

# 2019 WRITING AT THE CENTER Tutors as Learners



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## PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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



***Jazmin Flores***

## **WHAT THE WRITING CENTER TAUGHT ME AS A GRAD STUDENT: NOTEBOOK AND A PEN**

It's very telling that for this piece I tried to write it with only my laptop and found myself stopping and deleting too many times to make progress. I had to use my pen and paper to understand what it is that I wanted to say. For this piece, as well for myself, I want to record how the Writing Center has positively changed how I approach and handle writing. This change is most visible in that handwriting now takes part throughout my writing process when it hasn't always been this way. To fully appreciate this change, I'm going to take a look at how I've written throughout my college and university years to appreciate that this happened.

The first time I heard of the Writing Center was in my first English class at Fresno State, where the Writing Center was a suggestion, an aside on the course syllabus: "If you need help writing, you can always go to the Writing Center," my instructor said to us, an afterthought as she finished going over the syllabus. As a transfer student from Madera Center with stressful and frustrating experiences with high school and college English courses, I promised to myself not to go the Writing Center. I knew how to write. Passing those frustrating courses proved that. Having passed my AP English classes in high school proved that. Just like that, I ignored the Writing Center's existence for my next two years.

Fresno State was where for the first time I got a D on a writing assignment. It was also where for the first time I missed classes because I was too scared and frustrated to come to class because of the paper that was due the next meeting. I hand-wrote outlines once or twice. These outlines did not dictate how my paper would be structured. Yet, this was the only time where I wrote on a physical paper. I wrote my first drafts solely on my laptop, and these moments were long, boring events.

Maybe, this is why at Madera Center, I developed the habit of waiting until the last few days to work on my paper. At Fresno State, I perfected this habit. I would write on the same day it was due and missed class. Or I would write it the day and night before, and I would be so tired in class I would not pay attention.

Around two years and a half later, I looked up the Writing Center because in spite of never checking it out; I knew that it was still there, and I was desperate. I wanted to apply to the MA English program, and I had a draft that I wanted to use in my application.

Since I wanted to make sure that it made sense structurally, the tutor suggested we use two step summary. Still, up to this point, I had only experienced the writing process in a linear fashion. I had changed some of my habits and had acquired the concept of the writing process, but I wasn't ready for the Writing Center. My

desperation colored my experience with the tutor and made what we did hard to understand. I wanted to be told what to do. I thought of the tutors as those who knew how to make a paper perfect. I was disappointed because I did not see the value in discussing responses and using those observations as guidance for a new draft.

I became a tutor in my first semester in the MA English program. I applied because my professors encouraged me. They were proud of my accomplishments. I was too. I felt confident enough to teach students. Hadn't I gone from writing papers the night before to taking more time to write a paper? Hadn't I gotten into the MA English program? I had obviously done something right. These were the thoughts that pushed me to submit my application.

My writing process has changed since I started working in the Writing Center. However, it's only until this semester that I've noticed. I knew that the Writing Center's philosophy and what we do as tutors had affected me positively because I could now more easily write messy first drafts because I know that mostly everyone does. It's just the way it is. However, I don't think I've been that mindful of how I now write until I started working on my thesis.

It first hit me that something had changed when I geared up with my notebook, my pen, and my laptop to continue writing my second chapter. This made me pause, right there in the middle of the hallway, because my intentions were to use my notebook to write through the writer's block that was too difficult to work through while I typed. Handwriting to me had become an act free of constraints and pressure, and I hadn't even noticed.

When I write on a page from my notebook, whether it's the one that I use in the Writing Center or the one I use for homework, I do it with the intentions of understanding the question and also, perhaps, to come up with an answer through the act of writing. Writing in my notebook is one hundred percent of the time an act of discovery. I find this fascinating because as an undergrad, handwriting was never something I did to discover new ideas. I make this connection because I can see this same hesitation in some of our tutees. I wonder how long it'll take them to also find security in writing even when they don't know what they're saying.

In becoming a tutor, I did not expect to become less anxious when writing academic papers. For most of my first semester, I still believed the final paper to be the most important even as I put into practice the Thursday weekly lessons. I worried about my papers. Sometimes I still panicked. Yet, now I had a community who also worried and with whom I could share my worries.

I write everyday with students about different topics and questions without any expectations other than to write. It's this routine that's changed writing on a page to an act of discovery. If I get stuck from one thought to the next, I know that writing can help me find that connection. Writing down what it is that I want to say or what it is that I don't understand is sometimes all I need to keep writing because there is this less restrictive connection with the paper, the pen, and my hand. I can scratch out words in less than a second instead of deleting whole sentences because it's faster than clicking on the word I want to change or delete. A page on a screen is too clean for red and green wavy lines so it interrupts my thoughts and my questions. Writing on a paper is just me and my next thought whether it's something I have already conceptualized or am still discovering.





***Adriana Chavez***

## **CONFIDENCE IN WRITING**

Looking back, I remember being hesitant to apply to be a writing tutor because I was not too confident as a writer. My hesitation came from my focus on grammar and the surface level things. For my first couple of short writes during orientation, I remember being a bit lost because I thought we were going to look at errors. To my surprise, we did not which threw me off. Instead we were just told to write and then share, leading to open discussions about what we had written. Needless to say, I was a bit confused as to why the other tutors and supervisors were not telling me what I should work on or talking about grammar. For some reason this made me feel out of my comfort zone. Perhaps because the feedback was not directive, I felt that it was a bit useless. So, I thought, “yeah this is cool but how is this going to help students.” Perhaps, because I felt this was not helpful to me it would also not be helpful to students. Even when the lenses were taught and explained to us, I still felt doubtful as to how it could benefit me and other students. I attribute this mentality of mine being shaped by how directive and distant feedback for me had been and what was often asked of me. This is why I think that it did not hit me how beneficial the writing center strategies were until this semester. At some point I realized that I had become more confident as a writer. I knew my perspective of writing had changed because I would no longer overthink what I wanted to say. This has helped me immensely when I approach a writing assignment because I just write down on paper what I want to say. Rather I expand on a point that I have made and worry about polishing after I have exhausted all possibilities. I’ve also learned to how to find my voice in writing through sharing and discussions that are born out of short writes. In a way this has allowed me to not be burdened by the weight of the red pen that had hindered my writing abilities.

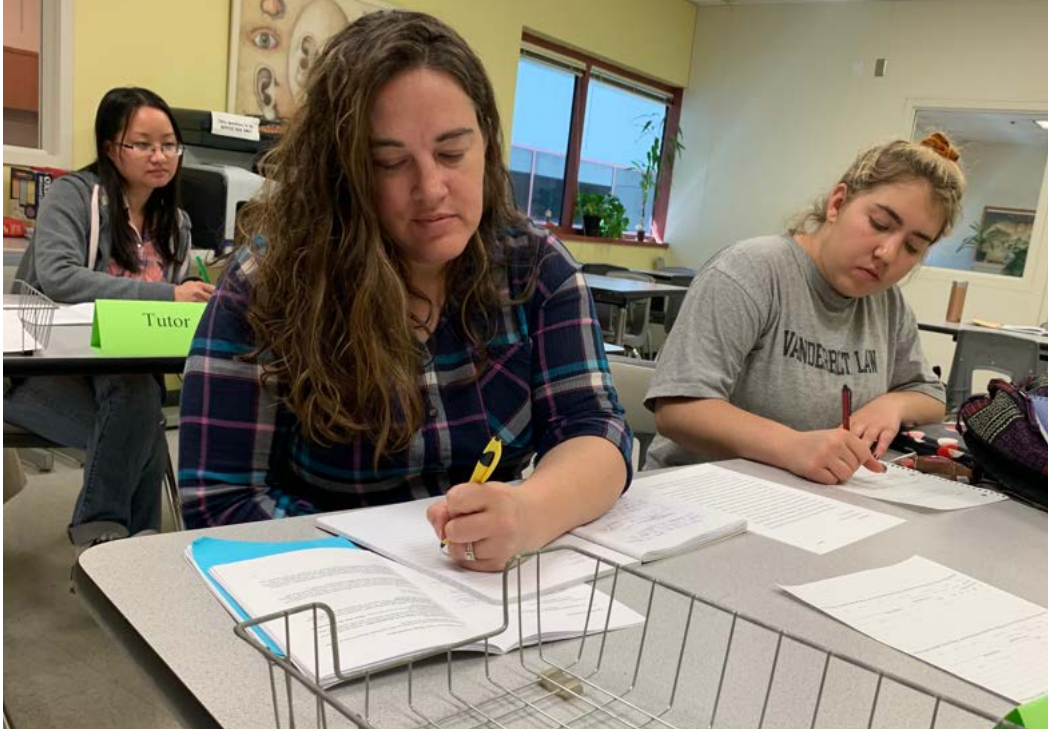
This is why, I think that it’s important that I translate my confidence and positive relationship with writing to students since I know that they probably have had the same relationship with writing that I used to have. I do this by getting really animated when we talk about their paper and ask to follow up questions. Sometimes my enthusiasm

throws them off, so I'll let them know not worry, I'm just super excited because I feel that we are getting somewhere with a paper. For instance, I was working with a group and was using the play-by-play lenses and at some points we were very confused as to the message that the tutee was trying to convey in his paper. At some point, however, I realized that he knew what he wanted to say but the organization was very off, and he had some difficulty articulating what he wanted to say because English is his second language. So, when I animatedly pointed out that the message was clear, but the organization could be improved, I noticed that the other tutees just smiled and laughed. They then got excited as well and engaged the tutee about his paper. This moment was gratifying to me because I realized that they cared about his paper and were not just going through the motions. Retrospectively, it's moments like these that let me know that tutees are getting something out of the sessions. This "ah" moment helped me realize that it's important to show them that they can let loose while writing to find their voice and discover their abilities as writers.

I encourage this by establishing at the beginning of the semester that I won't be judging them for what they have to say or the errors that they make. Besides that, I also let them see that I write how I talk so that they may do the same. I think that by doing these, I let them ease into expressing their ideas like how they would normally talk, so that when they start writing they are not overwhelmed thinking that they have to convey ideas on paper in a certain way. Before, I thought this notion was unfavorable but since working here, I have learned that it has been quite beneficial in repairing my relationship with writing. I also see it with students by the end of the semester.

Once they realize that they don't have to worry about the cosmetic things and focus on content, I can see that they share more often because they want others to know how they feel. Their mode of perspective changes to consider what they think should be included in a paper and overall how their or another person's paper could be improved. Seeing the changes in their attitudes towards writing shows me that I am getting across to them that writing shouldn't be difficult. Thus, I now understand that my positive relationship with writing can and has improved their relationship with writing, which is the most gratifying thing about being a tutor besides becoming a more confident writer.





***Erin Chavez***

## **REFLECTIONS ON MY FIRST YEAR**

A year ago, I made the decision to apply for the M.A. program in English at Fresno State. When I was accepted, I was thrilled but also nervous. It had been six years since I had graduated with my B.A. Would I remember how to be a student? Would I be able to write at the graduate level? What if I failed? With these concerns in mind, I embarked on this new adventure. In addition to enrolling in classes, I took a job working at The Writing Center. I pictured myself poring over student papers and pointing out every error I could find. The real experience was quite different. Working at The Writing Center allowed me to help students cultivate a positive relationship with writing and to rediscover joy in my own writing.

During training, I learned that I would be working with groups of three students throughout the semester. I immediately liked this idea because it would allow me to get to know the students. I was surprised to learn that these groups would not be focused on grammar. Instead, we would focus on content, learning lenses that could be applied to student essays. This way of working with papers was foreign to me. In my experience, writing was a solitary process. Working with lenses like “More About” and “Play by Play,” showed me how valuable it can be to receive feedback from others. It was rewarding to see a student leave a session full of new ideas to explore in their essay. I especially liked that not all of these ideas came from me; they also came from other tutees. Many of my tutees were uncomfortable sharing their work in the beginning, but they quickly relaxed when they realized they were in a safe, judgement free zone. In addition, providing feedback on other students’ essays seemed to give tutees confidence. Though the feedback could be critical at times, the lenses eliminated comments like “I don’t like your paper,” and instead promoted more helpful responses like, “I would like to know more about...” or “This paragraph confused me because...”

Before diving into an essay or a writing prompt, each session at The Writing Center begins with a brief private write. Though it only takes up about 5 minutes of a 50-minute session, this time is invaluable to students. Many of them have told me that they look forward to it each day. It allows them to take a moment and reflect on what is happening in their lives. Because we do not share this writing, tutees are free to write without restrictions. Because the tutors are also group members, we do everything that our tutees do. Since I have multiple groups, I do several private writes every day. I enjoy this opportunity and use the time to journal about my life. These brief

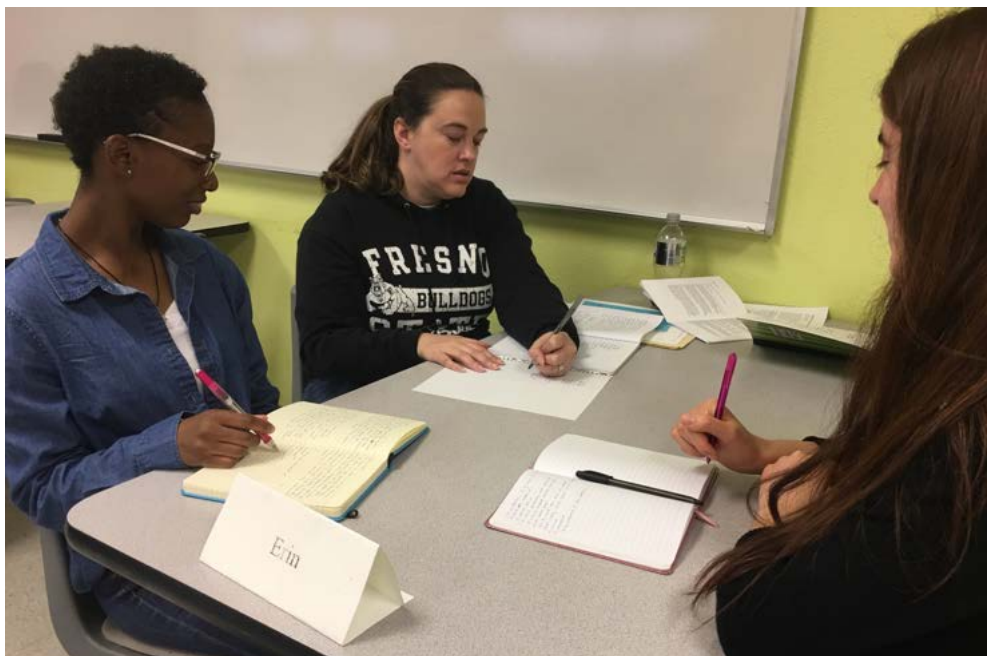


writing sessions have helped me discover an aspect of writing that I had forgotten about. Academic writing is formal and impersonal. Though I like writing essays, I realized that I had unconsciously learned to associate writing with work. By doing private writes, I have rediscovered the therapeutic benefits that writing has to offer. I believe that this is an aspect of writing that is largely unfamiliar to students. They have learned to associate writing with stress and pressure. Most of them only write when they have assignments due. At the end of last semester, several of my tutees told me that they had decided to keep journals even after their time at The Writing Center was through. I love hearing that tutees plan to continue writing for their own enjoyment.

Because the private writes are relaxing and the work part of the sessions are so positive, many tutees have reported that they feel that The Writing Center is a place that they can come to alleviate their stress. This is an unexpected bonus of my job. It makes me feel great that students look forward to our sessions. I try to make to make them feel welcome each time they come in. I always begin by asking them how they are doing. This seems like such a small thing to me; therefore, I was surprised to see it mentioned on several of the evaluation surveys that students take at the end of the semester. One student even said it was their favorite part of the session.

Working in these groups has also had a positive effect in my own life. I took this job because it seemed like a great way to learn about college students' experiences with their English classes, but what has surprised me is how much I look forward to going to work each day. Because we work with the same students all semester, our groups have built rapport. In addition to providing the tutees with a place to work through assignments and distress, it has also given me a place on campus where I can focus on writing that does not have to do with my own assignments. This escape has helped me cope with the pressures of graduate school. There is also solidarity in venting together. Most of my students are college freshman. Though I am older than they are, I can relate to their struggles because I am also starting a new program. Sometimes we will all share things that we are stressed about. Occasionally, I will have them do short writes that explore this, such as "What is your biggest challenge this semester?" Since I also have to write an answer, it gives me a chance to share some of my struggles. Somehow, the fact that we are all going through this together seems to give us all strength. We find the humor in it and keep each other going. College can be such an isolating experience and it is nice for all of us to have a chance to bond in this way.

Next year, I hope to begin teaching English at a community college. Working at The Writing Center has been an invaluable help in developing my own teaching style. I know that I will incorporate many of the lessons I have learned from this experience when I teach. I will always take the time to ask my students how they are. I will encourage them to write just for the joy of it, reminding them and myself of the many benefits that writing has to offer. I will teach my students that working in groups can be productive and even fun at times. I am so grateful to have had the chance to work in such a positive, uplifting environment. I believe that I will be a much more productive and helpful teacher because of the time I have spent here.





***Adrian Carli***

## **USING THE LENSES IRL**

Last semester was my first semester of grad school. It was super hard because I wasn't used to reading so much in a given week, but what made it harder was that every class was basically a big group-discussion. Unlike my undergrad classes—which were primarily lecture-based—my grad seminars were heavy in discussion. Students were expected to actively participate in the group discussions, and we were graded on what we said and how often we spoke. Discussions were based on the readings assigned for that week, with the instructors merely acting as discussion group facilitators.

I was super nervous at the start of every class because I never knew what to say. My biggest concern was that I'd say something dumb; like, I feared telling the class what I thought the readings were about, only to hear other students or the instructor disagree or tell me I was wrong. I knew that I was expected to help keep the conversation going, so when it came time for me to speak, I would usually just say “what stood out to me was...” and then I'd just say what stood out to me from the reading! So I was basically giving just Centers-of-Gravity. I noticed that when I did this, someone would usually say something in response, and the conversation would continue from there.

Once I saw that giving a COG would allow me to add something to my class convos, I started giving COGs regularly. When I had the opportunity to, I would also give Replies—these also helped keep the convo going! I eventually started giving Overalls too. What's super crazy is that I didn't even realize I was giving Lens responses in my classes until partway through the semester. Once I realized that I was doing this, I came to appreciate the Lenses so much more.

I've always known that Lenses could be used outside of the Writing Center; I often used Lens responses to help me take better notes on my readings for school. And I knew that Lenses were based off of things we regularly say in everyday conversation. But I never used them with purpose in a conversation before, at least not until this past semester. Lenses allowed me to contribute to my graduate seminars in meaningful ways, and I still use them in my

class discussions this semester! I usually use them when there's a big lull in the conversation. For example, when the instructor asks a question and no one says anything—those are usually the moments I bust out a Lens response, and that often re-starts the conversation.

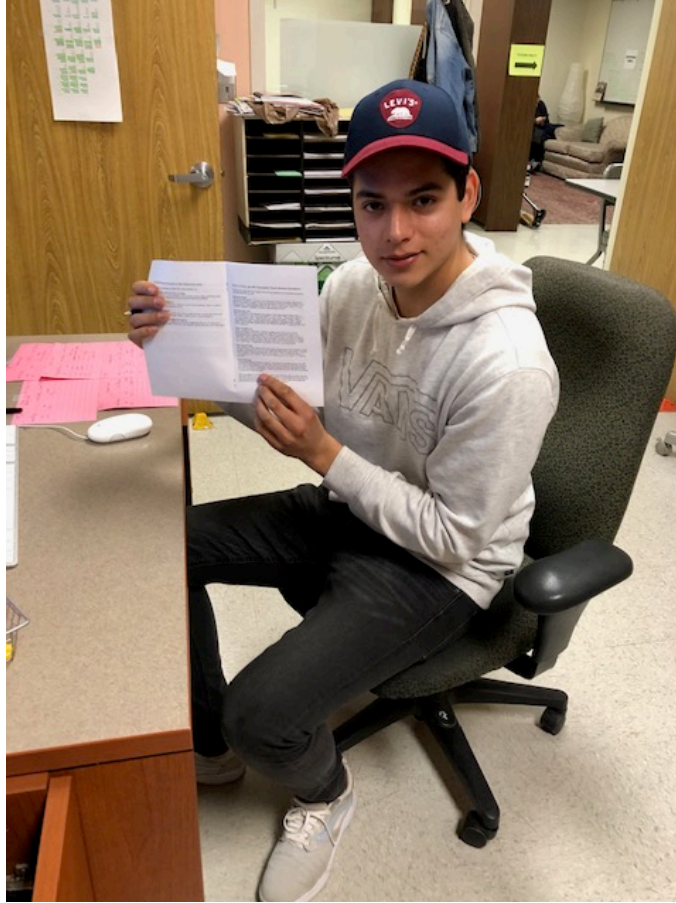
I also started using the Lenses in other parts of the academe. Earlier this semester, I went to a presentation here on campus. The presenter was an instructor from the English department, and he spoke about research he had been conducted on the works by a poet. I went to the presentation with my thesis advisor, and afterward I briefly spoke to the presenter because my advisor introduced me. I'll be honest—I didn't really know what the presentation was about. I don't know anything about poetry, so I had a super hard time following along. When I was introduced to the presenter, all I could think to say was "I liked your presentation!" And then I felt hella dumb. Like. What a generic thing to say. "I liked it" isn't constructive, and it doesn't help spark a conversation. I then realized that this was the kind of response I usually gave to academics when I talk to them after their research presentations. I realized I didn't want to be that boring person who simply says "I like your stuff" to people, so when I went to a communication conference earlier this semester, I changed up my approach!

After I saw people's presentations, if I didn't have a specific question to ask them about their research, I would give them a Lens response instead! I tended to just give a COG, but I also gave a couple of More Abouts, which is super helpful when you think about it, since the researchers are presenting works that are currently in progress! So the Lenses helped a couple of ways—first, they allowed me to actually start a dialogue with the people I spoke to, and they allowed me to feel prepared when talking to people.

In a way, now that I'm using Lenses in my life outside of the WC, I've kind of integrated the prompting-questions we ask when doing lens responses into my everyday speech. I find myself saying to people "So what stands out to me..." and "So, overall, are you saying..." or "Yeah! I'd like to hear more about that!" It makes me laugh a bit—on one hand, it's like I'm always taking my work home with me, but on the other hand I think this reiterates that the Lenses are taken from everyday speech and it shows why they're effective: they're effective because they invite people you're communicating with to respond in meaningful ways that gather helpful information, in addition to starting a dialogue.

It's cool how the Lenses have now become a big part of me and how I communicate 😊





**Luis Granados**

## **SKILLS OF A FUTURE TEACHER**

At times I was afraid of becoming a teacher. I had no experience working with students. I've been working in restaurants since I was 18 and I began thinking I would be placed into a classroom without any guidelines or directions. There were times I even feared students and doubted my future career because of the videos on YouTube where they are flipping out at the teacher. I applied to the Writing Center with hope of gaining some experience, plus it would also look bitchin' on my resume. Little did I know the Writing Center would prepare me more than I imagined.

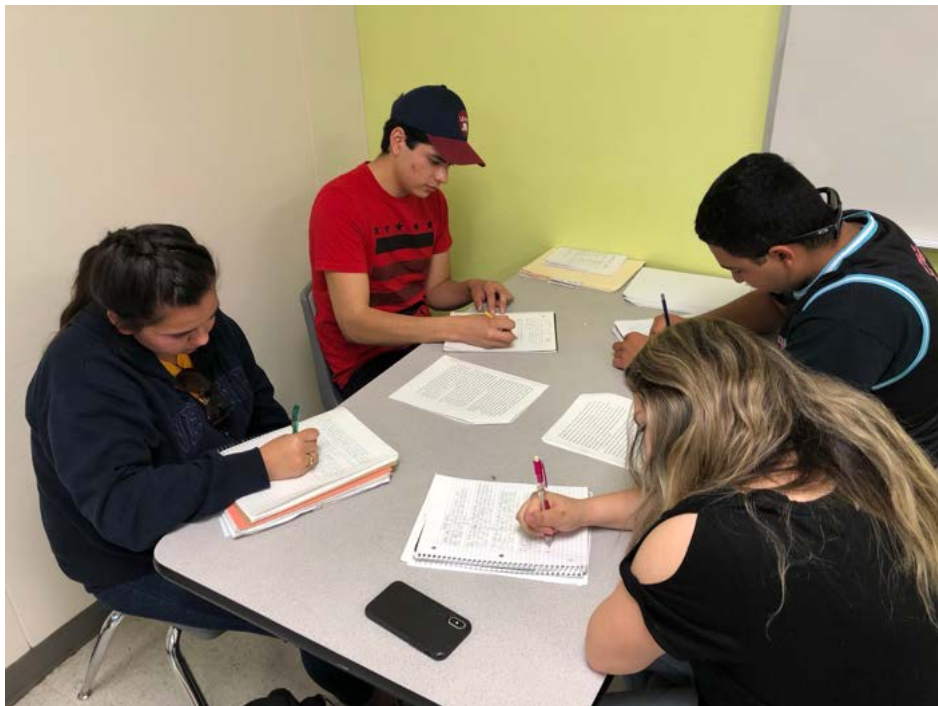
I expected to learn a thing or two at the Writing Center, not gain a variety of tips and guidelines to go by when working with students. I learned how to talk and work with students with some authority. I gained an authoritative voice, which was weird to use because I am quiet most of the time. There was a group (a fun group) that I perhaps got off with on the wrong foot. The two girls were lifelong friends and considered me one of them, so they assumed it'd be okay to use their phone. I knew they would continue that behavior if I did not speak up and it would be unfair for the one student who showed up eager to learn a new lens; I had to speak up. I stopped writing and looked up at her and stated, "Put your phone away." Blood coursed through my face and it felt like it got red. I was a bit embarrassed to look at them again, honestly. I asked myself *Did I really just say that?* One of the tutees said "Daaaamn," but they got the message. They stopped doing it, till I had to remind them again at least, then they stopped for good. That would have been hard as a teacher. I don't like speaking out as if I have great authority because I hear myself sounding like a douche because I was the kid that didn't care about much, but I did it! Working with recent high school graduates gave me a better understanding of how they would behave in class, especially in a class that at times they considered to be boring. I noticed there's always someone in any class that is bored out of their mind and my lame humor assisted in that. Participation is something that I will highly encourage

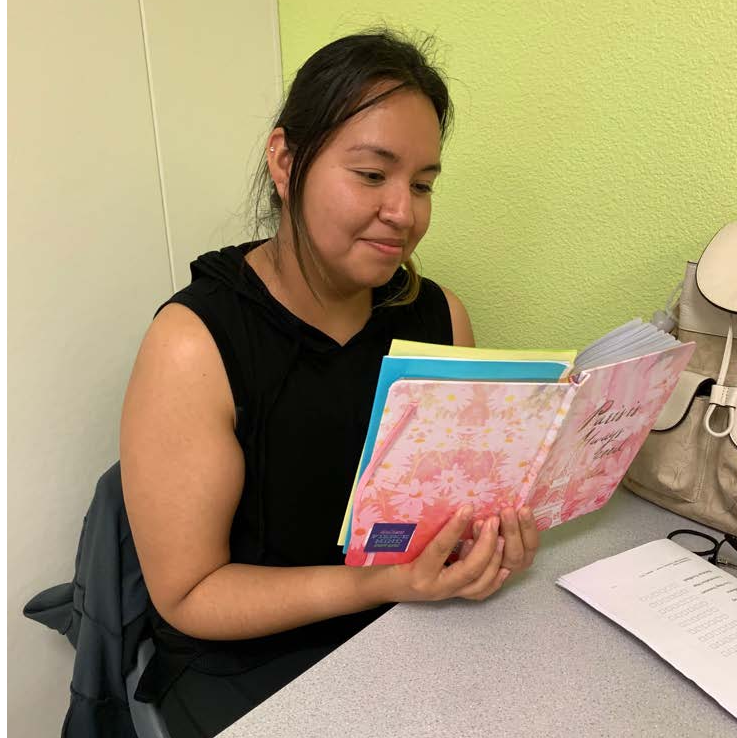
when teaching. Instructors usually turn to the talkative students because they always have something to say, but the taciturn students remain quiet. I was extremely quiet during high school the first two years. On account of that, I didn't pay much attention and didn't grasp enough information. I noticed that quiet students are the same way as I was. They just sit there, forgotten, existing, waiting for the hour to hit fifty.

Learning how to give feedback was tremendous. I would have probably just graded papers in red ink and half-assed cursive like most teachers, but now I won't. Thanks to the lenses and responding to everything with writing I learned how to give better feedback to my students and how to make them view their writing in a different way. After all, I will be in classroom to help students, not to critique and make them hate school even more. I now plan on using the lenses to approach my teaching style.

I got a wide range of tutees so I am prepared for them. I got the one that all educators must love—the one that shows up with a smile and eager to participate. There were also students that made me question why there were in college because they put no effort into anything. Now I feel confident when I imagine myself entering a classroom. I know what to expect and know what I can offer. I hit the lottery when I was hired at this Writing Center. My sister works at another writing center, but there's no way she has learned and benefitted as much as I have. Writing Center, you made me doubt my future career at times, but also reassured me I am headed in the right direction.

Working as a tutor gave me a glimpse of becoming an educator. As the tutor, I had more authority and power in the group. It helped because I observed how different students behave in class and how to address them within the environment. I noticed how the uninterested kids act and their response to certain activities. Although some students were uninterested and not fully into the discussion or topic, after writing about how the newly-learned lens could be beneficial, they gave an accurate response. I learned that although a student might not be in a classroom mentally, they may still be grasping to some important information; and as a future teacher, that is the least I ask for.





**Maritza Ortega Garcia**

## **Read Me!**

### IT ALL BEGAN...

I suppose that as we all embark on a new journey in any field, whether it's a new job, a new school, or simply meeting new people, we have certain expectations of what our experiences will be like. I'm very blessed to be using the tools I've learned as a tutor to write this piece. I see writing differently now. It's far more than focusing on a thesis sentence or using the proper suffixes to a word. It's a never-ending process that has allowed me to be comfortable with my own writing. Are you lost?... Well, let me explain. I hope that by the end of this you're able to get some insight on what it's like to be a tutor at Fresno State's Writing Center.

### ORIENTATION DAY 1

I am at the orientation for the Writing Center. Expecting to sit and listen to other people talk all day and "train" me as a tutor. However, I am surprised to see a notebook laying in front of me. I feel curious, nervous, and very intimidated to see all the new faces in the room. All these people who I have yet to know beyond the physical features of their faces are just sitting there in awkward silence. In Psychology, I suppose this is what we consider "Face Validity". We judge based on what we see and not what we actually know... Now, we begin to write and then are told to share what we wrote aloud. I am terrified and insecure to share what I wrote as I do not want to seem inadequate for the job. I hear my fellow peers share their responses and I immediately feel that I am not as creative or quirky with my writing as these amazing and innovative English majors. I already feel like I don't belong. Did they make a mistake in selecting me as a tutor? Did I miraculously slip through the cracks and take someone else's place more suited for the job? No, that can't be it. Can it? Do miracles exist? More on that later.

### ORIENTATION DAY 2

"Who are you as a writer?"

I scribble on a separate sheet of paper for a whole 20 minutes about who I *think* I am as a writer, and all I can feel is not being one. "*Mari! You're about to be a tutor at the WRITING Center.*" My life is a paradox. I

suppose science is my favorite type of writing. But it's not. I have simply been taught to write scientifically *well enough*. But what does well or "good" writing entail? I have no idea. Is this bad?... Flashback to my visit of the Agora, the marketplace in Athens, Greece where philosopher Socrates drove people crazy with all his questions, then drank Hemlock and died. Socrates said it perfectly though, "I know that I am intelligent because I know that I know nothing." Wise man. I agree. Similarly, we are taught to be listeners and that there is always room to learn and grow as a writer. We are never fully finished when it comes to writing. Note, our shitty first drafts will eventually turn into something completely different; like a caterpillar in transition to a beautiful butterfly. And like all butterfly wings, we all have our own unique style, colors, and patterns for writing. There is not a "right or wrong" way to express an idea.

#### THE LENSES:

Before I started working at the Writing Center, I thought I would be helping students with grammar, spelling, and other errors. Nope, instead I learned about the lenses. I admit, at the beginning I didn't trust these so called "lenses" to help with the writing process. How is sharing my feelings or thoughts going to help students know the difference between their, there, and they're?

*"Mari, remember how you felt about the first Greek philosophers and now you're quoting Socrates! There's a purpose to everything you learn!"*

Indeed. The lenses taught me a new way to approach writing. I learned to be curious. I learned to explore. I learned to ask questions. But most importantly, I learned to LISTEN. As a tutor, I am a listener and an audience for students. My role is comprised of being more than a correcting machine for student papers. Collectively, as a group, we all help each other to generate ideas and expand to new topics through short writes. Soon, a student who needed to write an eight-page essay but only had two pages now has enough content to write 10! BAM! Magic happens! This is only one example of the mind-blowing miracles that occur every day at the Writing Center. I learned that these incredible methods actually worked!

#### THE WRITING CENTER IS FOR EVERYONE

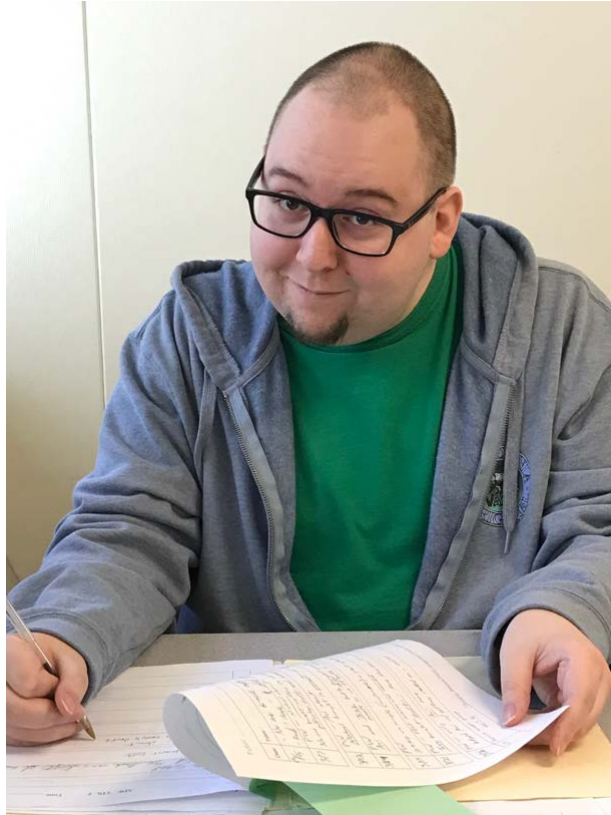
Was I still skeptical? Perhaps. But then again, aren't people usually skeptical when they witness a miracle? So, I applied these lenses to my own scientific writing. I hypothesized, experimented, made observations, then concluded. Once again, I was left with a scientific miracle. Wait, what?? Remember, my life is a paradox. As a Psychology Honors student, I have developed my research study with the assistance of these lenses and discovered that they are extremely useful for clarifying what I'm trying to say. Additionally, students from various academic backgrounds have received extensive feedback on their writing. As I have observed the miraculous discussions and ideas that are formulated through the use of the lenses, I have made my own conclusions that there is a purpose to the way we tutor at the Writing Center.

#### EMBRACE THE STEREOTYPE

As a Psychology major, people automatically assume that you are somehow psychoanalyzing them. Well, the methods I have learned being a tutor at the Writing Center has helped me be a better analyst I suppose. I can easily ask someone, "What does this make you think?" or "I want to know more about this or that," or my favorite, "How does this make you feel?" The best part about having students write down their responses to those questions is that we can look back and actually make new discoveries about what was written! I'll admit, there were many times during our writings and discussions that we felt like our 50-minute class session was a therapy session. It's great to know that by the end of the semester we all developed new skills to openly ask questions and answer them while simultaneously building long lasting relationships with our group members.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS...

Along with all the tools given, one Center of Gravity for me has been the relationships that I have made with my fellow tutors and tutees. We are all students helping other students. This is a miracle in itself because we know exactly what you're feeling or going to feel. The insecurities, the imposter syndrome, the "I'm not a good writer" mentality that haunts our very dreams. The stress from procrastinating an assignment that will be due tomorrow but neglected to start to watch Netflix. We've all been there. And for this very reason, I can joyfully say that we are here to help. We are like Socrates; we do not consider ourselves experts. Rather, we are here to listen, to share ideas, ask questions, and learn from each other. This is far more beneficial for a student who is unsure of what to write, than focusing on which there, their or they're to use.



***Michael Ramirez***

## **BRINGING THE WRITING CENTER TO THE CLASSROOM**

When I applied to work at the Writing Center, I didn't quite know what to expect. I'd heard a couple of classmates talk about their experiences as tutors here, and specifically their experiences using lenses, but it was still fairly abstract to me—I truly didn't know how this method of tutoring would work in practice. One thing I hoped, however, was that tutoring in the Writing Center would give me good experience working with freshman writers (and to understand them and their needs a bit better) before I began teaching English 5A/5B myself. Although the Writing Center has certainly met those expectations, it has done much more. Quite unexpectedly, it has changed the way that I think about writing, particularly when it comes to peer-review sessions or creative writing workshops, and perhaps more importantly, it has changed how I plan on teaching in my own classroom when I get the chance.

As a student, I've always resented small group work and peer-review, but I now realize this is because we typically aren't given the tools to make good use of that time. We waste valuable learning opportunities because hardly any of us know how to give useful, meaningful feedback on others' writing. Who among us hasn't had a rough draft "peer-reviewed" in class where the feedback amounts to nothing more than a few caught typos, some underlined or check marked sections with the word "good" next to them, and a vague sense that you've just wasted an hour of your life? Even group discussions of assigned readings or other topics can often feel like an exercise in futility, as the group (perhaps for any of several different reasons that go beyond the scope of this article) struggles to even begin a conversation, much less make it a productive one.

The Writing Center practice of *writing*-based responses to begin a conversation—about a draft, or something else—avoids these pitfalls altogether, as do the lenses we use. Because we respond by sharing what we've written, we are able to get around the paralyzing shyness of not knowing what to say or whether we should say it, and the act of writing helps us tap into our thought processes on an almost invariably more complex level than a spontaneous verbal response would allow. At the same time, this very act also serves to demystify the act of writing and build confidence in ourselves as writers, which is huge. And applying a lens to a draft gives us something meaningful to focus our attention on, opening up new ways of looking at that draft and of thinking about



our own writing process. Hopefully, some of the lenses even get internalized. Personally, I now cannot help but automatically apply More About to my own writing, even before others have had a chance to give feedback. I suspect the writing process for most of our tutees is heavily impacted by the lenses we learn, perhaps even subconsciously or at least in ways they may not fully appreciate, even as they appreciate the help they've gotten and the strategies and practices they've learned.

For me, what's been particularly instructive is not just learning these methods, but witnessing them work in practice. Truthfully, there were certain things we do—in particular, I'm thinking about the way we look at writing prompts—about which I was initially very skeptical. I didn't see how they would have any value to me personally, and therefore I assumed our tutees would be similarly short-changed by these strategies. In reality, virtually all tutees go out of their way to mention how helpful these strategies are—how much it helps them make sense of a writing prompt and springboard into a draft—and this is something I wouldn't have expected or even necessarily believed unless and until I had witnessed first-hand how students really do benefit. There's a broader lesson to be learned here. It's not merely that I've become a believer in particular strategies about which I was previously skeptical; more importantly, I've learned how to judge writing pedagogy based on what *actually works* rather than what I *think* might work, or even what works or doesn't work for *me* personally.

These experiences and insights will definitely inform how I teach first-year writing, because I've witnessed first-hand how beneficial our methods are. I will try to marry the pedagogies of the Writing Center and the traditional classroom so that students get the benefit of both without some of the drawbacks of the traditional classroom alone. For example, by having students first respond in writing and then share their responses in small groups before returning to the larger discussion, everyone will have a chance to have their voice be heard, while also giving them better tools for formulating and articulating their thoughts *and* getting practice writing at the same time. And, of course, whenever possible (perhaps even too often!) I will incorporate the Writing Center lenses into my classes.

I came to the Writing Center primarily to gain a better understanding of first-year writers, and although I definitely accomplished that goal, more importantly I've come away with a better understanding of first-year writing itself and the particular ways in which our practices can benefit the first-year writing classroom and set students up for success with a more productive, process-driven approach to writing. These lessons extend far beyond first-year writing and are things from which all of us as writers can benefit, myself included. But I don't think people will really be convinced until they try it for themselves—until they experience the Writing Center (or at least our pedagogy) first-hand. So, I'd encourage anyone reading this to sign up for a small group, consider working here in the Writing Center, or apply some of what we do here to your own classrooms or your own writing process.





***Zeyda Romero***

## **THE POETRY PROBLEM**

After working here a two semesters--and undergoing two beginning poetry workshops--I am beginning to notice the lack of valuable feedback when it comes to creative writing in the classroom.

At the beginning of the semester, it bugged me. I came out of my first workshop fuming; so much so, I fell off my scooter after--possibly receiving some mild concussion out of it.

Looking back on the moment, it made me wonder: what made me so upset? Could it be that students have no idea how to respond to writing? Could it be the use of free-for-all feedback? Or am I just an emotional wreck? Or super particular about feedback?

After all the private writes, contemplation, and field research, I have determined the root of the problem: students are never taught how to be an audience.

No, this isn't my rant about how everyone sucks at analyzing poetry--or about how I have no more hope for the future of poetry. This is about how we can respond to creative writing with the mindset of an observer--rather than a murderer, looking for soft parts to stab ferociously.

Before we get there, let me explain how my workshop actually works.

My teacher--god bless his graduate student soul--tells us to write two paragraphs about every poem. There are no guidelines on what we should write about, or look for.

Our writing is submitted on Blackboard forums; this means that everyone in the class has access to everyone else's responses. Then, on our "workshop days," we share the poem with the class.

We read it out loud. Then, we talk about the things we liked about the poem. Then, we move on to suggestions. Speaking is not required in our discussions, so typically we only hear from the same set of people. The time taken to discuss a poem varies on the willingness of participation from the class.

As a nosy, somewhat pretentious, writing tutor, I'm always curious as to how others approach writing. After reading and listening to my peer's responses, I found my classmates did not know how to effectively talk about writing.

It reminded me of myself before the writing center. Before, I, too, had a linear view of writing.

I would gauge it on a scale of good or bad. If it was good, it meant that there were no errors and that I could semi-understand what they were talking about. If it was bad, it meant it was confusing, convoluted, and full of errors.

When giving feedback, I would just list off problems. I did this because I had only been taught how to identify problems--not offer solutions.

My English teachers would mark down, cross out, and identify problems; often times, they were red marks that were in unidentifiable shorthand, illegible, and confusing. The problems were always defined for me, but I lacked proper solutions.

Once, I had a teacher put a huge, red 96% on my paper--with no explanation, marks, or feedback whatsoever. I learned how to write merely through trial and error.

I maintained this method of guesswork to even my college courses; that is until I landed a job here. That is when I learned the value of an audience.

So, can really blame my poetry classmates? The only "feedback" they have probably ever experienced is the unhelpful kind--red marks on their papers. It forces one to focus strictly on the negative, and try to guess the solutions.

I think while workshoping, my classmates put themselves in that same mindset. Their feedback is black-and-white, since their perception of writing is black-and-white; it's either good or not good. They rely on past experiences to help them formulate their feedback; they become the teacher they always had--marking off problems, with no solid solutions.

After combing through my peer's responses to multiple poems, here are some of the major patterns I found:

**Labeling a poem as "good" or "bad"**

- Giving **direct feedback** (ex: You need to...)
- **Saying the word *imagery* repeatedly** to describe detail, personification, turn of phrases, aphorisms, metaphors, similes, ect.
- **Saying the word *flow* repeatedly** to describe either the way it sounds out loud, the way it looks on paper, or the syntax of a sentence
- **Jumping to conclusions** about the meaning, without analyzing the literal

Instead of throwing my two semesters' worth of lens booklets at their faces, I try to lead by example and use various lenses to respond to their poems. I continue to give them information about the writing center and the lenses we use.

In my feedback, I try to give them an example of how to respond in an indirect way, that promotes thought on the writer's part. Any and all of the lenses from the writing center would help on their own. Often times, however, I find myself using multiple lenses to guide my response. Using a bunch at one time helps me ensure that I am giving indirect feedback.

I start with **center-of-gravity**, to highlight those moments that really stuck out to me as a reader. Usually, I pick out my favorite lines or images and write about those; sometimes I will use it to mention something that distracted me in the piece. If the situation arises, I will talk about both. For the most part, I like to keep the centers-of-gravity positive.

Next, I use **reply**, to show the reader how an audience connects with their chosen topic. This is beneficial for students who feel less confident about their topic. I use it to highlight the universal feelings embedded in their poem.

If I have strong questions about the poem, I'll often use a blend of **play-by-play** and **more about**. Although it is not typical, I use both to help the author identify a potential discrepancy between audience and writer. It identifies a specific place in their writing, and gives them various options on what to do next.

With all four lenses in play, it will look something like this:

***One moment that stuck out to me** in the poem is the speaker's devotion to their mother. I am almost envious of the strong bond you have with your mother. **This reminds me** of the devotion I have for important people in my life. I felt connected with you while you were describing your mother; however, toward the end of the poem, **I felt confused** when you mentioned the name Lucy. **I want to know more about** who Lucy is. Is she your mother, a girlfriend, or a fling? Why was her name mentioned among the seven deadly sins? Also, **I want to know more about** who you are referring to in this poem. I know you had mentioned your mother directly once in the poem; is it to her, or someone else?*

Sometimes, I will also use **Overall** to clear up any questions I had in the piece:

*Are you saying overall that Lucy is a bad influence on you? Are you saying overall that God is not responsible for what you have faced?*

This helps the author identify what their audience receives, in order to validate their claim and prevent misunderstandings. It's better to use this lense, in combination with play-by-play, when dealing with a topic that is very controversial:

*In this poem, I feel alienated because you judge people for having depression. Are you saying overall that feeling sad is not normal, or that depressed people should feel ashamed of the way they act? Are you saying overall that depression is self-inflicted and their pain is their fault?*

Sometimes, if the stanzas are long, I like to use **two-step summary**. It really helps the author understand what is coming across in the long passages. If they are unsure about the relation of the stanzas, I will often ask the author: **What is the one thing you want your audience to leave with?** This really helps the author focus on the purpose of the poem; it also helps us determine whether the written material gives the audience the intended reaction.

Furthermore, I have some other ideas on how the other lenses could work in the context of creative writing, which I am planning to use for future poems.

I think **audience** could be used to talk about the tone a poet embodies in a piece:

*I imagine you writing to people who have lived in hardship--or "the streets"--because you casually reference what they can take from a person. I imagine the people you are writing to have experienced loss. I also believe that they are young, and are familiar with slang—since you use slang and embody a casual sound in the piece.*

If a poem is a call-and-response, or has multiple voices, then **conversation map** might be a great way to plot out the speakers.

In my own poetry, I tend to have a lot of voices, so I find this helpful in determining the motivation of the speakers. Questions like, *Who is the loudest? Who do we want to hear more from?, etc.*, are helpful in understanding the character behind the speaker.

Usually, I will have different power levels of speakers in my poetry; so, in order to confirm that one is dominating, I can simply ask these same questions during workshop.

Lastly, if a poet and their audience are incongruent on what the poem is saying, **skeleton feedback** can help us identify what claims are made and where they are supported.

First, we could ask the poet to list the most important claims they want their audience to hear. Here's an example using one of my own poems:

*-Faced trauma at an early age  
-Experienced a similar trauma as an adult  
-Angry by what happened  
-This isn't the first time it happened as an adult*

After listing the claims, we can go through and highlight where they appear in the poem. Sometimes, we may not mention something enough, or too much. This can help us trim or cut out what we need to, in order to get the outcome we would like.

I think having groups answer questions about a draft--not as a teacher, but as an audience--is beneficial to the reality of writing. I don't know of anyone who opens a poetry collection with a red pen in hand, crossing out and adding things. Most people will just read the poem, think about it for a while, then move on with their day.

I think focusing on the audience experience is not only beneficial as a writer, but a reader as well. It gives you different perspectives on methods of improvement--it shows that, in writing, there is never one right answer.

I think one major problem of most creative writers is that they don't experience the benefits of having an audience; we often stay in our own head most of the time--writing and revising. Never sharing. How can one serve an audience, without thinking about the audience?

Just being an audience member can give a person so much insight on how others can perceive their work. However, if we don't have experience as an audience, then we rely on the past experiences of feedback--a flashback of short marks with no actual meaning to them.

So, I really challenge not only poets, but all creative writers to try to give more guided feedback when presented with a piece.

We do not have to be experienced scholars who know everything about writing. We must merely serve as an audience--a spectator who just notices things.



**Liliana Perez**

## **USING 2-STEP TO RETHINK OUR IDEAS ABOUT “SUMMARY”**

Before using Two-Step Summary, I thought I knew how to go about summarizing. In middle school, my teachers would say “Read this story and summarize it in your own words.” I would go about the task by thinking of every single thing the author said in the story, and then regurgitate the details in my own words. When I got to high school, the “summary” became a minor, almost forgotten, step. Turns out, the summary was only meant to prepare me for the *analysis*, the most important part! Before I knew it, my teachers were saying, “Read this story and analyze its literary components,” whatever the heck that meant. It seems that, as young readers, we were expected to read a piece of text and then proceed to analyze its parts, without ever stopping to ask, “Wait, what was this story about? What was this text trying to tell me?” The summary part had been deemed unimportant and, oftentimes, I was on my own to figure the story out.

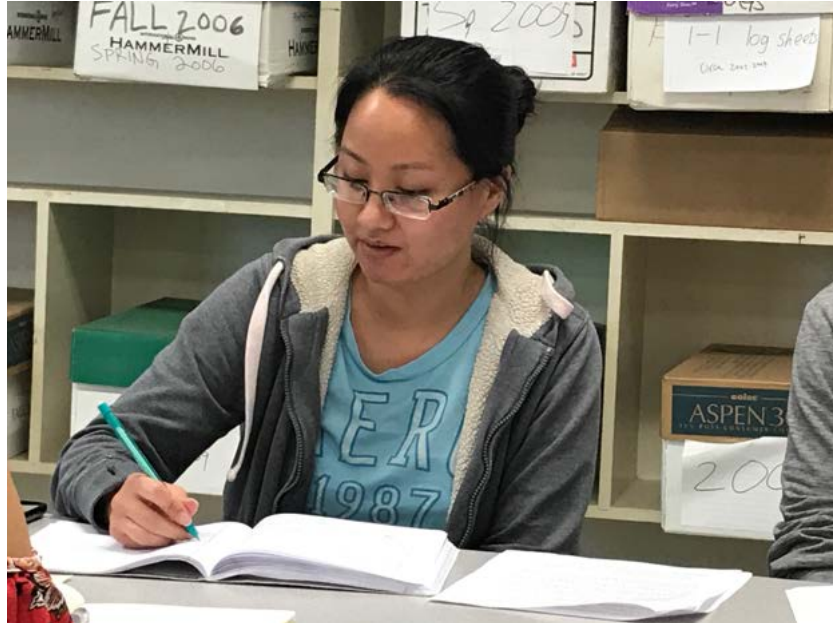
However, today, I am far out of the Dark Ages, AKA high school, and in a wonderful place called the Writing Center. Here, tutors make sure that tutees actually understand what a text is saying before they analyze it, or just for the sake of comprehension. We achieve this by using Two-Step Summary, my favorite lens! This lens stands out to me as a learner because it was one of the lenses that “clicked” with me the first time I tried it. It was something that, as a reader, I had been waiting to discover for a long time. Since learning 2-Step and using it regularly in group and 1-on-1 sessions, I have seen the things the lens makes clear to the writer and/or reader, especially with articles or dense pieces of text. Also, I think this lens is multifunctional, and often caters to the needs of student writers that come in for 1-on-1 help.

Tutees in groups often respond very positively to 2-Step because complicated texts are broken apart, long sentences are unraveled, and ideas are finally made clear. In group, I usually whip out 2-Step when a tutee brings in a dense reading to work on. This is because 2-Step is able to make clear to the reader the ideas and content of a text that they may have been unfamiliar with or overlooked beforehand. When doing 2-Step, we make a list of *things* that were talked about in each paragraph. After we share these things out loud, we write one sentence, summarizing what the paragraph says *about* those things. We repeat this for all the paragraphs. For dense texts or articles, it’s pretty obvious how it’s helpful. The reader is able to separate long sentences and confusing phrases into separate words, or

things. Then, we zoom out a little bit, and look at what is being said overall in the paragraph, using our list of things to guide us into shaping our one-sentence summary. I find that it's really helpful for tutees to first understand what things are being talked about in the first place before they can even summarize a text. Oftentimes, teachers assume that summarizing is simple, when it can actually be frightening or paralyzing for students. 2-Step is a helpful lens, and it's a tool that I wish I had when I was in high school.

2-Step is my go-to lens in 1-on-1 when I hear concerns like "I don't know if my paragraphs make sense" or "I feel like my paragraphs are too long" or the dreadful "Does my paper *flow*?" I find that 2-Step opens up these questions for discussion and writing, and makes the author more aware of the choices they have. When students don't know if their paragraphs make sense, it's often because they understand their own ideas, but aren't certain if other readers will be able to. The Overall lens could be helpful here as well, by asking the writer what they are saying overall, but I like that the 2-Step lens zooms in on the draft and looks at the precise details of each paragraph. If students are worried if their paragraphs make sense, 2-Step can help show the development or progression of ideas between paragraphs, or lack thereof. I think this also pertains to the "flow" concern that some students have. They want to know if they've connected their ideas consistently throughout their paper. As for the "Are my paragraphs too long?" concern, tutees and I have found that one-sentence summaries are hard to write for paragraphs that have so many ideas and *things* in them. Most of the time, that's probably a sign that changes need to be made, ideas need to be shifted to other paragraphs, or new ones need to be made entirely. Of course, these suggestions are never explicit nor corrective. The tutor never says, "Your paragraphs are way too confusing" or "This paragraph is much too long" or, worst of all, "Yeah dude, your paper totally *flows*." This kind of feedback may be what most students are expecting when they walk in through the door, but that doesn't necessarily mean it is the most helpful or *productive* kind. What will the students gain by a tutor telling them that their paragraphs don't make sense? Sure, they now have a verdict, but they may not know what's at the root of the issue, how to go about resolving the issue, or know how to prevent that issue the next time they write a paper. In short, 2-Step is a great way to look at each paragraph in a draft, summarize ideas, and provide the author with choices. It opens the door for revision by making clear to the writer the structure of their ideas, something that is not always visible when you're reading it on your own. Most importantly, it makes this concept of "summary" less scary and more manageable, and even prepares you for, dare I say it, the analysis.





**Yia Lee**

**INTRO TO INTRO WRITES  
FIRST IMPRESSIONS  
WHY ARE THE TUTEEES LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT  
THE AGGRESSIVE SQUIRREL, AND OTHER STORIES**

One of my favorite things at the Writing Center is the Intro Write. The Intro Write is basic, but valuable in building rapport and allowing writing to be seen as a conversation. I like to use the intro write when I sub for another group, when my group has a guest student for the day, or if we get a new addition to the group. The Intro Write never gets old<sup>1</sup>.

It is the first thing we ask students to write, and I invite them to write anything they are comfortable sharing. It's always interesting to hear about where they come from, what they study, and their hobbies. It's also a chance for me to explain how we always read exactly what we wrote down—so it's a sneaky way to get them to practice the habit.

I always notice that students enjoy the intro write. It is relatively painless and a great way to immediately build rapport. I remember with my first group ever, the intro writes helped reduce the nervousness and we had a good discussion about the things we had in common, such as hometowns and job experiences. In this way, the intro write becomes a social experience that fosters connections. It is a way for the tutoring group, as writers scribbling together for the first time, to experience the immediate impact of the written language.

In addition, the intro write also empowers students in the way it gives them the freedom to express themselves. They are able to control the way they represent themselves, and that is important because it makes them more willing to write. So, the intro write benefits the students in multiple ways.

For me as a tutor, I used to think of the intro write as just another chore I had to go through. Here is an example of a typical intro write:

*Hello, my name is Yia. I am a grad student in the MFA creative writing program. My goal is to teach college after I graduate. I grew up in Fresno and Clovis in a big family*

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<sup>1</sup> I know other classes and teachers might do quick introductions, but I like the fact that when I do intro writes at the writing center, it leads into a discussion and we get a more in-depth picture of who we are.

*with six brothers and sisters. My hobbies are reading, writing, and watching YouTube*<sup>2</sup>.

But, writing the same things in a row for multiple times gets dull very quickly. I grew tired of writing in this style. I quickly realized the intro write's power lay in its freedom to be creative. After the first day of meeting new tutees, I let myself loose. Now, I have fun with it. I never know what I am going to write. I like how flexible and interesting I can make it.

In my particular experiences, the Intro Write is my way of not scaring off the students<sup>3</sup>. Instead of writing about my violent tendencies, such as my road rage at morning traffic; or my dark secrets, such as the time I had an argument with my sister and ran over a vampire-red-eyed possum on the road; or my worst fears, such as my dream last night about an erupting volcano—I instead write nice things to lead the students into thinking I am sane.

Here is a sample Intro Write I wrote, when I subbed for a group:

*Hello, my name is Yia. I am a grad student in the MFA creative writing program. This is my first year at Fresno State. I like it a lot so far. Yesterday, I saw a really aggressive squirrel. It scared me. It looked at me like it knew all my dirty secrets; it stared at me with its beady black eyes and whipped its bushy tail around. I was forced to feed it my potato chips before it stopped threatening me.*

This Intro Write led the group to a nice discussion about the campus, and made the tutees more comfortable with me even though I was only a sub for the day<sup>4</sup>. In addition, it was pleasant to find we immediately shared things in common. I enjoyed listening to tales of the tutees' own ferocious encounters with wildlife, such as ducks crossing the road and blocking traffic and stray cats leaping on things.

Sometimes, I even discover new things about myself, such as the fact that I like the ninja-like ways squirrels scamper around in trees. It motivates me to exercise more outside and enjoy nature.

The Intro Write is one way of communicating through writing that gives us the freedom to express ourselves, and to let the students see that writing is how we converse. It is simple yet interesting and it works without fail.<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>2</sup> I did a lot of variations on this. Like, five or six. I was making myself bored with myself.

<sup>3</sup> This is not always the case. I have had at least two students not return after the first day. I must admit to the possibility that it was me who inadvertently frightened them away. The Intro Write is an art form sometimes difficult to master.

<sup>4</sup> Subbing and having a guest student for the day interrupts the normal rapport of the group, so I find it useful to re-establish a sense of sociality by using intro-write.

<sup>5</sup> So far it has worked. I have yet to see a student reluctant, as they occasionally are, to write when it comes to the Intro Write. The moment I see a student bored with writing about herself, I'll keep an eye on her and write a part two to this case study.





***Mary Cruz***

## **BUT WHY SMALL WRITING GROUPS?**

Why can't we just be tutoring robots, have a fine-point red pen ready in hand and tear down papers bit by bit? Why don't we slash out redundant words, add aggressive red commas, periods, prized semi-colons, add words like "expand," "awkward," "reword," or "remove" in the margins? Well I'll tell you why, but you may not like it. It is because we don't serve learning writers when we give this kind of feedback, we serve that specific draft at that specific time. If we give this kind of feedback, we are only taking out our own writer frustrations on a blossoming first draft that we treat like a "bad" final draft that needs to be fixed. We end up serving the institution, that wants statistics of successful students, institutions that want products, results, funding, and not the growing pains that come with writing. How can they measure curiosity? Investment? That "ah-ha" moment you feel when you finally see writing as a way to be heard and not evaluated?

It is easy to forget between stiff learning outcomes written in legal language and grading to remember why writing is important, why we teach it in the first place. Writing is a communal act, we write so others can hear us, engage, and god forbid, disagree. Writing groups brings back the community, students can see the conversation in writing, and that their voices—their genuine voices and ideas matter and will be heard. We show that when they write, their works are not going into a blackhole, that their time, energy, curiosity will not be voided out or evaluated under unsatisfying criteria of "meets requirements," "exceeds requirements," or "F—see me after class".

Without the community aspect of writing, it becomes a dreaded chore. You have to put yourself in solitary confinement, try to fool an instructor that you're college smart for X number of pages and that you've been working on this piece for weeks, and then get unsatisfying feedback, or no feedback at all. When students are asked to write, only to be evaluated, it becomes soul crushing. What can be even more upsetting is when a student is excited about a topic and is passionate to share with others, but the same dreaded feedback comes their way to squish that spark.

While tutoring in the writing groups, I hear students say that they hate writing, that they do not see themselves as writers, and that they don't feel like they can write in their own voice. Every semester I get a slew of

students who are discouraged or even paralyzed by having to write and at the end of every semester, those same students default to writing to gather their thoughts and some say they have started writing journals. Some say that they love the writing we do in the groups, which apart from warming my little tutor heart, shows that the act of writing isn't the issue. The issue is writing alone, writing that will get evaluated, writing that is not actively engaged, and once typed up, it becomes dead on the page in 12-point font.

So what the hell am I saying overall? I am saying that small writing groups is what we need. I am saying that the groups provide a third space where writing isn't used to judge, but to engage with ideas, and seeing the validity of our experiences and ideas. I am saying, no, I am writing that we can't engage with writing through checking off boxes or giving red pen feedback, and telling students what they actually mean or when they actually pause in a sentence. Writing for the sole purpose to be evaluated will not make us love it. Writing in groups as a community makes a text and ideas alive again. And that is why we write in groups at the Writing Center.





**Karley Lassley**

## **ROLING WITH THE WRITING CENTER**

Since I was hired here at The Fresno State Writing Center, I feel my role and position has shifted greatly in both title and relation to the organization as a whole. When I was hired in Fall of 2016, I began the role of a new tutor. I was excited and nervous. Orientation left me feeling like I could do what was asked but confused about why we were not focusing on the directive feedback I had received from most people on my own writing growing up. Also, my hand was very sore. I spent the next semester in the role of learner and new tutor. All these new, weird-sounding ideas were thrown at me –various lenses, “Sloppy Buckets”, and endless writing. We were responding to drafts without judging them. We were dissecting prompts and organizing prompt tasks in a fun and helpful way. I felt as though I was a receptacle being poured into as I simultaneously gave tools and facilitated groups for new tutees.

My second semester of tutoring, I took on the role of a second-semester tutor with a new lesson to tackle, 1-on-1 tutoring. Learning one-on-one was more about the things I initially thought we would be doing, in regard to the “polishing path”, but it was still not meant to be directive. In small groups, we hadn’t addressed grammar at all, but now we were able to occasionally help in this way. However, this was still not the directive correction one might get from asking someone to proofread, instead, we were able to teach the tutee how to correct and see errors they make commonly and help them to grow. I fell into the role of a learning one-on-one tutor and a growing group tutor. Throughout the semester I was able to see more why we do the things we do. For example, in group we do not focus on grammar because focusing on it would be too individual and alienating for other members, and not using it helps writers to realize that grammar is only a part of the writing process and a small part of a full revision process necessarily at the end. The Writing Center felt more like the place to find authentic feedback even for those who only ever see us once. I made plenty of mistakes learning how to handle pushy tutees who feel they need me to proofread or just wanted a slip. I found that most issues I dealt with a tutee in session could be resolved by committing to doing the lens, though I should state that these were mainly issues of not knowing quite how to help or of tutees questioning my credibility in mostly respectful ways. I always had back up when this strategy failed and I learned so much from the other tutors around me when I would ask for advice in these struggles.

My third semester here I felt confident, but I still saw I had a lot to learn. I grew a bit as some new tutors would look to me for a bit of advice, but overall I just felt like this was becoming my spot on campus and a place I could grow and help others grow. The new tutors would ask some of the same questions I had such as “Which draft do we use for a play-by-play?” and “What if I can't get them to write?” In these cases, I was able to help them with a mix of the advice I received and my own experience. There were some instances where I did not know an answer and I recommended they talk to the supervisors. This is also the semester I began to open up more. I would actually

join conversations, though I would often filter my authentic thoughts because I was afraid I wouldn't fit into the community here if I did so. This semester was interesting but did not seem very eventful besides new questions being asked of me, until I was asked if I would be interested in becoming a supervisor for the following semester.

In my fourth semester, I became a first-semester supervisor at The Writing Center. I maintained my roles as a tutor and learner, but now I was learning about what happened "behind the scenes" and taking on new responsibilities. I felt like my role as a first-semester supe was a bit like being a baby supe (do do do-do dodo). I say this because, while I had some responsibility, I was being molded and guided by Magda, Kirk, Teena, and Selena. I learned how to work on the publication, go through evaluflections, answer the phone, make appointments professionally, deal with problem tutees, advise and redirect tutors, use a professional recording device, help plan classes, organize the Writing Center, handle a fire alarm going off when I'm the only one in charge, and much more. There were times I would get confused, I handled some situations in not strictly correct ways, I got nervous talking down mad tutees, and it was not fun feeling like I had to correct a tutor when something seemed off no matter how gently I did so. This role is the one that made the Writing Center first feel like my home on campus. I was here often, I had keys, and I began feeling more comfortable just resting and doing homework in the lounge. I would talk to people more directly, join in intellectual discussions and show some aspects of my own authentic thoughts. My co-workers became my friends. As this semester came to a close, I said goodbye to Teena and Selena, the more senior supervisors, and invited up our two new supervisors for the coming semester, Tim and Lily.

Entering my 5th semester at The Writing Center I took on the role of being a veteran supervisor which, for me, came with the responsibilities of doing payroll, scheduling spiels, and helping train the new supervisors. It could be challenging to not rely on having more senior supervisors than myself. Spiel scheduling was extremely hectic for me. I was checking my email at least fifteen times a day and trying to work with the schedule of instructors, the supervisors, and Kirk. Looking back on it, I really overscheduled myself in that time because I didn't want to force anyone else to be overscheduled. This was occurring to the point that Kirk had to tell me to drop times and tell the other supes someone else needed to cover it. I also hit a bump in the road here because there were technical issues that prevented me from having full access to payroll in the beginning. I overcame this by working with Kirk when he was here to use his account to do my role. until I was able to contact the administrators of PeopleSoft so they could fix it. These experiences encapsulated the first half month of my time as a second-semester supe, but after this, I felt very comfortable in this new role. All of my roles seemed to collate at this point. I had all the responsibilities of being a new supervisor and tutor and learner, but now in the line of who people came to when there were questions or things went wrong I was a lot nearer to the top than I had been. It was my job to take on little things the second-semester supes before me did such as cleaning tables and training the current new supes. I felt extremely settled in this role by the end of the semester. I had mastered my work roles and my interpersonal relationships with my co-workers grew. I felt like had become a natural part of the Writing Center community. I had smoothly rounded together all of my roles at this point, and I felt proud of the two who would be filling my supervisory roles as I moved forward.

Now I'm in my sixth semester here at The Writing Center and I am no longer a supervisor. I am still a tutor and learner, though I am not in the class. I've struggled to fully let go of responsibilities I had as a supervisor and focus more on my place as a more senior tutor. I have been able to rest when I am on breaks more and socialize without having to worry about all of the extra responsibilities of being a supe. This has allowed me to feel more relaxed, and to have the opportunity to mentor tutors who have not been here as long. My roles throughout working here have made me well rounded in practically every aspect of the Writing Center. When people have questions or are concerned about a group, I feel comfortable offering advice on how I have dealt with various issues or experiences in the past. I feel I can explain how the Writing Center works like the back of my hand, though I'll admit there have been a few "that scratch is new" moments. I consider the people of the Writing Center my campus community and I know that it will be very difficult to leave this place and these people when I need to stop working here one day. My experience of roling with the Writing Center have allowed me to grow so much professionally and personally. As I move into Fall 2019, my last semester I plan to work at the Writing Center, I feel grateful for the experiences and relationships I have had here thus far. I hope this place remains the amazing center for treating writing as a conversation, a process, and an exploration and that it continues to grow and develop beyond even the time of any of us here now.



***Valeria Ayala***

## **THE VALUE OF PRIVATE WRITES**

I have not always considered myself to be a writer. It took me working at the writing center to understand that writing does not necessarily mean being a creative writer. I discovered I could be, and was a writer when I began to feel more comfortable with the process through my private writes. When the idea of private writes was first introduced to me, I found it a bit strange and meaningless as I saw it as taking time off from productive writing the students would benefit from. As a non-English major, I was intimidated with this type of writing as I had never been encouraged to be creative or personal with my work in Psychology. Doing this was also a bit uncomfortable and awkward because I didn't know what to write. I preferred structure and a topic that lead my writing. Because this was not the case with private writes, I often questioned if what I had written was good or bad writing even though it was not up for evaluation. Despite being told it was a free write, I still felt the pressure of making it sound nice and academic because I was out of my comfort zone.

My view on private writes changed the more I did them as I became familiar and felt less intimidated. The purpose of private writes clicked in my mind when I overheard another tutor describe them as being a warm-up to the writing we would do for the rest of the session. I began to see it as a necessary step in our sessions as it helps both students and tutors focus on themselves before sharing their views and opinions through the short writes that focus on a specific topic. We often come from a hectic environment outside of the writing center and these five minutes give us the opportunity to adjust to the new setting and relax in order to do something most students don't do, write for themselves.

I never expected to appreciate and enjoy private writes as much as I do now. I think this is the way a lot of tutees feel about them too. At first, they are a bit hesitant to do them but then slowly warm up and begin enjoying the time they have to write about whatever they want without fear of judgment. Many mentioned private writes being their favorite part of the sessions and wishing they were longer. I liked seeing how their view of private writes slowly evolved because it was very similar to how my view changed. In the beginning, I had to encourage many of them to write more and towards the end of the semester, I found myself having to ask many to stop writing in order to begin with the session. I think we come to enjoy private writes because they allow us to vent, organize our thoughts, or think about things that could be bothering us in that moment. I know this is what I use most of my private writes for, and from what I've heard from my tutees, they do too.

Looking back now, this has been an interesting transition for me as writing for myself is something that I now do so often and naturally. I am surprised with how much my view of writing has changed in a year because of

how much I struggled with it before. I no longer fear writing the way I did before. I truly believe I have come to this point because I was able to find my voice as a writer through my private writes. I do them often because I've realized it is a bit therapeutic for me. I tend to open up to myself and be more honest about my emotions and concerns because I know I don't have to share any of this with others. In a way, I can say I have become more in tune with my emotions. My private writes are records of how I have changed and evolved both as a person and a writer. I sometimes go back and read them and can see how much more comfortable I feel writing for myself as well as how these private writes helped me organize myself.

Private writes are a simple idea and task, but because it was new to me and it took some time to accept and adjust to this type of writing, this transition felt like a big and important change. Viewing writing as not necessarily having to be structured, meaningful, or requiring an evaluation is very liberating. What I enjoy most about this is that nothing has to flow, as people often say, or follow a certain order that dictates what the writing requires. It is okay to not make sense and write for one's self. These private writes, that I did not value much in the beginning, are what have truly helped me express myself more comfortably in writing. I see myself continuing to private write even after I am no longer a tutor at the writing center, and I hope those tutees who also valued and appreciated private writes continue to do the same.





*Danielle Potter*

## WHAT WE BRING TO THE TABLE

Here at the CSU Fresno writing center, we do something called “small writing groups”. How they work: at the beginning of the semester, a tutor will get three random students who have signed up and expressed interest in participating in the groups. They usually don’t know each other. They’re usually unsure about or lack confidence concerning their writing. Some of them have been told they aren’t good writers. Some of them don’t want to be here, but maybe want extra credit their English instructor offers if they complete our one-unit small writing group course. Some of them know they need it, want some help, but don’t know what kind of help they need. Sometimes they don’t have the academic language to express their concerns.

Here, students are expected to bring their work to the group—drafts of essays, prompts, assigned reading from classes—rather than the tutor giving them homework or tests or projects or something. Because in the context of this writing center, we don’t see that as helpful. My job as a tutor is to help students understand and digest information through different writing strategies and conversation.

In total, there are four of us sitting around a table twice a week at the same time for fifty minutes. During a semester, we spend, give or take, forty hours together. Needless to say, each student probably spends at least as much time in their other classes. Most classes are at least two hours long per session, so that’s eighty hours with the same peers. For a college freshman, that means being one face in a group of twenty or twenty-five, and sometimes over fifty, or close to one hundred, and having that fact hammered into you eighty hours per semester. And that’s just for one class

A lot of these students have been told the instructor won’t care if they come to class, that the instructor will probably not remember their name or their face, that they are responsible for themselves. They are strangers in a mix with other strangers trying to find the motivation for work so they can get a good grade and move on.

And I can relate. That’s what my high school teachers told me. No one else will care for you in college, so you take care of yourself.

Sometimes it’s hard not to think, “Well let’s just get this over with.”

Because what are they going to do with the assigned essay about their personal writing experiences? About that assigned argumentative essay?

Probably hope they get at least a “C” and forget about it.

Cause no one is ever going to read it.

Just the teacher, Mr. or Mrs. or Professor So-&-So.

In pedagogy classes I've taken for teaching through the university and the weekly training tutors have for the writing center, we're taught that writing is a conversation—one piece of writing is always responding to one or more other pieces of writing; agreeing, disagreeing, arguing, expanding upon, etc. If we're in the position to teach or tutor, chances are we know this already, have accepted it as a truth, and are ready to delve into deeper conversation and practice on the topic.

Students don't usually know this. Their instructor can tell them it's a conversation, try to show them, try to get them to participate in one with in-class workshops. The thing is, telling and showing with examples doesn't show how true this really is. Workshops help, but workshops take practice, and in most cases, there simply isn't enough time, and much of the feedback comes from students who comment little more than "good" or "fix" or simply underline something, all of which is too broad to be useful.

Then there's the small writing groups. Four individuals talking about writing, and almost always the writing of one of the students. And even though we only spend two hours a week together compared to the four per week they spend in their English classes, we have much more room to converse, write, contribute, and generally get to know each other. The group meetings don't depend on me or any other tutor spending the hour lecturing. Instead, these group meetings depend on everyone contributing, via reading their short writes, conversing about those short writes, helping brainstorm, and by helping read the essay out loud.

Recently, one of my students thought his paragraphs in his twelve-page essay were too long. A single paragraph could go on for at least a page and were more often closer to two. After we had read the essay together and out loud, we each responded individually by writing things that stood out to us with a short explanation as to why (a strategy our writing center calls "Center of Gravity"). A couple of us commented on the length of paragraphs. We talked about it. One student said her English teachers in high school were very strict when it came to paragraph length and content; at least five sentences, should very clearly introduce a new topic, that sort of thing. Another agreed and added that one of their teachers said they taught essays this way with the AP test in mind, as in if an essay for these tests very clearly doesn't do these things, it will receive a low score. And it's true. Many high school teachers do teach with these tests in mind and it can easily take over the curriculum. Then when these same students come to college, the five-paragraph essay with five sentences each is all they know. It's safe. It's comfy. So why change it? It's easy to check off if you have five paragraphs and if each of those paragraphs covers a specific topic and has at least five sentences. Then you can reassure yourself it's ready to turn in. No fuss, no muss.

I listened to them exchange ideas and experiences. It got me thinking. How often do students have the opportunity to sincerely talk about something like paragraph length? How much does it come up with friends? Do they ever get the nerve to ask their teachers in class or in email? How much does it seem to matter when they're alone in their rooms typing their essays? How much thought do they put into it?

I asked how often they read an article or novel that was contained to this rule? Never mind five paragraphs. The five sentence and specific topic format? How often was that used in newspapers? In the peer-reviewed articles they were asked to reference as sources? Pretty much never. But if an instructor were to tell students they could make a paragraph and an essay as long as they needed to be, that instructor would be met with panicked looks and bombarded with affirming questions. Wait, how many pages? What's the word count?

But there's room for that here at the Fresno State writing center, and it works because it's not just a tutor and a student working one-on-one for one hour and never again. Instead it's four different people with different backgrounds, each bringing their personal experiences, lives, and understandings to the table. Four minds conversing around a table about the academic, about an essay one of them brought in, all those confusions and agreements and expansions and questions. It's the personified version of "writing is a conversation". Because it is. And here, they can see that.





**Tim Bird**

## **THEY'VE GIVEN ME A NUMBER AND TAKEN 'WAY MY NAME**

*The following accounts are completely true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent. In the Spring of 2019, I went undercover into a group to see how the feedback that students get in the writing center helps with the writing process. This is my story.*

Tutor's log; Day 1; Date 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2019:

I've successfully infiltrated the writing center as a tutee. I managed to walk in and all of my coworkers pretended not to know me as I sat with the students anxiously waiting to get into a group. I've been placed in Tommy's group, and I think I can count on him to keep my identity secret from the other tutees. It was difficult to take a step back and be a student rather than a tutor. I asked Tommy if I could keep the syllabus just to kind of test him. He said he would ask his superiors. I've decided that this kind of trolling is unnecessary, and I will not do it anymore. Overall, this is an interesting experience, and my group mates, Ashley and Marsha, have no idea that I am a tutor.

Tutor's Log; Day 2; Date 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2019:

Through the channels of the listserv, I learned that Tommy would be absent today. I didn't want to have my cover blown by a tutor that was unaware of my mission, so I decided it would be best if I didn't show up to my group. I decided to take advantage of my newly freed hour to get lunch. After eating, I decided to take a peek to see what had happened with my group. Ashley and Marsha had their backs turned to me and I saw that Illiana was running the group. Shortly after, Kurt came to me and confronted me on my decision to skip the group. He seemed more disappointed than mad.

Tutor's Log; Day 3; Date 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2019:

Today we did a prompt like I had never seen before. It wasn't really a prompt, but we treated it like one. Marsha had to answer a question for what I assume was her history class. Instead of writing tasks in the sloppy

buckets, we put parts of the writing process. Later I was amazed at how quickly thirty seconds passed when doing quicklisting. I almost never quicklist in my groups, so this was a somewhat unique experience.

Tutor's Log; Day 4; Date 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2019:

My cover was almost blown today. I was sitting in the tutoring lounge making dancing tweaker videos, and Marsha popped around the corner and asked me if I could watch her stuff while she went to the bathroom. When she got back, I made sure that I was in the lab rather than the tutor lounge. I will have to be more careful in the future. When it came time to meet in the group, we were working on Ashley's prompt, and this one was an honest to goodness prompt. I was kind of bewildered to find out that Tommy doesn't do sloppy buckets like me at all, but as a student, it is not my place to speak up. It turns out that he never makes a task list and always puts parts of the writing process in the buckets.

Tutor's Log; Day 5; Date 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2019:

Today, I brought a draft in of a piece of writing that I am working on for my MA program application. I have forever cemented myself as a part of this group after having brought this piece in. They see me as just another student. We did center of gravity on my draft, and I almost blew my cover again because the end of my paper talked about some of the values we hold about writing in the writing center, but luckily, it seemed as though Ashley and Marsha just sort of glossed over it. I really need to start being careful otherwise they are liable to discover my true identity. After today's session, I feel like I am more accepted as a member of this group known as Tommy's Tuesday/Thursday 2:00 group.

Tutor's Log; Day 11; Date 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2019

Well, it happened quicker than I thought it would. As soon as I sat down at the table today, Marsha asked me, "So, are you a writing tutor?" I replied with a simple, "What makes you say that?" hoping that I could further lie my way out of the situation. She responded, "I've seen you this morning in the office in your guys' little group meeting." At this point, I knew there was no use in trying to lie to protect my identity so I simply confirmed that I am a tutor, but I did not divulge the information that I am a supe. Mwahahaha. During our private write, out of nowhere, Ashley said, "It all makes sense, now." I waited until after private writes were over and asked her what she meant by that. She said she remembered me putting her information into the computer when she signed up for a group. She always thought I looked familiar, but she couldn't place where she knew me from. Tommy and I tried to stress to them that between the hours of 2:00 and 3:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I am just a regular student trying to get help with my own writing. I told them that I didn't sign up to the group to spy on anyone, I signed up to get help. Both Ashley and Marsha seemed ok with that. It feels good that I don't have to sneak around anymore, and I wonder if, perhaps, we should have been honest since the beginning.

Tutor's Log; Day 12; Date 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2019

So, the group dynamic has changed a little bit. My fellow tutees insist on jokingly calling me tutor. Overall, I think they are fine with me being a tutor, but they like to make jokes. I think it was helpful that we had a chance to build rapport before they realized they were being bamboozled. It just goes to show how important it is to build rapport, not only with tutees, but with other people in general. Had they found out in week one or two, I think it may have betrayed their trust. Now, they seem to consider themselves lucky that they have two tutors sitting at the table instead of just one. I need to be careful not to overstep my bounds as a tutee, though. This is still Tommy's group.

Tutor's Log; Day 13; Date 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2019

Today was the first day that Ashley and Marsha did not call me tutor, or Mr. Tutor, or any variation of some word mixed with tutor. Things are starting to feel normal again. We have gotten back to the way things used to be. I wish I could get inside the heads of Marsha and Ashley to see what their thoughts about the whole situation are. They seem to be content, though. I'm happy with the way the group is going, and I think I got pretty lucky because nobody in the group has any trouble finding their own voice. I can imagine it can get a little frustrating for Tommy when he has to reign us back in and get us to start writing, but we aren't that bad.

Over the course of this experience, I learned what it is like to be a tutee. Granted, I did not go into the experience blind like a lot of our other tutees do; however, I was able to experience some of the things that tutees go through. I've often brought some of the stuff that I'm working on to my groups on days where my students hadn't brought anything of their own to work on, but I feel like this experience was different. In the past, when I would

bring stuff to my groups, I chose what lens we would use. In this case, Tommy was the one choosing the lens. The feedback that I got on my work was genuinely helpful. It helped me see things in my drafts that an audience would be concerned with. I think as authors, it is hard to put ourselves in the place of an audience because we have a certain level of omnipotence when it comes to our own draft. What makes perfect sense to us because we know a great deal of background information may not make sense to our readers who may be less informed.

The one regret I have is that my cover was blown before Tommy was able to have one of those “let the tutee be the tutor” days. I would have relished in that opportunity. I really would have liked to see their reactions to my style of tutoring. Like I said earlier, though, it is nice not having the weight of the lie on my shoulders anymore.

I came into this experience thinking I was only going to see things from the tutee’s perspective, but I also got a chance to observe another tutor’s style. There are some things that I saw Tommy do that I will have to adopt into my own tutoring style, but I think I will continue to do sloppy buckets my way.





***Kaely Cullen***

## **MY GROUP FROM HELL**

College can be the ultimate trial of adulthood. Financial liability, time management, and school attendance all become overwhelming responsibilities for young people, especially seventeen and eighteen-year olds fresh out of high school. They are expected to act like adults, (or as I like to say it, get their shit together). The good news is that most of these incoming freshmen do. The bad news is some can't seem to make that maturity transition and they take advantage of their newfound independence. If you're lucky enough, you'll get a tutee in this phase. If you're like me, you'll get two in the same group.

For my starting semester as a tutor, I dreaded going to my 1 o'clock group on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Every single session repeated itself with "please pay attention," "stop drawing in your notebook, you have to participate," and "yes, you *have* to write because this is the *writing center*." For this piece, we'll call the group members Mandy, Jen, and Jose. Mandy consistently talked back to me, muttered how dumb the writing center was, and rolled her eyes almost every single time I asked her to do a short write. When Mandy wasn't participating, Jen wouldn't either. More often, Jen would ask why we couldn't do some random "fun" short writes because that was the only time she liked to write. She would also derail our academic conversations to talk about her life outside of school with Mandy. The two of them combined were nuisance to productivity. To put the cherry on top of this, Jose had a challenging time putting his thoughts down onto paper. He genuinely needed help with writing, but I found it incredibly difficult to adequately show him the tools the Writing Center has to offer while also juggling the disciplinary aspect of my group. He was always pleasant to be around, though, and thankfully he never gave in to the others' attitudes.

I held off on telling people about this problem for about a month because I thought that it would cave in on itself once the group fully understood the norms of the writing center and spent a little more time learning what I had to teach. Eventually I just couldn't take it anymore. I did what anyone in that situation should and spoke up. I talked to Kirk and Magda about my group. The new tutors and I talked about it in class on Thursday nights. The veteran tutors would each give me their own advice in passing. I was told to find out why the group members were there, (extra credit from their English professors, by the way), or tell them that they won't pass if they don't participate. Some even told me to be blunt and confront the group head on.

Throughout the rest of the semester I learned to be very, very patient. I used everyone's advice and saw small improvements. Every day when Mandy would ask why we couldn't just talk about a draft, I would explain to her we can't become better writers if we don't write. When Jen wanted "fun" shortwrites, I helped her craft questions about our topic that would engage all of the group. On top of this, I learned to lay down the law. My catchphrase became, "If you don't participate, you don't get credit." Read exactly everything you wrote. Talk after everyone is done reading their responses. If you start interrupting someone else's turn to read, I'll interrupt you. On top of the disciplinary aspects, I also started to focus on giving Jose more opportunities to choose discussion questions so that he would have more to say in his short writes. I reminded him that he wasn't a bad writer and I saw improvement. Mandy and Jen may have been a nightmare, but Jose made 1 o'clock worth it.

I want to make it clear to the incoming tutors reading this that the issues I had were rare. If a tutee really does not want to be in a group, they would not stick around the entire semester. If you ever find yourself in a similar situation, don't wait and hope that things will work out. You have to be upfront to your tutees and let someone know about your group. Squash the problem right away and there won't be any opportunities for it to get worse.

Overall the group was difficult to work with, but the experience was valuable. It prepared me for my future as a high school teacher because I now know what does and does not work when teaching and working with multiple students (or tutees), at once. It also helps me in the real world because I know how to work with people who may be rude or uncooperative. My first semester was rough, but definitely worth it.





***Rachel Greenmyer***

## **INK BLOT**

So this essay walks into a therapist's office...  
is the joke I never start with. I'm handed  
sheets of paper stained in explanation,  
searched in scribbles; symphony of neurons;  
I'll be the face to which she gives her  
parched alignment, and I mimic what it's  
really meant to say.  
Question like the clock ticking  
rigged above us until it meets the plot  
just above the upper palate.  
Sometimes it's in silence or in Spanish.  
My white forehead wrinkles,  
unreadable verb endings, ñ's;  
This guilt of not knowing how it feels  
to have to tame a wilder tongue -  
Is it guilt or a privilege that this  
life spills out of me in soft refrains, there's nothing like  
the feeling of being listened to  
and writing seems the loudest lonely act.  
I let her leave, enchanted,  
understanding at a slight remove.

I wrote this after a one-on-one session I had with someone who clearly knew what they wanted to say, but just didn't speak English very well, and to me, these are always a challenge for me personally; simply because I can't relate and yet I know English is one of the hardest languages to grasp and articulate well. English has so many different subtleties that are just hard to explain sometimes. I joke with a lot of one-on-one students that it's kind of like "essay therapy." We aren't going to tell you what's wrong, but rather ask a bunch of questions, talk to each other and scribble our way through prompts and mutual territory, until hopefully we can reach some sort of conclusions or clarity. But, similar to therapy, I think we both just want to be listened too, and strive to come across as clear as we can when we write and discuss in tutorial. In the end, when students leave, I can only hope that in those fifty minutes I've done something to get us both as close as possible to an epiphany, no matter how small.



***Tony Vang***

## **THE SUN, THE BIRD, THE EIGHT, AND THE GARDEN**

Our story starts on a day like any other: Garden had just finished meeting up with a group of his tutees, and had a 10-minute break before Bird, Sun, and Eight would arrive. Garden had written down that today Sun was going to bring in a draft. As Garden was chatting with his co-worker Ayala, Bird flew in and perched on his chair. A few minutes later, Sun and Eight came bouncing in together and rolled into their seats, laughing and talking about their classes. Seeing that the group had assembled, Garden shambled back into his spot, and seeing that Sun, Eight, and Bird were too involved in their conversation, Garden bellowed, “Okay, let’s start on our private write.” The group willingly abided by Garden’s request, and began to write down their private thoughts.

After a few minutes, Garden asked, “So, who brought something today?” and Sun enthusiastically answered, “I did! I brought my draft that I’ve been working on. It’s about how homelessness affects children.” Garden nodded in content, and after noting in his record the draft Sun had brought, he had to take a moment to think to himself about the Lens he was going to use. Garden had already gone through and taught the group the lenses “Center-of-Gravity” and “More About,” so he debated with himself whether to teach “Reply” or “Overall.” As Sun, Eight, and Bird talked and laughed, Garden came to the eventual conclusion that he would first have to read Sun’s draft before he was able to decide which Lens to use. Garden asked, “Sun, could you read the first paragraph for us? Then we’ll rotate to Eight, Bird, and then me.” Sun complied, and the group took turns reading the draft.

Once the group finished reading the draft on how homelessness affected children, Garden came to the realization that he was going to have the group use the “Reply” lens. “Today we’re going to learn the ‘Reply’ lens, and as usual, we’re going to read this page in the booklet about Reply.” Once we read about what Reply was, we then proceeded to write our own individual Replies. Garden had to think quite a bit about this topic before he remembered a specific incident in his life: when, in his late teens, a homeless person once offered him shelter. When he finished writing his Reply, he read it over and came to the realization that he had forgotten this episode in his life.

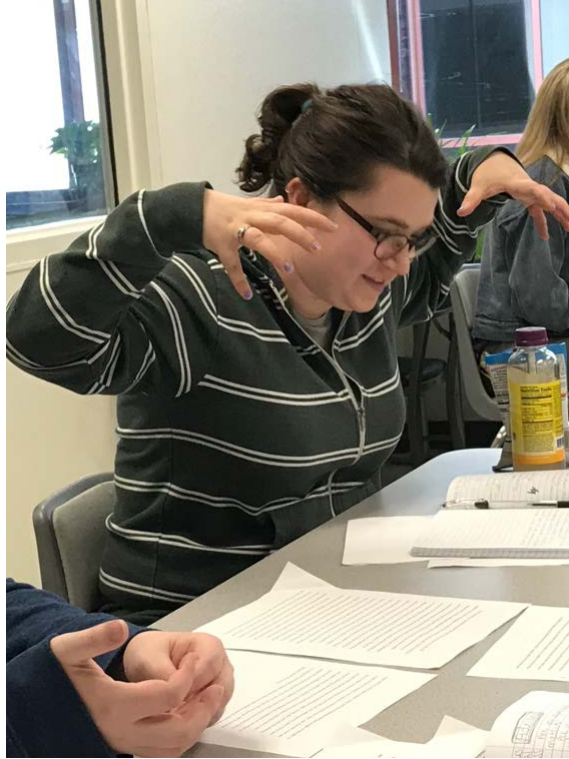
It was an experience he thought he would remember forever, but with the self-generated chaos in his life, there was just too much that had happened in the past 1-2 years of his life to hold onto memories that were a few years old.

The group shared their Reply with each other. Reading about homelessness, Bird remembered the kids separated at the U.S.-Mexican border and how those children were scarred when they were taken away from their parents and put into camps. Eight remembered all the poor children in the world who have dealt with homeless, and pointed out that their situation was beyond their control. Sun thought about the mental disabilities that homeless children developed because they lacked a stable shelter. Finally, Garden read his Reply, highlighting how he had once been thought of as a homeless man. Once each member of the group had read their fair share of responses, the group's discussion about their Replies began. Although the group all shared emotional responses, they noticed that Garden had the most intimate Reply, and that intimacy had an impact on Sun, who had brought in the draft for the group to work with.

Garden had been a tutor at the Fresno State Writing Center for almost 2 years, and a student at Fresno State for almost 5 years; in the hustle and bustle of trying to balance work, school, family, and self-care, it was hard to keep track of everything that was happening, let alone already happened. But what Garden learned that day with Bird, Sun, and Eight was that personal experiences, good or bad, can help other writers better understand their topic that they're writing about. It's important to always remember that the life experiences of one person, no matter how unlikely, can amaze and surprise other members within the group.







***Amanda I. Ausman***

## **CONVERGENCE**

I snatch my composition notebook out of my box, tugging my headphones off simultaneously, and nearly drop both as I pull open the filing cabinet drawer and reach for my students' folders, rushing because I got in the minute the clock struck the hour. A glance over my shoulder tells me that they are running late. So, I exhale, and go to sit down. I open my notebook, thinking of something to write, as I wait.

I imagine the tired faces of the people in my writing groups that still manage to bring at least a low-burning energy to the discussion; I think about the way their eyes light up when they realize what they will say in their short writes. And I imagine that, hopefully, I will hear the sudden increase in pace of fervent scratching from their pens in their notebooks when they hit a point that they are really excited to tell the rest of the group.

Outside the door, people are walking by and looking in to see tutors helping students with their writing assignments- they walk by and the writing center room has only existed for one, small, insignificant moment. (We know that tired, distracted college students have almost no object permanence). Outside the door, the writing center may be a place that raises the percentages of grades by a little bit and that's all.

What the writing center actually is, is a convergence.

What led up to this moment? As I sit here, trying to think of something to write, so much has led up to this. It started 13.7 billion years ago with the explosive expansion of electrons, neutrons, and protons, eventually collided to create Hydrogen, which converged to create stars.

Our star exists in a graveyard- the remnants of an ancestor giving the solar system the material it needs to create Earth, which in turn creates us, the amalgamation of cosmic dust which has come together in such a way--

I catch myself daydreaming about the universe again, and look back down at my blank paper. I put my pen to it and write the date. The black ink against the stark white reminds me of something I had written in the past, comparing the negative of the night sky to a page with writing. I glance up at the door- still no sign of my group.

I think about the conversations we've had, using live writing, exposing our thoughts to each other on a topic; a convergence of ideas bind together to create something more interesting.

We look at the skies through our telescopes to gain a better insight on what exactly is out there, so we can write down our ideas and theories to share and to expand our understanding of the universe- a combination of lenses and mirrors bringing the rest of the universe into focus. We use a combination of lenses and reflections to gain a better understanding of our shared inner worlds. There is a lot to learn through this process, too.

The writing center looks at a very different type of universe, where words are elements, sentences are stardust, and paragraphs are galaxies. This universe, it seems, is a paper white void containing shining black ink, and we have it pressed together in the pages of composition notebooks. The huge, expansive, living conversation that is all writing- it is as churning and complicated as the universe we live in.

Another glance up towards the door and I realize that a solid twenty minutes has passed, and I have just written the date. My group is absent. I sigh, and I finally begin to write.





***Mason Dupras***

## **THE PERFECT GROUP**

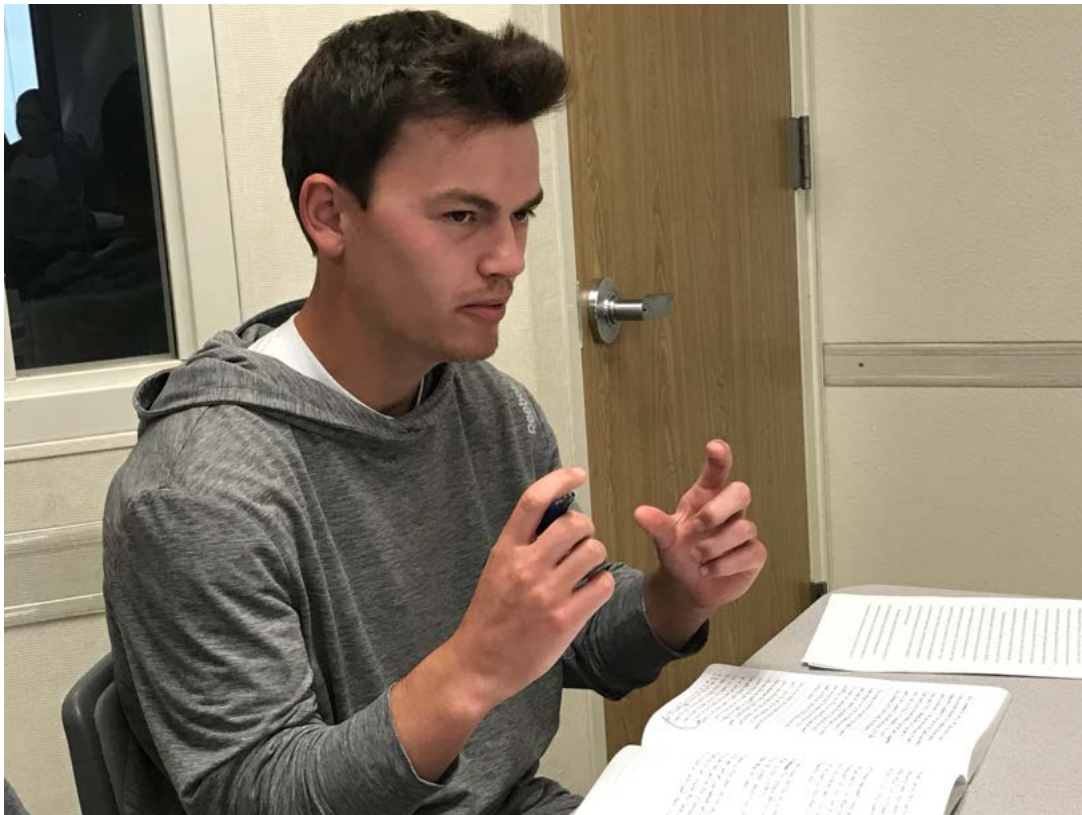
The perfect group. It sounds so, well, perfect. You may be asking yourself, ‘Well, what constitutes a perfect group?’ And to that I say, ‘Well, when you know, you know. You know?’ One does not simply create the perfect group. You cannot walk into the writing center after hours and do sacrifices to Writey, the rat-tailed maggot. (Learned that the hard way.) You simply have to leave your fate up to which ever supervisor is arbitrarily assigning students to random groups. The perfect group is not given perfect, they become perfect after developing rapport, and even a quasi-friendship between each member; it is respectful but fun. That first day: you are waiting for the trio of students, most of which will not laugh at your puns for the entire semester. It hurts at first, but by the end... who am I kidding, it still hurts. But there is hope because there will be that one group, who not only laughs but will make puns back: perfect.

This group does not stop there, they will actually do what you ask. Crazy right?! You tell them to write, and boom they actually write for the entire time of the quick write. What they write about is not only relevant but insightful that provides the other group members different perspectives. When debates break out, every so often, over complicated topics or there is a disagreement, there is no shying away from your opinion. You best be ready to defend it though because they will be gunning for you, but in a respectful way, of course; of course. As if to say “Good idea, you’re wrong.” Obviously, it is all in good fun and to further the academic purpose or to make the position of the paper stronger. I have found the best way to end these debates is with a center of gravity of the conversation. That is the only way to defuse the situation and make it safe for civilians once again.

Each semester I have worked in the Writing Center, all two of them, I have told all of my groups that reading is the best way to become a better writer. In the beginning, this led to discussion about whether or not they read. Most of them did not actively read unfortunately, this of course spawned a lot of discussion and quick writes as to why they, and most of America, do not read anymore. If memory serves, they all agreed that it was because the attention span of young people was too short, to which I agreed. But did this revelation dissuade me from trying to get them to read? No. No it did not. I asked them at least once every other week if they had started reading again. Finally, at the end of

the semester, one of my students looked me dead in the eyes and said, “I still have not read anything.” Nah, I am just kidding. She told us that she started reading her favorite series again and how much she enjoyed it. She also mentioned how much she missed it, which was a surprise to her.

In all seriousness, the feeling of watching students getting better at writing, and not only that but feel better about the writing process was something that I will never forget. These “small victories” are what make the job so incredible. I watched as these three hooligans became more confident in their writing and their responding skills as they morphed into the perfect group. Knowing that I was able to help these individuals for an entire semester and seeing how it paid off made everything worth it. These practices, or lenses as they are colloquially referred to as, are something that I will take with me into my profession, regardless of the level I end up teaching. That feeling of accomplishment, even if it was only one student, made everything worth it.





***Matt Driscoll***

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Ok. Have you ever done a lens with someone? Oh, that's wonderful. Have you ever done a lens wrong, like on accident? Oh really, is that so? How did it turn out? Was there anything different or special about that situation, like an unexpected context that you were not expecting? I dare say, it's all true!

We work in public education. Every day we rise to meet occasions that we never knew existed before the last sunset. It could be a constraint on your resources, like time or energy, or something else yet undefined.

Overall, it seems as though some days, in some ways, the Fates have peculiar plans set out for us. We may rise to meet the occasion, or falter, clinging to our precious lens booklets.

Now you may feel taken back, aghast at this proposition because without our special brand of lenses, we're no better than those lost and forsaken amateurs at the other writing centers peppered across the nation. I predict that the sacred book of lenses will guide future generations of tutors into bright and beautiful careers in academia and beyond.

But still...I want to know more about how the lenses came to be. Was there a trial and error process? Did someone wake and baketh one day to the songs of seraphims, lauding epiphanes that were transcribed to Stone tablets? Was it a meeting of minds all shored up in that WC think tank we call an office? The world may never know.

When I read the lens booklet for the first time, I said it was just for kicks. Because I finally let down that apprehensive guard and took that first refreshing sip of honey-sweet kool-aid...it reminds me of other times in my life when I emptied my cup /ɪtuədɒmpid:ɔləfə-kə-kspj<sup>h</sup>æns/ to make a little room for something new since I'll never be done learning till I'm dead. An empty chalice is the most valuable tool that I've ever known

