

Teaching with

WRITING Across the Curriculum

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Fall 2011

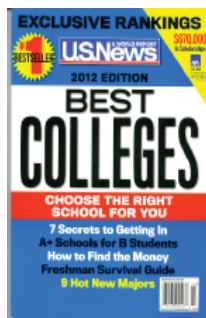
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This issue focuses on supporting student writers and recognizing their accomplishments in and across the disciplines.

WAC News

Congratulations to us!

For the 10th year in a row, Mason was named one of the top programs for Writing in the Disciplines by *U.S. News and World Report*. Mason joins 16 other universities and is among the nine public universities on the list to win this accolade.



Welcome to the 2011-2012 WAC Committee members: Joan Bristol (CHSS), Susan Durham (CHHS), Tamara Maddox (VSE), Agnieszka Paczynska (S-CAR), Gregory Robinson (CVPA), Nicola Scott (SOM), Miruna Stanica (CHSS), Shahron Williams van Rooij (CEHD), Stanley Zoltek (COS). In addition to WAC director Terry Zawacki, WAC assistant director Sarah Baker, and WAC graduate assistant Jackie Brown, the committee also welcomes its consultants: Melissa Allen (English Language Institute), Dawn Fels (University Writing Center), George Oberle (Library), Shelley Reid (Composition), Larry Rockwood (Biology), Paul Rogers (English; Northern Virginia Writing Project), and Bethany Usher (Center for Teaching Excellence, OSCAR).

More WAC News on page 6

Writing Center News

In the fall semester, the **Writing Center:**

- saw more than **1500** clients, for a total of more than **2600** appointments.
- met with **229** students in **10** workshops.

Does Your Department Give an Undergraduate Student Writing Award?

In 2010-2011, 21 departments gave WAC-sponsored undergraduate writing awards to honor and support their excellent student writers. This article also outlines the process used by various units to select and recognize winners. *See page 6*

What Happens in a Tutoring Session and How Faculty Can Help Students Prepare

Faculty can help students get the most out of their Writing Center sessions by explaining how sessions work and what can be accomplished. This article also describes the roles a writing tutor can play. *See page 2*

Notetaking Strategies for Faculty to Teach and Students to Learn

Faculty often assume that students know how to take notes, but many students either don't take notes or use a method they may have learned as early as middle school. Notetaking, when taught as a writing-to-learn activity for meaning-making, turns notetaking (consumption) into notemaking (production). *See page 3*

New Writing Center Initiatives and Outreach

Writing Center director, Dawn Fels, describes the programmatic changes that have been and will be implemented throughout the 2011-2012 academic year. Fels is expanding tailored services and tutor presence on all campuses. *See page 6*

Grammar Corner: Tense or Aspect?

This article helps writers distinguish *tense*—when an action takes place—from *aspect*—whether an action is completed or ongoing. *See page 5*

AND ALSO...

The George Mason Review Wants Student Submissions! *See page 5*

Fall 2011 Peer Tutors and Writing Fellows *See page 6*

What Happens in a Tutoring Session and How Faculty Can Help Students Prepare

FACULTY CAN HELP STUDENTS GET THE MOST OUT OF THEIR WRITING CENTER SESSIONS BY HELPING TO INCREASE students' awareness of what tutors do. "We're here to have a conversation about writing that helps students progress as writers," says tutor RJ Hooker. At the beginning of each session, tutors set an agenda with the student writers, asking them what they would like to accomplish in the session. At the end of each session, tutors ask students "What will you do next?" Moving students toward their goals as writers increases their confidence and success. "We want to help students better develop their own writing process so that they are effective writers both in and out of school," tutor Darby Price says.

As most professors' expectations are stated on syllabi or on written assignment prompts, students should be encouraged to bring those materials to the session along with notes, handouts, and assigned readings relevant to the assignment. "Professors can also remind students that we can help at all stages of the writing process, and to come in well before a paper is due," advises tutor Kate Partridge. Appointments at the Writing Center can be made several weeks in advance and they fill up quickly, so faculty can encourage students to

build time into their writing process for up to two meetings per week with a Writing Center tutor. Early in the writing process, students can meet with a tutor to brainstorm how to get started. Students with rough drafts can practice revision techniques that, once learned, will help them become their own first critical reader.

Some students arrive at the session asking tutors to "fix" their "grammar" but, as the tutor can often tell from the initial reading of the paper, they do not have a clear understanding of the assignment or content. In these cases, again depending on the student writer's needs and goals, the tutor may advise the student to prioritize "higher-order concerns"—the strength of the thesis, development, organizational structure, the "flow" of ideas—a common concern for students—and integration of sources. Typically, once these concerns are addressed, the conversation will move to "lower-order concerns," such as grammar and sentence-level errors. In the end, a paragraph, or a paper, that is free from grammatical errors but lacks a central idea is not a successful paragraph or paper.

Liz MacLean, Writing Center Tutor

"Talking in the Middle": The Many Roles a Writing Tutor Plays

WE KNOW THAT THE ROLE OF A WRITING TUTOR IS TO "HELP" STUDENTS WITH THEIR WRITING. BUT WHAT DOES "HELPING" INVOLVE? IN HER ARTICLE "TALKING IN THE MIDDLE: WHY WRITERS NEED WRITING TUTORS," WRITING center scholar Muriel Harris describes many important roles tutors play.

First of all, tutors occupy a space "in the middle" between the teacher and the student writer. By giving individual, non-judgmental attention to the student writer in the tutoring session, the tutor's role encompasses so much more than just telling the student writer what's wrong with the paper and how to fix it. More than having just good writing skills, then, the writing tutor also must have strong interpersonal skills and a sincere interest in the writer and the writing. The tutor needs to listen closely, read carefully, and interact with the writer with sensitivity and skill. Here are some roles tutors play:

- Through **collaborative talk**, tutors encourage writers to think through their own writing problems and discover how to solve them for themselves.
- Tutors help writers acquire **strategic knowledge** to talk about writing, e.g., how to write a thesis, how to organize the paper, how to use evidence, both primary and secondary, and more.
- Tutors **interpret the meaning** of writing terminology, writing assignments, and teacher expectations for revising and editing. They help decode the assignment and teach the writer strategies for decoding assignment requirements themselves.
- Tutors help writers identify the "**higher-order concerns**" (HOCs) and "**lower-order concerns**" (LOCs) in their papers. They pay attention to the HOCs (focus, organization, evidence, etc.) as they set a session agenda with the writer while also assuring him/her that they'll help with the LOCs (grammar and mechanics).
- Sometimes tutors help with **affective concerns** by listening with understanding and empathy when students express their fears and anxieties about writing and why they lack confidence. Tutors listen and reflect back what the writer is saying to validate the feelings while also moving the student towards the writing that is the focus of the session.

Summarized by Terry Zawacki

Notetaking Strategies for Faculty to Teach and Students to Learn

Faculty often assume that students know how to take notes, but many students either don't take notes or use a method they may have learned as early as middle school without questioning whether their method helps them learn. To raise students' awareness of the importance of notetaking and to encourage engagement with this metacognitive act, Sarah Baker (WAC assistant director) asks students in her composition classes to list ways they take notes, as well as to brainstorm some additional ways. Students then try three different ways, both in and out of various classes, and report back orally or in a short written assignment on what works best for them and why. Here is one list (not exhaustive) that was generated by one of Baker's classes:

- outlining
- using bullet points
- making blanks to fill in
- stream of consciousness notes
- audio- or video-recording
- annotating lecture notes/slides
- annotating readings (margin notes)
- using drawings/diagrams
- talking to/teaching someone else
- making index cards
- making columns (double-entry)
- making charts, illustrations/visualization
- transferring from one medium to another (e.g., paper to computer)
- using post-it notes/flags
- using symbols or personalized shorthand
- summarizing
- circling and underlining
- highlighting and/or color-coding
- using different fonts

Although some research exists in WAC literature on the benefits of learning notetaking, the focus tends to be on the students; less is found on strategies faculty can use to help students take notes effectively, whatever their method. Teaching notetaking as a writing-to-learn activity helps students make meaning and turns notetaking (consumption) into notemaking (production).

Strategies Faculty Can Use to Facilitate Student Notetaking:

- Ask your students to read all material before class, noting unfamiliar vocabulary and preparing questions for class.
- Consider devoting some class time to talking about and practicing summarizing, which is beneficial to students in learning how to parse key information for their notes.
- Model your own notetaking method(s) by explaining or demonstrating how you take notes when you read or listen to a lecture.
- The average writing speed for students is between 0.3 to 0.4 words per second, whereas faculty speak at a rate of 2 to 3 words per second. So tell students that it is better to write something down and leave blanks for information they miss and can fill in later rather than take no notes at all.
- Encourage your students to consider using the "double-entry" format when reworking their notes, i.e., draw a vertical line down the middle of the page, recopy the notes in the left column, and include insights or opinions in the right column.
- Advise your students to revisit their notes shortly after class, adding any information they might have missed during class and expanding on unclear points. Encourage them to review their notes regularly.
- Encourage students to work in pairs or groups outside of class to compare and share notes. This exposes them to different notetaking methods and will help them process additional information.
- Encourage English Language Learner (ELL) students to sit with other students whose English is better than theirs, consulting with them when necessary, and encourage them to exchange telephone numbers and/or email addresses.

Adapted from:

Boch, Françoise, and Annie Piolat. "Note Taking and Learning: A Summary of Research." (Sept 2005). *The WAC Journal*, 16. <http://wac.colostate.edu/journal/vol16/boch.pdf> (This is a great article!)

McNely, Brian J. "Sociotechnical Notemaking: Short-Form to Long-Form Writing Practices." (2011). *Present Tense*, 2(1), \. <http://www.presenttensejournal.org/volume-2/sociotechnical-notemaking-short-form-to-long-form-writing-practices/>

Advice on Taking Notes in Class: A Handout for Students

Notetaking is an important skill for students to learn, yet it is one that is rarely explicitly taught. The following advice provides a guide in how to take effective notes that go beyond recording information to helping learn material more deeply.

Teachers usually provide clues about what is important to write down. Look and listen for:

- Reviews given at the beginning of class.
- Summaries given at the end of the class.
- Material written on the board.
- Word signals (e.g., “There are two points of view...” or “The third reason is...”).
- Definitions or discipline-specific phrases.
- Repeated words.
- The amount of time the teacher spends on certain points.
- The teacher’s tone of voice and gestures.

Notetaking Formats and Styles:

- Keep your notes in order and in one place such as a spiral notebook.
- Date notes to stay organized.
- Start a new page for each lecture.
- Take brief, condensed notes using abbreviations for often-repeated words and terms.
- Use an outline format and/or a numbering system. Indenting helps distinguish major points from minor ones.
- Use visual cues such as circling, underlining, highlighting, and color-coding.
- Draw diagrams, pictures, and symbols when applicable.
- Leave space to go back and add information later.

WHAT to write:

- Summarize what you hear. Don’t write down everything. Be alert and attentive to the main points.
- Put the notes in your own words. However, the following should be noted as exactly as possible:
 - Formulas
 - Definitions
 - Specific facts
- If you miss something, write down keywords you heard and leave space to add the information later.
- If you hear an important word that you don’t know how to spell or aren’t familiar with, write it down phonetically (as it sounds) and ask about it after class.

After class:

- As soon as possible after class, and maybe in consultation with other students, fill in or clarify any missing or unclear information.
- When reviewing notes, use diagrams, pictures, or symbols or use other visual cues such as underlining, circling, or color-coding to highlight or connect information.
- Rework notes into a different format, such as an outline format or “double-entry” format (make two columns, copying your notes in the left column and writing insights or opinions in the right column).

Useful Resources:

“Classes: Notetaking, Listening, Participation.” Dartmouth College Academic Skills Center. <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/notes.html>

“Note-Taking.” Concordia University Counseling and Development. <http://cdev.concordia.ca/our-services/learning-support/learning-and-writing-handouts/note-taking/>

“Active Reading and Notetaking.” George Mason University Writing Center. <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/resources-template.php?id=60>

The George Mason Review Wants Submissions!

The GM Review, a publication for undergraduates by undergraduates, seeks scholarship that demonstrates creativity and critical thought. The WAC program, advisor to the *Review*, asks faculty to encourage students to submit their exemplary academic work.

The submission deadline is April 15, 2012. Students can submit up to 10 works including research writing, literary critiques or analyses, creative nonfiction, visual art, and other work written for courses.

For details, visit gmreview.gmu.edu



GRAMMAR CORNER: Tense or Aspect?

You might have heard “English has 12 tenses!” and wondered how writers are supposed to keep them straight. In fact, this number conflates tense with aspect. Tense deals with whether an action takes place in the past, present, or future, and aspect tells us whether that action is completed or ongoing. English has three tenses (past, present, and future) and four aspects (simple, perfect, progressive, and perfect progressive), which can combine for 12 possibilities for writers to employ! Perfect aspect in particular can be tricky, especially for non-native speakers of English.

Simple vs. Perfect Aspect

The simple aspect is usually used to state facts. For example, we use simple past—“I walked to school”—because it happened. Simple present—“I walk to school”—is usually used for habitual actions. Simple future—“I will walk to school”—states a plan we are fairly certain about.

The perfect aspect gets more complicated. We form the perfect aspect with the past, present, or future form of the verb “to have” (had/have/will have) and the past participle form of the main verb (which usually ends in *-en* or *-ed*). The perfect aspect is most often used when some action is completed prior to the time being referenced, but there are variations in meaning:

Tense and Aspect	Example	Meaning
<i>Past perfect</i>	“I had left the party before the fight broke out.”	One action (leaving) was completed before another event (the fight).
<i>Present perfect</i>	“I have been in college for two years.”	An action or state that began in the past and continues up to the present.
	“I have already read this book.”	A past action that has current relevance.
	“I have just finished my homework.”	A recently completed action.
	“I have studied for three hours today.”	An action that occurred over a time period and is now complete.
<i>Future perfect</i>	“I will have finished my homework by the start of class.”	A future action or state that will be complete before a specific future point.

Some students, especially non-native speakers, overuse the perfect aspect in situations in which the simple aspect works fine. For example, you may see “I have written a paper” in a context where “I wrote a paper” would be more correct or more concise. Good general advice to students is to use the simplest tense that gets their point across. Even when an action has current relevance or was recently completed, the simple aspect can often clearly communicate the time frame, e.g., “I have already read that book” and “I read that book already” mean the same thing.

Christine Bobal, Writing Center Tutor

WAC News cont.

WAC's WIN(ning) initiative is gaining momentum, with the following departments now participating: *Criminology, Law, and Society; English; History; Philosophy; Social Work; and Systems Engineering*. Each department is working on compiling resources for students and developing learning and writing outcomes.

Each semester, outstanding undergraduate students apply to be peer tutors in the writing center. Once they have completed their semester's training and have gained tutoring experience, they are eligible to be course-embedded writing fellows or curriculum-based tutors through the WAC program.

Fall 2011 Peer Tutors:

- **Nicholas Hager**, Philosophy and Government double major, with a double minor in Philosophy and Law and International/Comparative Studies
- **Hannah Menefee**, Global Affairs major, with a concentration in International Development and a minor in Public Health
- **Rachel Semenov**, Art and Visual Technology major, with a concentration in Graphic Design
- **Kate Shanahan**, Management major
- **Olivia Stockmann**, Dance major and Business minor

Fall 2011 Writing Fellows:

- **Michael Hecker**, Government major, with a minor in Middle Eastern Studies; fellow in Systems Engineering 489 with *Prof. Peggy Brouse*.
- **Taryn Brooks-Faulconer**, Biology and Psychology double major, minor in Creative Writing; returned for a second semester as a curriculum-based tutor for 10 lab sections of Biology 308, coordinated by *Profs. Larry Rockwood and Cody Edwards*.

The George Mason University WAC Program Newsletter

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New Writing Center Initiatives and Outreach

NEW WRITING CENTER (WC) DIRECTOR, DAWN FELS, DESCRIBED IN AN INTERVIEW WITH WAC GRADUATE ASSISTANT JACKIE BROWN THE programmatic changes that have been and will be implemented throughout the 2011-2012 academic year. Fels is expanding tailored services and tutor presence on all campuses. The following is a partial list of the WC's goals:

- **Increase service to students** by placing more tutors in areas students frequent. The WC recently added residence halls to its tutoring locations. Tutoring sessions now take place in the Johnson Center Library, Fenwick Library, Enterprise Hall, Robinson Hall A, Eisenhower Residence Hall, as well as on the Arlington and Prince William campuses.
- **Increase contact and collaboration between tutors and faculty** from across the disciplines to provide graduate tutors with opportunities to develop into good colleagues.
- **Provide faculty with workshops customized to their students' needs** and on topics they suggest. So far this fall, tutors have custom-designed workshops for faculty in BIS, University Life, Social Work, and SOM. Current general workshops include grammar refreshers, grad school applications and letters, annotated bibliographies and literature reviews, and avoiding plagiarism.
- **Increase the number of writing center "roadshows"**—a 10- to 15-minute presentation on the WC's services—in classes across the curriculum.
- **Make the Writing Center more conducive to multiple literacies** by offering small-group tutoring (now available), in-house workshops (upcoming), and events where students can practice written, spoken, visual, and digital literacies.
- **Redesign OWL, the Online Writing Lab**, to make it more of a conversational environment rather than the current asynchronous model.
- **Expand the Undergraduate Peer Tutoring program** to serve more students and to better reflect the diversity of students who use the WC.
- **Enhance the existing Opt-In ESL Support program** by improving the value of the program to students. The WC currently has three ESL specialists who welcome the opportunity to work with ESL students.
- **Increase the work the WC does with area high schools** and teachers who currently run or hope to set up writing centers in their schools.

For information, questions, or comments, visit writingcenter.gmu.edu.

Does Your Department Give a Student Writing Award?

As of Spring 2011, 21 departments honored their undergraduate student writers with 31 WAC-sponsored writing awards. Each department designs its own selection process. In **Biology**, faculty can nominate any student in the major; those students submit writing samples and winners are chosen by senior faculty/administrators. In **Nursing**, only senior work is eligible and faculty also submit to the student affairs committee a narrative on why the student met selected assignment criteria with excellence. In **Physics** and **Astronomy**, only students from the writing-intensive (WI) courses are nominated and an awards committee chooses the winners. In **SOM**, WI faculty nominate final papers and use the assignment rubric to select three winners. **English** and **Anthropology** select winners from among undergraduate honors thesis writers. **Systems Engineering** uses the rubric developed for writing assessment to select its winner from the WI course. Using the rubric in this way means not only that the department is honoring its outstanding writers but also that faculty are continually engaged in discussions of writing. In fact, this process has also yielded refinements to the rubric, making it a better tool for assessment.

Departments typically honor winners with funds and certificates and by recognizing them at awards ceremonies or convocations. Biology puts winners' names on a plaque in David King Hall, and other departments feature winners on their websites.

If your department would like to institute an award, email tzawacki@gmu.edu.