

Writing@theCenter



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Writing Center
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☛ Every year since 1994, when Magda Gilewicz began directing the Writing Center, we’ve created and printed a volume of writing and pictures produced by tutors. This publication served as an assignment for tutors, asking them to reflect on what they had learned in the past year of tutoring, but it has also functioned nicely as a kind of yearbook that we can all browse through later, when tutors have graduated and moved on.

This year, for the first time, we decided to make the publication available online. In the past, tutors would often ask, "Am I writing to you? Am I writing to other tutors?" And it made us uneasy to think they were only writing to us, as an assignment. It might have made the assignment feel a bit artificial for some tutors. But this semester we were able to tell them that they were writing to you. You, who came to our web page and were interested enough to look at this pdf, but are most likely unfamiliar with our practices and the reasons behind them. Having you as a reader allowed us to shape this semester’s publication into a kind of open house of our Writing Center. We asked tutors to choose from a list of topics that might best work in that way. Some tutors also found topics that weren’t on our list but we decided dealt with things you might like to learn about as well. In this publication you’ll find pieces that talk about our small writing groups, our online tutoring, our one-on-one sessions, and even our training. Tutors share their experiences of becoming tutors and working at our Center.

You might follow along a bit better as you read this if you take a moment to look at our Response Lens booklet we also have available on our website. This is the actual booklet we give tutors, which describes in detail some of the practices they mention in their pieces.

And if you would like to turn your experience reading this into a conversation, please feel free to email us with questions or examples of your own practices. Thank you and welcome.



Magda Gilewicz

HOW WE TUTOR IN GROUPS: DEVELOPING OUR PRACTICE



Groups are not common in writing centers. With few exceptions, tutoring writing happens in one-on-one settings, whether in person or online. I would like to give a short history about how tutoring in groups has evolved at our Writing Center over the past couple of decades and how we have moved far along the way to establishing a sound, thought-out pedagogy of tutoring writing in small, semester-long groups, a practice that now also informs our one-on-one tutoring.

I inherited group tutoring when I started directing the Writing Center (Writing Lab back then) twenty years ago. I had previous experience with working only in the one-on-one tutoring set-up, and semester-long group tutorials puzzled me. For one, I didn't like that the Writing Center was not available to students not committed to working in semester-long group tutorials, to students who might want to just walk-in on demand, but, more importantly, I had no idea how tutoring writing was supposed to happen in groups. With four people at the tutoring table, the arrangement was too crowded, and there were no models for this kind of tutoring. Originally, groups were established for students to practice various grammar exercises. A drawer full of mimeographed sheets with grammar drills attested to that practice. Discussion of drafts also was advocated but nobody could point me to a method. The best approach I could devise in meetings with tutors was for the tutor to survey what students brought to a session, give two students tasks to perform on their own while the tutor worked with the third student. Sometimes that would be a configuration for a whole session; sometimes the tutor would rotate her attention around the three students. I thought that in this way each student's needs would be addressed during a session and they would not feel they were leaving empty handed. It was the best approximation of a one-on-one tutoring interaction possible in a group. There

were also occasionally sessions when a draft would be read and all participants would try to give feedback, but more often students would watch a tutor ask questions of the writer, occasionally engaging the other students. All of the feedback was done orally—faithful to the universal premise that writing centers provided a space where *talking* about writing could take place.

It was in preparation to present at the National Writing Centers Association Conference at Indiana University in 1999 that we realized the various roles students, in fact, play in a group: first and foremost, as writers, but also, as it began to become more and more visible to us, as readers and responders. Kevin Hooe talked about group sessions putting students in the role of readers. Ginny Crisco's presentation focused on the fact that sometimes students could give each other good advice that a tutor missed, and therefore occasionally they could step into the role of tutors. Those moments were lucky moments that happened unrehearsed and seemed to be demonstrating to us that students were learning how to talk about writing from watching and hearing the tutor. From

that moment, we started viewing the tutor as a modeler of response. The presentations tutors gave at the conference made it evident that not only the tutor but the students themselves could function effectively in the roles of readers and responders. The question, however, was *how* effectively.

One of the training materials I used from the time I started training tutors was Elbow and Belanoff's *Sharing and Responding*, which introduced tutors to a variety of non-evaluative responses. In training, we moved thoroughly through the various ways of providing each kind of feedback, one class at a time, with tutors practicing giving each kind of response in writing and sharing it with the class. The point was to teach tutors a range of questions to ask of drafts, hoping that, with an array of new, non-evaluative questions at their disposal, they would be able to create an effective discussion in the tutoring group. We were expecting a lively conversation at each table with lots of input from students ensuing from the evocative questions posed by tutors. We trusted, based on our observations, that students would learn to function in a group as effective responders thanks to the tutor's modeling. Afterward, the more the tutor would limit his role to a facilitator and the more the students talked the better because the students would be the ones engaging writing, asking questions, negotiating. The tutor then could step back into moderating, planting questions, steering the discussion. So we assumed.

At about the same time we started recording and transcribing our group sessions. We examined the sessions (1) for participation: how much who talked, who controlled turn-taking, who dominated and

who was excluded, as well as (2) what kinds of questions tutors asked, at what points in the conversation, and how much students focused on the questions in their oral responses. Examining the recordings and transcripts, however, I started noticing that even during what we judged to be productive sessions where discussion was lively and stayed on topic (some conversations occasionally veered to topics outside of writing), there was still something missing,



not enough was said about the drafts, but most importantly students were treading water, going in circles, not contributing substantial feedback even if they talked and focused on drafts. If the tutor asked the kind of questions we expected them to ask, the students wouldn't be able to engage those questions and would go back to talking about what was "good," as well as not being able to engage rhetorical issues by seeing beyond the content. Often the draft itself became almost invisible and the conversation centered around content only. The kinds of questions we wanted tutors to ask and students to respond to seemed too difficult, requiring hard thinking and concentration. Writing down the responses, as we did in tutor training, gave the necessary space to concentrate and focus on the questions asked of drafts and to formulate responses; talking provided too much wiggle room to drop the hard questions.

Our new practice developed from distrusting talking more and more, and went against the generally unquestioned axiom of tutoring being a "conversation," and the writing center being a place where writing is *talked about*. Steven North's proclamation that the writing center's "primary responsibility" and "only reason for being" is talking to writers, Bruffy's collaborative "conversation of mankind," or Lundsford's idea of a "Burkean parlor" alive with talk—all viewing tutoring as rooted in talking—were failing us. Talking was not good enough, slippery, fickle, intangible, diffusive, zigzaggy, spurty, and always running onward. Those were the pitfalls we were discovering through our recordings. When current tutors examine those earlier tutorials now, they comment on: how hard it seemed to be to begin a conversation; how unfocused, "meandering" the conversations were; how much people would talk about what's "good" in vague terms; how little students had to say; how evaluative and directive the feedback was.

The need to train students the same way we were training tutors became more and more apparent. We were convinced it would take care of what was not satisfying about the talk we heard on our recordings. Earlier in training, I was encouraging tutors to use writing to answer questions they posed, but that rarely happened. As in classroom teaching we much too often miss writing opportunities. Bringing writing into the session that's always been structured around talking is also hard. The act of writing is odd, it's seen as solitary, better done alone, a chore, an unnatural activity that doesn't fit into a conversation. We rarely see groups of people writing as a way of creating a conversation. But as oral discussions were not satisfying, we decided to go all the way into using the *Sharing and Responding* lenses in groups—having tutors teach students to respond *through* lenses, *in* writing, then sharing their written responses by reading them—and only then proceeding into a conversation. We also insisted on the responses to be read, not talked out, as all too often reading what's written is abandoned and talking takes over with all its perils. We also wanted to validate writing as a communicative act. This way students wrote, everybody had feedback formulated, everybody had a voice and space, and everybody was equal in sharing; then the conversation could proceed from there.

The next step in the evolution of our practice was the focus questions for written responses themselves. *Sharing and Responding* was out of print and hard to come by, plus the explanations there were often too long, and therefore the questions readers needed to address in their responses would be lost; students didn't know what exactly to write about. We wanted to isolate and sometimes sharpen the questions we were asking of drafts, as well as creating easy, everyday analogies to explain the responses. So on Kirk Stone's initiative, we started distilling the questions and producing our own handouts, changing the questions and inventing our own.

The tutors' role changed too. First they needed to transfer the training they received themselves to students in groups. They needed to teach students how to respond through the lenses we developed, do so in writing and using students' real drafts in real sessions—i.e., teach them how to read and respond to writing in new ways. Writing the responses at the table individually but also in a group, together, allowed each group member to articulate a full response through a new question. The lens questions demanded that the response stay within clear parameters; there was no room to revert to vague, evaluative or directive responses. Providing three (or four) responses to a draft in the act of sharing them gave each participant opportunity to launch her/his feedback, affording a variety of opinions, and fashioning richer, more focused, better articulated feedback. The sessions also acquired interesting new rhythm, oscillating between the silence of writing, the solos of reading out loud, and the multi-voicedness of discussion—often turning back to writing, and repeating the sequence again.

As you will notice reading through this collection, we also adopted successfully some of the lenses for our one-on-one and online sessions. Writing also features prominently in our face-to-face individual sessions. We feel we have created a sound and new pedagogy for writing tutorials, which will keep evolving with new questions surfacing as we observe how we tutor. We would now like to have a better sense in what ways so much writing during the sessions influences students as writers, how using the lenses changes them as readers, and how we can promote transfer of learning beyond the tutorial session.

Kirk Stone

REVISING OUR LENSES



While our practices at the Writing Center started with Elbow and Belanoff's *Sharing and Responding*, we've actually done quite a bit of revising to the responses found there, and even some invention of our own. I could write pages about the history of changes we've made, but I'll just give a brief overview of our aims in revising and a few examples.

I think that there are probably two main goals that have guided most of our revisions. First, the lenses need to be as easy to perform as the responses we give when we talk to each other every day. And second, the lenses are meant to help students see features of texts, not evaluate them.

While Elbow is a master of simple, straightforward language, the lenses in *Sharing and Responding* were still using several sentences to elicit responses. We tried to boil them down to a single focused question where possible. We also tried to use language that our students would find familiar and comfortable. So Center-of-Gravity goes from asking what moments in a text are "resonant or generative" to asking "what sticks in mind." There are still explanations and descriptions in our booklet, but the hope is that the lens question will be so straightforward that it will be self-evident how to perform that response.

Another example of revising for simplicity and clarity is changing the names of responses. More than one student thought that Movies of the Reader's Mind was asking them to write out a scene of the events happening in a paper—like a scriptwriter for a movie. We changed the name to Play-by-Play to try and emphasize that, no, the intention is to record your reactions as a reader to the text. I've toyed with calling it Liveblogging an Essay, but not enough students were familiar with that so I set it aside for the sports metaphor of an announcer doing a Play-by-Play.

Because we're trying to help students see features of texts, it's important to make the feature each response focuses on clear and distinct. So, for example, when we realized that tutors were using Sayback on paragraphs rather than whole texts our ears perked up. Used that way, it was bringing to light claims in the paragraphs, which Skeleton Feedback is designed specifically to do. We revised Sayback to, "Are you saying, *overall* ...?" to try and ensure that Sayback and Skeleton Feedback were focused on different things, but also to make sure we had a response that was about what a text as a whole was trying to say.

Along those same lines, a few semesters ago it became apparent that students were struggling with a feature that we had no lens designed to help them with. They were being asked to write essays with three quotes from different sources and present this as a conversation between the sources. Students would often manage to find three relevant quotes, but had a hard time showing how these voices related to each other. And so, we had to create a new lens that would help students see this feature in order to perform their assignments. We called the new lens Conversation Map. It starts by summarizing the voices speaking in a text and then asks responders to imagine what those speakers might say to each other if they were physically in the same room together. The new lens has seemed to help students make the leap from just listing what sources have said to understanding how the statements relate to each other and what the ongoing conversation about that issue is like.

We pay close attention to how tutors use our lenses and how students understand them. While we feel the lenses are powerful tools that, for the most part, work as intended, the collection of lenses is a work in progress and probably always will be.

Monique Quintana

CONVERSATIONS THROUGH WRITING: VALIDATING THE STUDENT WRITER

Recently, a graphic design student brought an essay to writing group in which she has been asked to endorse a product to a very specific demographic of students. She chose to speak to her own colleagues, first year graphic design majors. Along with her essay, she brought a visual piece that she had created for the project. The written text, coupled with a visual medium made for a revealing group that day. The student was given affirmation through a group community that genuinely cared about what she had to say. One of the ways in which writing group makes a significant impact in the lives of students is the way in which they become validated as individuals. Through conversations in writing, student writers are recognized and valued as individuals.

Our motto is that we're "the writing center that writes." This might seem like a conundrum, but it's entirely true. Our writing groups are a response to traditional notions of writing and tutoring. In writing group we have conversations through writing. The graphic design student was able to bring her project to a place where she knew other writers would examine it with great care and attention. Our writing groups validate student writers through a small communal effort of sharing, reading, and responding to writing.

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects about being a student writer is handing your writing over to others. Our writing very often feels like an extension of ourselves, of our inner being, and that is exactly what they are. The student who brought her essay to group was revealing a part of her inner self as both a student and as an individual. As students, our rough drafts are things that we birth, they are our metaphorical babies, and as such we want to keep them safe at home with us. Who wants to be told that their baby is stupid, or ugly? Who really wants their babies to be picked on? So, it is only human that we feel anxiety over the prospect of others reading our writing. The only problem with keeping our rough draft "babies" to ourselves is that they won't really get a chance to grow, and truly partake in a conversation.





Through sharing, writing groups become a space in which students become validated. Not only is it a safe place, but also it is a place where individual voices are both heard and recognized. In our writing groups, we take turns reading from our own drafts. Hearing others reading their writing is validating for writers, as their own voices are lifted out of obscurity and into a conversation. The group then uses a lens to respond to the writer's draft. The lens is selected based on very specific needs the writer may have. This is validating because it recognizes the individual worth of the writer. It is the group asking, "What do you specifically need right now in your writing process, and how can we best approach these needs?" The graphic design student decided to have the group respond to her draft with a lens we call "More About." With "More About" the group wrote on what they wanted to hear more about from the draft. In turn, the writer of the draft wrote on what she thought she could write more about. There is no one size fits all approach to writing in writing group. Writers are given the means to articulate what kind of feedback they need most, and this reaffirms their unique role as a writer.

We take turns sharing our written responses with the group, and then we generate writing prompts using the draft as a springboard for discussion. One of the most challenging aspects of writing group, it further engages the group with the text. After reading, and responding to graphic design student's draft, the group chose to write about the psychology of advertising. We found that we all had significant things to say about the subject. This validated what the writer by showing her that what she had written had relevance in a conversation beyond the page.

Through just one group session I was able to see just how profound writing group can be. Our group had become a place in which its members were able to create a discourse through writing, and in turn become invested in the small community that they had created. Writing group had become both a place in which individuals could become heard and recognized. Not only did the graphic design student leave with feedback on her writing, but also the entire group created conversation. Through the act of writing each and every member had become validated.



Kevin Jensen

WE'VE GOT THAT ILL COMMUNICATION: STORY OF A GROUP SESSION

Something I find really fascinating about what we do here at the Writing Center is the way that we treat writing as a social act as opposed to the more traditional view of writing as a solitary act. Most of us tend to think of writing as something that comes from an individual and which is then experienced by others. But here it isn't at all like that; or at least, ideally it isn't. The ideal is that pieces of writing here are co-constructed by the group itself. By each of the individuals in the group reacting to one another and giving feedback the writing ends up being a collective product with help from each member of the group.



For instance, the other day a student, who I'll call Juana, brought in a prompt for her Chicano/Latin American Studies class which she was having trouble getting started with. This assignment was in response to the company, Google, celebrating its fifteenth anniversary by throwing themselves a Quincenera, which is a traditional Latin-American celebration of a girl becoming a woman. Juana's prompt was to answer the question: what assumptions can you make, based on this, about the way Google views the Latino/a community? She had ideas about what she wanted to say but couldn't really articulate it.

Juana said she knew that she wanted to talk about stereotypes of the Latino/a community so I suggested that we all write for a few minutes about how this instance could possibly be seen as Google perpetuating stereotypes of the Latino/a community. After a few minutes, we all shared what we had written and ended up having a fruitful discussion. Me and Juana both wrote about different aspects of stereotyping and disrespect which were shown by this event and another student wrote about how she didn't feel that there was anything disrespectful about it. While this could have possibly just resulted in an argument, Juana was actually intrigued by what the other student had to say and said that she felt she could maybe use some of each side of this debate in her paper.

Our discussion after that first writing eventually led us to the much broader topic of how we are influenced by images in the media which we then wrote about some more. Again, we each had different things to say about the subject and Juana said she felt like she could use a lot of the ideas that we had come up with. Prompts are often really interesting examples of how pieces of writing are co-constructed amongst individuals and I think this was a really productive instance of that. We started off with something very vague and through writing and discussion of that writing we eventually ended up with some more substantial ideas. When Juana brought the prompt in she wasn't sure at all how to begin but by the time she

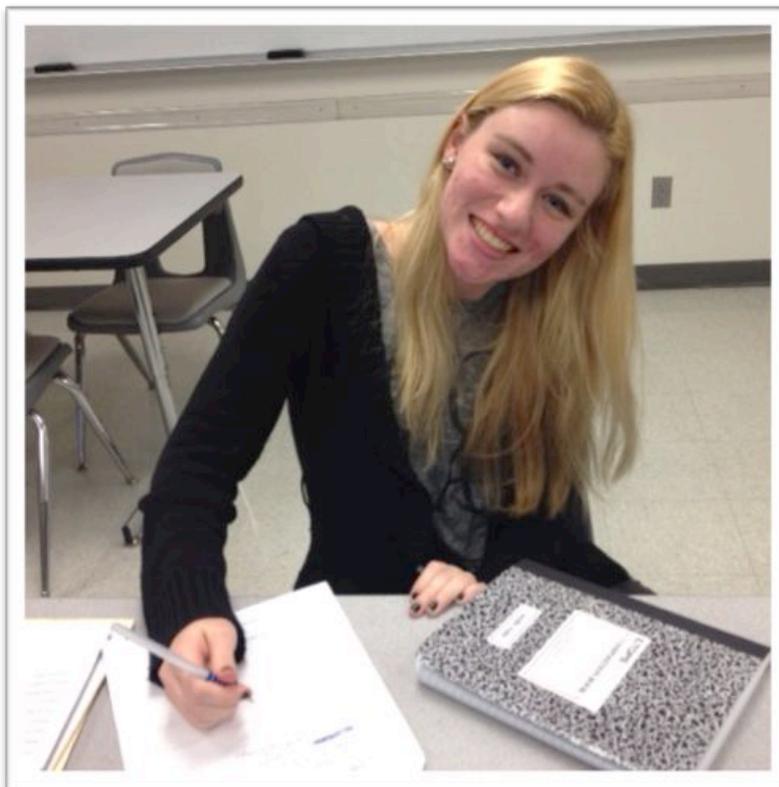
left that day she told me she felt much more comfortable about the assignment.

There is hardly any human activity which takes place entirely without the help of others. Even when one is physically alone, we are still being affected by the influence of others we've come in contact with. It is often unconscious yet everything we do is shaped by our interactions with others. So why should writing be any different? Yet for the longest time (forever, really) writing has been thought of as this strange mystical thing that you were either able to do well or not. There is this kind of unspoken belief amongst most of academia that tell us that we're not supposed to talk about writing; you don't try to get help from others and if you do it's only to fix any grammatical problems that may be there. The idea of working out the substance of a piece of writing as a communal thing is very new and rare. But whether we acknowledge it or not everything we write, and really everything we do, is being influenced by some external force and often that includes the people who we interact with. And it's really interesting getting to watch those interactions shape a piece of writing, as in this case with Juana's prompt. That group session revolving around her prompt helped her to create something that belonged to her, but it also had something from each member of the group in it as well.



Selena Edin

**FROM TUTEE TO TUTOR:
PERSPECTIVES FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE TABLE**



I was introduced to the Writing Center my first semester at Fresno State. My English professor took us to one of the seminars and promised extra credit points to anyone who signed up. Though I was in English 10 and liked writing for the most part, I went ahead and joined the Engl. 1L Writing Tutorial. I was so insecure with my writing at the time, and honestly believed that I wouldn't be good enough for college standards. So the idea of meeting twice a week with a tutor and other students, working on my college writing assignments, seemed like the perfect thing to sign up for.

The next year, I started working at the Writing Center as a tutor.

Most seem surprised when I explain this. You never think of a tutor needing tutoring herself. But this reaction comes from the common misconception that students, professors, and the general public (as well as myself at the time) have about tutoring. Often, the Writing Center is viewed as this remedial place for students who can't keep up with their regular English classes. The line of thinking here is that anyone who goes to a writing center "needs" it, like they might "need" medicine to get over an illness. I've even suggested to some of my friends to come by the Writing Center to get feedback on their papers. Some seem offended that I would suggest such a thing, and others flat-out tell me "I don't need help."

So for me to come out and say that I once was a tutee in these small writing groups implies that not too long ago I was a mess of a writer that really needed help. But the truth of the matter is: we all need help. To believe that there are such things as "bad writers" and "good writers," or even that writing should be this solo endeavor just



because you already have the basics down is not only absurd, but also a detriment to your learning. As a student at the Writing Center, I learned that writing is a never-ending process of growth and development. And as a tutor, I discovered how important this concept is and why it should be encouraged.

In high school, I not only wrote the essays that were required of me, but I also kept a daily journal and wrote fictional stories for fun. Writing was my preferred method of expressing myself, and yet I still felt self-conscious about it. I never let anyone read my stories, and I labored frivolously over assignments before turning them in. I was convinced as I entered college that I would not be able to keep up with such a high level of academic writing.

This is how most, if not all students end up at the Writing Center, regardless of their backgrounds in or attitudes towards writing. At some point, someone—whether a teacher, a peer, or themselves—made them feel like their writing just wasn't good enough. But the reality is all writers struggle to make whatever standard they're writing for. It doesn't matter if you're an English or Biology major, a grad student or a first-semester freshman. You experience the same process as any other writer, and therefore can always benefit from feedback.

I didn't know this going in to the Writing Center for the first time. I thought the writing process only consisted of one draft and a final, where the draft had grammar errors and the final didn't. Because of this mentality, I painstakingly wrote my papers line-by-line, refusing to move on to the next sentence until the last one was perfect. And if I ever asked for critiques, it was only on whether I had good word choice or proper punctuation. There was an obvious disconnect that I had failed to see before the Writing Center. I knew my writing was missing something, but because I didn't know how to actually make writing a process, or how to ask for the right feedback, I couldn't improve.

Looking back to my semester as a tutee, I now realize how the Writing Center was able to help me. If it had filled the stereotype of being in a remedial place that only marks up your "mistakes," my experience would've been so different. I wouldn't have acquired the tools necessary to successfully find helpful feedback. I wouldn't have gained the confidence needed to seek that feedback and implement it myself. And I certainly wouldn't have been inspired to want to help others with their writing.

Now I have the opportunity to help others who are like I once was. Not only do I have the Writing Center's methods and philosophies, I'm also able to use my experience as a former tutee to relate to, advise, and encourage my group as their tutor. I remember the discomfort I had in the beginning few sessions, only just learning these new concepts and ideas, so I try my best to ease this tension among my tutees. I encourage freewriting about fun, personal topics at the start of every session, because I know how much the connection with fellow group members makes a difference in the rest of the session. And because the talks I had with my tutor about writing helped me see the bigger picture, I know now how facilitating these discussions among my groups is important towards their growth.

It's amazing to watch these students make a journey similar to my own, from self-conscious and dejected, to confident and hopeful over just one semester. The first time a tutee brings in a draft, they're nervous, shy, and unsure of what to do next. But by the end, they come ready to share and with specific feedback in mind. As I watch this growth take place, I'm reminded of my own experiences and thus excited to do my job in helping students improve. And what's more, I'm able to further my own growth by continuing to be engaged in these small writing groups.

So to be a tutor at the Writing Center, you don't have to be some phenomenally gifted writer, know every grammar rule in the book, or be an English major. And to be a tutee at the Writing Center, you don't have to be failing your English course, struggling to put together simple sentences, or ignorant of how the writing process works. Every writer deserves feedback, and every writer should have the opportunity to receive it. The Writing Center provides such an opportunity, whether you're a tutor or a tutee... or even both.

Sam Retton

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TUTOR



I arrived at 11:50, grateful to have slept in a little instead of starting my day with a two-hour meeting for an internship I have with California Faculty Association, as I do on most Thursdays, and went to my usual table to prepare for my noon group. All three students are normally present and relatively timely, so I was surprised to find that only one had arrived. Kirk approached me to ask if I'd mind taking on two of another tutor's students since he was out sick, and we welcomed them to the table. We were in the midst of our private writes when my other two students arrived, pulling chairs up to sit at the now-packed table. Despite the group now being almost twice as large as usual, we were able to accomplish everything we needed to do and get to know each other enough to be able to enjoy a few post-short write laughs on the subject of revenge. I had initially been nervous about trying to accommodate so many students at once, since anything more than one student at a time already seems daunting to most tutors. But I quickly realized that as long as everyone is mindful and respectful of everyone else's time and

thoughts, a larger group can be quite successful, as I think we've seen this semester with the implementation of a couple slightly larger groups.

When this group dispersed at 12:50, I moved to a walk-in table and checked the appointment sheet to find that we were booked solid. My first tutee arrived promptly, asking for help on an English 10 assignment and proof of attendance, and we got to work, addressing his concerns about what might be missing from the paper. After a "More About," he left at 1:20 with a short list of things to consider adding and expanding upon in revision and my next walk-in arrived minutes later with the exact same task. In a similar fashion, I asked him what his concerns were and helped him find and correct a few mechanical mistake patterns, and we attempted to make his conclusion feel more satisfying to him. During walk-in sessions, I always really appreciate hearing first-time tutees' thoughts on the process. Some don't say much about it, particularly if they're only there because they have to be, but I've had students tell me they find our methods helpful and enjoyable, and that makes the day that much more worthwhile.

After my walk-in hour, I returned to my group table for a 2:00 session. Only one student showed up, to my surprise, given the group's usual attendance and enthusiasm, and we delved into our private write. With that out of the way, we looked at a draft he'd done for his humanities class and used the Center of Gravity lens in order to refresh his memory before launching into a conversation, both written and verbal, about Humanities and education.

My last group of the day was similar in that only one student showed up. This wasn't a surprise to me, though—this group, save for the one student, had a history of unpredictable attendance. She had been given the same assignment as my earlier walk-ins and needed a form filled out to prove that she had been to the group. I had seen multiple drafts of her essay before, and we had applied a couple of lenses already, so I was quite pleased to see an almost-finished draft. That's one thing I really enjoy about working at the Center: we get to watch students really engage with the writing process and see papers transform from "shitty first drafts" into polished college-level papers. We learned the Sayback lens and began a discussion on how to expand the paper without being repetitive, which had been her biggest remaining concern.

When the Center closed at four, I waited for our Thursday evening training class, eager to go home for the day, but also eager to get in my last bit of productivity for the day before doing so. I can't say I wanted to be there, but I felt like there were certainly worse places I could be on a Thursday evening. Most weeks, I leave class at six and drive straight to Fowler to tutor an eighth grade student in math, a subject I know very little about, so I was particularly excited about ending my day then and there.

A day in the life of a Writing Center tutor can vary greatly. Having to mentally shift gears between working with three students you've gotten to know over the weeks to working with one you've never met and may never see again can be quite the challenge. Some days, groups are full, and on others, not a single student shows up for their hour. If working here has taught me anything, it's that thinking on your feet is a skill never to be underappreciated. In any case, despite any outside stress or mid-workday hunger, I have found working at the Writing Center to be enjoyable and fulfilling. Despite the fact that I'm sitting behind a desk for four hours straight some days, I'm certainly never bored.



Hannah Richardson

STORY OF A ONE-ON-ONE: THE MAGIC OF TUTORING THROUGH WRITING

“I don’t know where to start.” The eternal struggle that all writers face. In fact, that very thought is what crossed my mind about this publication piece. As a writing tutor, I have definitely felt a shift in the way I think of and approach writing. Yet, as much as I have come to embrace writing as a process, I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to fully shake the stress and pressure of just getting started.

I often get the feeling that students who come to us for help want us to let them in on the secrets of writing. Well, the secret is there is no secret. The secret to getting started is to just get started, because even if what you have is crap, at least you have something, and usually, once you make it over that initial hump and are done being paralyzed by the blank page, words will start tumbling out all over the place; then you can start wrangling them in

and shaping them into “not crap.” I try to explain all this to tutees, but for some reason the advice of “just start” doesn’t tend to go over so well. However, usually you can trick them into it.

One time a girl came in wanting help with a personal statement for a scholarship application. It was her first time in the Writing Center. She said she had read and reread the prompt many times, but hadn’t written anything yet. She was talking just short of a mile a minute, telling me all of her worries and questions. Then she looked at me with this stressed, expectant look on her face, waiting to hear my solution to writing the perfect personal statement. For a moment, I was pulled into her stress and feeling frazzled and unsure how to help her. I wanted to say, “I don’t know!!” and run from the room, but then I took a breath, and realized all of her questions were things we could work through together.

There are several things we often do when students come with a prompt and haven’t started the writing process yet. If the prompt is confusing or overwhelming, we can work with the student to help break it down so they can clearly see what they need to do and what first steps they can take. We also have several brainstorming tools we use like quicklisting ideas to allow associations in our brain to lead us somewhere we maybe hadn’t yet considered or drawing out a map of bubbles to generate ideas and see connections between the ideas. In this case, however, I decided to jump right to writing. It seemed like she already knew a lot of what she wanted to say but couldn’t get past the anxiety of it all. I wanted her to leave with something concrete she could use so that she would be over the hump and could go from there on her own. Although she looked at me a little surprised when I asked her to write,



she was not as resistive as others sometimes are. I explained this would be a way for us to both explore our thoughts and then share with each other. She was willing to give it a try.

It seemed like her biggest concern was not knowing what the people evaluating her application were wanting from her. What would they be looking for? So, we both did some writing about audience- who would be reading this statement and what kinds of things would they want to hear about or not want to hear about? We shared this with each other and discussed what had come up. Then we started writing about some of what we decided would be important to have in a personal statement. We decided one major aspect would be what makes her a unique applicant, so she wrote about that. Another big piece was the source of inspiration for her goals, so she wrote a bit about that. While she wrote, I wrote too. I wrote about my own experience writing personal statements (I had just finished several for graduate school applications), and also about things I was curious about from what I knew of her major and goals.

It was an awesome session full of writing. Once it was set into motion with the discussion of audience, everything else fell into place from there and spiraled outward to more and more writing. By the end I could visibly see how much calmer she was about the whole thing. She looked down at all the writing in her notebook and said, "Wow, I actually have something now. I'm started."

Many people view writing as very linear. You start at the start and write until the end, and it must all come out organized and cohesive. I used to be restricted by this idea myself. In this session, by diving into a few of the things she would want to tell the application evaluators, we jumped off this linear track and moved past her paralysis over the start. She then had pieces she could expand on, move around however she wanted, or throw out if she decided one piece was not as important as others.

I think she saw all we were doing in our 50 minutes together as separate from her assignment and didn't realize until the end that she actually had a lot she could use. She hadn't been thinking about the final product anymore, but was just having a discussion and conversation with me through writing. Through this process of writing together, informally and free of evaluation, the pressure was taken off of her to get started and immediately produce a perfect product. On top of that, the pressure was completely taken off of me as the tutor to be any sort of expert and show her exactly what she needed to do.

It is sessions like this one that work to deepen my investment in what we are doing at our writing center, especially the value and trust we place in writing. A couple days later the student returned with a full draft of her personal statement to work with another tutor.



Joseph Marcure

STORY OF AN ONLINE (AND THEN SOME)

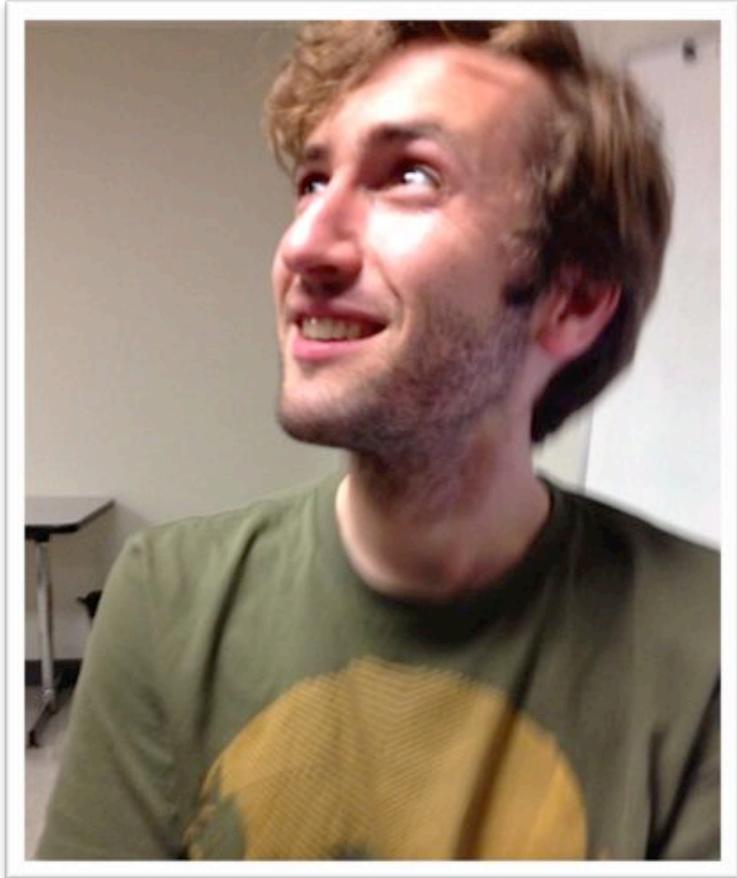
Until the start of this April I wondered if our Online Service was perhaps outdated, even off the radar of the current student population. But then online requests for feedback started flooding in. We've gotten over thirty drafts emailed requesting feedback within the past week. I guess email's not dying after all.

We refer to our email responses to student writing as *Onlines*. This service allows one to largely tutor writing in writing. My affinity for it quickly became apparent after my first online response in September of 2012. A few months later and I was a supervisor (what we call a *supe*) in charge of running our online service. This is a position I now share with a fellow supe: Elizabeth. We each manage the drafts sent in by students, assign them to tutors, review the tutor responses, and, if all is well, return the drafts with feedback to students. This service is one that, like much of our practices, has been developed in-house. To clarify, I'll give a simplified story of an online.

A student submits a draft for online tutoring by way of a Fresno State email address listed on our webpage. This account feeds into a listserv that redistributes the email to our Writing Center Online email account. Seeing an emailed draft, I grab the Walk-In Sign-Up schedule and find the next fifty-minute opening. I look at the Master schedule taped on the office door to see who's working that hour. Taking the black Supe Binder down from atop the office cupboard, I write down the details into the Online Log, put it on the Walk-In schedule with a high-lighted border, and email the student's draft to the tutor. This draft is copied into a new email and sent directly to the tutor with a clear subject stating it's an Online as well as when it's assigned. This makes it easier for the tutor and protects the privacy of both parties. Next, I email the student letting him know that his draft was received, assigned to a tutor, and that the feedback will be returned within two business days.

When the tutor sees she's been scheduled an Online she goes into the Computer Lab attached to our Writing Center and logs-in to her email. She opens up a new document and pastes in a template that explains our feedback method. With fifty minutes to do this in, the next thing the tutor does is to count up the paragraphs and figure out a good pace to complete her response, including time for a final comment. Then she begins responding to the emailed draft paragraph by paragraph. This is a modified version of the Play-by-Play lens. This particular draft is confusing the tutor as she gets to the second paragraph. By the fourth, she's starting to get frustrated. As she gets through the final paragraph, she realizes the writer is not going to be answering any of her questions. The tutor finishes, takes a look back over her responses and then writes a Center of Gravity for her responses and the features of the draft that led to those reactions.

As the minute hand turns toward 10, the tutor copies her response into a new email and sends it to a listserv address that distributes it as above. Seeing the completed Online Response, I'll read over it. I'm looking mainly to see how it went, but also for directive feedback and any heterodox practices that I'll edit out. This tutor asks a lot of



questions. One string of questions sounds a little intense, so I link them into a complex sentence: *Do you mean A, B, or, C?* There are a few other questions which I turn into statements that begin with, *I'm wondering*. I replace *think* with *found* in an instance where the latter feels more reader-based: I *think* the way you did this is jarring → I *found* the way you did this to be jarring. Then, I copy the tutor's response, track down the original email from the writer, open a reply, and paste in the tutor's response. I'll glance over it once more to make sure everything looks good and then, after changing the subject line to alert the student that the response is *Complete*, I email the response to the student.

Now we enter the mysterious afterlife of an Online. Students do write back and use the service again. But more often than not, once the Online Response is emailed, what we hear is silence. If there is any feedback, it's usually *thanks!* Occasionally, the student will unpack that a bit. Some students will follow-up in person, especially if they want to work along the Polishing Path (e.g. grammar or formatting). Now let's turn to some common questions about this service.

Why do we do Onlines like this? In one alternative tutoring strategy, we could rely on markup or comment features of word processor software. But closed source tools are practically anathema here, as can be gathered from our Creative Commons licensed lens booklet (it's available on our webpage under *Tutor Resources*). Of course, there have been compromises: Gmail, for one. This did not come easy. Rather it was a necessary tango with evil as our university has a policy against official email addresses not attached to a living person – but this might be changing (and not because of any nascent zombie apocalypse).

Why don't we do grammar online? Simply, it is not practical through email. We are a Writing Center rather than a fix-it shop. We aim to make audience apparent as a feature, or meta-feature, of a draft. Through tutoring, we give students the experience of writing as a conversation, albeit one where you have more time to express yourself and more time to listen. It is in this latter sense that our method of tutoring writing becomes ideal via our email responses. They give both writer-reader and reader-responder equal amounts of time to *listen* and to *talk*.

Why are we so focused on the reader's reactions? We can't know every teacher, or every prompt, but we can all respond as experienced readers and writers. This is perhaps the most important sense in which a writer needs to expand. Admittedly, it's not often easy getting tutors to trust themselves as readers. I think there's an idea that it's too much like New Thinking (e.g. *I'm okay, you're okay*). In truth, if a reader honestly gives his reactions, it is far more of a challenge to the writer than any sort of red-ink-esque authority-figure aping. But don't take my word for it. Try our service out. We don't card.



Nawal Hussein

BREAKING DOWN EXPECTATIONS: THE STORY OF A GROUP

As a first time tutor, the idea of sitting with three random students and discussing writing is nerve-racking. I really did not know what to expect, or how the tutees would react. The first day is always the toughest; establishing the understanding of the Writing Center's tactical approach toward writing is challenging—for both the tutor and tutees. Everyone comes in with diverse mentalities toward writing; as developing writers, we are so entwined with the concept that writing has to be a certain way. Understanding the way The Writing Center addresses writing using the lens books seemed peculiar at first, but over time, I realized just how crucial those lenses are. Over the course of the semester the tutees' mentalities slowly began to dissolve as they gained a greater insight and understanding about the writing process.

For one certain group, the transformation and understanding was truly amazing. As we started, it was rough and the tutees were extremely uncomfortable. We established the group rules and procedures, but the group was still extremely hesitant and uncooperative. Everyone seemed tense and didn't acknowledge one another. When they spoke, they spoke to me

alone, which not only neglected the other two members, but also made me really uncomfortable. Over the first three weeks, I really had to grill down the aspect of non-superiority amongst the group. The group dynamic is that we are all students and developing as writers; no single person has the upper hand. Writing and sharing "Free Writes" was also a struggle; students preferred speaking rather than reading their written responses.

Once we started reviewing lenses, the concept was lost and misunderstood. When my interpretation of a lens was read, they decided to switch their own. It seemed to me that content was a reoccurring concern, but not necessarily sought to be understood. Their expectations revolved around the basis of correcting their individual errors rather than developing their writing skills. At one point, I honestly thought that all students would drop. They did not seem to like the group and did not want to cooperate. As a tutor, I thought that they might have been uncomfortable with me, but I noticed it was their mentality of intellectual hierarchy that made them uncomfortable. Because I was the "tutor," they felt that I assumed the position of a "better writer;" that being the "tutor" meant I had writing qualities that matched "perfect" or "good" writing. Even though we did those free write "ice-breakers" the first week, they still felt like they were being judged on their writing.

Surprisingly, the next week all of the tutees showed up. One of the tutees brought a draft. The first lens we applied was "More About." The paper addressed the student's goal of becoming a CHP officer. It was an interesting



topic that really caught the group's attention. Developing our "More About" was a simple task and all shared what they had written without speaking out. When we developed "open-ended questions," the group seemed to understand the concept of what we were doing even more. The idea of questioning something and just writing about it seemed easier. I noticed that they understood the lens better when it was applied toward their own individual writing.

Throughout the course of the semester, that group became such a cooperative and attentive group. They understood the lenses and knew exactly what each lens asked for. They got really comfortable with one another and, more importantly, the idea of writing. The individual barriers they had set up at the start of the semester slowly and gradually demolished. Brainstorming ideas and "free-writing" no longer was a struggle. They came in knowing exactly what to do—or if they brought in a draft they knew what they wanted; at points, some of them had already brainstormed open-ended questions they wanted the group to answer and share. When they would get really into a conversation and notice that they'd gone off track, one of them would say: "Guy's let's focus on the lens." The fact that they knew to refocus once they'd gone off track was amusing and lessened my worries.

At one point, I came in extremely late for the group. When I took my seat amongst them, they were reading a draft a student had brought in. The student next to me whispered to me what lens they were doing and whose draft it was. I did not intrude or comment on anything. I took my place in the group and went through the process with them. That's when I realized they no longer felt within the "intellectual hierarchy" that we all have been raised in. They no longer wanted to be evaluated for their writing, but sought non-evaluative feedback that only sparked more pronounced understanding and realization.

It was a really nice group to work with; they were all willing to learn and commit to the process and the group. The greatest accomplishment of the group is recognizing each other and learning. Writing itself is diverse and unique and when you put a group of writers together, sparks are created. By the end of semester, one of the members stated: "I honestly did not expect this group to be like this. I was gonna drop it." I thought it was really nice how open and expressive they'd become. I couldn't agree more with his comment. I too felt like the group was falling apart in the beginning, but later realized how much we'd progressed and accomplished. From the start of the semester I counted the days till the first semester would be over. But as I went along—the aspect of time was forgotten.

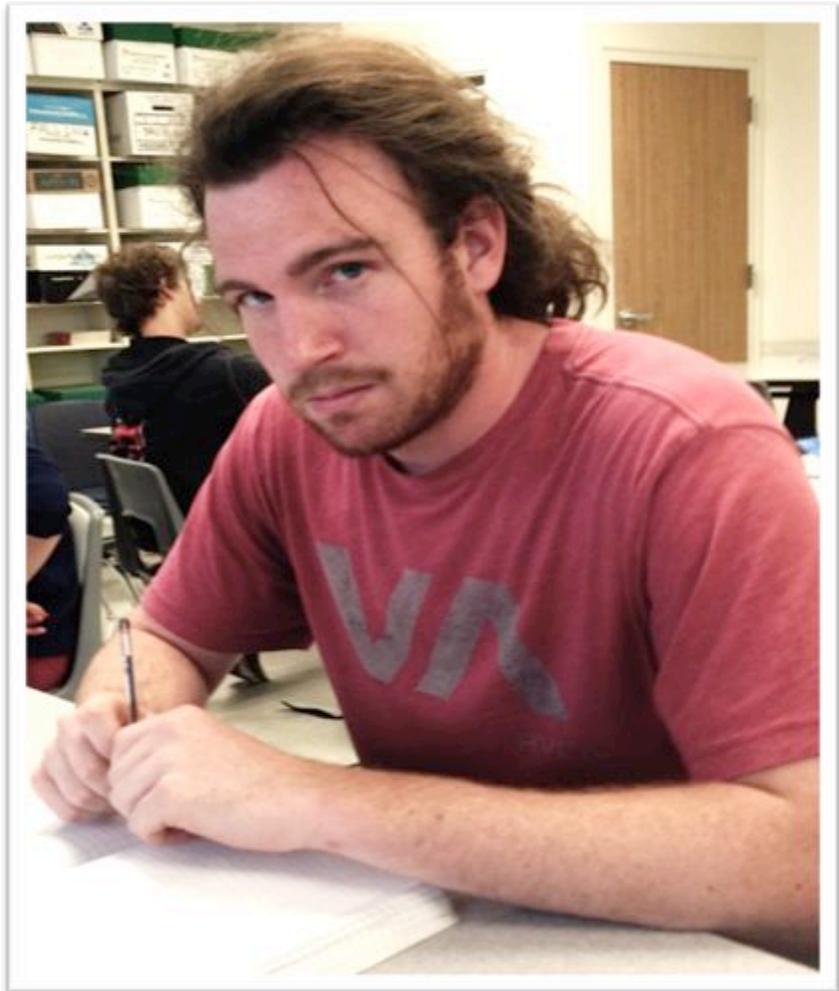
By the time I knew it, we only had 3 weeks left. It's weird how the first three weeks are the adjusting stages and extremely awkward; whereas the last 3 weeks fly by with laughter and great conversations—but that's a group for you.



Shane Alden Wood

**GROUP TUTORIALS IN CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
FRESNO'S WRITING CENTER**

In October 2013, I went to Seattle, WA for the Two-Year College (TYC) & Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association (PNWCA) joint conference to talk about the value of assessment within writing programs. My purpose, ultimately, was to argue for a pedagogical assessment solution—the grading contract. The grading contract is a form of assessment that is based on student labor, the quantity of writing and the time it takes to produce writing. Unlike common assessment methods (e.g. traditional letter grading), the grading contract places more responsibility on the student. My presentation was three-fold: (1) to introduce the grading contract, (2) to explain its value, and (3) to demonstrate how teachers could apply the contract to their first-year writing classroom. The conference was going to give me the opportunity to present the grading contract as the most valuable (current) assessment method, while also giving me the opportunity to meet other academics and learn more about the conventions of two-year colleges.



When I arrived at Cornish College of Arts, I saw that the conference was divided into two main audiences: two-year colleges and writing centers. I knew that I was going to be talking to the two-year college audience, but I didn't know that I would have the opportunity to engage and interact with other writing centers across the nation. The first night I was there, I decided to attend the writing center open forum. I figured that I could gain applicable information and bring that back to Fresno State to share with my own coordinators and colleagues. Many of the conference attendees were writing center coordinators, and I wanted to hear more about what they were doing in their programs and how they were interacting with student writing. As a writing teacher and writing center tutor, one of my research interests includes how teachers produce feedback to student writing, and then how students perceive that feedback. Even though I was there to encourage the grading contract for assessment practices within two-year institutions, I wanted to become more familiar with how other writing centers were providing feedback to student writing.

When I was in the forum discussion, I realized (1) how writing centers operate in different ways, and (2) how our writing center operates differently than most. Since I know more about the writing center I work at than other institutional writing centers, I'm going to spend the majority of the time describing ours by emphasizing what makes our writing center different. Fresno State's writing center is divided into two concepts: (1) one-on-ones, and (2) groups. At the conference, I gained an understanding that most writing centers have one-on-ones (or walk-ins). Now these one-on-ones vary differently: subject-based tutors/consultants (tutors work with students who are in their discipline), editing errors (tutors address common grammar mistakes), commenting on content (tutors address content concerns), writing with students (planning, free writing, brainstorming, and collaborating), etc. One-on-ones operate in different contexts across college universities but there's one commonality—they exist.

Now, the other concept—group tutorials—for the most part, doesn't exist. The group sessions are relatively unique to most writing centers, and I realized that during the TYCA-PNWCA conference. At Fresno State's writing center, group sessions operate for a semester and count as a 1-unit (CR/NC) course. These tutorials consist of one tutor and three students (total of four people per group).

The tutor facilitates the group but does not control the group session; *writing* controls the group tutorial. The foundation of the group is based on writing. These tutorials function on parallel days of the week for fifty minutes each session (T/TH or M/W). There's also an opportunity for a group tutorial on Friday for one hour and forty minutes. Students can choose which day/time works best for them and their schedule. Now students have two main responsibilities: (1) attend the session, and (2) bring drafts of writing. Students are allowed to miss four sessions through the course of the semester. And, students must bring a total of six drafts; students can bring a first draft and a second draft of the same prompt/writing project.

The group begins each session with a free write, which is 4-5 minutes spent on writing whatever (much like a journal entry). Then, the session usually consists of the group providing feedback to a student draft. The feedback is guided by a response lens (adapted from Peter Elbow). The group reads the draft, rotating paragraph by paragraph, and then the group responds based on the lens, which is usually chosen by what the student thinks he or she needs the most. Then, each student reads their response. The group tutorial functions as a space to share writing and to share responses. By cultivating the purpose(s) of writing and reading through the course of the semester, the groups begin to see how writing is a process and an act of meaning-making. At the same time, writing and thinking are seen as parallels; writing becomes purposeful. The group tutorials provide an opportunity for students to better understand reading, writing, and responding. Writing becomes an act of communication, or the way in which each individual communicates within the group. Each student's voice is valued equally which promotes student agency and ownership over their writing.

If a student doesn't bring a draft, then, usually, a student has a prompt or assignment that can be talked (via writing) about. The group collaborates in order to better understand the prompt by brainstorming, or by producing other kinds of idea-mapping activities. Once again, this shows how writing is thinking and writing is a process. In some ways, this also illuminates genre theory, or how each text can be seen as a piece of writing that details purpose(s), function(s), and rhetoricality. Prompts can be seen as active artifacts which require a response from readers. The students can engage in the prompt by dissecting the purposes of the text which also produces

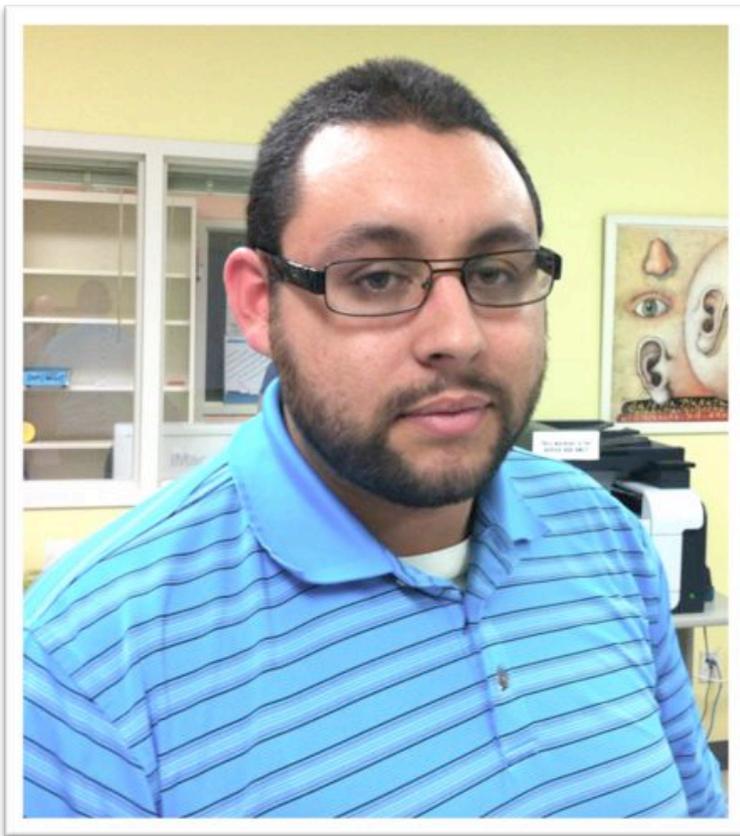


awareness. The student becomes an active reader, engaged in the text, having experiences to bring to the text. Writing requires a response and reading is seen as a purposeful act.

When I was explaining the purposes of the group tutorials to the writing center coordinators at the TYCA-PNWCA conference, I started to understand why we offer group writing sessions and the importance of those sessions. I began to realize the necessity in building a community of writers, readers, and learners. The group tutorials help students better understand and practice reading and writing, and, at the same time, the group tutorials allow tutors to better understand and practice reading and writing. Reading and writing can never be perfected; reading and writing can only be practiced. The group tutorial at Fresno State's writing center functions as a place for the practice and development of these essential skills.

Oscar Chavez

THE TUTOR TRAINING EXPERIENCE



A new line of work is always exciting, but it can also be very intimidating. My initial perception of tutoring at a writing center was different than what I encountered here. I began my tutoring career with students in the K-12 education system, in a capacity where I was a supplement to their daily learning. Since the first day of orientation, my experience here at the writing center has been far beyond feeling like just a supplement for students. I was greeted with a welcoming attitude where other fellow tutors, new and anxious like me, also sat in a circle.

The fact that we were seated in a circle threw me off a bit, since orientations and training for other workplaces required that we sat in a formation typical of a traditional classroom. We weren't facing the front of the class, which enabled everyone to get to know each other. There is a sense of familiarity when none of us are forced to face a direction. We are not staring at the backs of other people's heads, but staring at the faces of our peers.

After introductions, we began with a tour of the Writing Center, the

office, and the tutor lounge area. Getting to know the lay of the land proved to be immensely helpful in making us more familiar with the center. There was an explanation of where particular documents for our groups are located, such as the syllabus that we distribute to our groups. This also served as a way to guide tutors and get us to be comfortable in the areas where we will be helping students with their writing and writing process. It helped to get a sense of the place, but there was still a bit of tension in me.

My tense feelings came from my initial thoughts about what happens at a session where a tutor helps others discover through writing. I had observed a session before coming to orientation, but I thought that we were going to be handed some kind of instruction manual and assigned groups. I figured that they would let us figure out what do with writing since each of us brought our own knowledge about what writing is and how to approach it.

The thought of jumping headfirst into tutoring intensified the anxious feelings I was having. We began with some writing that asked us to speculate on what we thought writing was and how we could approach it as tutors. I was surprised, but I was very happy that we did, since I got to hear from others and their writing and how similar it was. During our discussion about writing, we reflected through some more writing.

All of the reflecting really helped take the pressure off to an extent, but I was still wondering, how do I do this role of a tutor? A wave of relief hit when we were told that before we tutored we were going to go over what to do in a group session. We then were taken to another room where we went through a session, the whole 50 minutes as if it were a real session.



We began the session with writing down an introduction about ourselves, handling logistical/administrative aspects of the group and then began to explore our writing experiences. Shortly after our simulation, we discussed step by step what to do the first day of tutoring, the second day, and everyday thereafter

Modeling the session is important for us to not only get a sense of the experience of tutoring, but also to get insight as to how students who come to the writing center for help might feel. We get to be placed in a position of being students and tutors and this allows us to be able to further approach students. Since we are already familiar with some of the feelings about coming to a writing group, it is easier for us as tutors to guide and help students with their writing process. As a student during the modeling session, I felt very nervous about how I would provide help. I found myself asking questions such as, will my feedback be helpful? How do I even give feedback?

The second day of tutoring involved more writing that included reflection through writing on the question, "Who are you as writer?" This abstract question allows the students and the tutors to explore how we function in the writing process. We get to thinking about what writing is, how it is

contextualized within us as students and writers, and we also get to explore our identity as a writer in all aspects of life.

We then modeled a day where a prompt was brought in and how to help students make the prompt more approachable. We also modeled a situation where students brought in drafts. We learned about lenses and how they help us as writers look at certain aspects of a draft. Then we applied lenses, which involved more writing and discussion.

The lenses we use are in a booklet that is available for not just tutors, but for everyone wanting to see how we approach writing. It includes a brief explanation of the lens, how to do the lens, and an example of the lens being applied. There are also tutor notes that help us as tutors to better understand and apply the lens. The lenses range from looking at the pieces of writing holistically and looking at them at the paragraph level. These lenses allow us to get into fruitful discussions that help the writer by leading him or her to thinking about the paper and as a writer. We explore the paper using the lens as a guide that allows us to think more about how we function as readers and writers when approaching a text.

I am very thankful that our tutoring session involved simulating and modeling what the first two days of tutoring look like. This took a lot of pressure off of me and my fellow tutors. We were prepared to handle most, if not all situations of a tutoring session. If someone brings in a prompt, we know what to do. The same goes for situations where we have essays and situations where we do not have anything that was brought in by students.

WRITING@THE CENTER 2014

Training did not end at orientation, but is an ongoing experience that we partake in our weekly course. Our weekly course is taken by tutors as an opportunity to keep developing and growing as writers, scholars, and tutors. We've discussed composition theory and how organic writing is. This was done through well-thought-out discussions and through lots of writing. We have also transcribed tutoring sessions to get a sense of what a session looks like on paper. Writing can be seen as thinking on paper and putting the session down on paper allows us to see what kind of thinking is done and what kind of moves are taken during a session.

Our training has not stopped at transcriptions; we have also designed charts that help us with our sessions. These charts offer us options as to how to approach writing, and contain information on the genres of writing, as well as working with one-on-one tutoring, and many others.

The charts help with training for one-on-one tutoring and are not charts that help us run a tutoring session. Since writing is organic, we are taught to approach one-on-one organically. Charts allow us to see the options we can take when approached with a paper during a one-on-one session. During the composition of these charts, we learned that for a one-on-one session to be most beneficial to both the student and the tutors we have to establish a vocabulary with the student.

The training sessions we take every Thursday night have prepared us for working around arbitrary words such as "flow" and "structure" during one-on-one sessions, in an effort to help students create a new vocabulary where writing is concerned. Often, students use these words while asking for feedback and can have a different meaning than we do as tutors.

During our training, we have also learned what to do when students want more technical feedback such as grammar. We do not go through and mark their paper, but instead we help identify patterns in a student's piece. This helps them recognize their pattern and allows the students the opportunity to address their grammar concerns after the tutoring session. Learning and writing leaves the domain of the writing center for students and enters their academic career. A particular student can take what was learned in a session of both group and one-on-one and apply it to all writing they encounter.

The training experience at the CSU Fresno Writing Center is not just a way to teach us how to do our job, but a way to teach us how to understand the writing process as tutors, writers, academics, and thinkers. With this knowledge, we can move forward to help students organically. Since writing is organic, our training allows us to approach writing and students successfully.



Kyle Hoover

**SUPE AS TUTOR AS STUDENT AS SUPE:
COLLABORATION IN HOW THE PLACE IS RUN**

A lot of the time Writing Centers are seen as something akin to a repair shop, a place where students go with their writing in order to get it fixed, made good again. Of course, we are not that at all. Our tutoring is collaborative; it is not instructive, authoritative. Our administrative practices are similar. The Writing Center at Fresno State is managed by four supervisors and two faculty directors. Our managerial decisions often include things like what to do in training, how to help tutors who are struggling, and how to provide our services best to our community. The Writing Center administration is quite collaborative, and our relationship with the tutors, I feel, is very similar to that of the tutor-student dynamic we strive for in our practices.

In order to make decisions, the supervisors, who are all students and who all work as tutors as well, meet with our Director, Magda Gilewicz, and our Assistant Director, Kirk Stone, once a week. Our meetings run somewhat similarly to groups, at least at the beginning: we write a Center of Gravity for the week, allowing us to pull together all of the difficulties, problems, successes, etc. that stood out to us. Then, we take turns reading what we wrote. From here it is different, because our discussion is mostly verbal, but usually we have a good amount of stuff to talk about. I think something that's different here from other places is that the supervisors, as tutors, actually have quite a good amount of say in how the place is run. I think this is a necessity, because in order to meet the needs of tutors, one needs to actually be a tutor to understand what needs need to be met. Magda and Kirk do some tutoring here and there, but for the most part they are busy with running the place. That being said—and we try to be humble about it—I don't think the Writing Center would run as smoothly if it weren't for the supervisors. Magda and Kirk could definitely run it on their own, but it would be a much, much more difficult task.

The supervisors are also working as tutors, and we are also students. We are going through the same training, the same pressures, the same struggles perhaps, as the rest of the tutors. This adds to the equality of the supe-tutor relationship, since—in the same way that tutors are also student writers, like the student writers they are helping—supes are tutors as well. Since I first started working here, I have felt that this relationship has made the job so much more enjoyable and stress-free. As a new tutor, still learning and being presented with new challenges to overcome, it felt very comforting to have a community of tutors who I knew would help me out if I needed it. Just like in the small groups, I knew I wouldn't be evaluated as "good" or "bad" by the administration and then



respectively be praised or fired, but that I would be helped in ways that would actually make me a better tutor. Again, I liken it to how we treat students in our tutoring: we're not expecting students to right away be "good" or "bad" writers—that defeats the purpose of what we're trying to do. We see that, like writers, tutors have to learn how to tutor, and so much of that is just from experience. One doesn't become a good writer by just learning about writing, but by actually writing; one doesn't become a good tutor, either, just by being taught how to do it.

And this is totally understood here. We are not apt to label a tutor as a "good tutor" and then leave them be forever, as if now they have the knowledge that will lead them to eternal success. Just the same, we're not going to see a tutor as a "bad tutor" and then just give up on them completely and fire them (unless something truly out of whack is going on), but we'll try to help them, advise them, get them to tutor in a way that is most effective for the student and for themselves. This is exactly how we treat writers. Sometimes, we might get a call from teachers telling us they want to send their students here because they "really need it," and because they are "bad writers." It is fine they want to send them to us, because we can definitely help them, but at the same time, we try really hard to get across the fact that not only bad writers could find us useful, that the kind of feedback we give is for all writers. Even confident, successful writers can get help from our feedback. We're not deciding whether a paper is good or bad, and we're not deciding whether a tutor is good or bad, but we're responding and helping with more meaning, with something the student and the tutor could actually use to improve.

A lot of the time people come expecting us to do that, though, to see whether their paper is good or bad. Or, they think that after just one session with us, their paper will change from a "bad" paper to a "good" paper. This is a perspective of writing that we have to deal with all the time. It is a perspective on writing and on tutoring that emphasizes a hierarchy of the teacher/tutor over the student. To draw a parallel once more: this is a common hierarchy in most workplaces, one that is largely unavoidable. The nature of our tutoring, in being void of evaluation, tries to eliminate this hierarchy somewhat, and make the tutor-tutee relationship more egalitarian and collaborative; so does our administration, in our training, in our assignments, in our general practices, try to eliminate the hierarchy between supervisor and tutor.

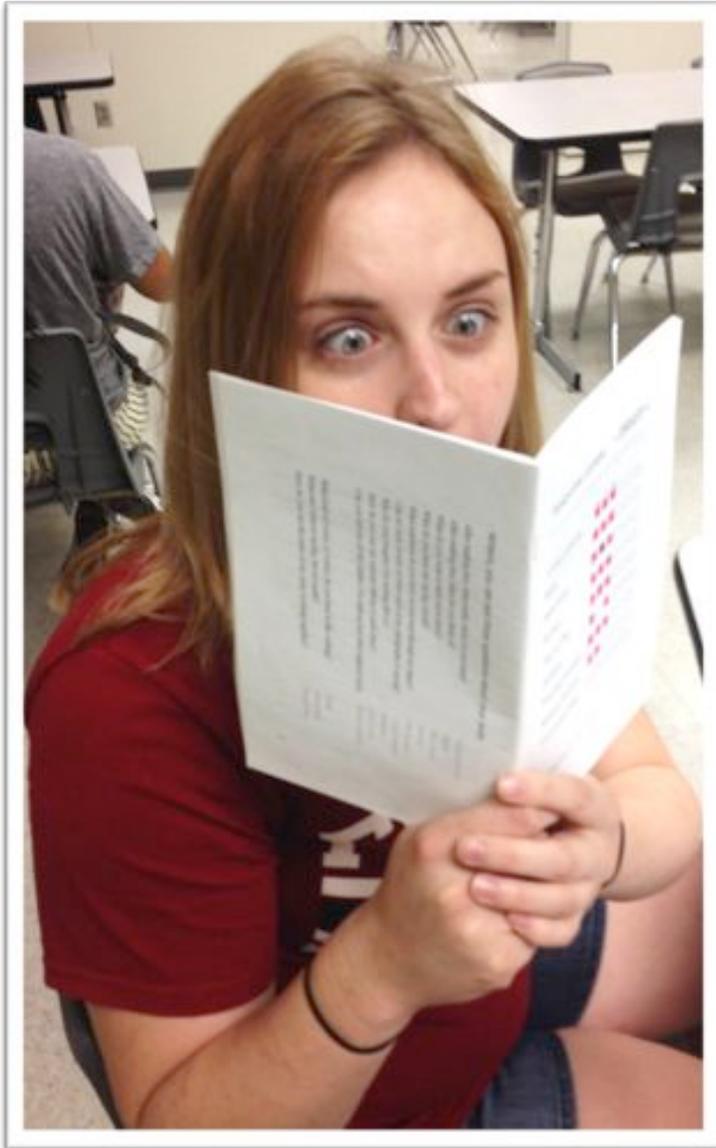
Our tutors are probably more experienced with writing than the students who come in here, but at the same time, there are probably things that the student knows more about than the tutor. The supes may be more experienced than other tutors, but that doesn't mean other tutors don't have something they could bring to the table in how the place is run. Some things the tutor does teach, like the lenses, or maybe formatting or language errors, but for the most part these things, especially the lenses, are designed to get the tutor and the tutee on equal footing in order to facilitate their collaboration on the paper. Some things the supes have to teach are how to run the small groups and how to effectively do one-on-one tutoring. But, this is mostly just so that the tutor knows what to do, to get all the tutors on equal footing (just like with students again!). The rest is from experience and from help from the community. In this way, just like our tutoring practices, training tutors is often highly collaborative.

So much of what we do in training, in class, in practice, is in response to the needs of the tutors and to the needs of our community. It is very difficult to know these needs and how to go about them if I don't have the same needs myself, as a tutor and as a writer. This is why it's so crucial to have a more collaborative relationship between the directors, the supes, and the tutors. Collaboration in writing makes us more confident writers, and collaboration in tutoring makes us more confident.



Sara Ingels

**FROM FRESNO CITY COLLEGE TO FRESNO STATE:
A LOOK AT TWO DIFFERENT TUTORIAL ENVIRONMENTS**



I feel like I've been tutoring a long time. It has been a while, most of my college career in fact. I started tutoring the spring of my first year at Fresno City College and fell in love with it. It was fun meeting new people and helping them get a better understanding of writing and what they were required to do for an assignment. I felt like I was making a difference in other student's lives as well as improving my own writing knowledge. Walk-in tutoring had always been my favorite type of session, and I had never even considered the possibility of group tutoring. It seemed like it was too much to deal with – one person at a time sometimes felt like a lot! But when I was asked to do PASS (Peer Assisted Student Sessions), I said yes. It was something I had always wondered about. The PASS tutors always seemed almost mysterious because we “regular” tutors would see them for a few hours a week, and then they would be gone. The Writing and Reading Center (WRC) would always be busy, but the back two tables were usually reserved with small blue signs for the PASS sessions. We knew as walk-in tutors that students at those tables didn't need us; they were in PASS, and those tutors had everything under control.

For PASS, I was assigned to a specific class that met at a specific time. It also helped that the instructor for the class was also my boss, Tabitha, at the WRC. I met with her in her office, and each week we would run through what was going to happen in class and what I was expected to do. Usually, I would sit in on class on Fridays and take notes on what assignments they were expected to do. During the week, I had a time where students could come in and get some

extra help. The amount of students I would get to tutor at the same time on any given day would depend on where those students were located in the writing process. Most days, my groups were more like one-on-one sessions where we could focus on individual issues, and I would bounce around between two or three students. I would help one student for 20 minutes or so, get them to practice what we talked about, and then move on to the next student. Other days, students would come in larger groups because I would be giving a presentation on MLA or sentence structure that Tabitha wasn't able to cover during class. One of my supervisors even liked to call us PASS tutors “supplemental instructors.” I'd have to agree with that title! A lot of the time, I felt more like a teacher than a tutor. When there was a big group of students, and we were going over something, students wouldn't even talk to each other about what we were doing. They would come to me with sometimes really hard questions, and I felt

overwhelmed at times because I was just a tutor and didn't have the degree or all the knowledge to answer them. Beyond that, the group was there to supplement what was going on in class. We would go more into depth on something talked about in class, and I would help students to the best of my abilities.

When I was hired at the Fresno State Writing Center, everything was just different. They called the center "the writing center that writes." During training, we were taught to talk through our writing and that conversations could occur using writing. I was taught that we were not figures of authority but peers there to write and respond just the same as the students who came to the groups. Those students are usually recruited during "spiel week" where English teachers bring their classes to the Writing Center and the supervisors tell them about what we do here. Groups consist of three students and a tutor and they're the same people for the entire semester. Each group meets twice a week for 50 minutes. The students are mainly freshmen and they sign up for writing groups in the form of a class that earns them an extra unit. In order to receive credit, they have to bring in six drafts and miss no more than four sessions. The groups learn how to do lenses, or different ways to look at a draft, and then give a response. For example, a popular lens is "More About" where we first read an entire draft, and then take a few minutes to write what we as readers are curious about or want to know more about. In groups, we never bother with grammar or sentence structure but instead focus on the ideas presented in a draft and what the writer is trying to say. The cool thing is that everyone in the group writes. Everyone has a notebook, everyone writes their responses, and everyone shares them. My responses are no more important than the person sitting next to me. All I'm there for is to facilitate the conversation and teach them the lenses, so the

students can ask for those responses for their drafts. The dynamic is different as well, since it's always the same group every time we meet. The students are comfortable with each other and aren't scared to say how they feel about a piece of writing. In fact, groups almost become little families where we sit around a table, talk, and write. Sometimes there's even food involved. A lot of times students come in saying they want to learn how to write, and the first time we write anything they didn't write very much at all. A lot of times, those students, by the end of the semester, have no trouble writing for a full five or ten minutes straight, as they're comfortable with the medium since it's what we have been practicing the entire semester. By writing in groups and making it a community act, we take away that fear that writing is this structured, forced act that needs lots of preparation to do. Instead, we ask a question and write a response just like we would say it if we were giving a verbal response.

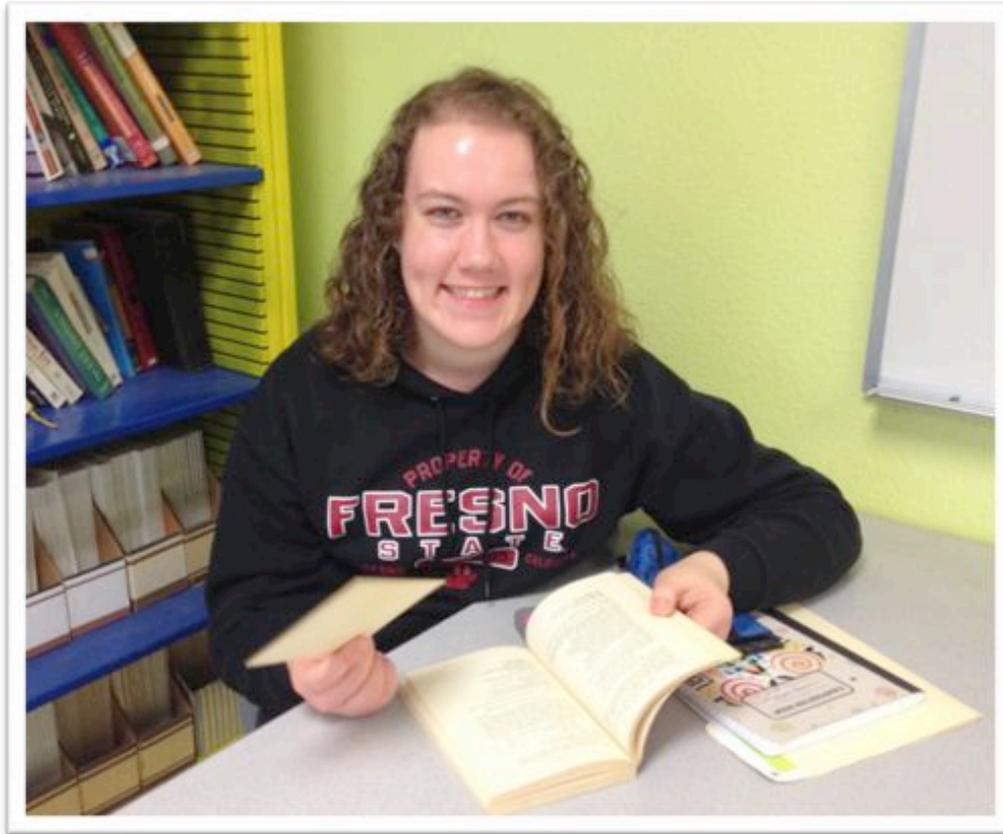


Both groups serve their own purpose. For Fresno City, a lot of classes need that supplemental instructor to make sure everyone is getting all the information they need to succeed in high-level classes. A lot of students at Fresno City are returning adult students and need to be reminded of all the writing basics we all (supposedly) learned in high school. Others just need a little bit more help. PASS is an excellent program, especially for the ESL population that they serve, for a more in depth practice with sentence construction and grammar. Writing groups at State serve a slightly different purpose. They're almost supplementary, almost not. They're almost something entirely different because of what we do during groups. Because we're writing for most of the session, it isn't scary. It isn't intimidating. Writing just becomes another part of the day, like taking notes in class or getting lunch. We sit down, write, and something changes. And that's pretty awesome.

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Elizabeth Alfving

TEARS AND SAYBACK: THE STORY OF A ONE-ON-ONE



I looked at the schedule and saw Julie’s name in the slot for a twenty-five-minute one-on-one session. As usual, I waited until the top of the hour, peering through the little window separating the Writing Center from our connected computer lab and trying to figure out who it was I would be helping. This little game is a norm for me, although I’m not entirely sure why. The lab was not as crowded as it tends to get in the early afternoon; a few students were scattered around at various computers while others had headphones in and heads down, scribbling in their notebooks. One young woman in particular caught my eye; she seemed to be upset and was wiping her eyes, looking around. I wanted to ask her if everything was okay but I feared I would scare her away; not everyone appreciates an approaching stranger when upset. I continued to look around and saw others chatting and laughing with one another and little by little, as the top of the hour approached, they trickled their separate ways; some went to sit down at their tables for their writing group while others scrambled out the door. The emblematic Fresno State Bulldog clock indicated that it was the top of the hour so I grabbed my now-worn composition notebook and pouch of colorful pens and made my way to my table.

I poked my head into the lab and called out, “Is Julie here?” To my surprise, the teary-eyed woman stood up and tried to put on a smile. Her eyes were red and she sniffled her nose while making her way into the lab. Part of me was terrified; it’s always uncomfortable when a stranger is upset and I can never decide whether I should respect his or her privacy or try to be a decent human being and ask if everything is okay. We sat down next to one another and she seemed to put on a front of being okay so I carried on as usual. After finding out that she was a freshman Public Health major, I turned my attention to her draft. As with every one-on-one session, I asked her what she wanted to work on, explaining the differences between focusing on content versus grammar and she chose to turn

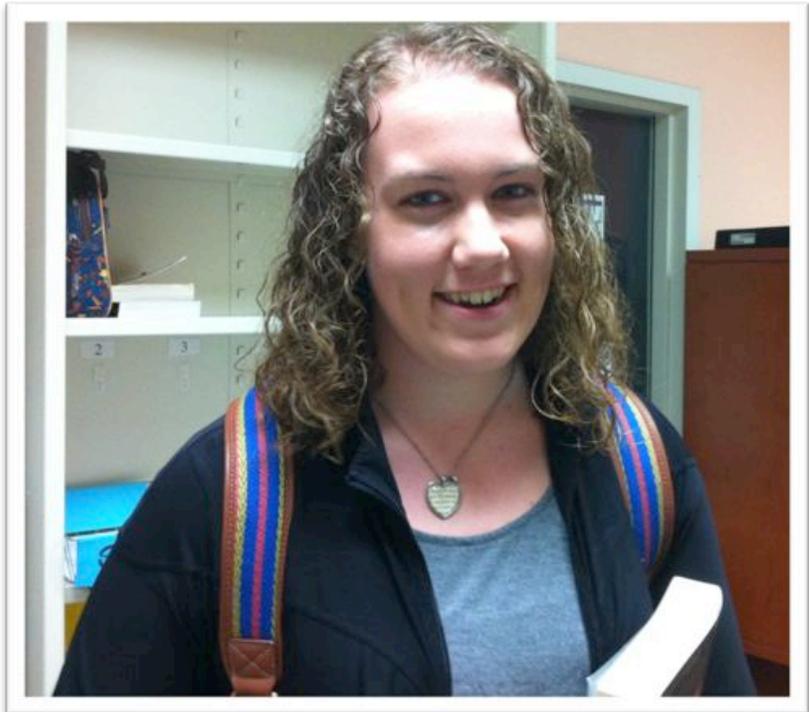
our efforts to the content of her paper. After asking her to take some time to write out her concerns, I made my way through her paper. Some parts were a bit confusing and I found myself trying to figure out which of three ideas, that we should keep the death penalty, that we should be rid of it, or that we should allow it in specific situations, was the focus of the paper, internally deciding a Sayback lens would be the most beneficial for me as a reader.

Once finished, I asked Julie to share the concerns she had written. She read the first one, expressing worries that her paper didn't have a point. While she was reading, her voice cracked a couple of times and I could see her eyes grow wet with tears. I finally asked if she was okay and she went on to explain how she was having a difficult time with this paper and felt like nothing she did helped it progress. This alone seemed to help, as if just talking to someone about her frustrations was beneficial. She explained a little more about how she had to have a clear argument that included opposing views and that she felt like she may have talked too much about other points. I told her that that was what I struggled with while reading and asked if this would be something she'd like us to focus on for the session and she smiled and eagerly nodded. I briefly introduced the concept of our lenses, describing them as tools we use to look at and respond to writing. I told her that a lens I thought would help with her concerns was Sayback and we went over how to do the lens. She grabbed her pen and we both took our time writing our responses. I wrote to ask the question, "Are you saying overall...?" while she wrote to answer it with, "I think I'm saying..." allowing us both time to think and come up with solid responses.

After a few minutes of intense writing we looked at one another and smiled. I told her I'd start us off and read my Sayback response. I asked her a series of questions emphasizing my understanding of her argument and she scribbled down everything I said, nodding all the while. Once I finished I looked over at her and she just smiled before jumping and saying, "Oh right, I should probably share too," her mood noticeably different from what it was fifteen minutes earlier.

She read her response and it was clear that what she was hoping to get across was a bit different from what I understood her paper to say; while she wanted to focus on arguing that we should ban the death penalty, I expressed an inability to land on which of the three was the focal point of the paper. Once she finished reading she still seemed very happy; I was concerned that she didn't realize how our responses seemed to differ. I asked her the usual question, "So how did our responses line up?" I hoped I wouldn't have to break the news that we seemed to vary in our understandings of the paper and my fears were calmed when she said, "Oh, they weren't what I was hoping for because we were different but I know what I need to do to fix it. I need to take out some of the opposing argument and then relate what I leave back to my argument." I was impressed by her attitude, barely remembering her emotional state at the beginning of the session.

She continued to explain how she thought she was too close to the paper and couldn't get far enough away to see where she was or wasn't supporting her argument. We talked about a few different ways to relate everything back to her thesis and she was bright-eyed. I looked up at the clock and saw we only had a minute left, a disappointment because we could have gotten a lot of writing done if we had the whole fifty minutes to work together. When I asked her if she felt like she had something to work on when she left, she gave me a big smile and told me she had a ton to work on. She packed up her bag and asked me for my name. After I told her she said, "Thank you Elizabeth. You're a lifesaver." She again smiled, eyes dry and clear, and we said our goodbyes. She walked out of the door and I sat for a moment, smiling to myself before getting up to call the next name, hoping for a session as fulfilling as the one with Julie had been.



Mathew Kenerly

THE PORTRAIT OF A TUTOR AS A YOUNG(ISH) MAN



The demands of work and school have transformed me into a creature of habit these days. A normal day begins around 6:30 in the morning with breakfast preparation for my wife and myself. She is a graduate student in Fresno State’s MSW program, which means she is an intern, and she is a research assistant on top of that, so since I am merely an undergraduate with a plush tutoring gig, ensuring that we get off to fast starts is a fair tradeoff. We joke at the beginning of the week that we’ll see each other on Friday but, you know, we *are* both in demand. It’s not all that far from the truth. Sharing a meal and a tasty beverage – oatmeal and sweetened green tea for her, cereal and a Rockstar for me – is a small way that we connect when our responsibilities invariably pull us in different directions.

I take the bus to campus around 9:00 and use the forty-minute trip to get my head right. I have found that doing what I need to do at school requires a certain mentality. You have to get up for what’s ahead of you, which means that I have to slough off whatever negativity I rolled out of bed with (this mostly comes back to waking up in the middle of a dream, which no one enjoys), so I use the free time to enjoy the things I like: A rotation of sports podcasts, leisure reading and so on.

On the whole, my days start and end at the same time. I’ve found that it’s easier for me to have class before working here at the Writing Center, though. Being engaged in lectures and class collaborations require preparation, not unlike warming up for strength training, and those couple hours give me what I need to hit the ground running when the time comes to lead a group.

I always ask how my students’ days are going. For walk-ins, it’s a little more of a formality because there’s work to be done and only so much time to do it. In my groups, I’m interested in where their heads are. I’m not just a tutor, after all; I know what it is to be a student, to be young, and I like to dispense advice when the occasion calls for it. Whether it’s restaurant recommendations or the gospel of getting organized, I want to offer more than just what we teach.

Our lenses are our centerpiece, though, and those introductory moments of each session are important. I usually wrap up the private writes faster than my peers and the common temptation, I think, is to speak in hushed tones when other groups are still involved with their writing. This is understandable. However, I am sociable by nature, and I try to encourage my students to voice their concerns as though we’re having a normal conversation. To me, this mirrors what the Writing Center intends when we promote “conversation through writing”.

Some days demand teaching groups back-to-back, which isn't as daunting as it sounds. I use the ten minutes to loosen up, whether it's by stretching or walking around, because I believe there is some correlation between physicality and mental dexterity. Sitting around too much can kill you, after all, and I prefer dynamism to inertia.

Going to class after I work takes a bit of adjustment, as well. Oftentimes, I don't have to be a facilitator elsewhere or there is no opportunity to do so, and that can feel like a restriction. Listening to lectures is important, of course, but it is much different than being proactive through the process of writing.

At the end of the day, my wife and my home await me. Most evenings involve a lap or two around our block, cutting into our prodigious television queue, or reading, writing and researching for the days ahead. My wife has found it useful to have a personal tutor on call, while I practice what I preach as often as I can. For example, I have my own papers to write on occasion, but I also contribute to a fairly prominent sports blog on the side and my tutoring instincts kick in when I have time to edit entries. If some team's left tackle was injured up last week, I'd want to read more about how the opposition might exploit that weakness. Will the guard next to him have to help out? Who will lead the pass rush? It may all be trivial in the grand scheme of things, but these questions satisfy our audience.

It's over before we know it. Honestly, though, this life is much better than the alternative, and the future is always getting brighter. I have a sense of belonging that I did not always possess, a sense of rightness, and when sunrise comes back around, I can't wait to get back into action.



Nicholas Wogan

GROUP SESSIONS: A UNIQUE APPROACH TO TUTORING



Quiet scribbling and the ticking of a clock; these sounds are common in any writing center but they pulsed a bit more loudly than I would have preferred. I listlessly flipped through my notebook and stole glances at the door. This is the story of a group session at our Writing Center.

It was my second semester as a tutor and I had certainly been in this situation before. It wasn't necessarily common, but by the laws of probability it was inevitable given enough time. My three group members, usually quite consistent, were all missing. I quadruple-checked the clock and it stood firm at six minutes past the hour. With nothing else to do, I reflected on the likely changes I would have to make to the day's usual business. Would even one student appear? I hoped the day's session wouldn't go to waste. Perhaps everyone who works as an educator has these itching moments of doubt, in which we realize the service we provide is vulnerable. If a paper gets revised in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does the student still write a second draft? These are the questions that keep me up at night.

I eased my shoulders and allowed myself a sigh of relief as two group members walked through the door. They apologized for their lateness, looking a bit embarrassed. I was just happy to see them. Two out of three is like, sixty percent? I'm not a math major. Anyway, I tell them that we might as well skip the usual private write warm-up and get down to business. I ask whether or not one of them has a paper, and one of the students (let's call her B) pulls a new rough draft out of her bag. "Y" and I ask her a bit about the assignment, and she explains that she had to interview someone related to the food service industry, and also connect to some larger food service issue. The assignment was one I'd seen a lot of at the time, and I felt confident with what it was asking for. B seemed a bit shy

about the draft, explaining that it was a first draft and that she was unsure where to go next. I reassured her that it was fine to have an unfinished product and that maybe we could figure out her next move.

Alternating paragraphs, we read aloud her interview with Alberto, a Hispanic field worker. The draft started with personal information, and went into an elaborate description of the process of growing the crops and maintaining the fields. This emphasis on the mechanical side of the fieldwork confused me, and I longed to learn more about Alberto and his difficult but honest living. Toward the end of her draft though was a surprisingly intense twist. In his interview, Alberto relayed a gripping story of his negative reaction to the pesticides used on the crops. Even wearing gloves and a bandana around his mouth, his contact with the pesticides sent him to the hospital. At the story's conclusion, Y and I looked at each other in amazement. Alberto's story was one of the most dramatic true events I had ever heard! The account of his hands and throat swelling up and him desperately trying to communicate to his supervisor had us mesmerized.

Then it was time to choose one of the lenses. Lenses are essentially the toolbox of the writing center; each is a unique way of approaching a draft. Based on what she had described earlier, I suggested "More About" to B and she agreed. All three of us looked over the draft and wrote out statements related to what we wanted to hear more about in the draft. After around ten minutes, we each read aloud to each other exactly what we had written. We discussed some of the different points and it became evident that Alberto's last story had really made an impact on us as readers. B was surprised at how interested we were in that side of the draft. She wasn't sure when she was writing what her "food industry problem" would be but our conversation on pesticides gave her the information she needed. We discussed what health benefits, if any, the workers had. Alberto ended up having to pay his hospital bills out of pocket and then go back to work the next week. Questions about the safety of the industry in general gave her new ideas. She decided to remove the sections on maintaining the fields and bring in a stronger focus on the use of pesticides and how it affected Alberto.

This was one of the most rewarding group sessions of mine, but I chose to write about it for another reason as well. I think it provides a lot of insight into our writing center's ideology and our techniques. It would have been easy for me to just tell B I thought the anecdote at the end of her paper was the "best" section or what I did or didn't like in the draft. However, there are pitfalls to this more direct tutoring relationship. Even if the same corrections were made, B still would have likely felt that her first draft was "wrong". She was unable to see the mistakes as clearly as her tutor, which meant her writing wasn't successful. Instead, using the More About lens gave her a chance to hear feedback from two of her peers, and also to reflect on her draft and speak for herself. Our responses weren't corrective but we ended up reaching the exact same conclusions. The difference was that the energy was far more positive. All three of us participated in writing about and discussing the draft, and all three of us were excited for the potential changes. This story of a group session has a happy ending, but it is just one of many experiences.

Still, when students walk through the door with an open mind, amazing things happen here every week.



Adam Kunkleman

WRITING ACROSS THE CENTERS

While attending the city college in Visalia, College of the Sequoias, I found a job at the writing center. The CoS writing center is on the second floor of the library and is pushed into a room along the wall farthest from the entrance. From this out-of-the-way location, a team of about 20 student tutors help CoS attendees with their writing problems. The director of the writing center at CoS, Josh Geist, worked at the Fresno State writing center for quite some time. Josh would point out from time to time that he designed the CoS writing center to approximately match the center at Fresno State. Although the main philosophy and basic practices align, there are great differences between them. The basic ways which they don't match is in the use of group tutoring, discussion questions/short writes, and response lenses.

Getting used to tutoring in a group at Fresno took some time. I was so used to the one-on-one routine I had fallen into at CoS. With a group session, it becomes important to create a conversation at the table in which we explore a principle of writing as a group. This conversation become the jumping off point for our discussion questions and "short writes." Trying to guide a conversation between students about writing is, for me, a lot harder than simply talking to a student about writing. The group sessions at Fresno are helpful in my opinion because it gives



the students the practice they need to become comfortable engaging in the academic discussions in their classes. I also see how discovering knowledge for oneself through talking can be more valuable than being told the answer. I've never had a group with which it was too difficult to work, but the group format itself seems to throw a bit of a wrench in things.

I find myself wasting more time as a tutor trying to rein in side conversations, get students to engage with the discussion at hand, or come up with a useful, open-ended question for a short write than I would if I had the liberty to be the only voice in the group. I don't know how it would turn out if the group sessions were conducted to resemble an interactive lecture rather than an open conversation, but I know that my job would become easier in my opinion. I enjoy group sessions, but a lot of the time it feels like I'm not really tutoring. It feels like I'm dancing around an academic idea and trying to get the students to notice its value without directly pointing at it or telling them why such a writing idea is important. Again, I enjoy groups but this can be maddening.

At CoS there were no groups and the tutoring depended on the tutor discussing writing directly while using the student's paper as the example. At CoS I had the liberty to tell students exactly what I thought they should work on and give them specific tips on how they can solve the problem themselves. I want to stress the idea that we didn't solve the students' issues for them. One of the values I see in the discussion based session is the idea that it can help



prevent directive feedback. While this is true, directive feedback can be avoided while still being direct in describing the issues the student has. I believe a student can be told that their thesis needs to be worked on and they can be told what a passable thesis looks like without writing a thesis for them.

I would never put words into a student's mouth by coming up with the wording they need to improve a passage of their essay, but I was still able to concisely explain to them what they need to address, some tips on how to address it, and what the end result should resemble. Both writing centers believe that it's useless to hand students the answer, but Fresno State seems to have stepped so far away from directive feedback that the feedback we do give comes off as cryptic at times. In short, I don't appreciate the idea that I should come up with a series of discussion questions with regards to thesis building when I could simply show an example of a thesis and have the student talk it through until they come up with one for themselves there at the table.

I can see how the group sessions are valuable, though, and I think the group session's main strength is its ability to create discussions. My groups have been fulfilling and useful for me and I believe the tutees feel the same. Despite my issues with the style of feedback, the discussions offer the ease of not having to be the expert on everything. I assert myself as a peer sharing a discussion and the tenor of the whole session changes. I also find it a lot less stressful to tutor Fresno State style than it was to tutor at CoS.

Although I did feel comfortable and respected at CoS, the environment and methodology didn't put me at ease. We wore nametags and lined our tables up in two straight rows. There was a designated greeter and a non-student supervisor sitting at a desk overseeing the one room. We didn't regularly hold appointments and there was no online tutoring. It felt a lot more like a business than the writing center at Fresno and I remember being on edge there more often than I am here. The expectations I felt as a tutor were greater at CoS due to the more direct way of tutoring. I felt I had to know the answer to any question and I found myself turning to my more experienced colleagues for some answers.

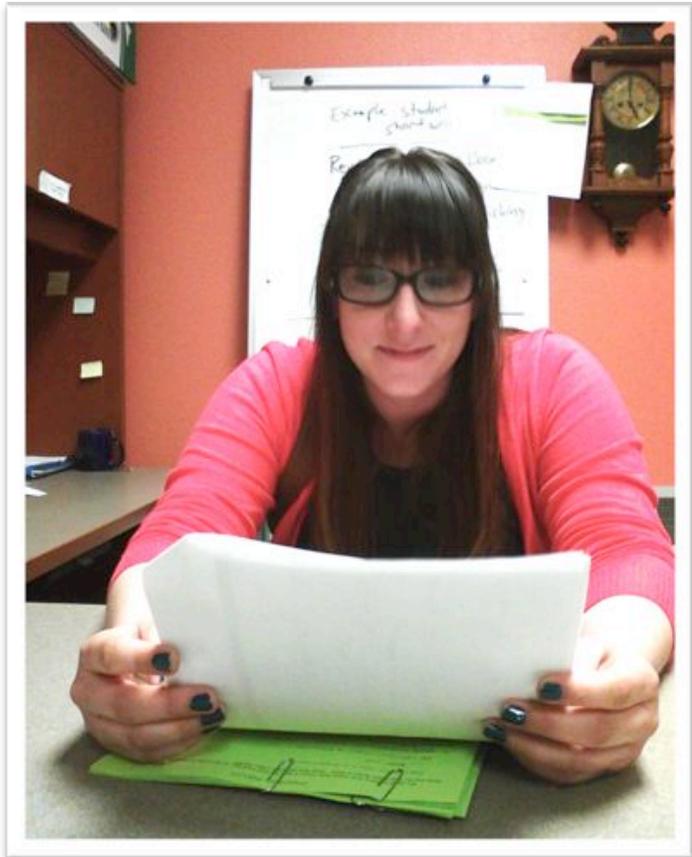
The response lenses offer a useful resource for tutoring, but sometime I feel bound by them. Students are doubtful of their usefulness in a lot of cases and I find myself having to defend them. I believe they're all useful and can generate good conversations. I often end up talking about something completely different by the end of the session, but the lenses provide a good jumping off point. I am tempted to use them in order to point out specific things I see in a draft, though, and tutees sometimes request specific lenses because they want to talk about a certain thing. This becomes frustrating because there are times when tutees focus on something that shouldn't be their main priority. Then I feel obligated to go along with it because I don't want to over assert myself as an authority figure and he is showing an interest in the program by keeping the lenses in mind. Again, at CoS I didn't have to consult a booklet or use any kind of discussion generator. I would read the essay and take notes on a separate piece of paper. After that I was free to address what I saw in a way that didn't do the work for the student. The benefits are great though, and I'm never surprised when a student wants me to get them a copy of it at the end of the semester.

Despite the differences between the two writing centers, I think my experience at CoS prepared me for the work I do here at Fresno. It's been challenging to adapt but I feel at home here. It's a different type of tutoring, but ultimately it wishes to accomplish the same thing and is designed to avoid the same hazards.

Emily Basiletti and Gilliann Hensley

A “SAYS & DOES” KIND OF CONVERSATION

The work that we as tutors do at the Writing Center (and even the learning that comes from working in this capacity) can often bleed over into our lives in interesting and beneficial ways. Even graduate students can find a use for the lenses and processes that we use in the Writing Center, as Gilliann discovered when working on the final revisions of her Master’s thesis. The feedback that was received from her committee members pointed to major structural issues in a couple of sections in the second chapter of the thesis that were resulting in the overall purpose of the chapter being lost or unclear. There was also information that didn’t really seem to be playing any specific role in the chapter, which gave the content added confusion. When Gilliann met with the head of her thesis committee, it was suggested that she do some “Says & Does” on those problem sections, and even the chapter as a whole, in order to work through the issues of structure, or to even get rid of content that didn’t need to be there



Our Writing Center is unique, in that it’s a writing center that actually writes (what a novel idea, right?). When giving feedback to other student’s papers, we use various “lenses,” each of them designed to give a certain type of feedback. When working on the thesis, we went ahead and used the “Says & Does” lens, as suggested by Gilliann’s thesis adviser. This name more or less explains the lens; as you read through the paper you respond to each paragraph and write down both what that particular paragraph is saying and what it’s doing. We chose to use this lens because, based on the feedback Gilliann got about her thesis, this lens seemed the best fit for what needed to be done.

Gilliann and Emily sat down to discuss the process, looking at THINGS like how helpful this ended up being, its usefulness for graduate students, and some of the ins and outs of what is done in the Writing Center.

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EMILY: I know that the initial feedback you got from your thesis chair was that there were some sections in your thesis that didn’t seem to be serving a purpose and she suggested doing “Says & Does” to see if you could identify some of the issues she found in the thesis. The type of feedback we give in the Writing Center is typically given through these types of lenses. What would you tell a graduate student about giving and getting feedback in this way? Do you think it would be helpful?

GILLIANN: I honestly think that a graduate student, no matter how confident a writer they may be, could benefit from this kind of lens. I know that I consider myself more or less confident—or at least as confident as possible, since I mean we are all our worst critics, right? The rhetorical functions of paragraphs as both singular units and as a whole are things that I think any stage of writer would be concerned with. If other students/writers are having structural issues then doing this kind of activity can, I think, help with the sorting out of those issues. I would also tell them that they might want to have someone else do this kind of response activity with them, because I am not

sure that doing it all on my own would have helped as much. I mean, we're both grad students, and I think that we can sense, at this point, whether or not any given feedback is beneficial, right? So, do you think it was helpful?

EMILY: Haha, you can answer that question better than I can. But in any case, I did feel like we were getting somewhere when responding to your thesis with this lens. I think that looking at each paragraph individually and considering its purpose and how it was functioning actually helped me understand that content even more than I did before using the lens and I think the conversation that developed through using this lens was helpful. When I really got into looking at how each part of the essay was working, and understood what you were trying to do, I felt like I wanted to try to map out the essay, which - as you know - we ended up doing. It seemed like the mapping was helpful and I'm thinking you probably agree with me there. I also feel like the dialogue we had about the essay that came out of using the lens was beneficial as well. So, yeah, I think the feedback was helpful. Was it helpful?



GILLIANN: Doing "Says & Does" helped me to revise the second chapter of my thesis in some remarkable ways. I had three sections that were causing readers problems when understanding the chapter purpose. In one of the sections, "Says & Does" revealed to me that the organization I had in that particular draft wasn't really doing what I wanted it to do. I wanted to begin in a general way, and then hone in on the work of a particular scholar whose thinking ends up guiding much of what is discussed in later chapters. "Says & Does" helped me to see, though, that the order of my sources was all off, and that how/why I was using those sources and how they were interacting with each other was not clear at all. The lens helped me to see how I could reorganize the content and better synthesize those sources so that the section moved with a clear rhetorical purpose. In addition to this, the lens showed me that I had paragraphs that weren't even really doing anything for the chapter—that needed to be cut and replaced altogether. And yes, I do believe that you were able to give valuable feedback. In fact I think your distance from the subject and field probably helped a lot because your confusion with the information and connections signaled to me that something was definitely up. I'm not sure I would have seen the issues in the chapter since the structure originally made perfect sense in my head. Besides these lenses being helpful tools for providing feedback, we often talk to students

about how these lenses can be helpful to readers. What did using this lens tell you about my thesis? Do you feel like it was helpful to you as a reader, especially given the fact that you didn't know much - if anything - about my topic beforehand?

EMILY: Well, I think that as readers we often have a tendency to take in the information being given to us in each paragraph, rather than looking closely at how a certain paragraph or section of a paper is working within the piece as a whole. At least, I'm often guilty of this. On first reading through the various chapters of your thesis, I found myself more trying to understand the concepts and take in the scholarly information that was being given instead of looking at how each part of that chapter was working towards the overall goal. Using this lens really forced me to think about 1) what you were trying to do in a certain section, and 2) how you were doing it. One of the things I find interesting about the lenses is that, often times, when one response is harder to write than previous responses, it often tells us something, and in this case it told me that I wasn't entirely sure about what you were trying to do with certain paragraphs; I didn't understand its function in the chapter when considering the overall purpose.

After I realized these things, I found it easier to talk to you about the chapter as a whole, which is when I

started feeling like we got into a productive discussion about the thesis. That's another thing we do often in the Writing Center: have fruitful discussions about the topics at hand. I found myself wanting to engage you in a dialogue about the topic, both to help my own understanding and to perhaps help you see something that may have been overlooked, which happens when you spend so much time with one text. Did you notice this and, if you did, did you find it helpful?



GILLIANN: Yes, I did notice that you were interested in engaging in a discussion with me about both the topic I was dealing with (for the overall thesis, and particularly in that chapter) as well as about what it is that I wanted to do in that chapter—like how I wanted it to function—like how I saw the relationships between the content in the problem sections. I think it helped when I explained, for example, what some of the specific terms and ideas meant in the context of the chapter, and how I wanted to hone in on the particular scholar's thinking. I also think that creating those maps based on these discussions helped a lot in connection with doing the "Says & Does" lens. Using the mapping in addition to the feedback about my paragraphs was highly valuable for my reorganizing and my ability to see what I was (or wasn't) actually doing, and how what was happening in the draft didn't actually match that mapping. I'm curious, how could this lens help you with creative writing?

EMILY: Creative writing is not so different from academic writing. It's still important to pay attention to what you're trying to do with a certain paragraph and how that paragraph relates to the overall theme of an essay/story. It's not uncommon that we go through a creative piece in class and get hung up on certain paragraphs - even entire sections - and then have to reevaluate certain writing choices. Perhaps the paragraph does not belong in the piece, or perhaps the paragraph belongs somewhere else. With creative writing, as with academic writing, we [the writers]



become so familiar with the things we write that it's incredibly easy to completely miss something that's just not working, because we know exactly what we're trying to say. Getting someone else's perspective, particularly when looking at each individual paragraph, is always illuminating in creative writing just as in academic. Everyone can use feedback: creative writers, academic writers, undergrads, grad students, the list goes on. How did using this lens on your thesis change, or not change, the way you approach one-on-one sessions in the Writing Center?

GILLIANN: I would say that there were both similarities and differences in that area. In the one-on-one, we generally try to establish with the tutee what needs or concerns he or she has when it comes to the content of their essay. And so for this reason, it is often appropriate to have a kind of dialogue about that, or to have the student do some writing to him or herself to come up with those concerns. Of course, in a one-on-one it isn't all that common that a student will have the clearest idea of what kind of feedback they want, or any idea of which lens

might help them—so me having one firmly in mind was, I suppose, a bit different. And obviously one of the biggest differences was time. We had a lot more time to focus on the paragraphs and have these dialogues that wouldn't have been possible in only 25 or 50 minutes—we didn't have this restriction. I was already familiar with this lens because I've used it when I was a TA for English 5A, 5B, and 10, and in the Writing Center a while back. We don't use this lens anymore in the Writing Center, so how would you say this compares to lenses we still use?

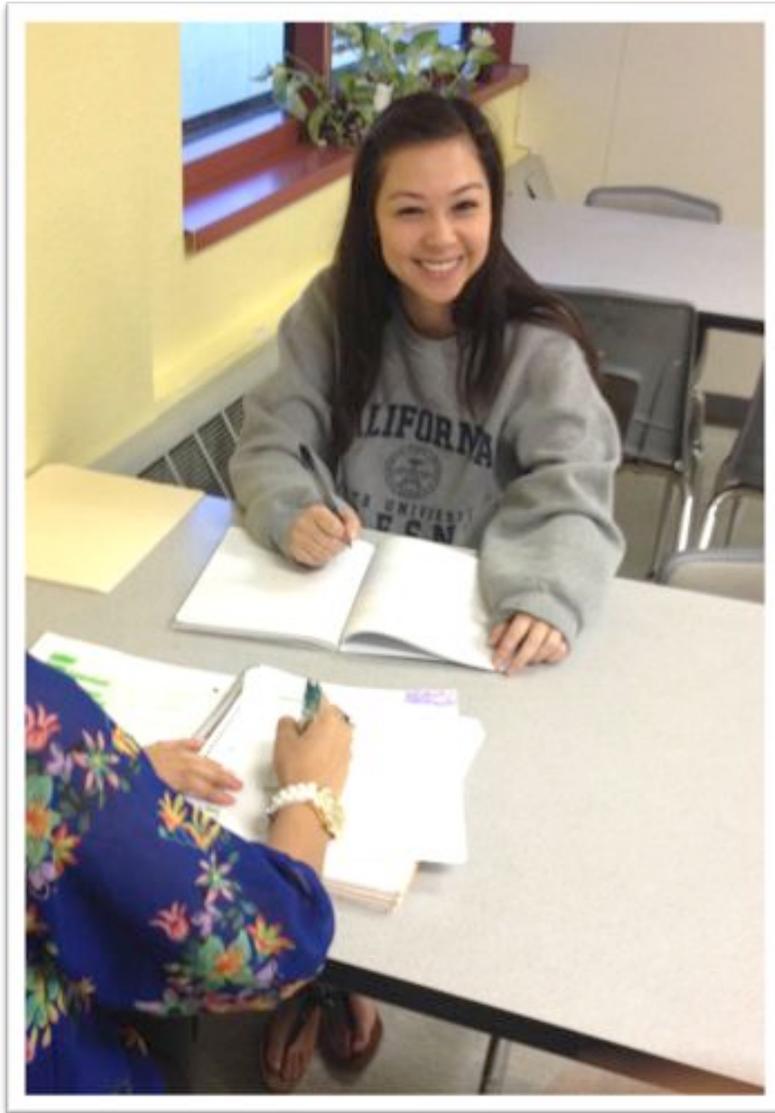
EMILY: Yeah, when you said you wanted me to do a “Says & Does” on your thesis, I didn't know what you were talking about. But it seems like that's because it was changed into two separate lenses. “Says & Does” is a little denser in that we're going through paragraph by paragraph and doing a two-part response. We have lenses now that get at the same thing (what the paragraph says and what it's doing), but they're no longer smashed together as they are in the “Says & Does” response. Breaking that lens into two different lenses works well, I think, because it makes it easier for students to do in the 50-minute time limit. Don't get me wrong, I like both versions. I just think that breaking it into two separate lenses helps with time constraints for the group sessions. Also, this lens really forces you to look at each individual paragraph while still considering the work as a whole, which we don't necessarily always have the tendency to do.

FINAL THOUGHTS: After all of the feedback and Gilliann's diligence in revising, and revising again, she finally received approval from her thesis committee, as all of the issues in that chapter were able to be solved, and she was able to send the thesis along to the Graduate Division for approval from the thesis consultant. Shortly after she submitted the thesis, she got a response back from the university's thesis consultant with the final approval on the thesis. In the end, the process ended up being incredibly helpful, but then, that's what writing is - a process - and when you treat it as such the end result will always reflect that.



Stephanie Erbe

THE WRITING CENTER'S IMPACT ON MY LIFE



Even though I've only worked at the writing center for two semesters, I can already see how it has begun to impact other aspects of my life. Through experience working with the techniques here, I have changed my attitude about how the writing process works, how I give feedback to my peers, and grown confidence communicating my ideas through both writing and speaking.

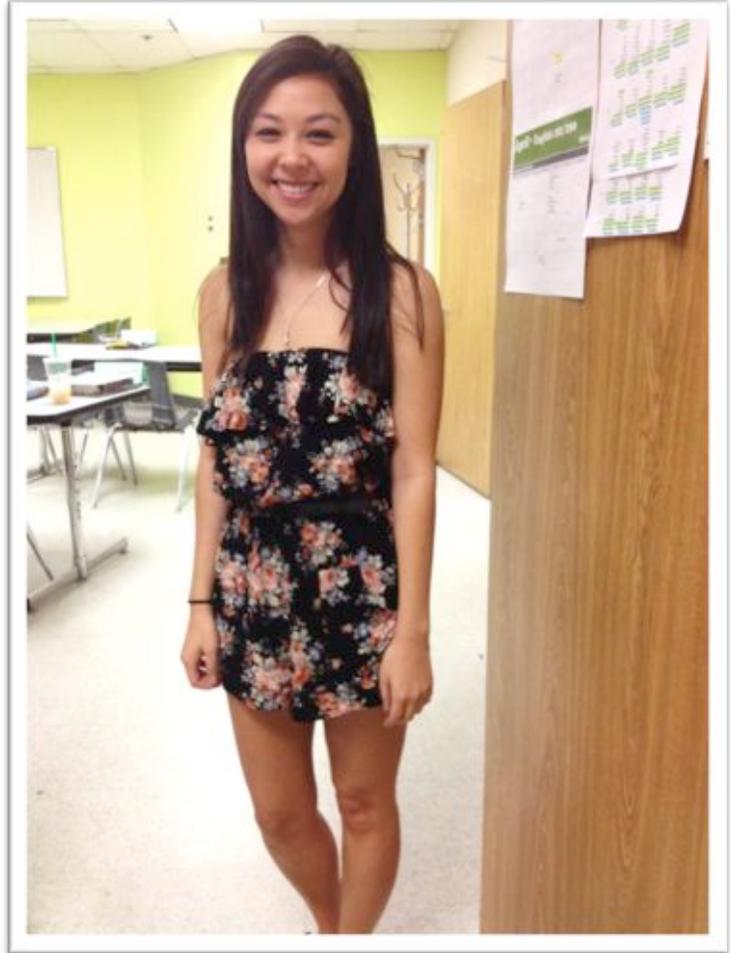
Before I began working at the writing center, I had the same mentality of many of the first time students who think that a first draft needs to be as close to the perfected final draft as possible. When the tutors here introduced the lenses to me I was just as skeptical as any other student about their effectiveness. However, I found that as we continued to use them, along with doing the short writes, we were able to explore a wider variety of ideas in the paper that would've been potentially overlooked without them. Personally, outside of the writing center I have used some lenses to help me explore my own writing. Writing a Center of Gravity is particularly useful for me when

beginning essays because it helps me remember what stood out to me in a text and continue to explore why. Writing down my thoughts on paper sometimes leads me to unexpected discoveries that I wouldn't have thought about had I not been forcing myself to come up with something to say about it. More About has also helped me in my creative writing classes as I try to guess what others might not know about or be interested in hearing more of. I enjoy using the lenses because I think they are really effective with helping me develop ideas.

The writing center has also impacted the way that I help my peers in other classes. In a way, I think most people subconsciously do some of the lenses that we learn here, in particular More About and Sayback, when they give feedback to a peer. However, learning to focus on one particular lens can be more helpful for a writer who might feel overwhelmed with information if they tried to incorporate all the different lenses at once. I feel like I now have a better idea of what each of those lenses helps in a paper. Depending on the type of feedback that a person is looking for, or even things that I see going on in the paper, I can choose what I think would be most helpful for them. Being a creative writing minor, I give a lot of feedback to classmates on their written work. Sometimes when someone is trying to express him or herself through writing creatively, their message may get lost or they could leave things out because they are so obvious to them. These lenses give me a way to communicate these things to them in a positive and noncritical, but still constructive, way. If I were to continue in any type of field where I would be critiquing others' writing I would definitely try to incorporate the techniques I have picked up here.

One of the biggest changes that the writing center has helped me with is helping gain confidence in my ability to communicate with others. Although my role as a tutor here is to be a fellow writer, I often do have to take some initiative to keep the other members involved and thinking. Being a shy person, I can relate to many of the students who feel uncomfortable, particularly the first few weeks, having to share their ideas on the spot. I have always been the type of person that was afraid of sharing my thoughts because I was afraid of being wrong; but as I continue working here, I notice that it gets a little easier to speak up in class or share ideas with classmates. I am still not the first person to speak in class, but it is not as stressful of an experience as it used to be. I've learned that even if my idea seems completely different from everyone else that doesn't necessarily mean that it's wrong. Often it just means that, as an individual person, I have a different perspective to share.

The writing center is continually impacting my life outside of work because it has given me new skills to implement not only in my own writing but also how I help others. Those skills have helped me to grow as both a writer and a person becoming more comfortable sharing ideas. It has been a unique learning experience that I'm sure will continue to impact me in unexpected ways in the future.



2014 NCWCA CONFERENCE, SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY April 4, 2014

This spring, seven tutors participated in a statewide writing conference a little over two-hundred miles north by north-west of CSU, Fresno. The tutors were in two groups: one ran a workshop, the other a panel. We've put a page in here about it to show future tutors what we did in past semesters. Our hope is that seeing this will inspire you to participate in a writing center conference while you're tutoring here. Below are the details of what our tutors presented as it appeared in the conference program (with pictorial evidence).

WORKSHOP: SAILING THE SEA OF REVISION

Elizabeth Alfving, Joseph Marcure, Hannah Richardson

Focusing on the developmental and social aspects of writing, our One-on-One tutoring sessions are grounded in a written conversation that also minimizes tutor and student anxiety. This workshop introduces then gives a firsthand experience of our unique approach to all content-based revision concerns.



POSSIBLE PATHS: CHOOSING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK IN ONE-ON-ONE TUTORING

Kyle Hoover, Cody Hoover, Shane Wood, Gilliann Hensley-Sanchez

One-on-one tutoring can present many difficulties, and it may be tough deciding what to do in any given session. This panel helps by introducing and explaining methods that make tutoring easier but that still allow for the flexibility and personalization needed to give effective feedback.

