WRITE FREE OR DIE

IN THIS ISSUE

Readers and Scanners

Ed Mueller, Director, University Writing Programs

Until a computer can understand the difference between "The roast is ready to eat" and "The tiger is ready to eat," computers will be unable to offer any meaningful assessment of writing. That day will undoubtedly arrive, but it is still in the far distant future.

--William Condon

A piece in *Inside Higher Ed*, "AI Arms Race," related that major corporations are increasingly using AI-based applicant tracking systems to scan and rank resumes. The ramifications are significant. For the applicant, tending to correctness and conforming to the conventions of the field may no longer be sufficient. These AI readers score passages and structures based on language algorithms, privileging (and punishing) the use of keywords, marks of punctuation, and other parameters. How they are programmed to do so, however, is not shared, nor do they provide feedback. Thus, applicants may be submitting things that *look* like resumes, which came from another time and are designed to be read by people, but which are being scanned (I hesitate to say "read") in a very different way by machines. As a remedy, college career centers have been increasingly turning to VMock™, an AI-based resume scanning platform that "ensures" that resumes are ready for these applicant tracking systems.

Some career centers are using VMock™ as a screening tool, only seeing students after their materials have achieved a certain threshold score. The rationale for this practice generally runs that this frees counselors to spend less time on "basics" and more time on the "meaningful" things in the resume. At a glance, this seems practical. Closer examination, however, suggests that this approach relies on the false dichotomy between substance and mechanics. One career center even advises students in creative fields to prepare two resumes, one with design elements (ostensibly for human readers) and one with a "conventional" layout (ostensibly for the machine reader). Drawing a hard line between substance and mechanics, inferring that they can be read apart from one another, runs contrary to how language works. Writing is holistic, both in generation and consumption.

Future Tense: *Upcoming Writing Across the Curriculum Events*

Spring Semester WAC Brown Bag (Via Zoom): TBA
A round-table event for faculty to share information and discuss writing in their courses. All faculty interested in discussing writing in their courses welcome. Worth 1 CEITL Participation Point. Watch for an announcement.

Writing-Invested Faculty Retreat (June 5-8, 2022). Covid-19 may have interrupted our plans for '20 and '21, but we are scheduled to return to the Mount Washington Hotel in 2022 for the next iteration of the WI faculty retreat. Watch for news in Fall of 2021.

WAC(ky) People

UNH Writing Program

Ed Mueller, Director
Scott Lasley, Associate Director
Samantha Donnelly, Associate Director

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CHHS— Lauren Ferguson **2022**
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UNHM—C.C. Hendricks   **2023**
(English, Director of First-Year Writing Program)

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By examining the VMock™ scoring model, we can glean more insight into the definition of less-important basics. According to the *Inside Higher Education* piece, a resume in VMock loses 15 points for using parenthesis around an area code; a section title like "Leadership & Activities" is fine, but a section titled "Leadership and Activities" is not. For bullet points, dots are fine but dashes or arrows are not. Text boxes are also a negative. In fact, none of these are actual errors or represent fundamental problems in standard written English (SWE). Put another way, an average reader would probably not be distracted or even notice them, particularly if integrated into a consistently formatted document. For the sake of argument, let's accept that these are important tenets of resumes. If so, then they (and others like them) are important threshold genre conventions that would seem to merit talking to students about.

At this point, I need to say that the object of this essay is not to critique career center practice or the state of play in corporate hiring, neither of which I would pretend to be qualified to comment upon. I also need to add that something like VMock™ itself is not the issue. Like any tool, it is how it is integrated into any assistance model that matters--for instance, not all career centers use it as a screening device but in combination with other practices. The larger point is that this vignette provides a useful illustration of the potential unintended side effects of AI use in connection with student writing.

It should also be pointed out that I am not resistant to technology in pedagogy, or to the role that AI and machine-readers may have. In fact, I think it is important to recognize that writing to machines is actually nothing new. For decades, we have been teaching students how to write to search engines as an integral component of research methods. The same applies to when we tell students to run spell and grammar checker. In both cases, though, we understand that the AI is not the actual intended audience. Further, we understand the differences in how they "read" and provide feedback and how human readers do. The problem comes when we place the AI in the role of intended audience, or conflate the way that AI and humans digest language. I won't pretend to have the answer to how much AI is too much or too little, or when it stops being a tool and starts becoming an issue. However, I think that it would be safe to suggest that we at least pause to gain a full understanding of how any particular AI tool works and how best to incorporate it into our aims for student writing.

Burke, Lilah. "AI Arms Race." *Inside Higher Ed*, 17 Dec. 2019,
        https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/12/17/résumé-scanners-gain-ground-college-career-centers.
Condon, William. "Large-Scale Assessment, Locally-Developed Measures, and Automated Scoring of Essays: Fishing for Red Herrings?." *Assessing Writing* 18.1 (2013): 100-108.

Ask Bear:

Your teaching concerns addressed by our very own Bear Donnelly

As Transposed from Paws to Person by Samantha Donnelly, UNH Writing Programs

This year has been really difficult on students and instructors alike. With the constant changes from online instruction to in-person instruction and the added elimination of spring break for most colleges and universities across the country…my students are stressed and often checked-out. To be honest, I'm tired, too. Can you suggest any ways that I might infuse some relief?
    --Exhausted Educator

It's no secret that education looks completely different compared to years past. Many instructors have had to learn new technology, reevaluate their curriculum, and learn to be flexible with the continuously changing circumstances we are living in. Don't get me wrong, I love it when the adults in my life work from home—it allows more time for belly rubs—but, I also know they are having a *ruff* time. At the same time, students have also had to relearn what it means to be a student. And all are suffering from "zoom fatigue" along with associated side effects.

A recent article in *Inside Higher Ed* pointed out that even before the pandemic students had been experiencing an increased amount of stress and anxiety. It is not too *far-fetched* to understand that the challenges of the last year have exacerbated these issues. Leaving aside the discussion of the role of mental health, in this piece we'll *fetch* things that faculty may do with writing to promote well-being. Chief among them would be to build in opportunities for reflection.

To equally over-taxed faculty, this might sound like a lot of additional effort. However, there are some readily available writing models that could be used to provide an outlet for students.

For this explanation, I turn to UNH's own Donald Murray. In 1972 he published a piece entitled "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product" in which he suggests that writing "is the process of discovery through language…what we should know and what we feel about what we know through language" (2). Following from this, informal or reflective writing would be a way to provide an outlet. For example, you might ask students to briefly communicate the challenges or successes they are having with a block of instruction. Stepping beyond of the limits of coursework, you might invite word games. For instance, students might be asked to provide a "word of the day" along with a reason for their choice; students might be asked to pick an animal to identify with (extra credit for *dogs*!) in terms of how they feel that they are inhabiting the course, with updates as the semester progresses (perhaps morphing into other creatures or taking on new traits, like taking flight). These activities aren't intended to be challenging, but to generate "authentic" writing--which is what will also keep them from being perceived as "busy work."

This form of recreational and reflective writing also comes with some *pawsitive* learning objectives. While such small reflective breaks would be helpful for

mental health, they also strengthen learning. Kathleen Blake Yancey's book *A Rhetoric of Reflection* explores these benefits: "Through the practice of reflection, we draw on what is culturally known and infuse, interweave, integrate it with what we as individuals know…to make new knowledge that draws from the extant but is not a replication of it, that is, instead, unique, a knowledge only each one of us can make as it is in dialogue with what is" (11). You're *barking up the wrong tree* if you think I'm suggesting you add additional assignments to grade on top of your current workload.

Keep in mind that this is informal writing: you will want to make it accountable, but it needn't be graded, scored, or even marked. This is writing for its own sake. You might even try writing along with your students and sharing your own perspectives. After all, it's always more fun to play *fetch* with others!

Horne, Laure and Davis, Kelly. "Why Aren't More Students Seeking Mental Health Support?.'" *Inside Higher Ed*. 31 March 2021. https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/03/31/how-campuses-can-encourage-students-seek-mental-health-support-opinion

Newkirk, Thomas., et al. *The Essential Don Murray : Lessons from America's Greatest Writing Teacher* . Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2009.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "Introduction: Contextualizing Reflection." *A Rhetoric of Reflection*, edited by Kathleen Blake Yancey, University Press of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, 2016, pp. 3–20.

For more information, please email Bear at samantha.donnelly@grad.unh.edu

Readers want our pages to look very much like pages they have seen before. Why? This is because they themselves have a tough job to do and they need our help.

--Kurt Vonnegut

Look Ahead
Writing-Invested
Faculty Retreat
June 5-8, 2022
Mount Washington, Hotel

Contact: Meaghan.Dittrich@unh.edu
or   Samantha.DeFlitch@unh.edu

Teaching Multi-Modal Assignments in Online Writing Courses

Excerpt from *Foundational Practices of Online Writing Instruction* (Open Source)

Student Assumptions

Students often come to OWI [online writing instruction] with even more traditional expectations than their instructors: writing equals print essays; writing equals grammar. Thus, another aspect of needs assessment includes determining the expectations students have about the course, about what they will be learning, and about their own motivation to be successful. For writing instructors, some of the initial icebreaking activities used within face-to-face writing courses, such as asking students to share their definitions and attitudes about writing, and what tools they use to "write," are critical in an OWI environment. Students may not see the texting, Facebooking, Tweeting, Instagraming, and YouTubing they do as a form of either writing or multimodal composing, but helping them to see the way technology transforms our collective definitions and assumptions of what a writing course is supposed to be is as crucial to their success as to the instructor's.

Assignments and Activities

One key to success in multimodal assignment construction is to allow organic opportunities for multimodal composing—that is, to not integrate new media technology for its own sake but because the development of a visual argument or an audio essay represents a rhetorically appropriate response to the assignment context. These genres are not necessarily new to OWI but may involve transforming an alphabetic-only option to one that provides students the opportunity to meaningfully assemble digital artifacts to compose a multimodal response for a specific purpose and audience.

Blair, Kristine, "Teaching Multimodal Assignments in OWI Contexts" *Foundational Practices of Online Writing Instruction*. Hewett, Beth L., and DePew, Kevin Eric (Eds.). (2015). The WAC Clearinghouse; Parlor Press. https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/owi/ 484.

The Grammar Box: Conjunctions

Scott Lasley, Associate Director, UNH Writing Program (sel2005@wildcats.unh.edu)

Conjunctions connect words, phrases, and clauses. Today, we'll focus on two common types: coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. In order to get started, we have to first think about the difference between **coordination and subordination:** A coordinating conjunction is single purpose: it joins equal or balanced elements. A subordinating conjunction is dual purpose: it joins and shows relationships between joined elements.

Coordinating Conjunctions: and, or, but, yet, so, for, and nor.

Most are familiar with coordinating conjunctions used to create compound sentences: two independent clauses (each with a subject and a verb) joined by a coordinating conjunction and a comma:

Two Separate Independent Clauses:	Joined by a Coordinating Conjunction With Comma:
I went to the store. I went to the gas station.	*I went to the store, **and** I went to the gas station.*

Here is an example of a sentence using coordinating conjunctions in two different ways:

*I needed to study for exams without distractions, **so** I packed up my things **and** went to the library.*

"So" with a comma connects two independent clauses; "and" connects two phrases.

Subordinating Conjunctions: after, although, because, once, since, though, and while

Subordinating conjunctions can introduce clauses and signal relationships. They can convey a cause-effect relationship, a contrast, or some other connection. The following sentence is an example of a subordinating conjunction being used to a cause-effect relationship between two ideas:

Once the semester is over, I'm going on vacation.

"Once" signals a cause (the semester being over) and an effect (I'm going on vacation).

Additional Resources

Conjunction Junction Music Video (Highly Recommended!) Connors Writing Center Conjunction Handout

Image from D23.com, *The Official Disney Fan Club* "Life Lessons from Schoolhouse Rock." https://d23.com/life-lessons-from-schoolhouse-rock/

Dangling Modifier: MLA 9th Edition

Scott Lasley, Associate Director, University Writing Programs

Later this month, MLA will update its style guide to the 9th Edition. This edition touts minor changes compared to those of the 8th. That being said, there are still some important additions. Several changes clarify additions introduced in the MLA 8th Edition, and there are guidelines to using more inclusive language. What follows is an outline of three areas where some of the significant changes are happening: expanded clarification of the citation template system, new guidance on inclusive language, and guidance for capitalization and punctuation of quotes.

Clarification and Examples for the Template System

Perhaps the most substantial update, the MLA 9th Edition provides new clarification and examples for using the (then) new citation template system introduced in the 8th Edition. For example, the different core elements, like author and location, are more clearly defined with multiple examples. Each core element also includes a "How to Style It" section that explains how the core element works in the actual citation. While the basic approach to developing a citation is the same as the previous edition, these expanded explanations provide a clearer understanding of how to use the template system. To further aid in utilizing the template system, MLA 9th Edition also provides a comprehensive appendix of citation examples for a variety of print and digital sources. This useful reference guide will be a welcome aid for instructors who teach or require students to use MLA citations in their classes.

Inclusive Language

Along similar lines as APA's recent edition, MLA 9th Edition also provides new guidance on using inclusive language.

Specifically, this new edition provides guidance on making references to identity relevant, discussing diverse populations, choosing terms of identity that respect the subjects, and choosing appropriate pronouns. For example, MLA 9th Edition supports the use of the singular "they" as a means of respecting a subject's gender identity. This new guidance not only provides writers with support for describing and discussing individuals respectfully, but it also supports writers' efforts to describe research subjects and individuals in more accurate ways.

Capitalization and Punctuation of Quotations

Lastly, MLA provides new guidance on capitalization and punctuation of quotes. Specifically, 9th Edition provides clarifying language on when to start a quotation with an upper- or lower-case letter and when to use a comma or colon to introduce a quotation. For example, when a quotation is introduced by a *verb of saying* (e.g. writes, states, explains) that is integrated into the text's prose, it requires a comma after the verb of saying. When introducing a block quote, however, it requires a colon. Along with this, the rule for capitalizing the first word of a direct quotation is further defined as depending upon how it is integrated into the writer's prose. If the prose uses a verb of saying to introduce the quotation, then the first word of the quote is capitalized, regardless of the case used in the original source. As before, square brackets are used to signal that the case has been changed from the original source. MLA 9th Edition is expected to be released later this month. You can find an overview of all of the changes in this new edition here: https://style.mla.org/ninth-edition-whats-new/.
For more information, contact sel2005@wildcats.unh.edu

And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.

--William Saffire (Fumblerule of Grammar #13)

Faculty Profile: C.C. Hendricks, UNH-M

This past year, the University of New Hampshire welcomed C.C. Hendricks to the UNH, Manchester faculty. C.C. came from Syracuse University where she graduated with a PhD in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric. While at Syracuse University, she taught First-Year Writing, Second-Year Writing, and Professional Writing. During her time there, she also worked at the campus writing center and served as the Director of TA Education.

As an Assistant Professor in English Studies and the Director of First-Year Writing at UNH Manchester, C.C. teaches several classes, including ENGL 401(First-Year Writing) and ENGL 710 (Teaching Writing). Out of all the classes she has taught throughout her career, she explains that her current ENGL 710 course has given her a different perspective and is one of her favorites. Given that this course is for students who are considering teaching English Language Arts (ELA) as a career, C.C. finds herself really diving into the theory and praxis of teaching writing much more so than when she was mentoring teaching assistants in the past, where her responsibilities involved working on writing from an administrative standpoint. The course uses a process approach to try out varied literacy activities while studying the art of teaching writing. She has found that this class has been beneficial to her as well. Through her students, some who are already teaching ELA in grades 6-12, she has been able to connect and gain an understanding of the surrounding New Hampshire community and school system.

Although moving and starting a new job during a pandemic has had its complications, C.C. is thoroughly enjoying being a member of the UNH community. She has found that people from all over UNH have gone out of their way to reach out to her. While all of these interactions have been via Zoom, she still feels very connected to the UNH community. Another of her favorite aspects of being at UNH has been working with her students. She describes them as "amazing" and has genuinely enjoyed working with each of them.

C.C. says one of the biggest challenge teaching this past year has centered around providing support for her students. Like many, she acknowledges the sense of overwhelming fatigue that many students are encountering and she constantly questions how she can better support them. She tries to keep her pedagogy flexible so that it can addresses the unique demands of teaching under current conditions while also responding to student needs. She's been focusing of managing the balance to ensure that her students have the ability to meet personal and academic goals while still being mindful of their struggles.

When asked what advice she could give to writers, C.C. stresses the importance of asking for help. She explains how, "The perspective someone else can bring your writing is invaluable" because oftentimes we are limited by our own perspective. Acknowledging that she has to constantly remind herself to pause and get other perspectives when writing herself, she understands that students can find this particularly challenging. Nevertheless, she emphasizes students need not struggle with their writing alone.

In addition to her (somewhat recent) lifestyle change in relocating to New Hampshire, C.C. is also a mother to an 18 month old. While enjoying the slowly warming weather of our New Hampshire spring, she is currently working on an article about feminist rhetoric.

Samantha Donnelly, Assoc Dir UNH Writing Programs

No style is good that is not fit to be spoken or read aloud with effect.

--William Hazlitt

Past Perfect: *Director's Notes*

Ed Mueller, Director, University Writing Programs

Groucho Marx as Captain Spaulding

[Hello, I Must be Going]

For colleagues who may not be aware, I will be leaving UNH in June via the Covid Enhanced Retirement Program. By defintion, any director is an advocate for their program's agenda. Although I have played this role for the Writing Program during my time here, I must at last confess that I have been doing so dishonestly: instead, I have been secretly advancing the UNH agenda:

As the cornerstone of any higher education, academic and disciplinary literacy is the concern of the entire faculty and the whole university curriculum. Understanding that literacy is a long-term developmental process, the university community is committed to the following goals for student writing and learning.
•Students should use writing as an intellectual process to learn material, to discover, construct, and order meaning.
•Students should learn to write effectively in various academic and disciplinary genres for professional and lay audiences.
•Students should learn to display competence with the generic features and conventions of academic language.
Writing assignments which support course and curricular objectives are strongly encouraged in all courses, whether they are designated Writing Intensive or not.

As the above excerpt from the Writing Program Charter indicates, the vision for writing is owned by the entire UNH academic community, and this has been the guiding ethos of the program. Furthermore, this vision endures, resident in culture of writing across the institution, which preceded my arrival and will continue after my departure. This is the real continuity.

For those who may not recognize it, the title of this note comes from the contradictory tag line of Captain Spaulding's arrival song in the film, *Animal Crackers*. In our focus on day-to-day business at UNH, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that we are only serving a term here, however long, as part of something larger than ourselves. As such, the day we arrive is also the day we begin departing. In this light, perhaps the tag line isn't so contradictory. After fourteen years, it certainly feels as if I'm still saying hello as I pen this good-bye.

I would like to express my thanks to all whom I've had the honor (often the pleasure) of meeting and working with during my tenure at UNH, and am confident that you will extend the same collegiality and support that I enjoyed to Meaghan Dittrich, who will be assuming the directorship in July.

Last Word

I write by ear. I tried writing with the typewriter, but I found it too unwieldy.

--Groucho Marx