# THE WRITING LAB

## – FROM THE EDITOR –

This issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* completes Volume 35 for the academic year, and we'll spend the summer preparing for Volume 36. (Yes, some of us have been around for 35 years in this fascinating and always rewarding world of writing centers!)

Articles in this issue should help as you plan for the next academic year. Pamela Bedore and Brian O'Sullivan offer us an account of how two writing centers directors collaborated in structuring workshops to be held in classrooms. For those of us who spend some summer leisure planning and writing and find, as a result, that we suffer from an overload of files and folders scattered all over the hard drive, Jackie Grutsch McKinney introduces us to free software programs designed to help bring some organization to all our documents.

As part of preparation for tutor training for next fall, Arlene Archer offers guidelines for tutors working with students who come with multi-modal documents to work on. And our tutor's voice in this issue is Jacob Bender reminding himself and other tutors of the difficulties some students have when writing in unfamiliar genres.

I wish us all a delightful summer pleasantly filled with vacations, relaxation, and just enough productive writing for our profession and planning for next fall so that we can enjoy some guilt-free summer leisure.

✦ *Muriel Harris, editor*

## WRITING CENTERS GO TO CLASS: PEER REVIEW (OF OUR) WORKSHOPS

✦ *Pamela Bedore*
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Peer review workshops have become a staple at many writing centers, including ours. At the writing centers we direct at the University of Connecticut, Avery Point and at St. Mary's College of Maryland, faculty members invite peer tutors to their undergraduate classes to lead workshops on a variety of writing-related topics—but most of all, they ask us to help with peer review. Faculty seek this help because peer review is, as Brammer and Rees found in surveys of faculty and students, notoriously hard to teach and to learn. After all, undergraduate tutors embody the fundamental principle underlying peer review: peers—not teachers alone—can offer meaningful feedback. And, at both our writing centers, we find peer review to be the best element of our in-class writing workshops. However, we have few ready, universally applicable answers to the questions peer review raises: Where is the borderline between peer review and joint authorship? How can authors share their knowledge of craft while fostering each other's individual styles and voices? How can we give genuine feedback that is true to our own writing preferences while acknowledging another writer's personal style and context? Overall, how can peer reviewers learn, or be taught, to become effective reviewers of each other's writing?

These are questions that we, the co-authors, continually explore and answer for ourselves in our own research, since we formally collaborate on some writing projects and informally ask each other for feedback on others. Recently, we have peer reviewed each other in the administration of the in-class peer review workshops we organize at our respective colleges, and we have come to this conclusion: despite stylistic and institutional differences, writing workshops address both the practical and philosophical challenges of peer review when they draw students, tutors, faculty, and writing center directors into an authentic conversation about what peer review is and how it works.

We both ask tutors facilitating in-class workshops to explain that student peer review emulates peer review in academic publication and/or daily workplace reviews of colleagues' writing, since peer review becomes most valuable when students understand it both as a classroom activity that can improve their critical reading and writing skills and as a real-world process in which writers address the needs of their audiences. This understanding, we have increasingly found, must inform not only the content of the workshops themselves,  but also the ways we collaborate with the faculty to whom we offer the workshops, the ways we teach the rhetoric of peer review to students across the curriculum, and the ways we incorporate peer review and workshop leadership into tutor development. How writing centers incorporate these principles will vary—but such variations only underscore the need to practice what we preach by sharing our different perspectives through cross-institutional peer review.

## A. PEER REVIEW AS A MENU ITEM VS. PEER REVIEW AS A SIGNATURE INGREDIENT

Subtle differences in our faculty, tutor, and student audiences drive some of the differences in our approaches to peer review. At the University of Connecticut, Avery Point (UConn-AP), an 800-student regional campus of a research-extensive public university, a newish core curriculum requires explicit writing instruction in upper-level writing classes across the curriculum. Some of the faculty teaching these courses have less experience in writing pedagogy. Many of the peer tutors—representative of the student body at this commuter campus—are non-traditional students who have little time beyond their tutoring hours for meeting with faculty and designing new workshops.

The needs of both the new writing instructors and the busy tutors are served by a menu that offers faculty members a number of distinct, though customizable, workshops that can be offered to their students: Academic Integrity, Close Reading, Conventions of Science Writing, Principles of Grammar, Thesis Development—with peer review as the most popular item. The menu breaks writing instruction into manageable segments and allows new as well as experienced writing instructors to choose specific areas in which writing fellows would be most helpful. Additionally, busy tutors can offer workshops with less case-by-case labor-intensive planning when they use a menu. Because the workshops are fairly standardized, experienced tutors are able to autonomously take charge of them with little direct intervention by writing center directors. Standardization also promotes a consistent view of peer review across campus. While the model might not seem responsive to the pedagogies of individual instructors, tutors and writing center directors always engage instructors in workshop planning, keeping the instructor's goals and concerns in mind as they work from existing materials.

St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM), a residential public liberal arts college of 2000 students, has been less receptive to a "menu" because faculty requesting assistance have been more likely to expect workshops that have been designed for their unique needs. SMCM's writing-intensive core curriculum and its "writing in the majors" component is still being developed, so most of the faculty requesting writing center workshops have been those who voluntarily emphasize writing and who already have

*Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing.*

their own ideas about writing pedagogy. At SMCM, then, tutor-led writing workshops have most often complemented and augmented (and, perhaps, gently nudged) instructors' own strategies. Therefore, the Writing Center tries to have each workshop emerge out of a dialogue. In an email each semester and on the "Resources for Faculty" webpage, the writing center director offers to "tailor" workshops on any writing-related topic, an offer that often draws faculty requests that are as amorphous as they are enthusiastic—but, at this stage, "amorphous" can be good. Amorphous requests lead to rich conversations about the instructor's goals, expectations, assignments, and strategies for teaching writing.

Instructors' goals can suggest many possible methods, but one method is almost ubiquitous: peer review. Therefore, at SMCM, peer review is not only a frequently requested workshop topic in its own right, but also a key element of custom-designed workshops on many topics, from improving arguments to polishing style. SMCM has come to talk about peer review as not only a particular genre or even a specific writing task, but as a practice that can inform workshops on any topic. For instance, when an Art History instructor requested a workshop that would prepare students for a visual analysis assignment, the Writing Center asked students to peer review descriptions that they wrote in class. This helped students (and the instructor) collaboratively address the challenges involved in writing visual analyses. This sort of work with instructors to develop course-specific strategies helps writing center directors and tutors contextualize their general strength: modeling effective talk about writing between peers.

## B. STRUCTURING THE PEER REVIEW WORKSHOP

At UConn-AP, most workshops occur on the day a draft is due and begin with an overview of the discourse of peer review. Peer tutors then distribute a sample paper they have written along with guidelines for writing a formal peer review memo. The tutors then lead a discussion of the sample paper, asking students for responses as they generate a list of comments on the board. Tutors prompt students to think about the positive and the negative, and to engage with the paper's arguments and organization. Often the class notes problems the tutors had not intended while writing the paper, and the exercise can become a learning experience for tutors not only as tutors but also as writers.

When the board is full of ideas (often 20-30 comments), the tutors lead a discussion of how to organize the formal peer review memo, asking questions like: How many different suggestions will be effective? Which of these issues go together? Do we have enough focus on the strengths of the paper? How can we reframe negative comments in a way that will be helpful without being hurtful? What order should we put the comments in? With an outline of the model peer review memo on the board, students then work individually to review a colleague's paper, while peer tutors offer assistance.

> " [W]riting workshops . . . draw students, tutors, faculty, and writing center directors into an authentic conversation about what peer review is and how it works. "

Feedback on this workshop has been overwhelmingly positive. Faculty often note that students engage in more rigorous revision after peer review workshops, likely in response both to strong peer review memos and to a lengthy class discussion about the expectations of the paper. Students participate actively in both the full-group session and the individual writing of the memos. As a result, peer tutors eagerly volunteer to facilitate this workshop, since they know they can easily engage their peers with this topic, and since they enjoy finding a balance between the outrageous and the provocative in writing the sample paper. Although UConn-AP faculty members who

have asked the Writing Center to facilitate a workshop have often adopted the tutors' resources to teach the writing topic themselves, in the case of peer review workshops, instructors often ask peer tutors to come back semester after semester because of the poetic "rightness" of having peer tutors lead workshops on peer review.

This "rightness" is often noted at SMCM as well. Here, the Writing Center began facilitating peer review sessions when a faculty member, frustrated with peer reviews that seemed quick and content-free, asked tutors to come and show her students how to talk about other students' writing. In this class, as in others, tutors addressed the concern that peer reviews lacked substance by showing students how to identify and prioritize "higher-order concerns," in consonance with general writing center practice. Typically, SMCM tutors model peer review on a representative paper from a previous semester in order to accurately capture the kinds of issues and challenges that the instructor has seen in response to similar assignments in the past. Whatever kind of model paper is used, the tutors and students usually begin with descriptive analysis. In this, their general model is Kenneth Bruffee's "descriptive outline" describing what each paragraph "says" and "does"—i.e., both its meaning and function. Led by a tutor, the class discusses the rhetoric of peer review by talking about how a student writer would be likely to respond to some of the kinds of input the group generates. Tutors emphasize the rhetoric of whatever kind of peer review—whether a form, a memo, or something else—seems most suitable to the nature and tone of the course and the role of peer review within it. Instructors and students often seem impressed with the conversational flow of the peer reviews that tutors model. Thus, compared to UConn-AP's focus on the peer review memo, SMCM's approach to peer review workshops usually focuses a bit more on oral peer review. After the tutor and class model peer review together, students apply the same techniques to each others' papers—often in a follow-up session or in small-group visits to the Writing Center. These small-group tutorials allow maximum flexibility for the tutors to stress issues that are most relevant not only to individual classes, but to individual students.

## C. TUTOR DEVELOPMENT

Both UConn-AP and SMCM are committed to providing a substantial academic and practical pedagogical background to tutors, and both offer a credit-bearing peer tutoring course. At SMCM, tutors take a four-credit course before tutoring and then attend regular meetings throughout their tutoring careers. The course incorporates the peer review workshop methodology, with trained peer tutors visiting the peer tutoring class to facilitate the students' own peer review, modeling the workshops offered in other classes. Also, peer tutoring students work in groups to craft approaches to teaching topics in writing and turn those approaches into handouts, always thinking about how those handouts could be used in a workshop incorporating peer review. At UConn-AP, writing tutors may take between one and three iterations of a one-credit Tutor Training (TT) course that includes a service-learning component in which tutors design and deliver workshops to local high school students. They take TT I strictly in the role of student, TT II partly in the role of workshop leader, and TT III in the role of researcher, completing an independent research project on a writing center topic.

Leading writing workshops across campus not only requires prior training, but also is, in itself, a staff development opportunity. UConn-AP's menu approach encourages the autonomy of peer tutors, with tutors-in-training often accompanying more experienced tutors in meeting with instructors, writing model papers and guidelines, and delivering peer review workshops. As tutors become increasingly comfortable with the techniques of this and other workshops, they may well go off the menu and lead workshops in a more casual, creative way. Additionally, the success of

this workshop has given some undergraduate tutors the impetus to develop their own workshops, including a Close Reading workshop that is now on the menu, thus avoiding the problem explored by Susan Hrach Georgecink, who worries that without adequate autonomy of design, "consultants become like marionettes asked to perform without betraying that the writing center administrator is holding the strings" (175).

At SMCM's small, intimate campus, the rather uninhibited tutors don't easily become puppets; they're happy to teach directors. And since each SMCM workshop is usually either a new model or a significant adaptation, each is also an opportunity for the tutors to be creative and take responsibility. Still, the SMCM directors recognize the problem Georgecink describes. Developing a fresh workshop in response to each request is time-consuming, and a residential campus has its own scheduling constraints; though the tutors are always around, they're also always busy, and, because much of the Writing Center's tutorial traffic is by appointment, it's difficult to pull tutors away from their tutoring hours to plan or conduct a workshop. Therefore, the directors have sometimes had to play a more active role in workshops than they would like—and this problem could easily intensify as demand for workshops grows under the new core curriculum. To maintain flexibility and promote tutor autonomy, the Writing Center is assigning tutors as liaisons to each first-year seminar and asking those liaisons to work with seminar faculty to customize existing workshops and/or develop new ones.

In both our contexts, tutors often mention that developing and leading workshops helps them think about writing in a way that develops their own writing skills as well as their tutoring skills. Peer review workshops are especially valuable in this regard, since the students in the class teach the tutors as well as their classmates a great deal about audience, whether they're peer reviewing a sample paper from a previous class or one that tutors have written.

## D. MUTUAL INFLUENCE

As a result of our conversations, each writing center has moved in the other's direction in its approach to peer review workshops. As SMCM has implemented its new core curriculum, its writing center has benefitted from UConn-AP's experiences of leading workshops for a wide variety of faculty with different levels of experience in (and commitment to) teaching writing. Accordingly, SMCM has inched towards UConn-AP's model by experimenting with a rudimentary "menu" of suggested topics to instructors of the new first-year seminars, who are more likely to be teaching writing explicitly for the first time. Moreover, SMCM has increasingly borrowed from UConn-AP by having tutors write sample papers—especially for the new first-year seminars, for which there are often no relevant paper from prior semesters.

In response to SMCM's effective focus on the tailoring of workshops, UConn-AP is offering more customization by highlighting the Writing Center's willingness to develop new workshops in response to faculty needs on workshop request forms as well as in e-mail communications with writing faculty. In addition, UConn-AP has taken up SMCM's more wide-spread use of the principles of peer review across workshops by redesigning some of its existing workshops. For example, in a frequently requested workshop on paragraph-level revision, tutors previously modeled revision techniques on a sample paragraph before having students revise a paragraph of their own. This workshop now sometimes includes an intermediate step so that students first participate in the full-class modeling exercise, then review a peer's paragraph, and finally turn to their own paragraph revision. This provides students the opportunity to give and receive peer feedback on paragraph cohesion and style in developing their own revision skills, and it has allowed UConn-AP's Writing Center director to more fully integrate peer review across workshops.

## CONCLUSION—PEER REVIEWING PEER REVIEW

Discussing our differences of approach has led Pam to "customize" and Brian to "standardize" a bit more than before. Our approaches will never quite converge, though. We've suggested that our different approaches match our institutional contexts, but people who know us will chuckle, recognizing that our approaches match our personalities as well. While we both have always enjoyed an improvisational quality in our teaching, Brian tends to enjoy such improvisation even in an administrative context, while Pam prefers a more structured approach in administration. Fundamentally, these differences are a matter of personal preference and taste. We like to do research and write together partly because of these differences; however, in co-writing, there comes a point when we must blend our differences into a single harmonized voice. But consulting with each other on the work of our writing centers is different—we've found occasions to say "here's something that might work for you—even though I'd never do it that way myself!"

This is at the core of peer review. We want our student peer reviewers to understand that the peer reviewer isn't simply trying to improve the writing, but rather is attempting to help the writer realize his or her own vision of the work. Our own conversations have led not just to a narrowing of differences between our approaches, but also to a new direction for both of us—and others—to explore. This, it seems to us, is part of the essence of peer review: not just the perfecting of a text or the nearer approximation of mastery by one party to a conversation, but the opening up of new perspectives through dialogue. How can we help peers avoid appropriating each others' work, as Candace Spigelman has shown that students, with some justification, often fear that reviewers do? Should tutors' introductions to their workshops emphasize the differences between peer review and collaborative writing? Should tutors get reviewers to identify, discuss, and affirm their different approaches to the same assignment?

If we see our workshops as moments when "the writing center goes to class," we see our professional interchange as something equally exciting: a chance for the writing center to go to the writing center. ✦

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# GEEK IN THE CENTER

## REFERENCE AND RESEARCH MANAGEMENT

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I admit it: I've got a pdf problem. Though having the ability to instantly download articles as pdfs is remarkably helpful, all those files are making my computing life a mess: I've got pdfs on my desktop, pdfs filed in folders for various classes and research projects, pdfs in Evernote, pdfs in Dropbox, and pdfs on my Kindle. Beyond forgetting what I have, I also struggled to find a pleasurable way to read, annotate, and keep notes on these articles. I often resort to an old-school, tree-killing solution—printing out the files each time I need them, reading the hard copy, and annotating the hard copy, and entering notes into my reading blog. Then, I recycle the article at the end of the research project or class and repeat that cycle again and again. I lack a system to keep a digital annotated copy connected to my reading notes.

I was trying to solve my pdf issues when I started hearing more and more about reference management tools. These tools help you create bibliographies in your papers. One of the earliest of these, EndNote, was a rather expensive Microsoft product. The first time I played around with EndNote and other similar programs, I didn't really see how they might make my life easier. I figured if I had to type in all of the bibliographic information for each source, I might as well just make my own bibliographies. The word that occurred to me was "tedious." So, I did not pay much attention to how much improvement has been made to these sorts of programs in the last few years until I happened on a session at the recent East Central Writing Center Association Conference where the presenters mentioned the social and organizational dimensions of two reference management programs, Mendeley and Zotero (Milu, Elenbaas, Jackson, & Nguyen).

After the conference, I decided it was time to give these two a spin and see if they would work for me. I also found, in addition to Mendeley and Zotero, a whole slew of similar programs such as Sente, RefWorks, Papers, Bookends, Reference Manager, and Qiqqa.[1] Of these though, the one that appealed to me the most was Mendeley, so I'll focus on that program for this column as an illustration of what a reference management program can do. Most of the other programs also include many of the features that I discuss; my purpose is not necessarily to recommend Mendeley over the others, but merely to explore one program closely.

Mendeley is a free desktop application that works with Mac, Windows, or Linux operating systems and is synced to a web-based account. Basic accounts are free; premium accounts provide more online storage for a monthly fee. (Mendeley is funded by the some of the same people behind Skype and Last. fm.) Using the desktop app and the web-based account, users can accomplish five research-related tasks: databasing research, managing papers, generating citations, collaborating on research, and seeing research trends. Because Mendeley and most other reference management tools do more than just generate citations, I'm beginning to call myself a convert.[2]

For example, in Mendeley, I can drag and drop my research pdfs into my Mendeley desktop "library." Upon doing so, the program either extracts the bibliographic information from the file or, if unable to do so, it asks if it should look up the information in Google Scholar or another database. If the program is unsure of its results, it asks me to double-check it. In a matter of minutes, I was able to have a dozen or so pdfs on my desktop into Mendeley with full bibliographic entries for each. Mendeley also has a browser add-on called the web importer that allows one-click citation grabbing from many research databases like JSTOR and WorldCat, and even from Amazon.com. So while I'm conducting new research, I can add sources to my Mendeley library swiftly.

Once in my library, I can organize the files into folders, and I can view, highlight, annotate, and tag each pdf.[3] I can then search or filter what files I see by tag, search term, publication, or author. What this means for me is that my research can accrue much better than having research for different projects and classes in different folders on my computer; it can all be in one spot and my researching might start with a search of my own Mendeley library to see what I've already read or added to the library that might intersect with my next project or class.

As one would expect, Mendeley makes citing the research in your library ridiculously easy. If I'm working in a Word document (or OpenOffice or NeoOffice), I download a quick add-on and every time I need an in-text citation, I simply click a button in Word that opens my Mendeley library. I click another button and the citation is automatically generated in the style I specify (they claim over 1,000 different citation styles are available). Similarly, if I'm composing in Google Docs or any other word processor, I can go to Mendeley, select an entry, and click a "copy citation" button and paste the citation into my document. Doing a bibliography is just as easy. Like with other citation generators—as noted by Susan Mueller in her review of database citation generators—the results are not always perfect, but it certainly generates a draft quickly. Mueller writes, "No documentation formula releases its user from the thoughtful application of critical inquiry or careful scrutiny" (10).

Mendeley also is social; Milu, et al. dubbed it "Facebook for researchers." Similarities do exist. Each user creates a profile page, which includes prompts to post her education, current position, publications, and grants. I can make "contacts" the Mendeley version of friends, and I have a dashboard where I can add status updates and interact with my contacts as I do on my wall in Facebook. As a user, I'm also able to create and join research groups, which might be public or private, in which I can share files and notes from my library if I choose, making this a slick interface for collaborative researchers or even, potentially, for classes.

Since Mendeley socially aggregates citations, I can search within Mendeley for articles I might want to read. If I find something I want to add to my library, I just click on it and the citation is added to my library. (In most cases, the article itself is not available for download through Mendeley, though a web link to an online version is often provided.) As such, one can do some researching within Mendeley, but it is no replacement for more comprehensive research databases. Mendeley also does some rudimentary tracking of the "most read" articles and popular tags overall and within specific fields. (Sadly, however, there is no category for Rhetoric and Composition or Writing.) If I add my publications to my profile page, it will also track how often those publications are downloaded.

After exploring all of these features, I can say fairly confidently that, soon, I will no longer have a pdf problem. It will take me some time to migrate my old notes and pdfs to Mendeley, but adding new research will be pretty easy. As a researcher, teacher, and administrator, I think a reference management program will make life easier. I plan on introducing Mendeley to my classes and possibly offering a workshop on it for teachers and students through my writing center.

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Again, though, Mendeley is not the only option out there; I'd advise looking at several before settling on one. Some writing center folks, for instance, are using Zotero, another free application. Neil Simpkins, Writing Center Coordinator at Agnes Scott College, has used it for a couple of years. He likes the fact that it is open-source, free, and integrated right into Firefox. Dani Weber, Director of the Writing Center at Eastern Oregon University, is also using Zotero and has been working with her library to train tutors to work with it in tutorials. Alternatively, Valerie Balester, Executive Director of the University Writing Center at Texas A&M, has been using RefWorks, which is free to her through a campus subscription. This subscription also means that training and support is available on campus. Balester says, "I just like using [RefWorks] because I can get to work easily—I attach the electronic version to the note, so no matter where I am with web access I can check a source, re-read, pick up where I left off." It is worth noting that most of these programs allow importing and exporting of files from one to program to the other, so users aren't locked into the first program they try out.

Reference management programs have evolved past simply generating citations into being robust ways of managing digital research detritus. If I may divulge one remaining hope about these programs: I hope they might eventually change the academic obsession with citation. If your center is like mine, we consistently see students who are required to come to have their citations checked, who will lose one or two or more letter grades for mistakes in citation, who fixate on their citations and miss the bigger picture. Though I get the importance of citing sources, I think we can all agree that good writing does a whole lot more than merely follow citation rules. If these programs take off, the perception of citation as important will remain, but perhaps faculty will feel less inclined to grade only how well an automatically generated application automatically generates—much like how spell check has changed perceptions of spelling errors. The granting of this wish is not within the purview of software developers, but it may be within ours.✦

### Notes

[1] See a comparison chart at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_reference_management_software>.

[2] Beginners might start with the Mendeley "Getting Started Guide" available at: <http://www.mendeley.com/getting-started/>.

[3] "Tag" is a common Web 2.0 word for keyword. Blog posts, for example, can be tagged (bloggers add words into the tag field when writing a post) to indicate to readers what kind of post or what topics the post discusses. ✦

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## TAKE NOTE

### SOUTHEASTERN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

# DEALING WITH MULTIMODAL ASSIGNMENTS IN WRITING CENTERS

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## INTRODUCTION

We can no longer confine literacy pedagogy to the realm of language alone, as we need to take into account the role of images and other modes of meaning-making in texts. Nowadays, the tasks set for students' assignments in higher education often require complex multimodal competencies (Archer 2006). Many assignments use images as evidence, while other assignments are predominantly visual in nature, such as posters, storyboards, or assignments that include CD-roms or other media. New technologies also enable a range of possibilities for individuals creating documents, including variety in layout, image, color, typeface, and sound. The challenge for writing centers is to train tutors to utilize these technologies effectively themselves so that they can deal with the changing nature of assignments.

Our writing center, like many others, sees students from a range of disciplines and at all levels of study, from first year through to postdoctoral. The tutors are all post-graduate students at the Masters or Ph.D. level and are thus fairly deeply immersed in the practices of their own disciplines. The diversity of the tutors enables us to investigate multimodal academic conventions both within and across disciplines in quite nuanced ways. This essay focuses on ways in which we can assist students in the composition of multimodal assignments, specifically looking at the visual design of written texts and the integration of images into written assignments.

## VISUAL DESIGN OF WRITTEN TEXTS

A conventional view of writing is that meaning lies in linguistic content and structure, not layout or materiality (Sharples 129). This perception is surprising, since we gain a first impression of a text from its visual appearance. A scruffy piece of paper containing untidy writing may put a reader in a less receptive frame of mind than a neatly word-processed text. But to insist that students bring neatly typed documents for consultations could mean that some of the messy processes of thinking through ideas are lost to the consultation dialogue. Also, many students in the South African educational context do not use computers in the early stages of composing because of lack of access to computers and also because of limited word-processing and typing skills.

However, learning to write in higher education also entails learning how to produce well-designed print and digital texts and learning how the design of the page can contribute to readability and rhetorical import.

An interesting example of the sometimes unspoken visual requirements of different genres (taken from an assignment at my university) is a third-year accounting essay that requires students to write an article for an accounting magazine. This is a complex genre—somewhere between an academic essay, a news report, and a feature article. This hybridity creates difficulty for students not only in terms of tone, function of the first paragraph, and referencing but also in terms of the layout requirements, which are different from a traditional academic essay. The writer signals the feature article genre through the use of columns, bullets, boxes of text, choice of font, use of point form, and so on. When tutors work with students on such an assignment, they might start with John Trimbur's advice on visual design:

- Group similar items together to create visual units of attention on the page and thereby help readers organize and remember information.
- Align visual elements—center, flush left, or flush right. Such alignment is important when writing a feature article using columns.
- Create consistent visual patterns through repetition and contrast. Repeating a visual element, such as a bold font, a bullet, or spacing creates a consistent visual pattern on the page. (617 – 623)

Working on such an assignment highlights the visual nature of writing, including the use of emphasis and white space. Each choice writers make in laying out text and images on the page generates multiple meanings for readers. Different strate-

gies for emphasis include font size, use of boldface type, boxes around text, or bullet points. These all guide the reader through the macro-structure of the text. White space too can be varied for effect and is utilized differently in different textual genres. A page can be spaced both horizontally (spaces between letters and words) and vertically (space between lines and paragraphs, space at the head and foot of the page). With horizontal spacing, a writer can group text into meaningful components by, for example, tabulating items or right justification. However, with right justification, sometimes the design and the readability are in conflict. A justified text can look neat and orderly but can be less readable because of large open spaces between letters. A writer can signal the macro-structure of a text by combining the use of white space to indicate breaks in meaning with appropriate headings to describe the content (Hartley).

Working with this assignment also may involve looking at issues of typography. Letter forms as graphic shapes have distinct characters, partly based on association and partly on form. Serif typefaces, such as Times New Roman or Garamond, are often used in academic writing. The short decorative strokes on each character perhaps suggest classical elegance. Sans-serif typefaces such as Ariel are also commonly used as they are open and unadorned and thus suggest "modernity" as well as objectivity. They are often used in tables. Van Leeuwen argues that since word processors are now the norm for creating documents, typographic expression has become accessible to all, and he therefore argues that teaching "typographic literacy" should become an integral part of teaching writing (142).

## INTEGRATING VISUALS IN WRITTEN ESSAYS

Predominantly visual texts have been quite rare in academia, but they are becoming more plentiful, in such genres as storyboards, photo essays, PowerPoint presentations, visual comparisons, posters, and "culture jamming" of media texts such as advertisements. More common amongst students' assignments are written texts that utilize images in conjunction with the written mode to provide context, illustrate a point, make an argument, furnish evidence, and organize data. Many also require the use of numerical graphical representations, such as needs analyses, impact assessments, and cost benefit analyses.

For an essay assigned in a first-year History and Theory of Architecture course, students are required to compare the social, cultural, experiential, and design characteristics of two buildings. Our Writing Center tutors discuss with the students how best to write a comparative essay, providing input on the possible structure and the kinds of linking words used in a contrastive analysis. However, since students are required to include images in their essays, they need to think of structure and cohesion across modes, where visuals are used as both evidence and illustration of arguments. They thus need to think about how to integrate the visual and the verbal. In working with this assignment, the tutors concentrate on the following aspects: choice of image, proximity of image to writing, relations between image and writing, and the function of the image.

In terms of proximity, the images need to be near their verbal analysis. A writer cannot assume that readers will look at an image embedded in written text. Any item that is set outside the flow of written text, including pictures, tables, and blocked quotations, is a diversion. To control when a reader views an image, the writer needs to divert attention from the written text by adding a reference to it, in a phrase such as "see Figure 2 for an example of Cape Dutch architecture."

Words are generally used to explain the image in terms of the key point being made in the overall argument and also to explain the inclusion of the image. However, the relations between image and writing can be quite complex. For writing tutors in our center, giving students a simplified explanation of visual-verbal relations is usually sufficient. Input here can be based on Barthes' *Image-Music-Text*. The main concept is that of "anchorage," using the written text (usually in the form of a caption) to limit the possible meaning of the image. The writing functions as a kind of specification, picking out one of the possible meanings of the image. A second word-image relationship that is useful to be aware of is "extension." Here, word and image form a complementary relationship, and each mode contributes its own, distinct but semantically linked information. See Figure 1 (p. 12), taken from a student essay. We use this text in our tutor training to discuss some of the issues around visual-verbal linkages.

As the confidence grew for the establishment intended only for passing ships, Dutch Governor Simon van der Stel was sent with the purpose of further development of the area in terms of cultural and commercial prosperity. This action was of immense importance concerning the development of the architecture in Cape Town. Van der Stel built Groot Constantia, a superb example of the typical Cape Dutch homestead. A definitive South – African architectural language was born (fig.2).

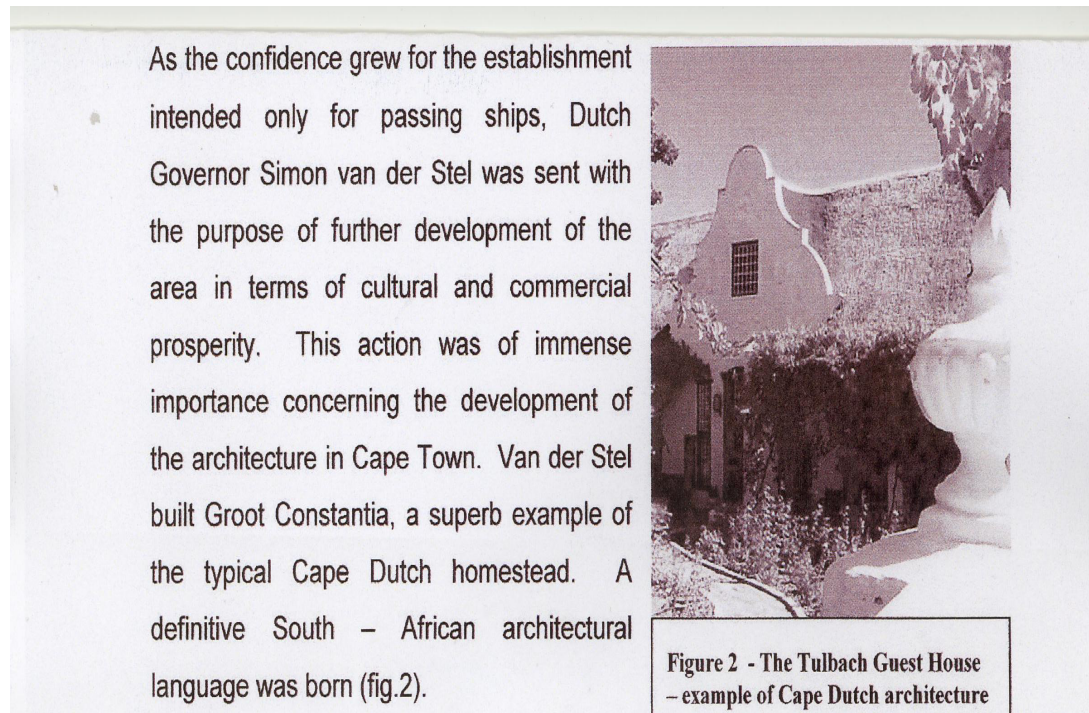Figure 2 - The Tulbach Guest House – example of Cape Dutch architecture

Figure 1. Extract from a first-year architecture essay

The caption here acts as a kind of specification—the image of the house points to an example of one type of architecture. However, there is a slight disjuncture between the surrounding writing and the image, which it would be useful for the tutor to point out to the student. The writing talks about Groot Constantia and the image is of the Tulbach Guest House. The image serves the function of filling the content gap in the written explanation between the description of Groot Constantia and the statement that a definitive South African architectural language was born. The tutor can point out that the student is using the image as a short-cut to provide a ready-made explanation of the features of "typical Cape Dutch" architecture (the characteristically grand and ornately rounded gable, the thatched roof, the sash windows and whitewashed walls), and these features are then not explained in words. The positioning of "(fig. 2)" is important in the written text. If placed after "Van der Stel," then it would probably exemplify that statement, making the disjuncture between 'Groot Constantia' and 'Tulbach Guest House' even larger. In its current position (after "A definitive South African architectural language was born"), it points to a type of architecture, rather than a specific building.

Tutors need to get students to think about what function an image is performing in their text. Is the image serving as an illustration, or is it being used as evidence in an argument? It is also important to consider the type of image that is chosen for a particular purpose. For instance, a photograph may be better suited to emphasize a building in its context, whereas a more abstract drawing of a plan of a building could emphasize certain structural aspects. It is important to identify the salience of the image to the reader. Writers do this by referring to specific aspects of the image in their writing. In the particular discipline of architecture, however, it is also possible to intervene directly in the image through labelling or drawing to highlight a particular point.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR WRITING CENTERS

Tutors need to realize that reading and writing practices are only one part of what people have to learn in order to be literate, and thus they need to learn strategies to help students understand and gain competency in multimodal composition. This process includes learning how to produce well-designed print and digital texts. It also includes knowledge about the appropriate use of visuals and the integration of visuals in multimodal texts. This is in line with current thinking about Communication across the Curriculum (CAC), which points to a widened notion of communication (including the visual design of written assignments) and the redefined nature of texts through new technologies (McLeod, Reiss, Young and Selfe).

At my institution, we are also thinking about questions of academic voice and how voice might be realized differently across different semiotic modes such as image, writing, and layout. Take "modality" as an example. Modality refers to the produced shared truth value or credibility of a representation. Modality is realized through discourse markers such as hedging ("It could be argued that. . . . ") and emphatics ("It is clear that . . . . ") (Hyland 104). Modals indicate degrees of certainty and expressions of obligation (must, should, may). When looking at modality in a visual text, we look at how truth value is established within a particular domain. In a scientific domain, for instance, abstract and decontextualized representations often have higher modality than naturalistic representations. Here a black and white line drawing may have more credibility than a photograph. In architecture, sketchy hand-drawn analytical diagrams may have higher modality than highly produced images. Color can be used as a marker of truth in the visual mode. Here the markers of modality are color saturation, color differentiation, color modulation, contextualization, depth, and brightness (Kress and Van Leeuwen). A highly saturated photograph may have lower modality in an architectural image than an image with the colour de-saturated. Thus, the sepia image in figure 1 is appropriate for a classificatory image representing a 'type' of building. In analytical drawings in architecture, strong colours such as black, white, and red are used, while pastels often lower the modality. Digital editing software (using levels, filters and layers) can also provide authors with semiotic resources to adjust modality.

Writing centers have come into being to address specific needs on specific campuses, and thus they serve the social context of which they are a part (Archer 2008), and some courses and post-secondary environments may require more multimodal texts than others. However, we cannot ignore that academic literacies now involve effectively constructing and navigating multiplicity, manipulating and critiquing information and representations in multiple media, and using diverse technologies (print, visual, digital) in composing multimodal texts. From the examples discussed above, it is clear that this composition is not a simple process. It is not just about selecting semiotic resources, but it is also about the weight given to each mode in a particular text. Decisions need to be made about which mode carries the proposition and which the evidence in an argument. Often students write their own text, but copy and paste the pictures. This compositional choice prioritizes the written mode and the visual gets relegated to the status of decoration. However, any image used in an academic assignment is generally required to have some kind of written framing or explanation. Students sometimes use images inappropriately or vaguely and do not integrate them into the argument. When images are used like long quotes from sources, it is perhaps assumed that the image is able to make the case better than the student writer. In cases like this, the student voice could become subsumed. Writing center tutors can play an important role in helping students with these aspects of the composition of multimodal texts. ✦

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# *T*UTOR'S COLUMN

## NOT REMEDIAL, BUT A WALK-THROUGH

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Often when a student enters the writing center, it quickly becomes obvious that the student doesn't understand the assignment, so the tutor begins to offer a remedial lesson, erroneously assuming the student was improperly instructed. But typically, the instructor taught the student the same principles the consultant is now reviewing, and if the student didn't learn these conventions the first time, there's no reason to assume he'll understand them the second time. What most students need, then, isn't a remedial lesson. Rather, they need the one thing a writing center can provide that the classroom often cannot: a one-to-one walk-through in which the student is shown explicitly how to understand a writing assignment.

A comparative example may help illustrate what I mean. Although writing may come naturally to me, I have always struggled with math. I have had to learn overtly what most mathematicians learned intuitively. Hence, the math classes I struggled with most were ones where the teacher reviewed the same lesson with me individually that he had presented before the class, expecting me to pick up the math intuitively. The math classes where I excelled the most were the ones where the instructor walked me through a problem, taking into account my current knowledge and skill level. After I had been walked through the process of solving a math problem, I could solve the math problem on my own. Areas of math such as geometry, algebra, and calculus were all foreign and frightening esoteric disciplines that I had no intuitive access to. I tried to apply the principles of basic arithmetic to them and failed. I had to have the principles of each area of math explained to me explicitly before I could operate in it.

The same principle applies to writing: for most students, most genres of college writing are strange and forbidding, and they try to apply the principles of more familiar genres in their desperate attempt to function in a new one. However, once most students are walked through a genre, they can write in the genre on their own. For example, here at the University of Utah Writing Center, about four weeks into every semester, we're inundated with freshman composition students seeking help with their "rhetorical analysis" assignments. In this assignment, students are asked to analyze the rhetorical techniques used in a famous text, such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

What often happens is that King's iconic status as a civil rights leader overshadows his rhetoric in students' minds, causing their papers more often than not to be discussions on race relations rather than rhetorical analyses. Even if the student remembers to minimize her own opinions in the paper, she still forgets to analyze the speech and instead simply summarizes the author's key points. As well intentioned, even insightful, as these papers can be, they fail to address the key components of the rhetorical analysis genre. Students are often unaware of their mistake and must receive the bad news from the writing center consultant, "Your paper did not follow the assignment." This situation occurs because the students are unfamiliar with the genre of rhetorical analysis, and so they write in a genre they are more familiar with, such as argumentative essay or textual summary. It's not that they don't want to write a rhetorical analysis; it's that they don't know what is expected of them.

The problem often is that instructors and consultants are too good at writing. For many of us, the conventions of the rhetorical analysis genre appear self-explanatory or are easily learned; in fact, literary genres may come intuitively to tutors who are proficient readers and writers. Even if the tutor encounters a genre in an unfamiliar discipline, such as business memorandum or annotated bibliography, she can usually pick up the conventions fairly quickly. What instructors and consultants sometimes fail to realize is that most students are not able to do that. Nothing about the rhetorical analysis is self-explanatory; it is an alien genre to most students. They are uninitiated. As Amy Devitt, Anis Barwashi, and Mary Jo Reiff write, "[genre] instructions contain presumptions, implications, specifications known by the . . . community but unknown to the unsuspecting" inductees (544). We members of the writing community don't always understand just how fully initiated and saturated we are in the discourse of the writing community, a community foreign to most new students.

Just recently I worked with a student who was asked to analyze Thomas Frank's "Why Johnny Can't Dissent," an essay about the assimilation of the counter-culture by American capitalism. To help this student understand the expectations of the rhetorical analysis genre, I asked him to focus on the following line:

> You can't outrun them, or even stay ahead of them for very long: it's their racetrack, and that's them waiting at the finish line to congratulate you on how outrageous your new style is, on how you shocked those stuffy prudes out in the heartland." (1)

I told the student he could almost write an entire paper on this line alone. Look at the rich diction: "outrun," "racetrack," "outrageous," and "prudes. All of these are loaded words, calculated to play on people's prejudices, preconceptions, and emotions. By the time we got through picking apart this one sentence's diction, the student had at least a page-worth of detailed rhetorical analysis. Suddenly, the student wasn't fretting about how to fill three pages but about how to trim the paper down. This quotation could also be analyzed for the word order, pronoun usage, position of clauses—the analytical potential of this line is nearly inexhaustible, and the rhetorical analysis is only a three-page assignment. I can't count how many students have said, "You mean, that's all I have to do? Explain it in detail?" So accustomed are these students to writing in broad terms, over-generalizing on subjects, that they've never really learned how to write in specifics. For many of them, it's a breath of fresh air, a feeling of freedom, to have to parse apart a sentence and nothing else.

In acknowledging the difficulty students often have with this assignment, I do not mean to imply they are unintelligent: quite the opposite. The genre expectations that have been hammered into them for years are that papers are supposed to be detailed arguments defending a specific point of view—requiring introduction, background, context, and argumentation—and that this format is the only form an essay can take; they are not even aware that other genres of formal college writing exist.

For example, a high school senior writing a paper on *Hamlet* isn't usually instructed to parse out the interplay between rhyme and diction in Act III, scene i, lines 56-86, but rather is typically trained to comment on the general theme of "madness" or "vengeance" as it occurs throughout the play as a whole. In other words, most students arriving at college have been trained to comment on the forest at the expense of the trees, and now suddenly they are being asked to focus exclusively on the trees. This dissonance between their high school and college instruction has tripped up more than one incoming college student. Even in more standard writing genres such as analytical essays and research papers, the student is often unaware that the expectation now in college writing is to write in specifics, not generalities. Suddenly focusing on concrete details instead of on the writing's overall theme is foreign to most new students, a factor both composition instructors and writing center consultants need to acknowledge.

Hence, these students don't simply need to be told to write differently, as though all these different genres are intuitively understood; rather, they need to be explicitly shown how to write them. And it's not just rhetorical analyses, but research papers, research proposals, memos, business plans, news articles, responses, literature reviews, literature surveys, bibliographies, graduate theses, and so forth—all of these genres need not remedial instruction, but a walk-through. I have found that walking students through different genres of college writing has made my job easier and more enjoyable.

Offering a walk-through not only prevents us from becoming remedial instructors, but also helps justify our existence, as we fulfill a function the classroom often cannot. Logistically, the writing instructor simply doesn't have sufficient time during class or office hours to provide all the walk-throughs that students need to understand a genre. The walk-through is the purview of writing centers. ✦

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# THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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# CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

October 20-22, 2011: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in
   Madison, WI
Contact: Katie Levin: 612-624-7720, kslevin@umn.edu.

February 16-18, 2012: Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in
   Richmond, KY
Contact: Russell Carpenter: russell.carpenter@eku.edu; conference
   website: <http://www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html>.