WRITE FREE OR DIE

The Newsletter of the UNH Writing Programs

IN THIS ISSUE

Introductory Course Aversion

Ed Mueller
Director, University Writing Programs

   Recently, I attended the annual Conference on College Composition & Communication in Kansas City. Apart from the feeling of accomplishment that came with achieving escape velocity from the nor'easter that was pummeling the region at the time, the experience was worthwhile. Entering into the national conversation at such gatherings is always informative and invigorating, particularly so when one finds that a local conversation you've been having is being echoed by others. The topic in question was students bypassing first-year writing courses via advanced placement.

   Craig Hulst, of Grand Valley State University, gave a talk entitled, "Do We Need Nontraditional First-Year Composition Courses for AP Students?" On the surface, the title of his talk would seem counterintuitive—according to the College Board website, the rationale behind AP courses and exams is clear: to help place students "beyond general education requirements" and to allow them to "avoid required introductory courses—so [they] can . . . focus on the work that interests [them] most." The College Board's wisdom notwithstanding, the issue of students bypassing EN401 at UNH has been a point of conversation, not only among faculty but

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Future Tense: *Upcoming Writing Across the Curriculum Events,* Spring 2018

April 10: Guest Speakers: "The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing In Higher Education" (12:45-2:00, MUB, Theater I): Dr. Anne Geller, Associate Professor of English and Director of Writing Across the Curriculum at St. John's University, and Dr. Neal Lerner, Associate Professor and Writing Program Director at Northeastern University, will share findings from their recently published research on projects and assignments that engaged students in support of student learning. Their three-year study surveyed seniors and faculty from three different post-secondary institutions and found that "meaningful writing occurs across majors, in both required and elective courses, and beyond students' years at college." For more information, please go to http://meaningfulwritingproject.net/. There will be a presentation followed by an opportunity for Q&A with the speakers. Please register to attend at: https://www.unh.edu/cetl/unh-writing-program. [1 CEITL Participation Point]

April 23: Student Exit Interviews (12:00-1:30, Dimond 352): The Writing Committee will once again be conducting exit interviews with a panel of graduating seniors on their writing histories at UNH. Faculty are invited to join and participate. [capacity: 12] [1 CEITL Participation Point]

June 11-13: Writing Intensive Faculty Retreat Offsite, Mount Washington Hotel (Application Deadline April 9): The UNH Writing Program is looking forward to reprising the well-received WI faculty retreat experience, consisting of a three-day offsite at the Omni Mount Washington Hotel in early June followed by three 1/2 day sessions at UNH in the following year. The salient goals of the retreat are to give faculty a fuller awareness of the principles underlying WI courses, to equip them with practices to enhance working with student writing, and to promote connections among WI faculty. For application information, contact the director of the UNH Writing Program: edward.mueller@unh.edu.
[3 CEITL Participation Points Upon Completion of the Entire Program]

WAC(ky) People

UNH Writing Program
Ed Mueller, Director
Matt Switliski, Associate Director
Corey McCullough, Associate Director

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PCBE - Vacant	2019
COLSA - Iago Hale (Biological Sciences)	2019
CEPS - John LaCourse (Engineering)	2020
COLA-1 - Marcos Del Hierro (English)	2019
COLA-2 - Soo Hyon Kim (English)	2020
CHHS - Robert Barcelona (Recreational Management and Policy)	2019
UNHM - Gail Fensom* (English, Director of First-Year Writing Program)	2018

* Faculty Chair

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Center for Teaching Excellence
    Catherine Overson (Academic Affairs)
Discovery Committee
    Kathrine Aydelott

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also among students—each year, we hear from student panelists in our exit interviews who say that they felt that they had missed something by bypassing EN401 via AP. Most go on to say that they wish that they had taken the course. Thus, this presentation caught my eye. It was clear during the Q&A that followed that others in the room had been having similar conversations.

Focusing on first-year writing, Dr. Hulst presented concerns about the uneven preparation of AP students for college-level writing at Grand Valley State and also the place of first-year writing in the transition between K-12 and college—things that have been talked about at UNH.

At Grand Valley State, they took the step of creating a course specifically for students who had "AP'd" out of first-year writing. They made it 2 credits and named it "Advanced Strategies in Writing" in an attempt to make it attractive and also to thematically connect it to their first-year writing course ("Strategies in Writing"). They marketed it to AP students during summer orientations and initially had a good response, with 4 sections of 15 students planned for the upcoming semester.

Unfortunately, they were obliged to shift the course to spring, which caused interest to drop, leading to smaller enrollments and a high drop rate among enrolled students. It's unclear how the course might have played out had they been able to offer it in fall. Although they were unable to gather much meaningful information on the lower enrollments and the drops, the student evaluations from those who did complete the course were positive.

Interestingly enough, the Grand Valley example inverts the norm. Usually, an extra course is added for students who are *under-prepared* for first-year writing. In the Grand Valley case, we see the obverse, a course for students who are *over-prepared* for first-year writing. Thus, we see the circle closed around the identified need for a first-year writing experience.

One lesson to take away might be that the transition from K-12 to college is, well, a *transition* (if you will excuse the tautology). Perhaps, then, avoiding a course in writing practice at this juncture might not be such a good idea. If so, perhaps we should stop referring to first-year writing as "introductory" and instead start calling it something else . . . something like "advanced strategies in writing."

For more information, please contact edward.mueller@unh.edu.

The Fourth Annual WI Faculty Retreat

~ June 11-13 ~
At The
Omni Mount Washington Hotel

Apply by April 9th

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For details, please see the "Future Tense" section on page 1.

Dangling Modifier: Options for Responding to Student Writers

Corey McCullough, Associate Director, University Writing Programs

In a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article (https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-I-Stopped-Writing-on-My/242477), English professor Michael Millner explained why he stopped writing on student papers altogether after 25 years of teaching. The reason? He questioned the degree to which students tried or were able to able to make productive use of his written comments. In fact, Millner abandoned asynchronous feedback altogether in favor of one-on-one conferences. Conferencing, when purposefully done and when students are engaged, can be highly effective and surprisingly efficient compared to providing written feedback, especially extensive written feedback. Whereas written feedback approximates a monologue from professor to student, conferencing brings the student into the dialogue.

Of course, conferencing is not always pragmatic for a number of reasons, including course size and load, time and space constraints, and student learning styles, among others. Meeting with small groups of students can mitigate some logistical challenges, but only to a degree, and like videoconferencing, which provides an alternative when distance or meeting space is an issue, requires more coordination. And of course, technology brings its own tangles. Though I do recommend trying writing conferences, even brief in-class conferences, particularly as part of the drafting process of major writing assignments, the rest of this article will discuss different modes and methods of responding to student writing. For suggestions about conferencing and a brief consideration of its history at UNH, see "Dangling Modifier: Writing Conferences," from the Spring 2017 issue of *Write Free or Die* (pp. 3-4): (https://www.unh.edu/writing/sites/default/files/media/write_free_or_die_spring_2017.pdf)

There are a number of reasons that extensive annotation of student work is generally not worth the time it takes to do it. If the feedback is summative rather than formative, meaning that the feedback is being provided on a paper that has already been submitted for a grade—often with the purpose of explaining a grade—students are often more concerned with the grade than with the feedback. Unless students are using feedback for revision, they may not see a reason to apply feedback from one assignment to subsequent writing, even if it seems obvious to us.

The primary takeaways from recent decades of scholarship on response to writing are the need for both moderation and prioritization in our responses. In addition, technology has provided alternative modes of responding to student writing. Written feedback allows instructors to carefully consider and articulate feedback to students. But written feedback circa 2018 can take many forms, from annotating hard copies of student essays to using word processing programs and exchanging files via email to utilizing feedback mechanisms embedded inside learning management systems. Available technology even allows instructors to create voice recordings with simultaneous screen capture to provide a feedback experience that, while asynchronous, is nonetheless rich, interactive, and can be revisited by the student.

Another threshold-level concern besides the medium of response is the important question of the purpose for feedback. I've already mentioned the importance of formative rather than summative comments, the latter of which usually explicate a grade (and are best informed by a hybrid holistic-analytic writing rubric) while the former helps students revise particular assignments and promotes the imaginative thinking that serious revision requires. A longitudinal study of writing at Harvard conducted by Nancy Sommers suggests that students value feedback that 1) poses questions for further consideration, 2) includes short summaries of the reader's response, 3) identifies challenges encountered by the reader, and 4) presents respectfully-delivered critique (qtd. in Gottschalk and Hjortshoj 53).

The question of how much to focus on local, sentence-level issues and global issues such as organization and content depends on a combination things: assignment goals, instructor preference, and the stage in the drafting process. Too much attention to sentence-level issues in early drafts might foreclose revision, send mixed messages about priorities, and overwhelm students. The issue of mixed messages can be dealt with by articulating the goals and purpose for feedback at each stage. Identifying patterns of error or prioritizing feedback to address local-level issues only when they interfere with meaning are two ways to avoid getting bogged down in minutiae.

If you choose to address sentence-level errors, consider how you will identify them. Will you correct errors for the student (the most directive approach, and one that requires the least thought on the part of students), use a correction code to identify the type of error, underline errors, indicate the presence of an error in a sentence with a symbol in the margin, or identify the number of

He has left off reading altogether to the great improvement of his originality.
—Charles Lamb

errors in a given paragraph and ask students to find them themselves? Research suggests that native and non-native writers of English in US undergraduate contexts can fix errors if they are identified by the instructor (Ferris and Roberts). Extensively rewriting student sentences (copy editing) diminishes personal agency and is not generally recommended, although there may be reasons to do so selectively, such as when modeling stylistic or discourse conventions.

Perhaps the most efficient approach to responding to student writing, as recommended by Gottschalk and Hjortshoj, begins with the challenging task of reading an entire paper without writing on it, focusing on understanding rather than grading. Following this protocol, the instructor, after a holistic reading of the essay, writes an end note that refers back to selective marginal comments. My approach has been to put inconspicuous placeholders in the margins as I read and then come back o add marginal notes, but I continue reading the entire paper without stopping to write. I do, however, keep a separate sheet of paper handy if I need to jot down a brief note to myself, but it's best to limit these pauses to no more than a few seconds. Finally, once you've composed your end note, go back and add selective marginal comments that address the points you've enumerated in your end note, including "questions, suggestions, or praise" (56). This method of responding to student writing might be challenging at first, but stick with it. You—and your students—will appreciate it.

Works Cited

Ferris, Dana, and Barrie Roberts. "Error Feedback in L2 Writing Classes: How Explicit Does It Need to Be." *Journal of Second Language Writing,* vol. 10, no. 3, 2001, pp. 161-184.

Gottschalk, Katherine, and Keith Hjortshoj. "Strategies for Including Writing in Large Courses." *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines*, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004, pp. 145-161.

For more information, please contact Corey at csf45@wildcats.unh.edu.

It is useful to recognize that almost all writing occurs in some sort of externally determined and possibly artificial context. Consequently, we need to examine exactly how the context of classroom writing is both similar to and different from other common discourse situations. —*Les Perelman*

Student Citation Habits and the Landscape of Authority
—**Susanmarie Harrington**

Students arrive in college prepared not only by high school curriculum standards but also by their experience of reading and writing in the world. In school, the details of citation systems carry authority. Out of school, other strategies help readers evaluate information. Material on the web provides links rather than formal citations. Journalists don't use parenthetical citation systems to indicate where their information comes from—they simply identify it in the text by putting the source's name and qualification. Graphs and charts, seen in posters, pamphlets, textbooks or journalistic sources, may have a legend identifying the organization that supplied the data. Nonfiction books have varied styles for citation—from copious footnotes, extended lists of sources at the back, to a list of works consulted without any attempt to map where they influenced the book. Sometimes, experts supply information without citing sources: Reputable food bloggers dispense authoritative information about, say, how to safely can produce without necessarily linking to or identifying the scientific sources for those recommendations Outside of school, there are many ways to convey credibility and indicate relationships to sources used for a piece.

Writing with authority is complicated and needs to be learned anew in each situation: successful writing isn't just about following rules, but about establishing connections among readers and writers. Writing with sources is about participating in ongoing conversations, situated in the complex, messy politics of social networks.

Excerpted From The Following Open Source Text:

Harrington, Susanmarie. "Citing Sources Is a Basic Skill Learned Early On." *Bad Ideas About Writing*, p. 242–246, West Virginia University Libraries, textbooks.lib.wvu.edu/badideas/badideasaboutwriting-book.pdf.

Ask Matt:

Your writing concerns addressed by our very own Matt Switliski

I would like to incorporate more writing into my courses, but high enrollments make me wary. How can I bring writing into a large course without sacrificing all my available time? —Crunched by Caps

Integrating writing into a course structure *is* time intensive. Simply reading student work takes far more time than checking answers, to say nothing of designing assignments that use writing meaningfully or providing comments that guide students through the process. Thankfully, scholars have devised strategies for weaving writing into large courses; I've summarized some of the major suggestions here. The Writing Program is also available to consult with faculty on these practices, so please get in touch to discuss writing in your courses.

Less Is More

One of the most common teaching models in large courses has the instructor delivering information to the students throughout the course. At the mid-point and then at the end of the term, students produce papers making use of the information they have acquired, often with the final paper being the larger of the two. Rather than these one-shot, high-stakes/high-effort writing tasks, consider shorter, more frequent writing assignments.

Gottschalk and Hjortshoj describe a number of examples such as summaries of readings, explanations of central concepts, and research exercises (150). These brief write-ups range from a paragraph to 2 or 3 pages. You can also use these pieces to take the temperature of the class; if most students seem to misunderstand a major idea, you can adjust your instruction to address the confusion, saving some effort when students write about the topic. Writing frequently will also keep students engaged in the practice of writing over time, which is more beneficial than one or two isolated writing events that students may produce the night before the due date.

Read (and Grade) Selectively

Not all student writing must pass before your eyes, nor must it all be converted into points toward the final grade. Different kinds of writing demand different responses, whether that's graded, credit/no credit, comments (at different levels of depth), read, or not read. Take into account your goals for the course and the kinds of writing you're asking students to do; if writing feels tacked on or disconnected from context, you'll know it and so will the students. Let students know what feedback to expect from you and why.

Respond Efficiently

Reading through a paper and commenting on each and every issue as it occurs can take the better part of an hour (or more), never mind if you decide to include an endnote synthesizing your feedback and/or explaining the grade. Let's not even discuss sentence-level matters. In a large class, this model is not sustainable. Gottschalk and Hjortshoj recommend reading through papers while keeping a list of general patterns. Rather than commenting on each instance on each paper, compile a handout to describe and address the common patterns with the class, freeing you to comment on what's distinct about a given paper (154). Bean claims that your time is better spent commenting on drafts instead of final products so that students can make use of feedback rather than just noting the grade and moving on. It also helps to limit your comments to a few specific issues; this way you save time and you can explain what's most critical to revision. Beyond the above methods, rubrics can streamline the response process. Rubrics do have limitations, but they can also help clarify expectations and offer students more information than a lone grade (312-314).

Experiment with Student Roles

Students typically work in isolation in school, but in many professions teamwork and collaboration are standard. Before students make the transition to the professional world, you can encourage them to work together in the classroom. Peer review, for example, can shift to fellow students the obligation to respond. Group projects can also cut down on the number of papers turned in as well as present an opportunity for cooperation. Of course, it's not just as simple as telling students to exchange papers or make a project together. These activities must be structured: communicate your expectations to students and, if possible, establish protocols in class. Bean in particular discusses groups and their benefits.

Obviously, a single column can't cover all the possibilities across contexts and disciplines. In fact, these suggestions, though general, will likely need to be adapted for your specific circumstances—the subject you teach, the size of the course, your course goals. In light of such considerations, writing can become an integral part of effectively teaching in large classes. Good luck!

Works Cited

Bean, John C. "Coaching the Writing Process and Handling the Paper Load." *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, Second Edition, Jossey-Bass, 2011, pp. 290-316.

Gottschalk, Katherine, and Keith Hjortshoj. "Strategies for Including Writing in Large Courses." *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines*, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004, pp. 145-161.

He wrote very fluently, but was slow and scrupulous in correcting.

—Samuel Johnson (Life of Addison)

The Grammar Box: Vague Pronouns

Matt Switliski, Associate Director, University Writing Programs

Pronouns are tricky. It must be in their nature, standing in for something else. Maybe all the substituting causes confusion. No one can agree just how many kinds we have. (I've seen lists ranging from 7 to 10.) To keep things simple, we won't cover all the nuances of pronoun use here. Instead we'll focus on one of the more common problems in student writing, the vague *this* (which also applies to vague *that*, *these*, and *those*). Chances are you've read student writing that included something like the following:

> *Fred often called out sick. This made his boss angry.*

Pronouns take the place of a noun. In the above example, *Fred* is the only noun in the first sentence. The *this*, however, does not refer to Fred but to Fred's behavior of calling out sick—an idea that a lonely pronoun can't replace. People use sentences like the Fred example all the time in speech, and rarely does anyone notice. In formal writing, however, such lapses can erode the text's clarity and the writer's credibility. To address the problem, writers have essentially two options: restructuring the sentence(s) or adding a noun to *this*.

> *Fred's frequent tendency to call out sick made his boss angry. [Restructured]*

> *Fred often called out sick. This habit made his boss angry. [Noun,"habit," added after pronoun]*

Some instructors take a hardline approach to stamping out vague pronouns, forbidding the use of *this/that/these/those* unless followed by a noun. That kind of blanket rule can cause confusion in instances that call for an unaccompanied *that* (as in this very sentence). Forbidding students from beginning any sentence with *this* (unless followed by a noun) is another local rule. This can be problematic, however, and cause redundancy if the referent in the previous sentence closely precedes the pronoun (as in this sentence). Another possibility would be to address the issue in written comments or individual conferences so that the advice is targeted toward the specific students for whom *this*, *that*, and their ilk are a problem.

For more information, please contact Matt at mjr254@wildcats.unh.edu.

A little inaccuracy sometimes saves tons of explanation. —H. H. Munro

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Past Perfect: *Director's Notes*

Ed Mueller, Director, University Writing Programs

In the last newsletter, I mentioned *Faculty Senate Motion XXI-M16* in connection to NEASC requirements. In this piece, we revisit the motion to discuss a recommendation about writing-intensive course management. It reads, in part, "There must be a method to ensure accountability and a mechanism to eliminate WI courses that do not meet the requirements. As for the latter, we recommend a mandated sunset period, whereby every five years a department has to review and resubmit courses, with syllabi, that are to maintain the WI designation." The Writing Committee has been charged with proposing a method to operationalize this recommendation, with intended implementation in the next AY.

Although this action extends from a finding in the recent external review of the Writing Program, it also picks up on what has been mentioned in other studies over time at UNH, that this kind of curricular attention to WI course management, as part of the "department planning" envisioned in the Writing Requirement, doesn't seem to have taken hold. For instance, in a survey distributed in support of the 2016 UNH Writing Program Self-Study, 64% of responding departments indicated that there was no structure for revalidating or managing WI attributes over time. In short, WI course designation seems to define the extent of WI course management in many cases.

This absence of a more connected approach to WI course creation and management has been identified as a contributor to other issues such as large enrollment WI courses (growing beyond their original models), the attenuation of WI tenets over time, and the expansion of the WI curriculum (850+ courses and still growing).

Regardless of its final form, any method for revalidating the WI attribute will simply wind up replicating the current status quo if mainly treated as an administrative action. The real intent is for it to be part of an authentic process, connected to a wider discussion of department writing goals, student learning outcomes, and the place of writing in the major (in WI courses and others).