



Writing at the Center



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FRESNO STATE
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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.



Liliana Perez

EXTEMPORANEOUS WRITING USED TO SCARE ME

It used to scare me a lot, actually. I started working at the Writing Center last fall, not expecting that my perceptions about writing would change. You see, if I had been asked a year ago to do a ‘short write’ on a topic, a common practice at the WC, I would have panicked. If someone had asked me, “What is good writing? Let’s take five minutes to write about that,” I would have been petrified. Five minutes? To define what is ‘good’ writing? Let me get back to you on that. I’ll email you my response next week. Catch you later. This is how I would have responded. But today, someone asks me – or rather, I ask – to write about the effects of learning a foreign language or how gender roles play out in higher education, and I don’t panic anymore. My heart doesn’t pound at 100 beats per minute nor do I begin hyperventilating at a rapid pace, while glancing around to see what others could possibly be writing about. These are no longer questions that I necessarily *question*, or topics that I have to spend two hours contemplating before scrawling out a response.

My fears about short writing derived from my preconceptions about the writing process. You see, my writing process (or as I like to call it, my self-loathing process) is a systematic mess. It consists of me moping around for a couple weeks, chewing on the possible topics that I might write about for my paper. After an epiphany hits me and I decide on an essay topic, I engage in heaps of research, checking out textbooks from the library by the dozen, hopeful of the fruitful work to come. I quickly become engrossed in my research and don’t spend much time thinking about anything else. I usually end up sleeping on a bed of loose pages and notes that are scribbled with trivial ideas that really have nothing to do with my paper. After a week or two of this, I manage to get a few sentences typed out onto my computer screen. I usually stare at these sentences for a couple hours, thinking of countless ways to modify them, but never actually having the courage to have my fingers dance across the keyboard. I’d like to say that it is the uncertainty of my topic that restrains me, but really, it’s a lack of confidence in my academic language. Eventually, I force myself to write, and I finish the essay two to three days later, with 10 pages to show for my meticulous work. Although this writing process was lengthy and exhausting, it had been difficult for me to get any writing done otherwise.

By the end of my first year of college as an English major, I had come to accept that 90% of my writing process consisted of painstaking research and premeditated structures. The rest was reserved for writing, and I only wrote when I really had to, so it was all done within 48 hours of the deadline because I tended to prioritize my research above everything. Having these writing habits deeply rooted into me, it was only natural for me to believe

extemporaneous writing to be utterly terrifying. It was scary because it was spontaneous, uncertain, and messy. To have asked me to write off-the-cuff and be prepared to share my ideas with my group members would have rattled me to my core. Knowing myself, I would not have produced a single word within 10 minutes. Well, I might have written down a sentence or two, hated them, crossed them out, erased, and tried again. Most likely, no writing would have been produced, and if there had been, it was done most unwillingly. To have done a short write meant to defy all the assumptions I had about 'good' writing, about how academic writing was supposed to be and look like, and would have challenged who I was as a writer.

After many weeks of many short writes in small groups and at weekly trainings, I became accustomed to them, and was even enthusiastic about them at times. But I don't want to claim that I've completely changed as a writer and English major, that I've perfected my writing process, and how freewriting comes second nature to me now. I am still learning, still gradually applying spontaneity to my writing. What has rapidly changed is how I brainstorm when starting essays; I find myself doing Sloppy Buckets at home to unravel my prompts, doing the famous mind map, and freewriting to discover new questions and ideas. But every now and then, I hit a wall, and my mind is blank for days at a time. During these instances is when I have to remind myself that writing doesn't always have to be structured, formulaic, perfect. Writing can be fun, impromptu, whimsical, and, as I've recently learned, unpredictable.

To ease myself into writing again, I try to imagine myself at the WC, and that I'm bringing in my prompt to a group tutoring session. I imagine that my tutees and I are doing a mind map to look at the topic in a different way and discover new leads. I usually give myself a short write question to think about, crank out a response, and then it goes off from there. It's always a good feeling when I manage to overcome that wall and find a new road. I realize that when I imagine myself at the Writing Center, sitting with my tutees in the corner of the room by the window, I can feel my motivation rise, my creativity bubble, and a wave of reassurance settle over me. I now know that doing a short write isn't about finding the answer to a question or trying to sound smart; it's about discovering new thinking, new ideas that you wouldn't have thought of unless you had written without inhibition or preparation. Sure, extemporaneous writing can be scary, and lack of structure can be intimidating, but it's only when you answer a complex question in five minutes that you learn how to become a hindrance free writer.





Karley Lassley

A LETTER TO ME

Dear Pre-Writing Center Karley,

So, you have just applied to the Writing Center at Fresno State. You're anxiously waiting to hear if you'll get an interview and if you'll be able to eventually get the job. You've grown up thinking that tutoring for writing is proofreading with a few comments on actual ideas. You're nervous that you won't know enough about grammar, spelling, and academic expectations to succeed. How do I know this? Because I'm you from the future and I'm here to tell you it's going to be okay.

I know you're beginning to think you have the work you are doing all figured out. I need to let you know you don't, and that's okay. You have been allowing yourself to build outlines around quotes and fill in the blanks for a long time. You then finish the paper in a day or two, and only get feedback when it is required. The Writing Center will be nothing like you expect. Just breathe. It's okay, you will learn.

The way the Writing Center views writing is different than many other places. You're going to go through quite a change in perspective, and it will be okay, beneficial even. You will not be proofreading, you will not be making judgments, and you will not be expected to know everything. You're going to gain a certain set of skills that will help you educate others on the importance of content revision and new ways to give feedback that fosters it.

Punctuation and spelling are not the end-all-be-all of essays. The voice of tutees (that's what we call students) and the content and views that they wish to express are the main emphasis at the Writing Center, where you will work. I know it's hard to trust, but please try. Have confidence and remember it's okay to ask for help. You will be doing a LOT of writing by hand, often in place of verbal dialogue. This will help you become comfortable with writing. Your tutees and you will be expected to read exactly what you wrote to each other. No verbal summaries of your thoughts. This helps you and tutees reach a level of confidence, letting yourselves talk through writing.

You will not help people with grammar first. In small groups you won't talk about it at all and in one-on-one tutoring you will rarely use it. In groups, this will become important since focusing on grammatical errors would be too individual and alienating for other members. Not using grammar in groups also helps writers to realize that grammar is only a part of the writing process and a small part of a full revision process.

It will also likely be strange to you that you will not be expected to tell the tutees what to change. As tutor, you don't know what has happened in the class, so you don't know what is necessary for those lectures, the given text, or even the teachers' expectations. Don't worry. I know you're probably thinking at this point, "what the heck do I do with them then?" Instead of direct advice you'll be expected to give feedback by looking at writing through specific lenses, writing a response and sharing it. It will be the tutee's job to decide what to do with that feedback. Through

working at the Writing Center, you will learn tools for looking at your own writing and your tutees who are learning to respond will learn this, too. You will learn how to imagine your readers as you write and get a better understanding of how other readers may view your writing.

You will also learn how to navigate personal and polarized issues, as they are brought up, in groups or one-on-one sessions. The most important thing to be careful of and remember is that everyone's voice and expression matters. Try to keep things general when needed and help tutees learn how to be respectful of others. Doing short writes, where people can write out their opinion or are forced to see strong points of other views, are really helpful.

Overall you will learn a lot about revising and responding to writing. You will learn how to work with people and help them improve their own abilities. You will be nervous, you will have fun, and you will really enjoy your job. I wish you could really see this at the time I would send it to you, but I can't send it to the past. However, maybe this text can help future tutors to know what you didn't.

Sincerely,
Karley after two years at The Writing Center.





Selena Carbajal

WRITING ABOUT WRITING: PIECING TOGETHER PURPOSE

Writing essays was confusing. I remember once in 7th grade, I had a meeting at the library about one of my essays in English. I can't remember much about that meeting. It was with some woman I had never seen before or ever saw again. The meeting took place in a room that I didn't know existed, near the entrance of the library. I don't know what she said but I knew that she explained what was wrong with my paper, and maybe even how to fix it. I just remember nodding a lot as I stared at the red lines and circles, thinking I knew what she meant about paragraphs and supporting evidence.

It took me a long time to figure out why I felt so distant from my writing. Not until my senior year of high school did I figure out why I couldn't find a home in writing. When I found *House on Mango Street*, I realized why I was so disinterested in literature and writing in general. My identity was previously not fully reflected in the books that were taught in my education. Writing had never been about me until that point. I didn't find a similar voice in writing until then. When I started working at the Writing Center, I also realized that I wasn't the only one that felt distant and excluded from writing.

I find these moments of realization among my students when we do an activity for a lens called Play-by-Play. Before using the lens, we all write what reactions we have that make us like and dislike a text. It was interesting to see how they didn't have the words to say that they liked a text that made them feel valued or connected. Rather they wrote strings of words such as *similar experiences*, *shared life stories*.

The Writing Process

During my interview here at the Writing Center, I was asked, "What is your writing process?" I didn't know how to answer this question, which is ironic given that I was interviewing for a position as a writing tutor. Thinking back now, the question threw me off because it was the first time that someone had asked me to talk about my own writing. It was the first time that I didn't have to passively listen to someone pointing out things about writing to me. So, to answer a question about how I felt about my own writing process, I remember pausing and blabbing on about quotes and bullet points. I felt like I didn't really know what I was talking about. Yet again, when I started working at the Writing Center, I also realized that I wasn't the only one who didn't have the language to discuss their own writing.

I realized that in order to be more familiar with my writing process, and thus the relationship with writing, that I had to let go of my fixation on parts of essays like quotes and transition words. It's something that I try to make noticeable to my students when they bring their own writing. The only language that they have when they begin is: *do you think it's good, is that a good quote, does it sound smart, what about my introduction*. They fixate on parts and

pieces of their writing and forget that they are writers themselves. They forget that they are individuals who hold knowledge, experiences, and thoughts worth writing and reading about.

Fresno Says Goodbye Sometimes

During my freshman year in high school, as my English teacher passed back our first paper, she said she could see that some of us already had our own voice. I wondered if I was one of those students. I should have asked but I didn't. I can't tell you exactly why. Maybe I was just a timid freshman back then. It wasn't until my fifth year as an undergraduate did someone validate my voice in my writing.

During an interview for a doctoral program, I was asked if I had received help on my application essays. I answered, "Yes." She then asked, "Did you write most of this?" I replied, "Yes, my mentors helped me with ideas, but the writing is mine." She asked, "So, this is mostly your voice?" I said, "Yes." After that interview ended, I went back and re-read those application essays because I was curious to see what she meant by my voice. After reading them, I realized how personal writing could be even though what I was asked to write about for graduate school applications was the personal and academic experiences that have shaped my desire to pursue doctoral studies.

Applying to graduate school was an exhausting process because how was I supposed to write who I was to someone I didn't know? Maybe what the interviewer saw was that my voice is who I am. My voice in those application essays was what I was vulnerable enough to share with the audience, the admissions committee who was going to read my essays. In that sense, writing has been my bridge to finding and letting others know my purpose, and at its current form, it was to enter a doctoral program.

Because of my writing, I am now able to leave. I am going away with my keyboard of letters, my pens, and paper, my cart of books. After several drafts of my personal statements, statements of purpose, academic statement of purpose and/or personal history statements, I was able to open up doors for myself. I was accepted into three Ph.D. programs and ultimately decided to attend the University of Arizona for my Ph.D. in Family Studies and Human Development.

I am pursuing a Ph.D. to continue my research. I will use my own voice for those who I will leave behind. For those who cannot out. I am continuing my research on the personal. I research my own experiences as a first-generation Chicana college student and daughter of Mexican immigrants. I didn't think that I could do that. I didn't think that my life was worth documenting and that there were already others researching similar work. I often didn't think of those things. I didn't think of the audience. Now, that is all I think about.

I started thinking about audience when I had the chance to reflect on my experiences responding to the question, "Who are you as a writer?" During the first week of our small writing groups, everyone at the table gets fifteen to twenty minutes to write the answer for themselves about who they are as a writer. It didn't occur to me until now that who I am as a writer always relies on a relative definition. It depends on what I've been reading, writing, researching, with who have I been talking to and revising with. Regardless of the genre, it is by no means a solitary process.

The Writing Process for this Piece

Even writing this piece took the shape of the way that I write my research. I take notes, type them up in a Word document, rearrange paragraphs, cut, copy, paste, delete, and type some more. Command + Shift + S and then type out a new title for my latest draft. The process takes multiple times of sitting in front of my Mac, typing into a Word document, or on my journal on Pages, or penciling in my thoughts in my composition book as I wait for the next tutoring appointment to show up. It is shaped by a culmination of explaining my draft to others or asking them about their thoughts or experiences related to my topic of interest.

The Writing Center also dedicates two tutoring sessions to ask and give feedback on each other's publication piece. In my first tutoring session, we did the lens Sayback because one of my fellow tutors wasn't sure if she was understanding my draft correctly. It turns out she wasn't understanding what I was trying to say overall, nor was the second fellow tutor at my table. I thought I was already explaining how my relationship with writing changed for the better, but they thought that writing was still something distant and abstract for me. And I was happy that they didn't understand what I was trying to say in my first draft because that meant I still had the chance to work on it until the next tutoring session.

That's where my relationship with writing is now. Before, I would stress about trying to make it perfect, clear, coherent, and understandable all in one moment. Now, I am more patient and comfortable with not knowing how exactly my final draft will look. I have learned to trust in the process, in my changing relationship with writing, and in my voice.



Teena White

FAREWELL

I often wonder how soon to be accountant is tutoring at a writing center, teaching other students new ways of responding to writing. Shouldn't I be somewhere interning and crunching numbers at some major accounting firm for free? The answer is yes, I should have been, but the experience I have gained here has been more valuable than what I would have gotten as an accounting intern. Besides, I have plenty of years to crunch numbers and bury myself in paperwork. At the Writing Center, I have gained more than just a new perspective on writing, I have become a better person because of my experiences here.

I have always loved to read and write, so when I got an email from one of my accounting professors about this place called the Writing Center, I was interested. I just happened to be looking for a job and the location was perfect, since I spent most of my time on campus. The most interesting part of being hired was the interview. It was simple, yet super intimidating. I came into an empty room and an essay was on the table with instructions for me to read it. I wasn't sure where they wanted me to go with it or what they were expecting me to "revise." I was a little worried that I would be turned away or not chosen because I wasn't an English major. But what I saw as a weakness, they saw as a strength, at least from my perspective.

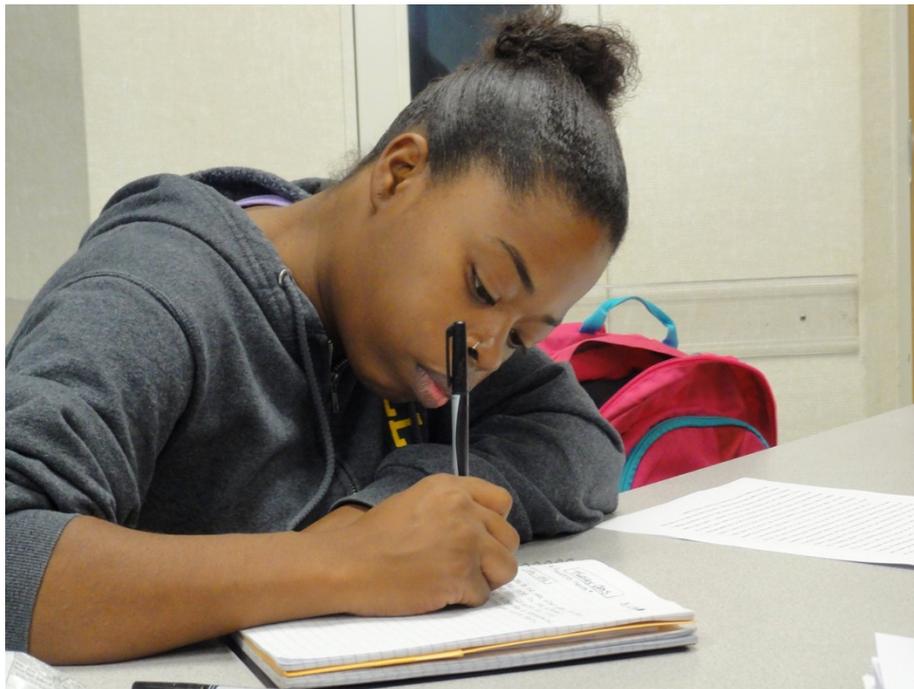
The great friends I have met over the years have been unique and memorable in their own ways. I have bonded with people I would never have met otherwise. We have grown together and have inspired each other to become better at everything we are doing. My fondest memories are of the write-in's with coffee and cookies, the library hour (that was in the library), and always writing about everything. Getting to know other tutors over potlucks and Thursday classes has been amazing.

Over the semesters, I have gotten to know many students who have impacted my life greatly. I have been exposed to many personalities, perspectives, and cultures, and I have learned to appreciate the differences in all of us. In these groups, we are all equals coming together for a common goal: to become better writers. We connected on a deeper level through this unique experience we call small writing groups. I believe that I have made a lasting impression on their lives as well, and I consider them all friends. Even though 1-on-1's seemed impersonal, it is somewhat satisfying to help others calm their fears about writing, and sometimes in 50 minutes you can make a lasting impression. One of my most memorable 1-on-1 was with a student who was studying astrophysics. I was so intimidated because I knew absolutely nothing about this subject, and I was worried that I would not be able to help her. As it turned out, not knowing anything about the subject was extremely helpful and I used the more about lens to

ask questions about topics in her draft. I remember this session in particular because of the way that her face lit up as she was explaining to me how stars are created. She left the session feeling like she had gotten closer to what she was trying to say, which is always our ultimate goal.

The Writing Center has always been a place where I felt I belonged. With all the hustle and bustle of college life, it's easy to feel unnoticed, but here I always felt like a person. Hanging out in the lounge with the other tutors telling stories and drinking coffee are some of the best times I have had at Fresno State. Reflecting on my time here, I notice how much I have grown as a person and a professional. I have become more confident in my ability to lead others and solve problems, like sub-magedons. I have become a better public speaker from facilitating many small writing groups, along with the many spiels I have given to classes about the services we offer. I have offered guidance and support to others and have gotten it as well.

As I begin the next part of my life story, I will bring all the lessons and great memories with me. I am forever grateful for this opportunity. Although I will miss coming here every day, I get comfort knowing that what we do has an impact. The students that we work with go into the world and the rest of their academic careers with the lessons we have taught them.





Rachael Dudek

ADVENTURE TO THE WRITING CENTER

Why does one enter the Writing Center? For questions about research and citations? I never did, I went to the library instead. For grammar? I never did. I got Grammarly and had others proofread it for that surface level. For revision? I never did. I did not trust revision I did not know – suspicious of what some define as ‘revision’ when it is actually just surface level corrections, subjective criticism, or formulaic five paragraph essay judgement. I never entered the Writing Center before I heard of the tutoring job opportunity.

I did not trust the Writing Center for the longest time. As someone studying to eventually teach high school English, I have been through the ringer when it comes to the most flawed definitions of revision – something so formulaic and surface level that it *should* be called rewriting, rather than revising, by most people. I had this suspicion that the Writing Center would be like almost every other English class: focus on your grammar, let us delve into linguistics, make sure your points are in order, your thesis should be the last sentence in your introduction paragraph, what are the pros and cons, where is your five-paragraph structure?!... The Writing Center was an unexplored part of my world: new, intimidating, but still a tired and old wilderness I never thought I would set foot in.

But, then I walked into the wilderness and knew I was home. I was pleasantly surprised to see that tutors were not just proofreaders for students to rewrite. In fact, I would hardly say we are tutors or proofreaders, rather we are like revisionary guides. Revisionary guides who care for your lives as writers, who must walk the same path of revising and writing as those students joining us, fending off the beasts of those flawed ideals of rewriting.

Why was I so against setting foot in the Writing Center before? Well, as I said, I have been through it all, seen it all...or so I thought. The whole reason I chose to study to be a high school English teacher was because I wanted to make a change in the way I had seen writing taught; I later learned that the Writing Center was that change to the system, that place where one could grow as a writer. I was tired of teaching and treating writing as a systematic and isolated experience – a solo journey or life-or-death battle against a poacher of our words. Often, we see writing as such: we write about something for the professor, we turn that writing into the professor, the professor reads it, the professor is the only audience we cater to, and finally we get a grade from the professor. The world of academia treats writing as some unruly part of the wilderness that teachers must tame by slashing through the vines of writing with a machete known as the red pen. So, with the Writing Center dauntingly sitting within the Kremen School of Education building, what I identified as the heart of academia, I was fearful of even setting foot in the Writing Center.

So, why should one enter the Writing Center? Frankly, it is so much more than revision, and so much less boring than revision may sound. We *could* do the boring academia style revision and rewriting, but why cut your writing down in its prime. I want to know more about it: will it grow fruit, does it blossom? Writing does not have to be untamed wilderness, your writing can be and is beautiful. As unknown and daunting the Writing Center might seem, I assure you it is not. So, adventure to the Writing Center. Enter the Writing Center and take a revision guide with you to conquer those previously flawed and isolating experiences of academia. You are not alone in your writing and your writing is not alone without you, without us.

How should one enter the Writing Center? Burst through the *front* doors of academia...despite this being a longer walk. Do it. Oh, do these doors automatically open in a welcoming manor? This is an adventure, a journey, burst through them anyways. Walk down the halls and notice smiling faces of educators mounted on the walls. These are not the trophies of conquered beasts. These could be idols. Think to yourself: they are looking at you with pride as you have taken the first step. And, as you lose confidence entering the Writing Center – as all do in fear of the unknown space and threats by the same daunting beasts of desks, computers, and reference books – look instead to us guides. We do not carry the red pens that slash away your growth as writers. Instead, we carry similar guides and tools of growth, our pen ink scribbles resembling vines occupy our own paper only growing to raise your own words up. Word conservationists, if you will. You can even call us word botanists (Please do not call us word botanists). But, we are still going to be called tutors. As we both adventure in writing, take pride in seeing new growth within that wilderness of writing and academia. Know that this is a journey, and every new word is progress – growth of yourself and your writing.





Nicholas Wogan

IVORY TOWER FRUSTRATIONS

Academia. The Ivory Tower. The seat of knowledge.

Growing up, I rarely questioned the path laid out before me. I was a child, eager to learn and please my parents. Honors classes begot more honors classes. Attaining the A grade was top priority. In high school, this emphasis on achievement sharpened. The implication: that success was to be achieved through competition—the business model of achievement that defines American society. To be wrong? To not know? These were never to be acknowledged. No, I was always told by my betters that the ordained path was best—the path of the intellectual, as old as the philosophers of Greece. It wasn't enough to be curious, or to be smart. One had to be *smarter*—to prove one's worth in comparison to others.

The implication? To be a scholar is an expression of masculine pride. To be learned is to study the classics. To contribute to society, one must be separate from the herd: alone. Every test, every project, every essay is a chance to gain entrance into the tower. The word “intellectual” contains the prefix “in”, but ironically our society associates it with “out”. That is, one must outwit, outdo. One must be outspoken in class and must overachieve. In short, pursuing knowledge is an individual achievement, never collaborative. It sends one away from the normal and encourages specialization. To go through years of graduate study is to become out of touch.

I now question these assumptions. The tools of analysis bequeathed to me by my American education have guided me away from what I thought was important. I still deeply value higher learning. However, as one climbs up toward specialized and unique expertise, one abandons the essential. A brilliant professor may know every detail of Russian Seventeenth-Century poetry, but can they translate that knowledge into something meaningful? Years ago, I took education classes, planning to teach high school. In those classes, I learned of techniques to reach the average student—to frontload contextual information, to check for understanding, to adapt to an audience's needs. These are strategies that few college professors seem to value. There's an instinct at the university to deliver information from on high. Classes emphasize lecture: a one-way conversation that I would guess often leaves the average student few opportunities to truly engage.

My work at the Writing Center has given me the opportunity that I craved to confront this dilemma. In groups, college learning connected with everyday life. Recently, a student writing an essay on college costs asked if I could help him understand how taxes worked. He had never learned what a tax refund was, or why he had never had to pay taxes himself (extremely relevant information to his assignment). I could give expertise, but not from the tower. I could simply be a guy in his mid-twenties who had seen more of life. Outside of the student-teacher relationship, I

could take the time to tell stories, and more importantly to listen. I met students who had to leave my group halfway through the semester because they feared deportation. I worked with students terrified of sharing their writing with anyone. I was challenged for the first time not to write “up” but to write “down”—to consider that a good anecdote in regular language could be more effective than writing, ironically enough, like a college professor. Aiming to teach at the college level in the future, I’ve realized that conversing with regular college freshmen could be much more crucial to my career than finally finishing *Moby Dick*. To become the teacher I want to be, I need more time talking to the earnest young students that will sit in my future classroom. These students have struggles that are rarely understood, rarely verbalized, and rarely set down on the page. Every day, they come to the writing center and expand their knowledge of social issues, of writing genres, of what they need to know but are too afraid to ask.

To go through a graduate program is to climb the ivory tower; to be a teacher is to throw a rope ladder out the window. Both are necessary. I care deeply about literature and have faith in its ability to help young people question their world and gain the tools to challenge the status quo. I also have faith in the students I meet, who have started college without yet fully *understanding* it. It’s a brave action. They need to learn that confronting their own weakness is as crucial as honing their strength—that it’s alright to be wrong, or to ask for help. In fact, deciding to sign up for a writing group is a first step in facing their anxieties.

Being an educator is about honoring a student’s desire to learn, not about flaunting one’s superior knowledge. It’s about getting *in-touch* with one’s community, not looking down on it from overhead. In questioning my own place in the college system, I can help students find their own.





Jennifer Vang

THE WRITING WAR

Like Diana Prince, also known as “Wonder Woman,” I saw myself as a warrior. But instead of fighting villains and saving mankind from doom, I found myself going off to the Writing War constantly and tirelessly. Now, the dreadful aspect about the Writing War is that its enemy varies for each writing warrior. For me personally, my enemies were the anxiety of failing an essay and writing long pages to fulfill a page requirement. And even though I faced and defeated these enemies time after time, they would always revive and promise to meet me in the next battlefield in hopes of finally finishing me off. Armed with my shield of somewhat developed writing skills and my laptop as my weapon of choice, I would silently grit my teeth and force myself to write whatever was expected of me in order to survive and move forward towards the next battle. But once I finished a battle with a paper in one field, I was immediately sent away by a professor to another, and it felt like this war would never end. I didn’t even have time to catch my breath or take a break. I would be forced to dive back into the battlefield as soon as an opportunity presented itself. But as the routine grew, it led me to a point where I began to loathe writing papers. I wanted nothing more than to escape from this never-ending war, so instead of strategizing and planning to revise to sharpen my skills or secure more victories, I would try to end all my papers in one shot and never look back. And while it worked for me for a few battles in the Writing War, sometimes it would backfire on me and cost me a massive loss on my end of the battlefield.

On the day I decided to join forces with the Writing Center, I was cautious and a little suspicious of how their tactics would work for fellow writing warriors like myself. I couldn’t understand why the process was so long or why everything was structured in an untraditional tutoring style. None of it made sense to me. After all, couldn’t I just look at my fellow writing warriors’ papers and tell them their mistakes directly? Wouldn’t that have saved us time and effort? But once I started my training as a tutor and practiced more with the Writing Center’s lenses, I slowly saw how useful each of the lenses were. I will never forget the day that I became obsessed with the Sayback lens, and how I was always quick to point its sharp blade the moment I clashed with my enemy on the battlefield. It was a lens that I could rely on without fail, and it made me a stronger opponent because I was surer of myself and my writing. It served its purpose to me, and I grew fond of it in that way. Soon enough, I eventually decided that the lenses would be another weapon for me to use for the Writing War, especially since I only had one goal to constantly improve on: to win. And as I taught other writing warriors the purpose of each lens and how to use it in their own writing, my eyes finally saw that there was meaning for revision in papers. Utilizing the lenses was a process, but it wasn’t a painful or inconvenient one. It took time to master and understand the tactics behind each lens, but it made me a better writing warrior. In fact, if I had to give myself a new position and title, I would argue that I’m qualified enough to be considered a writing commander because now I have more control over the battlefield with my newfound weapons and skills. To this day, I still loathe writing papers, but now I know how to secure my victories and strategize better to gain the upper hand in this never-ending Writing War. If this is a battle that will never disappear, the best option would be to improve my abilities and never give up.



Lisa Shepard

EPIPHANY IN THE CLASSROOM

So far, I have taken what I learned in the Writing Center small groups and lenses into my English 5A/B and 10 class and now my English 44 creative writing class. One of the problems I have heard voiced by students of writing classes is the quality of the feedback, that the responses from other students wasn't very helpful. This is often because students do not know how to be givers of feedback on writing. But the other problem that arises is that of the friendships that develop over the course of the semester. If students do not know how to give feedback on writing they may think that they have to be critical of a paper to give feedback, the result is a response that just reassures, the author of the paper, that it's fine or it's good. Giving students a tool to use when giving feedback on drafts avoids these problems and that tool can be the Writing Center lenses.

In my English 5A class I first used the lenses individually asking students what stood out to them from a reading (Center of Gravity). Then having them respond to each other's early drafts using the More About lens. Then one day I had the opportunity to put all these things together.

I arrived for class to find that only thirteen students had come to class and of those only three had brought hard copies of their drafts to class, on a day when the whole class of 25 was to bring copies of their drafts, for in class workshopping. Looking around at the class I could feel that they were hoping the class would be let go. A work shop, the way we normally do them, wouldn't be possible with only three drafts and thirteen students. Surveying the classroom of students, I also realized that at least five of my students were taking the Writing Center's one-unit small writing group class. I did not want to let this class be a loss. Quick mental math told me that I had thirteen students, three drafts and five students familiar with the Writing Center's style of group work using lenses so I had three small writing workshop groups. I put students into small groups of four and five with at least one or two students in each group who were taking the Writing Center class. These students worked as the group's leaders. They knew the lenses and how to use them.

The groups shared the reading of the student writers whole draft first. Each student read one paragraph, then passed the paper to the next who would read another paragraph, and so on until the draft was completely read. Then students wrote out a More About lens for the student's paper. I maneuvered around the class checking on each of the groups, to make sure, that the group was reading and not summarizing their lens responses. And I noticed as I stood at the front of the class that the sound was different from normal group work. The sound was more constructive. I could tell when they were reading vs. just talking conversationally about a draft. The same was true of reading their lens responses. And when they conversed, the sound was different also, the talk was follow-up on the lens response

they had given. And when it wasn't I could hear the difference; the conversation was less the business of the draft and varied in tone the way a conversation would.

After this one class worked so well I decided to recreate the Writing Center small groups in my class for final days of workshopping the student's portfolios: I titled these the Final Five. I created a name card for each student and went to class early to arrange the desks into groups putting the name tags on the desks of each student who was assigned to that group. If a student assigned to a group did not come to class, that day, that student's card was collected. If multiple group members did not show up for class that day, the remaining members were consolidated with other groups with low student totals. I made sure that each group had a group leader familiar with the lenses. Parts of the Writing Center lens booklet was also printed up and handed out to all group leaders. It turned out that of my 24 students eight were enrolled in the Writing Center one-unit small writing group. This gave me more group leaders than I needed. The following semester, of the two-semester stretch course, I began to distribute the position of workshop leader to other students who had now learned the lenses. The lesson of responsibility helped build the confidence of students.

I have also used the lenses in my nonfiction creative writing workshop class. I had the students first use the Center of Gravity lens on readings that were handed out. They would read the essays at home and then come to class and write about what stood out to them in the essay. Then each student would read what they wrote, this got them into the habit of reading what they wrote. Still, what happened next was a surprise to me.

For the workshop responses on student papers I asked that the students use the Sayback lens to tell what they thought the essay was about rather than just summarizing the essay as if the author was not going to be in the classroom hearing it. I also had them use the More About lens when suggesting that the author expand on an area or section of their essay.

The class started the workshop with each student reading their Sayback lens on the essays topic. Then the class moved on to what they had written about the essays craft choices and what they would like to see revised in the essay. And that's when it happened. Some of the students automatically read what they had written on Craft choices, first one student then others joined in and read what they wrote, rather than summarizing it. And at that moment, I realized what they were realizing as they watched other students read what they wrote, they had been given their chance to say what they thought and not have these thoughts be forgotten, be left out or ignored. And I realized that this also solved a big problem with writing workshops, that the student whose paper is being workshopped starts out reading their fellow student's responses, but as time in workshops goes on, they stop bothering, and many only read the instructor's comments. The student responses go unread, the voices of these student writers are shuffled off to a pile somewhere, ignored. But by having students read them in class they were heard by the author and the class.

The Writing Center lenses that I have used in my classes are the Sayback lens, the Center of Gravity and the More About lens; these lenses are shorter and take less time to do. If I had more time I would also teach the 2-Step Summary lens. However, I recently found another lens that I think would work well in the classroom. Reading through the Writing Center's lens booklet I noticed the Where-and-Why lens. I feel that this lens would work well in a creative writing workshop. The most common craft choice deliberated in this early writing class is the arrangement of the essay. I find I must suggest that they look more closely at a draft and that I must encourage them to think of different ways the paper could be arranged. I think this lens would give students a constructive way to consider different way for arranging a paper, rather than just accepting the paper the way it is written.

I could see that the students who read their papers felt a sense of inclusion because others had heard what they had written. And by reading what they wrote they had been given their time to speak, so the author heard their voices. This might also have happened in my English 5A class, but the class is too big, with too many groups for me to see it happening. Whereas my creative writing class is very small with only nine students, it is easy to have the entire class form one big circle, and as the instructor, I am part of the group when it responds to student writing.

Many students in my English 5B class wrote in their final reflective cover letters that the in-class mock Writing Center workshops showed them what was done in the Writing Center class and if they had known this earlier, they would have enrolled in the Writing Center one-unit class. Upon reflection, I did have my English 5A class of 25 students workshop student papers, peer review style, in a big circle. Thinking about this and how well the big circle worked in my Creative writing class, I believe that I could use a big circle to get students to read what they have written and read their lens responses to drafts. Getting students to read what they have written is the biggest hurdle to get over when it comes to the creating mock Writing Center small writing groups in a classroom. As a member of the big circle I could make sure that students began to read what they wrote, and I could see their reactions to the lenses and hear their responses using them. Starting out in one big circle group could also be used to teach the lenses on practice essays. Then the student could be put into smaller groups to workshop actual student drafts with lenses.



Tony Vang

HOW PLAY-BY-PLAY MOVES ITSELF ALONG

There are times in our literary lives when we come across a text that decides to start itself off with some moral story that is supposed to prove a point, and the author decides, “I’ll get to my point after I’m done telling my story, not before it.” Such a text was brought in as a reading by one of my groups this year, and oh boy were we initially confused. It just so happened that on that day I was teaching the group the basics of the Writing Center lens “Play-by-Play.” And this was one of those moments where the lens just played itself out, leading us from confusion to understanding.

As I remember it, we only managed to get through about 3 paragraphs. The reading opened up with some ancient Greek philosopher telling a story to another ancient Greek guy...I think. And these two ancient Greek men’s story was about a god of knowledge and a king debating about whether or not the creation of writing was good or bad.

So, as you can understand, my group and I weren’t expecting something like a story within a story to be at the beginning of this reading. Our first Play-by-Play was indifferent: the language was simple and easy to follow, but opening up a written piece with a conversation between two ancient Greek men without any clear focus on 1 topic does normally leave readers with only a hint of what comes next. I was curious about the direction the author was heading towards; pretty sure at least another person in my group was as curious as I was. So admittedly, in that moment, my group, myself included, didn’t feel any confusion because we were hooked; we wanted to know more about what was going to happen and willing to give the writer a chance to further explain himself.

So, the two Greek men dived into their own story about the conversation between the Egyptian god of knowledge Thoth and a king. This Play-by-Play for paragraph two was noted by me because my group and I were clearly confused. We wrote out our responses, and we were all confused by something. One tutee said she didn’t know who was saying writing was good, and who was arguing that writing was bad; she might have perhaps even not gotten that the subject was writing. Another tutee got lost when Thoth and the king began to debate what “true wisdom” was. I’ve gotten used to proper formatting for dialogue, so I had no idea who was talking because the author or publisher didn’t format the dialogue between Thoth and the king. The last tutee in my group, the one who brought the reading, didn’t see how this story was supposed to connect to the topic his class was discussing.

So, we were all in a fluster. There was a lot to digest, and more questions than answers. We read paragraph three, and suddenly our Play-by-Play of confusion became a Play-by-Play of clarification. It was one of those moments where you see faces go, “Oh, that was the point” (or as the Greek saying goes, “Eureka!”). After the story within a

story is brought to a close, the author then clearly reveals his intentions with his own written words: technology can both deprive and improve the human condition. All of a sudden, the past two paragraphs made perfect sense with the addition of this third paragraph. My group was relieved at this clarification, but I noted that the author could have made the third paragraph the first paragraph and could have thus avoided confusion altogether.

Since the reading was a decent chunk, I decided to have my group write down their reflection on Play-by-Play after we finished that third paragraph. There were a few things I noticed, but the one remark that caught my ear was how a tutee noticed that Play-by-Play reassured individuals within a group that their reactions are a part of the larger audience; if we shared what we felt, we would most likely share a similar reaction that we all had. It's difficult to tell a large group of 20 or so people how one would genuinely feel towards a piece of writing because of the fear of appearing stupid and ignorant; in a group of 4, however, this sharing only serves to strengthen the bonds between the participants. I believe that the sharing helped the group bond as a unit because we came to a realization together; we worked together through mutual confusion to attain understanding.

Despite popular belief, a Writing Center lens doesn't hit the mark every time or reproduce the same results over and over again; in the words of the uninitiated writer, the lenses can't always "solve things." Individuals within groups may have very similar reactions, maybe even identical reactions, but the reasoning behind these reactions will most likely be different. And that's okay, because Writing Center lenses like Play-by-Play are supposed to be personal. As our very own Kirk Stone, the Fresno State Writing Center Assistant Director, puts it, "These lenses aren't prescription medication that will solve just this one exact problem." So, most of my experiences with "Play-by-Play" had so far been: all confusion, no confusion, indifferent understanding, or boredom. That being said, the one time where doing a "Play-by-Play" with my group played out differently would of course catch my personal attention.





Arturo Morales

COMMUNITY IN THE LENS

Although each lens in our workbook has its advantages in teaching the various ways in which a writer may mine their own head for more ideas, I feel that none of them do nearly as much as the “More About.” It is the most straight forward of all the lenses and its power hinges on its simplicity. It’s an effective teaching tool that disguises itself as a common-sense question. It’s the most requested piece of information in any workshop, whether it is academic or creative, and yet it is often the last question that a student or tutee thinks of.

In the few short years that I have been teaching at the college level I have noticed that students will normally rush to critique a person’s grammar or spelling mistakes rather than request more information in the essay. This strikes me as both natural and quite odd because, while they are prone to hiding in the groups, when it comes to grammar some students become so confident in their ability to write so technically perfect that they become grammar bullies. Even after asking the student to focus on the content, rather than grammar and punctuation, they critique the writer so harshly on misspelled words, missing letters and incorrect sentence structure. It’s as if there is some primal instinct to stand above others that is unlocked when one sees “thr” rather than “the.” While the beginning writer is normally too shy to talk about content and the structure of the essay because they are anxious they might not know the correct terms to discuss the ideas in the text, they’re often bold when it comes to correcting others about their grammar. For them, writing is about how correct a paper technically is and not about the ideas and questions being presented to the reader.

The “More About” lens offers everyone in the tutoring group a chance to become equals. There is no hierarchy when it comes to curiosity and knowledge. The most confident and experienced student may have the same questions that everyone else does about that one tiny detail that the writer introduced and then forgot about. By making time for the group to write individually about their questions and then having everyone share their writing out loud the veil of authority is, not only lifted, but torn apart as well. Each student reads their full response without the worry of being interrupted by anyone else in the group. This is actually a rare experience for some students, as some are used to being constantly interrupted either at home or in the classroom.

Once the waiting and writing becomes a habit, the “More About” becomes a place where each tutee can add their own personality and creative insight to the original writer’s paper. Without realizing it the paper then becomes the communities because each of the different ideas will somehow make it into the next draft, even if the writer doesn’t realize it. What one student says in the “More About” may not make it onto the actual page but it may have caused the original writer to take their research or body paragraphs in a new direction. Or it may simply have just been something to scratch off their list as things they don’t want in their draft. Either way, the original writer is left with more ideas than they are actually aware about because of the power of communal writing and sharing.



Nou Her

PRIVATE WRITES AND THEIR PURPOSES

I used to not really get the point of private writing. It was first explained to me as a way to get tutees into the mood of writing and I think that reason still stands, but is that really it?

When I do my private writes, I am not actively conscious for majority of them. My pen just writes strings of words that aren't coherent. It's mostly just me going through the motions so I look like I'm writing alongside the tutees. (Still, even if I'm just writing nonsense, I do find it relaxing to just be scribbling nonsense.)

However, tutees seem to love the private writes. I don't know if they are like me and are just scribbling whatever but I feel like most of their private write times are the ones where they write the most without pause. I had a tutee once share that he started writing down lyrics to a song that was stuck in his head and he found it relaxing to just be able to get it out on paper. Is one of the side effects of the private writes to relax tutees?

Having worked here for two plus years, I no longer doubt how powerful writing can be as a tool to help us collect our thoughts, to reflect, and to engage (or reengage) in conversation. I don't think the writing we do in our groups is meant to replace verbal conversation so much as it is meant to complement it. To me, the writing moments has functioned as a sort of pace changed and a breather. We all know the pitfalls of talking: the randomness of it, the quick pacing, etc. The writing complements those weaker points as it helps everyone take a chance to breather to recollect their thoughts, or to refine their thoughts, before jumping back into verbal conversation. This is all to say that I understand the usefulness and practicality of writing in the groups, but what about the private writes? Why do we do them? Why don't we just jump right into the session and bypass the private writes?

Perhaps, like earlier stated, it's a way to relax tutees and tutors, maybe even a way to "cool down" before the session begins, a way for everyone to start the session on the same page and emotional level. I think that's what my private writes have been for lately, as just a way for me to clear out my thoughts and start the session with a blank slate because whatever was occupying my mind has been written down and occupies that space now in the page, rather than my head. My private writes are a way for me to write down my distractions or things I need to do or am worried about and then when it ends, I focus on the group instead and if I ever need to revisit those concerns of mine I wrote in my private writes, they will be there.

I think too, the steadiness and routine of the private writes serves as an efficient and practical purpose. It's an established routine that tutees come to know and expect. If a tutee is late or such, they know what to do and what is expected when they sit down at the table at the start of a session; and because in our sessions we will write, beginning with writing seems appropriate: a session begins with writing and is then interspersed with writing throughout.

Although the private write isn't the only time we write, the private writes are the one of the few things that we don't share in the group and so it's writing down without the purpose, or intention, or being shared. It becomes writing just for the sake of writing and I believe there is just something nice about writing for the sake of writing. It helps to reinforce the idea that you can write just for yourself and it gives time and space for you to do so. In the academic setting of college, I think these moments of just writing for the sake of writing, is far and few in between because how often do we write outside of essays or discussion board responses and so forth, where writing is mandated with a predetermined purpose? Unless we are someone who writes in a journal or maybe avidly posts on social media or such, I don't think we ever really just take five minutes to sit down and just write for ourselves or just because, and to spend those five minutes just writing, uninterrupted, without doing anything else. Private writes then, in the structure of our group sessions, gives tutees that opportunity without seemingly demanding much in return and, perhaps, that is the beauty of the private writes: It's short and simple but a routine built into the structure of our group sessions and all that helps gives tutees a dedicated time and place to just write.





Isabella Lo

AN OPEN LETTER TO MY TUTEES

First of all, I just want to say thank you. Thank you for being patient with me as I struggled to remember your name. It was not because you were not a memorable person; I really just am that terrible with names. Thank you for not letting me forget that you did indeed bring your draft in for us to work on and you have the notes to prove it. Thank you for being understanding when I just could not push myself to be the best tutor in the world the one day that my world was sort of crashing down. Thank you for understanding that I am human.

Now, there are a lot of “thank-yous” that I can say, but I have so much more than “thank-yous” for you. I hope that you learned something here at the Writing Center. I hope that you understood that I did not give you the answers; we found them together. Those lenses that we used almost every session, I learned those probably the week before you did because I too was pretty new at this whole tutoring stuff, at least here in the Writing Center. My favorite was the Play by Play because I loved breaking down your essay and really understanding each and every intricate piece of your work. I liked Sayback even though the way the questions hit you were pretty annoying the way they were said. “Are you saying over all...are you saying...?” It works though you must admit.

I looked forward to seeing you every session believe it or not, because you helped me to forget that I had a paper due myself that I should have been working on, but now I get to spend awesome time with you and everyone else and ignoring it. I enjoyed the fact that we all had assigned seating without assigning seating. It was funny how we all kind of just knew where to sit and how our dynamics would change slightly if someone were sitting somewhere else.

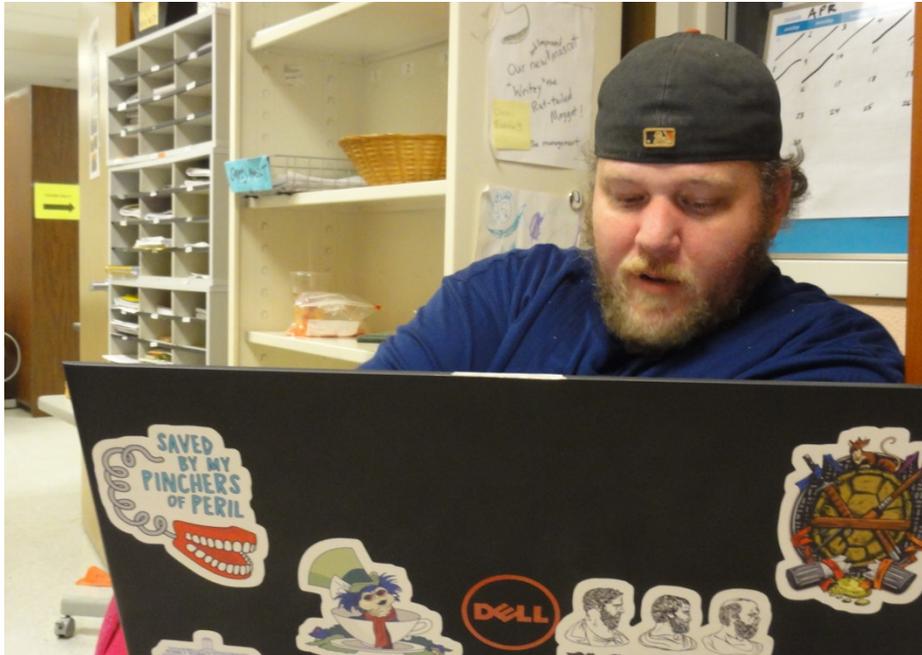
Yes, I admit, I had other people whom I tutored besides you. However, you all had something different that made the sessions worth sitting in and learning with you on. I am glad I got the chance to sit and grow with you throughout the entirety of the semester. The jokes, the laughter, and the terrible sample essays we tried to avoid. I appreciate the constant forgiveness when I would miss sessions due to unforeseen circumstances. You reminded me that I was and am only human.

The stories from our short writes are always my favorite. I always just want to do short writes with you guys because I love hearing the personal aspects of your life that you tell me you wouldn't share otherwise, but you felt comfortable with us enough to open up. Whether if you were loud or quiet, it interested me all. The way you would communicate to each other through eye movements, snickers, and remarks that never meant to offend, but always improve.

I always found myself learning from you because you all are different. Cultural aspects I've learned, media, memes, life outside of Fresno, and all sorts of other things. I got to travel through your stories and your essays. I got a glimpse into the unknown world of different fields and careers in which I never thought I would learn about. You definitely kept me on my toes when it came to making sure I knew what I was talking about and you were not afraid to question when you thought I was wrong.

The level of comfortability after only a few sessions was astounding. I hope that when you left here, you left with something more than just a fixed paper, a better draft, a bubble chart, and a sloppy bucket sheet. I hope you left understanding who you are as a writer and as a person. I hope that when you left, you understood that some drafts will always meant to be fixed because there is no such thing as a perfect draft. I hope you left thinking you would come back. Because if you did, this is why you are reading this.





Tim Bird

ASININE ALLITERATIONS ALWAYS ASCERTAIN ASSONANCE

Some of you have, over the course of the last several semesters, heard me reading my short story that I have been working on with my students. It usually happens when the room is completely quiet and I am still droning on in my monotone voice about Diane and her time spent at Shady Acres Medical Facility. Often the quietest moments in the room are the darkest moments in the story. I share my story with each of my groups each semester. I do this, because believe it or not, the students in my groups help me immensely. I know that our main purpose is to help them, but it is a fallacy to think that they cannot help us as well. We are not superior to them just because we have been trained to help them with their writing. My point is that every semester, I end up learning things from my students. I learn from them.

When I started with my story, it was a lot shorter and it was full of holes. It still isn't perfect, and every time I read it with students I find things that I want to change or perfect, but the amount of progress I have made just from doing the lenses with the students has been invaluable. I guess this is a testament of two things. The first would be that the students can help us to learn even if we think they can't; the second would be that the lenses really do help.

I'll be honest, when I first saw a couple of the lenses like center of gravity or reply, I thought to myself, "How could that help someone?" But after using them with my students, I came to realize how much valuable feedback one really could get from them. Without even realizing it, my students were pointing out plot holes that existed in my story. They were finding things that they wanted to hear more about that would help them make sense of what was going on. As a writer, I have a tendency to think of my work as being great and that there is not much that can be done to it other than a good proofreading to make it better. However, after doing the lenses with my students so many times over the past several semesters, I have come to realize that writing is a living thing that is constantly going through changes. I realized that the story I had written was only a baby and that it had a long way to go to grow into what it is today, and today I know that it is still growing into something bigger and better.

I started off trying to make a point about the students teaching me and I feel like I have veered from that point entirely. The truth is that I do learn from my students and it is not always from the papers they bring in. Sometimes I learn things from the papers that I bring in. It is nice to share my work with them and get an entirely new perspective on things. I think that we forget that we can learn from our tutees because, whether we choose to believe it or not, we are cast into a position of authority. While we insist that we are just students, the tutees often see us in another way. Even if it is a 1 with 1 session and we are not in charge of giving credit or no credit, the students still see us as a form of authority. Earlier this semester, a student referred to Tony and me as genius writers, and I had to remind her that just because we work here, doesn't mean we don't have things that we struggle with in our own writing. I also think that since most of our students are in either English 5A or 5B, and those classes seem so elementary to us at this point in our college careers that it is easy to forget that they can help us, as well.

There are times when things can get tedious and boring. I know more than I would like to about the schooling system in Finland, Freemont Highschool in LA, and a beached whale that symbolized otherness. I see these things almost every semester, but sometimes there is a student that comes in with a paper that is just amazing and makes me say, "Wow." It is these papers that can help me learn something interesting or new from another's paper. Last semester, I had a student come in with a paper that argued that the black fathers from the sitcoms in the '90s served as interim father figures for young black kids who grew up without a father in the home. It was an awesome paper with good examples, and I would have never thought about that as a subject for a paper. It was truly like a breath of fresh air. It is papers like that that make me want to come to work each day. The conversations to be had afterward are super interesting.

That being said, a paper doesn't have to be fantastic to create good conversation. Near the beginning of this semester, I had a student bring in a paper about an abortion pill. Overall, the paper was the typical paper we see from English 5 or 10 classes, but in the conversation we had, someone brought up the question, "If you had a kid and they asked for birth control, how would you react?" The responses were all different and people were able to express their opinions freely. At the end of the conversation, it was evident that some of the students involved walked away with a point of view that they had never considered.

I think our students have a way of surprising us. We should always remain open to learning things from them as we are not experts in everything. I will continue to learn from other students as long as I work with them, and I encourage all of my colleagues to do the same. As long as there are students, we have the ability to learn from them as long as we welcome the opportunities whenever they arise.





Matthew Kenerly

JUMPING INTO FREELANCING WITH BOTH FEET

If you're reading this right now, take a moment and give it up for the freelancers of the world.

I imagine that it's not easy to live without the security of a steady job, and the thought of jumping into this gig economy with both feet makes me uneasy. I think about joining those professional ranks because I love the minutiae of text, helping an idea to become the best version of itself, but it doesn't hold the same appeal in many corners of the American publishing landscape anymore. You may remember, for instance, that the *New York Times* laid off many of their copy editors last year. Many popular websites like BuzzFeed never bothered to hire many of them in the first place, which I suspect says something about how modern America views the act of writing. That's for another essay.

If, by chance, you don't know what a freelancer does, they're more or less writers and editors for hire, job by job, and they examine texts at every level, scrutinizing everything from grammar to structure which is what we do in our tutoring roles at the Writing Center. The biggest difference, at least in my initial experience in that world, is that a freelancer must tackle all of those things at once, rather than focusing on one thing at a time. Writing is still a process, but the other end of that, being an editor, is another process entirely.

Regardless, fate has steered me in that direction. I've proofread for this publication in the past, helped countless students with similar issues. I've combed through multiple issues of Fresno State's literary magazine with the proverbial fine-toothed comb, too. When the time allows for it, I've taken up editing the articles that my peers write on the sports website to which we all contribute. I sometimes joke that it provides little more than "burrito money" but, line by line, it brings me a rare feeling that I'm doing something I was meant to do.

Most notably, I had an opportunity earlier this year to edit a friend's manuscript on college basketball "bracketology", the process by which the NCAA selects teams for its annual tournaments. The role came with a lot of responsibility since I had to exert influence in a directive way to which I'm not always accustomed and, really, the book is the only one of its kind. I knew any omissions would weigh on me if I allowed the text to its wide release without catching them.

Despite all of the writing I've done over the years, academically, creatively and so on, it was the first time that I could see the full strength of everything that's been at my disposal as a Writing Center tutor.

First and foremost, I needed to think with a particular audience in mind: Basketball fans who are nominally familiar with the on-going bracketology process (funny how even our most trivial pursuits are iterative, right?), but uncertain of the nuts and bolts. I had to consider how that audience might react at every point, confused or surprised or simply buying in, and what they would want to know more about, and how he could back up his assertions with concrete examples. I remember, for instance, clarifying that readers might need to know more about how an unlikely team can throw a wrench into the tournament committee's plans, as well as how they've done so in the past, like the famous 2008 Georgia Bulldogs who snuck in despite an overall losing record.

If you're familiar with our handbook, you'll understand what I mean when I found a use for every lens in it. Beyond the lenses, though, I knew I had to be more assertive with the granular parts of the text, line editing that runs counter to our values at the Writing Center. When it came to adverbs, for instance, I only had to say "cut this", and though I've always subscribed to Stephen King's advice – that the road to hell is paved with adverbs – being so blunt felt strange because, in a face-to-face setting, our training maneuvers us away from being so directive.

Over the course of 40-plus pages and three rounds of feedback, the book rounded into a form with which both author and editor were happy. You can buy it now and see for yourself. You can see my name on Amazon. Matthew Kenerly, Editor.

It felt phenomenal the first time I saw it. It still makes me smile when I see it now.

The experience, and my subsequent discovery of the Editorial Freelancers Association, gave me faith that the profession may not be in as critical a condition as I once believed. There's still a significant gap in finding a job and landing a job, but it no longer seems quite as intimidating.

And I think we're seeing, more or more, just how valuable editing can be. The *Denver Post*, for instance, slashed a significant chunk of its staff in the last year and, not long ago, committed a photographic gaffe that confused Denver's Coors Field with Citizen's Bank Park in Philadelphia, then compounded that error by mentioning a "National League West wild card game" which never existed. The critical eye is, at the risk of redundancy, more critical than it has ever been.

Making that jump, at least from here, seems scary, yes. At the same time, though, people get a thrill from bungee jumping and sky diving, and I think it helps me to consider such a role in the same manner. From the outside, it may look strange to get adrenalized from reading and responding to a document for hours on end, but I could get used to it.





Kevin Jensen

HOW TO HELP 'COOL' TUTEES TO CARE ABOUT WRITING

I've been thinking about this mentality that I've noticed in some of my tutees, this it's-not-cool-to-care, or it's-cool-to-not-care, kind of mentality. I can remember feeling this way when I was younger. But I've got this one tutee right now who, I think, has almost fully embraced that mentality. In some of his short writes at the beginning of the semester, when we're still all getting to know one another, he basically said that he thinks reading and writing are boring and lame, which is not abnormal to hear in those short writes, but most students, even if they feel the same way, will at least try, or pretend, to care during the sessions. For the first few weeks, this guy was almost making an effort to not try. And then when he brought in a draft of his, his attitude was completely different. Typically, he seems very confident, bordering on arrogant, but on this day, he was actually close to humble. At the end of the session, he hung around for a bit longer than the other tutees, and he was sort of apologizing to me for all of his spelling errors and things like this, as tutees often do. So, I said what I normally do, that he shouldn't worry about things like that, because it's only a draft, and we can understand what he's trying to say anyway, whether there are errors or not. And it was obvious to me that he had probably never heard this before, and was comforted by it.

And in that moment, I could see that he clearly does care, but he's trying so hard not to.

I've been wondering about that whole "school sucks" thing that many of our tutees probably still carry around in their heads, to greater and lesser extents. The thinking seems to go a little something like this: if you're taking things seriously, then you can't be having fun, or *you* simply are not fun. School sucks because school is serious, school means work, and if those things are at odds with fun, then school sucks. And having fun means being cool, and being cool means not caring. So, if a young kid does take school seriously, then they're looked at as not being fun, which is definitely a vulnerable place to be for most 18-year-olds. But then, my tutee was clearly worried that he was going to be negatively judged for not having a perfect paper, which does betray the fact that he takes school at least a little bit seriously.

I think that some of our tutees try really hard to act like they don't care about their writing, because they are really worried about feeling stupid. The way that writing is traditionally taught makes students live in fear of feeling stupid: the belief that constructive feedback is harsh; the emphasis on mechanical things like grammar and punctuation; the assumption that a draft should be perfect, or you deserve to have your work, and thereby yourself, insulted. This creates an environment of fear for our tutees and acting like they don't care about it takes away their feeling of vulnerability. Paradoxically, I think it's because of how much they care that they are driven, by a combination of the institution and the culture at large (the 'school sucks' culture), to pretend that they don't care. But sometimes, when we let our tutees know that we aren't going to make them feel stupid, that we don't care if they've got some errors or run-on sentences because it's a draft and it isn't supposed to be finished, we can see that even these students who try really hard to not care, genuinely do care.





MEGAN BRONSON

FIVE SEMESTERS IN AND TWO SEMESTERS OUT

CENTER OF GRAVITY

What really sticks in my mind is how open my students have become toward sexuality. I say this on a spectrum because when I first started tutoring here, gay marriage was not federally legal. It was not uncommon to have tutees bring in papers about their thoughts on my rights, though they didn't know they were commenting on my rights at the time. As time has passed, and laws have passed, the tutoring table has become a more open space for sexuality to be discussed. I now feel that I can write about my identity in my introduction at the start of the year, whereas prior to legalization, and just shortly after it, if sexuality came up at the table I immediately prepared to flip open our booklets to the page on "Dealing with polarized issues."

PLAY BY PLAY

I am feeling interested in what you have to say, but I also feel curious. When did you come out to your tutees? How did you do it? I predict that you will tell me about the first time that you came out to your tutees.

REPLY

This makes me think of a time when a tutee brought a draft in for his humanities class that was about gender roles and his belief in traditional gender roles as appropriate gender roles. In his draft he included a section on how gender role reversal in relationships causes homosexuality, and that to avoid homosexuality, men and women should adhere to their traditional roles. At that point in my tutoring and in my life, I was not out of the closet. While I knew that I was queer, I was not sharing that fact with anyone. I struggled at the table to find a response for his draft, as he had requested we do More About. I remember writing that I wanted to hear more about his research on role reversal causing homophobia. Where was his proof? I wasn't the only one in the group who picked up on the homophobia, but for different reasons. The other tutees asked for similar More Abouts, but because they were insulted that someone would accuse the of being lesbians because they didn't want to stay at home and cook and clean. The conversation then came to focus on the idea of gender roles, and nothing about homosexuality. To this day I wish I could go back in time and blurt out that I was gay and loved to cook and wear makeup. That I still identify as a pretty femmy female, despite my affinity for those of the same sex.

PLAY BY PLAY

I am feeling sad about what happened at the table, but also a tiny bit let down. I expected you to talk about maybe an empowering time at the tutoring table, as I am sure they have happened. I predict that you will follow this crappy experience with a more empowering one.

CENTER OF GRAVITY

Another thing that sticks out to me was the semester that I did come out. That year of my life was one of my most traumatic ever. I had ended a long term relationship and started seeing a woman I had went to school with years ago. That semester I had one group that was all men. It was the only semester that happened. These tutees were all friends outside of class and were a hoot. They loved writing private writes and would often suggest topics for everyone to write and share on. They always wanted to read their private writes aloud, and I thought as long as they were willing, I was willing. So that semester my group was more personal. Every day we started class talking about how we were feelings or what had or had not gone well for us that day or week. So the tutees knew about my break up. They knew that I was having a hard time, and they would be the first tutees that I ever told about my sexuality. I wrote it in a private write. I wrote about a date I had that had went well. I told myself that if the tutees wanted to share aloud, I would read it. And if they didn't want to share, then I wouldn't either. I had no clue how any of them felt about homosexuality, but I needed to share and this group was my only group that I felt comfortable enough in to bring it up. So I ended up reading it aloud. I almost started crying while reading, not realizing how difficult the words "girl" and "gay" were to say aloud to people who weren't your friends. The boys were stunned, and then excited. They ignored the fact that my voice was cracking and were genuinely happy for me. One got up and slapped me on the back and said, "welcome to the land of the ladies." I will never forget the importance of coming out at the tutoring table, as I'm not sure I ever would have, had the stars not aligned and placed these total bros at my table who loved to writer and read their work aloud.

PLAY BY PLAY

I am feeling pleased because you finally told us about coming out. I am feeling interested in the idea that you may have never come out if it hadn't been some divine act, I am not sure I trust that part of your voice, but I want to hear more about it.

SAYBACK

Am I saying overall that tutees have become more open to discussing sexuality at the tutor table?

Am I saying overall that maybe it is me who has grown more comfortable in my sexuality and bringing it to the tutoring table?

Am I saying overall that there has been a cultural shift in both my perception of my identity, and my tutees' perception of sexuality as identity?





DANIELLE POTTER

THE REAL REASON COLLEGE FRESHMAN NEED THE WRITING CENTER

I could tell you all the practical reasons students should try the Writing Center. I could tell you it helps with student procrastination (at least a little), that it helps students practice giving useful feedback, that we never take a red pen to a draft but converse with students about their work, and other useful benefits of what we do as a writing center.

But I don't want to talk about any of that. I want to talk about another aspect of our small groups. Yes, we offer one-on-one tutoring as well, but it's the small groups we take real pride in. Students sign-up for them like a class, and for the entire semester, the same three students work with the same tutor. Together they will read drafts, respond to pieces of writing, use some handy "lenses" from our tutor's booklet, among other useful, writing-based things. But there's something else to be gleaned from the small writing groups, and in combination with the same people meeting at the same times every week, the form of our short-writes also plays a valuable part.

When we respond using one of our lenses, the responses never judge the writing, but question and respond to the draft and the writer on an idea-based level as opposed to focusing on grammar and sentence structure. Are you saying *this* overall? This reminds me of *something else* from television/social media/my person life. *This idea* really stood out to me as a reader. I want to know more about *this idea*. With these lens-guided responses, a student draft isn't judged for being a good or bad. Rather all of the students (including the writer) are encouraged to converse about their responses and the ideas in the draft.

Yes, the lenses serve as useful tools we hope students continue to carry with them long after they've exited our doors, and yes focusing on the ideas in a draft is much more useful than ever-dreaded comments such as, "You're missing a comma here," or, "This word is misspelled," because that's the kind of shit you can look up on the internet or learn from an online editing program.

It turns out, being with the same group of people for the course of a semester, sharing your work, and sharing your responses and how you relate to that work does more than just help the writer with what they're working on. It also helps build a safe, welcoming community. Unlike the English/Academic Literacy course so many college freshmen are required to take their first year, the groups are small enough so each student can speak their thoughts:

what they want to know more about, what stood out to them, what the essay reminds them of, and most anything else they want to bring to the table. Because writing *is* a conversation, and this physical representation makes it real for them.

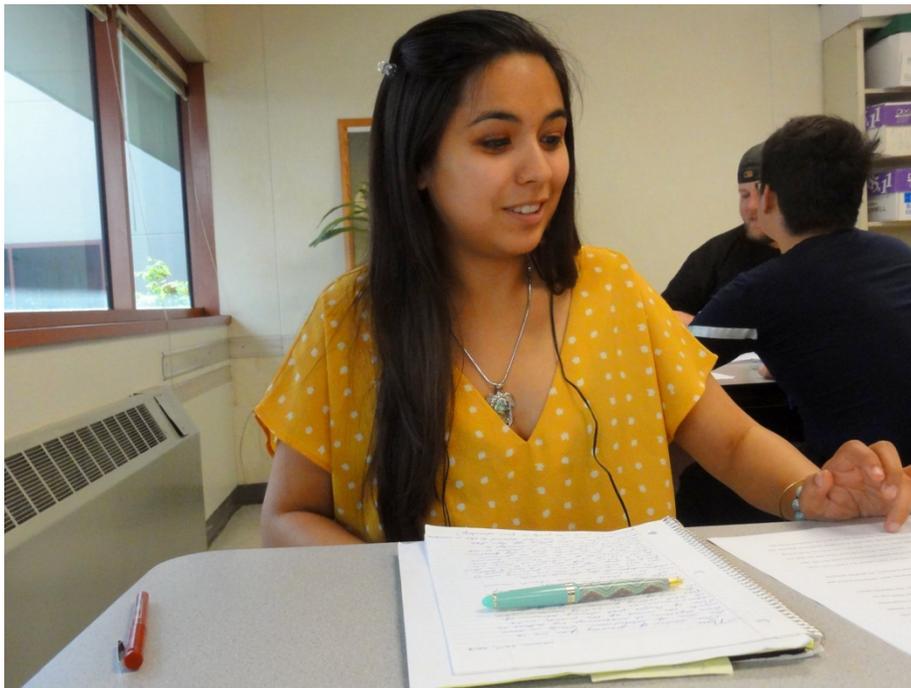
When you're a freshman trying to get a foothold on your professor's crazy idea that writing is a conversation, seeing it and experiencing it can help grasp the concept tremendously. Better yet, when you're a freshman in college trying to get even the slightest grip on this new academic world that works in a completely different way than other academic worlds you've encountered, having a small group in which you see and converse with consistently throughout the first semester of this new life can make you feel less like a faceless nobody in the crowd and more like an emerging adult with a voice and opinions.

In a group I had during my first year of tutoring, a student had brought in an argumentative essay about freedom of speech, how some countries have restrictions on it, and how we as Americans often abuse it. We did written responses and talked about those responses, discussing things like social media and news outlets. It was well into the semester, and as the session wound to a close, one of the students said, "Ya know, I really like coming here. It's almost like therapy, but not. I dunno."

"Well for me, anyways," another student said, "I feel okay with expressing my opinion with stuff like this. I feel safe because no one's going to tell me I'm wrong, but we'll talk about it."

Because how can there be a clear right and wrong with public issues such as abortion, gun control, or immigration? And where can we go to figure out how we feel about these things without the fear of upsetting someone? The problem is, our news media often paints politics in this respect, and these very big issues become a matter of picking sides, saying *yes* or *no*, instead of becoming the conversations we so desperately need to work towards a common ground.

Sometimes I think we fail to realize or remember what a tumultuous transition students go through when leaving behind the familiar halls of high school and moving into the often intimidating environment of higher education. They're not just trying to get a better grip on their classes or their new lives, but they're also trying to gain a better understanding of who they are as emerging adults. The Fresno State Writing Center provides a safe space for students to take a breath and explore how they feel about sensitive topics in sensitive times as they gain academic knowledge. And when more people feel as though they have a voice beyond simply saying *yes* or *no*, they'll be more apt to use it.





MATTHEW DRISCOLL

PUBLICATION DRAFT III

It's not a job; it's a spiritual journey, man. History proves that one could take all of the Writing Center lenses and procedures to any station of formal education and thrive. But there's more to our story than what ends up on a resume- like sweet yellow cake uranium, exposure to live writing changes people. The unique situations in which we place ourselves as tutors each day require us to imagine, share, and get along; it's basically picking up where our kindergarten curriculum left off.

Imagine, if you can, three adult strangers who have just introduced themselves; now it's time to lead them through imagination land. My favorite prompt from the semester's first week is "What metaphor is writing to you?". There's nothing quite like looking up from your scribbles to find three bewildered pairs of eyes glaring back in disbelief. For most, this is the moment when we have revisited fancy, fabrication, and fantasy after years of academic training in rationalism have smoothed out those abstract wrinkles in logic. When we ask someone to introduce themselves point-blank, they may conjure up some version of themselves that they think is appropriate to share with a stranger. It can turn into a coolness contest or become a tedious experience where students rail off fast facts about themselves that don't carry any meaning. The metaphors for writing are neat because they reveal a little about the person that maybe they did not recognize or understand before, something integrally important to their character but one that they would instinctually hide from others. If there were a classroom full of people, the creative imagery of the metaphor exercise would be mute because the students would only present what they perceive to be socially appropriate ways to express their thoughts. A small group is just the right size for writers to express their fairly intimate ideas (ones that are creative and reflect the writer's personality) to a manageable audience that lacks the certain type of group-think that full classrooms of students do. Asking someone to identify a metaphor is one thing, and simply telling them to construct one is another, but modeling this behavior is both an opportunity and a challenge that sets a lasting tone.

To me...writing is a direct line to that devil on my shoulder who passes secret notes to and fro with the monkey on my back. It's a map to a chest that hides a vulnerable heart, long forgotten and neglected. My private write

is a perch atop the soaring Shehadey Clock Tower of Shaw Avenue where I am ranting naked and unashamed at the ants below. A written thought is a pandemic virus that floats in the ether, indiscriminately infecting one host after another. These little notebooks are breadcrumbs leading back to where it all went wrong, through the dark wooded hallows of memory. It can be a knife to cut the fog of war that gathers over time, a tide swept in by Hurricanes and levies that they climb.

In the midst of all this wonder and whimsy is hard truth. Little did the tutors realize that signing a contract with the English Departments would mean actual work. There would be smiling involved. The contract says between the lines, that we must keep an apprehensive yet reluctant audience coming back for more. Yes, human emotions are in demand and on command. This is true for all tutors, but only an obstacle to some.

Indeed, for certain individuals it may be elementary to pop an emotive cork and bubble over with enough joy and happiness to go around. By some proprietary concoction of nurture and nature, they are vintaged into the finest champagne personalities. And the bounty of their endless froth invites present company to drop their guards where they stand and make merry on the spot. Still other tutors are crafted by a different mix of the same forces into so much salty vinegar, flat and acrid. For those who plainly struggle with the feels, that same bubblyness comes from greatest exertion of painful effort. But like any skill, regular practice leads to seamless execution.

Sharing and opening up is easier in three to four person groups because a bad day or a quiet day for one student can be made up for by another. Generally, the close bonds of the groups foster interpersonal support; tutees recognize emotions in their group members and lend themselves to help each other through everyday college crises.

Finally, all the damned effervescence in the world won't float you over some occupational hurdles. People come into the writing center with controversial topics and they want to talk about them. When such situations appear we are made to traverse between the immovable beliefs and the unstoppable philosophies of our peers. It could be mild stuff like politics or religion, though sometimes its forbidden shit like suicidal tendencies, murder, cannibalism...mostly death and sex. Not only are we mediating potential brawls with self-restraint but teaching others to prevail with cool heads.

Getting along is made easier by the dynamic of the group because it is made of peers. Because no member (even the tutor) is the final voice of right or wrong, and because members recognize that they will have to return and face the same people again, they do not fly completely off the handle. They are all beholden to each other and the rapport is usually what keeps them pulling punches.

Live writing does change at least our expectations of group discussion. We all come in with our own idea of what drives discourse. These expectations rarely align with the prescribed method of going in rounds, where we record our thoughts before sharing them and offer room for others to participate. It's like the reading of the written material to a non-interruptive audience is sort of what holds it all together, and rewards deeper more connected thought with a chance to be heard. Without the infrastructure of lenses and social writing, if each group was a free for all, then the discourse of three to four person groups would naturally devolve off of topic and a single loudest voice would come do dominate while the smallest would fade into whispers.

