

Helping Graduate Students Become Successful Writers: A Graduate Writing Center Deploys both Disciplinary Writing Consultants and Generalists to Best Meet Disciplinary Writing Needs

D4. PANEL • ROOM 4 (LEAGUE 1ST FLOOR)

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A DWC in a social sciences college, Kristina will discuss tailoring “Reading as a Writer” modules to her college’s disciplines and reflect on how the prioritization of knowledge across disciplines helped the discipline-specific implementation.

Title: slide #1

Presenters: slide #2

Introduction: My appointment at NDSU is split between undergraduate and graduate writing; I have taught FYW for the English department and worked as a graduate writing consultant for the past five years and a disciplinary graduate writing consultant for the College of Human Development and Education for the past two years. While I do one-on-one writing consulting sessions, workshops, and group sessions with graduate students, much of my work has been developing relationships and then writing initiatives within departments and with individual faculty.

As I was sitting in the “What Works in Interdisciplinary WAC Faculty Development: Results from a Pilot Study” (Elisabeth Miller, Brad Hughes: University of Wisconsin-Madison; Terry Zawacki; George Mason University) roundtable session yesterday, I chuckled along with the other attendees when someone made the observation, and I paraphrase: “I see how working with graduate instructors is impacting the WAC teaching of the future, but what do I do with the faculty that have been there forever!?” This observation followed on the heels of a session right before that one, “Undisciplined Knowledge? Researching Departmental Cultures of Support for Writing and General Education” (Christopher Manion, Jennifer Michaels, Cynthia Lin, Evan Thomas, and Melissa Beers: Ohio State University), where Christopher Manion, likened some faculty members to large, feral turkeys in the forest ready to chase the WAC director up a tree – some faculty just don’t seem to welcome us into their territory. They already have their way of maneuvering through the forest of student writing and that is just how it is.

And while I don’t always work with the feral turkeys per se—it does sometimes feel like I work in a forest. As a disciplinary writing consultant for the past two years, I have worked to develop relationships with individual departments, faculty members, and graduate students so that I can shape my work to their needs, be they disciplinary or general writing support, faculty development, curriculum development, or assessment.

This work includes collaborative sessions with faculty and students, in which the faculty members are kept apprised of student progress by both me and the students, usually via email reports, but sometimes face to face. As we heard from Matt Warner’s paper (which Enrico read for us), the possibility of a breakdown of communication between graduate student and graduate advisor is all too real; as we know, the consequences for the student of such an impasse can be devastating. Fortunately for Matt’s student, the work that they did was solid enough that the student could still move forward.

Providing writing support to both advisors and graduate students can frequently ameliorate, sometimes even avoid altogether, the kind of breakdown in communication that can derail student writing progress.

I also develop workshops and interventions specifically for faculty: some examples include **Workshops for Faculty: slide #3**: “How to develop rubrics to assess discipline-specific writing,” which can be time-consuming and difficult to grade; “Responding to student writing: How to write helpful comments on drafts;” “Genre-specific pedagogy;” “Writer’s block;” “Scaffolding writing assignments;” and “How to create assignments that develop specific skill sets (like synthesis or citation).” The workshops usually stimulate very interesting and enlightening cross talk among the faculty that participate.

I was reminded of this again when I heard the presentation, “What Works in Interdisciplinary WAC Faculty Development: Results from a Pilot Study” (Elisabeth Miller, Brad Hughes: University of Wisconsin-Madison; Terry Zawacki; George Mason University); facilitating faculty conversation about writing, and providing vocabulary and the space to encounter and work with threshold concepts, can, just in itself, be highly effective. These faculty are accomplished authors and researchers in their own rights, and it is often very frustrating and confusing to them that they cannot help their students develop writing professionalism along with research knowledge. Through these workshops, I have seen faculty actively and excitedly interrogate the intersections of their experiences as teachers who teach disciplinary content with their experiences as teachers who understand that writing is a vital *component of the content* they teach. These workshops provide an opportunity to coalesce their practices as teachers who use writing in their pedagogy with their experiences as professionals who think and use writing to learn and know content for themselves.

As Matt paraphrases from: *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*. Eds. Linda Adler-Kassner & Elizabeth Wardle **Threshold Concepts: slide #4**:

“Writing is a *social* and rhetorical activity
Writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms
Writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies
All writers have more to learn
Writing is a cognitive activity”

And, as such requires a metacognition element in order to effectively transfer knowledge from one situation to another. I find that these workshops highlight, reinforce, and integrate these four fundamental understandings in many of the dimensions that graduate and faculty writing intersect. Writing is a social activity that intersects across faculty, between faculty and student, faculty and class, faculty and administration, student and consultant, and writers and reviewers. The list can go on and on. It is an activity that creates identities no less for the faculty than for the students. This creation of identity (professional as well as personal) is ongoing and pervasive. Furthermore, it is not just “unidirectional” in a hierarchical direction from faculty or consultant to student. The navigation of graduate writing can become even more confusing than it already is because the recognizable forms for academia often feel to the writers involved as if they have taken on a life of their own.

Another one of the ways I work directly with faculty is graduate student writing assessment, usually for incoming graduate students. I have also had several faculty members reach out to me for help for responding to problematic student writing. In addition, I help faculty with their own professional writing, and point them to strategies and materials that may help them mentor graduate student writing more efficiently and effectively.

Furthermore, I develop workshops for graduate classes and/or cohorts of students. These are usually discipline-specific and use examples pulled from appropriate journals. The faculty member is usually a participant in the workshop along with the students. One example of this is the “Reading as a Writer” workshop. “Reading as a Writer” workshop title slide: slide #5

This is a generalist workshop, based on a prioritization of knowledge across disciplines. One of the basic concepts that are pretty revolutionary to the faculty I work with is the hierarchy of rhetorical priorities: Writing Priorities: slide 6. I begin the workshop with some foundational understanding of **how** we read and write: “Reading as a Writer” general audience knowledge slide: slide #7 I then revise this workshop each time I use it for the specific disciplinary audience.

What I would like to show you today are some materials from this workshop that I developed for a class focused on helping students write their master’s or PhD (but mostly master’s) proposals for the Health, Nutrition, and Exercise Science department at NDSU. One of the faculty members I met when I first went to the departments to introduce myself asked me to help with the class. The class had several years of history in the department, but this was the faculty member’s second time teaching this course. She followed her predecessor’s lead the first time, but was far from satisfied with the results.

We chose two well-written articles from the discipline, one in APA style and one in AMA, and had the students work through some questions about how the information was framed and presented in each research article through online and in-class assignments completed over the course of about seven weeks and designed to help prepare students to write their own proposal rough drafts through a combination of close reading, analysis, synthesis, and discussion. See Handout 1. below for the first of these assignments: “Reading as a Writer: Introductions.” After the analysis of the two introduction sections, the students synthesized their findings through writing and in-class discussions. Then, using a rubric with input from their synthesis of their observations of the two articles, the professor, and me, (See Handout 2. below: “Rubric for Introductions”), the students began the rough drafts of their proposal introduction. The students used the same rubric for a blind peer review exercise. We repeated the process for the methods section with a handout designed specifically for methods. This past spring we reversed the order, and students analyzed and wrote rough drafts of methods before they analyzed and wrote introductions. Our experience was that doing the methods section first was beneficial.

Like I mentioned before, I have also re-tooled the workshop, “Reading as a Writer,” for students and faculty in the School of Education.

The ease, and I would say the effectiveness, of the retooling of the workshop for various disciplines or venues (classroom, workshop, online assignments, etc.), not to mention the original workshop itself, relies on some basic premises that have come out of my work as a generalist consultant. These include those I mentioned earlier (Writing Priorities: slide 6. and “Reading as a Writer” general audience knowledge slide: slide #7) and the lively conversations we generalists and disciplinary consultants have every week (sometimes every day) about how best to serve the students and faculty who turn to us – often when they are frustrated, overwhelmed, and in the case of students, panicked.

To sum up, I have found that my disciplinary writing work is almost as much with the faculty in the College as it is with individual students.

As you can see from the program guide, our experience as a Center, and my specific experience as a disciplinary consultant, is enhanced and enriched through the interaction of disciplinary and generalist Thank you.

Handout 1: “Reading as a Writer: Introductions”

As you know, one purpose of an introduction is to lay out for the reader the need for the proposed research within the context of current knowledge. This means that the writer must set out the relevancy of the research using a framework of published research that demonstrates both the broader topic and the specific need. Furthermore, the research must be integrated into a logical narrative.

So, how do experienced writers do this? Can analyzing their “rhetorical moves” help novice writers become more adept at integrating sources into their own writing? Let’s see.

First read the Introduction section from the assigned journal articles for content understanding in order to ensure that new content doesn’t distract from concentrating on how the writing works. Then, answer each of the following questions with complete sentences.

Topic Sentences: Framing the Introduction—

Read the Introduction again paying special attention to the *topic sentences*. Now answer the following questions for *each paragraph*.

How does the topic sentence guide reader expectations for the paragraph?

How do the first two or three words of the topic sentence set up reader expectations?

Now read just the topic sentences for each paragraph.

In one sentence, explain *how* the topic sentences move the introduction forward from establishing the topic to the purpose of the research.

In one sentence, explain whether it works and, if it works, why.

Read the paragraphs again.

Using a single color throughout, highlight the moves within the paragraph from broad information to more specific information at the sentence level (as opposed to *within* sentences).

How evenly spaced throughout the paragraphs are the moves spaced?

Are all the paragraphs similar?

Reading Citations:

Now, using a different color than you used for the rhetorical moves, highlight all the citations.

Where is the first citation?

Where is the last?

What do you notice about the frequency of citations?

What do you notice about the clusters of citations?

What do you notice about the distribution of citations?

Now look at the *kinds of information* that are cited.

How do the *kinds* of information relate to the number of citations?

What do you notice about the relationship between the number of citations and:

Where they are in the introduction?

What they are supporting?

Their specificity of information?

What qualifiers (words like “have/has been shown,” “many,” “some,” “suggests,” “numerous,” “may be,” etc.) do you find?

Do you see a relationship between the numbers of citations and the kind or level of information?

How are researcher names handled?

Are all researcher names located in parenthetical citations?

What researchers are cited in the sentence versus just in the parenthetical citation?

Why are these researchers cited differently?

Application to Your Proposal Introduction

Considering the differences between the lengths of a journal article introduction and that of a proposal, how can you apply your observations about framing topic sentences and citation placement and frequency to the introduction of your proposal?

What are the similarities?

What are the differences?

Handout 2: "Introduction Peer Review Response Rubric"

REVIEW CATEGORY	Number the paragraphs. Please refer to specific paragraph number in your comments section.
Organization	Comments
Do the topic sentences lay out a logical outline? If not, please explain where the logic breaks down.	
Check each paragraph for internal consistency. Mark all paragraphs that stray from their topic sentences. If a paragraph does not have a clear topic sentence or does not forecast the paragraph accurately, then indicate to the writer what/where you think the problem is.	
How are the broader, more foundational studies presented? Are any studies out of place or in need of more discussion?	
Please identify the following: Introduction of broad topic Introduction of issue Gap in the knowledge Proposed research	
Citation	
How are the broad claims cited?	
Is it clear who (writer or source) is making the claim or stating a fact? If you cannot tell, underline the questionable claim and explain your confusion.	

Is each source cited either in text, parenthetically, or with a footnote? Note any that are not.	
Relationships between sources: Where are transitions missing? How do the numbers (clusters) of citations reflect the broadness of the claim and their relationship to the research question? What claims seem to require more sources?	
Is the citation system easily recognizable as either AMA or APA? If not, what do you think the problem is?	
Are the citations consistent throughout?	
Do all quote citations include page numbers? Note any that are not.	
Do APA in text and parenthetical citations conform to basic APA citation styles? Note any that do not.	
Do AMA footnotes conform to the basic AMA citation style? Note any that do not.	
Does the review use quotations appropriately? Note any quotes that seem unnecessary. Remember, both AMA and APA discourage the heavy use of quotations.	
Are all in-text, parenthetical, or footnote sources reflected on the References page? Note any that are not.	
Grammar/Punctuation/Sentence Level Organization	
Mark all fragment sentences: they often begin with the following subordinating words: when, as, if, by, because, after, while, before, since, unless, whereas, although, even though	
Mark all run-on sentences, look for two or more complete sentences set apart with commas (the dreaded comma splice).	
Check all commas; mark any that are incorrect (or missing) Introductory	

<p>Lists: make sure there is a comma before the final “and” of the list</p> <p>Parenthetical / appositive</p> <p>Conjunctive: before the common conjunctions: but, so, yet, so, however, and, nor, or,</p>	
<p>Mixed sentence patterns: If you know something is “wrong” with a sentence, but just can’t put your finger on it, it is usually because the sentence doesn’t adhere to one of English’s conventional sentence pattern. You do not need to “fix” the sentence, just note it here for the author to revise.</p>	