Reflections from the Writing Center

"Good writing is clear thinking made visible."
-Ambrose Bierce

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Good writing skills for all …

Students often come to the Writing Center with the idea that consultants are here to fix things. We are often perceived as grammar and punctuation mechanics who wield number two pencils and big ideas about the right places to put periods and commas; we are expected to spend most of the session putting wayward sentences in place and making paragraphs and conclusions work properly. Certainly, a lot of what we do involves suggestions for tweaking and revving up the revision process, but our ultimate goal is to help writers to help themselves.

The ideal Writing Center session involves shared effort, which begins when writers read their work aloud to consultants. A lot can happen here: the reader often notices things in the writing that were not apparent before. Giving voice to the words on the page becomes an effective first step to recognizing problems with phrasing or wayward ideas that sound convoluted. When the writer stumbles over a word or a sentence and acknowledges that something is not right, the revision process has begun.

The best tutoring sessions, the best teaching and learning moments, occur when we are willing to spend time grappling with things that do not make sense, sentences gone askew or ideas caught in syntax ambiguity. This might mean revisiting an idea or a sentence. It might involve reorganizing and deleting, or thinking more about how the details of grammar and punctuation affect meaning. This is rarely an easy process, and anyone who professes otherwise should be looked on with suspicion. Hard work and diligent practice comes with the writer’s territory.

Writing practice involves pulling disconnected ideas together and harnessing the usual ramblings that knock around our busy brains. And like many other endeavors worth doing well, writing skills are best honed through reflection and collaborative effort. We invite collaboration here in the Writing Center; we provide space for writers to wrestle with their ideas, to rethink and refine; and we make suggestions as to how these ideas might be revisited or rearranged. We are not mechanics or miracle workers; we do, however, believe in the seemingly magical possibility of good writing skills for all.

Pamela Kenley-Meschino
Writing Center Coordinator

“What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.”
-Samuel Johnson
A Professor’s Perspective

The Writing Center’s Compassionate Approach to Assisting with the Integration of a Writing Intensive Assignment into a Clinical Course

Writing is often a slow and sometimes frustrating process for many of my students. The Writing Center provides a caring place for students of all ability levels and at all stages of the writing process. To encourage my students to utilize the Center’s services with the writing intensive assignment, I have implemented the following into this course:

1. Referred to the Writing Center in my syllabus and Lion’s Den page where students have access to the location and contact information of the Center. I also provide the Center with a copy of my syllabus and writing assignments so consultants are aware of my objectives and assignment due dates.

2. Invited the Writing Center to my class for a short introduction describing the services they provide, as well as a refresher on APA style and formatting. The Writing Center offers students assistance in every phase of the writing process, from generating ideas to drafting and editing a paper to documenting sources.

3. Consistently reminded the class that all students can benefit from the Center’s services. By encouraging students to visit the Writing Center, I avoid isolating those who might be performing poorly or who feel especially vulnerable about their writing ability. After one session at the Center, a student remarked, “The Writing Center is an amazing resource for nursing students.” Consultants empower students in simple ways; they give the students positive feedback on what they arrive with and make sure they leave with a clear sense of direction on where the paper needs to go. These may all seem like insignificant details in the writing process, but they are vital in the writing intensive component of this nursing course.

4. Discussed the Writing Center experiences. I encourage students who have utilized the Center’s services to share their experiences with the class. One such student remarked, “The Writing Center was not just an opportunity to get my paper looked over but also a learning experience as well.” For some students who have experienced frustration with not the actual writing component but rather with formatting their assignments, Center consultants were able to guide students’ use of computers to enhance their writing efforts.

5. Acknowledged Writing Successes. When my students visit the Writing Center for assistance with the first or second draft of their writing intensive assignment, I often acknowledge their extra efforts to improve their work. As a result, several students make regular appointments and work on one or two issues at a time, slowly improving over the semester. Even accomplished writers utilized feedback from the Center to develop and polish their writing.

6. Sought the Writing Center’s feedback. During and at the conclusion of the semester, I meet with Center consultants to seek feedback on the writing intensive assignment. Consultants are able to share areas where students demonstrate difficulty or frequently asked questions pertaining to the assignment. I then review those areas with them and, if necessary, modify future assignments.
A Student’s Story

Madhuri Sembukuttige, Art Education Major, tells me that she’s been coming to the Writing Center since her freshman year (she’s a junior now). She first discovered Molloy’s Writing Center after attending an orientation, where consultant, Pam Smith, gave a brief overview of the resources available to students here. Since Madhuri knew she had upcoming papers to write, she wasted no time making an appointment. She’s been coming here ever since.

She sits at the conference table, turned toward me, swinging on the chair in a gentle arc. The purple bow in her hair matches her sweater. She is smiling broadly. “People who come here are more likely to get better grades,” she tells me. This is not something we have any way of calculating right now, but, clearly, face-to-face consultations can make an impact. When I ask Madhuri how, exactly, her visits to the Center have helped her, she laughs. It’s almost an inside joke. All of the regulars here are familiar with the animated exchanges she has with Pam, whom she has been seeing, almost on a weekly basis, since that first consultation. Madhuri likes to brainstorm; and she likes to laugh. She comes here, not just to address her writing concerns, but to talk about ideas, and school, and family. Today, she shares pictures from a recent trip to Sri Lanka.

I ask Madhuri what advice she would give others about visiting the Writing Center. “Plan appointments ahead of time,” she says. Good advice. Too many students show up in the doorway hoping to see someone “today” or “tomorrow,” but as the semester kicks into gear, the demand for appointments grows, and so does the waiting list at the front desk. Madhuri likes to plan her appointments two weeks ahead. Sometimes she comes in during quiet times to say hello; she plops herself at the conference table to wait for an opening, spreads out books, and delivers warm smiles to everyone.

When I ask Madhuri how we could improve the Writing Center, she informs me that we look “too serious” to passersby. We should “smile more.” “Or wear silly hats?” I ask. She giggles at the notion. “People are too intimidated to come in sometimes,” she says. “But I tell them that you are all friendly and fun.” I tell her that we try to be. While working on writing assignments can be hard work, for both the consultant and the writer, the rewards are often immeasurable. As consultants, we get to learn about all kinds of topics, from asthma treatments to community profiles, and we get to meet all kinds of earnest, interesting people, like Madhuri Sembukuttige.

Her writing center sessions have become an important part of her college experience.
Writing Center Hours

Monday to Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Saturday (graduate students) 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Summer Hours: Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

(Schedule may change depending on consultant availability)

Coordinator
Pamela Kenley-Meschino, M.A.

Consultants:
Stephen Albanese, M.F.A
Valerie Griggs, M.F.A.
Mary Ann Howell, M.A.
Pam Smith, M.S.

Office Assistant
Denise Hughes, M.S.

Upcoming Summer Workshops at Molloy

Expressive Writing and Healing

These two introductory workshops will focus on writing from a healing arts’ perspective, using expressive writing to explore the possibility of self-healing and catharsis. You will be invited to engage in the story making process and encouraged to examine how theme, structure, voice, and clarity can be developed and strengthened through personal narrative. The workshops will provide you with the opportunity to explore a variety of genres and styles of writing that depict the healer/patient dynamic.

Requirements: Willingness and Imagination ~ You must register for both workshops

Dates: Saturday June 22nd & Saturday June 29th 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Location: TBA Fee: FREE Register in the Writing Center now! (Limited enrollment)

“You write to discover what you want to say. You rewrite to discover what you have said and then rewrite to make it clear to other people.”

-Donald Murray