

Writing At Center

Combined Tutorial Support Highlights Collaboration between UWC and GMU Libraries

By Terry Myers Zawacki, Director WAC/UWC

If you're assigning research papers in your classes, you'll want to know about the collaborative work of the Writing Center and the JC Library instructional staff. Every Fall and Spring at the middle and end of the semester, we've been offering drop-in research workshops, staffed by both UWC and library tutors. We're set up with internet access and good old paper and pencils in a prominent spot in the Johnson Center. The workshops are offered in the afternoon and evening of three different days with a four-hour window of time for each workshop to give students maximum opportunities to get assistance on researching and writing from sources.

Because the drop-in workshops have been so successful, Library Services also shared a graduate research assistant with the UWC; under this arrangement, we provided tutor training for GRA Emily Lu and, in turn, she tutored students working on research assignments and assists the UWC Tutors in accessing the library's many databases. **Kevin Simons**, the library liaison to WAC and the Writing Center, has been the motivating force behind these shared projects; in fact, Kevin has become so interested in writing processes that he has enrolled in English 615: The Teaching of Composition. Needless to say, the UWC is looking forward to continuing this beneficial and productive collaboration. I welcome this opportunity to say a public thank you to Kevin for all of his hard work.

The Rhetoric of the Internet: Seeing the Screen as Rhetorical Space

By Ruth Overman Fischer, Director of Composition

As with print-based text, online texts work within the context of a rhetorical situation. In creating a Web-based document, authors attend to such aspects as purpose, audience, and content. Members of the GMU community discussed the implications of these rhetorical elements at a Spring '99 Brown Bag Colloquium on Teaching & Reading/Writing/Critical Thinking.

Composing Meaning on the Internet

In designing the in-progress Web site for the College of Arts and Sciences, **Jim Sparrow** (TAC/CAS) demonstrated how audience, purpose, and content have been implemented. The site's purpose is to create a sense of community and coherence amidst GMU's diversity for an audience seeking information in a straightforward venue that loads quickly.

Initially Raphael's *School of Athens* was used to depict this purpose. However since audiences expressed concern about the painting's representation of education for an elite white male population that fails to account for GMU's diversity, the design team is considering adding multiple timed images to amend this failure. The CAS logo, a topical
Cont. p. 2

Attendance of UWC--JCL Workshops Steadily Increasing!

Dates of 6 work- shop series	Clients seen per workshop
October '98:	2-5
December '98:	4-6
March '99:	5-6
May '99:	6-8

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Tell Your Students About It!

3 Session Appointments at the UWC

- Students may sign up as groups to work on specific assignments or skills.
- Individuals and/or groups may sign up for up to 3 sessions at a time.
- Slots fill up fast, so the sooner the better.

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representation of a mathematics problem with interlocking rings existing interdependently, also supports the concept.

John O'Connor (Dean of New Century College) highlighted a particular rhetorical event on a school/college Web site known as "the Deans' Welcome," in which deans present themselves as well as their institutions on their Web pages. His welcome, with its brief textual introduction with multiple links, but no personal photograph, is meant to convey the integral role of Information Technology in NCC through the immediate access to other Web pages through these links.

Peter Denning (Computer Science) characterized the current state of the Web as "a place to publish rather than communicate," thus promoting "the myth of self publishing." To enhance writing and design, Denning offered these suggestions:

- 1) Remember that the medium displays the text in the way that the browser formats it.
- 2) Keep fonts consistent within the page.
- 3) Avoid highly decorative images that do not convey meaning and take time to load.
- 4) Avoid excessive links.

Linking Meaning throughout the Internet

Lesley Smith (New Century College) considers links to operate within a "system of meaning." She compared links to film editing: what began as a navigational shortcut to link narrative highlights was quickly recognized as a way of adding "complex meaning to the film." So, too, links, initially a navigational tool, have become a place where meanings "adhere and inhere."

Links can perform two basic functions. Navigational links move the audience either to major sections within a site or to a related external site. Content-building links, on the other hand, situated "at the center of a web of associated links," function as either "authority-conferring" or "authority-seeking." In constructing authority-conferring links, the author

sanctions the links in some way. Authority-seeking links act like citations in a print-based medium and serve the purpose of supporting the author's argument: "we pull authority from an external site into our work."

Hans Bergmann (English/ Editorial Board for *English Matters*) sees the Internet as "a new medium for serious, literary text," requiring new rhetorical devices to enhance its reading. A Web page tends to be "devoted graphically to the display of other places to go" via links, instantiated by the characteristic blue ink or an image, which we assume to be a link (and may continue to click on—even when it's not linked).

Links resemble aspects of literary text (the footnote, the allusion, the reference, the quotation, and the metaphor), seeming to move toward the literary goal of presenting texts as intertextual, in "the sense that the text we read is infinitely related to all texts." However, problems occur when links do not "improve the text or educate," but make it "thinner and more disposable." What we need, he suggests, are new rhetorical devices that encourage readers to linger with online text, as the site called *Plumbdesign* does.

Teaching Meaning Making on the Internet

Anne Agee (Executive Director, DoIIIT) asserts the need for us to develop ways to help students become proficient in "visual rhetoric." Word processing software allows students easy access to formatting options, from margins, fonts, and centering to footnotes, graphs/tables, and clip art. However, "students may be very media-attuned, but they can't necessarily articulate the rhetorical strategies" behind their formatting choices, which tend to "show off technology" rather than a sound rhetorical rationale. And "since visual literacy isn't a high priority in the educational system at about the 3rd grade when they stop giving out crayons," teachers of writing generally have not developed a strong visual literacy.

WebWriting Sites from A. Agee of DoIIIT (See her web-writing matrix, p. 3)

www.sun.com/980713/webwriting/sun-on-net.html

www.dsiegel.com/tips/index.html

kbs.cs.tu-berlin.de/~jutta/ht/writing.html

Online Writing Lab (OWL)

OWL provides **online tutoring** and writing resources to the GMU community. Check out ESL materials, the grammar hotline, and a wide variety of links to informational and "how-to" sites such as APA and MLA style sheets.

To sign up for online tutoring, students should write to wcenter@osf1.gmu.edu. Once a student has sent his or her paper on line, a tutor will respond in 48 hours.

Web vs. Traditional Writing: What's Got to Change?

By Anne Agee, Executive Director DoIIIIT*

If rhetoric is “finding in any situation the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.1), then it is likely that a significant change in situation, such as a change from a print to an electronic medium of communication, may make available some new means of persuasion and render less effective some traditional means of persuasion. In the table below, I have suggested some of the changes that may occur in such a shift from one medium to another. I offer these as starting points only, suggestions about how traditional rhetorical strategies for print may need to be reconsidered when the medium shifts.

*Department of Instructional Improvement and Instructional Technologies

	Print Text	Electronic/Hypermedia
Format/Working Material	Mostly text, some graphics	Multiple media blend: text, graphics, sound, video, animation; Requires new visual rhetoric
Writer/Reader Roles	Distinct functions in creation and interpretation of text	Blurred roles; Reader chooses path--adds, modifies, scans rather than reads; Collaborative; Expectation of feedback from readers
User Behavior	Sometimes scans; Generally reads through to understand ideas, nuances	Searches, scans, prints, reads 25% slower on screen; Focus on more retrieval
Organization	Typically linear--beginning, middle, end	Associative/recursive/non-linear; Beginning, middle, end not clearly delineated; Spatial depth, links, Web structure
Unit of Development	Sentence; Paragraph	Screen; Page; Web
Emphasis Devices	Repetition/variation; Sentence Structure; Position	Color; Size; Media; Position; Repetition/Variation
Coherence Devices	Transitions; Repetition	Visual cues; Templates; Graphic links; Consistent fonts
Navigation/Path	Linear; TOC; Chapter headings; Index	Multiple links; Visual cues (logos, buttons); Search engine; Multiple entrances to content
Outcome	Finished product	Process; Always under construction; Connections; Fluid product
Access	Catalogs: subject, author, title	By URL; Must plan for search, consider endings, titles, keywords

Writing for the Web

By Mary Mulrenan, UWC Tutor, Graduate PWE

As a tech writing specialist and communications consultant, I thought I could write for any medium until recently when I was asked to write the text for a Web site. After I perfected my prose, I shipped it off to the designer via email who wrote back "Your words would be perfect for a brochure, but they don't work on the Web." I didn't know how to revise for this mysterious format, and thus began my challenging search for worthy sources.

My search proved that on the Web words play a subordinate role. Skim through a few books on Web creation or design and you will note the scarcity of information on the mechanics of Web writing. These books discuss software, building links, graphics, mapping, etc., but don't always address "writing" for the Web.

A textbook titled *Writing for the World Wide Web*, for example, has 10 chapters but not until chapter three does it provide some brief tips on writing. It quickly moves on to issues of linkages, graphics and photographs, and disposition of pages before revisiting the "writing" issues again in chapter nine. If you had skimmed through the book quickly for advice on writing for the Web, you might have missed chapter three entirely since the title is "The Elements of Hyperstyle: Page Conventions."

If that title makes perfect sense to you, you have my admiration. I'm still struggling to understand how to change my writing style to accommodate the Web. I have found a few recommendations which I have taken to heart.

My first change will be in finally admitting that words can't stand alone on the Web, and I must work more closely with the designer plus improve my own artistic eye. In the chapter referenced above, "Page Conventions," for example, the first subhead is called "Words and Images." Words and images are now inexorably linked. Writing for the Web requires attention to graphical elements and layout issues, things many writers have not traditionally had to bother with. So I began to understand why I couldn't find books on writing. Writing is only one aspect of Web creation, just like a swipe of brush is one aspect of painting.

Nonetheless, words, and thus writing, do exist on the Web. The good news is the Web hasn't changed the criteria for effective writing -- use strong, active verbs for example -- but it does require some adjustments, including emphasizing brevity and organization. Here are some guidelines on sentences, paragraphs, and organization to keep in mind when "writing" for the Web.

Sentences

-Use simple sentences with few subordinate clauses and more monosyllabic words. Keep sentences under

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20 words.

Paragraphs

-Keep paragraphs to no more than two or three sentences. Cover a topic in no more than two or three short paragraphs. (If you decide to put longer documents on your site, give your visitor the choice of accessing it by linking.)

-When you create a paragraph that works well on paper, cut it in half for Web use.

Organization

-Organize information into layers like index cards, one section on top of the next. (Try to write so that your reader doesn't have to scroll.)

-Summarize topics and have links leading to subsections on separate pages.

-Make sure the title of your link buttons accurately reflect the content.

-Use more subheads.

Words are still important, of course, but they are forever linked now, at least on the Web and perhaps in all forms of writing, with visual elements. As Victor J. Vitanza, author of the perhaps aptly titled *Writing for the Web*, tells us, "...the web is about multimedia not just words, words, words."

Sources

(General web design information and writing tips. Herrington article offers best advice about writing.)

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Vitanza, Victor J. *Writing for the World Wide Web* Allyn and Bacon. Boston: 1998.

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