The Writing Center is designed to provide services for students from a variety of backgrounds. However, non-native speakers of English may hold different expectations of the Writing Center because of both cultural influences and the challenges faced when writing in one’s non-native language. For a Writing Assistant, working with these students can be challenging yet rewarding at the same time. I have found that it is essential to set clear guidelines at the beginning of the session because different cultures may have varying views about the purpose of this type of organization. The Writing Assistant may need to explain the goals of the Writing Center for students who have not been here in the past. Additionally, the Writing Assistant should ask the student what he or she hopes to accomplish in the session. It is important that the goals of the session are realistic and that they address the highest order concerns within the paper. As the Writing Assistant begins to read the paper, he or she may help the student to tweak his or her goals.

Another important virtue a Writing Assistant must have during these sessions is patience. By taking one’s time and reviewing concepts the student does not understand, the Writing Assistant can make the experience a positive one. Language barriers can occur and sometimes it is necessary to explain something using different terms to bridge the gap. However, if you find yourself having difficulties in aiding a student, it is always possible to ask for help from others in the Writing Center. Receiving information and techniques from others can help to make the session flow more smoothly and can aid the student in improving his or her paper. Overall, when working with non-native speakers of English is important to consider their language and cultural needs and to be prepared to explain the same concept in a variety of understandable ways to meet the student’s needs.

I began my role as a Writing Assistant in June 2009. Majoring in English and pursuing a minor in public relations, I was seeking out career opportunities that would allow me to both showcase and further develop my oral and written communication skills. Shortly after graduation in January 2011, I accepted a position as Account Coordinator at R&J Public Relations, a Bridgewater, N.J. public relations agency with a diverse client roster.

I owe a large degree of my recent professional success to The Writing Center. In working with students of all disciplines and ability levels, I strengthened my own skills, making myself a more viable job candidate. It wasn’t only my writing that improved either; I became more analytically minded, more organized and strategic, and much more confident. I also became extremely adept at utilizing semi-colons in written correspondence, which based on my speculation most likely landed me my current position.

Right now, I am responsible for driving tactical activities on a variety of company accounts, including business-to-business clients, non-profit and association clients, and real estate clients. I meet with my assigned clients often and am responsible for developing persuasive communication initiatives and materials. I also assist with event planning and execution as is needed.

While a college degree goes a long way in selling you to potential employers, experience goes further. And being a Writing Assistant is experience that will go far above and beyond.
Dealing with the “I Have to Be Here” Student by Dara Palms

Some of the most difficult tutoring sessions for Writing Assistants arise when students do not feel that they need to be in the Writing Center. Often, professors will require students to come to the Writing Center as a part of an assignment, and sometimes the students react quite negatively to such a requirement. It can be very difficult, especially for a new Writing Assistant, to deal with a student who feels as though he or she is “above” being tutored.

In situations like these, I have found that the best thing to do is to take time at the beginning of the session to engage in an open conversation. If you allow the student to complain (only for a moment, as anything else can turn into a venting session that will be completely unproductive) and you let the student know that you understand his or her frustration, he or she will be much more likely to get past the supposed stigma of being tutored and to actually listen to what you have to say. After the student realizes that you do not feel that you are in any way superior, it will be much easier to offer suggestions in regard to the student’s writing. I usually try to boost the student’s confidence by complimenting the positive aspects of his or her writing skills, and then I’ll tell the student that we’re just going to read through the paper to see what can be “tweaked” in order to make the paper even stronger than it already is. Using this technique allows the student to become more relaxed and open to suggestions, and it allows for a much smoother tutoring session for both parties.

From the Eyes of a New Writing Assistant… by Courtney Luk

Even though I just started tutoring at the Writing Center this semester, I already learned a lot. I have been exposed to different writing styles and met other students whom I had the pleasure of getting to know on a more personal level. I got to understand them through their writing and our interaction during tutoring sessions. Every student has his/her own unique opinions, which is the best part about reading and going through all of the essays. Not only is it interesting to hear them explain themselves and talk about the topic, but it is also wonderful to discuss the topic. The student starts to open and freely talks about how s/he feels about the subject. This makes way for a friendlier atmosphere and makes the task of developing an essay more fun. I enjoyed the sessions that I had in the past several weeks because of the connections with students. When the students develop an interest for the essay topic, it makes the sessions that much more interesting.

So You Call Yourself a Writing Assistant by Greg Montagnino

There are times when I think about why I chose to apply for the position as a tutor. Over the course of the past six months of tutoring in the Writing Center, I have learned that the aspects of this position are relatable to a larger social context. The primary job of a Writing Assistant is to help students improve their writing; writing is a skill which relates to most professions, daily activities, and extends to communicating with people on all different levels. Through the exercise of tutoring, I am able to interact with the students and not only discuss their writing but also explain (indirectly or not) the importance of knowing the proper way to write. I find my job as a tutor to be important because it gives me the opportunity to assist others. Having such a position is very rewarding and enables me to improve my own writing and social skills. These social skills include interacting with the students, my fellow writing assistants, and Jane and Jeanne, all of whom have an impact on my constant personal progression.
Sunny With a Chance of Problems: Inconceivable Writing in Student Papers

By Sue Stever

We all know the signs of “overdoing it”: taking on too much in terms of academic or personal commitments. Overextending ourselves can make us cranky and unfocused and can derail the best intentions. Making healthy choices is no accident and takes a certain level of maturity and engagement with life to accomplish with grace. In fact, every choice to over-pack our day can cloud the simple joys of purposeful living.

This same sort of over-commitment can creep into our writing. In The Writing Center sessions, how often do we see student drafts that, although grammatically correct, are so saturated with words and phrases that ideas are having a hard time emerging? Inconceivable writing is writing that struggles for meaning as it unnecessarily strings phrases, clauses, and details in an effort to explain.

At the paragraph level, it’s even more insidious. Packing paragraphs with multiple or divergent ideas or recasting tangled ideas even more. How can we help the student writer “see” that sometimes less is more? It might help to remember a few simple rules about making writing more concise: reduce, rethink, and refocus. Discuss places where the student could reduce long clauses and phrases into shorter, more direct ones or cut empty phrases entirely. Ask her where she intended the emphasis to be and help her rethink the sentence’s subject. Lend her a hand identifying empty placeholders, such as “actually,” “basically,” “there is”, and “I feel that.” Help her wring the vagueness out of her writing by using embeddings, appositives, and active verbs and to not assume that the more ornate the description, the better.

Less is more! Inconceivable writing can do as much damage as missing or incomplete ideas. The next time you sit down with a good student who has unfortunately just become BFF with a thesaurus, just ask Jane or Jeanne where they keep The Writing Center pruning shears. The dead wood has to go!

“\textit{In The Writing Center sessions, how often do we see student drafts that, although grammatically correct, are so saturated with words and phrases that ideas are having a hard time emerging?}”

Grammar Gab by Kara Polhemus

\textbf{Who vs. Whom: When to Use Which}

Who is subjective, meaning it performs the action in a sentence. Whom is objective, which means it receives the action in a sentence. If you have trouble determining when to use which, you can try answering the question being posed. If your answer is subjective (he, she), use who. If your answer is objective (him, her), then whom is the correct choice. Here are some examples:

Original Sentence: Who did this?
Answer: He did this.

Original Sentence: Whom do you wish to speak to?
Answer: I wish to speak to him.

You can use a similar technique for sentences that are not questions:

Danielle, who fought against the robots bravely, is visiting (“she fought” works, but “her fought” does not, so who is correct).

Robert, to whom I gave my pencil, has not returned it. (“I gave my pencil to him” works, but “I gave my pencil to he” does not, so whom is correct).

Keep in mind that the correct usage of who and whom are rarely modeled in everyday speech (or writing!), so it’s best to remember the rule instead of just mimicking what you hear on TV, on the news, in songs, or even what you hear from your teacher!
Hello everybody, If you do not know me, my name is Ryan Taylor. I would describe myself as a member of the class of 2012, but, as a panicked transfer student, I prefer to refer to myself as an eventual graduate. I have been working in the Writing Center since January 2010 and have thoroughly enjoyed the experience, as I am sure all of you have. However, that is not to deny the low moments where you would rather eat the pen in the student’s hand rather than inspire it to move. Working at the Writing Center is not an easy job.

We have all trudged through sessions we swore were as healthy as having a lead paint smoothie. We’ve exhaled the sigh of relief when the WARF was completed and the student is logged out (or at least deceptively appears to be in the latest iteration of TutorTrac). We’ve heaved our ten ton bodies onto the blue chairs and stared at the white pseudo-tile sky. For us, the appointment has ended, and the life of the paper continues without us. It is again tucked amidst a folder or dirty backpack, but that is just the paper.

What do I mean “that is just the paper”? Well, I am glad I asked you this rhetorical question, and, please, allow me to elaborate further. As Writing Assistants, we are inundated with papers, and we see them as mere objects and ignore their wider implications. A paper is an extension of the student behind the keyboard or pen. What is behind that paper we only spend thirty minutes on may be a student who has perhaps struggled for hours rereading the text, investigating every millimeter of the assignment sheet, parsing the professor’s comments, or simply grappling with a multitude of concepts while staring at a blank Word document. We only see the culmination of what could be hours upon hours of work. We only see the product, not the process.

This poses a particularly unique scenario to us as Writing Assistants. We enter a session with a student that could be a powder keg of emotions, and yet I fear we may only see Times New Roman font and one-inch margins. We see the output of the brain, not the inner turmoil that often comes to baffle us as the wide eyed stare, silence, and eventually the “I have no clue… what do you think?” moment. We can become aggravated with the student or believe him or her to be intellectually inferior. I would beg of all of you reading this that we avoid this temptation. Our collective patience and understanding are what make a session work.

We need patience and understanding to oil the gears of the student mind. We may focus on proper pronoun use, diction, or a slight error in APA formatting, but most importantly we must hone in on the state of the student. The student will become a wallflower if he or she is not actively involved in the process of revision. We must encourage students to take risks as part of their revision. Through risks, students are able to express themselves without fear of harsh judgment or a binary response of correct or incorrect. We need to work in the gray areas that ultimately allow students to better define their own thoughts.

If we provide encouragement, the student will provide active participation and a sense of accomplishment for both parties involved. This mutual participation often results in success, and we should not shy away from our part of the process. I often find myself exclaiming, “Yes! That’s it exactly! Write down exactly what you said, it was perfect!” We are able to be life-lines for the student who attempts to grab the treasure chest floating on the water. If they are taken by the tide, we must reel them in. If they are able to grab the treasure, we can enjoy the reward alongside them.

We need to be the smiling face, reassuring look, and encouraging force regardless of the student’s output. Students improve if they feel confident and unafraid to discuss topics even if they are unsure if what they are saying is correct. Although we only participate in thirty minutes of the paper’s life, we participate in an infinite moment with the student. I encourage all of you to make this infinite moment as beneficial and positive as possible with your students. Even if the papers we handle every day may not be picture perfect, we must remember the painters behind them.
The Joys of Being a Writing Assistant by Pooja Mevawala

There are a number of perks to working at the Writing Center. One of my favorites is the relationship that is established between the tutor and the student, which extends beyond just the tutoring room. When students come in, the tutor is expected to make the students feel comfortable about their papers and expressing their ideas. This can be achieved through friendly conversation, complimenting the student’s work, or even relating to the student’s writing experience. Such easing of the environment builds a relationship between the tutor and the student, which goes further than just the Writing Center. Several times I have run into students whom I have tutored elsewhere on campus and at public sights such as restaurants and malls. It feels good to say that we both usually stop to say hello and acknowledge our acquaintance. Sometimes, we even have an enjoyable, friendly conversation. This is typically the case with freshman students, who tend to be more dependent on your assistance at the Writing Center. You usually have these same students coming back for help, and the level of comfort between the tutor and the student increases with each visit. In many cases, the students will come back to me and tell me how well they did on their papers. Not only do such comments make me feel good about being helpful, but they also give me a sense of how the student is progressing in terms of his or her writing skills. Assisting students in broadening their writing abilities is a major goal of the Writing Center, and the presence of such relationships between the tutor and student facilitates the achievement of this goal. I feel that the overall warm and welcoming environment found at the Writing Center encourages these types of interactions. I truly enjoy meeting new people while working here, and I take pleasure in building new relationships that extend beyond the Writing Center.

Strive for a Silent Phone, Not a Silent Session by Samantha Wilson

Most of us can admit that keeping our cell phones off and put away during a day of sessions can feel a little strange, but we know we have to do it if we want our sessions to be effective. Students who come to the Writing Center, however, sometimes have trouble with this concept and stay glued to their phones during sessions, and this leads to a lack of focus and concentration. There are several methods that we Writing Assistants can use to snap the students back to attention.

Asking a student questions usually brings back his or her wandering mind to the session. For example, asking, “Can you find the errors in this sentence?” forces the student to focus on the words on the paper instead of text messages on a phone. In addition, it also helps to ask the student what a specific paragraph was trying to convey, as this also makes the student think about the writing itself. Making the students an active part of the session keeps them engaged and attentive. We cannot steal the students’ cell phones, but there are certainly ways to make them focus on you and the writing process.

Let’s try this together instead by Joselyn McClatchey and Kaitlyn Roberts

One of the mottos here at the Writing Center is “let’s work together on this,” and sometimes students don’t get why. Many of us, even here at the Writing Center, would love someone just to tell us what we did wrong so we can fix it. However, that rarely improves a person’s writing skills. That’s why at the Writing Center we always tell our students, if need be, that “We can help you understand this...” or “We can help you work on that...” if he or she were unsure of what we do here at the Writing Center. The Writing Assistants want to work with the students to show them that we aren’t the ones with all the skills: the students are! So although it would be simple for the staff just to pick up a pen and fix some grammatical mistakes, it is through our passion for writing that we want to help others learn the writing skills they will need for the rest of their life.

Communication is key!
Get to know Jane... 10 (or so) interesting facts about our Director!

1. Although little else has stayed put over the years, I am still wearing the same size slippers as I did in high school.
2. I'm seldom happier than when I am rearranging my library of books. Sometimes I alphabetize them by genre; sometimes not. This is the point where most people tell me to get a life.
3. I have the most beautiful grandson ever born, throughout time, in all of history, ever.
4. I will kill for chocolate.
5. One of my favorite restaurants is Fred & Murray’s Kosher Delicatessen in lovely Freehold Township, although I have yet to meet either Fred or Murray. They will most likely show up around the same time that the restaurant offers anything under 1500 calories or serves cheese.
6. When I win the lottery, I am taking a trip on the Orient Express with my three BFFs. So far, the lottery gods are not interested.
7. My favorite current author is Michael Chabon; my favorite all-time author is determined by which classic I last read.
8. I have lived in fifteen locations in my short twenty-nine years of life.
9. I make the finest matzo ball soup in the English-speaking world, according to my nephews.
10. In 1995, I made my best friend in the world leave a 15 inning, American League, division series Yankees game at 1:00 a.m. in the bottom of the 13th inning, and I have never lived it down. We got lost in the Bronx and had to pay our last dollars to a fine purveyor of gas (use your imagination) for directions.
11. A few years back, I was skiing in a glade in Colorado and hugged a tree, unexpectedly. After confirming that I was still, indeed, alive, I skied down the remainder of the slope and headed back up on the lift. Somewhere on that lift, I realized that my knee had sustained significant damage. I got my first toboggan ride down a slope. That was fun.
12. Math is not my strongest area.

Learn a Few Things about Jeanne, too!

1. Has worked at MU for 25 years in Disability Services, the Registrar’s Office and the Writing Center
2. Monmouth Alumna 2001!
3. Has the most beautiful granddaughter in the world - Alexandra (no kidding)
4. Hails from Brooklyn, NY!
5. Has only lived in two locations – Brooklyn and Hazlet, NJ
6. Does not have functional fixedness* Jane, unfortunately, has an acute case of FF
7. Loves the beach
8. Has had more medical procedures in the last 10 years than most people her age (bad genes and bad luck?) – her husband calls her “God’s experiment”
9. Used to ski, play tennis, golf and swim (before all above mentioned medical procedures)
10. Is a mathematical wizard, of sorts (compared to Jane)

*Functional fixedness is a cognitive bias that limits a person to using an object only in the way it is traditionally used. For example, if someone needs a paperweight, but they only have a hammer, they may not see how the hammer can be used as a paperweight.
How often does a student come in to The Writing Center and right off the bat we can see an issue in the development of his or her assignment? Oftentimes, an assignment itself will seem underdeveloped due the construction of the paragraphs. Paragraph development is a key aspect to a thorough assignment, and as Writing Assistants, we should be able to help students develop this skill during our sessions. In teaching a writing and research course at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island, I was introduced to a strategy called PIE used to create well-developed paragraphs. PIE is an acronym for “point,” “illustration,” and “explanation.” Each paragraph should contain these three elements, not necessarily in order, but it’s best to begin this way, especially with novice writers.

P = Point
What is the point of the paragraph? What claim is being made? Generally, the point is the TOPIC SENTENCE of the paragraph. The main idea of your paper has points to support it. Use these points to begin each paragraph. For an example, on an essay supporting the legalization of marijuana, one of your supporting points may be that the sale of marijuana could be taxed, bringing necessary income to the states. This would be the “P” of one PIE paragraph.

I = Illustration
How is the point illustrated? Specific data, experiences, a quotation or other evidence are often used. Illustrations (examples) are used to support/develop the point. Ways to illustrate your point include: information from a reading or class discussion (paraphrases or quotes), personal experiences (stories, anecdotes), representations in mass media (newspapers, magazines, television), elements from popular culture (song lyrics, movie lines, TV characters, celebrities), definitions (from the dictionary, a reading, or another source) or statistics (polls, percentages, data from research studies). This would be the “I” of one PIE paragraph.

E = Explanation
How does the provided illustration connect to your point? The explanation is the writer’s analysis or elaboration of the point and illustration given, which connects the entire paragraph back to the thesis of the essay. Ideas for explaining how your illustration supports your point include: interpreting, analyzing, explaining the information, opinion or quote you’ve included, commenting on the accuracy (or inaccuracy) or the quote, fact, data, etc, explaining the meaning of your observation, findings or experience, or showing your reader how the information you’ve included relates to your THESIS. This would be the “E” in one PIE paragraph.

This is an example of a good PIE paragraph:

Watching my sister grow up, I’ve seen how toys influence children to adopt stereotypical gender roles in adulthood. When my sister was a girl, she always wanted to play with toy cookware. She saw these toys displayed on commercials. Girls in pink dresses were shown smiling, pretending to cook meals for their proud parents. I gagged when I saw these commercials, because they seemed so clichéd, but my sister thought that it would be fun to play with these toys. So she begged our parents for an Easy Bake Oven. When she finally got one, she pretended to cook elaborate meals for her stuffed animals. This went on for years. Now that my sister is grown, she is expected to do most of the cooking in her household, and she accepts this. It’s obvious to me now that the toys she played with as a child trained her to be the stereotypical housewife that she is today.

As you can see, using this format, a well developed paragraph is formed. This approach to paragraph development could be useful in a session where the tutee is having difficulty with his/her overall development of each paragraph.

Each of the components of the PIE can constitute its own paragraph. When this occurs, the student often develops each component further, adding depth to the essay. Jane DeTullio
Alumni News

Britt Travis

Since graduating from Monmouth University, Britt "Half Pint" Travis has been working up a storm on some of television’s hottest TV shows and events. While working on General Motors’ multi billion dollar advertising account, Britt has been rising the ladder & making a name for herself in the ad world. If you look closely enough, you may even spot her on a few red carpets these days! Working at the Writing Center enabled Britt to help students on a variety of subjects; this is something that she focuses heavily on in her day-to-day. Whether it’s making sure launches go seamlessly, her assistants are all on the same page, working effectively with celebrities, the WC’s desire to help others out has stuck on Britt. She’s also taken that desire of helping others to various countries by doing volunteer work in poor areas of the world. Britt’s latest venture was to raise over 200 lbs of notebooks from TV networks and bring them down to Honduras to help SOL International. The children were overwhelmed & Britt is excited to plan another volunteer trip soon! While not working or volunteering, Britt’s love of travel is taking her around the world! Oh, and for those wondering how “Half Pint” is doing on the softball field these days, she currently prefers to attend games through work & leaves the hitting to the pro’s.

Erinn Deignan

After graduation in 2007, I got a job as a Special Education teacher at Howell Middle School North in NJ. I worked there for 2 years and then in July of 2009, I married Devin, my best friend. We honeymooned in Hawaii and then moved to Westminster, Maryland. I got a job as a special-ed teacher teaching children with autism in Westminster. In May 2010, I graduated from Monmouth University once again, this time with a Masters of Arts in English with a concentration in Literature. I continued working until the birth of my son, Devin Landon on July 28, 2010. Now, I stay home full time with Don, as we call him, and I couldn’t be happier. When he is in his naps, I write. I am currently working on a novel-no promises about when it will be finished, but I am enjoying the process.

Jessica Skarzynski

After serving as Editor of NewsLinks, the quarterly publication of International Schools Services in Princeton, I’m now the Assistant Director of Mail & Marketing in the Department of Annual Giving at the Rutgers University Foundation. Since 2009, I’ve been producing fundraising materials for the university such as letters, brochures, web content, emails, and newsletters. Working with various schools and units across all three campuses, the Foundation promotes the idea of giving back and creating a culture of philanthropy at Rutgers.

I’m looking forward to marrying my fiance, Michael, this coming August. We both worked together at Kmart back in 1999 when I was in high school and he was in college. We kept in touch after we both left Kmart and eventually got together in early 2006. He proposed in 2009 and we can’t wait to take the plunge this summer! In my spare time, I enjoy writing and spending time with family and friends. I’m also training for my first half-marathon this April!
This semester I have been student teaching at my old high school, Monroe Township High School. I am currently teaching English to students in grades 9-11. I am teaching World Studies to a freshman Honors class. This class is an English class where I communicate regularly with the corresponding history teacher so that we are teaching similar material and making sure that we are in sync. I am also teaching two SAT Prep courses. The final class in my schedule is AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination). This class is designed to motivate students to attend college. It serves students who fall in the academic middle. This program encourages students to perform better in their classes. The teacher's job in this program is to think of activities to promote team building and increase self-motivation. My cooperating teacher is going on maternity leave on April 1; I have been going on a series of interviews for her position as a leave replacement. I hope to receive this position, and if not, I look forward to finishing my student teaching and looking for a teaching job where I can help middle or high school students better grasp concepts of Language Arts.

To date, I am writing my thesis (on F. Scott Fitzgerald and football) at Oklahoma State, and am currently searching for employment. I am in my early 20s, unmarried, and currently residing in Stillwater, OK (though hopefully for not too much longer).