THE MANUAL OF THE WRITING CENTER AT SAINT MICHAEL'S COLLEGE
2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface *page 2*

Introduction *page 3*

Chapter 1: Writing as a Process *page 6*

Chapter 2: Tutoring as a Process *page 21*

Chapter 3: Setting the Tone *page 32*

Chapter 4: Tutoring Itself *page 38*

Chapter 5: Solving Writing Problems *page 50*

Chapter 6: The Rules of the Writing Center *page 72*

Chapter 7: Language Differences *page 89*

Chapter 8: Learning Styles, Learning Differences *page 103*

Preface to the 2009 Edition of the **Writing Center Manual**

Dear Coaches in Training:

What you have in your hands is the first major revision of the *Writing Center Manual* since it was first written six years ago.

Over those years, both this course and the Writing Center have evolved. This year, after many years, we have finally given up our primary text, *The Practical Tutor,* by Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith. I still consider it the best text written about tutoring writing, but its length and its style have dated it, and the years have taught us which of its strategies and concepts are most applicable to our own center. Thus, in this new edition of the *Writing Center Manual,* I have squeezed out the excess of the *PT* and provided you with what I think is the essence of good tutoring. We owe a debt of gratitude to *The Practical Tutor* but here, its ideas are presented with our own twist and understanding, as we have come to practice them in our center.

This edition of the manual, however, is still very much a draft, and I offer it up to you for feedback. There are, no doubt, redundancies—please point them out to me. There are, also no doubt, places where more explanation or examples could be added—point those out, too. Whole topics might be missing—I'm sure we'll discover them together. And there are probably numerous typos and other errors that I couldn't catch before it was time to go to press; for each of those you report to me, you'll receive a quarter point extra credit (but only if you're the first to report it!). In other words, this is a work in progress, and I need your help to finish it.

In one other way this is still very much a draft, and that is the order of the chapters and the timing of the reading of them. Ideally, I would like new coaches to read the entire manual *before* coming to class—but that would be overwhelming. Ideally, also, I would like us to be able to devote a whole class to each chapter; unfortunately, that's impractical.

So I have settled on your first reading the Lucy Calkins book, which—although it might not seem that way at first—is the best introduction you could ever have to all the principles of teaching writing. Then we'll read the first six chapters of this manual, which will position you well to start tutoring on February 1, along with help from *Tutoring Writing,* a new book to me. The final two *Manual* chapters, or rather their topics, will then take up the majority of the rest of the semester, along with the ESL and style texts.

Please let me know, at the end of the term, how well this order worked for you. In the meantime, as you start to coach, keep in mind that coaching is one of those things that must be learned "on the job." All the reading in the world can only introduce you to the concepts; only coaching itself can teach you how to do it.

Thanks for taking this step toward becoming a coach, and thanks in advance for the valuable feedback I know you'll give.

Liz Inness-Brown
1/10/09

Introduction

The Saint Michael's College Writing Center was established in 1987 with the goal of helping students to improve their writing by providing a place to go for feedback from peers. That goal survives to this date, but how we achieve it has evolved a great deal. In the beginning, the only requirement for becoming a coach was to be an English major who had workstudy. Now we have a process that includes faculty recommendation, an entrance test, a four-credit training course, and continuing education through an internship seminar. We've learned a lot about coaching and writing over the years, and this manual is an attempt to compress that knowledge into a small space so that it can be passed on from generation to generation of writing coaches. Both the director and past coaches have contributed to this manual and—in the true spirit of the writing process and the Writing Center itself—our goal is to revisit it annually to make sure that it stays current with our philosophy and our practice.

As you read, you may wonder how you'll ever be able to remember so much information as you begin to coach. Of course, you can't. It's best to think of this manual as a reference to which you can return again and again as you go about the business of learning how to coach, the only way you really can: by coaching. As you read now, make notes, try to absorb what you can, but most of all, familiarize yourself with the contents. Then, as you start coaching, feel free to return here to review issues and ideas as they arise for you.

Our Philosophy: Teach the Writer, Not the Writing

In Lucy McCormick Calkins's book *Lessons from a Child*, Calkins describes two years of research into how a third/fourth-grade class and their teachers progress as they learn to write and to teach writing to one another. At one point, Susie, the "child" of Calkins's title, finally completes her story "Snuggling with My Father" and pastes it into the little booklet that contains her finished writing. Calkins observes:

> "All that work," Susie said happily, "for seven tiny pages."
> "Same with my writing," Diane said. "Like at home—we have to get about a million buckets of sap before we get the tiniest bit of maple syrup."
> But to Pat Howard the classroom teacher, the final pieces sometimes didn't seem like Grade A syrup. Without jesting, she would groan, "All that work—for this." Then I would remind Pat that she wasn't teaching pieces of writing, but young writers. No matter what the final pieces were like, none of the drafts, none of the experiments were a waste, for each left a mark on the writer, if not always on the writing. I didn't necessarily believe what I was saying, I was mostly trying to cheer her up. Only now, as I pore over the data, does it occur to me that I was right. (73-75)

The first semester that we used Lucy Calkins's book in the Teaching Writing class, a student asked, "What does this have to do with college students?" After all, Calkins's book focuses on children eight and nine years old, and the writers we see in the Writing

Center are usually eighteen and up; certainly, this student implied, the problems of coaching and teaching writing would be very different at this level. In fact, though, I chose Calkins's book exactly because I was impressed with the parallels: between how these children learned to write and how adults continue to learn; between how these elementary school teachers come to teach, and how contemporary college writing instructors do; between how these children collaborate with one another on their writing, and how, in my vision, we ought to collaborate with one another in the Writing Center.

But more than anything I was impressed with this single idea: that when we help someone learn to write, whether in the classroom, the Writing Center, or elsewhere, we should be teaching the writer, not the writing. We should be more concerned with empowering writers to write well, on their own, than with producing individual, superficially correct pieces of prose style. We should be more concerned with learning than with grades. We should, in other words, delay the immediate gratification of "fixing it up"—so easy for those of us already confident about writing—for the long-term benefits of teaching our writers how, and why, to fix their work up themselves.

"Teach the writer, not the writing," then, has become the guiding principle of our Writing Center, undergirded by two other of Calkins's main ideas: that writing is *a conversation, a collaboration* between writer and reader, and thus can benefit greatly from "conferencing," and that above all, a writing teacher must respect a writer's *ownership* of the writing. Thus, in our writing center, it's very rare for a coach to sit and read a writer's draft to herself; instead, after some conversation about writing and the assignment, we read the draft aloud with frequent pauses for discussion about content, organization, or style. Sometimes, even, we might *not* read the draft; we might be able to help simply by talking with the writer.

And so of course, in our writing center, if there are changes to be made, the writer—not the coach—decides when, where, and how to make them; the writer—not the coach—holds the pencil or uses the keyboard. Our job is not to correct, write, revise, or edit *for* writers, but to teach them the skills to do that themselves. Yes, we do help writers identify problems—but mostly by giving genuine "readerly" responses and asking lots of questions. And yes, when writers truly can't see the problems in their writing, we do "teach directly," but even as we do that, we strive to protect their ownership and make sure that, each step of the way, they are collaborating with us.

Like most principles, these are not always easy to live by. Learning to write is a slow process, and sometimes, both our writers and the faculty who refer them to us expect instant improvement. Some of our writers drop in to solve an immediate problem and rarely return for a second or third conference on the same paper (although they often bring in other papers). When they do return, often it's not at the same time of day or week, and so they work with a different coach, and we don't get to see the progress that would be our primary reward for delaying gratification. Instead, in fact, despite our efforts to make our purpose and goals clear, we are sometimes faced with a writer who, when he does not get the instant gratification he came for, becomes disgruntled and does not return at all. Discouraged by such conditions, coaches are often tempted to go for the "quick fix"—to give the writer what he wants, rather than what we sense he needs.

Partly these problems result from the system in which we find ourselves. Once students fulfill SMC's writing proficiency requirement, some of them are satisfied with "adequate" grades and don't see the value of writing well. Some faculty give up hope of

seeing truly good writing, and so reduce their standards, which in turn makes the time and energy required to learn to write truly well seem wasted. Thus, some writers come in only when writing presents a problem they can't surmount with their usual tactics: when the teacher's requirements seem incomprehensible; when the threat of a failing grade looms overhead; when required to by some outside agency; when English is their second language or feels like it; or when they are writing something that *does* matter, like a letter of application for a job, a scholarship, or graduate school. In short, many of our writers come to us in desperation, and often at the last minute; to them, we represent a last hope, a final resort.

How difficult it can be, then, to create what is called the "teachable moment," to slow down the writer's steamroller of need, to involve the writer in the kind of dialogue necessary for her to *learn the skills* that will prevent this desperation from arising again. Our writers are like people who don’t go to the doctor until the pain is so bad they can't stand it, and so we are faced with emergency surgery instead of preventive medicine, which is our idealistic goal.

Nevertheless, by keeping certain principles in mind—and by remembering what Lucy Calkins told Pat Howard—we *can* have a lasting effect on our writers; we *can* teach them, even if we on occasion have to do so almost against their will; we *can* help them experience the value and pleasure of writing for themselves and not for a grade; we *can* teach them to care. It takes a tremendous will on our part—but if we stick to our guns and don't allow ourselves to be swayed by a writer's desperation, we can do it.

How? How do we begin, and how far do we go? How do we tell when, and with whom, to do what? Over the years, experience has taught us a good many strategies that really work. In 1994, the first internship seminar class devised a self-evaluation instrument called “The Eight Principles of Good Coaching Practice.” In the instrument, the coaches listed specific strategies for coaching that they had found to be useful, effective, and in keeping with our philosophy. Those strategies fell into eight categories:

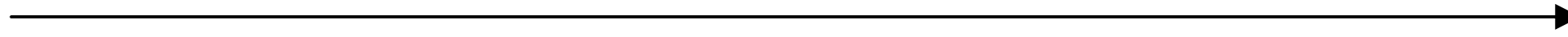
1. **Good coaching practice requires understanding and promoting good writing.**
2. **Good coaching practice requires creating an atmosphere of comfort, trust, and friendliness.**
3. **Good coaching practice requires understanding and responding to the writer's needs.**
4. **Good coaching practice requires giving useful and appropriate feedback.**
5. **Good coaching practice requires following a stepwise process.**
6. **Good coaching practice requires respect of an author's ownership.**
7. **Good coaching practice requires teaching writing as a recursive process.**
8. **Good coaching practice supports and promotes the reputation of the Writing Center.**

In the following chapters, we expand on many of these principles; others will be clarified as we read additional books and do additional exercises. Study these principles, embrace them, and practice them, and you too can be that someone who changes the life of a fellow student: a good writing coach.

Chapter 1
Writing as a Process

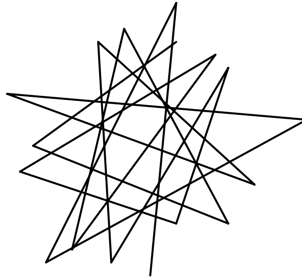
Exercise: Before you read this chapter, take ten minutes to freewrite about your own writing process. Think of a specific, recent, typical assignment. How did you approach it? What did you do before you sat down to write, while you were writing, and after you had written? Be as detailed as possible.

Many inexperienced writers—and even some experienced ones—believe that writers—*real* writers just sit down and, well, *write.* They imagine that real writers come to the task with all their ideas already formed, and from those ideas flow words, perfectly chosen, one after another, adding up to perfect sentences that fall into perfect paragraphs, in just the right order, until—*voila!*—the piece is finished. In other words, they imagine the writing process this way:



This is what is known as a *linear* process. Start at the beginning and keep going till you're done. Sure, maybe there's call for a little proofreading at the end; even real writers make mistakes. Or maybe there's room for a little editing, cutting a word here and there, maybe changing one or two, combining a couple of sentences. But essentially that's it: start, go, stop.

The reality of the writing process of the vast majority of writers—"real" or otherwise—looks more like this (as you'll recall from Calkins's book):



Messy, eh? That's what we call the "recursive" process. The word *recursive* comes from the root *recur,* which has these meanings: to go back in thought or discourse; to come up again for consideration; to come again to mind; to occur again after an interval or occur time after time. It describes the writing process because, as we write, we aren't just adding words one after the other to create sentences. We are:

- Collecting information, either from reading or from memory
- Planning, organizing, thinking about what comes next, what we might add later, what else we need to consider
- Developing—literally—our ideas, in the way photographs used to develop, the picture of what we want to say and what we believe or understand slowly becoming clearly only *as* we write.

Not only that, but as you wrote about your process, you probably realized that the writing process doesn't just happen when we're actually writing—it usually starts well beforehand and can continue even when we stop to eat lunch or go to the bathroom or chat with a friend. You get ideas for your writing in the shower, while you're walking, while you're reading the text you're going to be writing about; in fact, your writing process begins the moment you're given a task (or give yourself one), as your mind begins to work on the problem, consider the options, gather its thoughts.

Many researchers have created "models" to describe this process. A common one used in schools is "prewrite, write, rewrite." That's all well and good, but it still sounds pretty linear to me. I prefer Donald Murray's model, which I echoed above. Murray says that writing is a recursive process that involves three activities: collect, plan, and develop. These not only can happen in any order, but they happen over and over again, throughout the writing process. As we write one sentence, we might remember another detail we want to include (collecting), add it in and connect it to some other idea (developing), and then start to think about what else we might want to say about that (planning). We reread what we've just written (collecting) and make a connection to something else (developing), which we think we might be able to use for the ending (planning). And so on, and so forth—and often *all at once.*

Yet we can also say that "prewrite, write, rewrite" is accurate. Usually when you're given an assignment, a certain amount of collecting has to happen before you sit down to write; we could call that *pre-writing.* And when you sit down to *write* a draft, it's true that you "collect, plan, develop." So maybe Murray is just describing that process, the process that starts with deciding to write and ends with the draft we produce.

So what about "rewrite"? Where does that begin, and where does it end?

Donald Murray, as you've seen on the Writing Center wall, also said that "writing *is* revision." What we discover when we think about revision is that—when your writing is really cooking—it happens *throughout* the writing process. No one really writes without stopping, backtracking, revising, moving forward again. Not merely a matter of correcting, this kind of fluid "editing" is part and parcel of figuring out what you want to say. (For instance, just now originally I wrote: "This kind of fluid editing is part and parcel of figuring out what you want to say. It's not merely a matter of correcting." But I stopped myself, deleted the second sentence, and backtracked to add it, as a phrase now, to the beginning of the previous sentence, thus not only changing the sentences but also clarifying my meaning.) This kind of revision is part of *developing.* And the truth is, all revision is *developing.* When you move or cut a paragraph, add a section, rearrange

sentences, change words—you're still developing your ideas, trying to get them "right," trying to make a coherent whole out of many somewhat incoherent parts.

(If you've had the experience of starting a paper with one thesis or idea and having it evolve into another by the end, you know what I mean. You didn't make a *mistake* when you did that—you simply let the writing itself *teach you* about your topic. Changing your mind this way is evidence of the writing process at work, doing what it's supposed to do: help you to learn.)

So, the writing process turns out to be more like "prewrite, write/rewrite."

And sometimes it can actually be more like "prewrite/write/rewrite." The truth is, it's possible to sit down with absolutely NO idea (focus, topic) in your head and *write* your way to one. This is best described by Chris Anderson in his book *Free/Style.* (Included further on is a summary of the Free/Style method; we will try this in class.) Writing itself, if it's "free" enough, can be used as prewriting—can be used to help us find a topic or a focus, develop our ideas, and even come up with a structure or plan for our piece. And of course "collect, plan, develop" can describe the prewriting stage; certainly everyone who has done a research paper knows that collecting information, outlining a plan, and developing a thesis and argument can all be done before one even sits down to write.

So—how does this fact that writing is a recursive process relate to tutoring?

First of all, you can reassure your clients that they're not the only ones who don't get it right "the first time." It's reassuring to learn that writing is a messy process for everyone, even professional writers. To learn that there's no one right way to do go about it. To learn that making "mistakes" is a natural and *useful* part of the process, because from mistakes come many of our best ideas. (Who hasn't typed the wrong word only to discover that the wrong word is better than the word you thought was right?)

Second—and this is crucial—understanding the writing process and keeping it in mind as you tutor can allow you to diagnose your client's underlying problems. Each of the following examples is really a problem with writing *process,* not with writing skills:

- The client who has clearly plagiarized whole passages because he has not understood the readings on which the assignment is based and feels safer using "their" language.
- The client whose paragraphs are out of order and redundant because he didn't plan and hasn't read it over with order, flow, and audience in mind.
- The client whose writing is full of little errors that she doesn't ordinarily make because she's overwhelmed by the prospect of writing a twenty-page research paper.
- The client who is having a hard time coming up with ideas for a paper because she's missed several classes and has no idea what the assignment is asking for.

All of these clients need help understanding that they can't write well (and might not be able to write at all) if they don't learn how to use the writing process. As their writing coach, you can ask questions about their process and help them discover new strategies to circumvent the problems they're having.

A note about "premature editing": Maybe you do this as you start a new piece of writing: laboring over the first paragraph, trying to get it "just right." For you, it might be a fruitful part of your writing process, a step that helps you formulate your thesis or find a focus. And it's not really a problem if, within a reasonable period, you can move on and get the rest of your draft written. And if you realize that, after you write that draft, you might have to go back and revise that first paragraph anyway.

But some very perfectionistic writers get caught up in an endless circle of editing for editing's sake, or "premature editing." In other words, they try to perfect each sentence before they're even sure what they want to say. If the writer has a hard time producing more than a paragraph or two because of excessive perfectionism, this is a kind of writer's block. It's not that the writer *can't* write—it's just that he or she is trying too hard to write *perfectly,* is more focused on correctness than on getting ideas down, probably out of fear of being judged. To "cure" this, the writer must realize that it's far more efficient, and productive, to write quickly and then go back and revise—in other words, she must realize that *writing is a process*.

If you have this kind of client, it may be useful to explain that writers need to first write for *themselves,* and then only as they revise slowly begin to write for their *reader.* Two strategies described below, freewriting/looping and the free/style revision method, may be very helpful. Read on for more information on strategies for helping clients who have a hard time "finding anything to say."

Strategies for the writing process. You probably have many strategies for writing that you can teach your clients, everything from making outlines (useful mainly after having come up with ideas) to proofreading "backward" sentence by sentence. It's a good idea to make a list of them, so that you can consciously recommend them to clients for whom they might be useful. As you'll learn in later chapters, no one strategy works for every student, but what works for you might work for others, and that's a good thing to know.

At the same time, as a coach you'll often be working with clients who aren't "like you," and so you'll need to "expand" your toolkit of strategies. Throughout this course I will ask you to experiment with multiple new strategies for the writing process. Even if you don't like these, trying them out will at least allow you to explain and show them to your clients, for whom they might just do the trick.

As a start to your new toolkit, below are, first, an outline of strategies for each part of the process, and, second, descriptions of specific strategies that other coaches have found useful in their sessions, written by the coaches themselves.

TEACHING WRITING AS A PROCESS

1. Some basic guidelines
   - Remember that there is no <u>*one*</u> process for writing.
   - Remember that the writing process is recursive, not linear.
   - Remember to suggest steps that parallel how information is processed; that is, begin with the beginning—e.g., with understanding the assignment, collecting ideas, finding a focus, etc., not drafting.
   - Remember to emphasize audience and purpose. To whom is the writer writing? To do what? Suggest potential (if imaginary) readers other than the professor.
   - Read as a *reader* first, not as a critic or teacher. Respond to ideas, not just to errors. Offer encouragement and reassurance. Offer help as a collaborator, not a judge.
   - Make process strategies explicit, by using protocols and by modeling.

2. Some strategies to call upon

   Remember: Any of these strategies can be used at any stage of the writing process, whether a draft has been produced or not. Handouts for many are in the low black cabinet in the WC.

   - Generating/inventing: freewriting (unfocused, focused, looping—set either page limit or time limit, depending on your client), mapping, listing, brainstorming, talking; also, protocols for invention, collection of ideas (see cabinet).

   - Previewing/goal-setting/arrangement/planning: mapping, clustering, outlining, freewriting *about* plans, as well as protocols like standard structures, paragraph organizers, charts or models of the essay plan, topical outline, glossing, or paragraph by paragraph planning with topic sentences followed by details. (See cabinet.)

   - Drafting/translating/writing: For students who have trouble organizing, clear paragraph plans can ease the shift to writing. For students who lack fluency and can't generate a draft with too-specific plans, writing first and planning paragraphs afterward can be better. Individualize this process according to the student's learning style/writing difficulties.

   - Reviewing/revising/re-arranging: Break down the process into pieces. Tackle one aspect of writing, one task at a time (i.e., is there a thesis? does every paragraph relate to that thesis?). Provide an audience and help with reading. Check for key things, one by one; use a checklist. Postpone error correction until ideas are down and organized. Use color-coding (pens, dots) to help find misplaced ideas and relocate them. Use colored index cards to sort ideas for rearrangement.

   - Editing/proofreading: Make sure to emphasize the writer's own accountability/responsibility for this. Create an individualized checklist of typical problems and proofread for them *one at a time*. Read aloud to the writer who can't "see" his mistakes; simple errors can often be heard. Copy a problematic sentence onto a blank piece of paper so that it can be discussed independently. Ask writers to bring in triple-spaced drafts to make them easier to read and write on.

Charts and Diagrams: generating ideas
By Alexa Chrisos, Alison Marsh, and Jessica Sheehe
(Adapted from* The Practical Tutor, *Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith, Oxford, 1987.)

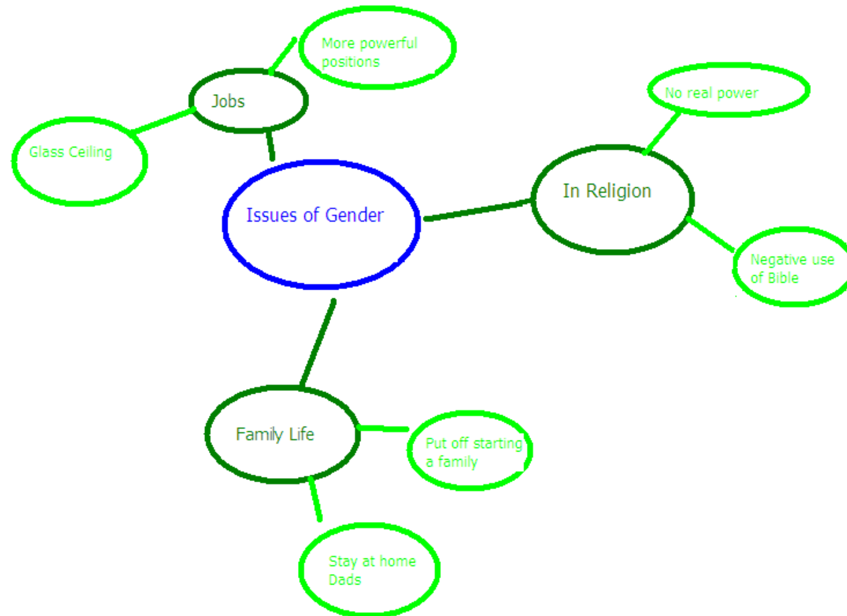
Sometimes a client comes into the Writing Center because he or she is having a hard time getting started on an assignment. Other times, a client might want help expanding ideas or adding substance to a paper. Charts and diagrams can help jumpstart the writing process because they allow clients to collect and organize information *before* trying to write. Once the material is out on paper, writing it up seems a lot less difficult.

If the client is having a hard time getting started on an assignment, first review the assignment with her and make sure you both understand it. Then describe or show the client some of these strategies for getting started, and let her decide which one best suits the assignment or her learning style.

When a client needs to expand a draft already written, start by reading it out loud. As you read, ask the client to listen for places where more could be added. Underline those as you go. At the end, describe or show these strategies for generating ideas, details, or examples. Once you've completed a chart or a diagram, suggest that the client freewrite about the new material. Often, with a little tweaking this freewriting can then be added directly to the draft. (See the next section for more on freewriting.)

<u>Webbing</u>

Webbing (also known as "mapping") is an extremely useful trick of the trade. Begin by placing a broad topic or idea in the middle circle. Ask the client a question, like "in what areas of life do gender issues play a role?" and have him add the answers to circles branching off from the original topic. Even more branches can then be produced through more questions and answers. Circles are only one way to do a web—let the client use whatever representation appeals to him.



Double-Entry List

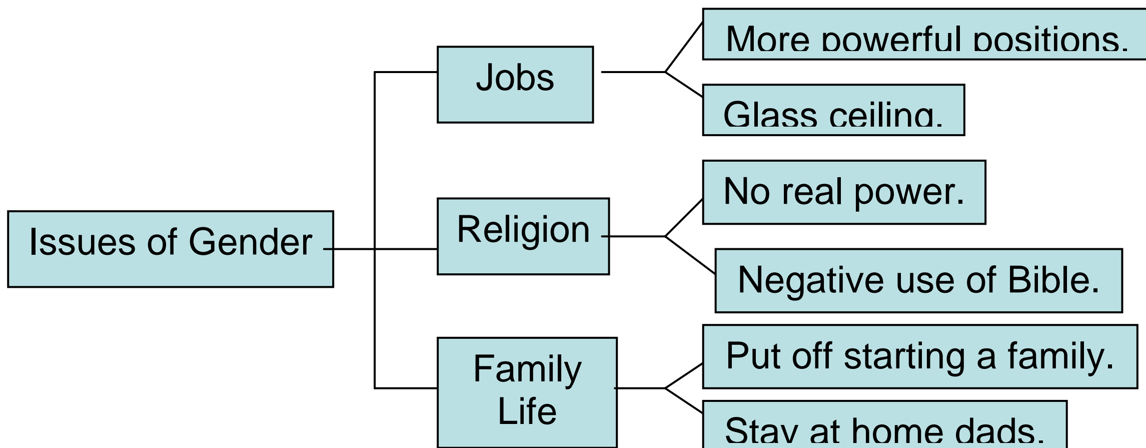
A double-entry list is useful when the client needs to compare or contrast two elements. Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper, and write the two elements at the top of each column. For instance, you could ask the client, "Who is affected by gender issues at work?" The client's answers, "men and women," go at the top of the two columns. Then ask the client, "What's one way in which gender affects women?" That answer goes under "women." Ask "Is there a parallel way in which that affects men?" and put that answer under "men."

Women	Men
Experience sexual harassment at work	Accused of sexual harassment at work
Earn less money	Compete with women for jobs
Juggle motherhood and work	Give up family for work

After the client has brainstormed a number of ideas, you can proceed by asking questions about the relationship between the lists. Through this process, the client could narrow the topic to something narrow enough to write well about, or generate ideas to add to a draft that already exists.

Tree Diagrams

Tree diagrams are basically flow charts. You identify the main issues within a topic and then break them down into their subcategories, then subtopics and evidence.



Note the similarity between this and a web? While both work the same way, the tree diagram has a more "logical" and limiting feel, while the web has a more "intuitive" and open feel. Either one could work, but a client might feel more drawn to one than the other. Your best bet: Let the client choose.

Matrices

Matrices help writers to see relationships among complex ideas and expand upon them. A matrix is a two-dimensional array of information. One axis lists questions or criteria (the top row in the example below) that are then applied to the other axis items (the left column in the example below). Have the client make a chart and identify the subtopics and then what questions could be asked to compare them. Use the following matrix chart as an example to show your client.

Issues of Gender	**Participation in decision making?**	**Rules and Regulations?**	**Balance of concerns between men and women?**	**Time spent?**
Jobs	Yes	- sexual harassment - equal opportunities available	- who is in more powerful positions	- taking advantage of workforce
Religion	No	- no real power - women's purity issues - not able to perform some rituals	- negative use of Bible	- opportunity for active participation in community
Family Life	Yes	- does the wife need to stay at home?	- control over parental rights - financial stuff	- stay-at-home dads - put off starting a family

HDWDWW

HDWDWW stands for Berthoff's sentence: **H**ow **d**oes **w**ho **d**o **w**hat and **w**hy? This chart helps writers generate ideas by naming the agent, action, and purpose. HDWDWW could be used, for example, to generate information about guitars: *How* are they played? *How* are they made? *Who* sells them? *Who* is interested in guitars? *Why* do they have different size strings? *Why* do people play guitars? Other questions could focus on when, for whom, and what. This type of chart is systematic; it enables the client to generate a lot of material without becoming confused. Because the relationships are broken down into sections, they are easy to understand. This method of generating ideas is specifically helpful in finding the *why* because it is a specified section of the chart. When the other categories expand, so does the "why"—the question underlying critical thinking, and therefore most analytical papers.

Here is an example of an HDWDWW chart based on the essay question: "Why are women still discriminated against in the workplace?" This difficult prompt can be overcome by a HDWDWW:

WHO	DOES WHAT	WHY
Employed women	-Compete for higher positions -Fight for equal opportunities and equal pay -put up with sexual harassment -Put off starting a family -Have to go on maternity leave -Might have to stay home with family	-to make more money to support their families (single moms, divorce) -to fulfill their potential and lead satisfied lives; to feel good -to get ahead -to give career a chance -To give birth and recover -To care for new or sick child
Employed men	-Compete with women -Commit sexual harassment	-Because their job might be threatened -Because of lack of sensitivity or out of hostility
Employers	-hire women for lower-paying jobs or pay them less for the same job -hire women to satisfy equal opportunity laws -hire women because they are best for the positions -don't want to offer sensitivity training -don't want to hire married women of child-bearing age	-to save money -to avoid lawsuits or bad publicity -to benefit the company and make more money -to save money -don't want to pay for maternity leave or job replacement

Closing thoughts about these methods:

During the session, your client might be unsure how to begin brainstorming and might be nervous about putting anything at all down on paper. In this case, try just chatting casually about the topic. While chatting, jot down what the client says, putting the ideas into a loose map or web pattern. By sketching a map as you talk, you allow the client to focus on thinking and not worry about recording. In fact, with a client who's having a very difficult time, this is a good strategy with any of the charts or diagrams: let the client do the talking while you do the recording.

Brainstorming and prewriting strategies like these are part of "collecting," an important aspect of the writing process. Getting your client do such collecting during a session can be tremendously helpful. Just be sure that your client remains in control of the topics; too much of your own input can spoil the broth!

Freewriting and Looping: generating ideas, improving focus, finding a thesis
By Al Teodosio and Sarah Jassim

For many writers, creative infertility—aka writer's block, or being "stuck"—is the most discouraging thing. It feels as if you've lost or forgotten the ability to write, and with it has gone your confidence. You start second-guessing every word you even think of writing, and down, down you go, into the darkest situation a writer can experience: no words at all.

In such moments, you must remember that it is not that your creative spark is lost; it's just hiding behind a clog in the conduit between your head and the page. Writer's block is almost always just that: a problem of getting what's in your head onto the page.

Artists in various media talk about the usefulness of *not* judging as you try to create. "Not judging" dissolves your wariness—you worry not about "Is this coming out right?" but only about "Is something coming out?" Can you move your pencil on a page and put down words without thinking about the amount of pressure needed for each letter and how much space you have until the end of a line? Chances are you can.

It's called *freewriting.*

Set the timer for ten minutes (or five or fifteen). If you've got an assignment, use that as your "topic." If you don't, just start writing about anything that comes to mind. Write. Just write, without stopping. If you can't think of anything to write, write that you can't think of anything to write. Just don't stop writing. Allow yourself to stray off topic; just let your thoughts lead you wherever they may. Branch out, expand, form connections, explore, babble. Don't worry about making connections or making sense; in fact, don't worry about anything at all. Not about transitions, or paragraphing, or grammar, or spelling, or even punctuation. Don't judge, don't censor, don't criticize yourself, don't cut or scratch out or erase or revise in any way. Don't worry at all about what you are writing—the point of freewriting is the process, not the end result.

As you do this, you will find yourself tapping into what goes on in your subconscious, which is where most creative ideas reside. (And remember: all ideas are creative.) By writing, you force whatever is in your mind *out.* However, nothing is really "forced" at all, since you are not thinking, not judging, just writing. You have bypassed the "translation" part of the act of writing that was keeping you stuck.

Freewriting may yield a tangled mess of phrases and incomplete sentences. But it will also get rid of the clog. If you're writing for an assignment, it will usually yield at least one *idea* that opens your writing up again. If you're just writing aimlessly, it will usually free your head of whatever it is that's been bothering you, so that now you can focus on something else.

If you're writing for an assignment, the next thing you want to do is *looping.*

Write till the timer tells you to stop. Then go back and read what you have. Underline one sentence or phrase that has potential, that could fit the assignment. If nothing seems right on the money, pick the closest thing, maybe a little subtopic that intrigues you. Also look for connections, threads that run through the writing; these can often suggest a train of thought that you could develop. Choose something. Then set the timer again, and with this as your new topic, freewrite the same way. Don't think. Don't judge.

When time's up, review what you have again, and pick a new sentence, or subtopic, or thread, and freewrite again. As you go, you'll find yourself focusing in, narrowing down, expanding out. Continue the process until if you *know* what you want to write. Then slow down, and write your draft, borrowing pieces from the various freewrites, adding to them, revising them, until you have your essay. (See "Free/Style" on the next page for more detailed instructions about how to revise freewriting into a paper. Copies of this are kept on hand in the filing cabinet, to hand out to clients as needed.)

Freewriting isn't just for people who are stuck on beginning a paper. Many writers use this method before they begin writing; it's sort of a mental warm-up, like a jog for the brain. Writers (including experienced ones) use this method in the middle, when they hit a wall and are stuck. Freewriting enables them to generate ideas and gets the mind working again. Freewriting, no matter the reason, makes the writers more comfortable with writing. Looping, the repeated freewriting process, allows you to follow your creativity down side streets off an avenue of your mind. Every time you "loop," your ideas get narrower, more refined, and closer to what you are trying to convey. With a bit of patience for the freewriting/looping process, you will find the fruitful creativity you are looking for.

Note to coaches: Use this method for your own writing, and share it with your clients. Feel free to ask them to freewrite during a session, while you sit by and keep time. Often this is the best way to break through a block in thinking, add new material to a piece, develop ideas more, find an ending, or generate a viable thesis. It's helpful at any stage of the writing process.

FREE/STYLE:
A quick, easy way to focus, organize, and develop a 3- to 6-page essay
or
WHAT TO DO WHEN THE PAPER IS DUE TOMORROW
AND YOU HAVEN'T STARTED YET,

The idea of "Free/Style" comes from Chris Anderson's book, Free/Style: A Direct Approach to Writing (Houghton Mifflin, 1992). The idea is to use "freewriting" to get your ideas down on paper, and then apply "style" to revise and refine those ideas into an essay a reader can follow (COAP it: *cut, order, add, polish*). General instructions: Stick to the time limits and other exhortations at each step. DON'T CHEAT.

PHASE ONE: FREEWRITE

Step 1: 10 minutes

For closed assignments (i.e., assignments that ask you to answer a specific question): Look at the question and write freely (without stopping or editing) for 10 minutes, putting down everything it brings to your mind. DON'T EDIT YOURSELF. All ideas/thoughts are equally important at this time.

For open assignments (i.e., assignments that suggest a general area to write about but allow you to choose your own topic): Write freely about the general topic for 10 minutes. What interests you about it? What intrigues you? What surprises you? DON'T EDIT YOURSELF. All ideas/thoughts are equally important at this time.

Step 2: 2 minutes

Read your "freewriting" and underline topics/ideas/sentences/phrases that interest or intrigue you or express something you're interested in pursuing. Take 2 minutes to do this.

PHASE TWO: CHOOSE AND CUT

Step 3: 10 minutes

Choose ONE of the things you underlined and freewrite again for 10 minutes, focusing this time on that ONE thing. Write down everything you can say about it in 10 minutes.

Steps 4 & 5: 5 minutes

Read this second freewrite and look for a sentence that can serve as a thesis (see "What is a thesis?" for information about what to look for). Also underline or draw a block around anything else you like. IMPORTANT: Check to make sure the topic and thesis you have chosen responds to the assignment.

Draw lines through anything you find uninteresting or off the topic or assignment.

PHASE THREE: ORDER

Step 6: 3 minutes

Look at the parts remaining in your last freewrite, and think about which would make the best "lead" or introduction and which would make the best ending. Think about where the rest should fall between. Put numbers next to these parts. Think about a title that expresses your focus clearly.

PHASE FOUR: ADD

Step 7: 15-45 minutes

Write a title at the top of the page, and then write a new draft, using your new lead and the other parts you want to keep. Write fast; keep going until you get the whole shape of your draft on paper. (You will naturally go a little slower this time, since you will be clearer about what you want to say.) This time, add in anything you need--in terms of evidence, analysis--to make your points clear. Focus on getting down what you have to say; you'll be able to fix the sentences in the next step.

PHASE FIVE: POLISH

Step 8: as long as you like or as long as you have

Now read your draft slowly, one paragraph at a time, thinking about what your reader will need to understand you. "Gloss" the paragraphs to check their order and to make sure they all relate to the thesis (to "gloss," label each paragraph in the margin with its main topic/function). TRIAC the essay (see attached), to make sure you have included illustration and analysis. At this point, you may also add, cut, or move words, phrases, sentences, or ideas; clarify by adding detail or transitions or by combining sentences; meddle with word choice; look at punctuation. Go through the draft several times like this, refining each time, improving the clarity. When you've gone as far as you can, read the draft out loud. Does every sentence read smoothly? If not, work on those sentences that don't till they can be read easily.

Finally, proofread. Look at each word and punctuation mark. Look for spelling errors (use spellcheck if you like, but ALSO READ IT OVER, since the computer won't get everything). When you've caught all the errors you can find, print out.

TOTAL TIME: Approximately 40-70 minutes for developing focused first draft; 1-3 hours for polishing, depending on how well the first draft turned out.

Glossing: organization and development
By Matt Serron

To "gloss" is to summarize a paragraph or passage, either in the margin or on a separate sheet of paper, thus creating a kind of outline for the whole paper. Glossing can be used for so many purposes as you coach that you might find yourself using it in almost every session.

In my own sessions, I have found glossing most useful as a tool for revising or fleshing out a writer's thesis. Say a student has written a first draft of his paper, but isn't sure he has a strong thesis or isn't sure if all the topics he's covered in his body paragraphs relate to his thesis. Because the body or content of an essay must flow from its thesis, glossing can show the writer what the body of the essay contains and whether he needs to cut something from the body or add something to the thesis. If any part of the body is irrelevant to the thesis, it can be altered or cut; if an important aspect of the body is omitted from the thesis, it can be easily integrated. With one easy strategy, you've not only checked the thesis against the body; you've reviewed the content and structure of the paper and probably discovered either gaps or redundancies.

Let's say your client says this is the thesis of her paper: "Reading, writing, and arithmetic are the only necessary components of early childhood education." A simple gloss of the draft might look like this:

Paragraph 1- introduction and thesis.
Paragraph 2- explanation of why reading should be taught to children.
Paragraph 3- explanation of why writing should be taught to children.
Paragraph 4- list of books that should be taught in all 1st grade curriculums.
Paragraph 5- explanation of why science and music should not be taught to children.
Paragraph 6- restating of thesis, summary of body paragraphs, conclusion.

The first thing you and this writer might notice is that the third item of the thesis, "arithmetic," isn't mentioned in the body. This topic could be covered in an additional body paragraph or dropped from the thesis. Next your client might realize that the fourth paragraph, though it has a connection to the second paragraph, does not relate to the thesis at all and needs, probably, to be cut. (Sometimes such information can be moved or integrated; in this case, it seems irrelevant.) Finally, you and the client might agree that though the fifth paragraph fits well with the overall argument, it is not explicit in the thesis; your client could then add it to the thesis, if they like.

As you can see, glossing can easily help you address all of the "global" components of a paper. The beauty of this strategy is that it helps you and your client see the writing in "chunks" that can be moved, cut, or altered. Once the writer has used the gloss to decide what changes to make, you can work together to integrate them.

Glossing can also be a great time saver. If the client's paper is long and you don't have time to read it through before you start working on it, the client can gloss it for you and help you get the gist of it that way. Just by forcing the client to look *at* the writing and not *through* it, glossing can also help a stuck writer get "unstuck." Give glossing a shot in your first session; I'm sure you'll find it one of the more useful tools in your coaching arsenal.

***TRIAC: Another way to gloss (*borrowed from Chris Anderson's Free/Style)**

TRIAC is a way of analyzing essays, sentence by sentence or by groups of sentences, to see what they contain and what they might be missing, and to see what functions the various parts are playing within the whole. (Note: There is no one "right" way to apply these labels; the same sentence may serve a different function in a different essay, or may be interpreted in more than one way within the same essay. Still, in general, the labels work to inform the writer what is/isn't happening in the essay.)

(T) =stating a thesis, theme, or topic

(R) = restating the theme, refining, restricting it

(I) = illustrating the theme or thesis: giving examples or evidence to support it; including concrete detail or description

(A) = analyzing the thesis or the illustration (explaining the thesis, explaining how the evidence supports the thesis, making explicit the connections between the evidence and the thesis; telling why or how)

(C) = drawing a conclusion, closing, summarizing, recapping an argument or point

The indentations show the relative specificity of the different functions. T and C are most general, R and A slightly less general, and I is most specific.

Common problems to watch for:

*Essays with lots of T & R but no I or A

*Essays with T & R, lots of I, but no A

Sample (silly) paragraph:

(T) John went to the store. (R) He had to get some groceries. (I) He bought eggs, milk, and butter. (A) It was a successful trip, because while there he also ran into Sally. (C) They're married now.

Paragraphs about TRIAC (from *Free/Style,* pp 90 and 98):

(T) These slots don't necessarily have to come in this order, although they often do.
(R) TRIAC is a natural progression:
(I) stating an idea, modifying it, illustrating it, and then analyzing the illustration.
(R) But a paragraph can also come in other orders:
(I) IAC, IRT, AT, TAC.
(T) TRIAC describes a grammar of structure that can be used to generate an infinite number of structural "sentences,"
(R) a logic for organization that corresponds to the logic of thinking about a generalization.
(T) Paragraphs don't have to have all of these slots at all.
(R) They may be just statements of theme to be illustrated or analyzed or restricted by other paragraphs in an organically developing bloc.

(T) TRIAC has three advantages over the five-paragraph theme or any other formula:
(R) It's flexible, suggesting a set of possibilities for an infinite number of combinations.
(R) It suggests operations, not just piles of things,
(R) helping writers understand what writers do, the kinds of intellectual moves they make
(I) (restricting, illustrating, etc.)
(R) It helps explain something about the inner coherence of a piece,
(R) how the pieces are logically and expositionally related.

Chapter 2
Tutoring as a Process

In *Lessons from a Child,* Lucy Calkins notes that:

> …the most creative environments in our society are not the ever-changing ones. The artist's studio, the researcher's laboratory, and the scholar's library are each deliberately kept simple so as to support the complexities of the work in progress. They are deliberately kept predictable, so the unpredictable can happen. (32)

As a writer myself, I know that my best writing happens when I get into a routine, writing at the same time and in the same place, following the same steps to get myself rolling. A cup of tea on the desk. The door closed behind me. The email turned off. It's a way to set the stage for work, to quiet the mind for its work.

Imagine again that you're a client in the Writing Center. You've been back several times now, and each new coach has taken a different approach. One forgot about filling the forms out to get you focused, and you ended up spending half of your hour just talking about a tv show you both like. Another one was ten minutes late to the session; because you both felt rushed, you started editing for grammar right away and didn't realize till the end of the hour that your evidence didn't support your thesis. A third coach took so long to fill out the initial forms that you began to get nervous you wouldn't have any time to do the proofreading you desperately needed help with, this being your third draft and your third time in the Center with the same paper—why didn't he just look at your folder so you could get started faster?

How would you feel, coming in for your fourth visit?

Now imagine that every time you come in, no matter who the coach is, the routine is the same. The coach is there waiting for you. After friendly hellos, you start by filling out a session form. The coach has your folder on the table, ready to refer to if you're working on something you've brought to the Center before. Without feeling rushed, the two of you decide what your priority for the day is. And then you get down to it, having most of the hour to work hard and make real progress.

As you can see, having a stepwise process for your sessions can create the kind of "predictable" setting in which the "unpredictable" can happen. It's not that a coach can't bring his or her own personality into coaching—it would be impossible not to. It's that if everyone agrees to follow certain steps, your clients will be able to prepare for and get more out of each session—and so will you.

Several years ago, a Teaching Writing class came up with this outline for a good coaching session:

1. Establish rapport.
2. Use the folder and forms.
3. Make sure you understand the assignment.
4. If there is a draft, *preview* it.
    - If it's a long paper, have the writer gloss it paragraph by paragraph or section by section, to get a sense of the whole thing before you start.
    - Read a short paper aloud at a brisk pace, or have the client do it while you read along. Take notes on a separate sheet of paper, if you like.
5. Tips for coaching during the session:
    - Give positive feedback first and throughout the session.
    - Diagnose the writing situation and prioritize what needs to be addressed.
    - Move from global (thesis, evidence, organization) to local (grammar, word choice, punctuation, mechanics). *Make sure you check both before starting on anything.*
    - Focus on one thing at a time; assume you might not get it all done in this session.
    - Teach the writer, not the writing; it's not whether you "get it done," but what the writer learns along the way.
    - Make sure the writer does the work and makes the decisions. Respect ownership and authority.
    - Use these strategies:
        - ➢ Talk about, teach, and demonstrate strategies for the writing process.
        - ➢ Look for patterns of error and teach to them.
        - ➢ Ask questions; teach at the point where knowledge breaks down.
        - ➢ Have the writer practice new knowledge; test that knowledge.
        - ➢ Model examples on a separate sheet of paper.
        - ➢ Adapt to each writer's learning style and ability.
6. Make sure something concrete gets accomplished by end of session. Don't just *talk* about what needs to be done; get the writer to *do* something.
7. At the end, recap what's been done and learned and what should be done next. Make sure the writer leaves on a positive note.

OK, well, that's nice—but what does it mean? Number 5 will be developed in later chapters, but here's more detail for the other steps.

1. Establish rapport

"Rapport" means, literally, "relation." Establish a relationship, then? In the few minutes you have at the start of a session? Yes.

Remember a time when you met a stranger. Maybe at a party, or on a long bus ride, or when you first joined a team. What kinds of questions did you ask? What attitude did you present?

The Writing Center is no different. It's a place where students meet, often for the first time, and have to get to know each other. You already have a lot in common: you're both students at St. Mike's. So start small, and build from there.

The form will help you. You'll find out a lot of little details, like major, year in school, what course this student is writing for. Look for something you have in common. Maybe you've had the same teacher, or the same course. Maybe you've seen the student at a sports event. Any little thing that helps establish common ground is enough.

The real rapport will occur, probably, as you begin working on the writing. So don't spend a lot of time searching for that common ground. Sometimes it's enough just to smile and introduce yourself, and make a few casual comments as you fill out the form together.

Remember *Teach the writer, not the writing*?

That's the key to establishing rapport, too. Because, no matter what problems you see in the *writing*, your job as a coach is to *teach the writer.* That means that you need to pay attention—first, foremost, and always—to the writer him or herself. Fixing the writing is not your job. It's the writer's. *Your* job, as a writing teacher, is to intervene in the client's writing process and set it off in a better direction. You're a coach, and as a coach, you need to diagnose what's going wrong, and then help the writer correct it—just as a sports coach will observe an athlete's performance and make a small suggestions to improve that pass, that stride, that pitch, that dive.

A truly good coach *knows* his or her athletes, and takes the whole person into consideration. Writing well is not just about knowing how to put one word next to another. It's about mood, motivation, confidence, preparation, personality style, and so many other things. As a Pulitzer-Prize winning playwright (Paula Vogel?) once said, "Writing is 99% personality management."

So, as you sit down with any client, you've got some big questions:

- How does my client *feel?* about writing in general? about *this* writing, *now?* today, period?
- How much does my client *know* about writing?
- How does my client best *learn*?
- Who is my client, and what is his or her writing *background*?

Big questions indeed. And, unless you have a designated client, you may have as little as an hour to learn the answers. Of course, even with a designated client, you will never have complete answers. But fairly quickly you *can* learn enough to help you help this client, with this writing, in this moment.

For this chapter, we're mainly concerned with the first question. *How does my client feel?*

Really, some of you will ask, what difference does it make how my client feels?

Imagine yourself, again, coming to the Writing Center with a paper you've been working on for days, and getting nowhere. It also happens you're feeling under the weather. You've not had much sleep. You just got fired from your job. But you had a hard time getting this Writing Center appointment, and it's your last hope of finishing this paper on time. So despite the fact that you would much rather just go to your room and sleep, here you are.

You sit down with your coach. You fold your arms across your chest. You frown. You're holding back tears.

The coach sits down with you and says, "OK, so what's the assignment?" You squeeze a few words out. You can barely speak. You realize you've forgotten your notebook, where the assignment is written down.

"Do you have a handout?" the coach says.

You shake your head.

"Well," the coach says, sitting back and shaking her head. "We can't really start if you don't know the assignment."

How would you feel? Would you be ready to get to work?

No.

Imagine instead that your coach, seeing that you're in a bad state, says, before anything else, "You okay?"

The words come tumbling out. You explain everything that's been going on—not just your problems with the paper, but all of your other problems. For five minutes you go on. The coach nods, expresses sympathy. As you wrap up your saga, the coach says, "Boy. It's been a rough week, eh?" You nod; she lets you have a moment of silence. "Well," she says. "Maybe if we can make some progress on this paper, a little bit of the stress will go away. What do you think?

"Sounds good," you say, realizing that letting things out has, somehow, helped you relax and given you more energy for your writing….

If your client is angry, sad, tired, bored, nervous, afraid, stressed…it affects both the session and the writing. Taking a few minutes, or ten, or even fifteen, to let the client voice those feelings can open up space to work. You don't need to solve the problems; you shouldn't try. All you need to do is let the client know you hear what s/he's saying, you understand, and you empathize. And then gently bring the client back to the work at hand, because getting absorbed in the writing may just be the best thing that client can do at that moment.

A frequent cause of stress in a student's life, of course, is grades. And by association, teachers. In this area, the coach needs to be quite cautious. As a coach, you're not in a position to know whether or not a student "deserves" the grades he or she is getting. And while you may be familiar with that instructor and know that s/he is hard to please, difficult to understand, or whatever, as an employee of the Writing Center, and thus of the College, you need to maintain neutrality. So say something like "sometimes teachers don't understand how difficult writing can be" or "I know what you mean—sometimes I have the same problem/feelings…." Let the client know you *hear* what s/he is saying, but don't give into any urges to diss that instructor. It won't help the client or your session.

Another special situation is if the client says or does anything that makes you believe that he or she might be a danger to him or herself or someone else. Take such situations very seriously. See the protocols in Chapter 6 for more details on how to handle such events.

For establishing rapport, a few of special cases to keep in mind:

- International students. Many of our clients come from other countries and cultures where the "rules" for getting to know each other are different. A good way to be

sure not to offend someone from another country is to observe their manners and do the same. For instance, some Japanese students will not meet your eye at first. This is a sign of respect. Reflect that respect back by not insisting on eye contact. Similarly, body language, including the amount of personal space required, varies from culture to culture. Students from Latin America will sit closer to you than you might find comfortable; that's considered normal in their countries. While it might seem odd, if you adjust your own body language and personal space to match that of your client, it might just put him or her at ease. Fold your arms; sit up straight; look at the page and not at the client—whatever your client does, subtly echo it. One last tip: International students love to be asked about their countries. If the student indicates on the form that he or she is an ESL writer, use that opening, and you'll be on your way.

- Students with learning disabilities. On the session form is a space where students are given an opportunity to disclose if they have an LD that may affect their writing, and a space where they are given a chance to say whether they're willing to talk to you about that LD. In addition, some students with LDs will bring in a letter from Toni Messuri (our liaison for LD students). If a student brings in such a letter or checks off that he is willing to talk about his LD, it's up to *you* to start that conversation. You'll be reading more about LDs later in this manual; for now, just be aware that for students with LDs, your reluctance to talk about the LD can actually create a barrier between you and your client. But it doesn't have to be a big deal to bring it up; just say, "So, what can you tell me about your learning style?" and the ice will be broken.
- "Designated" clients. A "designated" client is a client who has a standing appointment with you, week after week. (To get a "designated" coach, all the client has to do is request it; sometimes such a designation is associated with a class, like Writing I, and sometimes not.) Obviously, if you're going to be working with a client for most of a semester, or even longer, you should spend a little more time getting to know each other. Most of your first session might be devoted to this. Again, though, keep in mind that the best way to get to know your client *as a writer* is through his or her writing. It's not important that you become good friends (although you might); what's important is that you feel comfortable with each other and work well together on the writing.

2. Use the folders and forms.

The operative word here is *use.* The folders and forms exist to make *your* job easier and to make *your* sessions more effective. No one else can get as much out of these tools as you can. So give some thought to how you can *really* use them. Here are some tips:

<u>The session form</u>: As you might have gathered already, the session form is your FRIEND. It gives you an easy way to get to know your client and to gather the information you need to have a fruitful session. Moreover, the checklist at the bottom can be used to help your client identify what to work on in the session, your first chance to help the client take "ownership" of his or her writing: point at the list and ask ***What do you think we should to work on today?*** or perhaps ***What do you think your paper's***

strengths/weaknesses are? Thus, the form can be used to educate not just you, but also your client.

The form also provides an implicit structure for your session: Fill out the top, and you begin to establish rapport. Write down the assignment, due date, and instructor, and you begin to understand the task before you, how much time there is to work on it, and what kind of writing you'll be looking at, or for. Look at the list of things to work on, and you'll see the *global* areas to work on, roughly in order (top two or three lines, from left to right), followed by the *local* areas at the bottom (last one or two lines—there's overlap, of course). Last, you'll see at the bottom of the form a place to record both what has been worked on and what is left to be done, which is a good way to wrap up a session.

The form can also be used to orient a new client to the Writing Center. See below.

One copy goes into the client's file, for future reference. One goes into your file, for your own information. And the third goes home with the client, so that he or she can give it to the instructor, or just keep it for his or her own information.

As for those folders, read on….

<u>First-time client</u>: New clients may have misconceptions about our service. They might think, for instance, that they can drop off a paper to be read and "proofread." Or they might think we're going to tell them exactly what to do. Ask your client: Have you been to the Writing Center before? If not, spend a few minutes talking about who we are and what we do and don't do. Use the "agreement" part of the session form to go over this. A few minutes orienting the client to our policies can dispel incorrect notions and make your session go much more smoothly.

Give the client a copy of the rules, but don't expect him or her to read the whole thing right that minute. Read aloud the agreement section on the session form, make sure the client understands, and then have the client sign. If, during the session, he or she shows signs of confusion about what you're doing ("Why are you asking so many questions?"), go back to those rules to clarify.

At the end of the session, make a folder for the new client and file the white copy of the session form in it, and the pink copy in your own folder.

<u>Return client</u>: If your client says that he or she has been to the Writing Center before, take a moment to get his or her folder. To do this, you'll have to ask the client for his or her name, first and last. If you can't find a folder under that name, assume the client has no folder and may not have been to the Writing Center before, and proceed as for a new client.

If you DO find a folder, take a glance at the last session. If it was a recent session, it might help you with this session; to break the ice, you can ask the client about that session. Sometimes there are several recent sessions, and looking at what was worked on prior to this session can save a great deal of time. Don't assume a client will be self-assertive enough to tell you, "We already did that." Use the folder to inform yourself, and talk to the client about what you see.

If you check the sign-up as you arrive at the Center and see that you have an appointment, often you can pull the folder before the client arrives. That way, you can hit the ground running.

Note: It is the coach's job to fill out the form and make the folder, not the client's. Make sure your handwriting is legible; remember that a faculty member might be trying to read it! Have the client spell his or her name for you, and check to make sure you've got it right. Make sure you file the folder correctly, in alphabetical order, in the right drawer of the right cabinet. All of this will make all of our jobs easier, and we appreciate it.

3. ***Understand the assignment.***

Imagine you've come into the Writing Center with a paper hot off the presses. You're so excited about this paper, you can't wait to have your coach read it. It's the best thing you've ever written! It's just great! In your exuberance, you manage to throw the coach off track; neither one of you even glances at that session form. Who needs it, with a paper this great!

The two of you sit down and read it aloud. It's wonderful. It's creative, interesting, well written. Fabulous. The best thing you've ever done. Sure, there are some typos and things; you correct them as you go.

Then, about five minutes before the hour's up, your coach asks, "What class is this for, anyway?"

"History," you say, stuffing your things into your backpack.

"History?" the coach says. "What was the assignment?"

"Uh…," you say. "Lemme see. I've got it here somewhere."

The coach looks at the assignment and slaps his hand to his forehead. "OH NO," he groans.

"What?" you say, bewildered.

"Well," he says, "I don't know how to tell you this, but…I think what you wrote is great but…well, it doesn't fit the assignment, does it?"

Think this would never happen?

Guess again. At least once a year, and usually more often, a coach has this experience. Of course, if you followed step 2, you'd think it'd be hard to get to this point without seeing that something's wrong. But it's so easy to write down, under "assignment" nothing more than "history paper." And not realize, specifically, what's required. And easy to get caught up in a great piece of writing, and miss that it's missing the point.

Often faculty provide an assignment in writing, so it's a good idea to ask the client for that handout, as the session form will prompt you to do. If there is no handout, and the client has no notes, you might find the assignment on eCollege or on the instructor's web page. If not, you'll have to take the client's word for the nature of the assignment. Ask lots of questions. Probe. Try to reconstruct the assignment in writing, on the session form. *The best piece of writing is no good if it doesn't do the job it's supposed to do.* And you can't help your client do a better job if you don't know what that job is. Emphasize this to your client, and get him or her to help you truly understand the assignment.

Sometimes the client will actually *have* the assignment, but can't understand it. Perhaps he or she has come to the Center looking for your help with just that. And perhaps, at first glance, you don't really understand the assignment either. If that's the case, you'll need to know how to analyze assignments and teach the client how to do it

too. *The Practical Tutor* (Meyer & Smith, 1987, NYU Press, 74-79) suggests teaching clients the following steps to interpreting assignments:

1. Circle key concepts. This helps the client focus on *the ideas* they're supposed to write about, and the relationships between those ideas. Take this assignment: "Compare and contrast the objectives and achievements of the Bush administration and the Obama administration." You find two sets of key concepts: *objectives/achievements* and *Bush administration/Obama administration.* This is what the student is being asked to write about.
2. Next, interpret the imperatives. These are the *verbs* that tell the student what they are supposed to *do* with those concepts. In this case, "compare and contrast." Other common imperatives: *analyze, synthesize, discuss, examine…* Often clients won't be sure what the instructor means by these, and sometimes you won't be, either. If you can't figure it out together by discussing what's been going on in class, it's time to talk to the instructor and find out what he or she *does* mean.
3. Third, identify "signal words" or words that "signal" what the purpose of the paper is. These words might be in the assignment ("Discuss the *differences* between…") or might be suggested by the imperatives. For instance, "compare and contrast" suggests signal words like *differences* and *similarities.* A paper that asks a student to talk about *development* is really about *changes* through *time*, and might suggest signal words like *before, during, while, after….* Naming the signal words tells the writer what to focus on while reading or researching and also gives him or her vocabulary to use while writing the paper.

Assignments that are posed as questions require a bit of a different approach. It might be useful to rephrase the assignment as a statement, and then ask your client to talk about which statement best reflects his or her understanding of the assignment, or best echoes what's been going on in class. For instance, a question like:

> How did the economic policies of George W. Bush's presidential administration differ from those of his father, George H. W. Bush?

could be rephrased as

> Discuss the differences between the two policies.

or

> Compare and contrast the two policies.

"How," here, could mean "in what ways," and suggests that you are mainly naming the differences and comparing them conceptually. But in another assignment, it might mean something different:

> How did the economic policies of George W. Bush lead to government bail-outs?

Here, "how" suggests the need to *speculate* and *analyze* rather than just report. Here, "how" could also be translated as "why":

Why did the economic policies….

And that could be translated into a statement:

Discuss what led to the government bailouts of 2008/9….

Sometimes the assignment is simply "open." "Write a 20-page research paper on a topic of your choice." These can be particularly tricky. Who doesn't experience at least a moment of panic when taken off "writer's welfare" (Calkins, 25)? At the same time, these can be the most rewarding kinds of assignments to write. Chapter 1 suggests ways to help a client generate and develop topic ideas. For now, just keep in mind: No matter what shape the assignment takes, the writing is *always* answering a question, from "what did our department do in BU113 today?" to "what does this poem mean and how does it convey that?" Help the student find the question he wants to answer first; the writing will flow from that.

4. Preview the draft.

Imagine that the coach above *had* asked about the assignment. But the draft was just so darn *good*, except for those niggly errors, that he just got caught up in your excitement and spent the whole hour helping you edit. And maybe the draft *seemed* to fit the bill, kind of…till those last couple of pages, or paragraphs, when it became clear that—oops. It didn't.

This is where "previewing" the draft comes in.

Time is short, I know, and spending more time "preparing" for the session may seem like a waste of time. In some cases, you might do fine without "previewing." But for the most part, I recommend it.

So, just what is previewing?

Previewing is simply getting a sense of the *whole* draft first, before you start focusing on its parts. It's like reading the synopsis of a book before you commit to starting it, or reading the description of a product before you buy it. And there are two quick ways to do it:

- If the paper's short, you can just read it *aloud* at a fairly quick (not fast) pace. "Short" means under five double-spaced typed pages. It's better to read aloud than silently for two reasons: (1) reading silently leaves your client with nothing to do but feel nervous, and (2) reading aloud helps your client "hear" the writing, which is always helpful. If the client wants to stop you and make corrections, just have him or her put a checkmark in the margin, instead, saying, "We can come back to that in a minute." Note: If you read aloud, you can control the pace. If the client reads aloud at this stage, she might want to stop and correct things. Let the writer read aloud later; you read aloud now.
- If the paper's five pages or longer, use the *glossing* method described in chapter 1 to get a preview. The writer should know what the paper says, so have him or her tell you.

- First, ask what the thesis or main point or focus is—and then ask *where* it is, on the page. If he or she can't find it, that's a problem you can come back to; if the client doesn't know it, then glossing the paper might reveal it (or some possibilities) to both of you.
- Next, have the client summarize the paper in clumps: "These three paragraphs are about…" or "This section is about…." or "Here I talk about…." As the client summarizes, you can make notes in the margin next to the sections, creating a kind of outline. This outline can be useful later, too—right now, it just tells you what's in the paper, which also tells you what might be missing, or out of order, or redundant.

You can see, I hope, how previewing can be useful to you. Both methods can reveal problems with content, organization, or lack of development—but most important, both can help you see if the draft before you does the job it's supposed to do.

5. *Tips for coaching*

See future chapters for more on these.

6. *Get something concrete done.*

Sometimes coaches like to talk about writing. I know, I know—not you! But some coaches do.

The problem is, some clients aren't very good at listening. Or at remembering. So just talking about their paper and what needs to be done doesn't do them much good. They might leave the room to go off and socialize, and not come back to the writing till the next day…when they might remember none or only part of what you discussed so thoroughly. Or worse, might remember incorrectly, do something different, get a bad grade, and blame the Writing Center!

Sometimes clients like to talk. And it's easy to get caught up in conversation with them, and not notice that they're not writing things down. Suddenly the end of the session pops up, and nothing's on paper. A whole hour of great conversation…down the tubes.

So of course what you're going to do is make sure your client has a pen or pencil in hand, and makes notes as you go along. Or, if your client has a hard time doing that, you can make the notes—this is useful for some students with LDs and some ESOL students, and for any student who has a hard time writing and talking at the same time. *Just make sure things are written down as you go along.*

That's one way in which something "concrete" gets done.

But there's another way, too. Let's say your client is having a hard time adding a paragraph to her paper. You help her make a chart or map to brainstorm some ideas, and then you talk about how the paragraph might go. At that point, you could send her off to write the paragraph on her own. Or, if there's time, you could suggest she either freewrite it in her notebook and show it to you, or go to the computer where you can watch her write it and you can talk about it as she goes. Keep a light touch, of course, and protect her ownership as she writes, but small discussions about word choices or sentence order can go a long way toward teaching a client the "moves" of good writing.

Some clients, maybe even most, will resist writing "with" you. But if you can gently push back that resistance, the benefits will be great. Don't be shy about

explaining why you think it's a good idea: *It's all fresh in your mind right now. If you have any questions, you can ask me.* You can sit on the couch with a book while they write if they're really shy about it.

When the client does show you the draft, remember: it's just a draft. Anyone's rough, quick draft is going to need work. So praise the strengths, and then just start going through it line by line, using questions to help the writer see where the writing could be better.

In any case, whether it's just an outline, editing marks, or a new piece of writing, get something down on paper, so that the client leaves having a feeling of accomplishment and direction.

7. *Recap and end on a positive note.*

To end a session well, you need to keep an eye on the clock.

It's easy to lose track of time. If you're someone who doesn't wear a watch, sit so you can see one of the clocks, or bring one of the small clocks in the cabinet with you to where you're sitting. Try to leave at least five minutes at the end of the session to return to the form, check off what you've worked on, and discuss what's been accomplished and what still needs to be done. Write a couple of sentences at the bottom of the form stating those things, and give the client his or her copy of the form. Remind the client that many professors delight in receiving these forms; some even offer extra credit for them. Then end on a positive note: Perhaps tell the client you enjoyed the session and would like to work with him or her again, or mention something you particularly liked about the writing or the session. "It was interesting to learn about life in Afghanistan" or "You really picked up on that comma stuff fast!" Whatever you end on, it should be sincere and natural, but you can have planned for it by paying close attention during the session.

By ending a session with this kind of wrap-up, you help the client to internalize the learning. You also let the client know that we appreciate his or her business and that we'll be happy to see him or her again. But most important, you help to build the writer's confidence. From confidence comes motivation, and with motivation comes better writing.

Chapter 3
Setting the Tone

Coaching Etiquette

Imagine, for a moment, that you have come to the Writing Center for your first time. You're feeling helpless, hopeless, and a bit embarrassed. You arrive at the entrance, twisting that awful history paper between your hands. The coaches are all absorbed in reading, conversation, or they're sleeping or doing crossword puzzles. After a moment of standing there waiting, you finally clear your throat, and a coach glances up sleepily and sees you. "You need help?" she says gruffly. Meekly, you nod, and with a sigh the coach unfolds herself from her place on the couch and comes across the floor, her hair disheveled and clothes wrinkled. "Here—fill this out," she says, thrusting a form into your hands, taking your paper from you, and plopping herself down to start reading it....

How do you feel?

Consider this alternative: You arrive as above, but this time all the coaches are involved in their homework, quiet conversation, or writing. A coach who has been reading at one of the tables looks up almost immediately, and smiles broadly at you. "Can I help you?" he says, getting up and coming your way. "I have this paper due tomorrow, and it's a mess," you say. "Tomorrow, hmm? Well, let's see what we can do...." He gathers two forms from the top of the cabinet and gestures for you to sit down next to him at the table. "Is this your first time?" he says. You nod. "Okay, then, let's talk for a minute about what we do here...." and he begins to go over the first form with you, letting you read along as he discusses the Writing Center process....

Which scenario would you choose? Which would most encourage you to come back a second time?

Like any professional or social interaction, coaching has its own etiquette, or guidelines for behavior. And, as in many situations in life, that etiquette can be summed up in one, familiar old saw: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

A few simple principles should be clear:

1. **Coaching is a job, but it shouldn't be viewed as a chore.** (If it becomes a chore, please quit.) Coaching is a good chance to develop valuable skills you'll need in the workplace: acting polite and friendly to writers, even when you don't feel like it; keeping in mind that your purpose is to serve, to help, and to make writers feel comfortable, so that they want to come back; "selling" your service by making it seem pleasant and positive, even when the paper is due tomorrow and it's a complete mess. You *do* "sell" or fail to sell the Writing Center according to how you behave. If you want to be a successful coach and experience the rewards coaching promises, you have to *act* the role, and that role is to be a friendly, positive, helpful person. It's as simple as that.
2. **Be relaxed, but also professional, and always be ready to respond.** While we strive to keep the Writing Center informal, a place where writers can feel comfortable and safe, it's important to remember that it *is* a place where serious work takes place—it is a real "academic service" offered and paid for by the College. How would you feel if you went into your doctor's office and found him playing pinball or snoring on his couch? There's a time and a place for everything.
3. **Smile.** Smiling is the universal way of making people feel welcome; it is the

first step toward disarming uneasiness. Try to smile sincerely; if you can't, better a fake smile than none. (And if you're in a bad mood, smiling can actually lift your own spirits, too.)

4. Be neat; smell good. Coaching is close, one-to-one work. While you may dress as informally as you like, keep in mind that you're going to be within smelling distance of your writer. Clean, neat clothes and hair and good breath are important to the coaching session—for what should be obvious reasons. Not only that, but appearance is part of professionality. Learn that now, rather than be embarrassed in later life. (Breath mints are [nearly] always available in the cabinet!)

5. Take your time. While some coaching sessions *should* be kept short, your writer never should feel as though he is being rushed, or as though you're in a hurry to get the session over. Instead, he should feel as if you've got all the time in the world. If the writer comes in five or ten minutes before you're scheduled to leave, suggest that he work with someone else: "I'm going to have to leave in a few minutes, but Mike can help you now." And Mike, that's your cue to jump up and say, "Sure!" If a client comes in ten minutes before closing, say, "I'm sorry but we're about to close. Can I help you make an appointment for tomorrow?"

6. Take the coaching process—including the forms—seriously. Not only are these forms used to evaluate *your* performance (I'll read them, as may other faculty and staff); they also direct the session productively, giving you an easy way to ask valuable questions and exert authority without seeming domineering or nosy, and opening opportunities to collect information. Don't say, "We have to fill out this form" and then fill in only parts of it; instead say, "What we do to get started is fill out this form...let's see: what's your name? Joe Smith...Hi, Joe, my name is Amy...." If you view the process negatively, so will your writer. Model the behavior you want to encourage.

7. During the session, it's essential to *listen carefully*, to read closely, to pay attention. If you do, you'll be able to help the writer better, that's obvious; but you'll also be communicating, subliminally, that you view the writer and her writing as important and valuable. Two ways to indicate interest and to show that you're listening: eye contact and "say-back." Eye contact most of us have no problem with; sometimes we just forget, especially when there's a piece of writing to look at instead. So try to look up at the writer from time to time, especially when you ask a question. Often, what's on the page is much less important than what the writer has to say, and the writer's posture, facial expressions, and tone can communicate as much as or more than her words.

"Say-back" is a useful tool in any kind of counseling situation: when the writer says something to you, say it back to her in your own words:

"So, what do you think the strengths of this paper are?"

"Well, I've got good sources and good information."

"So, you've supported your argument well? You've got good facts to back up what you want to say?"

"Yeah, except I'm not sure I use them right, you know?"

"Maybe you don't know if the facts you've got really line up with the argument you're trying to make? If they really support your thesis?"

"No...I think it's more that I put them in the wrong places...."

"Maybe you need to work on reorganizing, structuring your argument differently?"

"Yeah, I think that might be it...."

Here, "say-back" not only lets the writer know she's been heard; it also begins to teach her the vocabulary and concepts she needs to understand and solve her problem. All this, and you haven't even finished filling the form out yet....

Thus, it becomes clear that "coaching etiquette" isn't just a matter of being polite; it's a way of creating a teaching context, in which the writer feels valued, safe, and supported, and in which certain behavior, like listening well and "say-back," can actually help you begin teaching.

Coaching Attitudes

The first semester of the Teaching Writing class, one of the students expressed this attitude toward writing and writers:

> I don't think everyone *can* learn to write. I mean, we can't all be Dostoevsky or Tolstoy after all; some people are just never going to write well. And I think trying to pretend that they will be able to is wrong; it just deceives them....

Was she right? It's true, after all, that we can't all be Dostoevsky. And it is even true that some people may never learn to write truly "well." So what was my response to her?

I told her that, first of all, I didn't believe that this was a very productive attitude for a teacher—any kind of teacher—to have. To teach well, we must believe that within each of our students there is the potential to learn, and that our job, as teachers, is to try to tap that potential, whatever it might be, however deep or shallow the lode. To go into the job with the attitude that we might *not* find potential in a student is to begin defeated; it's like starting out for a picnic on a beautiful day saying, "I'm sure it's going to rain," and then spending the rest of the day on the look-out for rain clouds while your friends enjoy the food, the fresh air, the conversation. It rather misses the point.

The other thing I pointed out to her was that she was working under a very narrow definition of good writing. In fact, by referring to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy as her models, she revealed to me one of the reasons why her own writing was so careful, so cautious; why she wrote so little, and why each word seemed polished almost into oblivion. Her standards were too high; she was what I call a "constipated" writer, one who limited her production to only those words she felt she could trust completely. So long as her standards were this high, she could not see progress or value in anything less—in her own writing, or in that of the writers she was coaching. She wanted, in Calkins's terms, to teach the writing, not the writer; perfection in particular pieces was her goal—not progress along a spectrum.

I believe teachers of writing need to maintain three attitudes: (1) They need to believe that each student, or writer, has the potential to learn and improve. (2) They need to believe that writing, and learning to write, are processes: sometimes long, slow processes, but processes whose goal is a deeper, more valuable reward that simple superficial "perfection." (3) Lastly, they need to understand that the definition of "perfection" varies and depends on the objectives of an individual piece of writing: we do not apply the same standards to a history paper as we do to a great novel, or to a freewrite as we do to an essay draft.

It's not enough, though, to simply have these beliefs; we must show them to our writers. How?

Imagine, once again, that you have come into the Writing Center. Now you are sitting side by side with the sleepy, irritated coach who has silently read your paper to herself, furiously marking things up as she went along. Finally she looks up and says, "Okay. Here's what's wrong," and at breakneck speed begins enumerating your "errors."

How do you feel?

Now imagine instead that, having filled out the coaching forms, you and the coach have already talked about your paper in general. She says, "Okay, let's look at the paper itself now," and asks if you would like to read it aloud to her, or if you'd prefer her to read it to you. You opt to have her read it, and she begins. She reads the first sentence, and stops. Your heart comes into your throat. *What's wrong with that?* you think. You worked long and hard at that sentence. "That's a really good opening," she says. "It gets us right into the subject, without stating the obvious. I like it." You relax. *This might be all right after all*, you say to yourself. (Meanwhile, a little voice in the back of your mind squeaks, "Maybe she's just being nice?") She begins to read again; then, in a moment, she stops. "Okay. Let me read this sentence to you again, and you tell me if it sounds right." She rereads the sentence, and you can hear a problem, though you can't quite pinpoint it. She waits patiently while you look at the sentence. "Oh yeah," you say, "this verb doesn't go with this subject." "That's right!" the coach says. "The subject is plural, and the verb is singular. What got you was this prepositional phrase here" (she points to it). "I make that mistake all the time, it's really hard to notice when you're in the process of writing. Sometimes I don't notice it even when I proofread." She asks you for the correct verb form, and you give it.

How do you feel now?

Some more principles become clear:

1. The power of *positive feedback* can not be underestimated. If you read a sentence that's really good, or even just plain correct and clear, commenting on that can set the tone for the whole session. On the other hand, of course, you need to be *honest*; don't flatter insincerely. A writer can see through that. And don't feel you need to gush over every single good sentence; one here and there that you really like is plenty. Or comment on the quality of an idea, the use of a quote—whatever you can find that is genuinely working well. If nothing else, compliment the writer on his or her willingness to work on writing—as demonstrated by coming to the Writing Center in the first place.

2. And when you come to something that needs work, draw the writer's attention to it—but **give the writer the benefit of the doubt** and a chance to see the error and correct it himself. This may mean you have to wait for a bit of uncomfortable

silence to end; that's okay, no one said coaching had to be nonstop talk. **Give the writer time to answer. Never assume he or she doesn't "know" how to correct the error.**

3. Writers frequently feel they don't "know" anything about grammar, punctuation, and the like; they may believe that writing is an intricate system of rules impossible to remember. Yet at the same time most writers have, over the years, picked up much of the grammar and mechanics they need to know. **Reinforce what writers do know**; this will make them more receptive to learning more, since it will make them believe that writing *is* something they *can* master, and in fact have already begun to master. And let them know that writing is *more* than just grammar—writing is really about giving voice and shape to interesting ideas. Grammar's just the tool, not the goal. (Often, what writers *don't* know is the terminology —you can reassure them that not knowing the arcane language of grammar doesn't mean they know nothing at all, and you can use familiar language to explain grammatical ideas to them.)

4. Let your writer know she is not alone in making errors—that you, and other experienced writers, make mistakes too, have difficulty with the writing process, run into "rough patches." In their hearts, many students believe that writing is an arcane art requiring some magically bestowed or innate talent. It helps if you let them know that all writers make mistakes and have to learn how to spot and correct them. In fact, learning how to spot and correct problems in writing is what coaching can teach. And *all* writing can get better—even a paper that gets an A could be improved. Reinforce that idea, too, if you get a chance.

5. Introduce and reinforce often the idea that *writing is a process*. Nobody gets it all right the first time, and coming to the Writing Center is a good step toward taking control of the process, toward becoming a confident and competent writer. Often, just recognizing that writing is a process for *everyone* can itself give writers the confidence they need to reread their work and not feel discouraged by the prospect of revision. As mentioned in chapter 1, don't just *talk* about the writing process; *demonstrate* it during the session itself. Don't just talk about *what* to revise; also talk about (and show) *the process* they might use while revising.

6. Be yourself. You might think that, as a writing coach, you're now supposed to be a teacher, and worse yet, that most pernicious of all teachers, an *English* teacher. But as the dialogue above shows, you'll do much better to *be yourself.* What makes writing centers work is that *peers* are teaching *peers.* You're not judging or grading the client; you're *collaborating* with the client to help him improve this piece of writing. You have to respect ownership, yes—it's very important not to take over, not to help "too much," not to try to change someone's style or ideas. Your job is to help them express their *own* ideas as well as they possibly can, in their *own* voices, while at the same time helping to make those ideas and voices clear to a reader. As an objective reader, the most useful feedback you can give is the most basic, honest feedback: *I don't understand this part. I'm not sure this is as clear as it could be. What are you trying to say here?* As a peer, too, you can share your own stories—your own experiences with writing, your own flaws and foibles. Rather than undermine your author, this openness will give

your clients confidence: *If a writing coach can make mistakes and still be a good writer, so can I.*

Such simple things—in this case, a positive attitude shared through honest feedback and conversation—can both help the writer with a particular problem *and* create a "teachable moment" that transcends the coaching session and moves the writer toward independence. Setting the tone for a productive session isn't just about being nice and polite. It's about truly welcoming a writer into serious (and sometimes fun) conversation about his or her writing. If you care about your client's writing and communicate that through sincere interest; if you "be yourself" and share your own experiences as a writer, you'll find that your clients soon relax and begin to enjoy the session. All of which adds up to one thing: deeper, more lasting learning.

Chapter 4
Tutoring Itself

In the last two chapters, we've been talking about the *form* a coaching session should take: how to meet, greet, and treat a writer to make her or him receptive to learning. Now it's time to talk about tutoring writing itself.

Obviously, to tutor writing you have to know something about writing. Like our clients, you probably feel somewhat insecure about your expertise; yet the fact that you've been nominated and selected to coach does indicate that you *do*, indeed, know a lot about how to write. In a sense, you're like Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*. Remember how, at the moment he received the fake diploma from the Wizard, he suddenly "knew" so much more, and began spouting that knowledge spontaneously? Like him you already know most, if not all, of what you need to know; what you lack is confidence in that knowledge, and perhaps the vocabulary to express it. Over the course of the semester, you'll learn that vocabulary and earn that "diploma." The best way to gain confidence, though, is trial by fire: by jumping into coaching as soon as possible.

As you may already know, a peculiar thing happens when you begin to read someone else's writing. While you may have a hard finding your own errors, seeing your own structural problems or lack of evidence or development, in someone else's work such things seem to "pop out" at you. In many cases, you feel as though *you know exactly what to do*.

But knowing what to do is one thing: teaching someone else how to know what to do is another. As I've hinted above, and as Calkins's book shows, this is the crux on which successful coaching rests. If you say too much too soon, you're simply teaching the writing, not the writer. If you don't say enough, you're teaching nothing, to nobody.

How, then, do you decide what a writer needs, when? And how do you lead your writer to that flash of understanding we call "learning"?

FOSTERING OWNERSHIP

To keep your client invested right from the start, it's important to emphasize his or her ownership of both the session and the writing. After you've filled out the form, pause for a moment and ask: *What can I help you with today?* If the writer has a draft, even before you preview it you can ask: *How do you feel about this draft?* or *What do you like about it?* and then *What do you think might need work?* The client will rely on you to notice and point out problems that he or she hasn't recognized, but often the client knows *exactly* what the problems are and has an agenda for the session. Giving ownership to the writer right from the start is not only polite; it's important for developing rapport and getting real work done.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

We've already gone over the steps to a coaching session: get out the folder and the form; fill out the form; understand the assignment; foster ownership; get a preview of the paper; read aloud. When you feel that you understand where the writer is in his process, you're ready to get down to work. In general, we want to coach from *global* to *local,* from the largest components of writing (content, organization) to the smaller (sentences,

words, punctuation). That means that you, as coach, (mentally) move **down** something like this list of questions, and begin working in earnest wherever the answer is “no”:

1. Is the assignment understood and addressed?
2. Is there a draft?
3. Does the draft have a clear thesis, point, focus, purpose, or effect?
4. Does the draft include enough evidence or detail to make the point or effect?
5. Is the draft unified and consistent?
6. Does the draft flow?
7. Do the paragraphs hang together?
8. Do the sentences make sense? Are they easily readable?
9. Are the sentences grammatical?
10. Are there any typographical, spelling, or other errors?
11. Is the paper formatted correctly?
12. Are citations correct and in place?

On our session log sheets, this is expressed this way:

__Understanding assignment	__Collecting ideas/information	__Designing essay structure
__Developing/revising thesis	__Adding evidence/analysis	__Cutting
__Reorganizing paragraphs	__Creating transitions	__Improving local clarity
__Correcting GUM	__Fixing citations	__Other:

(GUM, by the way, stands for grammar, usage, and mechanics. If you’re not sure what those words really mean, see your handbook.)

In other words, we move from “what” is in the paper to “how” it’s written, and even within the “how” category, we move from larger units to smaller units—from paragraphs, to sentences, to words.

Of course, given the recursiveness of the writing process, it never happens quite this neatly. In the space of five minutes, you may find yourself talking about the piece of evidence in a given sentence, where that sentence should go, and then how it should be written and cited. Then you might move back to talking about the assignment, or the thesis, then another sentence, or the paragraph order. But the principle of “first things first” is still very valuable. For instance, if you’re working with a writer who’s written a draft that doesn’t address the assignment, there’s no point in discussing his spelling errors till she writes a draft that does. What you need to do in each session is make sure that all the larger elements are firmly and appropriately in place before you move on to the smaller elements. Stop and work where the biggest problem begins. Don’t move on till you’re both satisfied it’s been addressed.

QUESTIONS, NOT ANSWERS

We teach writing as a process—indeed, you might even say that we teach the writing process itself. Therefore, our primary job as coaches is not to solve writing problems, not to fix papers, but to teach our writers the tools to do it on their own. Largely we do this collaboratively, through dialogue, with the coach mainly asking questions:

- First, to help the writer identify problems, we act as objective, “ignorant” readers and ask questions of the draft at hand. Since, often, we’re not familiar with the topic, class, or discipline, usually these questions come easily, even naturally, from our curiosity and interest.
- Second, as we work with writers to solve problems, we ask questions to get insight into the writer’s learning style, writing habits, and background so that we can suggest appropriate strategies. This is a little trickier, and it helps to have a full bag of options—you’re already gaining some, but more about that in chapters 6, 7, and 8.
- Third, as we help writers become independent of us, we ask them to think about how they might use the new tools on other writing assignments.

So you can see that the key to our success rests on our asking questions, rather than our just giving answers, solutions, or even suggestions.
Look again at this dialogue:

"So, what do you think the strengths of this paper are?"
"Well, I've got good sources and good information."
"So, you've supported your argument well? You've got good facts to back up what you want to say?"
"Yeah, except I'm not sure I use them right, you know?"
"Maybe you don't know if the facts you've got really line up with the argument you're trying to make? If they really support your thesis?"
"No...I think it's more that I put them in the wrong places...."
"Maybe you need to work on reorganizing, structuring your argument differently?"
"Yeah, I think that might be it...."

Notice anything? Even when making statements, the coach speaks in questions, inviting the writer to respond, leaving the writer room to contradict or expand as well as agree. If instead of "So, you've supported your argument well?" the coach says, "Okay, so you've supported your argument well," the writer might find it much harder to speak up and say, "No..."

This simple principle—of inviting response by asking questions rather than by making statements—works for all kinds of situations in coaching. Let's look at another scenario:

"Hmmm. Does this sentence sound funny to you? Let me read it again." (You reread a sentence, *slightly* emphasizing the problem area.)
"Yes...I think I see what you mean." (The writer hesitates, hoping you will tell him what you're fishing for. After a moment, you give a prompt.)
"Which part of it's the problem? Where does it sound funny?"
"Hmmm...." (The writer hesitates, finally points to a place in the sentence. He gets it right—thank goodness.)
"Yeah, that doesn't sound right to me either. What do you think's wrong with it?"
"I don't know.... Something about the verb?"

"Yeah, I think so—how could we fix it?"
"Maybe it's in the wrong tense?"
"Maybe—how about if we try a different tense? What else could you put there?"

Here, the coach has slowly (and yes, somewhat painfully) brought the writer to see his own error, and to offer a solution. But what if the solution is wrong?

"Let's read that and hear how it sounds." (You read the revised sentence.) "What do you think?"
"Still sounds funny."
"Yeah, I agree. Can you think of another option?"

Ideally, this ends soon, with the writer finally coming up with the right answer, and the coach, finally, explaining *why* that answer is correct. It took a long time, yes—but now the writer feels good about having found and corrected the error himself, and has perhaps gained some understanding about why the error happened in the first place. In addition, this dialogue has taught the writer *how* to look for and identify errors, and this external dialogue will over time become internalized, much as Susie internalized the concrete processes she learned.

What happens next? Usually, this kind of stubborn error, an error it takes the writer a long time to pinpoint and correct, will recur. The next time it happens, the coach says, "Ah! This is just like that other sentence we had, the one with 'implement' in it? How should we fix this one?" Eventually, the writer will demonstrate that, at least for this session, he understands the particular problem and knows how to correct it. Then, at the end of the session, the coach might say, "Now—how can you remember about that verb thing so you can catch it next time? Would you like to make a list in the back of your notebook, or is there a word you can remember to help you think of it?" After the two of you have come up with something, the writer leaves, feeling positive about having learned how to solve his own problem, at least in this one case.

This may at first seem like a tedious, time-consuming approach; you might find it frustrating, and some writers definitely will, especially at first. Obviously, we need to be flexible and respond to writers' needs and the individual situation—endless questioning that goes nowhere isn't fruitful. If the writer above couldn't solve the problem on his own, the coach would have to *teach the answer directly* first—explaining what was wrong and why—then hope for another opportunity to "test" the writer's understanding of it.

Nonetheless, this approach to coaching has proven effective—in part because it is delivered by peers rather than by teachers, but also in large part because it protects the writer's ownership of the process and keeps him in charge of his own writing. In a survey of our clients in the spring of 1999, we found that 94% of writers found the coaches "very friendly" and 93% found the coaching process acceptable, very good, or excellent. So even if it seems a little forced at times, always begin with questions, not answers, and teach directly only when you find a real need for it.

A small note here about dealing with grammar problems: Unless both you and your client clearly know the technical terminology for grammar (*subject, verb,* etc.), it's better not to use it. If, for instance, a verb is in the wrong tense or form, you can simply

say something like “Is he selling the stock now, or did he sell it before?” Once you’ve solved the problem, you can slip in the technical term: “OK, so we fixed that verb tense…” helping the client to learn a little of the lingo that writers use to talk about writing.

But what *does* your client know? Never assume anything. (We all know the saying: “Never assume; it makes an ‘ass’ out of ‘u’ and ‘me.’”)

Let’s say you and your coach have gotten to work. Turns out your paper’s in pretty good shape, and so you are doing a final proofreading together, catching all the little errors that cropped up because you were so stressed and hurried as you wrote it. Over and over, you’ve typed “there” when you meant “their.” You know it’s wrong; you can catch it yourself. But your coach, seeing the repetition of error, thinks you *don’t* know, and starts to explain: “There are three kinds of *there’s,”* she says, and writes them down on a piece of paper. “Can you explain the difference to me?”

She must think I’m really dumb, you think. Flabbergasted, you don’t get a word out before she begins to explain. “T-h-e-r-e is an adverb….”

Never assume. It makes an ass out of you and your client.

Imagine, instead, that the coach says, “I see you know the difference between these. Why don’t you just underline the ones you see, as we go, and then you can fix them later?”

But the truth is, you think to yourself, I’m not always *sure* which one I meant. Too embarrassed to admit it, you just nod.

Somewhere between these two paths is the right one. Never assume too little knowledge, or too much. Just ask: “Do you want me to go over the difference between this *their* and that one?” Let the client tell you what he or she needs.

A good way to find the point where “knowledge breaks down” is to ask a series of questions, each one more specific. Start with “Hmm…is there something not right in this sentence?” and gradually get to “This verb is wrong, I think—what else can it be?” Give the client every opportunity to keep ownership—even over his or her mistakes.

STRATEGIES, NOT SOLUTIONS

Some of the problems you'll run into as a coach are "bigger" than finding the correct verb form or punctuation mark. Our writers can also have problems with focusing their topics, gathering information, developing a thesis, supporting their arguments, and organizing everything into a coherent, logical pattern. It's tempting, in this kind of situation, to go ahead and offer the solution you would use—tempting to help the writer make an outline, to read the writer's draft and say what you think the thesis should be, to offer ideas for how a topic “should be” focused or an argument supported.

Once again, that would be teaching the writing and not the writer. If you come up with these solutions for your writer, she may get a better grade on her paper—but what will she have learned? Who will help her next time? What will she do after graduation, when there's no writing center for her to turn to?

As a competent writer, you clearly have a "bag of tricks" you use for solving these kinds of problems. Sometimes that bag will contain one trick that perfectly suits your client and the situation—and sometimes it won’t. There is no “one size fits all” method for writing. That’s why we’re exploring a gamut of new tricks, some of which might not appeal to you personally but will be just the ticket for another kind of writer doing

another kind of writing. Teaching strategies for writing rather than simply offering solutions means that the writer both learns more from this particular assignment and gains a method that she can use in a variety of future situations:

"I'm not sure what you're trying to say here.... I mean, you have lots of good information, but it doesn't seem to have anything to tie it together. Maybe you need a thesis?"

"Yeah—the teacher keeps talking about having a specific thesis. What is a thesis, anyway?"

"Well, a thesis is an idea you have that you're going to argue or demonstrate in your paper. Usually it's an answer to a question, like why or how something happened or why or how something is the way it is. It's your main point."

"Oh, you mean like how Eliot makes the reader understand his ideas in this poem?"

"Yeah, that's right! But usually a thesis is pretty focused—like maybe on one particular idea or one particular method that Eliot uses.... Is there one particular thing you focus on here?"

"I don't know...." You give the writer time to think, but she comes up blank. From your initial discussions, you know that this student is an art major who likes to paint, so you search your bag of tricks for a strategy that involves visual input. Then you suggest it:

"Well, when I'm not sure what my thesis is, sometimes I read over my paper and highlight what I think are my really strong ideas. Like, for instance, what do you think the strongest idea is in this first paragraph?" (You give the writer a chance to reread the paragraph. She points hesitantly to a sentence.) "Yeah, I agree, that's pretty forceful. Here, why don't you underline it, and put a star in the margin?"

After doing this for a couple of more paragraphs, you say, "Okay. Why don't you go through the whole paper this way, marking it up? When you're done, give me a holler and I'll come back over, and we'll see what we can see." With this, you leave the writer at the table to work alone, and go over to your seat on the couch; when she's ready, you go back to the table, and the two of you pull out the highlighted ideas and write them randomly a sheet of scrap paper; then you pull out some colored markers and color related ideas yellow, pink, or blue, so that she can see the connections. Most of the ideas are yellow, and you and she decide that the pink and blue ones don't fit. You talk about what it is that links the yellow ideas, she writes a sentence that expresses that link, and you help her number the yellow ideas to show what order they might come in to support it.

In this scenario, the coach has helped the writer learn how to discover ideas in her own draft and "salvage" it, the first step toward organizing a coherent second draft. Again, the coach should reinforce this learning:

"Great! Now you've got a clear idea of what you want to say, and you know how you're going to support it. The highlighting and clustering idea really worked well for you. Why don't you go write a quick second draft, following the organization you've laid

out, and then bring the paper back tonight? Then we can focus on making sure the paragraphs and sentences hang together. Sounds like it's going to be a good paper!"

Strategies for writing abound; writers invent new ones all the time. It’s important that you experiment with new strategies in your own writing, both to see how they work and to see what the pitfalls might be. Some strategies will work well with one kind of writer and not another, so getting to know your writers is valuable. An art major whose medium is painting might do well using visual learning techniques, like mapping or clustering for generating or organizing ideas, while a science or math major might do better with a chart or diagram. Freewriting is a good strategy for students who have a hard time getting words on paper, but could be disastrous for a student with Attention Deficit Disorder who tends to produce too many words too easily. (Chapter 8 will expand on different learning styles and tutoring strategies for addressing them.) Again, paying close attention as you fill out the preliminary forms—and referring to a writer’s file before he or she comes in—can help you understand your writer and what kinds of strategies will work best. And if you suggest a strategy and the writer seems unenthusiastic or it doesn’t work, you can always try something else.

As you can see, it’s important to “customize” each session to the writer. Here are a couple more tips for how to do that.

1. Ask yourself: What kind of conference?

Most writers come into the Writing Center believing that *revision* means proofreading to correct such superficial characteristics as grammar, punctuation, and spelling, an idea that has often been reinforced by years of red-pen corrections. By now, though, you have realized that this is *not* what the Writing Center promotes. Instead, we believe that writing is a recursive process that involves collecting, planning, and developing. *Developing* includes everything from finding a focus through drafting, revision, and editing. I like to make this distinction between *revision* and *editing*: Revision (“re-vision,” seeing again) deals with the "large" issues of meaning, structure, and ideas. Editing deals with the "small" issues of voice, including such things as grammar, but also including sentence structure, wordiness, and simple inelegance of expression. That is, revision deals with *global* concerns, while editing deals with *local* concerns.

Naturally, we know that the two are linked. Changing a sentence sometimes affects a paper globally—especially, for instance, if that sentence is the thesis! And rearranging the structure of a piece always requires some local changes, to make sure that all the pieces still fit together. Nonetheless, it’s a useful distinction, and one we should teach our clients.

So one of the first things you need to do is figure out at what *stage* the client’s writing is. Just because a writer has a draft doesn’t mean that that draft is ready for editing. Often, in fact, the draft is just a freewrite—a kind of collecting—and it needs developing and revision first. Ideally, we should encourage our writers to work on collecting before developing, developing before revising, and revising before editing, and ideally we should encourage our writers to work on one problem at a time. Since many writers don't understand the writing process in these terms, the coach's first job,

after making the writer comfortable and aware of how the Center works, is to diagnose the situation. Let's look again at this scenario:

"So, what do you think the strengths of this paper are?"
"Well, I've got good sources and good information."
"So, you've supported your argument well? You've got good facts to back up what you want to say?"
"Yeah, except I'm not sure I use them right, you know?"
"Maybe you don't know if the facts you've got really line up with the argument you're trying to make? If they really support your thesis?"
"No...I think it's more that I put them in the wrong places...."
"Maybe you need to work on reorganizing, structuring your argument differently?"
"Yeah, I think that might be it...."

At this point, the coach might deduce that (1) the writer has a complete draft; (2) the draft contains what the writer views as sufficient "evidence" or information that supports her ideas; (3) the writer feels that evidence points toward a single, clear thesis; (4) the writer's main struggle at this point is with the structure of her paper. Thus, the writer seems to need a *revision* conference, focusing on structure or organization. If, after the coach previews the paper itself, this diagnosis is confirmed, that’s what they should work on. Once the coach and writer have come up with a plan for that revision, the writer could go make those changes or they could cut and paste and rework the structure together. If the client has local problems as well, the coach should encourage her to come back with the new draft for an *editing* conference.

Unfortunately, some writers don’t manage their time well enough to allow for several sessions on a single paper. Nevertheless, by focusing on revision *before* editing, a coach is teaching the writer valuable skills and concepts—teaching the writer, not the writing. Insofar as we can accomplish this without alienating our writers, we should strive for this ideal.

Keep in mind, though, that the diagnosis isn't always so obvious, and the strategy so clear. Sometimes it may seem as though a writer's paper is ready for editing—and only after editing the whole thing will you realize that its arguments are unsupported. Some student writers become very adept at writing papers that "sound" good but contain no clear ideas. This is why we recommend previewing the draft before actually beginning a session, especially if the writer insists that all he needs is editing. But even if you have gone ahead and worked on editing, it's all right, at the end of the session, to suddenly switch strategies and open discussion about the ideas. Better late than never!

In general, our sessions tend to fall into three categories: "collecting," "developing/revision," and "editing." In a collecting session, you’re helping a writer at the earliest stage of the process, collecting ideas, trying to figure a thesis or think of arguments. In a developing/revision session, there’s a draft already on the page, and you may be working on improving consistency or focus, developing the ideas in more depth, or improving the organization. In an editing session, the substance, development, and structure are all good, but the language needs work. This is often the case with non-native (ESOL) clients.

And then, as mentioned above, there are times when a session delves into all three areas. Parts of the paper might be quite good, and ready for editing. Other parts might need restructuring or further development. The writer may need to write an ending or an introduction, and so you'll brainstorm about that. Feel free to give each aspect of a paper the kind of attention it needs most—keeping in mind the general principle that by doing so, you should *teach the writer, not the writing*: first things first; questions, not answers; strategies, not solutions. For instance, if part of a paper needs further development, you might question the writer into seeing this need, suggest freewriting on a separate piece of paper to gather ideas, and then help the writer see where the new ideas should go and where a transition is needed. This fluid approach to a session teaches another valuable tenet of good writing: that the writing process is recursive, moving forward and backward, left and right all the time as the writer negotiates the passage between language and meaning. In other words, writing is a messy process, and some coaching sessions can be too.

In fact, this last is probably the most common kind of session we see in the Center. While it may seem an attempt to "do everything at once," in fact it reflects the kind of thinking and rewriting real writers often do: a little editing, a little adding, a little rearranging.… In short, genuine recursiveness. The point isn't that you have to choose one kind of session or another; it's that you need to diagnose the situation and make some kind of loose plan before you begin, then be *flexible*—always keeping in mind your goal of teaching the writer new skills and strategies.

2. Ask yourself: What level of coaching?

In the Writing Center, your writers will fall along a continuum, from those needing "light" coaching to those needing "heavy." At one end of the continuum is the good writer who may only lack confidence and need reassurance. With this kind of writer, you might have a fairly relaxed conversation, acting more as a foil for the writer's own thinking—mainly, you need to stay out of the way. Or you might have a very intense, active conversation, the two of you bouncing ideas back and forth vigorously, with the writer always in charge but with you being more open and challenging than you might be with a less accomplished writer. In cases like this, focus on positive feedback and take your lead from the writer.

In the middle of the continuum is the kind of writer who has most basic skills, but lacks some (knows semicolons but not commas; can develop ideas, but not organize them); who has perhaps not yet discovered that writing is a process; who may need to learn revision strategies, brush up on grammar and punctuation, and develop close reading skills. With this kind of writer, your focus at first will be on assessing what the writer knows and doesn't know so that you can teach where his skills break down. With this kind of writer, too, it's especially important to focus on writing as a process. This is probably the most common kind of writer we see, and they can progress quite rapidly if you motivate them by helping them see what they do know and what they can already do well.

At the other end of the continuum is what we call a "basic" writer: a writer who does not grasp the grammar of sentences; who can not string sentences together in a logical fashion, state an idea clearly, or develop a thought; who is not familiar with even

that most rudimentary of forms, the five-paragraph theme; who writes as she speaks and speaks in nonstandard English; or who seems to have an excessively poor vocabulary. Basic writers need everything middle-level writers need, but more of it—and more slowly, ideally over a number of sessions.

Once you've experienced all three kinds of writers, you'll undoubtedly feel best about light- and middle-level coaching. After all, the gratification is immediate: the writers pick up on what you're saying quickly, and they can rewrite easily; you can see progress right away. On the other hand, working with basic writers may on occasion seem hopeless. Progress may be very slow, impeded by a severe lack of self-esteem with regard to writing, and sometimes by what seems like a lack of motivation to improve. But these are the writers most in need of our help, and when they do make progress, it is our greatest reward. Basic writers, then, as the most challenging group to deal with, are worthy of some special attention.

At Saint Michael's, basic writers fall into three, very general categories: international students who haven't yet mastered English itself; students with moderate to severe learning disabilities (LDs), who may speak quite elegantly, but can't put sentences together on paper; and students with inadequate preparation or poor educational backgrounds, who, much like international students, have yet to learn the language of standard written English (SWE)—in other words, the English expected of them when they write for college. We'll be reading a separate text about ESL writers, and further along in this book you'll read more about nonstandard speakers and LD writers. But it's worthwhile to review some principles especially important for these writers, who may become your designated clients.

1. **Go slowly.** In the first session, get to know the writer; ask questions about background, writing experience, feelings toward writing. Then, take your time in diagnosing what the writer needs now, with this particular paper, first. Find out what she thinks is her biggest problem with writing. Feel the writer out. Make a plan of action with the writer.
2. **Deal with the biggest problem first.** As with any writer, don't jump into editing when the paper has no thesis, structure, or development. A new international student might need help with these before you focus on verb forms and articles; a more experienced international student might simply need you to check grammar. On the other hand, if you can't understand the sentences, you might need to struggle through them in order to see what the bigger problems of the paper are. Be flexible; take your time.
3. **Prioritize. Don't expect to solve every problem in one session.** Look for patterns of error (for instance, a major pattern of wrong verb forms or comma mistakes) or the biggest problem with the paper, and focus on teaching one, two, or at most three main lessons in each session. Some basic writers may take a long time to grasp an idea that seems obvious to you. Try to talk such writers into taking their papers away and revising before you try to deal with other problems. Don't try to teach everything; teach only the first, most important things at this moment.
4. **Offer answers when you have to, and explain them simply.** If, after you've thoroughly tested the writer's knowledge, you find that he simply doesn't know what you're talking about, it's okay to teach directly. However, unless the writer

shows such knowledge, try not to use the complicated, professional vocabulary of grammar. Instead, try to use examples, metaphors, common language. Sometimes explanations aren't necessary or possible; then it's okay to say, "That's just how it's done in standard English" or "This is how we express this in standard English."

5. Offer to write things down while the writer talks; sometimes this takes the pressure off, and it can be essential for some basic writers, who may find the mechanical difficulty of making their own notes frustrating.

6. Tell and *show,* by modeling or demonstrating; when necessary, offer suggestions for words. Some basic writers learn better when they can see what you mean. Show them how to map, outline, revise a sentence; then have them try it. Because basic writers sometimes have small vocabularies, feel free, when pressed, to offer some options—but try to choose words that fit with the rest of the writer's vocabulary. Offer "used" instead of "implemented," or "colorful" instead of "flamboyant." Assure the writer that simple language, well expressed, is better than misused fancy stuff. Always give the writer choices, and discuss the choice.

7. Be especially patient, positive, encouraging, and respectful. Basic writers are often very sensitive about writing; they often have low self-esteem and motivation to write. Give lots of positive feedback—but keep it honest. As always, when the writer leaves, remind her what she has learned today, and suggest a next step: "Come back and see me when you've made those changes." Let the basic writer know you care, and that you see progress.

Keep in mind: All of us can be "basic" writers when faced with writing in a new way or about a new subject. When we're in that situation, we need more information, more help, more attention than we do otherwise. Different writers, too, may have different needs at different times, and on different kinds of papers; the best coach is the one who responds anew to each session, assumes nothing, pays close attention to the present moment, and has the flexibility to try new things as the situation demands. So feel free to use any of these techniques when the situation seems to call for it, even with a writer who you know is usually quite capable.

As a writing coach, you have to be ready and flexible enough to respond, in each session, to what *each* writer needs. It's a skill that takes a long time to develop—one that is rarely mastered. You will make mistakes on occasion, but always remember: If you do your best, that's good enough.

Coaching Yourself

Just as your writers will sometimes write well, sometimes poorly, you will have great coaching sessions, fair ones, and awful ones. It's all too easy to get discouraged after the bad, to feel once again as if you don't really know what you're doing, to doubt your value as a coach or even the value of the Writing Center, or to criticize the system that creates the problems we see. Even now, after nearly three decades of teaching, it happens to me. But sometimes I have a student whose problems *I* cannot help with until *he* makes an effort to help himself. *Teaching doesn't always work.*

When it doesn't work, take a moment to "coach yourself." Ask yourself the hard questions: Was I paying full attention this time? Was I in too much of a hurry? Did I

misread the situation? Was I somehow rude or unfriendly? Talk to other coaches, too; get their input. In short, diagnose yourself. If, indeed, you can see room for improvement, don't berate yourself, don't condemn yourself. Just make the effort next time. *Revise* yourself; *edit* your performance. Change and grow.

If, on the other hand, in answer to all your questions you say, "I did the best I could, given the circumstances," then forgive yourself. It's all any of us can do.

The Gift of Writing

It may seem overwhelming to you, to imagine keeping all this in your mind at once, as you encounter your first, your second, your third writer. What words can I write to make you believe that this enterprise, in many ways so frightening, so intimidating, so frustrating, so risky, is worth it?

I *believe* in coaching. It represents, at heart, my philosophy toward teaching writing, and indeed toward all teaching: collaborative, cooperative learning; students teaching students; one-to-one attention and individualized pace and methods; attention to process and skills as well as to products. But there's more to it than that.

Again I turn to Lucy Calkins, but this time she's quoting Peter Elbow, one of the first writers to write about the writing process:

> The essential human act at the heart of writing is the act of giving. There's something implacable and irreducible about it...it is a gift of yourself.... Writers are more apt to understand writing as giving: Here. Take it. Enjoy it. Thank me.... (111)

Writing is giving. And when coaches help writers, they empower them to give that gift—to put themselves, their ideas, their learning, beliefs, thoughts, and emotions on the line, available to others. So coaching writing, like all teaching, is giving, too. And it feels good. The bottom line is, it feels good.

Chapter 5
Solving Writing Problems

What is good writing, anyway?

The title of this chapter itself is a problem for me because the idea of "writing problems" implies that there is an ideal kind of writing. Just as there is no one "writing process," there is no one, easy definition of good writing, except perhaps the vaguest one: "Good writing is that writing which does what it sets out to do." By this definition, an incoherent rant on the page is "good" if it lets me blow off some steam; a poem full of clichés and empty of originality is "good" if the writer (or recipient) likes it.

Maybe it would help if I narrowed the field a bit. What is good writing *in college*? Or even more narrowly: How is proficient writing defined, at Saint Michael's College?

The latter is a question I can answer, but before I do, let me go on a bit about what I think the qualities are of truly good writing—writing that would be good by almost anybody's lights.

Some of you might know that I teach fiction writing "on the side." Others might know that I am a fiction writer. In both those capacities, I have had many occasions to try to figure out what makes good fiction. Once, I even made a list:

1. **<u>Style</u>. Control of the "local" elements of prose writing: voice, diction, syntax, grammar, sentence structure, and the like; how well the style contributes to the impact/meaning of the story.**
2. **<u>Technique</u>. Control of the "global" elements of prose writing: plotting, structure, description, characterization, point of view, imagery, and the like.**
3. **<u>Unity</u>. Achievement of unity between the writer's intention and the local and global elements of the work; the degree to which form reinforces, reveals, and expresses intention; the degree to which all parts of the work coalesce into a coherent whole.**
4. **<u>Effect</u>. A clear and emotionally or intellectually compelling effect arising out of the writer's intention and manipulation of form.**
5. **<u>Originality</u>. The degree to which the writer brings to his or her materials fresh insight, demonstrates a unique and interesting sensibility, or otherwise shows genuine creativity or force of imagination.**

You'll see some key ideas here. One is control. Another is unity. Another is effect. A third might be interest. From that, we might devise a definition that could fit any genre of writing: *When written for an audience, a piece of writing is good to the extent that it is written with control and has a single, interesting effect* .

Is that useful? Maybe; maybe not. Maybe we need a more utilitarian definition. *Good writing is writing that serves its purpose.* Yes, now we're getting somewhere, especially if we define purpose as *to communicate a specific thing to an audience.* "A specific thing," while seeming very vague, allows for a broad range of purposes. After all, a poem does not communicate the same thing as a business memo; a short story does not communicate the same thing as a history paper. But both communicate *a specific thing* to *an audience.* "A specific thing" contains that idea of *unity*. And "audience" implies a

whole raft of criteria, everything that makes something readable and comprehensible, from development of ideas or scenes to choice of words and punctuation.

So: If good writing is writing that communicates a specific thing to an audience, then "writing problems" are those slips, those infelicities, those errors, those half-hearted gestures, those vaguenesses—all those things that get in the way of that communication.

What this means is that a writer can't know if his or her writing works *unless a reader reads it and responds.* Imagine that. And that's just what the Writing Center provides: readers who are trained how to respond.

In school, most writers get very little "real" response to their writing. This is because their main audience is their teachers. Teachers *should* be a good audience for writing—they're educated, they're interested, they're usually articulate. The problem is, when teachers read writing, they're not *dis*interested. That is, they have something at stake, because they are usually trying to teach (i.e., correct mistakes) or grade (i.e., judge the writing against some standard or other examples of the same assignment). Because teachers can't be truly *dis*interested, their response to a student's writing is always subject to suspicion: how do I know what the teacher *really* thinks?

This is where the Writing Center has a big advantage. Like teachers, you're educated, interested, and articulate. You know good writing when you see it. Unlike teachers, you're *dis*interested. You're not trying to "teach" in the big sense of that word, nor are you grading or judging. You're simply trying to help, and the best way you can do that is to give a *readerly response.* That is, just let the writer know what you *get* and *don't get.*

> I really like the way you start this piece. I know right off the bat where you're going. What I got was that you're going to explain how Martin Luther King's religious background influenced his role in the Civil Rights movement. You're going to explain that what he learned as a small boy compelled him to take the role he did…. I don't know yet what he learned as a boy, but I assume I will hear that in the body of the paper, and that by the end I will see how specific lessons from his religious learning led him to take specific stances in the movement. What a great topic this is—your lead makes me really want to read on.

Imagine being a first-year student, writing your first paper for "Peace & Justice," getting that feedback from a writing coach. Imagine how confident it would make you feel. Imagine how *good* it would feel to be *heard* so clearly. Imagine how easy it would be, then, to start talking to the coach about the parts of your essay you're concerned about. In fact, maybe the coach has already, inadvertently, uncovered one weakness: you haven't talked about any specific "lessons" in your body. Oops. But that's okay, now you know what to do….

Sorry—I got carried away! But it's true. Just giving *readerly response* is often all you have to do as a coach—it should be your main job.

But I promised to tell you the College's definition of entry-level writing proficiency. It's simply this: *The ability to write a coherent, cohesive essay with a minimum of errors that interfere with comprehension.* In other words, to be a basically proficient writer, Saint Michael's students need to know how to develop a thesis, support it in cohesive paragraphs, and write it so others understand it. Not too different, after all, from my more primitive definition.

Now, onto how to help students who have problems with this—and those who wish to go beyond it.

Solving Writing Problems: A Diagnostic Approach

In Lucy Calkins's book *Lessons from a Child,* she tells the story of a third-grade boy who writes

I got a model from**:**Eric.

His teacher's response is positive and insightful: first she says, "Oh! You've used a colon the first time!" Then she asks, "How'd you go about deciding to use it in this particular place?"

To which the boy replies: "You know, like on a birthday card. 'To: Brad. From: Eric.'" The teacher applauds his way of thinking, and then goes on to give him a quick lesson in the colon.

This approach to teaching writing—identifying the reason for an error and only offering instruction if needed—is what we call the "diagnostic approach," and it is a method we rely on in the Writing Center. All St. Mike's students come to college knowing a great deal about writing, including some things we rather wish they didn't "know." If we merely "correct" the problems or tell students how to correct them, we're not addressing the cause, and so not really teaching. We're like doctors who, seeing a rash, rush to prescribe an ointment while neglecting to ask whether the patient has been exposed to measles recently. A little investigation into a student's most common, repetitive errors can go a long way toward finding a genuine remedy.

The key phrase in the above sentence is *repetitive* errors. *Everybody* makes mistakes sometimes. But if you notice a *pattern* of errors—either a pattern of local errors over the course of a single paper, or a pattern of global errors in two or more assignments—then some diagnosis is in order.

How do you diagnose the cause of frequent errors? There's only one way: Ask the client. Ask what she learned in high school; ask what her writing process is; ask if she understands the assignment; ask what her *reasoning* was. Only the client knows what goes on in her writing, but once *you* know, you can correct the misconceptions or educational gaps you discover.

In the charts that follow are listed some of the more common writing problems we see in the Writing Center, beginning with global and working toward local. Also listed are some common possible "causes" and "solutions" for these problems, but—you should know this by now—never *assume.* Ask, and find out for sure. Certainly you don't want to flip the manual open and look through these charts for answers to a certain situation; rather, read the charts over (perhaps periodically) to keep your options in mind.

GLOBAL ISSUES: CONTENT, ARGUMENTATION, ORGANIZATION

Note: In each chart, a number next to a cause parallels the number of the solution. That is, cause #1 responds well to solution #1.

Chart I: Apparent Lack of Thesis

HOW IT LOOKS	POSSIBLE CAUSES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
A paper without a thesis statement in the introductory paragraph.	1. Thesis has been placed in an untraditional location, where the student feels it is most effective or natural. 2. Client began writing without knowing what point s/he was going to make and discovered the point in the process of writing and then did not revise.	1. Unless the teacher has made it clear that there should be a thesis in the introduction, don't assume that this is a problem. Many professional writers put their real "point" at the end or even in the middle. If you discover a thesis later in the paper, and the paper is otherwise coherent, cohesive, and effective, ask if the placement of the thesis was deliberate and discuss the teacher's expectations. 2. This is a perfectly acceptable first step for writing a paper, but the client needs to learn that it should be followed with revision. In this case, help the client notice where the thesis falls, and discuss the option of writing a new introduction using that point. Also see "lack of structure/ organization" below. For more, see "What is a thesis?" after these charts.

Chart II: Actual lack of a thesis

HOW IT LOOKS	POSSIBLE CAUSES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
A paper that lacks focus; rambles and never comes to a point; names several points but never focuses on or develops one; or has a single topic but never makes a point that can be argued.	1. The client may have been rushed or writing at the last minute. 2. The client is confused about the paper topic and/or the reading assignment. 3. The client may have strong language skills and was able to "get away with" unfocused writing in high school and never realized it was a problem. 4. Certain learning disabilities—in particular, ADD—can also lead to this kind of writing.	1. Treat this as a freewrite or a "discovery" draft and help the client salvage it by using the Free/Style method or a variation thereof. Ask questions to be sure that the client knows what a thesis is and that an essay needs to be built around a single idea. 2. Help the client understand the paper topic and lead him or her in some strategies for generating a focus. Find out if the client does understand the reading; if not, see the section on reading to follow these charts. 3. #1 above, and #4 below. 4. As you read an unfocused paper or one with several undeveloped theses, have the client underline possible focuses; then suggest a "radical" revision, in which the client chooses *one* focus and writes a whole new draft developing just that. If the client may have ADD, help him or her develop a paragraph outline for that revision.

Chart III: Lack of Development, support, or evidence

HOW IT LOOKS	POSSIBLE CAUSES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
A paper that has a thesis/focus but lacks evidence and argumentation; often restates the same point several different ways without ever demonstrating it or includes a lot of seemingly unnecessary material.	1. Lack of or little sense for what a reader needs in order to accept or understand the point being made. 2. Not understanding the material and therefore being unable manipulate it to make a point. 3. The point chosen is something not arguable—either too broad or self-evident, or an "opinion" or feeling rather than a thesis.	1. Ask the natural questions a reader would be asking. "Why?" "For example?" "In what way?" "So what?" "How?" As the client answers the question, have him write those answers into the text. Suggest that the client to ask him or herself these kinds of questions after each sentence as he or she writes. 2. Check for understanding of the material. If it's clear the client doesn't understand, suggest a conference with the professor, possibly asking for an extension on the paper at that time. See *Coaching Reading Strategies* after these charts. 3. If the thesis is inappropriate (and this isn't always obvious, even to the instructor), review what a thesis is and discuss ways to narrow it down or revise it to make it work. Try to help the client keep the original focus so as to protect his or her ownership of the writing.

Chart IV: Poor or confusing structure/organization

HOW IT LOOKS	POSSIBLE CAUSES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
A lack of "flow"; writing feels choppy; reader's expectations are constantly thwarted.	1. The client's writing process: a paper written too quickly or late at night or with many interruptions; a paper written in pieces and then "assembled"; a paper written using an outline or formula that was not suitable to the topic. 2. Confusion about the material; see above. 3. A detailed assignment with a list of "questions to consider": the client may have tried to answer all the questions rather than use them as "thinking points." 4. The assignment may be more complex or longer than the client is used to; the "five-paragraph theme" approach no longer works but s/he is unsure how else to structure a piece of writing. 5. Lack of "connecting" material—the transitional phrases, cues, sentences that allow the reader to see how things are connected.	1. Help the client "salvage" the draft using one of these strategies: ➢ Glossing: "Gloss" each section or paragraph by writing its main topic, point, or purpose in the margin. Then make an outline of these glosses, putting them in a more sensible order. Cut and paste the draft to follow this outline. ➢ Color-coding: Instead of glossing, choose a color for each subtopic, and highlight the paper to see what goes together. Things that don't get highlighted don't belong at all. Everything else can be cut and pasted into the right order. 2. See "Actual lack of thesis." 3. Sometimes professors include many questions just to get students to think; explain that to the client and help the client find a focus and generate a thesis of his or her own. 4. Use #1, above. 5. Ask "how does this sentence connect to that one?" Show how to make sentences dovetail or add transitions. Ask questions; suggest phrases. Doing this on the computer, with the client at the keyboard, is particularly effective.

LOCAL ISSUES: CITATION, STYLE, GRAMMAR, AND PUNCTUATION

Chart V: Citation Issues

How it looks	Possible causes	Possible solutions
Direct quotes and/or paraphrased ideas without citation; improper or inconsistent citation; sudden shift in language (e.g., a more sophisticated or complex style, a different level of vocabulary).	1. Inexperience with citation styles. 2. Confusion about which style to use or what needs to be cited. 3. Lack of reference guide and/or internet access to specific citation styling. 4. Rushed job in compiling "works cited" or "bibliography" section of paper. 5. Plagiarism.	1-2. Introduce client to appropriate citation styles and explain college expectations; show several examples in handbook. 3. Review citation styles in handbook; give handout; take client up to reference desk for help. 4. Suggest ways to keep sources organized while doing research; refer to library reference desk for help with RefWorks. 5. Assume plagiarism was accidental and help client fix; if client denies it's plagiarism and refuses to cite clearly plagiarized information or passages, explain what an academic integrity violation could mean to both you and the client.

A note about the Writing Center and the Library:
New coaches need to know that we are not housed in the library by accident. We are here not only because it's a convenient location for our clients; we're here because in college the link between writing and reading, and especially research, is very strong. Our writing center is fortunate to have at its disposal library staff who are only too happy to come to our aid when we have a client who's having difficulty with research, citations, or even finding a topic to write about. Feel free, anytime, to march your client upstairs to the reference desk to ask for some help. Take advantage of our location and of the many resources—print and human—we have all around us.

Chart VI: Stylistic Issues

How it looks	Possible causes	Possible solutions
1. Words frequently used incorrectly—i.e., the wrong vocabulary choices. 2. Dialectical writing, writing that sounds too much like someone talking 3. Inappropriate "register"—i.e., language too formal or informal for the assignment 4. Words used that seem beyond the client's vocabulary and/or inconsistent with the voice of the paper. 5. "Mumbo-jumbo"—i.e., overly complex word choices, sentence structures; convoluted writing. 6. Words that are correctly used but send the audience to the dictionary. 7. Overly simplistic writing; short sentences, simple vocabulary.	1. Writer hasn't learned the nuances of meaning of certain words or phrases; may be an ESL client or a native speaker from a region with a strong dialect. 2-3. Client may lack experience with formal, academic writing and/or be unsure of academic expectations. 4-5. Client may be developing his/her "academic voice" and/or may be worried about impressing the audience; may have quoted without indication or citation. 6. Client may be gifted in the English language but lacks audience awareness. 7. Client may be "dumbing down" his/her language for fear of making mistakes.	1. Conference with client about the words in question; ask "what are you trying to say here?" or use WIRMI (What I really mean is….) When the client restates it clearly, suggest using those words. Check unfamiliar or new words in the dictionary with the client. 2-3. Talk about formal versus informal registers and on scrap paper show different ways of saying the same thing. Let client suggest revisions that would be more formal. 4-5. Compliment the client's efforts and show him/her where the language *is* working well. Suggest *not* using a thesaurus to "fancy up" the writing. Ask if the language came from another source and needs to be cited. Reassure the client that "fancy" or more formal is not necessarily "better"—that clarity is the important thing. Encourage the client to find his/her own voice to express his/her own ideas. Use WIRMI. Also see the *Official Style and the Paramedic Method* section following this chart. 6. Compliment the client's strength in language. Talk about audience and suggest ways to keep the style sophisticated and interesting without putting the audience off. Talk about the purpose of writing: to communicate. If client is adamant, simply support that choice. 7. Encourage the client to write more freely and openly; suggest freewriting; suggest that mistakes are a sign of learning; build the client's confidence by pointing out when the language becomes more complex and interesting.

WHAT IS A THESIS?

A thesis is not:

*a statement of topic
*a self-evident statement or statement of fact
*an opinion

A thesis is:

A **proposition, theory, stance, or position** stated in **a complete sentence** that has these three characteristics:

1. **It makes explicit the relationship between two things** (that is, two ideas or things are connected by a specific verb that makes it clear how they relate to each other).
2. **It requires demonstration** to make the reader accept it.
3. **It can be shown to be valid** (not "true"; if it were true, it would not require demonstration).

Look at and compare these sentences. Which one fits the definition of a thesis?

- This paper will be about the differences between how women and men have conversations.
- A lot of researchers believe that women and men have different kinds of conversations.
- The idea that women and men converse differently is interesting.
- Women's conversational styles differ from men's in that women focus on making connections, while men focus on establishing hierarchies, giving information, and showing expertise.

THESIS BROKEN DOWN INTO PARTS:

Women's conversational styles (first thing)

differ from (verb phrase expressing relationship)

men's [conversational styles] (second thing)

in that women focus on...while men focus on... (extension of verb phrase that makes it explicit by explaining "in what way" the two things differ)

A thesis should be able to be expressed in a **sentence.**

A thesis should contain **one main idea**, **but** this idea <u>may</u> have a number of parts which must be demonstrated. A thesis for a very long paper or a book might also require two or more sentences to be fully expressed. Any thesis should be **narrow** enough for the number of pages you want to write; many students make the mistake of using too broad a thesis. A narrower thesis is almost always better.

<u>WHAT IS THE THESIS?</u>

Here are first and last paragraphs of two essays. What would these authors have to do to demonstrate their theses?

from "Are Children's Books Racist and Sexist?" by John Rowe Townsend:

> Much good has probably been done by pressure groups in causing publishers to think hard about unconscious racism and sexism in school readers, textbooks, and information books. But when we come to creative literature for children I begin to feel serious doubts, especially where there appears to be determined fault-finding. (75)
>
> It seems to me that authors and publishers should avoid on the one hand jumping hastily on the bandwagon, and on the other hand reacting over-sensitively to criticism. They should consider suggestions and complaints on their merits, but also be prepared to reject unfounded condemnation. They have, it is true, a responsibility to children and to society in general; they also have an obligation to practice their craft as best they can, to tell the truth as they see it, and to hold on to artistic freedom for themselves and their successors. (77)

from "'Nothing Special'": The Portrayal of Girls and Women in Current Junior Grade Readers" by Elaine Batcher and Alison Winter

> In a recently conducted study commissioned by the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO), a major finding repeats and confirms eleven-year-old data indicating that "nothing special" is about as much as girls and women can ever attain as characters in Junior Grade Readers. (85)

There were many affirmations of manhood in the stories children read, but few if any affirmations of womanhood. Girls who read the stories in school Readers are forced to make daily identifications with boys and men in self-betraying ways. This cannot make them feel very good about themselves. We do not think this is the way things should be. Perhaps the gaffes in the stories mirror gaps in our knowledge of what girlhood and womanhood are in life. But isn't literature supposed to allow us to work through these things? Shouldn't our children be led to explore the possibilities of their existence through the experiences of others? Shouldn't school books affirm life rather than deny it? We think so. And we wish that people in the textbook industry would catch onto this a little faster. We are insulting and betraying so many children through their errors. (91)

Coaching Reading Strategies
Adapted by Lauren Proctor from pages 228-242 of *The Practical Tutor.*

Many college writing assignments require clients to read, understand, and analyze a text. There may come a time when, as a writing coach, you'll be able to tell when a client has not done all three. Struggling readers, for example, when asked to analyze a text, may write papers that simply summarize the reading. But before you assume that every superficial essay is rooted in poor reading skills, ask the client about his reading of the text at hand:

- How much time did he spend reading?
  If the client did not set aside ample time to read, he may have only skimmed the reading, preventing him from analyzing the text deeply.
- Did the client take notes or highlight parts of the reading?
  Taking notes and highlighting selectively may keep the client engaged while reading.
- Did the client look up words in the dictionary if he didn't know their definitions?
  Looking up words may help the client understand the reading and acquire a vocabulary more specific to the assignment.
- What did the client find difficult about the reading?
  Some clients may find reading dull or difficult because they're not actively looking for information to extract from text. But if the client says, "everything," he may struggle with reading in general and/or have a learning difference (See the previous chapter). If he found one theme or paragraph difficult to grasp, you might be able to help him. If you're unsure yourself, the client may benefit from subject tutoring, and should be referred to Joan Wagner, the Peer Tutoring coordinator in Klein Hall

These questions can help you determine whether the client is reading passively or actively. A passive reader waits for meaning to take shape and come to him after the reading; an active reader is engaged in the text and asks questions as he goes along.

Short-Term Strategies

If the client's deadline is looming, you might consider applying reading strategies to her writing assignment by asking her questions that encourage critical thinking. If you ask the client the kinds of questions that she should ask of a reading, she can internalize and use them when she reads alone.

First, make sure the client has understood the reading by asking her to summarize the text and *show you evidence* that reinforces the summary. This will give you some footing in the text, which will be helpful if you've never read it. Ask her to go a little further and interpret the reading. What is the significance of the passage in the context of the reading? What underlying assumptions serve as the foundation for the passage? Is the author objective or stating an opinion? Experienced, active readers often ask these questions subconsciously, but a passive reader may need a little prodding.

Take it a step further. If the client can apply the ideas in the reading to the course as a whole, the reading will seem more grounded in the curriculum. For questions that encourage her to interpret and apply a reading, ask her to show you evidence for her

answers. The answers to your questions, when integrated into a paper, may spark some great ideas that she can develop, giving the analysis depth.

Long-Term Strategies
If you and your client have chosen to focus on reading strategies before starting the paper, or if you want to help your client develop better reading habits, ask him about his studying habits.

- Does he read in front of the television?
  No matter what they tell you, people can't multitask. Background noise or music may help some people concentrate, but when your client tries to pay attention to the reading and a TV show (or instant message conversation, etc.), he is simply not paying enough attention to the assignment.
- Does he dedicate as much time as necessary for the amount of reading?
  As mentioned before, too little time does not allow for thorough analysis. Difficult reading could go as slowly as 10-20 pages in an hour; even the easiest reading can only move at about 50 pages an hour (unless your client's taken a speed-reading course, and speed-reading is not appropriate for college studies). Talk to your client about average rates of reading and help him figure out how much time he should *be spending.*
- Does he read for too long at a time, or does he allow himself breaks?
  Breaks are good; they keep the mind clear and focused. Suggest that, when he feels distracted or finds himself reading mechanically, he take a break and move around.

Work with the client to think of changes that might help make time spent in front of a book worthwhile. Encourage him to highlight or underline while reading. When done selectively, this may help him retain information and ideas. But if he doesn't know what he's looking for, the client may end up highlighting the whole page. Suggest he read chapter introductions and final summaries *first;* these can provide context for a reading. By skimming a reading assignment before reading in depth, he may get a clue of its main ideas and what questions he should ask of the text, which will make it easier to take notes or highlight.

Glossing in the margins of a book may help the client see the structure of an author's argument. If the client feels queasy about writing in the book, suggest an outline on a piece of paper. Both glosses and outlines should be brief so the client can review them quickly later.

Taking notes (or freewriting) *after* reading (not during) forces the client to put the ideas in a text in his own words. Such notes can also be used later to refresh his memory about the parts of a long assignment, so time spent reading is not wasted. While taking notes, the client may want to jot down key terms that relate to other readings or to the course. This creates a greater synthesis of assignments and gives the reading a more specific purpose.

The main point to coaching both short-term and long term strategies is to encourage active reading. Work with the client to think of strategies best suited to a client's needs. After all, it's impossible to write well about reading you haven't comprehended.

The Official Style and the Paramedic Method *as summarized by Jamie Gorton, '11*

Put simply, the Official Style is general multiloquence characterized by consummate interfusion of circumlocution or periphrasis, inscrutability, and other familiar manifestations of abstruse expatiation, commonly utilized for promulgations implementing Procrustean determinations by governmental bodies or for dissemination of academic—oh sweet apple Betty, I just can't go on. Let's try that again . . .

The Official Style is pure gafflegab. It's passive, slow moving, hard to read, and as useful as a wicker bedpan. The Official Style appears when writers feel insecure. They might be writing about an unfamiliar topic, or hoping to impress readers with important-sounding language. In reality, this style conceals their meaning and adds excess and often empty words that trip readers up. Richard Lanham, in *Revising Prose,* devised the Paramedic Method to correct the Official Style by eliminating those meaningless "lard" words. It has five steps:

1. Circle the preposition(s)
2. Find the "is" forms and draw a box around them
3. Find the real action (Who "kicks" who?)
4. Put the action in a simple, active verb
5. Get the sentence moving fast . . . no slow wind-ups!

Examples:

"This sentence is in need of an active voice."

1 + 2. This sentence [is] in need (of) an active voice.

3. This sentence [is] in <u>need</u> (of) an active voice.

4. This sentence needs an active voice.

Before, the sentence had nine words. After revision, only six: 33% lard reduction!

"On the other hand, it has been noted that a higher drinking age is connected with fewer DUI fatalities."

1. (On) the other hand, it has been noted that a higher drinking age is connected (with) fewer DUI fatalities.
2. (On) the other hand, it [has] been noted that a higher drinking age [is] connected (with) fewer DUI fatalities.
3. (On) the other hand, it [has] been noted that a higher drinking age [is] connected (with) <u>fewer</u> DUI fatalities.
4. (On) the other hand, a higher drinking age reduces DUI fatalities.
5. Conversely, a higher drinking age reduces DUI fatalities.

Before: 19 words. After: 8. Lard Factor: 58%

For the passage is as tortured as the opening paragraph, don't bother with the Paramedic Method. Instead, try the Jedi Hand Trick: place your hand over the passage and ask yourself what you're trying to say. What you say will likely be clearer, more concise, and more natural than the Official Style.

Chart VII: Grammar and Punctuation Issues: Ten Common Errors

Keep in mind that there are two kinds of local errors: *performance* errors, when the writer knows the correct forms but slips up occasionally (as in typos, etc.), and *competence* errors, when the writer is uncertain of the correct form or has never learned it. *Interlanguage* errors are very common in college writing. We see this most clearly in the ESL client, for whom forms from the first language sometimes intrude in second-language writing. But remember: For many clients, formal "academic" prose is also a new language or "second dialect." Both kinds of clients are still learning the correct forms and may use them inconsistently or inappropriately, like the boy who used the colon incorrectly.

The key thing is to look for ***error patterns***. If the client makes the error only occasionally, chances are she does not need instruction or correction; if you circle the error, the client can fix it herself. On the other hand, if the client makes the same error over and over or can't correct it himself, instruction is in order.

To help clients catch their own errors, try the following:

- Suggest that they proofread their work by reading aloud, preferably *to* someone. It works!
- Find one example of the error; check to make sure the client can't correct it; then teach the correction directly.
- In subsequent examples of the same error, refer the client back to the first example until he can see the error and make the correction himself without prompting.

If you have a client whose language skills are consistently lacking, you might offer to become her *designated writing coach* and set it up with me.

One warning: Make sure that the form you are identifying as an error really *is* an error. Grammar and punctuation rules do evolve over time; for instance, it's now perfectly acceptable to begin sentences with "but" and even, on occasion, with "and." Check a contemporary handbook if you have any doubt. Nothing is more embarrassing to correct something that isn't actually incorrect to begin with. We'll cover this and other stylistic issues in more detail in Joseph Williams's book.

Chart VII: Grammar and Punctuation Issues: Ten Common Errors

Type of error	Usual cause/example	How to address
Subject/verb agreement	1. A phrase intercedes between the subject and the verb that throws the writer off; e.g., "The **bowl** of potatoes **are** on the counter." (subject and verb in bold) 2. Another occasional cause is not knowing whether a subject is plural or not—words like "group" can be confusing. 3. Both ESL clients and clients who speak in dialect may have difficulty with subject/verb agreement because it's not handled in the same way in their native language.	1. Ask the client "what's on the counter?" to identify the true subject and the appropriate verb. Point out that this is a frequent error, even among professional writers, and suggest watching for "interrupting" phrases that can throw the writer off. 2. If the problem is a subject like "group," talk about when such a subject is singular (when the group "acts as one") and plural (when the *members* of the group "act as individuals," as in "the group argue amongst themselves"). 3. For ESL and SESD (Standard English as a Second Dialect) clients, the key is practice; point out the error as suggested above, but try to get the client to correct him or herself it as often as possible.

A note about using resources IN the Writing Center:

On the Writing Center bookshelf and in the cabinet are quite a range of useful books: handbooks to help you with grammar, punctuation, and other formal issues; a dictionary to help with usage and meaning questions; a variety of books especially for ESOL writers; style books for the various disciplines (MLA, APA, Associated Press); books about writing in the disciplines, including biology; books on usage, spelling, and other special topics; and workbooks, many of which contain sample paragraphs or sentences that you can use as models for your clients.

Make yourself familiar with these resources; spend an hour looking through them. And don't be afraid to pull them out to use them with your client. Maybe you don't know an answer; looking it up models to your client something he or she can do also. Maybe you *do* know the answer, but you'd like to be able to *show* it to the client. Or maybe you just want to show your client that writers do use resources to help them right. Go to the bookshelf with your client, and pull out something useful.

Additionally, in the low filing cabinet are files full of useful handouts, on everything from generating ideas to the writing process to editing and proofreading. Become familiar with these, and feel free to give them away. Just leave a note on the sign-in/out sheet if you use the last of something so that we can replace it.

Type of error	Usual cause/example	How to address
Comma splice; misuse of semicolon	1. A comma splice is the use of a comma alone to combine two sentences: “The idea of democracy is not new to them, it’s just never lasted before.” Most often, clients who use comma splices are reaching for more complex sentence structures that require sentence combining, usually with a semicolon. 2. Clients who’ve had problems with comma splices in the past often use semicolons where they aren’t appropriate: “When we had everything; we got back into the car.”	1. Ask if the client knows what a comma splice is, and if not, explain and show an example. Talk about the various correct ways to combine sentences (semicolon; comma + coordinating conjunction [and, but, or/nor, yet, so, or for]; or subordinating conjunction [e.g., *because, since,* etc.]. Talk about the semicolon in particular: It is actually a combination of a *period* and a *comma,* and can be used as a “hard comma” or a “soft period”; think of it as a “semi-period” when you use it to combine sentences. Encourage the client to pursue the complex sentence structure, which is usually a sign of more complex thinking. 2. Explain about the semicolon (see above). Ask if the first part of this sentence really can stand alone.

Type of error	Usual cause/example	How to address
Comma splice with "how-ever"	For example: "She came to the party, however, she was not appropriately dressed." The word "however" is *not* a subordinating conjunction, but clients frequently think it can work as one. Also, clients may be confused by the fact that "however" *can* be used between two commas (as in "She was, however, wearing a ball gown").	Explain that "however," "therefore," and the like are actually *adverbs*, not conjunctions, but the error can be fixed by changing one of the commas (whichever makes the correct meaning) to a semicolon (see above): "She came to the party; however, she was not appropriately dressed." Ask them to take "however" out; is the sentence appropriately punctuated without it? Applaud the client's effort to use more sophisticated structures.

A useful way to think of punctuation:
Coaches often believe they have a good "ear" for punctuation, and that therefore their clients do too. First of all, an "ear" for punctuation isn't something you're born with; it's something you've developed, through learning and reading. You're familiar with the conventions, so you "hear" when they're right and when they're wrong. Secondly, many of your clients don't have this "ear" and for whatever reason won't have picked up the conventions.

So rather than rely on "listen for the pauses" when a client needs help with punctuation, think of punctuation as a method for "clumping" words into "meaning units." Each punctuation mark has its own "meaning"—talk about punctuation marks as being like road signs, indicating full stop, or yield, for instance. We'll talk more about this in class and read more about it in the Williams book; for now, remember that unless your client demonstrates he or she has an "ear" like yours, don't rely on that method for helping with punctuation.

Type of error	Usual cause/example	How to address
Sentence frag-ments	1. The most frequent cause is the fear of *run-on* sentences—if a sentence seems to be getting long, or too complex in terms of punctuation, clients will often lop off the thing that seems most able to "stand on its own." Example: "Whatever the root cause of starvation, the physical symptoms are the same. Skin problems, eye problems, bone problems, and of course loss of muscle mass." 2. If this is not the problem, the client may have difficulty recognizing what a fragment is.	1. Let clients know that a "run-on" sentence is not just a long sentence—it's a combination of two or more sentences incorrectly punctuated. For instance, a sentence with a comma splice is a "run-on." Look at various samples of fragments in the client's writing to see if there is a common situation in which s/he uses a fragment; if so, discuss the possible corrections. For instance, in the example on the left, the simple correction would be to use a colon after "same." Also let clients know that *deliberate* sentence fragments are acceptable, *even* in academic or formal writing. Help them to see when they've made a sentence fragment for *effect* so that they can tell the difference. Also let them know that if a sentence *needs* to be long, that's okay! 2. Separate a fragment from its surrounding sentences and have the client look at it. Can it truly stand alone? Does it express a "complete idea"? Do this with several examples.

Type of error	Usual cause/example	How to address
Run-ons	A run-on sentence is any sentence that combines two or more sentences incorrectly—see "comma splices" for one example. Another kind of run-on is the "fused" sentence, where two or more sentences are combined with *no* punctuation or conjunction at all. Most often this is just a result of writing quickly and not proofreading, but occasionally clients might not know how to separate or combine sentences.	Ask "How many ideas in this sentence? Please separate them." If the client is unable to do this, show him/her where the ideas begin and end, and suggest appropriate punctuation. Repeat often till the client can correct independently or stops making the error. Again, remember that the combining of sentences indicates a movement toward more complex thoughts—which is something we want to encourage. Tell the client this!
Misplaced and dangling modifiers	1. A "misplaced" modifier is usually a phrase that appears at too far a distance from the thing it describes, as in "I shot an elephant in my pajamas." 2. A "dangling" modifier is a phrase that appears in a sentence that does not contain the thing being described, as in "The elephant was shot in my pajamas" or the common mistake "While reading the book, Pi stood out for his faith and patience."	1. When clients realize how their sentences might be misread, they can usually correct them, so tell them what the sentence means *as is*: "So, the elephant was wearing your pajamas?" and ask where else the phrase *in my pajamas* might go. Use humor if it seems appropriate. 2. Same as above: "So—Pi was reading the book?" "No—I was." "Where can you add *I was*?" The problem here is really one of realizing that what we can get away with in speech we can't get away with in writing. Where written words are placed *does* matter.

Type of error	Usual cause/example	How to address
Pronoun/ antecedent agreement	1. This problem often occurs when clients are trying to avoid sexist language: "A student needs to bring their book to class." 2. Another common instance is when a phrase that intervenes between the antecedent and the pronoun confuses the issue: "My sister, like many women, pay a lot of attention to their looks." (See subject/verb agreement, above.)	1. Ironically, the use of "their" as a nonspecific singular alternative to "his or her" was quite acceptable a hundred or so years ago. But nowadays, educated readers like things to agree in number. Use a sample sentence to show clients all the parts that must agree: "**Students need** to bring **their books** to class." 2. Remove the offending phrase and see if the client can make the correction: "My sister…*pays* a lot of attention to *her* looks." The client can keep the intervening phrase—either where it was or at the beginning of the sentence (although you might well question the use of such a generalization!).
Its* vs *it's	"It's" *looks* like a possessive, because many possessives are formed with *'s*. Add to this that the two words sound identical (*homonyms*), and you can see why we all make this mistake on occasion. But many clients really are unclear about which is used when.	Teach the client that there are NO possessive *pronouns* with apostrophes. Suggest substituting "it is" whenever s/he sees an "it's" in his/her writing. If the "it is" doesn't work, then replace it with *its*.
There, they're, their	Homonyms, again. Most clients know what these mean, but they often confuse them as they write.	Suggest proofreading looking *only* for these words and testing each instance for correctness. Reassure them that this is a common error.
Then* vs *than	Near homonyms, same as above.	Suggest that clients associate *then* with *when*, since both have to do with time, and *than* with *and*, since both have to do with connecting two things. Proofread for this alone if it's a real problem.

Coaching the "good" writer

On occasion you'll have a client who is, frankly, as good a writer as you are, or even better. And you may wonder to yourself: How can I help this person? Good question, and one I struggled with myself, for years.

Three things to keep in mind:

1. Even excellent writers need feedback. If you do nothing else than give a "readerly response" to the writer, you will have done him or her a good turn. It never hurts to be reassured that what you have written communicates what you intended it to. So don't just say, "This is good." Say back what you understand. Point out the best parts. Give a detailed account of your reading experience.

2. All writing can be improved. If your writer is proficient or even better than proficient, ask if she'd like to take the writing to the "next level." This might mean simple things like smoothing out transitions or eliminating minor redundancies. But the closer you look, the more you will see. Don't get lazy. This is the fun stuff, looking for ways to fine-tune the prose. Note: The Williams book will give you some new techniques for this.

3. As a coach, you've earned the writer's respect. As a good writer, he's earned yours. So take off your "tutor" hat and just talk peer to peer, equal to equal. With a strong, confident writer, the conversation can focus less on questioning and more on suggesting; you don't have to worry so much about the client just accepting your advice without question, as many less confident writers would. In fact, you may find yourself arguing fine points of meaning, discussing the content of the paper in a free-ranging way, toying with the placement of commas. The point is, give the writer the respect he or she deserves.

Frankly, there's nothing more disappointing to a good writer who's gone to the trouble to come to the Writing Center than to have the coach say, "This is great! Don't change a thing." Give even good writers their money's worth. Put them in the driver's seat, and ask them what they want to work on. The sky's the limit.

Chapter 6
The Rules of the Writing Center

If you become a paid, "core" coach, you will be taking on considerable responsibility. It's true that you're still a student, but you're a student who has been selected and trained to participate in the College's mission of delivering a quality education. You'll be working side by side with faculty (though perhaps never in the same room) and you'll be assessed by similar standards. It's important, therefore, that you follow the "rules" of the Writing Center—our various policies and protocols—which are designed to protect you and your clients and to ensure the quality of our service.

At the moment, the Writing Center enjoys a very good reputation among students, faculty, and the administration. Students trust us to offer them appropriate help, to know what we're doing, and to keep their sessions confidential. Faculty trust us to respect academic integrity, to help their students improve their writing, and to be supportive of their own educational efforts. The administration trusts us to be reliable, to be honest in reporting our hours, and to contribute to the overall reputation of the College.

Whenever a coach doesn't follow the "rules," it eats away at this reputation of the Writing Center. Worse, it discourages clients from coming to us, often for much needed help.

This chapter might not be as much "fun" as the earlier chapters, but it's essential that you become familiar with it, and that you refer to it whenever problematic situations arise. The "rules" are not optional; they are essential. Any coach who knowingly breaks a rule or who shows an inability to follow the rules consistently can't be allowed to continue as a coach. So it's to your advantage to make sure you understand what follows.

This chapter contains the following:

1. The Privacy and Academic Integrity Contract (for coaches)
2. Writing Center Rules (for all clients and coaches)
3. Work Protocols (what to do while at work)
4. Rules and Guidelines for Online Tutoring (for the rare instance of online tutoring)
5. Issue Protocols (what to do when you have an issue with a faculty member, a client, another coach, or the director)
6. How to Become a Coach (in case someone asks you)
7. The Eight Principles of Good Coaching Practice inventory (to use periodically to assess your own tutoring performance)

After you've read these, we'll discuss them in class; make notes in the margins to clarify anything you don't understand.

WRITING CENTER
PRIVACY and ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CONTRACT

Please read the following statement and sign it. Your signature indicates that you recognize the importance of respecting privacy and maintaining academic integrity in all Writing Center contexts, whether working with a client or with another coach.

1. Because we in the Writing Center work so closely with one another and with our clients, we may become privy to information that, if revealed, could damage someone. "Respecting privacy" means that we strive to recognize when a client, another coach, or a faculty member has revealed private and sensitive information to us, and we do not share that information with others without that person's permission (including such things as phone numbers and student ID numbers). While we may discuss coaching experiences and/or client writing in EN 314 or 414 as part of the learning process, we will only discuss what is relevant to the learning task at hand, and not other personal information that we might be privy to because of our personal or professional relationships. We will NOT discuss such topics outside of Writing Center contexts or with people not affiliated with the Writing Center.
2. **Exception:** If we learn that someone is in danger of bodily harm, either from themselves or from someone else, it's our duty to report that to someone in Student Life or Student Resources, or to the Writing Center director, who will then report it to someone in Student Life or Student Resources.
3. "Maintaining academic integrity" means following Writing Center protocols for good tutoring; keeping ownership of the writing in the writer's hands; not helping "too much"; not giving ideas or sentences or even words to writers, but helping the writers to compose and choose those on their own. It also means recognizing when a student may be breaching the academic integrity rules of the College, alerting that student to the fact, and following protocols for addressing that breach. By following these protocols, we protect the reputation of the Writing Center, our own reputations, and the sanctity of the coach/client relationship.
4. The consequences of any confirmed, deliberate breach of these policies will be:
    - An immediate F in any Writing Center-related course in which the coach is enrolled.
    - The immediate loss of the coaching position.
5. The consequences of an unintentional breach will be decided case by case but may include reduction in a course grade and/or the temporary loss of the coaching position.

I understand the importance of the above policy and will strive to uphold it to my best ability. If I fail to uphold the policy, I understand and accept the consequences of my actions.

Signed: ________________________________ *Date:* _____________________
Name printed: ______________________________

WRITING CENTER RULES: The Writing Center is a free service available to everyone. However, we do have some rules. Please take this home and read it before your next visit. If you have any questions, ask your coach during your next visit, or email the director (Liz Inness-Brown, at einness-brown@smcvt.edu.) **Our assumption is that you know and understand these rules and will abide by them; if you do not, we reserve the right to refuse you service.**

1. No appointment is necessary. If a coach is free when you come in, you may work with him/her. If no one is free, you may make an appointment for another time.
2. We allow one session per day.
3. A session is no longer than one hour.
4. If you sign up for an appointment and are more than five minutes late, your coach is not obliged to wait for you and may begin to work with someone else.
5. While we make every effort to keep appointments, an occasional emergency may mean a coach is late or can't come in. We will make every effort to notify you, but if we can't, please forgive us and make another appointment or see another coach.
6. Please do not wait inside the Writing Center. It disturbs other sessions in progress. You may wait in the hallway if you like; just keep your voices down.
7. Do not keep your coach past your appointment time or past closing time. But do remind your coach when it's time for your appointment.
8. Writing Center books may be used in the Writing Center only.
9. The Writing Center respects the College's policy on academic integrity, including the policy on plagiarism. If we suspect that you may have plagiarized either purposefully or accidentally, we will inform you of that. While we will work with you to learn how to cite ideas that need to be cited or to put ideas into your own words, we also reserve the right not to work with you if you are unwilling to acknowledge the problem. Writing Center coaches will *never* breach academic integrity by helping you "too much" with your work.
10. The Writing Center can work with you on take-home essay tests ***if and only if*** we have written permission from your instructor. That permission should be e-mailed well in advance and directly from the instructor to the Writing Center director, who will notify the coaches.
11. Accommodations for learning disabilities can be made for those students who are referred to us, in writing, by the Special Needs Liaison (Toni Messuri) or by the Student Resource Center. Such accommodations may include, for instance, proofreading for students with dyslexia. Regardless of the accommodation, however, every writer must participate in the process and respect the rules above.
12. If you would like a "designated coach"—i.e., a reserved, standing appointment with a specific coach—contact the director to arrange it.
13. **Most important: We use a tested and effective collaborative method to coach writing. It requires your cooperation and participation in the process. If we seem to ask a lot of questions and not give many answers, it is because our goal is to teach you writing skills, not just to "fix" this paper, and because we respect your ideas and your writing too much to "tell" you what to do. Don't expect miracles or overnight success; don't expect an improved grade from coming in only once. If you really want to improve your writing, plan on coming in several times for each assignment. Your coach is well trained in both writing and teaching writing; if you work *with* him/her, you can expect to learn a lot.** *We reserve the right to refuse service to any writer who does not abide by this policy.*

Feedback: Your feedback is important to us. You may email questions and problems to the director or fill out a feedback form. Ask your coach how to do this.

WORK PROTOCOLS

I. When you arrive:

1. The door should be unlocked and open. If it is not, go to the circulation desk for the key.
2. The first coaches to arrive, please be sure the furniture is arranged in the Writing Center configuration.
3. The appointment sign-up sheets will be on the door. Please check for appointments when you come in. Tear off the previous day's sheet if necessary.
4. Open the black cabinet using the hidden key. Then put it back, immediately.
5. Sign in on the clipboard located in the cabinet.
6. Fill out the appropriate time sheet on the clipboard:
    - **WORKSTUDY = BLUE WORKSTUDY FORM**
    - **NONWORKSTUDY = 030 STUDENT WAGES FORM**
    - **CITS: no time sheet.**
7. **To fill out time sheet:**
    - **Be sure to fill out all blanks at the top.**
    - **Be sure to include starting and ending hours.**
    - **Be sure to write in the date you worked.**
    - **BE SURE TO SIGN AND DATE YOUR FORM at the bottom.**
8. Until you have a client, sit so that you can see people coming in.
9. Greet writers with a smile when they arrive and ask if you can help.
10. If you are busy with a writer and someone else comes in, show them the appointment sign-up. We need to do everything we can to make sure that writers feel welcome.
11. DO NOT USE THE COMPUTERS for longer than five minutes unless you are working with a client. You should be readily available to work with a client at any moment.

II. When you have a session:

1. Ask if the client has been to the Writing Center THIS YEAR. If not, **GIVE HIM OR HER A COPY OF THE RULES TO READ LATER.**
2. Fill out a session form with the client, including all parts up to the summary. Make sure the writer signs the agreement statement.
3. If you need more privacy or less distraction, feel free to take your client to another space in the library.
4. **AT THE END OF THE SESSION, GIVE THE WHITE COPY TO THE WRITER, and file the other two copies, in your folder and in the client folder.**

III. When you leave:

1. Be sure to sign out and indicate how many clients you've had.
2. Leave a note if you've noticed that any supplies are low or if something else needs to be brought to my attention. If there is an urgent issue, please email me.
3. If you are the last to leave in the evening, make sure books, clipboards, and other supplies are put away, the cabinet is LOCKED and the key REPLACED IN ITS HIDING PLACE, and the computer screens are off.

Rules & Guidelines for Online Tutoring

The Writing Center offers online tutoring to those students for whom getting to the Writing Center presents a major impediment. Such a client first contacts the director, who explains the process and assigns a coach to work with that client. Below are the rules and guidelines both coaches and clients must use. These rules and guidelines were designed by Writing Center coaches to prevent online tutoring from becoming a lesser experience for the writer and to ensure that, even online, we continue to "teach the writer, not the writing." Note: Please talk to the coach about the format in which to submit your work so that you send it in a format he or she can respond to.

1) The online tutoring program is not an editing service. Our goal is to make it as much like the Writing Center experience as possible.

2) Therefore, when papers are sent back no changes will be made in the actual work. We will *show* you what needs to be revised.

3) Global questions will be addressed at the top of the response in a brief note from the coach. "Global" elements include things like in thesis development, focus, supporting evidence, and organization.

4) Mechanical errors (grammar, punctuation, spelling...) will be indicated by bolding the suspect sentence. The type of error will be listed below the bolded passage; explanations are available through the Writing Center website or any college writing handbook. Subsequent errors of the same nature will also be highlighted, but only the first will be labeled. It will be up to you to determine what kind of error was repeated.

5) Each time you submit a paper, we will indicate *no more than three areas* for you to address in your next revision. After you've addressed those areas, you may resubmit for more feedback. Up to three submissions will be allowed per assignment.

6) By submitting your assignment to us, you indicate your agreement to these guidelines. If you do not follow them, we reserve the right to deny you service.

ISSUE PROTOCOLS: What to do in problem situations

Issues with Faculty or Library Employees

There will be occasions when clients divulge information about faculty that seems to require some response or action. At other times, faculty or library employees may behave in what you believe is an inappropriate manner. What follows is our protocol for dealing with such issues, both in the session and afterward.

1. **Maintain neutrality during the session. Don't take sides.**
2. **Keep confidentiality; don't gossip about it outside the Center.**
3. **Discuss the issue with the Director as soon as possible.**
4. **Remember that you are hearing only one side of the story, that faculty and staff are people too, and that anyone can make a mistake.**
5. **Let the Director address the issue as appropriate.**

Issues with Writers

The vast majority of writers who come to us are cooperative and well behaved. Very occasionally, though, a writer will cause problems, and you will need to deal with that. If a writer is disobeying the rules, makes you uncomfortable in any way, seems to be plagiarizing, or behaves strangely or in ways that suggest he or she may be in trouble, the protocol is as follows:

1. **Always follow the usual coaching strategies as much as possible. Try to keep calm and keep the writer calm. Remain neutral.**
2. **If a writer is breaking the rules, remind him or her of the rules. If he or she refuses to abide by the rules, you have the right to terminate a session and ask a writer to leave. Contact the Director as soon as possible and she will contact the writer.**
3. **If the problem is apparent plagiarism, assume that it might not be deliberate. Ask the writer what the source of the material is, and go from there. Try to help the writer *not* plagiarize. Some writers may be unfamiliar with our standards for academic integrity; teach them how to quote, cite sources, and paraphrase.**
4. **If a writer seems to be in serious personal trouble, ask if he or she has someone else on campus s/he can call. Suggest calling his or her RA or RD. Offer to take the writer to a phone. Get another coach to come with you.**
5. **If a session becomes too difficult for you to handle on your own, enlist the help of another coach. If no other coach is available, enlist the help of a faculty or library staff member in the building. Try never to coach where you are completely alone with a writer, unless you know that person very well outside the Center.**
6. **If a writer refuses to leave or becomes too difficult to handle, call Security as a last resort.**
7. **If you get through the session all right and the writer leaves, but you still have concerns, call the Director immediately. Be sure you know the writer's name.**
8. **Keep confidentiality; don't gossip about it outside the Center.**

Issues with Other Coaches

If you observe other coaches disobeying the rules or coaching inappropriately, or are aware of coaches who are frequently late or absent during their assigned hours, you should:

1. **Speak to the coach directly first, if you can.** This gives him or her a chance to change behavior and could save his or her job.
2. **Discuss it with the Director if you feel uncomfortable or if the problem persists.** I realize that it is difficult to "tell on" someone else who is not doing his or her job correctly, but remember that our reputation and the success of the Writing Center depends on *all* of us performing our jobs consistently and appropriately. I will make every effort to keep your name out of it, but of course that doesn't mean your colleague won't eventually figure out who you are.

Since the Writing Center is largely unsupervised, we have a very stringent honor system. Anyone who is not able to uphold his or her responsibilities will be asked to quit coaching. Anyone who is caught defrauding the Center by falsifying hours or writer forms or by stealing supplies will be asked to quit coaching. The policy is "one strike and you're out," so please be honest with yourself and with us.

Issues with the Director

If the director should ever do anything that offends you or that you believe may be academically or morally inappropriate:

1. **Discuss it with the director first.** There may be an explanation for the behavior that you're unaware of.
2. **If you feel uncomfortable speaking to the director, or if the problem persists, speak to the Associate Dean in the Klein Academic Enrichment Commons.**

BECOMING A COACH

Here is a summary of the process by which one becomes a coach, in case anyone asks you.

1. Each year, in April and again in September, the Director asks faculty members to recommend students as possible coaches. *Anyone interested in becoming a coach should ask a faculty member for a nomination at the end of the spring semester or early in the fall semester.*
2. About two weeks before fall advising, the nominees receive an email from the Director, inviting them to take the “entry test” for getting into EN314: Teaching Writing, the course they must take in order to become a coach. The test assesses knowledge of basic grammar, and will be due at the beginning of the advising period.
3. When all tests have been received, the Director will score them and notify the top scorers, who are invited to enroll in EN314. *Everyone must enroll in EN314 to become a coach.* The course is offered each spring and only in the spring.
4. Students who successfully complete EN314 are invited to become “core” coaches and may begin to be paid the fall after EN314. They are paid the top student rates and receive a raise each year. They may use their workstudy grants in the Writing Center, but workstudy is not required. To be a core coach, each coach must work a minimum of two hours per week in the Writing Center.
5. As core coaches, students must continue their educations by enrolling in EN414: Writing Center Internship for the first three semesters of their coaching experience. After that, they may continue to coach but need not take the course. EN414 is a one-credit course meeting one hour a week.

THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF GOOD COACHING
An inventory for self-evaluation

To teach the writer and not the writing, a coach should follow these principles of good coaching practice:

1. **Good coaching practice requires understanding and promoting good writing.**
2. **Good coaching practice requires creating an atmosphere of comfort, trust, and friendliness.**
3. **Good coaching practice requires understanding and responding to the writer's needs.**
4. **Good coaching practice requires giving useful and appropriate feedback.**
5. **Good coaching practice requires following a stepwise process.**
6. **Good coaching practice requires respect of an author's ownership.**
7. **Good coaching practice requires teaching writing as a recursive process.**
8. **Good coaching practice supports and promotes the reputation of the Writing Center.**

These eight practices are not steps, but basic principles that guide the steps we take as we coach. As you'll find in your reading and your experiences, most of these ideas overlap and integrate in each coaching session—they happen simultaneously. And they happen almost naturally. If you are a good writer—a writer who cares about writing well—and a fairly nice person, most of this will seem logical, almost self-evident to you. However, we have found that breaking the coaching process down and discussing its individual facets can and does help us to improve our performance and gives us tools to solve the problems that can and do arise in coaching.

Below, each practice is listed individually, along with its action statements and some discussion. At the end of each semester, you should ask yourself whether you do each of the practices *A, U, S, R,* or *N* ("always," "usually," "sometimes," "rarely," or "never." Note: "Always" is *not* always the best answer!) Thinking and writing about your answers is a good way to review and improve your coaching habits. Read the following now and note any that are unclear to you or that you would like to discuss further in class. I've put each on a separate page so that you can write down questions and make notes. At semester's end, we'll review these to see if there are any additions or changes to be made to next year's edition.

1. **Good coaching practice requires understanding and promoting good writing.**
    a. I work with the writer to get a clear understanding of the assignment's purpose and the writer's intention.
    b. I work with the writer to make sure the writing fulfills the assignment.
    c. I recognize thesis statements and the role they play in the development and structure of essays.
    d. I explain that the organization of any piece of writing should flow from its purpose and consider its audience.
    e. I ask writers to consider the audience for their writing.
    f. I take steps to improve my knowledge of Standard Written English.
    g. I consult other sources when I am not sure what is correct.
    h. I differentiate between "better" and "correct" in stylistic choices.
    i. When a draft is already "proficient," I work with the writer to take it to a new level of achievement.

2. Good coaching practice requires creating an atmosphere of comfort, trust, and friendliness.

a. I smile and say hello to writers both inside and outside the Writing Center.
b. I establish common ground with the writer whenever possible.
c. I express real interest in the writer as well as the writing.
d. I let writers know that I'm human, and I make mistakes too.
e. I look up when writers come into the Writing Center.
f. I explain the coaching process at the beginning of a session.
g. I am neat and well groomed when I am at work.
h. I strike a balance between professionality and informality.
i. When I can, I use humor or empathy to ease discomfort.
j. I make it clear that I respect the writer's efforts.
k. I compliment the writer on his/her initiative in coming into the Center.
l. I recognize differences in culture and try to avoid offending writers from different countries.
m. I talk about sentence-level problems in ordinary language, not grammatical jargon.

3. Good coaching practice requires understanding and responding to the writer's needs.

a. I ask what the writer needs from me in the session.
b. I ask the writer where she/he feels the paper needs work.
c. I ask if the writer has any specific questions on any aspect of writing.
d. If my diagnosis of what needs work disagrees with the writer's, I still look for ways to accommodate the writer's wishes.
e. When a writer needs to get something off his/her chest before she/he can get down to work, I listen.
f. I observe the writer's body language during a session.
g. Throughout the session, I gauge how the writer is responding to me and make adjustments accordingly.
h. I am aware of differences in learning style and offer strategies with these in mind.
i. I look at the writer when asking questions.
j. I give the writer time to think and respond when I ask a question, and give more time for ESL and LD writers.
k. I don't answer my own questions.
l. I check for understanding.
m. I review ESL and LD principles regularly.
n. If I have an ESL writer, I am careful to use simple, straight-forward vocabulary.
o. If a writer is unable to read aloud or to write notes, I do so (making sure that I don't usurp ownership in the process).
p. I ask for clarification when I don't understand what a writer says.

4. Good coaching practice requires giving useful and appropriate feedback.

a. I respond to content first as a reader, not as a judge or teacher.
b. I begin and end each session with a focus on the positive.
c. I ask the writer what his/her goals were and work with the writer to assess how close the draft comes to those goals.
d. I help writers to salvage their drafts, building on the strengths and addressing the weaknesses.
e. I use descriptive comments, *not* judgment statements, both in conversation with the writer and on the visit record.
f. I ask returning writers about results with previous papers and help them to see their progress.
g. I look for patterns of error and teach the writer to do the same.
h. I teach by example or analogy and allow the writer to make the connection.
i. I teach rules of grammar and the like directly when necessary.
j. I test a writer's learning by asking him/her to apply new lessons to subsequent instances of the same problem.
k. I explain why something is clear or unclear, works or doesn't work.
l. I explain unfamiliar writing terms.
m. I recap the session and make sure the writer has specific plans for revision after she/he leaves the Writing Center.
n. I invite and encourage the writer to return for additional sessions.
o. I help the writer to understand that "mistakes" are often signs of the writing process at work.
p. I emphasize the importance of practice in learning to write.
q. I help writers to see the value and purpose behind their assignments.

5. Good coaching practice requires following a stepwise process.

a. I use filling out the forms as a way to break the ice and to focus, structure, and end each session.
b. I begin each session by understanding what the writing assignment or task is and by asking what the writer wants/needs to work on.
c. I get an overview of the draft before working on anything.
d. Early in the session, I diagnose the writing problems *and* the writer's needs.
e. Whenever possible, I work with the writer on global areas (thesis, evidence, and organization) before moving to local areas (grammar, word choice, punctuation, mechanics).
f. I look for, point out, and work on patterns of error rather than one error at a time.
g. I keep track of time and make sure that I wrap up the session gradually by summarizing and setting the direction for revision.

6. **Good coaching requires respect of a writer's ownership.**

a. I ask the writer what she/he wants to work on during the session.
b. I explain that my suggestions are only suggestions and that the writer must make the final decisions.
c. I ask the writer to read his/her own draft aloud.
d. I make it clear that the session will be collaborative and that I will not rewrite the writer's paper for him/her.
e. I listen as much as or more than I talk.
f. By asking questions and by making descriptive comments, I help the writer to see what needs work.
g. I start with genuinely open-ended questions.
h. I ask leading questions only when writers seem unable to answer open-ended questions.
i. I teach directly only when the writer can't answer leading questions.
j. I hold the pen and make corrections on the writer's paper.
k. When necessary, I record a writer's answers to questions to allow him/her to concentrate on thinking.
l. I use a writer's responses to questions to help him/her rephrase sentences that don't work.
m. I suggest strategies rather than solutions.
n. I help the writer to come up with his/her own solutions to problems.

7. Good coaching practice requires teaching writing as a process.

a. I discuss writing as a recursive process.
b. If a writer is having a problem with some aspect of the writing process, I offer more than one strategy to help him/her solve the problem, and let him/her choose.
c. I explain, demonstrate, use, and help writers try out new process strategies during a session.
d. I ask questions that help a writer become conscious of his/her own thinking and learning processes, encouraging metacognition.
e. I encourage writers to revise substantially, not just superficially.
f. I help writers read their drafts objectively.
g. I get writers to do some writing/revising during the session.
h. I share experiences with the writing process to show that making "mistakes" is a natural part of the process and that all (good) writers revise.

8. Good coaching practice supports and promotes the reputation of the Writing Center.

a. I am on time for work and stay till my time is up.
b. I make sure my writers understand the Writing Center guidelines and I try to abide by them myself.
c. If I can't make my hours, I get a substitute; if I can't get a substitute, I make sure my writers are taken care of by switching them to a free coach working at the same time or by calling them to let them know.
d. If I have made an appointment with a client, I respect that appointment.
e. I help make sure that our supplies and materials are used wisely and stay in the Writing Center.
f. I sign in *and* out.
g. I let the director know when a problem arises.
h. I complete my forms legibly, with correct spelling and grammar and complete sentences.
i. If I take something out of the filing cabinet, I return it where I found it.
j. I am always polite and professional while at work.
k. I respect the work of other coaches and don't gossip about them with writers.
l. I respect writer confidentiality.

Chapter 7
Language Differences

In the Writing Center, we have clients who present two kinds of language "differences": international students, for whom English may be a second, third, or even fourth language, and some American students, for some of whom Standard English, and especially Standard Written English, is a new dialect. These groups have a lot in common, which is why they are discussed in one chapter, but of course they are, at the same time, very different. And of course, generalizing about any group is hazardous. Please keep in mind, as you read, that every client we see is an individual and completely unique. Once again, it's crucial to *never assume.*

English Speakers of Other Languages

Saint Michael's College is a special place in part because it has long had programs for teaching English to speakers of other languages, programs now housed in the Department of Language and Linguistics. ESOL writers, as you might imagine, are frequent "customers" of the Writing Center. They come to us not only for help with their writing, but for an opportunity to practice speaking with a native speaker. For this reason, writing coaches come to think of themselves as ambassadors for the College, a friendly place for non-native writers from many countries to come, talk about their writing, and learn a little bit more about our country.

Since we will also be reading *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors,* I won't waste your time with a lengthy discourse here. What I'll mainly do is summarize a few things we've learned over the years, and let you get the details from that text. (Perhaps next year I'll add to this section and delete that text from the course.)

We see several kinds of ESOL students in the Writing Center. Graduate ESOL students are probably some of our most "frequent flyers." Many of them come here to get their masters in Teaching English as a Second Language; others are in the business or education graduate programs. They are usually "adult" students and might be quite a bit older than you; you might find this intimidating, but rest assured, they are eager to get your help. Often their writing will be quite sophisticated and they simply need your help in locating their "performance" errors—literally, typos or slips where their first language rules have intruded into their English writing. Working with graduate ESOL students is usually a joy, plain and simple.

Our next most frequent flyers are students in the Academic English Program or students who have already graduated from the AEP and are matriculated into the regular undergraduate program—the same program you're in. Like the graduate students, these students have studied English grammar in depth, sometimes since they were very small, so their knowledge of English rules is very strong and if you just focus their attention on an error, they can often correct it. But they sometimes need help with global elements, for they haven't really studied how to write an essay, or may, depending on their culture, be unaccustomed to formulating their own arguments. So be cautious: on the surface, the drafts may look very "clean," but if you read more closely, you may discover that the writer hasn't taken a strong stance or has been very indirect about it.

Students in the Intensive English Program (IEP) and students studying abroad in America can sometimes be the most difficult to work with, largely because their spoken

English skills may be weaker than those of the other two groups. If you have studied abroad, you can relate to their situation. Often this is the first time they've been to America, and writing papers in English may be particularly difficult for them. Take your time with these students; if they are having a hard time following you, speak much more slowly. Follow the protocol *first things first,* and other good coaching practices, and you can really be of service to them, although the paper they leave with may be far from "done" in your opinion.

Appendix A in this chapter includes a list of strategies culled from an earlier text we read for this class and some information especially about Japanese students, of whom we see quite a few; please review it, but focus your main attention on the chapters in *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors.*

Writers for Whom Standard English Is a Second Dialect

While the majority of African-American students who come to St. Mike's will speak and write in standard English, we may on occasion encounter students who—African-American or not—speak or write in dialects of English that are "nonstandard." It's important to recognize not only that "nonstandard" does not mean inferior, but also that "standard" forms are not necessarily oppressive. Standard forms of a language enable people to speak across subcultures, and thus are valuable to learn. In addition, standard forms are crucial to success in college and the world beyond it. If you encounter students who use nonstandard forms of English, it's important that you work with them to learn "standard English as a second dialect."

In 1992, Dr. Dorothy Williams, then our Director of Multicultural Student Affairs, was invited to address coaches on the subject of "Black English" (also known as "Black English Vernacular" or BEV, or Ebonics), to suggest to us considerations important while working with African-American students, and to heighten our awareness and sensitivity to the issues that African-American and other students sometimes confront when asked to learn "academic discourse."

The History of Black English

Dr. Williams told us that most African-American people today are descendants of cultural groups in West Africa, groups that had literally thousands of languages of their own and who, through trade, had come into contact with Portuguese, French, Spanish, Arab, and Dutch peoples. Thus, West Africans came to America already speaking languages comprising a "melting pot of sounds," including those adopted during time in the Caribbean Islands where they were taken for a "seasoning" or "breaking-in" period. Then, arriving at the plantation fields of America, they were exposed to English—not to the "King's English," but to the vernacular English typically spoken by field overseers. Thus the language which early African-Americans spoke was a pastiche, the "mix of tongues" necessary to communicate with the white overseers and with the variety of other West Africans brought to work in the fields.

Implicit here, of course, is the reality that West Africans were brought to America as *slaves*. They did not come here as willing immigrants who wanted to assimilate into the dominant culture, but as unwilling prisoners who were offered little, if anything, in the way of education. Ultimately, these African-Americans were further stripped of their identity—and their dignity—when their "owners" forced them to give up their own

cultures and languages for those of their new "home." In creating "Black English," early African-Americans both did what they had to—by speaking English—and rebelled in a subtle, but effective way: by creating a new English and the new cultural identity that accompanied it. The English that we call "Black English" is, quite simply, English spoken with a mix of sounds, syntaxes, and rhythms that reflects its diversity of roots.

Dr. Williams defined Black English as "a compilation of dialectical sounds representing variations on standard American English, Portuguese, Arab, Dutch, and French roots, and West African languages." Contemporary "Blackspeak," she said, is often a creative manipulation of English, a dialect or slang that helps define African-American culture and sustain African-American unity and pride. Like any slang or jargon, it is constantly evolving; your understanding or not understanding current terms places you "in" or "out" of the circle. In 1992, for instance, an African-American student might have responded to a piece of unexpected or surprising news by saying, "Word!" (Maybe this derives from "Upon my word!"—who knows?) "Word up!" meant that the addressee had somehow outdone expectations; this mimicked the term "one-up," meaning to outdo. "Kick you to the curb" and "diss" were two terms that meant to put down or insult someone. Over time, these terms have been replaced or have taken on new meanings or have become "mainstream." In this way, the language works both to *include* those who know it and to *exclude* those who do not.

It's important, then, to recognize that Black English is not merely "bad grammar"; it is a *different language*, or a dialect of English, that has historical roots and cultural importance. In fact, in the 1960s, that time of cultural upheaval, academia saw a brief movement that attempted to legitimize Black English in academic discourse. (Note from Liz in 2003: And later in the 1990s, another attempt was made, in California, to give recognition to Ebonics as a legitimate language. Both failed.) While Black English might not be "standard," it's important also to appreciate its aesthetic excitement—its life, rhythm, and expressiveness. American culture often celebrates this, in music, film, and literature. Meanwhile, the question remains: How do we deal with Black English in the Writing Center—here, today?

Black English and Coaching in the Writing Center

You're probably aware that you speak more than one "language," and perhaps even in more than one "voice." Among your friends, you probably use slang, questionable grammar, and maybe even profanity that you would not use with your parents; in the classroom and other formal situations, you're probably careful with grammar, pull out your ten-cent words, and try to speak in complete sentences. And when you write, you use different languages, too, depending on the audience and purpose for your writing. In exactly the same way, many African-American students develop more than one language, using Black English among their friends and family and reserving more formal, careful language for other situations, such as the classroom, job interviews, and academic papers.

But some students *do* arrive at college never having learned or mastered the more formal language of academia. Some of these students are African-American; some of them are not. (Recently I had in class an Asian student who had come to New York City as a child and learned that particular variety of Black English as his first second language.) Regardless of background or race, such students may experience discomfort

and a feeling of exclusion when required to read and write in "traditional" academic discourse—i.e., in formal, standard American English. These students may *want* to learn the "new language" that college demands, but they may also feel insecure at the prospect and angry at what may seem to be sudden, unexpected, unfair, and unfamiliar standards for writing. If in addition such students have other serious writing problems (such as difficulty developing and organizing ideas, limited vocabulary, or syntactical problems), the prospect of learning to write may be nearly overwhelming.

When such writers come to the Writing Center, they bring with them not only their writing problems, but complex psychological and social issues—issues that writing and language bring to a focus, but which may also have to do with their fears and trepidations about being here, in *college*, far away from the familiar social milieu which their language represents to them. Asking them to deal with all that—and to learn a new language too—may seem to you unfair, and you may be right. Yet that is what you, as coach, must do: slowly and gently encourage them to learn the language of academia.

If in addition the writer is African-American, he or she may also feel the tension of psychological and social issues of being at a predominantly white school. If you are a white coach working with an African-American writer, you may feel that tension yourself, residing just below the surface of each session; you may worry that you're going to offend the writer if you point out an error or suggest a change. And on occasion, students will deliberately *choose* to write in Black English—to express their defiance, perhaps, or perhaps because it best expresses their ideas, thoughts, experience, or emotions in a particular piece of writing.

What to do, then, when a writer in the Writing Center presents you with a paper containing Black English?

Our discussion with Dr. Williams led to the conclusion that, since correct, standard American English is necessary for success in our current academic system, we do need to teach that in the Writing Center, and not just for African-American students, but for any students who use non-standard forms in their writing. However, we must also ask ourselves some important questions when working with an African-American writer on a particular piece of writing:

- What is the purpose of this writing? Is it formal or informal? Is it meant to be "expressive" or "transactional"? I.e., is it meant to evoke emotional, human response—or to demonstrate knowledge and earn a grade? Help the writer to use, and learn, the style needed in the situation.

- Who is the audience for this writing? Is it a fiction or poetry writing teacher who is encouraging students to "find their own voices," to write "naturally"? Or it is a history, biology, or English teacher who wants students to learn a particular form of academic writing? Or is it other students? We all know that different voices, or styles, are appropriate for different audiences; help the writer choose, and learn, the voice appropriate for this one.
- Does the writer use nonstandard English deliberately—or accidentally? In short, is the "mistake" intentional? If so, you can discuss with the writer the purpose of the choice, and whether or not it works in this particular

situation. (Some common "mistakes": using incorrect past participles, especially of irregular verbs—e.g., writing "have drove" instead of "have driven"; using "be" instead of its conjugated forms—as in “she be sorry”; using ain't or double negatives—"don't have no.")

- Does the writer have problems other than with style—e.g., with argument development, detail, or organization? If so—as you would with any writer—work with those problems first. But if the paper needs to be in standard English, make that clear to the writer; let him or her know that the next step in revision will be editing for voice.

Above all, Dr. Williams recommended being forthright with our writers. If we suspect that a writer is using Black English for deliberate effect, comment on the use of English and ask if it is purposeful. If the situation merits standard English instead, suggest this to the writer, and offer to help make the translation, if necessary. Above all, though, continue to use good coaching practices by being supportive, responsive, positive, and helpful throughout the coaching session, working with each writer in the way most effective with that writer at that moment, and always protecting ownership.

With users of Black English, we should be sensitive to and appreciative of their language—while also helping them to decide when, where, and how to use it, and to learn the standard forms so that they have that choice when they need it. After all, to write truly well, and to succeed in college and beyond, we must *all* be able to speak a "mix of tongues."

Appendix A

The following strategies are culled from Ilona Leki's book Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers *(Heinemann, 1992).*

UNDERSTANDING THE ESL CLIENT

Know who the writer is, where he or she is from, what they plan to do. This is important with any student, but more important with ESL students. Find out the ESL client's goals, how they hope to develop their writing, and how far they plan to take it.

Recognize that ESL students differ in needs, motivations, and goals. Treat each one as an individual.

People's writing choices and style give the reader information about who the writer is—this includes ESL writers. Use their writing to help you understand them and their culture. Ask questions about why they chose what they chose—words, sentences, structure, punctuation, ideas.

Be aware of and sensitive to students' motivations and goals for writing in English. Is it necessary for this student to become fluent because s/he plans to stay in America or wants to teach English elsewhere? Or does this student simply need to write well enough to get a degree so that s/he can go back to the native country, where English writing will be rarely used?

Encourage students to take advantage of the asset they have of a broad, sophisticated perspective on the world and its diversity of cultures. But also acknowledge the innate difficulty of this task, as it involves collating memories and experiences stored in at least two different languages. Memories made "back home" will be stored in the native language, while memories made here will be stored in English.

It's important to be supportive and patient with students writing in their L2 because their attention/energy/cognitive resources are all being strained. This stress comes from having to focus on writing in a different language—from choosing the "right" words and trying to write with the corresponding grammar rules as well as organizing what they want to say.

We can actually help writers in their compositional strategies in both their L2 and their L1—if a writer is not strong in her L1, she will struggle with writing in her L2. Writing is a whole other language, no matter what culture it's done in.

Learning to write English as an L2 is not so different from our own experiences learning to write.

Realize the effects of culture shock; make each experience positive.

Be patient and empathetic with ESL students; imagine what it would be like to be in their place.

Be sensitive and not too hasty to "tear apart" their writing. Understand that the adjustment and transition they are making is difficult, and writing in an L2 is not an easy task for them. Offer them lots of positive feedback and encouragement.

Coaches should be aware that different cultures consider different kinds of questions offensive. For instance, we might find it offensive to be asked how much we are being paid or whether we are dating someone, but in another culture this may be just normal fodder for conversation.

Remember: You are doing more than just helping the student to write better. As a coach you are also: an ambassador for our country, a peer, someone to talk to, someone who understands and can explain things, a friend, and so much more. Remember this so as not to get too caught up in just coaching for errors.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR COACHING ESOL CLIENTS

A student's paper provides the opportunity for a connection between client and coach. This connection and a relationship can be developed by showing interest—asking thoughtful, genuine questions that go beyond the paper. Such discussion will also benefit the paper.

Keep in mind the individuality of the student—their relationship to American culture, the purpose of their studying English, their educational/writing history, and their body language and their perception of your body language.

We can help ESL writers not only to become better writers but to better understand their own goals in learning English.

We are part of an ESL student's experience abroad. Create a positive cross-cultural experience.

Reading aloud for the less experienced ESL clients helps them develop listening and speaking skills (as they hear how a native speaker pronounces things), and your hesitations may alert them to possible problems. Conversely, letting them read aloud—especially grad students—can allow them to correct their own errors and practice their pronunciation. Feel free to help them with pronunciation, too.

Try to maximize available cognitive "counterspace" by getting ESOL students to write down their thoughts on scrap paper if they are having trouble forming sentences. This helps sometimes if their content is good but their syntax isn't.

The Writing Center might help a cognitively overloaded ESL student in many of the same ways that it might help an overloaded LD student.

Coaches should take the time to go over the assignment thoroughly with an ESL student to make sure it's understood completely.

Be sensitive to the fact that not only are our ESL students struggling with their writing, but they must also work just to understand the dialogue we engage them in as we coach.

Just because a student seems unengaged doesn't mean she is indifferent to her work and doesn't care about improving her writing. This may be a personality or cultural difference. Assume all clients want to work and improve.

ESL students have often been taught formal English in classrooms. Therefore, it may be easier for students to understand coaches if coaches use formal English when speaking with them. Avoid colloquialisms and slang.

Slow down and allow more time. As coaches we may need to have more patience with ESL students and appreciate the extra steps they have to go through.

Take a step back and realize you cannot do everything in one session. Even if the paper seems like a train wreck, working on one specific thing, like the conclusion or the introduction, can make a difference for an ESL student.

The Writing Center can give feedback that is helpful and that is <u>used</u> in an ESL writer's writing process. Our feedback matters!

When coaching an ESL writer, look at progress and accomplishment differently than you would for a native speaker; have appropriate expectations.

Make use of your own knowledge and understanding of the challenges of writing in a second language. Share your stories and strategies. Relate to the writer's experience with any experience you've had with a foreign language or travel.

ESL coaching can be made easier if we think of a tutoring session as a consequence-free "communication workshop" in which we are equally involved in helping ESL students learn to think in English, speak and listen to English, read in English, develop an internal "English" reader, and write in English.

Work to make sure that the Writing Center is a place where students can engage with you in the English language through talking, listening, reading, and writing.

If a coach feels that there is too much to remember about working with an ESL student—or any student—just remember one thing: Be aware!

HELPING ESOL CLIENTS WITH GLOBAL PROBLEMS
When ESL students are writing, their main concern may be correct grammar and sentence structure, and content may seem less important to them.

We should attend to content as well as to grammar. First things first, as always!

Engage ESL clients in conversation by asking questions. Talking helps them express their ideas better.

There are times when everything is too much too think about in an L2, and so you might suggest that an ESL writer fall back on her L1 for planning strategies or developing ideas.

Remain aware of cultural differences and the fact that not all cultures write in the more “direct” American style.

Understand that different cultures have different styles and rules for writing. For example, some cultures’ essay structure is the reverse of ours, where the thesis statement is in the final paragraph, leaving the American reader confused until the end.

The rhetorics of other cultures—organizational patterns, emphasis, even logic—can be quite different from our rhetoric.

Explain the cultural differences in writing, such as “thesis placement.” Help them understand the expectations of American professors and readers.

Discuss the differences in rhetorics so that the ESL students understand what is expected here, our “standard” style of writing.

Remember, and perhaps address with clients, how culturally determined our ideals of effective, competent writing are.

Every culture has its own ideas about what is “exaggerated” and what is “understated” in writing.

Realize Asian writers are not used to directness in writing, but still encourage them to make changes.

Also, be alert to “accidental” plagiarism. While ESL writers might be aware of our idea of plagiarism, they might not understand it as we do because it is not an issue in their native country.

An important lesson can be learned by the teacher/coach when s/he realizes how culturally ethnocentric we can be when trying to impose our values and ideas on others.

It is our responsibility to help teach and reinforce the expectations of an English reader without insulting or ignoring the student’s native culture.

HELPING ESOL CLIENTS WITH LOCAL PROBLEMS

First fix errors that affect meaning or understanding and errors that might "bother" instructors most, like the use of the wrong form of a word ("discussion" where "discussed" is required, for instance). Local errors that don't affect meaning—like the failure to include -*s* on a singular verb—are less important. Don't overwhelm or discourage the client with too many corrections to absorb in a single session.

If a writer is using words that distort the meaning of a sentence, tell him how you would interpret the sentence as written, and ask if that is what he means. If not, ask him to say what he *does* mean.

Write the correct version of an incorrect sentence and ask the client to describe the differences between the correct and incorrect forms.

Create parallel examples to look at and consult grammar books to "teach" an ESL student a particular rule, rather than simply explaining it or just giving the correction. Even though ESL writers may "know" the rule from years of grammar training, doing this *in the context of their own writing* may help them understand the rule better and internalize it more.

Be careful about repeating back what you think your client means, because you may be putting words into his or her mouth. Instead, ask "What do you mean?" Japanese women writers are particularly likely to agree with everything you say; watch for this.

It's important to offer several options for editing choices and to understand what the writer is getting at so changes will still reflect what the writer really wants to say.

For Asian and Eastern European clients, articles are a key problem. Don't expect to solve it in a single session; just keep giving them practice at using articles correctly. Use reference books if you need help explaining.

Try to make sure that what you are teaching is important to the student. There is no point in having students struggle with concepts or grammar they do not really need to know.

ON JAPANESE CULTURE/LANGUAGE AND THE WRITING CENTER

The following information was culled from a talk given in the Writing Center on March 4, 1992, by Hideko Furukawa, who teaches Japanese in the Department of Modern Languages at Saint Michael's. Mrs. Furukawa is a native of Japan who had been in this country for about fifteen years when she came to see us. While Japanese culture had changed somewhat since she emigrated, she said that by and large, our Japanese writers will continue to reflect these needs and characteristics for some time to come.

We invited Mrs. Furukawa because a number of coaches had experienced some discomfort in working with Japanese students, who represent a good portion of the regular clientele of the Center. In particular, coaches had reported that while Japanese women were very attentive writers, it was often difficult to tell whether or not they understood what was going on in a session. On the other hand, some Japanese men

sometimes seemed almost hostile, unwilling to participate in the coaching process. We wanted to ask Mrs. Furukawa about these characteristics, and also to hear what she could tell us about how to make our coaching more effective for Japanese students.

Mrs. Furukawa divided her presentation into three parts, at the end of which we asked questions. The following is a summary of the presentation. *Note: This information will be supplemented by Leki's book and also by a presentation by our TESL coach. Do keep in mind that times are changing, and that each writer is an individual with his or her own personality, so there are likely to be exceptions to all these "rules." And don't assume all Asian-looking students are (a) Japanese and/or (b) non-native speakers.*

Coaching Etiquette for Japanese Students.

1. *Speak slowly*. Good advice for all international, ESL students. Saying *one word at a time* will increase your writer's comprehension. Pay particular attention if a Japanese student asks you to speak slowly; s/he will only ask once, even if you don't slow down enough. Check with the writer to make sure you're speaking slowly enough, by asking if you are or by asking the writer to repeat what you said; if the writer seems uncertain, *slow down more*.

2. *Avoid slang*. Learning a second language is hard enough without having to learn special slang or jargon. Japanese students learn standard, orthodox English, and their reading ability is usually quite good; what is most difficult is to listen to and understand a native speaker. Don't make it more difficult than need be. Don't, for instance, say, "Is this for a psych class?" Say, "Is this for a psychology class?"

3. *Avoid sentences containing two negative ideas*, like "It would*n't* be bad if you did*n't* do it that way." Say instead: "It would be all right not to do it that way."

4. *Use short sentences* as you speak.

5. *Pause frequently* to give the writer a chance to absorb what you've said—every few sentences is a good guideline. Make sure the writer understands by asking him or her to repeat the information to you. Japanese writers are unlikely to say "I don't understand"; to them, that seems impolite.

6. *Don't rely on humor*—i.e., jokes, allusions, puns, etc. Humor is not cross-cultural, and if you make a joke and don't get the response you expect, the writer will sense your disappointment. This may create discomfort that can't be overcome. Instead:

7. *SMILE!!* Japanese people smile frequently and easily. A sincere smile will help put your writer at ease more than any attempt at humor.

8. *Re: Eye Contact*: Eye contact during conversation is *not* encouraged in the Japanese culture; it can even be construed as a sign of disrespect. In particular, Japanese women may not meet your eye; this is because it is considered more feminine, and attractive, for

women to look downward. Don't take this personally, then, and if you can, show similar respect to your Japanese writers.

Special Language Difficulties.
1. In Japanese, there are no plurals in either nouns or verbs. Japanese writers may, therefore, commonly have problems with forming plurals of nouns and subject/verb agreement. They may, for instance, write "student need to buy supply" instead of "students need to buy supplies."

2. In Japanese, there are no articles—*a*, *an*, or *the*. Frequently, therefore, Japanese writers may omit articles: "Student ride bicycle past house" instead of "A student rides a bicycle past the house." They may also have difficulty understanding why you use which article when. Learn how to explain that *a* and *an* are used when the noun is not specific—when it might be *any* student who rides *any* bicycle. (*A*, of course, is used before nouns beginning with a consonant; *an* before those beginning with a vowel sound.) *The* is used when we have a specific student in mind: "The student with the red hair..." *No article* is used when, often in the plural, we are not specifying *which*, or when we mean *any and all*: "Students should come to classes." (See our handbook for more; keep it nearby as you coach.)

3. In Japanese, there are only three tenses for verbs: present ("I see"), past ("I saw"), and imperfect past ("I had seen"). Other tenses, such as our conditional ("I would see"), simply don't exist. Watch for problems with forming tenses.

4. In Japanese, the verb and adverbs of negation tend to come at the very *end* of sentences. You might see a sentence like: "The snow on the hill was melting not." This may be far more common, though, in speaking than in writing, especially when the writer is tense or uneasy, so be sure to give the speaker enough time to finish a sentence—don't assume you know what s/he is saying. (Adding "not" at the end of a statement, such as "I understand...not," certainly changes the meaning!) If you are unsure if the sentence is finished, ask, "Are you finished?" Alternatively, "say-back" the speaker's words to make sure you understood what s/he said: "You can't come back tonight? How about tomorrow?" Echoing is a good policy in any coaching session, and especially valuable with international writers.

Cultural Attitudes.
1. In Japan, talking too much or too easily is viewed as a sign of untrustworthiness, especially among men. Thus, if you want to encourage your writer to trust you, speak slowly and use as few words as possible; don't be chatty. And don't expect much chattiness or openness in return.

2. In Japan, one's ability to create consensus is considered an important quality for leadership. Good leaders hold back their own opinions and encourage others to express theirs by asking questions, gently leading a group to consensus on a subject.

With regard to coaching, this means two things. First, if you want to gain your writer's respect, ask questions rather than assert opinions. (This is, as you know, *always*

good policy when coaching.) Second, be aware that Japanese writers, attempting to gain *your* respect, will not volunteer their own opinions, but may instead ask for yours. In this case, what you should do is once again shift ownership back to the writer by *asking questions*.

If you do make a suggestion, be aware that the writer may not ask "Why?" even though s/he might want to know—so be *sure* to offer an explanation. Still, it is always better to begin with a question—"Can you think of another way to say this?" or "Why did you choose this way to say this?"

Japanese writers may tend to say "I'm sorry" when it seems (to you) inappropriate or unnecessary. This is often an automatic response, a signal of respect; often it's best simply to ignore it and move on.

3. Japanese writers will tend to be very concerned with mechanics and form in their writing, because this is how they are taught in their school system. Since they are struggling with learning a new language, this kind of strictness of form is probably a good thing. Feel free to be very specific in your instructions, and don't force or expect "expressiveness." Right now their greatest concern may be "getting it right," and your job is to help them to learn how to do that.

4. "Yes" can mean "I hear you" but not "I understand." Again, ask the writer to echo the information back to you to make sure they understand. When appropriate, give an example to the writer, and then perhaps ask the writer to give you another example back.

5. Remember: As Japanese writers listen and read, they are taking in information expressed in English—but their logic remains Japanese. This may mean that they take more time to process information than native English-speakers. So if a writer goes away looking confused, don't lose heart: s/he may process the new information later and gain clearer understanding. For this reason, it may be particularly valuable to *write down* as much information as possible—write down examples, explanations, in the margins or on the back of a page of the paper or on scrap paper. (This is a good example of when it is acceptable for a coach to take charge of the pencil.)

Questions and Answers.

1. We asked Mrs. Furukawa about the apparent hostility of some male Japanese writers. She said that it may be that they misunderstand the purpose of the Writing Center. Since the coaches are being *paid*, these writers may feel that working on the writing is the *coach's* job. Try to make it very clear to such writers that our job is *not* to correct the paper, but to work with the writer to help him/her learn English.

Alternatively, some males might be very shy, especially with American females. This might be a personal (i.e., not cultural) characteristic, or it might be a reflection of the Japanese system of authority. In Japan, the "boss" is almost always older and male; some male writers might, therefore, feel uneasy with the evident shift in authority when asked to work with a female coach (who may also be younger). One solution may be to pair male Japanese writers with male coaches. If this isn't possible, smile and ask a lot of questions; don't let the writer sit back while you do the work; explain again the rules of the Center. Perhaps expressing it that way—"These are our rules"—will help.

2. On the other hand, female Japanese writers tend to be self-effacing. They may giggle when nervous, say "yes" when they mean "no," and feel particularly uneasy about asking questions. While they may be paying close attention and seem to understand everything you're saying, you should check frequently to make sure they truly do. Assume nothing; go slowly and ask for constant feedback.

Chapter 8
Learning Styles, Learning Differences

How does my client learn? Three theories.
Everyone has certain preferred "learning styles," or ways in which we learn most easily. Understanding your own style is almost as important as understanding your client's, for the way we learn is the way we are most likely to teach—or tutor. In this chapter, we'll talk about learning styles and learning differences, and how to adapt your tutoring style to your client's preferred learning style.

One theory holds that humans have three "learning modes"—*visual, auditory, and kinesthetic*—of which most people rely primarily on one and secondarily on another, with the third being the weakest. For instance, I've discovered that I'm primarily a visual learner. What this means is that when I'm learning a new aerobics routine, I need to be where I can easily see the teacher. If someone simply *tells* me how to do something, I often can't visualize it; I need to *see* it modeled for me. My husband is constantly having to draw little diagrams for me in order to make me understand something that he can easily picture in his mind. Likewise, while he can do a crossword puzzle in his head, only writing the answers in when he's sure they'll fit, I use a more trial and error approach, writing an answer in as soon as it comes to me so that I can *see* it to help me find the neighboring answers (I do a lot of erasing, of course). This trait has its advantages and disadvantages, obviously: it's one of the reasons I'm good at fiction writing (because I'm observant and use a lot of visual imagery in my work), but it does make it hard for me to follow written directions unless they're accompanied by a drawing.

Because I'm a visual learner, in class I rely a good deal on handouts and overheads. I used to expect my students to be able to "get" the material from these written sources. But over the years, I've learned the value of adding the two other modes to my teaching. An *auditory* learner can learn well by listening—this is the kind of student, for instance, who may get more from the teacher's lecture than he did from reading the book. I find that reviewing the handout aloud helps a lot of students, and so I almost always do this in class, one way or another.

A *kinesthetic* learner learns best through or while moving his or her body or by manipulating objects. So, for instance, these days arithmetic is commonly taught in the lower grades using "manipulatives" like colored blocks. Three blue blocks added to two yellow blocks makes five blocks all together: 3 +2 = 5. Putting the blocks in separate groups, then moving them together helps the student "get" the idea. The use of the colors adds a visual dimension, and talking through the problem can add an auditory dimension. Using "multimodal" instruction ensures that everyone in a given class can process information in one way or another, regardless of their learning preferences. When I *talk* while *showing* an overhead and then ask students to *write* about them too, I'm using multimodal learning.

A little tip for identifying which modes your client relies on: watch where he rests his eyes. If he looks up when he's thinking, he's likely a visual learner. If he looks down, kinesthetic. If he looks left or right, auditory. Try this on yourself and see if it works.

A second theory about learning styles is Howard Gardner's idea of "multiple intelligences." Currently, Gardner asserts that there are eight such intelligences:

Intelligence	Core Operations
Linguistic	syntax, phonology, semantics, pragmatics
Musical	pitch, rhythm, timbre
Logical-mathematical	number, categorization, relations
Spatial	accurate mental visualization, mental transformation of images
Bodily-kinesthetic	control of one's own body, control in handling objects
Interpersonal	awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
Intrapersonal	awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
Naturalist	recognition and classification of objects in the environment

This chart came from Harvard University's Project SUMIT (Schools Using Multiple Intelligence Theory at http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sumit/MISUMIT.HTM; no longer online), which went on to explain:

> Drawing upon findings from evolutionary biology, anthropology, developmental and cognitive psychology, neuropsychology, and psychometrics, Gardner uses eight different criteria to judge whether a candidate ability can be counted as an intelligence:
>
> 1. potential isolation by brain damage
> 2. existence of savants, prodigies, and other exceptional individuals
> 3. an identifiable core set of operations—basic kind of information-processing operations or mechanisms that deal with one specific kind of input
> 4. a distinctive developmental history, along with a definite set of "end-state" performances
> 5. an evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility
> 6. support from experimental and psychological tasks
> 7. support from psychometric findings
> 8. susceptibility to encoding from a symbol system

In Gardner's theory, the word *intelligence* is used in two senses. Intelligence can denote a species-specific characteristic; homo sapiens is that species which can exercise these eight intelligences. Intelligence can also denote an individual difference. While all humans possess the eight intelligences, each person has his/her own particular blend or amalgam of the intelligences.

The following definitions of the intelligences, adapted by White and Blythe (1992), from the originals presented in [Gardner's] *Frames of Mind,* list occupation, professions, disciplines, areas and directions an intelligence can take. But these are by no means the only examples; nor do any of these examples or end states represent the use of any one intelligence to the exclusion of all others. Individuals are never endowed solely with one intelligence. Rather, all brain-unimpaired people possess all the intelligences, which they blend in various ways in the course of creating something that is meaningful or performing a meaningful role or task.

Linguistic intelligence allows individuals to communicate and make sense of the world through language. Poets exemplify this intelligence in its mature form. Students who enjoy playing with rhymes, who pun, who always have a story to tell, who quickly acquire other languages—including sign language—all exhibit linguistic intelligence.

Musical intelligence allows people to create, communicate, and understand meanings made out of sound. While composers and instrumentalists clearly exhibit this intelligence, so do the students who seem particularly attracted by the birds singing outside the classroom window or who constantly tap out intricate rhythms on the desk with their pencils.

Logical-mathematical intelligence enables individuals to use and appreciate abstract relations. Scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers all rely on this intelligence. So do the students who "live" baseball statistics or who carefully analyze the components of problems—either personal or school-related—before systematically testing solutions.

Spatial intelligence makes it possible for people to perceive visual or spatial information, to transform this information, and to recreate visual images from memory. Well-developed spatial capacities are needed for the work of architects, sculptors, and engineers. The students who turn first to the graphs, charts, and pictures in their textbooks, who like to "web" their ideas before writing a paper, and who fill the blank space around their notes with intricate patterns are also using their spatial intelligence. While usually tied to the visual modality, spatial intelligence can also be exercised to a high level by individuals who are visually impaired.

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence allows individuals to use all or part of the body to create products or solve problems. Athletes, surgeons, dancers,

choreographers, and crafts people all use bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. The capacity is also evident in students who relish gym class and school dances, who prefer to carry out class projects by making models rather than writing reports, and who toss crumbled paper with frequency and accuracy into wastebaskets across the room.

Interpersonal intelligence enables individuals to recognize and make distinctions about others' feelings and intentions. Teachers, parents, politicians, psychologists and salespeople rely on interpersonal intelligence. Students exhibit this intelligence when they thrive on small-group work, when they notice and react to the moods of their friends and classmates, and when they tactfully convince the teacher of their need for extra time to complete the homework assignment.

Intrapersonal intelligence helps individuals to distinguish among their own feelings, to build accurate mental models of themselves, and to draw on these models to make decisions about their lives. Although it is difficult to assess who has this capacity and to what degree, evidence can be sought in students' uses of their other intelligences—how well they seem to be capitalizing on their strengths, how cognizant they are of their weaknesses, and how thoughtful they are about the decisions and choices they make.

Naturalist intelligence allows people to distinguish among, classify, and use features of the environment. Farmers, gardeners, botanists, geologists, florists, and archaeologists all exhibit this intelligence, as do students who can name and describe the features of every make of car around them.

In his article "Are there additional intelligences?" Gardner examined two candidate intelligences, naturalist and spiritual, but ended up rejecting spiritual—at least for now—because it does not meet the eight criteria named earlier. He is still amassing evidence for other suggested intelligences. For example, existential intelligence—manifest in somebody who is concerned with fundamental questions of existence—does not, as yet, seem to meet all criteria. If decisions about intelligences are to be taken seriously, Gardner believes, they must depend upon examination of the available data. So at this point, one might say that the existential intelligence is the "half" in the 8-1/2 intelligences.

As this summary implies, each of us has strengths and weaknesses among these intelligences, and knowing them can help us find or design learning experiences to suit our strengths or to strengthen our weaknesses, as well as choose a major or find a career we'll enjoy. In the American educational system, the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences tend to be emphasized most, yet outside our educational systems, other intelligences are valued even more highly: a painter, an actor, a basketball player all can make more money and win more acclaim than, say, a poet or a mathematician. Yet because our education system emphasizes verbal and mathematical intelligence, people

weak in those areas are seen as "outside the norm." To learn what your "multiple intelligence" strengths are, visit http://www.ldpride.net/learningstyles.MI.htm.

Which are your client's strong suits? If you spend a few minutes getting to know your client and pay attention to what you learn, you can hazard a guess. Does she really love sports? If so, she probably has bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. Does he love to talk? Maybe linguistic. Is she a math major? Mathematical. And so on. Remember, you're just guessing—but after a while, you'll get good at guessing. (And of course, you can always just ask: How do you learn best?)

A third theory useful to understanding our learning styles is "personality type" theory, based on Jungian psychology. Jung's theory was that people are born with personalities, clear preferences in various areas. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which you took on the first day of class, measures this. It shows us where we fall along four "scales" as far as those preferences go. Here's a brief summary, just to give you the idea; this comes from St. Mary's College (http://www.smc.qld.edu.au/mbti.htm):

> The E - I scale describes two opposite preferences for where you like to focus your attention; on the outer world of people and things (extraversion) or the inner world of ideas (introversion).
>
> The S - N scale describes opposite ways that you perceive or acquire information. You use your sensing function, which corresponds to your five senses, or through your other perceiving function, called intuitive. [Intuitive] is shown as an N in the scales to avoid confusion with the I scale. Intuition shows you the meanings, relationships and possibilities beyond the information from your five senses. It has sometimes been said that an S person sees 'the trees' and an N person sees 'the forest'.
>
> The T - F scale describes how you make decisions. One way to decide is through thinking or using logic. Another is to decide through your feeling or considering what is important to you or others without requiring you to use logic.
>
> The J - P scale describes the lifestyle you prefer to adopt and how you orient towards the outer world. These opposites here refer back to the previous two scales. In other words, you take either primarily your judging attitude (using thinking or feeling) or your perceiving attitude (using sensing or intuition) towards the world.
>
> Your type is what you clearly reveal as your preferred combination of four letters from the sixteen combination types.

For instance, I usually test an INTJ—that is, introverted, intuitive, thinking, judging. However, on the scale I am a "weak" introvert, which means I like the inner and outer worlds almost equally. I'm a moderate intuitive, a moderate thinker, and a strong "J"—which mostly shows up in how I organize my life (I make schedules, lists; I don't like

spontaneity, surprises). We'll learn more about this theory when we find out our test results in class; for now, it's enough to say that the theory holds that we are born with certain preferences for how we view the world, make decisions, and handle time. Naturally, all of these preferences affect how we learn, how we write, and how we teach.

These three different theories often overlap. They may, in fact, simply be different ways of expressing the same ideas. A person who prefers the *visual* mode of learning may be said to have *spatial* intelligence and/or a preference for *extraverted* learning because he identifies mainly with things outside his head—things he can see. A person who prefers the *kinesthetic* mode may be said to have *bodily-kinesthetic* intelligence and a preference for *sensory* learning. And so on. The specific terms are not as important as the basic concept: Each of us has seemingly inborn preferences or strengths for learning, and we can use those preferences to help us excel. On the flip side, we each also have weaknesses—and we can either avoid situations that tax those weaknesses or learn ways to cope with or overcome them.

The chart below summarizes how you can "guess" different learning styles in your writers and yourself. Keep in mind that this is a very informal, loose way of identifying learning styles; if something doesn't ring true to you, it's probably not. (These ideas will also be amplified a great deal by the MBTI discussion later on.)

IF YOU OR YOUR WRITER….	THEN YOU OR YOUR WRITER MIGHT …
…tends to rest your eyes by looking up	…be a visual learner
…tends to rest your eyes by looking to the side	…be an auditory learner
…tends to rest your eyes by looking down	…be a kinesthetic learner
…tends to use phrases like "I see…"	…be a visual learner
…tends to use phrases like "I hear…"	…be an auditory learner
…tends to use phrases like "I understand"	…be a kinesthetic learner
…majors in math or a science	…have a strong mathematical intelligence
…majors in a humanities subject	…have a strong verbal intelligence
…majors in music	…have a strong musical (auditory) intelligence
…likes sports a lot	…have a strong bodily-kinesthetic intelligence
…etc.—make up your own examples!	

How does this impact us in the Writing Center? First of all, as I said above, it's useful to know your own learning preferences, because your instinct will be to teach as you would most like to be taught. If you are, say, a strong auditory learner with a strength in verbal intelligence and a personality type that is introverted, you might instinctively teach largely through brief, verbal explanations, expecting your client to "hear" you right away. If, however, you're working with a writer who is a strong visual learner with a strength in spatial intelligence and an extraverted personality type, she's just not going to

“get” you. So understanding your type and how it “meshes” with the types of your writers is very important.

Knowing about learning styles, of course, can also influence what strategies we suggest to writers: a visual learner might like mapping as a way to organize information, while a kinesthetic learner might do better using notecards that can be moved around on the desk. Color-coding might help a visual learner; tape-recording might help an auditory learner. And so on.

In addition, regardless of our own learning style, we can adjust our coaching style to match that of a given writer. You can, for instance, mimic a writer’s language so that the writer feels you are on the same “wavelength” as she is: if a visual learner says, “I don’t see how….” you can show her, and then say, “Do you see now?” You can mimic body language as well: if your client pushes back from the table and talks into the air while looking at the ceiling, you can do the same, and this can put your client at ease. If your writer shows a preference for writing everything down, you can get out the scrap paper and write, write, write—diagrams, sample sentences, lists, whatever the writer wants to generate. Another client might prefer just to listen and not write anything at all down—she might be a strong introvert and auditory learner, capable of remembering your conversation. While you will of course write down what you can on your session form, another way to make sure she’s “got it” is just to ask her to tell it back to you. And give her a moment to think, because introverts need that.

Of course, you CAN ask your clients how they learn and write best. You can also share with them what *you’ve* observed. If a client is having a very hard time with writing, it may be that he has developed habits that go against his own preferences—he may, for instance, be using outlines to plan ahead when he really needs to freewrite and learn what he has to say before he plans. If you talk to your clients about their process, you may find that they use “secret” techniques that you can assure them are “all right.” This “metacognition”—thinking about our own learning—is something that you and all students can benefit from, both in class and out, now and in the future.

Who is my client? What is his or her background?

As already discussed, it’s important to take a few moments to get to know any new client. This is not just about being friendly, though—it can also be crucial to having an effective session. Just as knowing whether your client is “into sports” can help you understand his learning style, knowing that his native language is French or that she comes from a part of the US where a strong dialect is spoken, or that he has a disability can help you adapt your strategies, modulate your own vocabulary, or otherwise respond more appropriately to the client’s needs.

Again, the session form is helpful. On it is this section:

Writer's background information:
Program (check one and fill in blank):
___Undergraduate. Major: _______________ Graduation year: _______
___Graduate program: _________________________ Graduation year: _______
___Intensive English Program (IEP)
___Academic English Program (AEP)
___Study abroad in America
___Other: _______________________________________
Have you been to the Writing Center before? __yes __no
If an ESL writer, what is your native language? ___________________
How long have you studied English? ___________________
How long have you been in the United States? __________________
Do you have a learning disability that affects your writing? __yes __no
If yes, are you willing to discuss it with your coach? __yes __no
If yes, do you have an LD accommodation form on file with us? __yes __no __don't know

Unlike the rest of the session form, which you should fill out, with this section you have the option of (a) asking the client each question directly and filling in the blanks yourself, or (b) handing the form over and letting the client fill it in. You'll have to use your own judgment, of course. But option (a) has certain advantages, in that it enables you to meld filling out the form with a little informal dialogue that helps you get to know the client (and lets the client get to know you, too):

> "Oh—you're a business major? My roommate's a business major too—maybe you know him?"…
>
> "Oh, Arabic is your first language? What country are you from...?"
>
> "Could you tell me a little about your LD...? Dyslexia? My sister's dyslexic, too…."

A friendly, interested question or two can go a long way toward breaking the ice. As you talk, you can also make certain observations about body language, speech habits, comfort level, and mood. To be able to adapt your session to your client, remember: *ask, listen, observe, add it up:*

1. **Ask.** This might seem obvious, but it's an option many coaches forget to use. The client knows. If you want to know, ask. Ask: How are you? How do you feel about this paper? Do you need me to explain? How do you learn best? What works for you?
2. **Listen.** If you've asked a question, really *listen* to the answer. Don't just "hear" it. Make sure you know what the student means, and make sure you catch mood and tone as well as information.
3. **Observe.** Pay close attention to body language as well as spoken language. Notice the student's work and study habits. Look for patterns of error.
4. **Add it up.** Put two and two together. Work with the information you have. English is her second (or third or fourth) language. He's a math major. She's an athlete. He looks at the ceiling when he thinks. She has ADD. From these small pieces of information, extrapolate what you can.

Working with Clients with Learning Disabilities

Note: Most of the contents of this chapter came from a course I took at Landmark College in Putney, Vermont—the first accredited college in the country to be devoted to students with learning disabilities. Thanks also to Toni Messuri, Liaison for Students with Special Needs here at Saint Michael's, for the many workshops she's given and sponsored over the years.

In the discussion of Multiple Intelligence Theory above, it's clear that "intelligences" vary from person to person—that we each have strengths and weaknesses, and that we can even seem almost to be "missing" an intelligence if we are very weak in it, and strong in others. The validity of this theory becomes even more evident when we look at learning disabilities a student experiences due to neurological differences—what is commonly called a "learning disability."

Unless you have an LD or someone close to you does, you might not know much about LDs. You may even imagine that few students with such problems come to college. In fact, while LDs range from mild to severe, people with LDs all have one thing in common: they are of average—and, not infrequently, above-average—intelligence. Thus, many people with LDs do come to college; in fact, at St. Mike's about 60 such students enroll per incoming class (and that's only counting the ones who know they have an LD and choose to disclose it).

At Saint Michael's, students with learning disabilities are encouraged to use the many resources available to all students here on campus. The Writing Center is one such resource, and many students with LDs do frequent the Center. For this reason, we devote a week of discussion to what we should and shouldn't do to help those students. However, the principles and strategies for working with LD students are not significantly different from those we use with other writers—in fact, discussing them will mainly deepen our understanding of the usual coaching principles. Understanding LDs helps us better understand *all* writers, including ourselves.

So what is a learning disability? It is:

- a chronic condition of neurological origin that
- impedes learning by
- interfering with processing necessary for learning in
- the visual, motor, and/or sensory systems.

Someone has a learning disability if s/he:

- demonstrates average or above average intelligence in most areas
- but does not learn as *rapidly* or as easily as others with similar intelligence.

Having an LD does not mean a person is:

- mentally retarded
- emotionally disturbed (or at least no more than average)
- from a deprived educational background
- physically or sensory disabled (by blindness, deafness, or the like)

...although persons with such problems may *also* have LDs.

A learning disability is a real disability, only hidden. Students with LDs process information differently. They may seem simply to be slow learners, but when diagnostic tests show a clear discrepancy between their cognitive intelligence and their

achievement, and no other factors (physical or emotional problems, or educational or economic deficiency) are at play, it becomes clear that the problem is neurologically based. In other words, a person has an LD if s/he is smart, but can't learn in the usual ways, and no one can see any external reason why.

We can make an analogy to computers here. Most everyone knows that Apple and Windows computers used to use utterly different systems to "process" information. If you took information written using a Windows computer and tried to read it on an Apple computer, all you'll see on the screen is gibberish. Without the appropriate software, even today the Apple cannot process Windows information, or vice versa. This does not mean that one machine is superior to the other; it simply means that they are different. One is less common than the other, but that doesn't make it inferior; in fact, many people prefer the Apple.

As the Apple computer has trouble processing Windows-produced data, an LD student may have problems processing or "inputting and outputting" information, especially information encoded in verbal or written language. Dyslexia is a common, well-known example. People with dyslexia have difficulty reading or writing because when they look at written words, they may see letters or even words reversed. For instance, they may look at "My Life as a Dog" and see "yM efiL sa a goD." Or they may see a letter itself backwards. People who have "dyscalculia" have similar problems, only with numbers.

But dyslexia and dyscalculia are only two forms of LD and may themselves come in varying degrees. Some people can take in information fine but have difficulty retrieving it for tests or papers. Some can retrieve just fine but have difficulty writing down what they retrieve. Some may have problems with written language, others with spoken language. Some may have trouble organizing information, deciding what is more general or more specific, what is more important or less important. The point is, just as with any aspect of human character, the variations are limitless, with various problems appearing to various degrees. Each LD student is unique, different from all others, just as you are unique, and I am.

Until recently, learning disabilities like those described above were considered to *prohibit* learning. But just as technological advancements have made Apple and Windows machines able to "talk" to one another, over the last few decades new types of testing and new research about learning have shown us that, in fact, most people with LDs can learn just fine by using other learning modes to compensate for the ones in which they are disabled or different. For instance, a student who has problem processing written language may learn better by *listening* to books or lectures on tape; a student who has difficulty listening to lectures may learn better by *reading* them; a student who has trouble with writing may speak his ideas into a tape recorder; and so on. Programs have developed that teach LD students to cope with and compensate for their weak areas, and to build on their areas of strength.

The point is: Many students with LDs have been shown to have average or above-average IQs and special talents. Clearly, anyone who has made it through high school and has been admitted to college is not "dumb," and people who have overcome such difficulties to get here clearly have more than enough ambition and ability to succeed. All they need from us, then, is some flexibility with regard to how they gather, retrieve, and demonstrate their learning.

According to federal law, schools receiving federal funds may not discriminate against students with LDs. We must (1) admit students with LDs so long as they meet our standards for admissions; (2) make minor course accommodations and exam modifications to allow them a fair chance at success; (3) allow auxiliary aids, such as tape recorders, readers, laptops, and the like; (4) *not* counsel students toward more restrictive careers unless strict certification or licensing requirements demand it.

Beyond accommodation of the LD, schools and teachers may undertake to provide LD students with multimodal, individualized instruction to help them learn to their fullest capacity. This is where the Writing Center can help. Here's a summary of what we try to do:

1. *Be open to discussion.* Whether you fill out the "writer's background" section of the session form or your client does, if he or she checks "yes" about being willing to talk to you about the LD, just ask: "What can you tell me about your LD?" Keep it casual, listen closely, be interested yet relaxed. Don't ask too many questions, but be open to discussion. This will not only improve your session; it will break the ice and help the client relax.

2. *Respect privacy.* Some writers with LDs may volunteer that information and yet not want to talk about it. Some writers with LDs will not reveal that fact. In either case, we should respect the writer's desires and feelings. And certainly, unless the writer gives you permission, don't reveal his or her LD to other coaches or students.

If a writer doesn't identify himself as having an LD, you may suspect he does if you see a *consistent pattern* of the following kinds of mistakes:

- Extensive misspellings, phonetic spellings, or use of similar-sounding words;
- Letter reversals (a pattern, not just one or two);
- Misreadings—the writer is reading what s/he sees on the page, not what is there;
- Slow, laborious reading;
- Paragraphs out of order, in an organizational sense;
- Either very little production (few words) or an excess of production with little to no clear focus;
- Bizarre grammar.

What to do if you suspect a writer is LD but hasn't told you? *Respect his or her privacy*; don't ask. Continue to use good coaching techniques: ask questions, trying to lead the writer to answer them on his or her own and to write down the answers him/herself. If the writer tries, but clearly can not make the corrections or changes, go to the next level of coaching: feel free to take charge of the pencil and let the writer talk while you write things down. In other words, just follow good coaching protocols, which will work whether the client has an LD or not.

If, after several sessions, you develop a trusting relationship with a writer that you strongly suspect has an LD, you might, in a sensitive way, try to find out: "I've noticed you have a lot of trouble with spelling…. Have you always had this problem?" or simply, "Could you tell me a little more about your learning style?" Perhaps at this time the writer will confirm your suspicions. Or perhaps you'll discover that the writer has

suspected the same thing, but doesn't know for sure. In the latter case, be sure to refer the writer to Toni Messuri (Klein 111) who can refer him or her to someone for testing. Let the writer know, if you can, that having an LD is not that unusual, and that if s/he will go for testing, s/he can receive accommodations to help to ensure success in school. Accentuate the positive; help the writer to take charge of the situation.

3. *Remember that each of our writers is "learning different" and always be ready to try different strategies*. Everyone learns better in some ways than others. To practice good coaching, you must always be ready to shift strategies, whoever the client is: If one approach to a problem isn't working, try another. For instance, if a writer says s/he is having a problem organizing the material for paper, you might instinctively try outlining. If that doesn't work, you might try, instead, mapping or clustering. What you do when you shift from outlining to clustering is to shift from a *verbal/numerical abstract* representation of the order to a more *visual* representation. If that doesn't work, you might shift to cut-and-paste or colored note cards that can be moved around, a more *kinesthetic* representation.

Such flexibility is especially important when working with LD students. You might try *asking* the student which way s/he learns best: visually, auditorily, or kinesthetically? Alternatively, listen for clues in the writer's language. Does she say, "I can't *see* what you mean"? The writer may be visually oriented. If she says, "How should I *move* that?" she may be kinesthetically oriented, and so on.

Good coaching strategies for anyone are good coaching strategies for LD writers:

- First, have the writer read his work aloud to you. If he has difficulty doing that, read it for him.
- If a writer has a particularly hard time writing something down, do the writing for her—in her words. Some LD writers may find it easier to type on the computer than write in long-hand. Recognize this, and move to the computer.
- If a writer can't write, have him talk, while you record what he says; suggest a tape recorder for times outside the Writing Center, or suggest recording the paper and then bringing the tape recorder in.
- If a writer can't understand a concept or idea when you speak it, *model* it; give an example, on paper. *Show* as well as tell.
- Whenever you can, use more than one mode to teach: Talk, write, draw, cut/paste, make arrows, maps, etc. Be flexible in your strategies, and, as for any writer, remember that your job is to help the writer to do the best that *she* can, at that moment in time—and to teach enough so that the writer can do better, on her own, next time.
- As always, accentuate the positive. When something is right or good, point it out. If a writer "gets" an idea, say, "Good! Yes!" Build confidence; don't show your dismay.
- *Take your time*. As with international writers, LD students may need a little longer to process what you say. Slow down. Check with the writer frequently to make sure you're moving at an appropriate pace.

4. *Offer targeted help to documented LD writers*:
Students who provide the College with documentation of their LDs are entitled to specific accommodations, including accommodations at the Writing Center. Typically, they will bring us a letter from Toni Messuri, which should be put into the student's file. (Be sure to have the file with you, so you can check for the letter.) For such a student, we may:

- **Proofread,** with the writer's help. We don't normally proofread "for" our clients, but in the case of a student with dyslexia or another language processing disorder, we can, if we have a letter from Toni to that effect. Recommend that such clients at least use spellcheck before they come to the WC; if they don't know how to, offer to show them. But be sure to emphasize that spellcheck doesn't catch everything and can actually lead to new errors, so it's no substitute for proofreading.

  Ideally, proofread *aloud* so that the writer can catch some of his/her errors, and let the author write in the corrections him/herself if possible (pencil is best). This combination of auditory/visual/kinesthetic can help LD writers a great deal. Encourage LD writers to keep a list of the homonyms they commonly confuse (*there/their/they're, then/than,* etc.) to refer to for a special check when proofreading.
- **With the client, check grammar, spellings, word misuse, and other errors, and show them the corrections.** Always make sure that the changes are what the client intends; keep ownership in the client's hands. Talk everything over while you work, but don't spend hours dwelling on explanations. LD students often *understand* grammar but make mistakes anyway.
- **Help with sorting through and organizing research.** For instance, you may need to tell an LD writer what is more important, what is less important. The writer should do as much as s/he can on his/her own, but you may help in a variety of other ways, up to the point of writing the paper for the writer. The key is: Help, don't *do*.
- **Suggest words, phrases, options.** If a writer has problems with retrieving language from storage in the brain, your suggestions may help him to recall. Again: Don't choose for the writer; simply make a variety of suggestions. Maybe write several choices down, and let the writer choose later. Always protect ownership.

Lastly: *Remember that we can only do what we can do*. So long as you do the best you can, within the limits of the guidelines above, you have done your job. Some students may fail a particular paper or exam, but even in failure they have learned something, and so have you. Some LD students may ultimately decide that Saint Michael's is not for them and may move on to some other school; don't feel responsible for that. Others may never come to the Writing Center again. Don't despair; you *have* been helpful.

The above is the essence of what you need to know. But learning disabilities are many and varied, so the pages that follow give more details, including specific ideas for how to work with students with specific kinds of LDs. As a coach, you're not expected to be an

expert in learning disabilities, but the more you know the better; so read the following materials now and then refer to them later, especially if you become a favorite coach of a student who has a learning disability. In the Center are a wide variety of helpful handouts for all stages of the writing process; feel free to use these with all our writers, but especially with those who have LDs.

What Kinds Of LDs Affect Writing Skills?

As you know, writing is a complex process that involves:

- generating/planning/goal-setting
- drafting, reviewing, and editing
- self-monitoring and time management
- deciding what's important and what's not
- reading, collecting, and organizing information
- repetitive, recursive activities requiring both short- and long-term memory—remembering everything from spelling to abstract concepts, from remembering the assignment to remembering the last few words you wrote
- both conscious and automatic activities—deciding what to say and choosing words, but then not having to thinking about how to write or spell them)

For you, most of the time, most if not all of these activities probably flow together subconsciously. But think back on a time when you had trouble writing. Maybe it was because you were struggling with a new form, like a major term paper, or a new subject area with new vocabulary, like philosophy. Maybe it was because you were distracted by events or people around you, or by an illness. Whenever you have “too much on your mind,” your writing suffers. Words you knew how to spell yesterday, you can’t spell today. Your paragraphs may be jumbled. Or you may just not be able to write.

This condition is called *cognitive overload.* Think of your brain as a stovetop with four burners, and imagine that writing normally takes up all four burners. The minute you add another “pot” to the stove—a new kind of writing, a new topic, a short deadline, any kind of stress—that pot pushes another pot off the stove, maybe the pot that contains all your grammar knowledge, or your vocabulary.

As you might imagine, a learning disability brings with it a lot of extra pots. What a good writing coach strives to do is reduce the stress of writing so that the client has “room” for the pots needed to do what needs to be done right here, and right now.

For this reason, it's especially important to teach writing as a PROCESS that can be divided into STEPS, each of which can be tackled with a STRATEGY. (This is one case in which you might want to de-emphasize the “recursiveness” of the process.)

Aside from dyslexia, which can simply be addressed by proofreading with the client, five basic categories of learning disabilities can create problems with writing for LD students. (Remember that each LD student and each LD is unique. All, some, or just one of these might be apparent in any given student, and might evidence itself in a different way from student to student.) On pages 98-99 is a chart that briefly describes these five categories, how each kind can affect writing, and what tutoring/writing strategies can be useful in addressing those needs. What you’ll notice is that the key thing is to teach writing as a process…and to teach the writer how to handle that process. While this might be difficult with a “drop-in” client, if you become the designated coach

for an LD writer, the most useful thing you can do together is break down the writing process into smaller steps and determine the strategies that work for that writer at each of those steps. Once the writer develops good writing habits, a big part of the stress of writing falls away: He or she knows what to do and when to do it.

The reason students with LDs *can* learn and succeed in school is that they can compensate for their disorders by calling on other strengths. Students whose writing seems to be that of a third-grader might be able to think or talk about a subject much better than they can write about it. The key to helping such students learn to write as well as they can think or talk is to help them learn strategies to translate that knowledge to paper. The strategies you offer should draw on their strengths, their other "intelligences," whether spatial, oral, visual, auditory, or physical.

LDS AND WRITING

Remember: A student may have just one or any combination of these LDs to varying degrees.

Area of LD	**May have problems with:**	**Typical symptoms in writing:**	**Strategies to address problems:**
Attention deficit problems (ADD or ADHD; often is a problem of paying attention to too many things at once, or not being able to shut out attractive distractions when needing to concentrate on something less attractive)	*planning *sustained mental effort *tempo/pacing *determining what's important *self-monitoring *reading comprehension	*topic too large or small *overproduction of ideas *scattered structure, poor focus, lack of transitions, connections *going off on tangents *including irrelevant details *not being able to finish a paper *inaccurate assessment of readings	*Step-wise approach to writing assignments (prewrite, write, rewrite) *Emphasis on planning and organizing strategies (mapping, clustering, protocols, paragraph by paragraph planning, charts, outlines, 3x5 cards, standard essay structures)
Memory problems (difficult with retrieval of information from short- or long-term memory)	*active working memory (concentration, focus, short-term memory) *finding data in long-term memory *simultaneous retrieval (retrieving more than one thing at a time) *automatic memory (effortful handwriting vs. effortless)	*sentence errors, esp. shifts in sentence intention *leaving off ends of words *low production of words, ideas; scanty drafts *difficulty developing topics *difficulty with essay exams (time strictures)	*All of the above, but *More emphasis on informal, concrete strategies for generating ideas: freewriting, mapping, clustering, brainstorming, talking, protocols for invention *More emphasis on final stage of revision (editing and proofreading): read aloud to find errors, use other proofreading strategies

Area of LD	**May have problems with:**	**Typical symptoms in writing:**	**Strategies to address problems:**
Language acquisition problems (perhaps didn't learn basic rules of written language in school, perhaps because the LD was not recognized)	*recognizing word sounds and/or differences in word appearance *vocabulary *retrieving words from memory *writing sentences that make sense *structuring or developing ideas	*overly simple vocabulary in writing *poor speaking ability *bad grammar, nonsensical sentences *no sense of what a sentence is *disjointed papers *poor reading comprehension and slow reading *spelling problems	*All of the above, plus one-to-one tutoring to remediate language skills
High-order cognition problems (difficulty with reasoning, making connections, analysis, synthesis)	*concept formation *problem solving *critical thinking	*papers without thesis or stance *reporting but not analyzing *focus on the concrete with little sense of the abstract; telling what happened in a story or poem, but unable to tell what it might "mean"	*All of the above, with focus on strategies for developing concepts and thinking critically, such as freewriting, glossing ideas, naming connections, dramatizing, double-entry charts, question protocols
Graphomotor skill problems (fine motor skill difficulties with the hands)	*the mechanical act of writing	*difficulty producing words or developing ideas on paper *poor spelling *simplified written language (compared to spoken)	*Using a word processor and spellcheck can often circumvent this problem.

A final note

Even with all this in your pocket, you're bound to make mistakes sometimes. *That's okay; you're only human.* Just apologize, and move on. It's never too late to apologize, either—days or even weeks later, it's still valuable. Your client will appreciate your honesty, and it will only deepen the rapport between the two of you. LD writers, like others who have problems with writing, may suffer from lack of motivation and self-confidence and fear of writing. They may resist your efforts to help them learn, believing—often because they have been told so—that they *cannot* learn. At every opportunity, support and encourage them by pointing out what they *do* know and by asserting that they *can* learn more. If they have other study skills problems—like time management or slow reading or poor reading comprehension—encourage them to take charge of the problem and visit the Student Resource Center and/or Toni Messuri for

strategies to deal with those problems. Tell them about success stories, and let them know that you believe that they, too, can succeed.

And remember: We all learn differently, we all have multiple intelligences—some stronger and some weaker than others—and we all may sometimes feel "learning disabled" in certain areas of life and learning. Many, if not all, of the strategies above may be helpful for working with students or writers who *don't* have LDs. LD students are different only in the *degree* to which they have weaknesses in one or more areas and in their need for deliberate efforts on our parts to reach them through means other than those we can typically use. Multi-modal teaching—adding visual and experiential aids to our usual strategies—can help *all* our students to learn better and more deeply. For the LD student, they may be essential.

At the end of this chapter are three helpful appendices: *Teaching Principles for Tutorial Instruction of LD Writers, Samples of LD Writing to Diagnose,* and *Teaching Sentence Skills.* Please read these now and come back to them as you need them. Helping clients with LDs is some of the most valuable work we do, both for them and for us.

Appendix A:
TEACHING PRINCIPLES FOR TUTORIAL INSTRUCTION OF LD WRITERS

1. Build on success.
   - Do not overemphasize error recognition/correction.
   - Point out progress.

2. Teach diagnostically.
   - Begin instruction where a student's skills break down.
   - Sequence instruction according to the student's rate of progress and mastery of skills.
   - Assess student performance diagnostically, focusing on factors *underlying* breakdowns—why was the error made?

3. Direct instruction.
   - Demonstrate and model what you teach.
   - Demonstrate the usefulness or validity of tasks, skills, or strategies by modeling or describing experiences.

4. Give time for processing information.
   - Be aware of the need for processing time with both visual and auditory information; slow down; allow silence; wait.
   - Don't try to do everything in one session.

5. Emphasize practice and repetition.
   - Teach to "automatization."
   - Put new skills or knowledge into the context of previous learning.

6. Take a multi-modal approach.
   - Balance instruction in various modes (see, hear, say, touch, move, write) to maximize learning.
   - Supplement auditory learning and reading with visual models, diagrams, manipulatives, hands-on experience, etc.

7. Use effective questioning strategies.
   - Cue students to perform tasks and subskills, to help them retrieve words and information from memory, to elicit and help structure oral language, to check comprehension.

8. Use micro-unit instruction.
   - Break tasks into manageable chunks.
   - Provide a clear, logical sequence of instruction.
   - Estimate how much time a task may take based on student profile.

9. Foster metacognition.
   - Discuss learning style, goals, and needs.
   - Experiment collaboratively to develop individualized strategies.
   - Help students develop self-monitoring skills and strategies.
   - Teach the generalization of strategies.

10. Plan appropriately. A good tutorial has a clear, task-oriented plan. It's difficult to achieve principles 1-9 without planning.

Appendix B

Samples of LD writing to "diagnose":
What patterns of error do you see?
What *do* these writers know about writing?

A:

Dogs are as common as shoes; because they come in different styles, colors and sizes to fit the owners personality. Dogs come in different styles, for example some people prefer long hair, other think short is better, and some just like curly dogs. Dog range in different colors like all black, or all white. some feel that it is better to mix colors. The reason why people vary in color is because the taste in people change.

Again dogs range in different sizes. Some people feel more cofortable with bigger dogs it offers better protection. Others like smaller ones because it offers copanionship. Then some people don't want dogs to big but they like the protection that it offers; others find the smaller dog easier to travel with. So what do those people due they usually buy medium size dogs. It just varies on people's opion.

B.

Anchent history is one of my interest particurley Babeylon Egipt and Rome. Babeylonean history is enteresting to me becous its ritenn history predates everything icluding Egipt by hundrededs of year. Indea is the only plase that might have an older civalization. But than thay traded with the ancent nere est. So its likly thay lernd most of there sicenes and mathamatic from ports citys like ur and urek. In the erly brons age.

Samples of LD writing to "diagnose":
What patterns of error do you see?
What <u>*do*</u> these writers know about writing?

C.

The purpose of public flag burning should be leagle if done with a purpose and not out of malice. We do not live under a dictatorship, we have democracy, a people government; by the people, for the people. The framers of the constitution gave us a wide definition of the freedom of expression. Flag burning is a dramatic utencil for crowd persuasion. When a flag is burned people become very emotional and it then relieves the stress the problem originally creates. People feel as if they have gotten one step forward in getting what they want from govt. For me the burning of a flag contradicts the morals, in my eyes, it stands for; freedom, democracy, power, and sucess. If a burning is for protest, to help get a point across I believe it is a given right to do.

D.

I ran into alot of different kind of people. Once in a while we would get these women in, and they were never pleased. But a majority of the time we would have woman in, and you could give them a mohawk & wouldn't care. The snoty woman we would try and put our best girls on that were fast so to get the patron out of the shop. But some time we would have the misfortune to have a girl that was slow and not good. At the shop thing usually ran smooth because most of the girl were slow and good (perfection).

Appendix C: TEACHING SENTENCE SKILLS TO LD WRITERS (AND OTHERS)

1. Look for patterns of error; determine the underlying cause, and teach to that. Is it:

   *an intentional error based on incomplete understanding of SWE forms? If so, teach the form (using multimodal means—show, don't just tell). *Do not just correct and move on*. Teach until understanding is reached.

   *an error due to dialect interference—i.e., the student is writing the way he/she talks? If so, teach the Standard Written English form as an alternative dialect that must be used in formal discourse—again, using multimodal means. Show, don't just tell. Use examples from reading, from textbooks; break it down clearly; use color-coding, 3 x 5 cards, etc. *Do not just correct and move on*. Teach.

   *an accidental error, or an error due to encoding or decoding problems, or an error produced by cognitive constraints? If so, teach effective proofreading strategies (and spellchecking) to help student eliminate these before passing papers in. When the student knows these techniques, he or she may still need your help in using them; this is permissible, so long as the student works through the process with you.

2. To teach written-language structures and rules:

   *Move from orality to literacy. Read aloud and speak to help students "hear" the cues of punctuation and understand its function.

   *Teach "rules" through auditory process. Teach students to learn to "hear" errors. Develop inner language.

   *Use models, templates, and/or manipulatives to show patterns for different kinds of sentences. Have students generate their own sentences that follow the patterns, first orally and then in written form, until the pattern is understood.

3. Teach strategies to decrease the number of avoidable errors:

   *Teach prewriting strategies to help them gather the words before they write, to increase cognitive space so that attention can be paid word by word while writing/

   *Teach planning so that, while writing, students can avoid fatigue and rushing. Schedule writing time, task by task.

4. Teach editing skills for correcting errors after a draft is written:
   *Don't correct errors <u>*for*</u> them.
   *Don't ask them to correct errors that haven't been taught.
   *Teach them to:
      <u>*Listen*</u> for problems (read aloud).
      <u>*Look*</u> for problems (triple-spaced rough draft; checklist).
      <u>*Know*</u> where the rules are (handbook).
      <u>*Take*</u> ownership.
      <u>*Get*</u> help.

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