



Wednesday, December 11, 2002

Volume 1, Issue 2b

# The Rough Draft

University Writing Center, University of Notre Dame (574) 631-5390

[www.nd.edu/~writing](http://www.nd.edu/~writing)

## Notes and News:

- Our visit-ometer turned over 1,000 visits for the semester on November 14—we're currently around 1200 visits!
- Spring Staff Meetings—Dates posted in calendar
- See the schedule posted in the WC for pay dates and timecard due dates
- Crunch-time hours in effect: December 2-15
- The WC will be open through Friday, December 13
- Writing Center Christmas Party December 12—Details Coming Soon!



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# Happy Holidays!

## News from the Prairie: Brett and Randazzo Present at National Conference

As many of you were finishing up the last weekend of fall break, we (Aidan and Jenn) were trying to navigate the many and various modes of transportation that ultimately ensured our arrival in Lawrence, Kansas. Once at the Midwest Writing Center Conference, we drew from published books as well as our own experiences as tutors in order to give an hour-long presentation concerning the unique problems and strategies involved in tutoring ESL graduate students.

We divided our presentation into three parts. First, we discussed the communication barriers and cultural issues that can arise while tutoring students whose first language is not English. Among the problems we discussed in this part were verbal misunderstandings, cultural differences about "personal space" during a session, and effectively tackling a paper that may have many and various sentence-level errors that obscure the author's meaning.

The second part of our presentation introduced some of the problems associated with undergraduates tutoring graduate students. During this section, we zeroed in on the inherent authority differential and how this can affect the dynamics of a session.

Finally, the third portion of our presentation linked the first two parts

together. We talked about how the problems associated with tutoring ESL students are often compounded by the fact that the ESL student is also a graduate student. During this section, we talked about the increased demand on a tutor to be a "grammar checker." ESL students tend to want to focus on grammar; this focus is exacerbated when the student is also a graduate student who has a mastery of his/her material, which the tutor simply does not have. Therefore, the tutor is working with complex content and awkward grammar.

We concluded the presentation by encouraging dialogue among those present. We actually had a pretty good showing for our presentation—lots of peer tutors as well as writing center directors—and the ensuing discussion was quite interesting. Participants shared their experiences, insights, and strategies dealing with ESL students in general, and we learned quite a lot from them.

On the whole, even if it sounds like John put us up to this, we really would recommend that our fellow tutors prepare a presentation for next year's conference. It is interesting to meet fellow tutors from other schools—yes, there are others like us. Plus, next year's conference in Hershey, PA is bound to include insane amounts of chocolate, so start thinking up a topic!



## A Modest Proposal: Present at the IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Conference in Hershey, PA

Here's how you can follow Aidan and Jenn's example by presenting at the next peer tutoring conference:



"insane amounts of chocolate"

For the first time ever, the International Writing Centers Association and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing will come together for a joint conference October 23-25, 2003, in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Whether you have attended the conference for either organization in the past or you are attending for the first time, the 2003 event promises to be an exciting time. Be a part of this history-making event.

The conference theme *Writing Back* is an invitation to create responses to the common, everyday practices and beliefs in our writing centers. This evokes the closing segment of many letters and emails: "Please write back."

A popular theme in postcolonial studies, the idea of *writing back* comes from a phrase coined by the author Rushdie, "the empire writes back." He refers to the ways in which postcolonial writers revise, rewrite, or respond to the ways in which a colonized people are framed by others.

The connection between writing centers and the idea of *writing back* suggests ways to reflect on, revise or rewrite our

familiar notions about writing center theory and practice, including writing center history, tutor and director roles and responsibilities, academic discourse, plagiarism, and our "canon."

Participants in the IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Joint Conference are invited to reflect on matters at hand and then *write back* to them, expressing possibilities. Tutors might choose to write back to writing center or university policies, while directors might write back to theories or administrators.

*Writing back* may take the form of a traditional conference paper or a more imaginative presentation such as an open letter, debate, re-enactment, or some other type of expression. Writing Back calls us to open doors and see new opportunities.

As always, feel free to develop your proposal apart from the theme. Don't let *writing back* hold you back!

**Proposal Submission Deadline:** April 1, 2003

**More Information:**

<http://www.wc.iup.edu/2003conference/> or contact conference chair, Ben Rafoth, at [brafoth@iup.edu](mailto:brafoth@iup.edu)

## The Dangling Modifier: "Write for a National Audience"

Tutors, do you want to write for a national newsletter? If so, *The Dangling Modifier* is looking for you!

*The Dangling Modifier* is now accepting submissions for our fall 2002 online publication. We are looking for articles about peer tutoring to share with writing centers across the country. Please submit brief articles, 500 words or less, to:

Please include your name, college/university, phone number, and e-mail address.

*The Dangling Modifier* is a newsletter by and for peer tutors in writing, produced in association with the NCPTW.

For more information, visit us at [http://www.uic.psu.edu/Dangling\\_Modifier/index.html](http://www.uic.psu.edu/Dangling_Modifier/index.html)

[danglingmodifier@psu.edu](mailto:danglingmodifier@psu.edu)



"...share with writing centers across the country."

## Fresh Writing: Sharing Successful FYC Essays



At the University Writing Center, our mission includes making good writers better. It's now that time of year to encourage those good (and better) writers to share their accomplishments by submitting to *Fresh Writing*, a journal of outstanding essays from First-Year Composition.

Tutors who are working with first-year writers can encourage them to revise and submit their strongest essays for possible publication, a rare opportunity for first-year students.

Tutors can familiarize themselves with *Fresh Writing* by browsing through the

Writing Center's copies of the first two print journals. They can also talk with Kati Duffey or Matthew Konerman, our tutors who were published in volume 2.

The Writing Center has a submission box with complete submission guidelines. The fall deadline is December 20, so start scouting out those good essays now and encourage students to revise their submissions at the Writing Center.

For more information, see the *Fresh Writing* web site:

<http://www.nd.edu/~frswrite/>

✓ *Fall Fresh Writing submissions due December 20*

## Emma Nolan: The Rewards of a "Regular" Relationship

Recently, I have had the pleasure of working with a few "regulars." What exactly is a regular? A regular is someone who may come into the Writing Center frequently to see any tutor, or may even have a permanent appointment with one tutor in particular. In my case, two ESL students have been coming to see me on a fairly regular basis, one a law school student and one an undergraduate student. Working with regulars builds relationships between tutor and tutee, which leads to effective communication and better tutoring. Working with regulars also lets the tutor see the progress that the tutee is making, in addition to what aspects of writing the tutee is still improving.

Building a relationship with the tutee leads to easy communication. When tutor and tutee are strangers to each other, both may be anxious. As a tutor, I ask myself the questions like "How will I get this tutee to clearly voice his or her concerns about her paper?" and "How do I make sure the tutee does not take offense to any of my constructive criticisms?" As a tutee, I can recall asking myself the most basic question of "What if the tutor thinks that my paper is bad?" From being in both the tutor's shoes and the tutee's shoes, I can understand both sides of the relationship, and I recognize the anxiety on both sides.

When you see a tutee on a regular basis, however, the anxieties one may have had with a stranger are alleviated. In the case of the law school student with whom I work, I already know about his particular Legal Writing assignments and what the main objectives of these assignments are. I already know his usual concerns, such as grammar and clarity, and I know what to look for and how to explain the grammatical issues with which he struggles. He can be honest and open with me about his writing, and I can do the same when it comes to our discussion of his writing.

Seeing a tutee on a regular basis is also very rewarding to the tutor because you can clearly see the improvement that has been fostered by your sessions. The undergraduate student with whom I work has been bringing in the same first year composition paper for about three weeks. I have been able to see the enormous improvements that she has made on her paper. She has been able to implement so much of what we discuss in our sessions. Seeing her improvements and listening to her get increasingly excited about what she is writing about help me see the benefits of my work as a writing tutor. I truly feel like I am helping people and making a difference in their writing. More importantly, I feel I am helping them to make the difference on their own.



## Tutor Moments: Jon Readey

Rachel came in with a draft of a philosophy paper discussing God and the role of goodness in the world, which used theories from Professor Quinn, a philosophy professor at Notre Dame, to refute a dissenting hypothesis from Plato.

both of which emphasized the importance of a clear thesis statement.

Rachel was excited to see our discussion and her inclination confirmed straight by her professor, and it helped reinforce concretely the shared attributes of a clear thesis statement that are held across almost all university departments and disciplines. After using Professor Ramsey's handouts to discuss thesis statements, we also read further over them to highlight the importance of such features as specific examples, counterarguments, and disciplined and explicit word choice. Rachel found the handouts so helpful that I copied them for her, and she left to reread them before making the revisions to her paper. I also felt validated not only because the visit helped demonstrate how beneficial and appreciated Professor Ramsey's presentation to the Writing Center tutors has been, but because it illustrated the consensus between the lessons espoused by the Writing Center tutors and the rest of the university.



*"...it illustrated the consensus between the lessons espoused by the Writing Center tutors and the rest of the university."*

After Rachel read the paper out loud, she and I discussed how she might make her thesis and topic sentences more direct, ensuring that they came right out and said what the paper or paragraph would prove and comprehensively covered the argument. Rachel said that she saw the sense in the idea, but she'd just never known a thesis could be that blatant or direct. To convince her, I asked her who her Philosophy professor was, and when she said Professor Ramsey, I mentioned that he had in fact recently given a presentation to the Writing Center tutors that conveyed exactly the importance of a clear and direct thesis, among other topics. I then showed her the handouts that Professor Ramsey had given us, "Philosophy: Handout for Paper" and Thad Botham's "The Truth,"

## Getting Aggressive with Passive Voice

The supposed fact that using "the passive voice will weaken your paper," has become a cliché in writing. The verb "to be" is characterized as some corrosive that if a writer uses, will instantly kill the paper. The passive voice has its place in some writing. In scientific essays, the passive voice can be better since it allows one to write without using personal pronouns. The subject of the sentence is an inanimate object, thereby making the information seem objective and unbiased by individual perspectives or personal interest.

to present a logical and seemingly unprejudiced argument. However, this distance is established by writing in the third person, rather than in the first. If someone writing in the third person also used passive voice, the author would seem even more detached and analytical about some topic that he/she is supposed to be opinionated enough about to want to argue. How engaging is an argument if the writer seems uninterested?

It is not enough that writers should just avoid the passive voice, but rather they should try to use the active voice whenever possible. Active voice is more concise since fewer words are required. Even in scientific writing, overuse of the passive voice in long complicated sentence can cause readers to become confused or lose interest. Active voice is generally more clear and direct.

### Examples:

Passive: Traces of ice have been discovered on Mars.

Active: Scientist found traces of ice on Mars.

Passive: A fair resolution to the crisis is being sought

Active: The leaders are seeking a fair resolution to the crisis.

*[In the examples above, the most important information in the sentence is the action that took place. The agent of the action is not as important and can be omitted.]*

In expository essays, the writer also wants



*This article is the first in a series produced by graduate student tutors Candice Adams, Shawn Brown, and Jon Readey. Their discussions of common writing issues will be available as handouts in the Writing Center.*

### Examples:

Active: She slammed on the brakes as she sped down the hill.

Passive: The brakes were slammed on by her as she sped down the hill.



**University Writing Center  
University of Notre Dame**

203 Coleman-Morse  
Notre Dame, IN  
46556

**Phone:**

Appointments (574) 631-5390  
Further Info. (574) 631-5427

**E-Mail:**

writing.1@nd.edu

**Director**  
John Duffy

**Assistant Director, Editor**  
Connie Snyder Mick

**Senior Staff Assistant**  
Kelly Folzenlogel

**Home of the Writing  
Irish.**

**Check out our NEW  
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**See us at:**

**[www.nd.edu/~writing](http://www.nd.edu/~writing)**

## Where are They Now? *Andy Larson*

It was a summer of mixed blessings, but much more “blessing” than “mixed,” I’m happy to report. I remained in South Bend to complete my final course requirements, which consisted of two consecutive semesters of intensive physics. Ugh. However, I was quite fortunate because two amazing people were there to play major roles in getting me through it. One is the lovely girl who enchanted me with her depth and caring, and with whom I’m now maintaining a happy long-distance relationship. The other is a longhaired colleague from the WC, whose insane genius and genuine love have influenced my life more than he knows.

Fall has brought another chapter in my saga of higher education. I am now a

graduate student at the University of Illinois, studying the ecology and sustainability of agricultural systems. I am a teaching assistant for Home Vegetable Gardening 105 and finally getting comfortable spouting information at the front of a classroom. It has given me an appreciation for the experience that I gained as a tutor and for those professors who made this pedagogical gig look so easy. It has been a time of fast learning and fast driving; personal and professional business has taken me to Chicago, St. Louis, Madison, Pittsburgh, and South Bend in the span of a few months. Perhaps I will soon be able to write and tell you where these various and sundry roads are actually leading me!

## Our Mission Statement

The University Writing Center at the University of Notre Dame is dedicated to helping students become better writers. Our tutors help writers by listening well in writing conferences, reading student papers carefully, and asking questions that will stimulate new ideas about how to express ideas or construct arguments. Tutors generally inquire about the nature of a writing assignment, the particular concerns of the writer, and the focus of the

argument. Writing Center tutors work with writers all stages of the writing process -- from understanding an assignment, to developing a thesis, to using evidence, to editing and revising.

Writing Center instruction conforms to the University of Notre Dame Honor Code. Tutors do not write or edit papers for students. Instead, we help students develop strategies to achieve their goals as writers.

University Writing Center  
University of Notre Dame  
203 Coleman Morse  
Notre Dame, IN  
46556