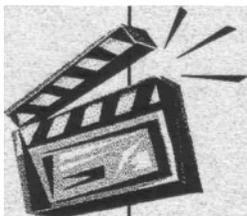


Director's Chair**Culture Shock: From Tutor to Director, Center to Lab***Cynthia K. Marshall**Director—Miami University, Middletown Campus*

During my arduous journey through college and graduate school, I worked at Wright State University's Writing Center, where I peer tutored for five years. I was part of a fifty-person tutoring staff. We worked with students of all academic levels, from pre-college to graduate, and most had scheduled appointments. During my time there, I assumed that I had gleaned the finer points of Writing Center work. When I graduated, I became Acting Reading/Writing Specialist at Miami University's Middletown, Ohio campus. In this position, I oversee the Reading/Writing Lab. During my transitional period, I experienced culture shock. Students here at MU usually work on computers rather than engage in face-to-face discussions with tutors. The staff includes six peer tutors and myself. Only one tutor works per shift, and all clients are walk-ins. When I arrived at MU, most shockingly, I was in charge! I was faced with record keeping, covering for no-show tutors, checking timesheets, training tutors, and representing the Lab to the University community, all while trying to innovate and improve the Lab. The times when, as a tutor, (page 2)

**Tutoring Creative Writing***Eliza Young, Peer Tutor—Pennsylvania State University*

No one would argue that every cover letter is the same or that every topic proposal can be approached in the same manner. Still, for most tutors, a certain level of comfort exists with these types of writing since most of us have had similar assignments. What concerns many veteran tutors is the **unknown**. What constitutes the unknown? The **creative assignment**.

Many confident tutors panic at the sight of a piece of fiction or a creative narrative. Having never written pieces of this sort, they feel that they lack the proper tools to help the writer. Yet tutors must realize that they don't have to be experts in order to do a good job.

Above all else, a tutor must be willing to ask questions. That is, the tutor should feel free to ask the author about certain aspects of the story: why does a certain character speak with an accent? Why the excessive amount of swearing? What does the ending mean to the author?

Just to be safe, it is also a good idea to know the important components of fiction writing. Here are some questions for tutors to consider:

- Do you understand the **plot**? Don't feel badly if the story leaves you confused. Ask the writer to explain the plot and theme. This will help not only you, but also the (page 3)

The Power of the Computer with Writing Students: Looking Ahead to the Millennium

Michael Anzelone, Professor and Writing Center Assistant – Nassau Community College

I am pleased to report that I have been able to convey the value of a good word processing program, Word '97, to many of the students at the NCC Writing Center. Most of the students I have worked with thus far have no computer at home, and many have limited knowledge of the power of this writing tool. I have helped these students to learn the basics of the word processing program and to improve their writing for a variety of subjects. These students have learned to create a writing file, to save files, to open and close files, and to work with Word '97 in ways that benefit them in our tutoring sessions and beyond.

Encountering word processing for the first time, students marvel at the ease of the "spell check" and "thesaurus" tools that correct careless errors and give them word choice options. Word processing gives them a powerful way to cope with their limitations in writing. It is a joy for me to watch these often meek, fragile, and frustrated students become empowered by the use of these programs.

These types of computer-assisted aids are only the very tip of the iceberg. Many other powerful and complicated programs available today will further enable students to improve their writing. At NCC, many English faculty members use interactive programs like "Daedalus," which allows for chats and e-mails. However, as a start, I feel that my work in the NCC Writing Center will have far-reaching consequences and positive results. Many students have mentioned that they plan to look into purchasing computers; others tell me that they plan to make use of the computers on campus.

I believe that I have helped some of these students to overcome their computer phobias. The next step is to have these same students master not only the basic skills of word processing programs, but also to have them understand how the writers of today employ computer technology. I use computers in the Writing Center as well as in my introductory composition classes to familiarize students with the Internet as a research tool. Additionally, I log on to the NCC Library to introduce the research capabilities of this system, and many students gain the confidence to research on their own. Finally, by implementing computers in both the classroom and the Writing Center, I help students to become informed and assured learners and writers. These students no longer fear the computer, they no longer fear research, and they no longer fear college writing tasks now that they have this important ally at their disposal.

Culture Shock (*continued from page 1*)

I was less than careful with paperwork, forgot to sign myself or clients in and out, or neglected my timesheets returned to haunt me.

While I was surprised by the obvious size and procedural differences between the Wright and MU Writing Centers, I also found fascinating similarities. Right away, I noticed the sense of community that developed among tutors at both schools. Particularly at commuter schools, as both are, students often feel like they're not part of any campus community. I remember how the Writing Center staff at Wright made me feel welcome and provided an on-campus community. The situation at MU is similar. Reading/Writing Lab tutors become friends; "hang out" in the Lab even when they're off the clock; and work their tutoring magic with each other, frequently discussing their classwork and writing.

At MU, we're less isolated than at Wright; tutors from the Math Lab frequently come into our lab to use the computers, and the Math Specialist's office is located virtually in the Lab. While Wright's Center had a larger space and staff, it could sometimes feel detached from the rest of the University. At MU, though, we're attached to Student Services, so we interact with advisors, counselors, and adjuncts regularly.

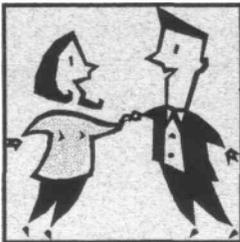
Another (unfortunate) similarity between the labs where I've worked is that we're constantly battling misconceptions about the services that we provide. At both schools, many people perceive us as grammar "fixers" with little to offer to non-remedial students. Interestingly, both centers are located in the basement, and I've wondered if that placement reflects these erroneous perceptions about the clients that we serve.

Despite these differences and perhaps because of the similarities, I have formulated a broader definition of our mission: to help students and each other. It might be easy for me to see the most familiar way as the "right" way; however, there are many right ways. It's all about perspectives and positions.

International Students in the Writing Center

Jeff Birkenstein, Scott Kremer, Jennifer Pour, and Tiffany Wilson-Mobley

Tutors, University of Kentucky



Here at the University of Kentucky, we recently celebrated the long-awaited grand opening of our new library! The library is a state-of-the-art facility; all computers are wired for Internet connectivity, bookshelves operate electronically (complete with an electric eye and automatic shut-off to ensure that no one gets crushed), and laptops are available for checkout. As the University moves into the new library, the University of Kentucky Writing Center will move into its new space. The Center will feature extensive computer connections and even a waiting lounge!

With our new and improved surroundings came a debate among the director, Dr. Gail Cummins, and the tutors about whether we should adopt a new name—The Communication Center. In our existing Writing Center we offer a variety of services besides writing consultations: videotaped speaking help, Spanish tutoring, and numerous writing workshops. New this year is the International Conversational Hour, which we created and implemented. ICH is an informal weekly gathering for international and American students to relax and to discuss various issues. Our participants represent all levels of English proficiency. Three students attended our first meeting; now we host fifteen to twenty students every week. Visitors drop in as their schedules permit, and the service is free, although many ESL students ask about the price.

With more and more American universities competing to attract international students—both for diversity and for revenue—it is important that the needs of these international students be met. You probably agree that international students frequently take advantage of the Writing Center. ICH grew out of this patronage. We at UK noticed that international students sit in class all day and *listen* to their instructors speak English, then return home to speak their native language. Many participants tell us that ICH is their only opportunity to practice comprehensive and practical English.

All facets of language acquisition are inter-connected. ICH has taken off because of international students' craving for this type of interaction. At UK, the German Department hosts a conversation hour, and the Spanish and French Departments have their own versions as well. The concept is universal; however, when we presented our initial ideas and findings at the 1997 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing in Lexington, Kentucky, we were astonished at the audience response. Tutors recognized that ICH is practical, beneficial, and easy to implement, yet few other Writing Centers offer such a program.

The Communication Center is a natural extension of the modern Writing Center. Many Writing Centers provide services other than writing consultations, and ICH is the perfect way to attract new students to the Writing Center. As our Center grows, we educate incoming TA's about the many strategies for meeting international students' needs. The possible rewards of ICH for both the students and the University are numerous. We encourage discussion about and implementation of such a program in your Writing Center. Please contact us at WRITINGCENTER@lsv.uky.edu.

Creative Writing (*continued from page 7*)

writer. Here are some important considerations to keep in mind:

- What do you think about the characters? If a character's action seems out of place or unnecessary, ask the author why the character performs the action and what this does for both the character development and the plot.
- Does the **dialogue** make sense? Remember, when it comes to dialect, it is always better to drop it than to use it poorly.
- Is the **point of view** consistent?

- Does the story contain potentially **offensive material** (i.e. vulgar language, sexual connotations, sexism, or racism)? If this material is present, and it seems as though it may be unnecessary, ask the writer why he or she included it. If the explanation is insufficient, perhaps the author will reconsider his or her choice of words.

Remember that the writer is studying creative writing and should have knowledge about everything on the above list. Although the tutor should have some idea of what to look for, he or she does not have to be an expert on character development or dialogue. Instead, the tutor's duty involves guiding the author to consider what he or she has written and whether it makes sense.

Tutoring cover letters may be more comfortable, but a little fiction can be a lot of fun every so often. Enjoy it!

The Revenge of the English Majors

Teraya White, Peer Tutor—Pennsylvania State University

There are very few majors that spark as much debate as English. I recently attended a conference and, during icebreakers, someone asked me about my major. Without hesitation I replied, "English."

"I assume that you want to teach," she said.

"I have no intentions of teaching," I told her, "I want to be an attorney."

After glaring at me for a few seconds, she berated my major for being unchallenging, non-marketable, and just plain idiotic. Needless to say, I was appalled.

While teaching is a worthwhile profession, it is not the only option for an English major. The beauty of English is its broad approach, which provides an infinite number of career possibilities that include, but are not limited to, teaching. English gives students an opportunity to hone their skills not only in writing, but also in research and critical thinking. In the next millennium, employers will search for people who possess these very skills.

The argument that English is an easy major is perhaps the most incredible. The largest component of the major is writing—a fearful and unpleasant task that many college students try to evade. Writing is the English student's reality. English majors learn to choose their words carefully, to support their arguments, and most of all, to deal with feedback. Writing also takes time, patience, and an enormous amount of creativity—it is not a mediocre task! If writing is easy, then why do students frequent writing centers in search of help? English majors realize the challenges of writing and rise to meet them.

I find it insulting that people do not realize the flexibility of the English major. When uninformed people assume that an English degree is non-marketable, I tell them to watch

NBC because English majors probably write for "Friends," "ER," and "Law and Order." I suggest that they tune in to CNN to see the many congressmen who began their careers as English majors.

For many students, English is an honorable major that emphasizes creativity over cash. I am proud that my major taught me to treat writing not as an act, but an art! At a recent conference in Philadelphia, the executive producer of an upcoming film asked about my major. I beamed with great pride and exclaimed, "I am an English major!" She smiled and replied, "Oh really? So was I!"

Falling Through the Cracks

Allison Bender

Tutor and graduate—University of Southern Indiana

As a tutor, I cannot help but wonder where the educational system has failed many of my tutees. Many students come to me for advice on their papers, but they cannot even write a complete, coherent sentence. These situations are frustrating to tutors like me because we have only a short time with our tutees and are not able to make up for twelve years of education. What we can do is cracks once again.

When I was in middle and high school, many writing teachers disregarded the different learning styles of their students and taught the same way they were taught in school—desks in rows, students quiet and still, and lessons centered around the teacher. Most of my teachers had little education beyond their teaching licenses and did not try to find out how their students learned. I am happy to report that this trend is changing; education departments are realizing that students learn more readily when they are free to take an active role in their lessons. As tutors, we should take the time to find out how our tutees learn most successfully and cater to those needs. However, sometimes we find it easier to correct a paper for them without explanation. We cannot allow ourselves to adopt this bad habit.

After my graduation in December 1998, I plan to teach high-school English. Most likely, my students will be like my tutees, and it will be difficult to undo the negativity they feel toward writing. To a pre-service teacher, it is upsetting that some students are too far gone to enjoy the writing process. As a teacher, I will try to instill the value of writing as communication to my students, just as I do with my tutees. This will be difficult at times, but I feel that I owe these students the time and effort to head them toward improvement. My wish for the future is to keep students from falling through the cracks so that they can experience success in their college writing classes.

Abstracting: An Advanced Listening Skill for Tutors and Tutees

David C. Brainard

Tutor and graduate—St. Lawrence University's Master program

The tutor's gift is the ability to facilitate another's learning without harming that person's dignity. In tutoring there is a relationship—often between two people, though sometimes more than two are involved—meant to stimulate academic growth. Because tutoring happens outside the classroom and in a context of concentrated effort, the tutoring relationship can be equal in all ways other than the designated role of the tutor. That is, because the tutor and the writer both concentrate on a similar end, the tutoring can take place in a context of equality. This equality can occur despite the tutor's supposed advanced knowledge of the topics discussed during tutoring. In tutoring writing, for instance, the tutor is certainly not an expert on the writer's work. A tutor's main goal is not to *tell* the writer what to write, but to *help* the writer to work with his or her existing context—perspective, experience, knowledge, and soon.

One way to piece together this fragmented information is through the abstracting process. Abstracting is the thinking process by which we lend meaning to something we have named, and we lend different levels of meaning to different names of a similar entity or event (Bois 1996). In the process of tutoring, the writer names entities and events with his or her words. The words on the page are the basic information from which both the writer and the tutor can abstract more detailed information. Both will try to answer questions about what is written, why it is written, how the thought process occurs, what the thought means, and how the thought works in the context of the writing. The possible answers to these questions are abstractions from the existing information.

In the tutoring process, a few specific kinds of abstraction can be particularly useful. One can attempt to abstract the nature of errors—not what kinds of errors exist, but how they came to exist. That is, tutors can ask, "How did the flaw come to be part of the writing?" This what/how distinction is important because humans don't tend to make errors deliberately. Thus, it can be abstracted that a writer's errors are part of his or her existing understanding of the written language and he or she does not fundamentally know how not to make the error. Similar to abstracting the nature of errors is abstracting the nature of writing patterns. A tutor can ask, "Where did these patterns come from? How were they formed, and why?"

Everyone abstracts. Writers directly concerned with awareness have suggested that few people are conscious of their abstracting (Bois 1996). Becoming conscious of abstracting helps the tutoring process by allowing writers to expand concepts, to develop ideas, and to gain greater fluency (Meyer and Smith 1987). Becoming conscious of abstracting means becoming aware of where one's thoughts, sentences, and phrases originate. It means learning why and how thoughts are formed. It means specifically noticing the whole process of thinking and writing. Noticing this process makes a writer aware of the details of his or her own thinking and provides writers with more creative choices.

Bois, J. S. (1996). *The art of awareness*. Santa Monica: Continuum Press.

Meyer, E. and L. Smith (1987). *The practical tutor*. New York: Oxford UP.

SKILLS EMPLOYERS SEEK

Mental agility
Critical thinking
Collaboration and teamwork
Writing (various types)
Listening and speaking
Presenting
Reading and researching
Technological experience
Accuracy and attention to detail
Interpersonal skills
Creativity and inventiveness
Professionalism
Work ethic
Positive attitude

SKILLS TUTORS POSSESS

Collaboration
Training
Service learning
Technological experience
Presenting
Outreach and recruitment
Advertising and marketing
Writing and publishing
Listening and speaking
Reading and researching
Problem solving
Critical and creative thinking
People skills—LD, ESL, ESD
Multi-tasking (flexibility)

16th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing Unmasking Writing: A Collaborative Process

Date: October 29-31, 1999

Location: The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

Writers and tutors often wear masks. The mask can be a persona, usually knowingly chosen, but not always. Sometimes we don them unconsciously. Masks can also be formulaic thinking, such as a five-paragraph essay and a preconceived tutoring agenda.

"Unmasking" can mean exploring, questioning, explaining, probing, finding, or negotiating meanings that don't declare themselves at first. "Unmasking" can signify, then, discovering with writers their achievements that may have been obscured from the

The Dangling Modifier

writer by the linguistic and cultural "masks" they wear. "Unmasking" can also mean helping the writer to see what is not yet achieved and, until the tutor and writer have talked about it, not seen or known.

We invite you to propose presentations for the 16th Annual NCPTW. We emphasize tutor-led, active workshops, roundtables, and discussion panels. The conference seeks to explore issues of collaboration and trust in our writing centers, as well as to investigate any dimension of peer tutoring.

Please include the following with your proposal:

- Name and position of contact person
- Address, phone number, and e-mail address
- Time required (15, 25, 50, or 75 minutes)
- Intended audience
- Format (workshop, discussion, demonstration, etc.)
- Presenters and their positions
- 150-250 word description
- Title and 50 word abstract (to be included in the program)
- Equipment needed
- Additional concerns

Please send to: Julie Story, Conference Director, Center for Excellence in Writing, 206 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802.