professors. This doesn’t necessarily mean that the methods were wrong, since there obviously was some improvement made after those days, but I do see now how the revision process could be much more structured. I think as a graduate student, I never really worried all that much on how I gave or received feedback among my peers, because I had always assumed that we’re on the same level and that we could all take any form of feedback and work with it. However, the Writing Center has given me the opportunity to work with nascent writers and those experiences have made it quite evident that this structure in revision is necessary to give a clear direction to a beginner writer. So in my experience, the lenses we are given haven’t only given a new way of looking at writing to my tutees, but have also allowed me to change my perspective of revision, one that is much more suited for the *teaching* of writing rather than the *study* of it.

There are a multitude of benefits and gifts that the Writing Center has given me that I’m truly

grateful for: a writing-based community I feel at home with, lasting friendships with coworkers and supervisors, and even the opportunity to get a “head start” on my career as a collegiate educator. All of these things have created a leaping-board for my future that I couldn’t have gained anywhere else, and I can’t express just how much this one “campus job”

has helped me grow as a person.

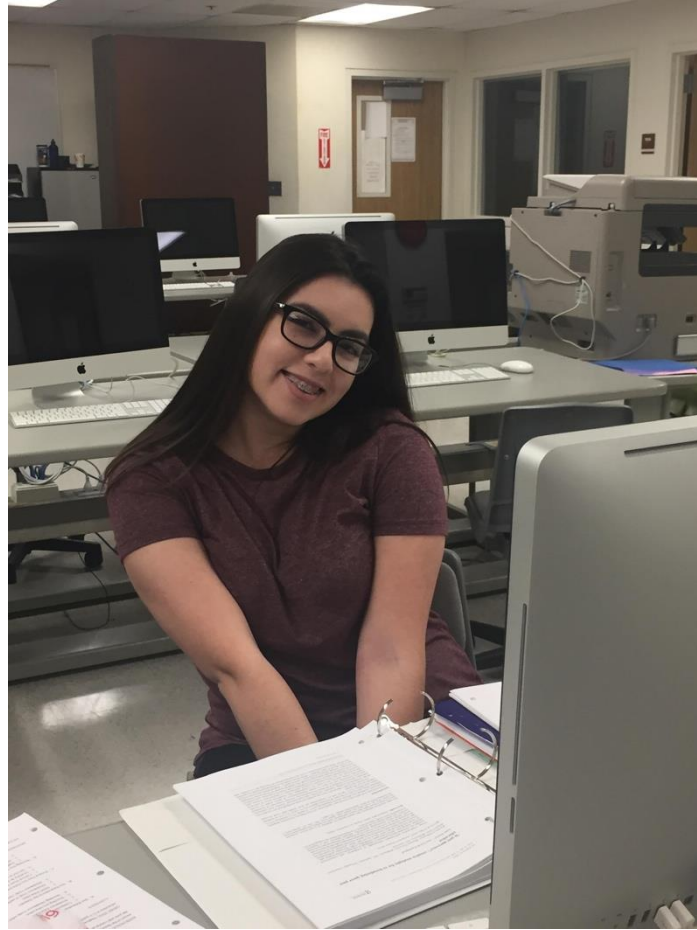
Although I will admit that this growth didn’t come without a few “growing pains” that I had to learn to navigate through. I had to realize that each of us as tutors have our own struggles.

Struggles that are as diverse and distinct as we are, and I have come to see now how being a graduate student was my own unique “struggle” of sorts.

Instead of feeling like the “learned” individual that academia expected me to be, I felt lost, full of knowledge that I had no idea how to practically apply or use. This is where the Writing Center has helped me the absolute most. By giving me a “tool-box” full of lenses and sloppy buckets, as well as the opportunity to use them with actual college students, the Writing Center has helped me transform from the usual “graduate student,” who mistakenly thinks they’re qualified to do something solely based on the degree behind their name, into a *writing tutor*, somebody who is actually qualified to do our job because we have the training and support behind us to do so. Just as the Writing Center has changed my perspective of what it means to be writer, tutor, graduate student, and future professor, I, too, hope that reading this will help shed some light on your very own perspectives and thoughts that you have formed at the Writing Center.

**“What the Writing Center has done for me is illuminate these practices for what they’re worth, and given me more applicable tools to work with writing as a whole.”**





*Kassandra Casillas*

## TEACHING THROUGH THE LENS

When I first came into the writing center as a first-year tutor, there was never any doubt in my mind that this would be a place that I would feel a sense of comfort and welcome. The only thing I was worried about was whether or not I would be “good enough” to be a tutor to students who signed up to receive help from the center. I had always been someone who looks for acceptance from others in life and so this was just another scenario. Would the students in the groups that I was assigned with enjoy my company? Would they actually feel like they were being helped? Would I have the right tools to help them? The thoughts were looming over my shoulders and micromanaging my every decision but I knew I had to look past those worries.

As a first-year tutor, there is only so much that can be taught to you during orientation. I was taught the basic “beginner lenses” and the horribly named “sloppy buckets” technique that would be used for pieces that students brought in. I was taught about the infamous center of gravity lens as a way to

begin introducing lenses to your groups. I was taught how to ask questions in a way that would trigger the students to write instead of talk. I had not stopped to consider how these techniques would help me in my aspirations of becoming a teacher.

With tutoring comes practice. Even though I learned these tools in orientation, a lot of what I essentially learned about being a tutor came from practicing with my groups every time I met with them. There seems to be this assumption from students that come to the writing center that we as tutors know everything there is to know about writing and the devices that come with them. What my students did not know half of the time was that while I was teaching them new lenses to use during and after our sessions, was that I was learning them at the same time. At times, I had to be honest with them and that actually paid off in the end. I thought that by telling them that I was unsure about whether a lens was going to work well on a draft, they would think less of me but it was the exact opposite. That was the

trick about tutoring; I wanted my students to feel comfortable enough to write about their thoughts and then share them with me and the group but I also didn't want to seem unqualified to teach them. I decided that if I admitted my struggles but let my students know that I was there to learn alongside them, then they would be willing to learn as well as build relationships with one another.

There is definitely rapport that has to be built with students in groups. There is no way that they will be willing to open up and be comfortable enough to write and discuss about their issues with the texts that they bring/read. When I first met my groups, they were very standoffish which I expected for the most part. I was once in their shoes when I was a freshman student coming for help at the writing center and so I understood the sense of nervousness they might've been feeling. It was because of introduction short writes that my students and I were able to learn more about one another and develop that sense of comfort that would allow us to work well for the semester.

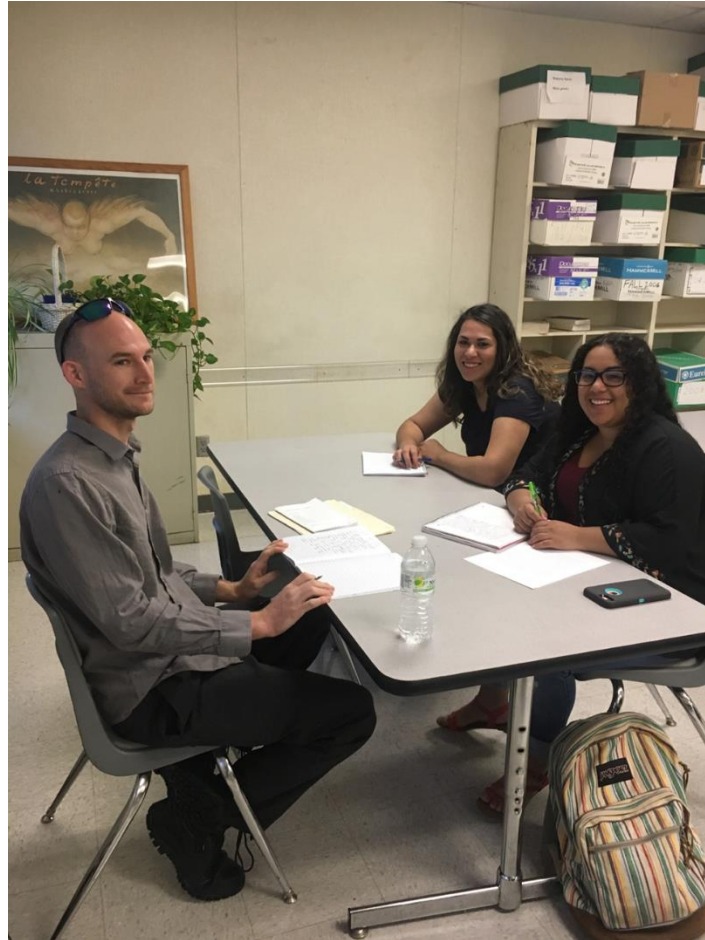
Now as I come to an end with the writing center after a year in order to complete my final student teaching in the Credential Program, I have come to see how useful this place and the things that I have learned here have impacted my decisions on how I will go about teaching ELA to middle school students. As I write this, I cannot help but think about

**“What my students did not know half the time was that while I was teaching them new lenses to use during and after our sessions, was that I was learning them at the same time.”**

how I am already using techniques that I've learned here at the Writing Center in the 7th grade classrooms that I am co-teaching. It has been through what I have learned from working as a first-year tutor that I have come to use my facilitation skills in group discussions. It is through the use of the lenses that I've learned here that I now ask my students to write Centers of Gravity first and sharing with a partner instead of immediately talking as a class. There are no words to explain how grateful I am to this center for teaching me the importance of using writing as a tool to better communicate and understand.

My advice to future first-years would be: Believe in the system that the Writing Center has. There may be times during orientation that you feel so unprepared to take on groups of college students waiting to be helped by someone who they believe has all the answers to writing a “good paper” and you wonder if this is even the right route for you. That's normal though. Don't fret and just know that you have a great support system here; part of why I made it through some pretty overwhelming sessions was because I had such great co-workers to lean on. Those co-workers have become some of my best friends so don't be afraid to open yourself up and get to know everyone here. A lot of what you will learn will almost always come from trial and error but as long as you learn from it and move forward, then there is no doubt that tutoring will be one of the most rewarding things you do in your college career.





*Matt Driscoll*

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If you study language, then the Writing Center is the best place to totally nerd-out. Technically, it's the same as every other room on campus- walls, chairs, desks, and people. What is unique is the premise. The great unnatural scenario of social writing takes place here. It's like walking into a rip in space-time, to before the internet enabled us to engage in public discussion while solitary. That being said, this place is of particular interest to the intrepid linguist.

Two paths meet here. The art of English and the science of language intersect right at the tutoring table. The two are naturally at odds because while art bursts forth from the soul through expression, science tries to quantify it in frustration. Each day I walk in, sit down, and watch Vygotsky's zone of proximal development unfold as non-native speakers engage fluent conversation partners and snatch words and phrases out of the air to keep as their very own. With these wrested words they paint their own stories.

Sometimes it's as if the room is wall to wall with spinning cogs. The grand workings of a language factory are turning and burning with the machinations of writers that negotiate meaning through discussion. It is a great manufactus where production lines create and assemble thoughts, and yet still it is more. The Writing Center is an open market for language exchange. The young folk bring their new words. I took pleasure in hearing a fledgling explain the meaning of PLUR to one of our more seasoned tutors. The experienced students will bring their charming old timey turn of phrase. A nurse may bring their entire medical dictionary and a bilingual student brings a whole other world with them. We all drop these prized possessions on the table and lay them out freely for others to examine and wonder over as if they had found something alien at a bazaar.

My favorite linguistic game to play is to notice someone's language patterns. It's a one and

only fingerprint of sorts- an idiodialect. A preference for certain syntactic patterns in speech is as personal and memorable as their handshake; best of all it can be captured in their writing. Phonological patterns can tell us where they have been and takes a little narrow IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet, not India Pale Ale) to record it. These linguistic dimensions of a personality are windows to the soul that cannot be seen with the naked eye. Even with all of these fascinating opportunities, there are pitfalls that our generation recognizes as “the struggle”.

The struggle is real. True heartbreak is watching a group gradually dissolve and disband. It’s the same frozen despair that overtakes a farmer watching their crops wither under the unforgiving Fresno sun. The first semester was hard to bear because so many tutees had walked off from me without explanation. Without that frank explanation I was forced to look into the mirror to find the answers. They weren’t comfortable answers to go looking for in the first place. There I was in my cave, having a Schmiegel-esque dialogue with myself when it hit. Only after realizing that I had been emotionally cold, that I had been keeping people at arms-length, could I do anything to change. This is stuff they don’t tell you in syntax class. It is having the opportunity to fail as a tutor that prompts us to go back, take “baby steps”, and “untie your knots”.

The Writing Center is a place for all disciplines really. Each day we encounter a slew of assignments from areas outside of our expertise, where all of my beloved linguistic jargon has no bearing. These are situations that put the student author in the position of the expert, relative to their adjacent company. The student that came in for help is suddenly thrust into teaching their group what they will need to navigate the text. Explaining the material to people who do not have the same background knowledge in the subject, forces them to relate what they can to the group. After teaching their peers some fundamentals, they are more confident in their abilities than they ever would have been otherwise. All the tutor needs to do is to assume the role of a student willing to learn and ask the right questions. The question of finding the right question lies in how we approach the literature...how we look at the world through different lenses.

When I first got into the W.C. (Water Closet) I was a bit taken back by the obsession with Lenses. The W.C. leadership, who shall remain nameless, seemed absolutely consumed with lenses. I had to stop and wonder if I was not wandering unwittingly into some sort of handbook based cult. At

**“All the tutor needs to do is to assume the role of a student willing to learn and ask the right questions.”**

first, the lenses seemed like a way to overcomplicate what could otherwise be the simple process of ripping apart weak theses and smearing red ink over ubiquitous mechanical errors. I fantasized how it would be savoring the tears of the tutees from a gem encrusted goblet. But apparently, that’s not what we do here. There was no first blood.

Using the lenses was a haphazard attempt initially. I would open the booklet and say, “Here it is, today’s lens” without even glancing. So there I was, randomly pulling tools out of the kit and using them indiscriminately for whatever job was at hand. Try to picture a carpenter reaching for their leveler, and then bashing in nails with it. A few months of trial and error led to the understanding that each lens had a specific purpose. So the true challenge was identifying the needs of the student in order to select the most appropriate device. Hey, true scientists need to experiment to be sure.

“Say back” for clarity, “More about” for expansion, “Skeleton feedback” for organization, “Play by play” to find dramatic effect. I began memorizing the mantra. Holy crap, it is a cult! The next level after learning to use the lenses for peer review is to take them out into the real world and apply them to situations for which they were never intended. Phrases like “Well, the center of gravity to me is...”, and “Are you saying that...” slowly work their way into our everyday speech and problem solving strategies. At that point, you have the hard-core-Writing-Center-tutor-status. We truly internalize these lenses from repetition. We find that lenses become communicative devices in real-time, they help us navigate interpersonal relationships. For instance, when I am scorned by my wife with the fury of one thousand Hells, surgical application of the lenses can reliably decelerate rising tensions. “I’m feeling \_\_ specifically because of \_\_”. How many times has Play by play saved my marriage? I will also take the techniques and the content centered philosophy of the W.C. to the unsuspecting students of any ESL class that I may teach in the future. The lenses may seem quite magical, but in reality they are not much more than a form of sheltered instruction. The activities are designed to provide academic scaffolding for writers to have a simple structure on which to build and expand their ideas. I will definitely unleash the creative power of the lenses upon the unsuspecting language students of mine.

What all this means is that writing is a process. To revise your work is to redesign the inner workings of your mind. Therefore, to write is to change one’s self. *Scribo ergo sum.*



*Rawan Abuelreich*

## EXPECTATIONS VERSUS REALITY

Students come into the Writing Center expecting tutors to point out their errors and tell them how to “fix” everything. I used to think of the Writing Center in a similar manner. I first heard about the Writing Center from my drama professor. I had written an interpretation of a play for Professor Dion’s class and he used it as an example for the class to follow. After passing out my exemplary essay to the entire class, he told me I should consider working for the Writing Center. I didn’t even know the Writing Center existed at the time. I sought out the Writing Center to view the atmosphere for myself. Everyone was remarkably friendly, so I applied for a job position.

I received an e-mail inviting me to an interview. I was ecstatic because I have always done well in past interviews. I arrived to the Writing Center in my professional attire expecting the traditional ask-and-answer form of an interview. When I first walked in, there wasn’t a single soul in the room. All that stood was a little board instructing me to pick up the piece of writing on a table and to

read it. My nerves began to kick in. I was clueless as to what was expected of me, so I did what I did best: I picked up the draft and skimmed through all the grammatical errors. I was ready.

I was called into a corner room of the Writing Center by Magda and Kirk. They were sitting on fluffy couches, which looked to be very comfortable. I was instructed to sit on a rolling chair. Magda and Kirk began to ask me all sorts of questions I wasn’t familiar with, such as, “How would you respond to the writer of this draft?” I was so confused and nervous that I began to roll in my chair. I knew I blew it.

Surprisingly, I received a job offer that I accepted without a doubt in my mind. I was required to attend orientation, which consisted of two 7-hour days. I figured 14 hours of orientation was sufficient to ensure that I had the capability to tutor other students. On the first day of orientation, all these new, weird-sounding ideas were thrown at me – lenses, sloppy buckets and endless writing. I was quite surprised that we would be writing for the

majority of the time. We were responding to drafts in very nonjudgmental ways. We were dissecting prompts and organizing prompt tasks in a cute thing called Sloppy Buckets. I initially thought we would be judging essays and correcting them. We didn't even correct a single grammatical error! I died on the inside a tad bit. I was itching to correct those mistakes. We shared a lot of our writing, which I was very hesitant to do at first. I was put at ease when I saw my boss, Kirk, writing messily and passionately.

After the first day of orientation, I figured we had been taught everything we needed to know. I could not have been more wrong. Even though I was a bit more comfortable during round two of learning and writing, I was a bit skeptical of how the Writing Center shifted from traditional tutoring. I thought to myself, "What did I get myself into?!" However, I was told to trust the writing process and methods the Writing Center follows, and so I did.

It took me awhile of strictly abiding by the methods taught by the Writing Center for me to realize that writing is an evolutionary process. It's a process that many students, including myself in the past misunderstood. The Writing Center helped me overcome many struggles I personally faced as a writer. That cute thing called Sloppy Buckets saved me from the excruciating all-nighters I was so accustomed to whenever it came to writing anything. Sloppy Buckets helped me understand some of my most challenging prompts, so it shocks me how Sloppy Buckets is not more well-known. Learning how to confidently and comfortably write my first

**"The Writing Center has taken what we use in our day-to-day conversations and applied it into writing."**

draft with the knowledge that I will not be submitting it was very new to me. My first draft was always my final draft. "Shitty First Drafts," taught me that even the people who we regard as the "best" writers might have some of the worst first drafts.

The Writing Center had secondary effects on me. In addition to the improvement I saw in my writing, I quickly began to realize that the way I read changed too! I was beginning to subconsciously use the lenses used to respond to drafts when reading almost everything—even Cosmo. When my older sister sent her personal statement my way for revision, we had two completely different definitions of revision. She had originally sent it to me for the purpose of eliminating grammatical errors. While grammar is still an important aspect of writing, it's only a portion of what to consider. I instantly began to think of all the things I wanted to know more about and expressed them to her via e-mail. She ended up including numerous things in her personal statement that I wanted to know more about and then thanked me!

What I have learned from the Writing Center is that it did not simply invent these lenses from thin air. The Writing Center has taken what we use in our day-to-day conversations and applied it into writing. The Writing Center encourages writers to confidently express themselves through writing and helps them see what's truly in their drafts. It is not a place for the judgment and degradation that are engrained in our minds since grade school. It took the Writing Center to change the way I write and read for me to give it my complete trust. The reality of events at the Writing Center thankfully conquered my poor expectations of the Writing Center





*Jay Singh*

## WHAT IS AVERAGE?

If you were to have an honest conversation with me just a year ago, you'd have interacted with a person hard-pressed to do the things we do here at the Writing Center. There are few words to truly articulate the impression that the methods, atmosphere, and people here have left me with over the past two semesters. I have learned a philosophy and an ideology that I feel has changed my perspective on writing and education forever. This will be my attempt to articulate that.

I am, by no means, the most "talented" writer. Neither am I, by any means, the most hard-working writer or even the writer that enjoys writing the most. I, just like many of the students I interact with and tutor, saw writing as an abstract entity entirely separate from my person. I write when it's required to get a good grade, I get a good grade so I can have the best job opportunities and make the most money. There isn't much different in my own experience from the average experience that the average student has. In a sense, it is not beyond reproach to imply that I held the skill set and

temperament of the average student when it came to writing. My background is what has made my experience at the Writing Center so striking and so interesting to go through, and a large part of why I feel so thankful to have been chosen to work here and experience this.

When I was hired to work in the Writing Center, I assumed it would be much like my previous tutoring experiences. I attended study hall and tutorial sessions all throughout high school because they were a requirement to play sports, and I was hired after graduating to work at a tutoring center for children. I quickly found that the Writing Center, and its methods, were nothing like the tutoring experiences I had before. The methodology was hazy, the execution seemed laissez-faire, and the process seemed tedious and overdrawn. I assumed like it would be a chore to go to work, and that I would hate my time here. Because of this initial view, my shift to the new style of tutoring initially annoyed me, and I went through phases of fear and confidence before I

learned how to settle into my new role as a tutor and a member of our Writing Center's community.

The fear of failing and punishment initially held me back as a tutor. I felt as if I would have a terribly difficult time learning the new style of tutoring, and in my troubles, I would attract the ire of my supervisors and co-workers. In fact, the opposite was true. I have experienced nothing but positive and engaging feedback from my coworkers and supervisors, and while learning some of our material and the purpose of such material has proven to be a challenge at some points, I have always been able to count on my supervisors and peers at the Writing Center to lend a helping hand.

The confidence that I have come to experience has precipitated my greatest experiences as a tutor. I have learned to trust the process of writing, to trust in the intellect and the work ethic of my students and my peers, and to trust in the curriculum created by the Writing Center over the last few years. This trust has afforded me the opportunity to learn, to be curious, and to see writing from an entirely different and new perspective, a more complete and creative perspective. This trust has also afforded me the opportunity to watch my students grow more confident and comfortable with their own writing. It is with immense gratitude that I value the experience of watching a student learn to value their education and come to class with a new enthusiasm.

The most annoying part of learning how to be a tutor was learning how to "rewire" my brain. See, being a tutor at my previous job was a lot more "straight-forward" and traditional in a sense in that it was mostly about collecting a student's work, grading it, and showing them how to do it "right". When it came to the writing portion of their work, my job was mostly to edit their work, tell them what did and didn't "make sense", and try to make a child's writing as coherent and presentable as possible. In that sense, it wasn't difficult to succeed and perhaps,

why it was so difficult to acclimate myself to this new position.

The Writing Center teaches a philosophy of acceptance and continuous learning, not only within the students that enter the Writing Center, but also within the tutors that they hire. In a very real way, we are all students of the Writing Center, and we are all here to learn. To say this is to say that my role at the Writing Center is very different than my previous tutoring job. In a very real way, I learned to connect with my students, force myself to think creatively, and understand the real struggles that students go through with their writing. That's an experience I never thought I would have.

Truth be told, I never actually wanted to be a tutor in college, much less work as a Writing Center tutor. All I knew was that I needed a paying job to earn some pocket money while I was in school, and the

Writing Center seemed to be an easy-going, friendly environment I could see myself in. In that sense, I was one hundred percent right, but I was wrong about so much else. I was wrong about how helpful the curriculum would be, I was wrong about the attitudes and roles that my peers at the Writing Center would have, and I was wrong about how much I would learn to enjoy the experience. I never actually expected to grow an attachment to my students. I never actually expected to enjoy coming up with short-write questions, seeing my students face light up when they get meaningful feedback, and having a smile on their face when they walk in and sit down at the table. I feel grateful for that experience.

To any tutors out there who feel as if becoming a tutor is daunting, or too difficult to manage, I ask them not to believe in me, but rather to believe in themselves. If there is anything to be learned from my experience, it is that as long as you are willing to work hard and come in with an open mind, you can succeed. Kirk, Magda, my peers, and my students, have taught me so much about learning, and learning to learn. That will also apply to you

**“I have learned to trust the process of writing...the intellect and the work ethic of my students and my peers, and... the curriculum created by the Writing Center over the last few years.”**





*Nicole Price*

## WHY YOUR PAPER IS A SALES PITCH

Wow, that really helped.” My student sat back in relief and looked over the page which was covered in his More About statements. His tutoring session was coming to an end and I could see him mentally reflecting over what we had just achieved in our 40 minutes together.

“Are you an English major?” His question caught me off guard and I quickly glanced down at the session’s summary sheet where I had jotted down that he was, in fact, a senior in the English Literature Program. I, however, am not.

“Uhh, no.” Doubt flashed across his face. Of course he had expected my answer to be yes. “But I’m a Business Marketing major.” I added quickly, hoping to evoke some sense of respect from him. His brow just furrowed in distrust.

“Oh.” He responded. Oh?! Didn’t he know how many grueling economic and statistics classes I had to take? I deserved some sort of recognition.

“You don’t have to be an English major to work here, they provide us with all the training we need.” Why was I giving this stranger an explanation for my current occupation?

I may not know how to “hook” an audience the way your English professors taught you, but I

have my own strengths as a Business major. Instead, I know how to sell to you. It’s my job to make you want what I have. My challenge is to convince you that I’m right. I’m an expert at detaching the writer from the writing content. We have to- there is no room for emotion in business papers. It’s strictly

business. So what can you write that shows absolutely no emotion? I write creative briefs, marketing strategies, company objectives, mission statements, and research summaries.

So yes, I’ll admit, when a student brings in a narrative piece I feel like an outsider looking in. It stirs up some distant memory of freshman year English. Sometimes I struggle with simple private writes. Even writing this piece I cringe every time I write the word “I” because “I” am not supposed to be in my own writing.

It’s true that not all of us at the Writing Center are English majors. Yet I think this is a strength, not a weakness. As a Business major, I tend to look at writing differently than an English major would. Although my marketing classes are of different focuses, the common idea is to target an audience, convince them to believe your message, and ultimately have them purchase your product.

This helps me in the Writing Center because as I’m reading a student’s paper, I ask myself: Who is the target audience? What is the message they are

**“First, I don't think an English major is necessarily desirable because the writing center is breaking ground on how to look at student papers.”**

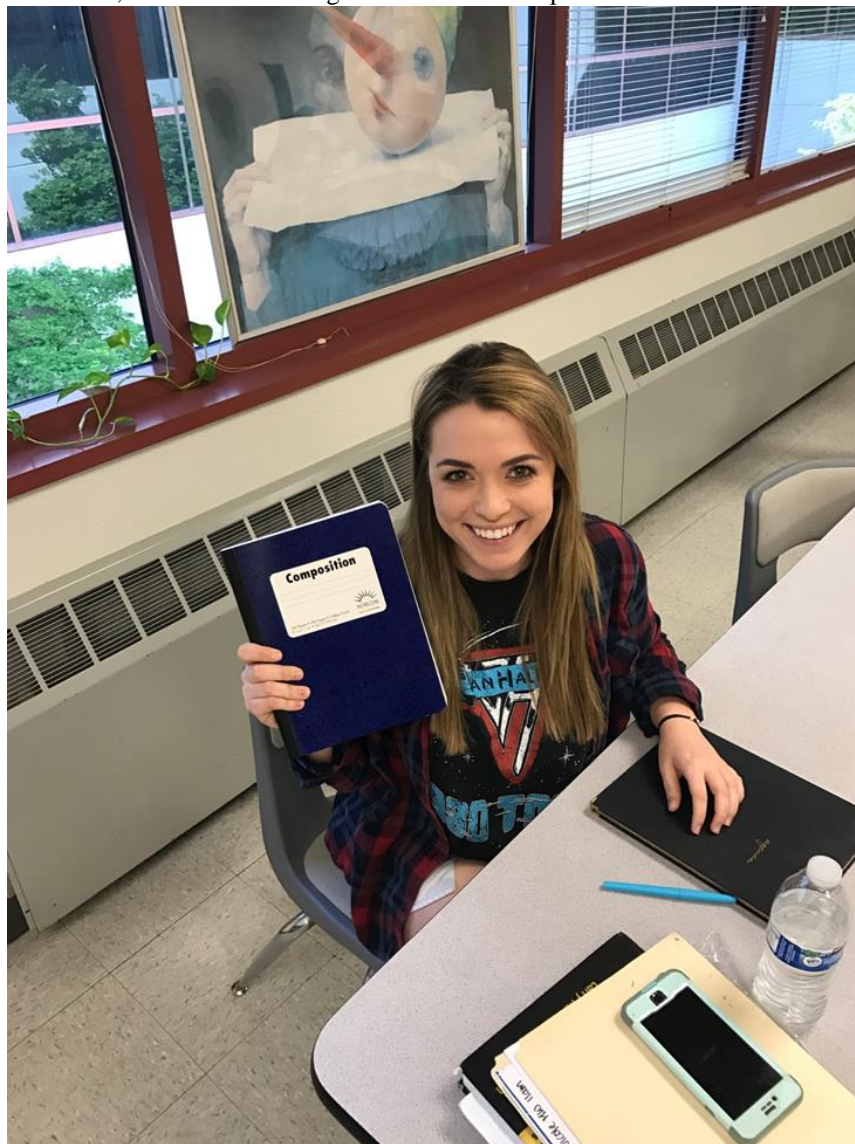
selling me? And why should I care? I don't mean to consciously do this as a reader, it's just how my brain has been conditioned by my major. Lenses such as the Audience lens and the Sayback lens help me ask these questions in ways I was taught through the Writing Center. So no, I'm not reading about your opinion on abortions, I'm reading your business proposal which is attempting to sell me on your marketing strategy for public health issues. This is the power of writing- everything can be considered a sales pitch. The goal is to make your pitch strong enough to impact your reader and ultimately sell them on your ideas. But that's just my viewpoint as a Business student.

I think the writing center hires different majors for two reasons. First, I don't think an English

major is necessarily desirable because the writing center is breaking ground on how to look at student papers. English majors would not have an advantage because they would be forced to abandon all previous knowledge of traditional English tutoring. Instead of tutoring in their familiar ways, they would have to use the writing center's lens methods.

Additionally, I think each major in the writing center offers different perspectives on the same paper. This way the tutee benefits from the sense of diversity and varying opinions. This applies to both 1-on-1 sessions as well as all the different majors in our small writing groups.

This had me wondering: do specific majors give other Writing Center employees advantages in one aspect over another?





*Danielle Potter*

## THE COMPLEX YET RELATABLE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND STUDENT PROCRASTINATION

Think essays. Think dry language. Not touching the forbidden “I”; muttering curse words after using the forbidden “I.” Think late nights. Think sleep deprivation, yawning till your eyes water and the corners of your mouth are dry. Think of the computer monitor, glowing a blank white in the dimly lit room, the insertion point blinking incessantly, mocking you so you’ll be too fed-up to ever type a word.

It wants you to fail. You know it. You can feel it.

And who the hell wants to write an essay? They’re long. They’re boring. They take forever. What’s the point? Who the hell knows. Who the hell cares. And they take *forever*. So you put it off. You put it off just enough so you can accomplish “forever” the night before it’s due.

You do this because how else are you going to force yourself into doing an assignment for a class that’s required? For a class you have to take to get into the good classes, the classes for your major. Or

maybe you are in a class you like, *really* like, then crap-sticks, the professor assigns an essay. Now what the fuck are you going to do? Writing an essay means reading other essays—fucking *articles*—that seem to go on for unapologetic miles and are so dry the Central Valley looks like a damned wetland. So hard to get through you could crack your skull on it, and you would too, if only so you could sift through the contents that spilled out, so you could find what you need to find to get this shit done already.

Who the hell wants to go through that disaster waiting to happen?

Because it comes down to the final product, right? If you attempt “forever” in a few, sleep-deprived hours, of course some of it is going to sound like shit, but that’s okay, because you only had a few hours to do it. That’s all you allowed yourself. Ignore the fact that it was assigned a month ago. Ignore the fact that there were resources on campus to help you. Ignore the fact that you weren’t as busy as you keep

telling yourself you were. Don't admit that there were hours spent scrolling through social media that could have been spent poking through the library's databases. Admit to any of this and you have to admit to that looming, boogeyman-esque fear you have of the blank page. The blank page. A fucking piece of paper.

Don't feel too bad, though. It's not really the paper. It's the chance to fuck-up, to sound stupid, to be misunderstood that's really itching at you. Start that essay ahead of time and you give yourself plenty of time to catch these mistakes, these errors. But what if you can't even make it through that shitty first draft? And if you do make it through, what if you're blind to each and every wrong thing? Are you screwed? Tempted to drop-out?

Is admitting dead-end failure starting to look like a pretty good option? Paradise compared to this mental anguish? Well slow down, kid, cause there's nothing all that threatening about it, not when so many other people are just as scared of the pitfalls that blank page contains.

Well not English majors, surely? I'd go as far to say English majors more than anyone, but I'm a bit biased. If anything, English majors have mastered this fear of the blank page a bit more than students of other majors only because we tend to face it so much more often. We're accustomed to the Boogeyman curving over the shoulder, often using his presence to motivate revision after revision. We let him eat up anything deemed un-useful and can be so bold as to force him to cough it up again if necessary. When it comes to essays, English majors just have more practice.

And I'll let you in on a secret. Professors might give you a prompt five pages thick without saying a word, might over-explain the assignment into a garbled mess, might say nothing at all beyond announcing the assignment, but in the end—sifting past the 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, double-spaced, one-inch margins, MLA format, word count, page limit, “imagine your audience” scenarios—all you're doing is having an opinion. And you can have an opinion, right? I mean, it's like breathing; it's kind of hard to avoid, so having an opinion can't be all that hard. Regardless of who studies what, everyone has an opinion. It's just translating thought into actual words and getting those words into the you-know-the-drill format.

But just getting started is a pain. You have to remind yourself there's such a thing as backspace, that, regardless of whether you know what the hell you're doing or not, that button isn't going to

magically detach itself and wander off in search of a better life. There is the option to start, wipe the page clean, and start again. Backspace doesn't just mean losing all that ground you gained towards the minimum wordcount, the minimum page limit, which I know, can feel like anything but progress as you watch yourself deliberately inch away from the numbers that will signal the essay is, at least in some ways, “done.” Whether you're wiping clean just a word or a whole paragraph, you're giving yourself another chance to go back and try to make your thoughts a bit more clear the second, third, or fourth time around. The earlier you get started, the more chances you'll have to make yourself more clear, to better understand what exactly it is you're trying to say and how you want to say it.

And sure, you could do that. You could sit down and start on the day it's assigned. Easy.

But that's not really the problem.

Some days, it's like you can only get down what you want to say in those last, waning minutes, when there are absolutely no other options of when you can do this paper. It's here. It's

now. And it's probably gonna be shit. Because it's not just the fear of a piece of paper. It's not just a fear of fucking-up, not really. It's the fear of setting your fingers to the keys and finding out you have absolutely nothing to say. And that could mean you're stupid. And that's one of the worst fucking feelings in the world.

And say you do get something down, whether way ahead of time or at last minute. Then there's a whole other set of hoops you have to jump through; the you-know-the-drill stuff. Sure, you get docked points if you don't reach the minimum length requirement, that makes sense, but then there are the bullshit prompts that emphasize how you'll get docked points not just for going over, but with the penalty of x amount of points being docked per five words, or some shit. It can be a struggle enough getting down what you did, but then to get punished if you have too much to say? If you can't contain your opinion within the page that exists between the minimum and maximum page count? You don't only have to give an opinion on a given topic from a perspective you didn't choose—descriptive, analytical, argumentative, expository, need I go on?—but now you have to do it under x pages *or else*? What kind of trap is that? Then there's the fucking format, because right when you have MLA figured out, it changes, or you're thrown a real curve ball and have to figure out something like Chicago or Turabian style, which, admittedly, wouldn't be so

**“Well slow down, kid, cause there's nothing all that threatening about it, not when so many other people are just as scared of the pitfalls that blank page contains.”**

bad if it wasn't repeated every other day that fucking up your citations can look like plagiarizing, and plagiarizing means not just flunking the paper or the class, but puts you at risk for being kicked-out entirely. So you sit there, paper finished, five minutes to the deadline, the mouse cursor positioned over "submit", too rattled to click because what if you missed something that will have much more dire consequences than docked points?

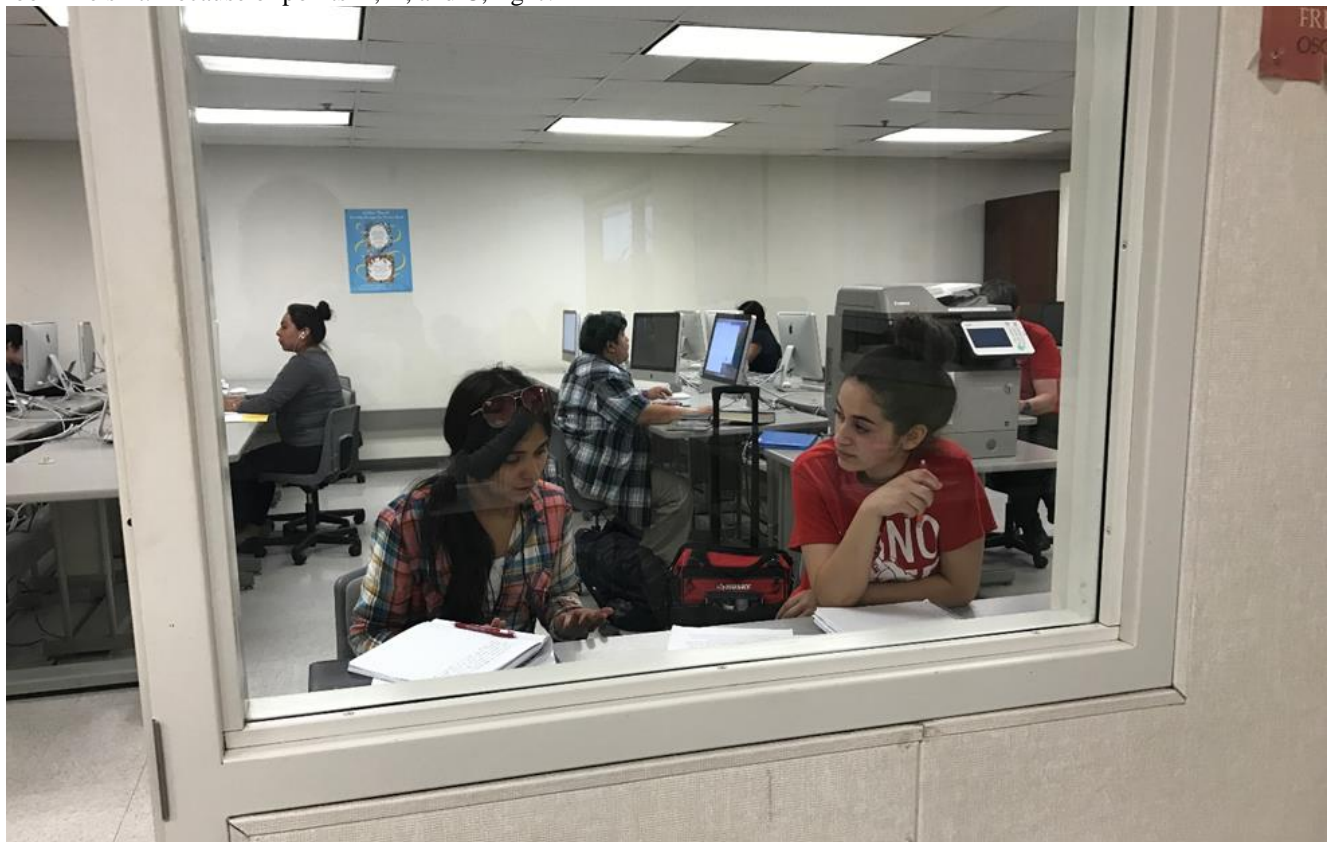
Has the Boogeyman come for you?

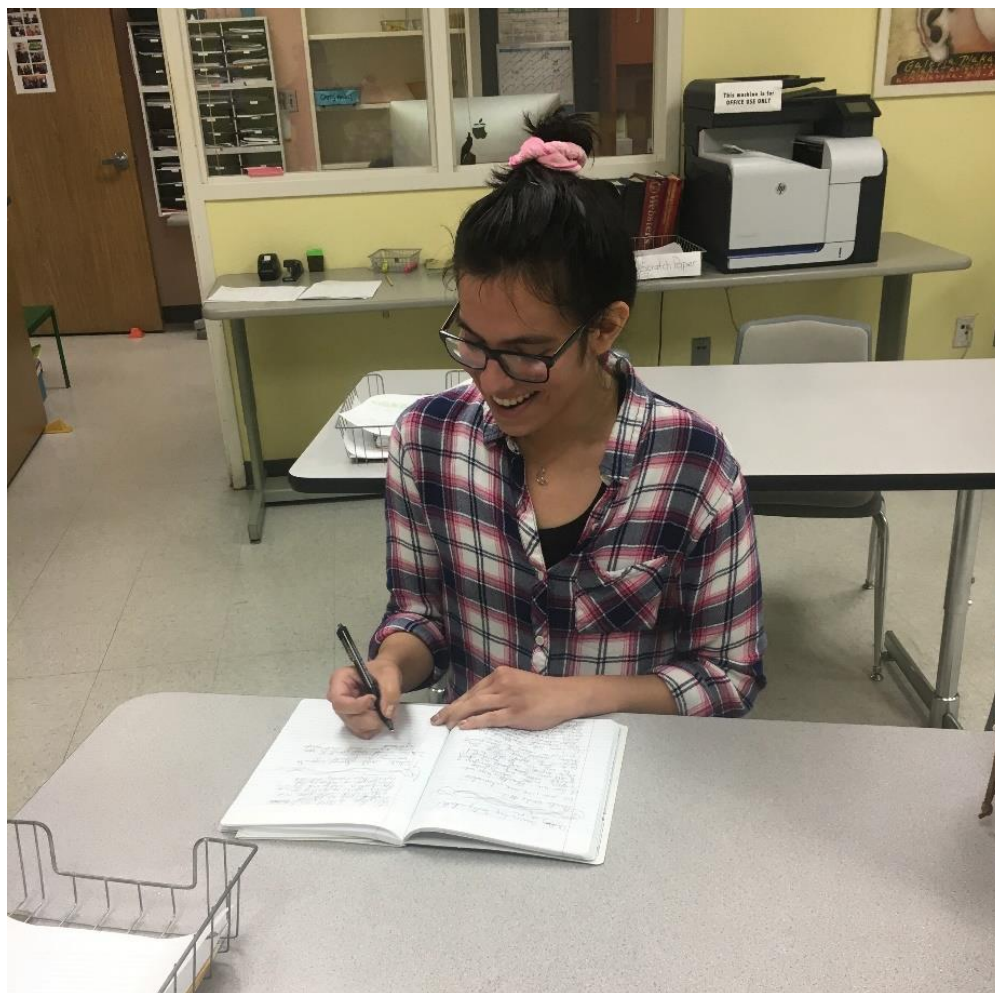
And you could ask for help, but sometimes it's like you physically can't? Because by the time you work up the nerve to talk to the professor, it's too late in the day, and they'll interpret this as you not caring, or as you being disorganized or stupid, or, worse yet, they'll attempt to give an answer but even as you're listening, it makes no sense. Then there's that superstition in the back of your mind that if you do ask, it'll somehow affect your grade, like jinxing something just by talking about it.

But it doesn't have to be this difficult.

Writing a paper is like telling your friends about the latest movie and how it makes the others look like shit. Because of points A, B, and C, right?

Hell, you might get carried away, giving points D and E too, whether they want to hear it or not. And that's okay. It works for your argument, right? Just do that, but on paper, and instead of discussing a movie, per se, do it about how Finland has free college education, the advantages of being bilingual, or whatever it is that's assigned in the prompt. Form an opinion, support that opinion. Just like in conversation, because the essay is a conversation too. More accurately, the essay is the vehicle for your piece of the conversation—your opinion—to get it out there, to agree with some, to combat others to the death (man, that road-rage). And it's okay to have fun with it. It's okay to be enthusiastic about it. You don't have to battle yourself just to get it done. And there're people to help you with this stuff too, ya know—your trusty, local Writing Center, perhaps, because sometimes just having a second opinion can clarify doubts and make the process that much easier. It might not be a sunshine-and-rainbows experience, but it doesn't have to be the crossroads to the end of the world either. And I'll tell you another secret: there are worse things than the Boogeyman.





*Adrian Martinez*

## DO YOU HAVE TO READ MY PAPER?

Sharing your writing can be a terrifying experience. I've always thought of myself as good writer; I'd even go so far as to say that I'm a fantastic writer. I think my writing is, like, amazing. I love reading my essays once they've been completed, and I always take time to congratulate myself once I've finished my work. I think it's pretty clear that I'm very confident in my ability to write.

So why am I so scared to let people see what I've written?

Despite my confidence in my writing, I have always struggled with showing others my work. I think this is rooted in a fear of being perceived as wrong, or even dumb. I'm afraid that I'll be judged harshly, or people will think what I've written is stupid. I don't think I'm alone when it comes to this—sharing your writing is a very vulnerable thing, and if I, a writing tutor, am afraid to show people my essays for these reasons, I can only imagine how

difficult it can be for our students to share their writing with the members of their writing groups.

Over the past two semesters, students have shown disdain for sharing their writing more times than I can count. This usually happens at the beginning of the semester, when students bring in their very first drafts. They often look super hesitant, or they even say something along the lines of, “ugh, okay,” before tentatively placing their essays on the table. Also, I frequently hear students say things like, “please be nice to me,” or “I still have more to do with this,” right before we read their work, as if they are certain the group members are going to harshly criticize their paper.

When I first started working here, I did my best to assure my students that the Writing Center groups are a safe, judgment-free zone. The group members are here to help them, I said, and I told students that sharing their work is actually super beneficial, since

they can get feedback or helpful input that they hadn't even considered before. Me saying this seemed to help make most students feel slightly more comfortable with sharing, so I kept saying things like that. I felt like a hypocrite though, because I was still scared to show my own writing to people.

And I remained scared until I saw the strides my students were making in their own writing. As time went on, I noticed that the group member's input was totally constructive—the way the lenses are crafted ensures that the responses we give writers are helpful and free of evaluative criticism, and this is super important; evaluative criticism, deciding if a paper is “good or bad,” is the kind of feedback I was scared of getting. Being told my paper was “bad” was always in the back of my head, so I never shared my work, and I think other students feared the same.

Because we actually address ideas, as opposed to just judging someone's paper, it helps students see that writing can never truly be “wrong,” and it's okay

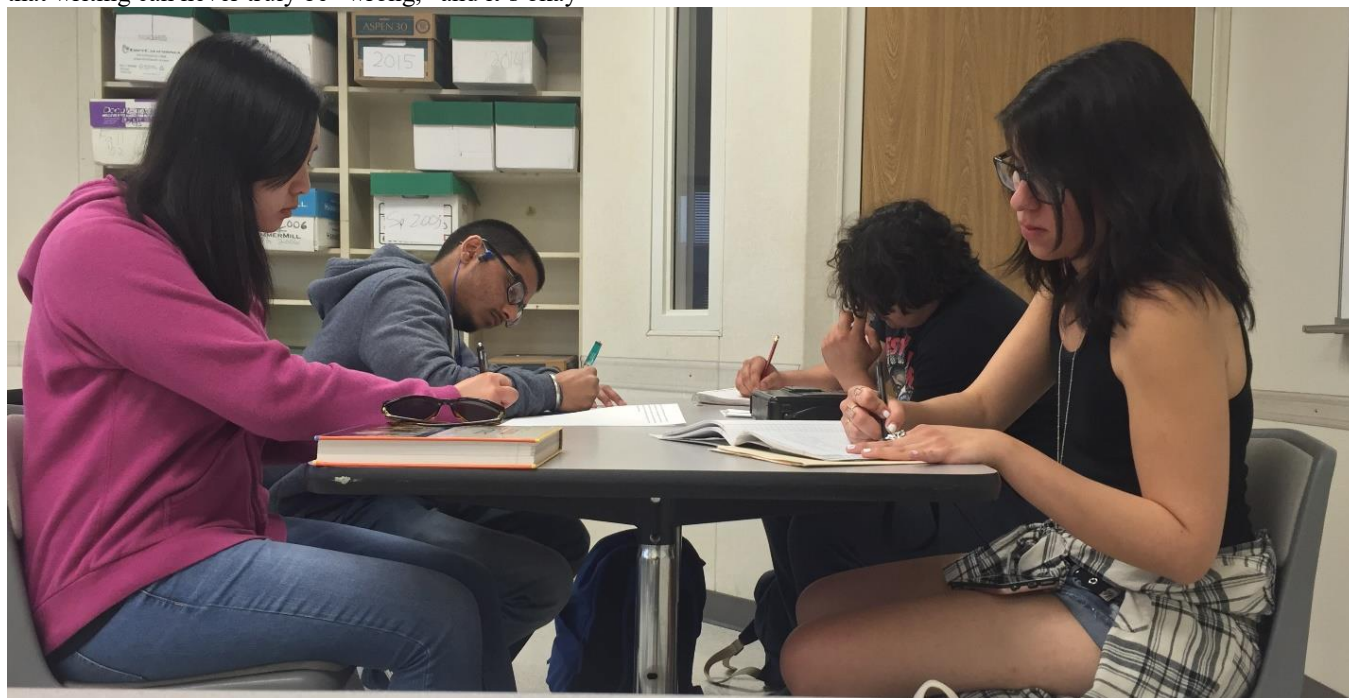
to make changes to your work, because writing is an ongoing process. Sharing your writing with others can only help make your paper better, and being open to sharing your ideas, and hearing the ideas of others, makes you a better writer.

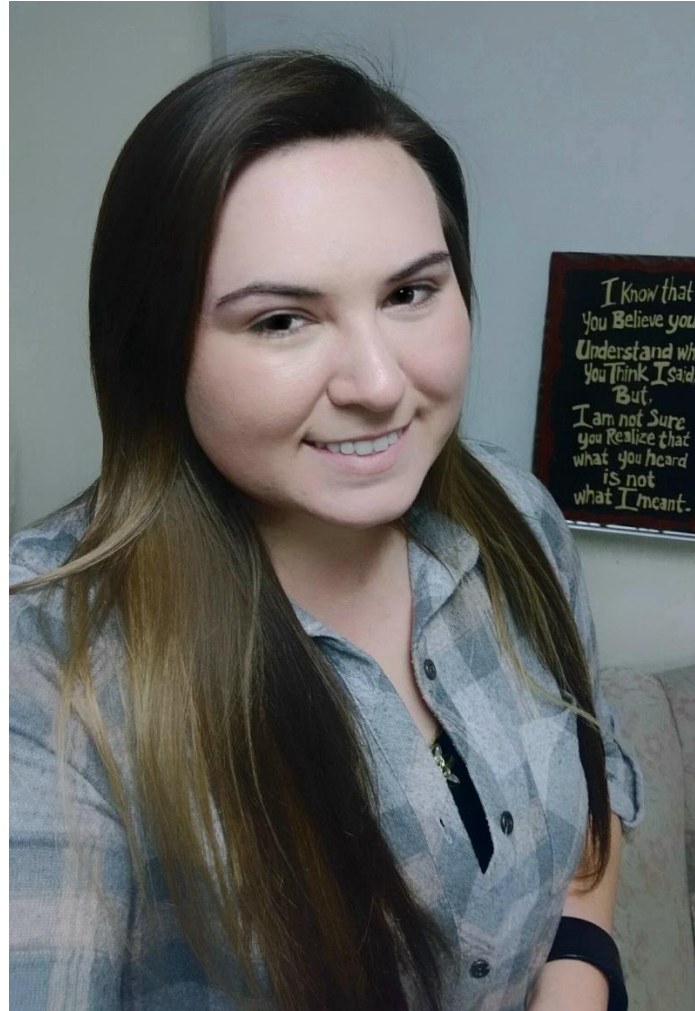
Seeing my students incorporate their peers' suggestions inspired me to start bringing own writing to the groups—although I am a much more experienced writer than the students I tutor, they were all still capable of giving me helpful suggestions, or bringing something to my attention that I hadn't considered before.

The writing groups helped me get comfortable with sharing my own writing, and being able to share my own writing has

allowed me to get incredibly useful feedback on my papers that I wouldn't have gotten if I hadn't shared my work in the first place. The Writing Center's methods work, and have turned me from an amazing writer to, like, the best writer ever.

**““I'm afraid that I'll be judged harshly, or people will think what I've written is stupid. I don't think I'm alone when it comes to this—sharing your writing is a very vulnerable thing, and if I, a writing tutor, am afraid to show people my essays for these reasons, I can only imagine how difficult it can be for our students to share their writing with the members of their writing groups.”**





*Karley Lassley*

## WHY IT ALL MATTERS

I have realized over the course of working at the writing center that the way we conduct tutoring is beneficial in many ways. It follows a more accepting and open way of looking at writing that breaks from the traditional views of what writing should be. The way we treat writing helps develop tutees and ourselves into better writers and empower each of us to use and value our own voices, especially in writing.

Starting out as a student just beginning to work here I believed that our job was basically to work with people on the polishing path that we rarely even do in 1-on-1. I was taught through school that this was the expectation of revision. I once would write out my paper, look for minor errors, and almost never think about doing content revision. Since working here, I have learned that my idea of revision was only a small part of becoming successful with

writing. I've learned it is ok to look at the ideas in a text and actually respond to them, potentially scrapping whole paragraphs and inserting entirely new ideas. I have had moments in groups where students have reflected these realizations, and it has inspired my own. I will often do short writes to get my mind flowing. I'll write multiple drafts and revise as much as I can before it is due.

Working here has improved my own writing and allowed me to help others improve as well. In one group I led last semester, my tutees were a group of all men. When we looked at a sample draft that could be considered sexist, I could see this group of guys realize the responses they would be reading would be discussed with a woman. I began to realize their writings were done in such a way that voiced their opinions while being both respectful to me and the initial writer. I talked to them about this and



pointed out that they were being aware of their audience and we wrote about the importance of doing so. Because of experiences like these, I find myself wanting to help my sisters and friends who ask for writing help by taking the time to sit with them for about an hour and use a lens. Originally in this situation I would simply act as a proof reader.

The various lenses we use here at the Writing Center are able to push writers into a mode of conversation that allows us to feel it is ok to make those bigger changes. We help students to see that we can take a look at a text from really far away, we can take a more focused approach to revision, and that the different moves we make in speech follow the techniques we can use for revision. They also allow feedback in a positive and respectful way that can help tutees and others see that a “shitty first draft” doesn’t make someone a lousy writer, but a learning participant in the conversation of writing.

When I first started here I was honestly a little confused with the amount of writing we do outside of the paper itself, another aspect of the more traditional view of writing I’m more familiar with. I’ve come to learn that the saying I’ve heard several times in my life, “Scribendo discas scribere,” or, “by writing one learns to write” is a statement that couldn’t be more true. As one uses their ability to write, we gain a certain confidence in our abilities. This allows us to take on a new view of ourselves as writers. The power of self-confidence in this ability level can be astounding. Psychologically speaking, each person has an internal dialogue constantly running through their minds. Your sense of who you are and likelihood of success improves when you fill this monologue with positives instead of negatives. In teaching students that they can write and that there is no reason to think they can not, and in showing them that what they have to say matters, we empower students to fill that monologue with positives toward

writing. In doing so we empower them to feel confident in the strength, power and worth of their own voice. Once someone can stop telling themselves that they are not good at writing and begin to see that they have the ability, their skills naturally improve and it’s wonderful to see this in our tutees.

Besides confidence building, exploring ideas through writing followed by discussion allows students the opportunity to write more freely rather than feel constrained by form or any permanence that a typed paper may feel like it has. Writing in this way also guarantees everyone a chance to voice their ideas in the types of language they use in their everyday lives. We allow tutees to bring a multitude of literacies with different discourses into sessions, which allows students to bring their own experience and knowledge in things not necessary traditionally academic. Teaching tutees that writing can be a free expression of ideas, and that their voice and ideas matter, can encourage them to explore directions they never thought of and empower them to let their voice be heard through their writing. A great example of this is shown in the publication pieces we have been working on. As we have gotten in groups to revise each of our own pieces, I have seen that every draft demonstrates that you need your own unique voice and style of speaking to truly create powerful writing. These discourses are unique to each of us and no way that we were right in the forms is considered correct or incorrect.

I believe that the things we do here really make a difference because we don’t just help develop better writers, we empower people through writing. Our methods focus on joining a conversation in each person’s familiar literacies, building a positive self association with writing, and responding in our own voice through our own experience. This focus sets up the writer to demonstrate their own views and see that their opinions and their writings matter.

**“I’ve come to learn that the saying I’ve heard several times in my life, ‘Scribendo discas scribere,’ or, ‘by writing one learns to write’ is a statement that couldn’t be more true. As one uses their ability to write, we gain a certain confidence in our abilities.”**



*Mariah Bosch*

## WRITING IN DIFFERENT AREAS OF MY LIFE

When first becoming familiar with the writing center and its procedures, I was surprised to learn how collaborative the tutoring process would actually end up being; I had a set of expectations about tutoring, and this was definitely not one of them. I'd come to expect I'd be in the role of an instructor rather than a facilitator, more of an authority than a peer. This was a much different experience than I would soon have as tutoring began, and what this also showed me was that writing could take different roles in my life. The goal of the writing center techniques was to redefine the expectations students have about their relationship with writing. What I didn't expect was that it would also redefine my own.

As students go through different courses and churn out papers for each one, writing becomes something that is just a given, not something that is necessarily enjoyed by everyone. These students may dread writing, fearing the red pen marks on their final drafts. This fear of writing is something that can apply to any discipline or grade level and in college,

there's little difference. This is something that the writing center will concede; when beginning the tutoring process, we try to relate to students by telling them our bad writing experiences as well as the good, leveling the dynamics between the tutor and students. We can admit that writing isn't easy, but we also tell students that it isn't impossible either. In my experience, writing hasn't been something I've struggled with, but instead decided I'd dedicate my time to in college, pursuing an English degree. This usually makes students skeptical about my issues with writing, assuming that since I'm in this major, I've got it all figured out. Academic writing is one area of my "writing life" that I've been able to learn a lot about - I've tried my best to adapt and be open to learning more about writing for different classes I've taken. This area of my life as a student, and as a writer, is one that isn't the best or most exciting, but it's an area I've developed a kind of patience for. I, like the students I tutor, know that professors all have different ideas of "good writing" and that all of us have to figure out just how to situate our writing into

that expectation. Working at the writing center has made me much more self evaluative when it comes to my academic writing and how that fits into the rest of the writing in my life. At the same time though, this way of critically thinking about writing that I've learned here has given me more confidence in other areas of my "writing life", such as my personal work.

Working at the writing center has shown me the importance of practicing writing when the opportunity presents itself. As a tutor, I tell students that you learn how to write by simply writing more - an over simplification, maybe, but something I've learned to be true to my own experiences. In teaching this emphasis on practice, I've developed it in my own writing. I've always struggled with getting myself to write poetry, despite enjoying it. I've tried to develop the same kind of willingness to practice writing that I pass along to my tutees. This has made me accountable to myself and producing more work over time. I think the attitude of practicing what I "preach" as a tutor has affected the way I think about my own writing - I try to write often so I can see how I can improve or change my style. In encouraging others to write often and become more comfortable with it, I've taken the same advice in regard to my own work.

**"The goal of the writing center techniques was to redefine the expectations students have about their relationship with writing. What I didn't expect was that it would also redefine my own."**

My poetry has benefitted greatly from this desire to write more often, as I feel I've come to understand more about my personal style of writing and what I want to develop into as a poet. I want to feel more confident in my own work so that I can feel comfortable doing readings or submitting it to publications. This, of course, is the goal of many other writers too, and I feel that confidence is where I can begin developing my process into a more productive one. I feel that

putting the same emphasis on practice that I apply to academic work onto more personal work is something I never really thought to do, but the motivation is much needed and has turned out to be beneficial.

Overall, the writing center has helped me gain skills through tutoring others that I have applied to my own work, academic or personal. Both areas of my "writing life" have seen improvements because of my renewed confidence in writing and I believe this can be attributed to the way that I've been able to practice writing more often and at my own pace. I'm interested in applying other skills that I've learned to my writing and developing my skills as a more confident writer





*Lia Dewey*

## WRITING HELPS

Anxiety sucks. It sucks because people who don't have it don't understand it and people who do have it don't really talk about it, but I get anxiety about a lot of things. I feel my heart pound as I force myself to get out of bed some mornings. I get this tightening in my chest every time I have to approach a professor or a boss or anyone in a higher position than I. I feel myself heat up whenever I have to talk in a non-scripted fashion. In fact, I usually try to script situations in my head so I don't babble or choke. I even get anxiety when I write. I can't actually remember a time when writing didn't make me nervous, even going back to first grade when we were practicing writing out letters of the alphabet in shaving cream on our desks. This probably had more to do with the fact that I'm a lefty and the teacher always had to give me separate instructions. I hated everyone looking at me, the lone southpaw, but it definitely propelled me into thinking that writing wasn't my friend.

In 5th grade I started seeing a therapist. She recommended that I take up journal writing which I

actually kind of liked, but I'll never forget my classmates' reactions to seeing me writing in my monkey journal at recess instead of playing basketball like a "normal" kid. At my small, ghetto Catholic school, there was no room for mental illness. After that I decided writing was meant for the classroom not recess. I carried this mentality all throughout middle school, high school, and eventually into college. It was only when I started working here at the WC that I started journaling again. I was prompted to pick it up again because of the daily private writes we do with our groups. Writing things out-- how I feel, what I plan to say, things I need to do-- it's like inserting a key into the lock on my body and unlocking it so that it releases all the tension my anxiety makes me feel. 10 year old Lia knew this worked, but 10 year old Lia felt a little ashamed at admitting she needed something extra to help her live life normally.

While I can say that my experience with writing is pretty unique, I know a lot of other college students feel anxious about writing too. There was a study done by the American College Health Association in 2008 that showed that more than 30% of students felt too depressed to function and nearly 50% showed symptoms of anxiety. These statistics are alarming, so it's natural for students to seek outside help. Some students are prescribed medications like Adderall or Xanax by a psychiatrist. Some students visit a therapist. Even more bottle up their feelings of stress and anxiety. This is definitely a tactic I've used many times before. A relatively unthought of method of therapy, though, is writing. I think because students see writing as a purely academic task, they don't take it seriously enough to work in other aspects of their life too. That's why in the first couple weeks of tutoring, most students don't write much in their private writes. They don't have a prompt, they don't know what to write about. They don't realize that writing doesn't always have to be an assignment, you can use it for whatever purpose you want.

Doing private writes in an academic setting such as a group session at the WC can honestly be revolutionary. Students can learn the value of taking 5 to 10 minutes to just clear their minds and write whatever pops into their heads, and appreciate how it prepares you to take on a daunting task such as writing an essay. I know before I could even sit down and write this piece, I had to do a couple private writes *about* private writes. It works.

Earlier this semester there was a specific moment when I saw private writes really affect a student of mine. This student is really shy; she often

wouldn't talk unless prompted, but she had a lot of great ideas. I think she was shy even when private writing initially, as if I would pull the rug out from under her feet and actually make her read what she wrote during that time. After a couple weeks, I think she realized she could trust me and she was writing like fire. On one particular day I just let her write. I didn't stop after about 8 minutes like I usually do. She was writing so fervently, I knew she had something she needed to get off her chest because she'd never

**“Writing helps-- on multiple levels,  
with multiple problems.”**

written like that before. After a little less than 15 minutes I asked them to finish their thoughts, and she looked up at the time. She

kind of looked at me a little embarrassed and smiled and said, “Sorry.” How I wanted to hug her and say how proud I was! “Not a problem,” I responded instead.

Seeing firsthand that journaling works for other people too was really enlightening. First of all it made me look back and think “fuck you” to those mean kids in 5th grade who told me I was weird for writing in my monkey journal. And second, it showed me that you don't need a mental illness to justify personal writing. Writing helps-- on multiple levels, with multiple problems. I think that showing students when they're younger that keeping a journal is great, they'll learn that writing doesn't always have to be this overly formal task that you only do for classes. And even when it's a formal essay, they're not that scared to work on it. Private writing, personal writing, journaling-- whatever you call it-- it makes developing a relationship with writing a lot less scary.



*Jazmin Flores*

## the room with the open walls

and  
 many tables where students sit  
 three or four and you can't tell that one of them is a  
 tutor  
 even though there are also name pyramids with each  
 of our tutors' names on each table  
 but only if you look close enough  
 it's no wonder that girl the one who came in for a  
 walk-in couldn't believe that a tutor wasn't available  
 for one-on-one but I had to explain  
 that those were groups and they meet all semester  
 she said "oh" but also looked like  
 she didn't believe me

my pen touches the paper where  
 we've spent weeks writing about  
 their stuff  
 so  
 it doesn't come as a surprise when  
 one of them reads  
 with our eyes on them  
 only them:

I missed high school a lot because  
 my mom was sick,  
 I'm not good at trusting other  
 people because I grew up with my  
 grandparents when my parents  
 died,  
 writing about my cousin's death for her funeral was  
 my worst writing experience,  
 my hero is my father and he's in jail

when I first walked into this loud openly lit room I  
 was overwhelmed

because when you listen closely you can hear the  
 sound of interest in  
 the students' questions  
 as they respond to each other's writing  
 and I wonder when that happened when writing at the  
 table became the norm  
 when did my headspace make the group a safe space

in a moment where we were confused because our  
 girl has too many thoughts and not enough words on  
 the paper to fully communicate one

they could be fragmented thoughts, I  
 never really thought of that possibility  
 until I talked to a fellow tutor  
 but our group didn't say it like that  
 instead it was a moment for our  
 fellow groupmate to write to us what  
 it was she was getting at in that one  
 paragraph through a shortwrite meant  
 just for her  
 the other students and I would write  
 about  
 one of them called it yolo writing  
 and I thought I could write  
 that maybe I would write  
 about Mia  
 Mia Barraza

or how people keep referring to her now that she's  
 gone:  
 Mia Barraza Martinez

I did,  
 I did write something and it wasn't painful to write  
 about her at the table in company of my group

**“I did write something and  
 it wasn't painful to write  
 about her at the table in  
 company of my group**

**my writing was more a  
 question if I should use this  
 publication to write about,**

**my friend**

**who was once a tutor”**

my writing was more a question if I should use this  
publication to write about,  
my friend  
who was once a tutor  
but  
when I read it out loud I heard  
the tears in my voice and felt them  
clinging to my bottom eyelids  
so I had to speed through my writing trying hard not  
to trip even when  
my tutees were gentle in their responses

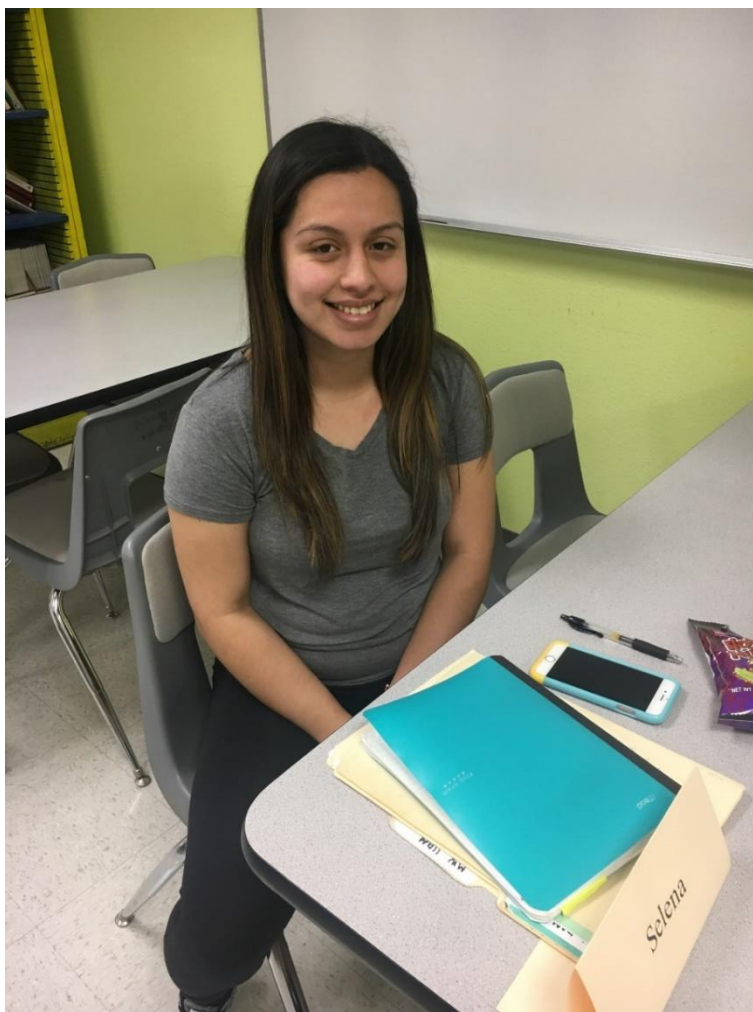
if my courage hadn't wavered  
I think I would have written about that night in fall  
2015  
it was october I think  
after our English class when Mia and I were starting  
to talk to each other

and I could tell she was one of those few people you  
could ask anything  
she didn't act like I was wasting her time  
I could tell because  
I asked her advice on how to go about teaching a lens

I think

it'll be two years pretty soon since that day  
even when I don't remember what exactly I asked her  
I can tell you we stood on the sidewalk next to a  
lamppost right next to the parking lot next to Peter's  
building  
for a long time and not once did she hurry  
her words  
soft  
warm and  
encouraging





*Selena Carbajal*

## SELF REFLECTION MAPPING

### *Before the Writing Center: Identity Crisis*

I am a triple major in Psychology, Women's Studies, and Chicana Studies. I am part of the Ronald E. McNair Achievement Program which is intended to assist first-generation, low-income students from underrepresented groups to pursue a Ph.D. I am a staff reporter for *La Voz de Aztlán (La Voz)*. You'd think I'd feel like I have my shit together and I kind of do, but it wasn't always so; before the Writing Center I was just a double-major in Psychology and Women's Studies with no plan of what to do with my life.

I heard about the Writing Center from a Chicana Studies professor who was willing to write me a letter of recommendation if I applied and I thought why not, I'm comfortable with writing and she saved me the hassle of having to ask for a letter of recommendation. I also didn't know about McNair and thus had no interest in applying until I was

encouraged by a Psychology and Women's Studies professor. As my Psychology professor once told me, it would be a waste of talent if I didn't pursue a Ph.D. I hesitantly applied to McNair, deciding to apply last minute (I worked on my application essay a week before it was due only because my Women's Studies professor had wanted to revise my application essay once I had it done). Somehow, I got in, I thought when I received an email from the McNair and then the Writing Center that I was selected. Somehow, I got the job as a tutor even though I dreaded the idea of having to talk to other people.

Before I joined the Writing Center and McNair, I didn't even have a firm grasp of who I was, what or who I wanted to be. As you can tell I had no initiative and was lucky to be guided by professors in my majors. I didn't know what I was getting myself into; I felt like an impostor, that I wasn't fit to be a tutor or researcher/scholar, but that



was just my anxiety talking. All I had known so far was that for McNair I eventually needed to figure out my research interests and where I would pursue a doctoral degree. Even though in my application essay for McNair I had written about wanting to explore research about the navigation of higher education for Latina first-generation college students (FGCS), I still had no idea how to get a research topic. When I got hired at the Writing Center, I had just gotten into my job as a staff reporter to which I also dreaded the idea of having my writing be published, but since my best friend was a co-editor for *La Voz* I thought why not. My lack of article ideas for *La Voz* were an even hotter mess.

However, the conversations that emerged through my group tutoring sessions created a safe space for tutees where they could bring in parts of their identity that they don't openly discuss during the first week of interactions.

These personal discussions have helped me shaped my research topic as a McNair scholar and to write my articles as a staff reporter for *La Voz de Aztlán*. Learning about their lives and their struggles as students helped me pick a problem to research about the schooling experience of FGCS. I wanted to explore how students may play the role of being a student at home while they have other roles. I also experienced the stress that came from receiving different messages at school and at home; the tension that emerges when individuality and personal success is valued in one space and not at another. You're expected to spend time with family but often experiencing guilt or anxiety when choosing to complete coursework instead.

My first semester as a tutor, I had primarily tutees whose native tongue wasn't English and it made me think how as a native Spanish speaker I also felt the tension from thinking I needed to have perfect English and how we can often get lost in translation—some sayings and words lose their intended connotation when you roughly translate—and thus we lose part of ourselves. One of the focused free-write questions I had with a group was asking about our experience with the Spanish language. My students and I wrote about how Spanish was a major part of our childhood, but we often feel guilty of losing our fluency in Spanish when learning English. This guilt exists because as Gloria Anzaldúa once said, "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language." One of my first articles with *La Voz* came from this free-

write; it was about how I felt tension being bilingual and bicultural. Sometimes I don't feel comfortable speaking Spanish in some places. I reflected on the experience of growing up feeling that English was more of a foreign language to me because I had grown up with Spanish as my native tongue. How having two tongues often butchered my identity as well.

### ***Learning to Be Writers***

During the first week of tutoring, we have our students write about who they are as a writer. During one tutoring session, I had a student who, at the end of the semester, read her 20-minute free write about who she was as a writer. Her first sentence was along the lines of "I don't see myself as a writer," to which she stopped and said, "but I do now." It's moments like these that make you feel like a proud parent, you see your tutees grow as writers and readers. You give them the confidence and skills to be a writer in the sense that writing is a skill that you continue to practice beyond the Writing Center.

During a different group tutoring session half-way into the semester, I decided to have a free-write question about what continues to be a concern about our own writing. I stated that I had trouble differentiating "been" and "being," I occasionally still write wordy sentences, and often I confuse APA and MLA. After I shared this response with my group, the tutee sitting next to me looked at me and asked, "Do you really have trouble with that?" and when I replied yes, he said, "Well, you need to get your shit together." This group obviously got comfortable with me since it wasn't the first time they got to know more about me as a struggling writer as well. I am also a student. I also struggle with my writing, with English. But the point of being here is to learn. To learn how to create conversations about writing. We learn to demystify the idea of writing and how to be writers. We learn more about ourselves as readers, we learn about our own writing processes. It's okay to not be a perfect writer. The point is that a weakness is only a weakness until you acknowledge it. Once you have an idea of what you're doing wrong you're already half way there to fix it.

### ***Beyond the Writing Center***

I never imagined myself to be a tutor, like an actual paid tutor that had to talk to people they didn't personally know. I guess for a long time I was an on-demand tutor for friends being paid in exchange for a caramelizer at Dutch Bros or breakfast at Denny's. And even then, writing was a whole different story.

**“Tutoring for the last two semesters has helped me learn more about myself, who I am becoming as a student, as writer, and as a tutor. The Writing Center helped me construct a narrative of myself.”**

My way of revising essays had no structure. It shifted from looking at grammar, spelling and meaning at the sentence level and then shifted back and forth from the overall content and purpose of the essay. I didn't have the tools that I learned at the Writing Center yet.

I am still an on-demand tutor, in a sense, but a much more effective one. Earlier this semester, I helped my best friend write two application essays for a graduate school application. We used Sayback and More About which helped me give her feedback as to what points she's getting across and what I wanted to know more about so we could include things in her essays she may not have thought of as being important to add. Of course, after my hard work she treated me to a caramelizer at Dutch Bros and she eventually was accepted into the graduate program. I'm not saying bringing in your essay at the Writing Center will guarantee you a good grade or acceptance into a graduate program but you will learn how to use tools that can improve your writing for the long-run.

At the Writing Center, I also learned that academia is a discourse community. I have become empowered as a scholar/researcher. My writing is more than its spelling and grammar, but rather its place in a larger conversation. My writing is about how it contributes to an ongoing conversation or creates a new conversation within the world of academia. Tools that I have learned at the Writing Center have strengthened my voice; they have given me the confidence and instilled the belief that my voice is important. I have a voice that needs to be heard. At first, I didn't see myself as a staff reporter. I didn't think that what I wanted to write about had any importance. At first I doubted that what I had to

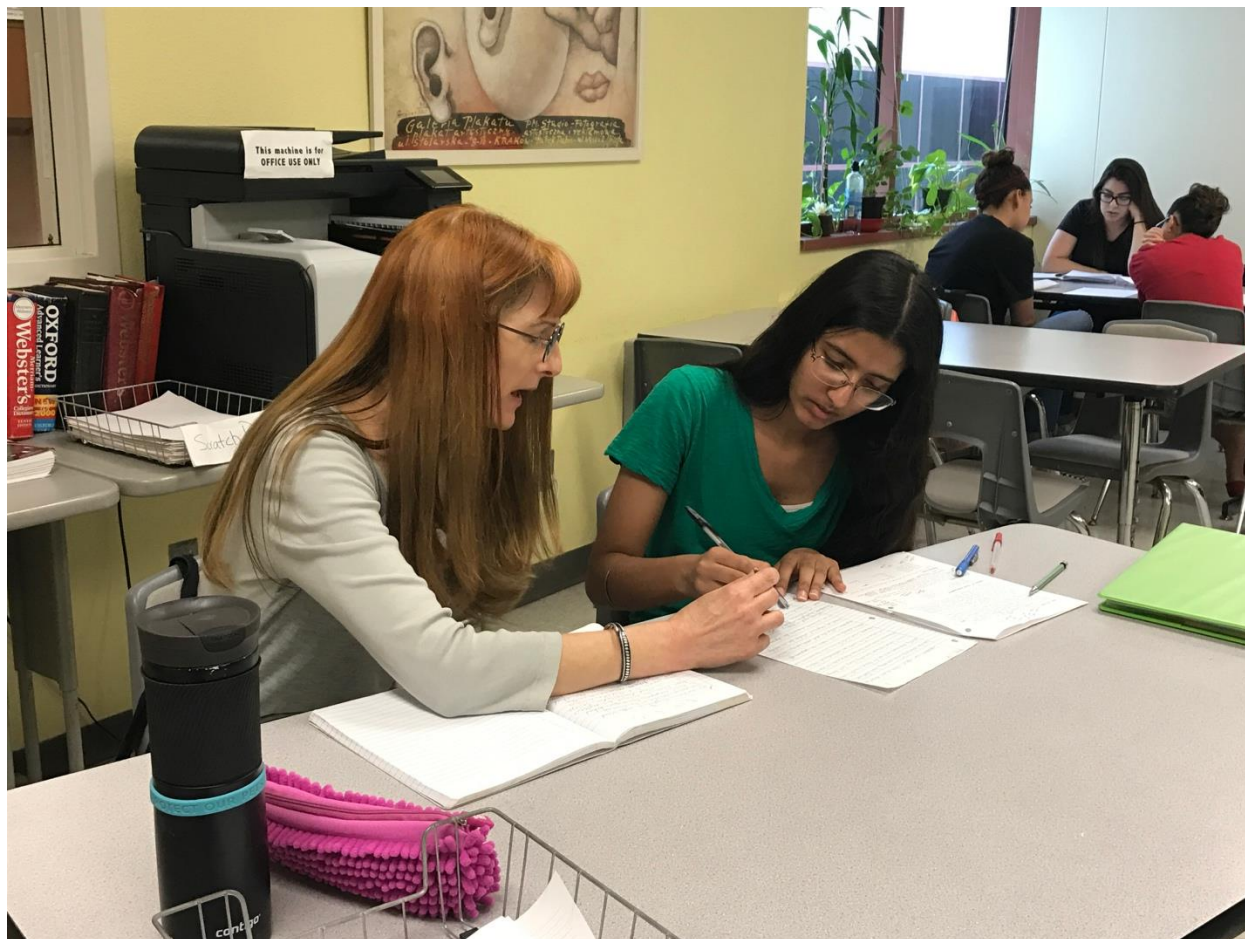
say mattered and I think that is also what my tutees struggle with. They struggle with thinking that what they say doesn't matter, they don't come in thinking that their reactions as readers is valid feedback for a draft. We are here to voice what can't be voiced, what others may not feel comfortable doing so. We give tutees the tools to ease the writing process and different ways to look at an essay besides a vague, "It's good." That's why we have lenses here at the Writing Center because they allow to have productive conversations about the complexity of writing.

I didn't realize right way that I was becoming a disciplined writer. Not until I took Feminist Research Methods as a requirement for Women's Studies, did I comprehend what the Writing Center was trying to get at during my training as a tutor. An essay is more than words written up for a grade in a class. It's about a conversation coming to life; essays have target audience(s), purpose(s), they have something to say to someone or invites others to say something. You don't write when you're inspired, you write when you discipline yourself to give yourself writing time.

### ***The Act of Becoming***

Tutoring for the last two semesters has helped me learn more about myself, who I am becoming as a student, as writer, and as a tutor. The Writing Center helped me construct a narrative of myself. I am now more comfortable telling students about myself, about who I am and who I want to become. I am a triple major in Psychology, Women's Studies and Chicana Studies. I am a research assistant, a McNair scholar, a staff reporter, a potential doctoral candidate. I am bilingual. I am still learning to become.





*Lisa Shepard*

## WORK-SHOPPING CREATIVE WRITING THE WRITING CENTER WAY

As a creative Writing major, I have participated in many creative nonfiction workshops. One of the problems I have seen in writing workshops is the tendency for some students to make line by line editing suggestions. These would be helpful if the draft was near completion. However, for early drafts these suggestions are premature because hopefully the writer will significantly revise their draft based on in class workshop comments. Students in lower division workshops are given some guidelines for their responses to essays that are being workshopped, but these instructions are not a focused lens. In the workshop classes I have taken students were instructed to tell what worked for them and what did not work for them in the essay being workshopped. This suggests that anything in the essay that did not work for the reader would be open for comment. Of course sometimes a sentence is ambiguous or confusing and the reader should feel

free to point this out. But what about the essay that is going to need complete revision to improve over all problems, this substantial revision will likely delete or drastically change many of the sentences in the essay.

I could see value in using the Writing Center teachings on the polishing path for a lower division creative writing class. Why not lay a foundation of theory on why they should try and avoid line by line editing of rough drafts in entry level creative writing classes? If students were taught early on the many reasons that line by line editing is problematic, that it can overwhelm students, that students might simply fix the errors and not revise (Sommers 381). For this reason I would have my class read the Nancy Sommers paper “Responding to student Writing” and possibly Peter Elbow’s essay on commenting on student writing “High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing” in which he

writes about positive commenting on student writing. My hope would be that these two authors would've help students to focus their attaching on revising and positive constructive feedback rather the editing. There is also the creative aspect to consider. Some writers like to use many commas, while others prefer to use very few. The fiction writer Cormac McCarthy author of *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men* who does not like to use apostrophes or quotation marks in his writing. McCarthy is known for his reduced use of punctuation and “simple declarative sentences” (wiki).

Another thing to consider would be that students in a lower division may be thinking about completing an MFA in creative Writing and then going on to teach creative writing classes or take more creative writing classes, it would benefit them to have some understanding of the theories on line by line editing. It would also be better for all students in the class to focus on the actual writing rather than wasting their time on detailed edits which will hopefully be changed in a revision of the draft.

If I were teaching an entry level creative writing class I could see the purpose in constructing a talk about Peter Elbow style of responding to student writers. I could also see developing a handout that covered the topic of proof reading rough drafts. If I did, I would include Peter Elbow’s style of responding to student drafts, his use of straight lines under sentences that he feels work well, wiggly lines under sentences that are unclear and simply circling words that are not correct (Elbow 355). I would also include information from the Nancy Sommers article on her theory about line by line editing of student writing and Dr. Ritter, an MFA creative writing recipient, who also promotes the theory of choosing two patterns of error from a draft.

If I were to use the lenses as guides in a lower division writing workshop I would consider the More About lens, Sayback, Center of Gravity and Play-By-Play. These four lenses would allow the reader to respond to an essay depending on what they felt the essay needed. If they felt that there were areas in the essay that could use more developing or that they found interesting, the More About lens could be used to make suggestions on expansion and inclusion. The Sayback lens could be used by the responder if they had uncertainties about the content

of the essay. The Play-by-Play lens would be useful in showing the writer how different changes and turns in the essay surprised or caught the reader off guard.

A good example of an essay that will need major revision or a hypothetical essay would be one in which the author wrote about outdoor hiking. Then, white space was used to separate the section about hiking from facts good areas for taking hikes. Finally, another white space break returns the reader to more writing about hiking.

If a More About lens was used to analyze this essay the reader might suggest that more information be added to the frame of the essay to explain the purpose of the information contained in the center or middle of the essay. The reader could also ask the writer to add more to the information found in the middle of the essay because they found it interesting and they would like to know more about

that particular piece of information.

The Sayback lens could help the writer of this essay by allowing the author to hear what a reader thinks their essay is saying. In this example essay the Sayback lens might allow the reader to ask questions about the author’s use of white space and information relegated to the middle of the essay. These questions might show the author that their purpose for having information separated is not clear to the reader or that its purpose in being misunderstood.

The Play-by-Play lens would show real time expression of the reader’s reactions to a writer’s draft. What did

the reader feel when they found that the writer had switched from describing a nature hike to information about hiking areas?

If the Center of Gravity was used the responder might say that would stood out to them was the information in the center of the essay. Or they might say that the frame story about hiking stood out to them as a center and not mention the information about the hiking areas. This could suggest to the author that the parts of the essay about hiking stood out more to the audience. The writer could then either add more to the other parts to make them more interesting or consider that they might not be needed in the essay.

A final thing I would do for an entry level writing workshop class would be a prompt explaining what students should include in their responses. This handout would be a blend of handouts that I have been giving for responding to workshop essays with some additions from the writing center. I would first

**“If I were to use the lenses as guides in a lower division writing workshop I would consider the More About lens, Sayback, Center of Gravity and Play-By-Play. These four lenses would allow the reader to respond to an essay depending on what they felt the essay needed.”**

ask that the students list themes they see in the workshop essay. Then I would have them list all the creative nonfiction writing craft choices they see in the essay. Next they would choose a lens that they felt best fit the type of feedback they want to give the author of the essay or one the author had chosen which they could state in an author's note and finally they would make revision suggestions for the workshop essay.

Other workshop class activities and tools I would use in class would be in class workshop essay

writing and providing students with a shorter version of the lens booklet that included the four lenses I feel would work best and could be used outside the classroom. I would also include educational information on the reasons for using lenses.

These are just some of the ideas I have had for how I could bring what I have learned in the Writing Center into my major of creative nonfiction. These thoughts are still a work in progress because I know these ideas will need to be vetted and discussed further.





*Kevin Jensen*

## EVERYTHING I TEACH, I STOLE FROM THE WC

This is something I feel like I've said before, but some of the most important improvements I've made (or have tried to make) in my teaching, so far, have had something to do with the Writing Center. Whether it came from the lenses that we use at the Writing Center, or the way that our groups work, or just from some conversations with my bosses, I've carried over a lot of what I've learned there into the 5A classroom. For instance, last fall, my first semester teaching English 5A, I gave pretty extensive feedback on student drafts, whereas now I try to limit my comments much more. This comes from some of the readings that I did in my English 270 course, which is a class specifically for people who are planning on, or who are already, teaching writing. I think the more immediate influence, though, came from some conversations I had with my bosses. I've been giving less and less feedback over the last two semesters, but just during this semester, my second time teaching 5B, I've started to do a lot more in-

class writing with the students, which is something that I'm taking directly from the small groups at the Writing Center.

When I first started teaching, I think I was under the impression that one of my duties as a teacher was to give feedback that at least attempted to address every mistake and/or chance for improvement. I should specify that I was not concerned with grammar, punctuation and the like, but instead was trying to comment on every content-related thing that I thought could use improvement. On average, I would write 2-3 comments in the margins of each page (if not more), and often write about half of a page for the final comment. I wanted to do this because some of the best feedback that I have ever received on my own writing was a little like this. In a creative writing work shop I was in a few years ago, John Hales would give each of us about a full page of feedback; I had never received so much feedback before and I found it so helpful that I

wanted to try and do the same for my students. While I think that the feedback I gave was good, there are a few reasons why I started moving away from this kind of responding. I guess the first reason is that I started to get the feeling like most (if not all) of my students weren't actually reading my lengthy comments. I received further confirmation of this suspicion from some of my students.

Another influence on my limiting my feedback was a conversation I had with Kirk Stone, the assistant director here at the WC. At some point, not too long after I had started teaching, he asked me how it was going and I probably started complaining about all of the time that it took to respond to papers.

He very simply told me, "When I was teaching 5A, I'd give them a Center-of-Gravity and a Sayback. That's it." Center-of-Gravity and Sayback are the names of lenses that we use at the Writing Center; with a Center-of-Gravity you would write about what stands out to you after reading a text, and with a Sayback, you would write a series of questions beginning with, "Are you saying overall ..." At first, this seemed like far too little feedback to me. I didn't even realize until recently that this is close to what I've ended up doing with my responses to my students' writing this semester. I think that this kind of responding takes some getting used to for most students. It is not at all like the strictly directive feedback that they have been given, and I realize that some of them get frustrated when they don't have this. They've been taught to simply work for a grade for so long, that it's hard, more likely impossible, for me to reverse that in a couple of semesters. But I also think that some of them, even if sometimes frustrated at first, can come to understand and appreciate this kind of response. Not only is it relatively simple, but I think it is actually much better at potentially creating a conversation between the students and myself. Particularly, the series of questions which are speculating about the overall purpose of a draft really leave it open to the writer to talk about what they were trying to do, or just to see how they are coming across to a reader, rather than assuming that I know what they want to say and therefore shutting down the conversation.

On the topic of better ways to create conversation, this semester I have been trying to use much more frequent in-class writing to try to

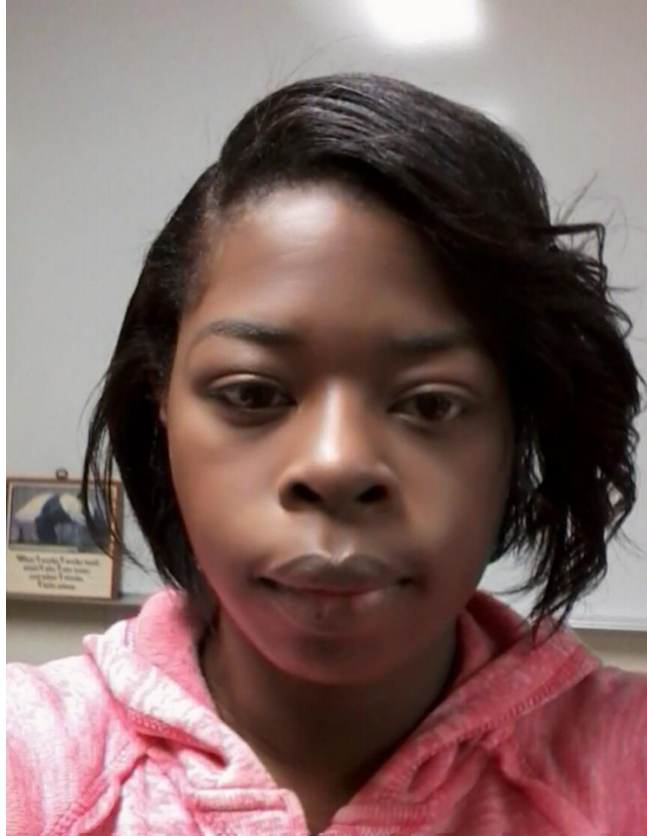
accomplish this. One of my struggles last year, and I'm sure one of the struggles of most professors, is trying to facilitate conversation in the classroom. Sometimes it went really well, but most of the time it was a pretty grueling process. Again, Kirk and Magda, the director of the Writing Center, both gave me some advice that has really helped me out with that as well. Each of them have told me about their experiences with teaching and how they truly believe that in-class short-writes are the best way to generate conversation, as opposed to just lecturing. I don't know why I didn't want to take their advice at first; I guess I thought that I was just so smart and charismatic that I would be able to lecture and

facilitate a conversation without much of a problem. But, of course, it didn't always work out like that, so this semester I decided to try it their way, which is also exactly how we run our small groups at the Writing Center. Typically, I'll have them write for five minutes or so responding to a question about a reading, or simply a subject that has come up, and then discuss what they've written with a partner, or in a small group of three or four. After writing and discussing on their own for a bit, then we come back together as a class and talk about what came up. To be sure, this isn't always a perfect success, either. But it works so much more often than just verbally

asking questions and waiting to see what happens. It gives them all a few minutes to silently collect their thoughts and try to articulate them; they can revise their thoughts, something that is regrettably impossible when verbally responding; the students who are perhaps more reserved, and have trouble speaking up on the spot, have some time to really express themselves, and I think that this often makes them more comfortable with sharing this expression.

Sometimes I feel that, in many ways, when I'm teaching English 5A I'm really just being a writing tutor to 24 students. Of course, there is much more to it than that, but I have carried over so much of my work as a tutor into my work as a teacher that I can't help but think of it that way. The simple, conversational language of our lenses has helped me to give more concise, and hopefully, helpful feedback to my students. And the advice that Kirk and Magda both gave me about facilitating conversation, which is also how we work with our small groups, has led to some much more fruitful discussions.

**"I also think that some of them, even if sometimes frustrated at first, can come to understand and appreciate this kind of response. Not only is it relatively simple, but I think it is actually much better at potentially creating a conversation between the students and myself."**



*Teena White*

## SMALL WRITING GROUPS: THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

One of the goals of the small writing groups is exposing the tutees to the concept of writing as a conversation. The conversation is between the writer and the reader, and the lenses help the tutees communicate more effectively in writing. Many students who are new to the Writing Center, including myself, initially find this concept foreign and possibly a little intimidating. However, by exposing the tutees to different lenses, or ways to respond to writing that are like the ways we normally communicate, they become more confident and willing to participate in conversations through writing, and view their own writing as a conversation.

One requirement of the small writing group is, that all group members must write their responses and let all members read their responses before any comments are made. By using this model, we are teaching them to express complete and detailed thoughts in writing. They are also developing a positive group norm of respecting all members of the group. These norms, which are behaviors that are

deemed acceptable or unacceptable by a group, are important to achieve group harmony.

At the Writing Center, we require that all tutees bring in drafts, which creates common goals and a sense of trust and equality in the small writing groups. The groups are generally diverse in culture and academic discipline, so tutees are exposed to topics and writing from a wide range of disciplines, that they may not have been exposed to otherwise. For example, in one of my small writing groups there is a nursing, art, accounting and psychology major, and we all bring in writing from our respective disciplines.

I believe that in addition to the writing skills that are gained at the Writing Center, the tutees are gaining skills that will benefit them tremendously after they leave the Writing Center and even Fresno State. What we do in small writing groups not only helps students become better writers, but it also equips them with a valuable set of tools to take into any workplace that will provide them a competitive advantage.



A competitive advantage is a skill or a condition that puts a person or entity in a favorable or superior position. In today's highly competitive global job market, many companies value employees who can work productively in small groups. Employers are now empowering small groups to solve problems or create products instead of assigning tasks to an individual. Employees from different departments and locations are put into small groups to complete tasks, where their primary form of communication is written. Therefore, it is essential to express your ideas and respond to others in written form. These virtual teams, as they are sometimes called are like our small writing groups in many ways.

To demonstrate these similarities, I will compare my own experience working in a virtual team to my experiences as the tutor of small writing groups. As a business major, working in teams is heavily emphasized and incorporated into many if not all of the courses. During the fall semester of 2016, the Behavioral Management course that I was taking randomly placed all the students into virtual teams of 4 or 5 students. Although we had a class together, we were prohibited from meeting face to face, and all our communication had to be written or through collaborative software like Google Docs and Hangouts. The goal of the virtual team was to simulate the real-world scenario of working in a small team for an employer. Our goal was to consult for the California Autism Center and Learning Group, located in Fresno. We were instructed to provide three solutions to solve management issues that were important to the company, while utilizing the knowledge and concepts we were learning during the course. The top three teams would be selected to present their solutions to the representatives from the company. Then the Autism Center would choose the team with the most effective and feasible solutions.

The first commonality between the virtual work team and the small writing group is the short time that the group meets before it disbands. From an organizational behavior approach, which is the study of the way people interact in a group, small groups work best for short time periods and are usually created to solve a problem. The small writing groups and the virtual team were both four months long, which provides enough time to thoroughly address

the issues needed. In the case of the small writing groups, the tutees are learning new ways to approach writing, and in the virtual team we were to address the issues for the company we were "working" for.

Next and arguably the most important aspect of a successful team in the workplace is establishing a common goal that can be achieved by completing smaller individual goals. These individual goals must be directly related to the common goal so that everyone's contributions are necessary to achieve group success. The common goal of my virtual team was to produce three well thought out and relevant solutions, which was achieved by completing smaller assignments created by the professor. The common goal of the small writing groups is for the tutees to learn to respond to writing as if it were a conversation. The smaller individual goals are for the tutees to bring in prompts, readings, and drafts of their own. If no one brought in any of these items, the group would not achieve success, which can be defined as applying the lenses that they are learning to their own work. This created an expectation of personal accountability and loyalty between team and group members.

Since many work based groups can be comprised of employees from different departments, sites, or countries, one of the main forms of communication will be written. Therefore, my virtual team was instructed not to meet in person. With the skills and lenses that I learned in small writing groups, I effectively lead my team to success as we defined it. Our main medium of communication was through Blackboard discussion posts and on Google Docs, hence it was extremely important to express complete ideas that were understandable by the other members of the team. Considering that we write out all our responses before sharing in the small writing groups, it was easy for me to do this.

I used the "Center of Gravity" lens to respond to each member's ideas and contributions in a positive way. By responding and telling my teammates what stood out to me, I was able to engage the group in fruitful discussion about our assignments and ideas. I also utilized the "Sayback" lens to make sure that I understood my other group member's ideas, and I encouraged them to do the same. By simply asking a question that begins with, "Are you saying overall..." I could clarify any misinterpretations that occurred. In addition, I created a document for the group to use during idea generating sessions. Since we did not meet face to face, this was the only way that we could simulate an

**“By being exposed to many elements that will be present in group settings in future workplaces, the tutees that have participated in the small writing groups will have an advantage over others who have little to no experience working productively in a group.”**

actual conversation. Each person was required to contribute at least one idea pertaining to the assignment, and then we would vote on the idea that we liked best. By having everyone use a different font color, we could identify different member's contributions.

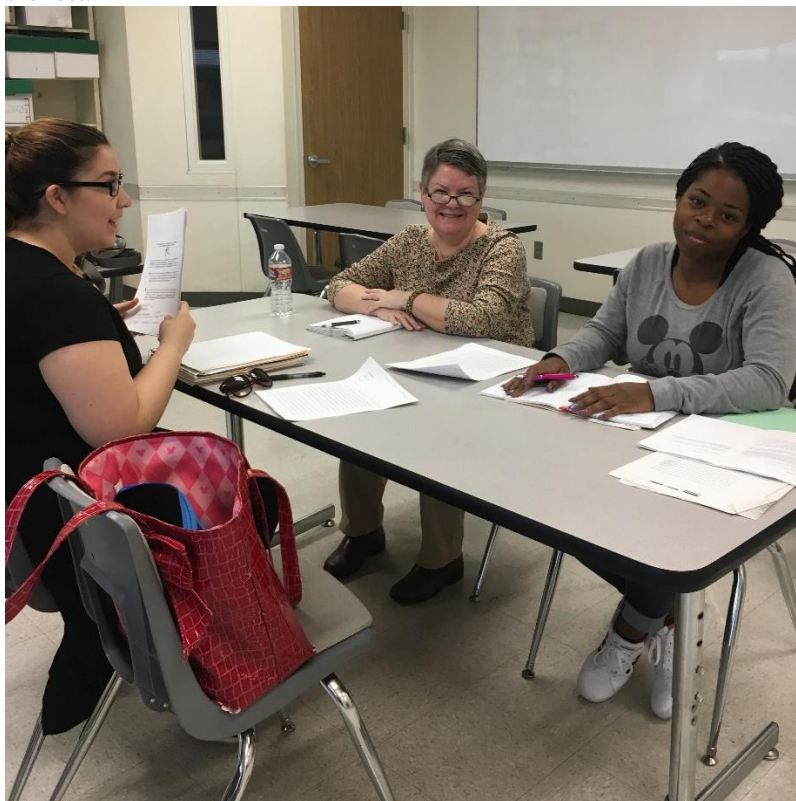
In the small writing groups, although we communicate face to face, most of our communication is written first and then spoken. Which makes writing our primary form of communication. By writing out our responses and reading exactly what we wrote, the tutees are learning to express complete ideas in writing and to become more confident in what they write. The lenses offer the tutees different ways to respond to writing and they practice these ways of responding on sample drafts, drafts from their peers, and their own writing.

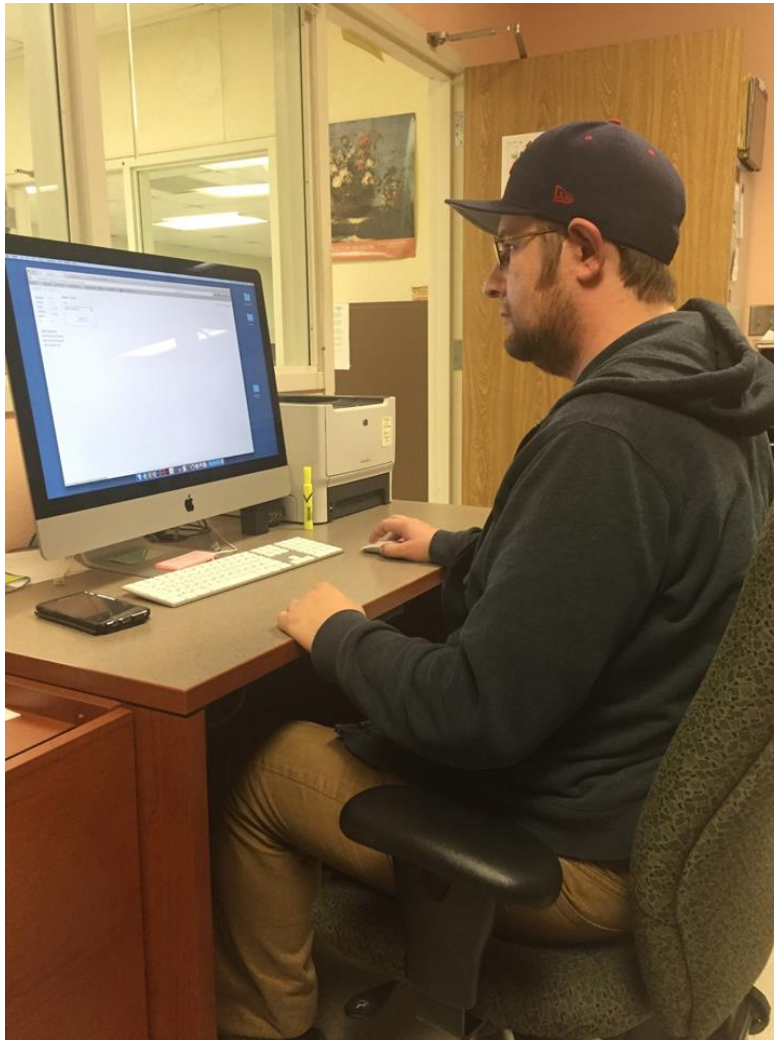
Conflict cannot always be avoided when people are working in a group. I have not experienced much conflict in my small writing groups, just mainly differences in opinions, which is to be expected. However, I did encounter conflict in my virtual team when a team member was not contributing their individual assignment, which was jeopardizing the successful completion of our common goal. To inform this team member about their performance, I used what have learned from the "Play by Play" lens to communicate my feelings. I used "I" statements to accurately describe how I was who stand out above the rest.

feeling and how I was affected by the team member's low performance without receiving a negative reaction from them.

I am certain that applying the concepts that I have been learning in the small writing groups to my virtual team, contributed to our groups continued success throughout the semester. Ultimately, we were picked as one of the three finalists, and we presented our solutions to the Autism Center on the final day of class. We were also picked by the Autism Center as the winning group. On that day, we achieved our ultimate team goal, which was to be picked as the winner of the case competition. Our reward was a letter from the Autism Center that indicated we had consulted for them which we can all use for our professional portfolios.

As a business major, I have been exposed to many team based assignments, that range from a few weeks to four months long. As a tutor at the Writing Center I have learned skills that I currently use and will continue to use in any workplace team or group setting. By being exposed to many elements that will be present in group settings in future workplaces, the tutees that have participated in the small writing groups will have an advantage over others who have little to no experience working productively in a group. Employers generally tend to promote employees who can work productively by themselves and in a small group, and these will be the employees





*Matthew Kenerly*

## WE'RE THE TUTORS BETSY DeVOS WARNED YOU ABOUT

*Now, let me ask you: How many of you are college students? The fight against the education establishment extends to you, too. The faculty, from adjunct professors to deans, tell you what to do, what to say, and more ominously, what to think.*

- Betsy DeVos

Well... yes. That's what we in the business call "academic discourse," but perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself. In the rapidly changing "post-truth" era we all appear to be living within at this moment, it's a little strange to find myself in tenuous agreement with our new Secretary of Education. She's right, but for the wrong reasons.

When I first heard the above epigraph it sounded like some sort of demonization. I've been a Writing Center supervisor for three semesters now and a writing tutor, a student peer to those with whom I've worked day after day, for nine; am I that who is being warned or am I the servile tool of Big Education?

I could simply say she doesn't know what she's talking about because she's never worked a day in

her life within education (I think I'd be right), but then I'd be ignoring the opportunity to explain, statement by statement, why my compatriots and I are exactly what the Central Valley and the rest of the country needs right now, perhaps more so than ever before.

*"The fight against the education establishment extends to you, too..."*

When I began working here back in 2013, I had no idea that our small writing groups, the service that we consider our crown jewel, was unique among writing centers in the region (let alone across the West). The vast majority of writing tutelage elsewhere in the Valley is based on the individual, one-on-one, and though we partake in that particular dynamic, too, helping hundreds of students every semester, in a grander sense the usurpers are already in the building.

The existence of the groups defies the average students' expectations, their schemas, of what it means to write. No, we can't just look at your paper; it won't take just five minutes because the practice, like anything else, takes time. Yes, grammar may be important but it isn't as important as ideas. What's wrong with the establishment has little to do with the restriction of free-market principles, as DeVos might believe, but with an adherence to big business that diminishes content in favor of form, that overtaxes teachers to the point at which individual attention to students in impossible in many places.

And this says nothing of the fact that, even within our institution, what we do often remains a mystery even to the powers-that-be or, lamentably, exists out of sight and out of mind to those whom we'd otherwise assist. Justify yourself, we're told, to our metrics, to our bottom line. I believe that, by and large, the Writing Center is undervalued given the long-forged expectations of every group with which we interact. The institution can draw up grandiose plans for a new student union and a new performing arts center and still can't find room for any consideration of our existence in their planned "synergistic" hub. Professors demand perfection from students, and we do what we can, whether in 50 minutes or over the course of a semester, to undo that pressure. We've drawn up maps of these pressure, we know them all. Students come to us often subdued by the monolithic act of writing, and we must give them agency and assurance.

There's a belief that teaching is inherently political, that helping students take those first steps

into the world of academic discourse inherently helps to forge a more informed population, and I think that means that, if we're doing our jobs correctly, many students will come to relish the fight against the establishment at some point. "Fight" sounds a little aggressive, though, now that I reflect on the idea, since much of what we do is designed to be reactionary, conversational, like rhetorical aikido, raising the mindfulness of what is said on the page by redirecting and prolonging arguments to be more considerate of divergent points of view.

*"The faculty, from adjunct professors to deans, tell you what to do..."*

This is true only to the extent that students would have trouble engaging with the academic discourse, new to them, without an experienced guide in this strange new world. "Do this," within the

Writing Center, is preceded by "Let us do this together" and "I will do this", a natural part of the learning process. We tutors model, define, remind if need be, with an eye toward self-determination, as one might lay the foundation for a house to

withstand the elements.

And it's derivative, too, because it reflects old-school thinking. It's indicative of two-hour lectures, through which students are expected to "absorb" information without any active engagement, or deficit learning. It's never as simple as "know this because I'm telling you must know this".

*"...what to say..."*

DeVos betrays her dearth of experience within higher education here because, let's be real, this is the antithesis of our entire mission. Keith Gilyard, in his keynote speech at the 2012 NCTE conference, said it best:

This, then, is the common core: a rich variety of reading and writing experiences to foster critical language awareness and rhetorical capacity; a doctrine of linguistic equality to promote fuller participation by a diverse student body; media initiatives to enhance explicitly and implicitly the development of student-citizens; productively crafted "street corners" inside schools to induce unanticipated encounters; provision of funding to Strengthen the functioning of schools as instruments of social and economic opportunity.

**"The existence of the groups defies the average students' expectations, their schemas, of what it means to write."**

I like this idea, the “street corner,” because all that’s missing from the small writing groups is some kind of boulangerie, rife with flaky delicacies to nibble upon while we discuss ideas. There are no expectations of eloquence at the Writing Center, there is no right or wrong; there are only your perspective or your thoughts and the dialogue which springs forth.

I once had a student in a group who brought in a draft about an experience which had shaped her desire to pursue her chosen major. I wish that I could recall more about the draft than I do, but what I remember is that the group’s discussion brought us to a point where it seemed apparent, to us as readers, that her mother seemed to play a significant role that wasn’t quite clear on the page. And I remember that, as she took a minute to explain the decision-making in that part of her text, she broke down and began to cry. None of us had anticipated that the encounter would touch upon an emotional nerve, she had come upon that revelation herself.

That moment exists as one of those rare instances where I felt caught off-guard, but in retrospect I realize that it validates the ways in which we strive to help students tap into their experiences, feelings, and more. I could not have created that value for her, even if I’d tried.

*“...and more ominously, what to think.”*

When Donald Trump said, back in February 2016, that he loved the poorly educated, many (myself included; I remember the severe incredulity that I felt) laughed off the comment as, perhaps, a projection of his own rambling incoherence. It is probably one of the most truthful things he has ever said.

My thinking now is best reflected in a column written by Howard Gardner in the

Washington Post a year later, following Trump’s stunning ascendancy to the presidency. Gardner, who established the concept of multiple intelligences, argues:

“It is hard to defend the position that knowing less is better than knowing more – though one wants the knowledge to be relevant (rather than scattered); grounded (not post-truth); and used in a constructive way. It is lamentable when an individual has had little opportunity for education – or, as one might put it, for an effective education.”

Furthermore, it’s ironic because DeVos’s words here signal the kind of unwavering loyalty to one voice, one authority, which tells one what to think – whether that’s Trump himself or any particular media – that’s far more common among the fringe than within the student population here. Do we tell students what to think? Sort of, but what we teach is ultimately subjective, dependent upon the individual to articulate reactions and experiences and interests, to make meaning from the words of their peers, rather than upon us.

Is there a bit of groupthink in higher learning? Yeah, probably, but what we hope to do in the long run is democratize the writing process, and build a literal community of learners that recognizes the value of other people’s thoughts, knows how to ask questions and provides proof. Those things are important no matter whether you’re liberal or conservative and, as any prolonged look at cable news or social media these days will tell you, are in desperately short supply. If that’s seen as threatening to the dominant discourse, well, maybe that’s the empowerment of which Betsy DeVos is afraid. And she’d be absolutely right to be afraid of what we achieve here.



*Gilliann Hensley*

## ALL THESE THINGS THAT I'VE DONE

Since this is going to be my final semester working at the Writing Center (and as a student at Fresno State in general!), I thought it might be interesting to look back over my time and reflect on the knowledge and experiences that I've gained. I started working at the Writing Center in 2010, when I decided to return to school to get my Master's degree in English, so I've been here a good six years. (I took a small break when I was teaching and finishing up my thesis.) That's a pretty good chunk of time, and so it's weird to think that I'll finally be moving on to something else, as the Writing Center has played a really significant role in my life!

Something that I'll definitely miss is the community that is in this space. Over the years, I've met a lot of good people, many of whom have become really close friends--and one who even became my significant other! #writingcenterromance Because of this awesome community of people, I've had a lot of good times--movie outings and potlucks and all kinds of good stuff. And being here so long means that, even though I've seen people go (which is

always sad), it has given me a chance to see the ways that the Writing Center has changed and grown, which is a really cool thing, especially being able to play a role in that, however minor.

As a long-time member of our community here, I've been able to participate in a lot of valuable things that have benefited me as a tutor, such as the time that I presented with some fellow tutors at the Northern California Writing Center Conference, or even helping to plan and host that very same conference when it was held here, on campus, in the Spring of 2015. Not only does that stuff look really good on a CV, but it was also interesting to get to meet people from other writing centers around California and to see the kinds of things they do, and to really realize what it is that sets us apart in terms of process and even goals for tutees. And I'll never forget getting to meet Peter Elbow--the man who has had so much influence on our process and lenses and such.

And I've of course gotten to work with lots and lots of students over the years, both in groups and

one-on-ones, which has been a really rewarding part of the job--though it hasn't always been easy-going, necessarily. But I've come to see the challenge that some students present as some of the best moments that I've had over the semesters. It's cool and all when a tutee really "gets it," and is totally down for the process you're asking them to engage in, but it is even cooler, I think, when a student who was more resistant to the process finally "sees the light." And just in general it's really awesome to see those tutees grow through the writing and reflecting that they produce over the course of the semester, and to see the way we've made writing a little easier for them, a little less stressful, a little less mysterious.

While tutoring here at the Writing Center, I also taught both First Year Writing (ENGL 5A/B, and 10), and undergraduate creative non-fiction. Even as an instructor, I could see the way that students who were enrolled in the small writing groups were impacted by our process, both in terms of learning outcomes in the classroom and the improvement of their writing as the semester progressed. And I've been able to make use of a lot of stuff that I learned as a Writing Center tutor within the classroom--teaching students lenses to help guide their peer workshops, as well as supplying them with tools for generating ideas and breaking down prompts and assignments. I'm really glad, looking back, that I had these tools at my disposal, because I've listened to a lot of TAs over the semesters worry about what they are going to do in their small group workshops, or how to get their students to start generating ideas when it seems like the students are struggling. I'll often share with them what we do, to give them some ideas--but it's nice that I've never really had that worry, because I felt prepared to handle that aspect of teaching.

I can also say, quite confidently, that my years as a writing tutor have greatly impacted my own writing process. When I started tutoring back in 2010, I had a lot of pretty bad habits as a writer--lots of procrastination, writing the essay at the last minute, turning in a shitty first draft because I knew

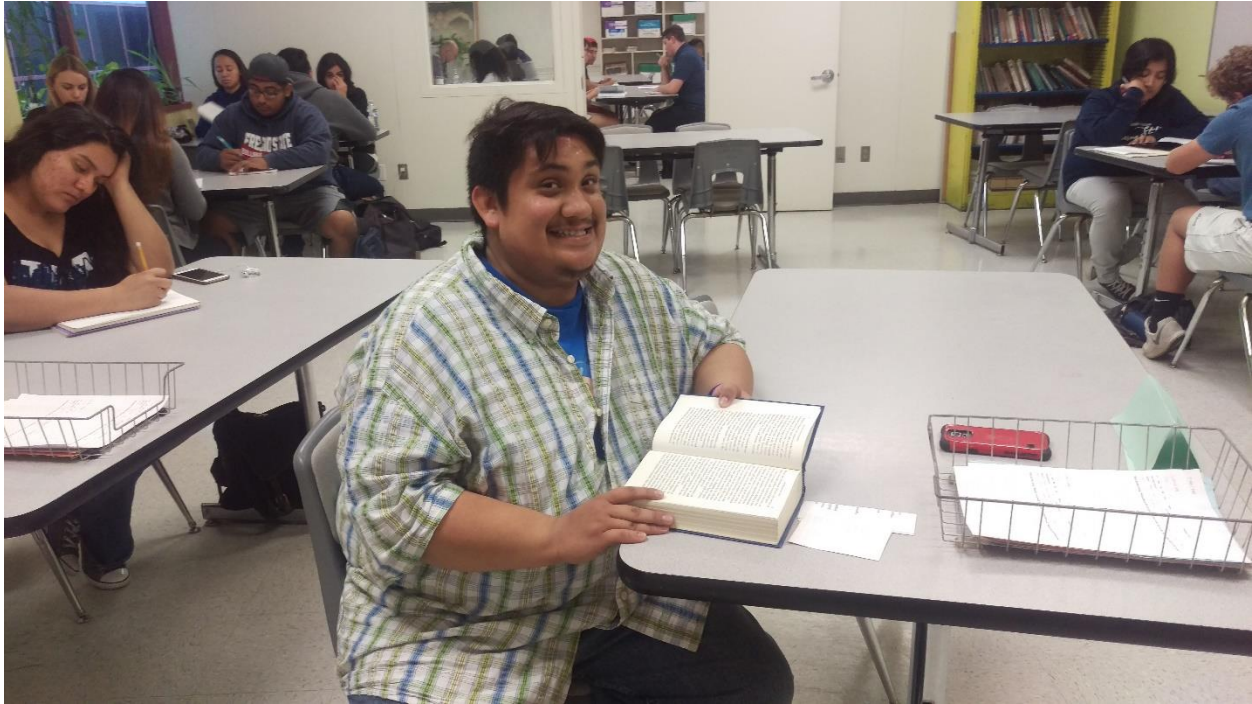
that I could pump out A-material with a decent amount of speed, not really bothering with brainstorming or getting feedback or anything like that. But now I've learned to trust freewriting as a way of generating ideas, and I've learned to be more-or-less okay with first attempts and shitty first drafts. I also now have ways of asking for and providing feedback that I didn't have before, and I have to say that using lenses on my own writing has helped me to overcome a lot of issues that I have run into in various stages of writing. And while that isn't to say that I don't still have some bad writing habits to work through, it's just been overall really cool to see that I'm not alone--and that we're all always in the process of fighting habits that weigh our writing goals down.

Finally, on top of all the awesome knowledge and experience I've gained as a tutor, I also got to get some experience being a supervisor, which allowed me to see the Writing Center from a different side--a more administrative one, which was a very enlightening experience overall. I'd never really considered all the work that goes into running a writing center and training tutors and all of that, and so as a supervisor I got a glimpse at that, and got to

have a hand in thinking about how and why we do things and working toward revising and improving on existing practices. Getting to work as a supervisor helped me to grow both personally and, I think, even professionally. I've had to work on how to delegate tasks and even how to interact with people from a more administrative position, rather than just on an equal footing tutor-to-tutor. I can say that I will leave with the confidence that, if I so desired, I could probably run a writing center if I so chose to.

I guess what I'm saying overall is that I'll always look back fondly at my time at the Writing Center here at Fresno State, and that I appreciate the hell out of all the experiences that I've had over the years and the knowledge that I've gained. It is going to be weird to be moving on to other things, given this space has been such a staple in my life, but I'll always be able to look back and see all the ways the Writing Center has shaped me as a writer, a learner, a tutor, an instructor, and even just as a person in general.

**“I'm really glad, looking back, that I had these tools at my disposal, because I've listened to a lot of TAs over the semesters worry about what they are going to do in their small group workshops... I'll often share with them what we do, to give them some ideas--but it's nice that I've never really had that worry, because I felt prepared to handle that aspect of teaching.”**



*Zoyer Zyndel*  
**AT THE WC**

It's no secret that I am social. It's no secret that I enjoy helping people. It's no secret that I love writing. I feel like here at the Writing Center, I have been able to merge my loves of helping people, being social, and writing all into one in the form of being a writing tutor. The following is a poem I wrote that I feel captures how I feel about all three of my loves.

It's always rewarding to know you've helped someone  
It's useful when it's not just work, it's fun  
My time at the WC did just help me as a reader,  
writer, and responder  
It helped me learn more about the practice which makes me grow fonder

To know you've helped someone become confident in their writing  
Is refreshing; to know they enjoy now what they have before been fighting  
To show writing is worth more than a grade  
A process of growth through refined articulation  
As there is no such thing as a perfect writer; there are many shades

Students have agreed with me  
Writing is much more enjoyable when on a subject that's exciting

The relevance to daily living, their personal written truth  
Is better than the best fiction writers can construe

What's consequential  
Is the beauty of students discovering their true potential  
Future writers; I am the igniter  
Because anyone who has a story can be a writer

It's interesting how tutoring here has taught me a lot about myself. I began my journey at Fresno State as an English major, but later decided to get my graduate degree in Social Work. Even though my focus then shifted from English to Social Work, I quickly noticed the similarities between the two subjects, how I loved them both, and how tutoring is very much like social work. It has the art of helping people, yet with a subject (English) I am familiar with. In this way, I see tutoring as a marriage between the two subjects I have devoted so much of my time studying. Pursuant to the values of social work, tutoring English has helped me to appreciate diversity, as there is a lot of variety among the different students we help on a daily basis.

From their fields of discipline  
To their background, philosophies, and lived experience



I find my calling, my purpose, and more understanding  
 Tutoring is a form of outreach and healing  
 It's insightful as it is rewarding  
 Here at the Writing Center, we are driven by our philosophies  
 Very non-binary, non-evaluative, but descriptive and reflective  
 We value the blend of various perspectives  
 Teaching students to honor various audiences, views that are transcending  
 Helps them to respect difference and not see it as threatening.

I believe that writing is an essential element of mental health  
 An outlet of correspondence; to gain fellowship and a sense of self

This is why our work is important here; to highlight the significance of freewriting  
 Yet to recondition old evaluative thinking requires thoughtful rewiring

As a student and learning tutor, I know that writing is a process – that I can do away with all my perfectionist thinking because it is irrational – and that product based tutoring is nothing but a mere employment of another academic fallacy. This knowledge did away with all the shame and guilt I used to feel as an imperfect writer. Furthermore, understanding that writing is a process just seems much more logical and realistic. I have always heard people say that quality writing takes time, not to mention that overthinking “starting” an essay only perpetuates the analysis that turns to paralysis that make me and other students hate writing. What I have learned here has also transformed my view on social issues. I naturally feel inclined to complicate issues by considering the source and who the audience is. Comprehending issues with consideration of the context is key, and something that I never used to value until I began here as a tutor and learned the audience lens. Other lenses have also shaped my understanding of social issues. Play by Play encouraged me to explain my perspectives in the form of I- statements more often which helped placed me in the present and own my own narrative. I also feel it helps me to speak more genuinely. It also adds value to my experience as a responder.

Writing is always relevant when using reply

It becomes personal when you can relate it to your own life  
 I learned more about my students interests after a Center-of Gravity  
 What resonates with a student often illustrates the crux of their personality  
 Using Sayback in tense social situations helps to diffuse  
 Framing things in the form of a question helps me to not assume  
 More About has helped me gather context and conduct outreach  
 Whether it's getting all the facts or showing genuine curiosity  
 These lens have provided a working language – a useful framework  
 That changed the way I write, and think; a welcome rebirth

**“Whether it’s getting all the facts or showing genuine curiosity**

**These lens have provided a working language – a useful framework**

**That changed the way I write, and think; a welcome rebirth”**

I remember being grateful for the language of Voice to show another person how their words illustrated their personality at that moment. I could have framed it with meaner words, but this lens gave me a choice to present it in how I “heard” it rather than how I suspected they “meant” it. This is invaluable in the field of social work, to address negative or dysfunctional thinking without placing blame or assuming too much. The content of a message may be sound but the delivery of it determines in the other person will heed what is being said, or ultimately reject it. I find it amusing how Almost Said can illustrate implications and assumptions even when the speaker did not intend it, which demonstrates there is power in what isn't said, as much as what is.

The richness that comes from audience awareness  
 Is not an experience achievable when tutoring is product based  
 Students finding their voice helps them become autonomous  
 Lest their creativity is erased

Beyond good and bad writing, a false binary  
 All students can have confidence in their writing, a safe reality  
 In the tutor-student relationship, the inspiration is mutual  
 As it reinforces the importance of conversations that are communal

I believe even more now that language shapes the  
way we view the world  
When it promotes introspection, community, and  
reflection  
Writing transcends thinking into understanding and  
action  
As we write our way to better articulating our story

I am reminded of something Magda had stated a few  
years ago which resonated with me greatly. She said  
that it is the very process of writing that helps us  
clarify our perspectives and distill them to make  
sense to another person. I couldn't agree more, and  
in this sense I find that writing is therapeutic: it helps  
to organize, preserve, and validate our thinking. I  
feel joy when I see that students begin to see writing

as more than a grade, but a way of thinking, feeling,  
and healing. This form of tutoring and writing is not  
just a style but I see it as a way of changing the way  
we think about writing and distilling our thoughts and  
beliefs. My hope is that for many of these students,  
they will carry these conversations from our small  
groups in the center to the larger social world, while  
continuing to learn as a responder and member of  
their community.

Relevant writing is the best kind  
Whether a way to share truth or simply unwind  
Once your words hit the page  
you become immortal, and a writer; all your anxieties  
fade away

