THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

– FROM THE EDITOR –

The times they are a'changin.' Since last month's issue of *WLN*, support by the previous institution ceased rather unexpectedly, and The RiCH Company has taken on the management and production of *WLN* (i.e., all the subscription, printing, distribution, publicity, and other management aspects). Please see p. 9 for details and addresses for questions, subscriptions, and the new Web site URL.

Because of some difficulties with the previous managing of subscription lists (described on p. 9), many people did not get their issues last spring. We *deeply* regret this inconvenience, but please note that Richard Hay and his staff at the RiCH Company are busily working to get all that in order. Because of their incredible efforts, *WLN* will not have to go on hiatus, as I moaned and whined publicly and privately to many of you.

On the other hand, some things remain the same—excellent articles to reflect on, including Melinda Baer's work on the benefits of a WeBlog in a writing center, William Silverman's reflection on the need to be aware of cross-cultural issues in tutoring, Summer Leibensperger's explanation of how to develop Cascading Style Sheets, a stunning announcement by Paul Anderson of a $10.5 million gift to Miami University for a Center for Writing Excellence, and a delightful "prattle of the sexes" by Lauren Gillispie and Alexander Olden about gender differences in tutoring styles. Enjoy!

✦ *Muriel Harris, editor*

USING WEBLOGS IN YOUR WRITING CENTER

✦ *Melinda Baer*
Northern Illinois University

Five years ago, Muriel Harris wondered what the next ten years' technology would bring to writing centers. Today, we as writing center professionals should be taking advantage of what technology *has* offered: in this case, user-friendly online self-publishing tools. Let's ask ourselves *How can weblogs be useful in our center's practice and teaching?* This article will open a dialogue on how blogs are or are not working for us in our writing centers.

In simplest terms, a blog is an online journal. Most users put their blogs online through a simple push-button publishing tool like Blogger or Wordpress, the former of which was the first tool of its kind and started the personal online publishing as we know it today. Blogger was developed by Pyra Labs, a firm whose co-founders were looking for a user-friendly way to communicate on the progress of their projects and to consolidate useful links in one place. Their in-house tool went public in 1999, with scores of other similar blogging tools being developed soon after, and was acquired by Google, the Goliath of search engines, in 2003. (For more information on the history of Blogger and other online publishing tools, look to the Web. I found the dates for this paragraph on Wikipedia.org.) We should remember Blogger's first uses as a tool to collect links and track collaborative progress as inspiration for using blogs in our consultant training and writing center discourses.

Since their inception at the turn of this century, blogs have become more widely used and users more diverse than most of us might realize. A quick Web search leads you to blogs by the masses on enough topics to make your head spin: We hear from teenagers musing on their worlds (www.livejournal.com/~niltiac or www.livejournal.com/users/cherryface); business leaders providing insight and inspiration (roger.staubach.com); famous musicians (boywhoheardmusic.blogspot.com); graduate students tracking thesis research (www.silviokohs.com); news correspondents (abcnews.blogs.com); a co-founder of the genre itself (www.megnut.com); and even dogs (suzydogsblog.blogspot.com). We can find recipes (recipes.tblog.com), sift through information on cell phones (www.bcellphones.com), read blogs from writers across the globe (barcepundit.blogspot.com), and participate in political chatter (www.dailykos.com). I'm willing to bet that at least one member of your department maintains a blog and that at least one department on your campus uses a blog regularly as a bulletin board for faculty, staff, and students to keep updated on pressing departmental concerns. Blogs have become the tool *du jour* for collaborative, sometimes anonymous, journaling, linking, tracking, and discussing. These applications are ones that we use in writing centers constantly – and we should not ignore the help that weblogs can provide us in our in-house communications. (You can find your own examples of good and bad blogs just as easily as I did – type *whatever-you're-interested-in + blogs* into your favorite search engine.)

Some people, and I'm no different, have a knee-jerk reaction against blogs, thinking that they are nothing more than a forum for whiny teenagers or angsty adults to write bad poetry or use too many exclamation points. I don't have a personal blog because I don't feel as if I have anything particularly interesting to add to the jumble of voices already out there. Honestly, it feels a little self-important to shove myself into the public forum. Who wants to read about my cat's trip to the veterinarian for her annual shots or about my dinner menu for the week?

On the flip-side, maybe I should remember that somebody looking for a new vet or wondering about the side-effects of those annual cat-shots or someone needing inspiration to perk up blasé weeknight meals might be interested in what I have to say. I also have to remember that no one is forced to read my blog, so I don't need to feel as if I'm forcing my opinions onto others any more than (maybe less than) if I were to speak up in class or during dinner conversation. Thinking negatively about blogs also ignores the very real benefit we could derive from them in the academic setting.

What sorts of benefits *can* a blog provide a writing center? The most useful aspect of blogs in writing centers is their ability to compile links and discussions (posts) in one place that is accessible by consultants anywhere they can get online. The information is available in the middle of the night, between classes, or during downtime at work, whether they're at home, in a bookstore with wireless access, at the library, or in any place with an Internet connection. That simple fact puts their participation in the writing centers' discussions on their own terms and virtually eliminates excuses for not participating. It also decentralizes the physical space of the writing center as the only place where they have to think about "work," however pleasant it may be. The fact is that not many of our consultants read the APA manual during their downtime, but if we ask them to respond in a blog post to a question about APA, they might do just that – read that APA manual at home to make their post before bed.

Other features make blogs appealing for use by writing centers, not the least of which is their relative simplicity. Harris is right when she points out that "technology is both enabling and disabling for writers," ("Making Up" 196) and for all users. Blogs offer a manageable entrée into technology for writing centers. They are often free, and those that do charge users for special features are almost always relatively inexpensive. They are highly customizable for those who have Web design experience, but most offer users enough ready-made templates to fit the individual tastes of the least technology-savvy among

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us. Privacy levels vary; most can be hosted either publicly through your provider's server or privately on your department's server. Your technology specialist will be able to tell you whether hosting your own blog is a possibility for your institution. Practically speaking, blogs tend to have amazingly simple user interfaces so that even the most tech-phobic of users is able to post and comment with relatively little training. Those who are technology-challenged usually find that, after one or two tries, posting is easy, and they tend to find comfort in the fact that, no matter how many buttons they push incorrectly, they won't "break" the blog. Some blogging applications, like Blogger, give an administrator (the creator of the blog) the option to invite other users (contributors) to the blog so that many people can share one space smoothly. (Other applications, like Xanga, do not have this feature, so they are best for single-person use, and I don't recommend them for community use by writing centers.) Blogs also allow other users to comment on posts, but administrators can turn this feature off or restrict those allowed to comment to only active, invited contributors to the blog. A blog's archives keep all of your users' posts organized by week or month, depending on your chosen settings, so that prior links, discussions, and comments will always be accessible. Administrators can also decide how many posts will appear on the blog's main page to help avoid the "information overload" that some neo-luddites flaunt as the bane of the technology age. Choosing the blogging application with the right features to suit your writing center might take a bit of research, but finding the right fit will make the transition into blogging all that much smoother.

The University Writing Center at Northern Illinois University has been using a blog for private, in-house communication since the beginning of the academic year. Our consultants make at least two posts to the blog weekly, and we use many of the questions and concerns they raise online as topics in our weekly staff meetings. Most of their posts center on their experiences with clients, specific questions about policies, their appeals for advice on working with a particular client, or on the progress the consultant and a long-standing client are making over time. Our blog has links to various writing and academic Web sites and archives of old posts, and the list of possible contributors is limited to only our Center's staff so that the communication that happens there is truly among us. This feature of multiple contributors was important to our Center, as was low cost and privacy, so we chose a blogging tool that met these needs. Ours happened to be Blogger. Many of you already know that the staff at Salt Lake Community College's writing center maintain a blog (peercentered@bessie.englab.slcc.edu/pc) that is open to all members of the writing center community – you and me included. Theirs is a wonderful example of the community-building promise blogs offer.

There are still well-founded apprehensions about using blogs in writing centers. For one thing, they are public (unless your tech specialist hosts and protects yours on your department's server, which is set up for just that sort of function). Unless your institution takes steps to password-protect the blog, you and your consultants should take special care not to mention any client by name and to avoid using language that might be misconstrued or be insensitive to someone who comes across the public blog.

Another hurdle to get over when introducing anything new is the tendency for users to focus on the bells and whistles of the technology rather than on the content they should be producing. The tendency for administrators to jump into the deep end of the technology pool and become quickly overwhelmed goes hand-in-hand with distraction in their users. To curb both of these potential problems, writing centers incorporating blogs (or any new technology) should start slow. Work with your department or college's tech specialist to determine which application will best meet your needs, and don't be afraid to ask questions, even of the technical support provided by the company whose blogging application you choose.

Newly-blogging writing centers will also realize quickly that a spin on the old adage is true: You can lead consultants to a blog, but you can't make them post. The simple fact of the matter is that we can provide all of the innovative new tools we can think of to facilitate communication and self-motivated learning

in our staff, but we will always face users who just won't buy into the new tools we offer. To get your consultants used to participating in the online forum, consider requiring one or two posts per week from each staff member. The posts could be used in preparation for staff meetings, as questions that other consultants answer relatively quickly, or just as conversations online. If you meet with particularly hesitant consultants who "don't know what to write about," consider assigning a topic for everyone to respond to. That way, consultants will have a focused discussion, learn from one another, and get used to the medium in one swoop.

Remember too that many of your center's consultants will be proficient in an online language that is absolutely removed from the one they use beautifully every day with you both verbally and on paper. Don't worry about the lack of "proper" language that consultants might use on the blog. Their failing to use commas or capitalization on the blog does not foretell a downward spiral in the quality of their academic writing or tutoring. We talk about audience, voice, and context all the time; you'll set the tone of what is appropriate on your blog. The important thing is that your consultants feel comfortable using their voices in the new discussion in which you are asking them to participate.

Most importantly, remember that no technology is a panacea. Blogs, like everything else, present unique opportunities and challenges for writing centers. Let's not focus too closely on either the positives or the negatives but instead be realistic in our goals, expectations, and strategies for what has the potential to be an innovative tool for communication and learning among our staff. ✦

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THERE IS NO WRITE WAY TO RIGHT: NAVIGATING THE BOUNDARIES OF CULTURAL WRITING PRACTICES

✦ *William John Silverman, Jr.*
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Not long ago I read a fascinating article about cross-cultural differences in the writing center. It opened my eyes to a world of writing I had never considered: not everyone in the world writes the same way. I learned that the Chinese did not see the need to present a thesis immediately in a paper because it "would be rude, pushy. They would lose face for acting too aggressively" (Harris 101). The need for a thesis, something that seems so obvious to American students and tutors may baffle ESL students.

Cultural conflicts are rarely obvious. In some cultures, the reader might be responsible for understanding what is written rather than the writer needing to make it more understandable. At the same time, the spread of English across the globe has forced it to change depending upon the culture that supports it. For example, Bonnie Lisle and Sandra Mano explain that "an international study found that "students from Australia … produced highly metaphoric, ornamented prose, while students from … the United States wrote in a much plainer style" (14).

With these and other possibilities, the writing center consultant must find a way to bridge the boundaries built between cultures. The difficulty is that these bridges must be built one at a time on a student-by-student basis. What helps one Chinese student realize the American preference for a clearly defined thesis early in an essay may not help another. What helps one English-speaking Australian may not help another. When we bring the focus to the individual, we can better help them find the right way to write depending upon the academic culture with which they are involved.

This paper will briefly analyze the spatial complexity of writing. Which is the right way to write and why? I will also take a brief look at the different aspects of writing within different cultures and languages and how they might help or harm the student's progress when learning to write in American English.

What writing tutors must be aware of, and I hesitate to go as far as teachers of writing in general, is that international students more than likely already have a strong foundation for writing. The foremost difference comes from the culture. When I first started working in a writing center, I made the mistake many times of assuming that an ESL student must not have had any formal training in the practice of writing, or that that particular student's training was poor. I have had American writing styles and rules pounded into my head for years and years, and fortunately, I have been blessed with the ability to apply those styles and those rules in a clear and cohesive manner most of the time. That ability has led me to good grades in my English and writing classes or any class in which I had to write a paper. In fact, I always expected good grades on papers I had to write outside of English or formal writing classes. That ability has taken me far academically and has taken me into the university level of instruction, mainly as a coach or tutor. For me, a certain prestige comes with working at the writing center at such a high level of academic achievement. When I tell people I work at the writing center, I know what they are thinking: "He must be a great writer."

Maybe I have a big head, but my point is this: When I helped students from other cultures, I would immediately feel sorry for them. I couldn't understand why their writing was so terrible. I couldn't understand why it was so hard for them to learn such simple rules. All I knew how to do was show and tell.

WRITING CENTER RESEARCH PROJECT SURVEY

The Writing Center Research Project is conducting another survey of writing centers. To date, 147 institutions have completed the survey which asks approximately 50 questions about your writing center's physical location and attributes, clientele, conference policies, and administration. New to the 2006 survey is a separate section devoted to questions on online writing services. We look forward to gathering very interesting data about the online services offered at writing centers across the country.

The survey can be completed online, by one of two options:

1) You may go to our website, at <http://www.wcrp.louisville.edu>, and click on the "Take the 2006 Survey" link, on the left-hand side of the page.

2) You may directly go to the survey by clicking the link: http://coldfusion.louisville.edu/webs/as/wcrp/surveyentry/select_school.cfm?action=survey. Select your school and continue with the survey. If you have not filled out the survey before, or if your school is not listed on the drop-down menu, select "New School." If you have completed the survey in 2004, the answers you provided at that time will appear in the fields.

If you would prefer to complete the survey on paper and send it back to us by mail, please e-mail us at wcrp@louisville.edu, and we will send you a copy of the survey as soon as possible.

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For example, I have a favorite question when working with students: What is your thesis? I have asked this question a thousand times, and often the reply is silence followed by a finger point and a question: "Is that it?" If students don't realize what their own thesis is, how can they possibly write a tightly focused, well-developed essay? Working with ESL students, more particularly students from a different culture, complicates the scenario, mostly because of the language difference. But I submit that the largest problem writing consultants face in working with ESL students is not because of the language barrier, but because of the language barrier. I know that sounds a little contradictory. I'll explain. Although it was six years ago, I remember well my first ESL consultations. I started working with Asian students: Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. I'll admit that, at times, I dreaded it. I exhausted myself trying to get my points across. You need a thesis. Tell me in one sentence exactly what you are trying to say. In the twenty minute sessions I worked with those students, I never felt as if I could drill enough into their heads. This was my show and tell method. I would tell them what a thesis is and why it is important. Then I would offer a few examples of specific theses and set the student on their own, usually still confused. Why did I focus so much on the thesis? Well, it's important, but I also dreaded the sentence-level problems. How do you help Chinese students understand the proper use of articles in twenty to thirty minutes and leave them without knowing anything about the importance of a thesis?

I expected a language issue, and that is exactly why it became such an obstacle. I never stopped to consider the needs of the individual student. Oh, I did just fine discovering the individual needs of native English-speaking students. "You seem to have trouble with comma splices," or "You need more specific examples to strengthen the support of your argument." I already knew what the ESL students' problem was: language. They can't speak English very well, so they can't write English very well. That was the real language barrier. What I failed to understand was a simple idea: They already know that they can't speak or write English as well as native English speakers. In twenty to thirty minutes, I cannot teach them *everything* that they need to know to write better in English, more specifically American English, but I can find out what major obstacles they face, especially cultural writing preferences. What would have happened if I would have read an article on cultural writing preferences before I ever worked with an ESL student? I would have realized "a strong Chinese preference for the steady unraveling and buildup of information before arriving at the important message or point" (Harris 101). If that sounds a little familiar, it is probably because that is exactly what the opening paragraph does for the American writer, except quicker, and in a condensed fashion, followed by a body that develops the support: right to the point and on from there. I cannot explain the need for a thesis without understanding why they might not have one in the first place.

Although most of the ESL students I initially worked with were Asian, especially Southeast Asian, this barrier is not limited to the Asian cultures. It seems that most of the rest of the world does not follow the pithy method American academia prefers. "Digression in German academic discourse is a recognized functional feature, providing the opportunity to offer theory, ideology, or additional information or to enter into polemics with other authors" (Harris 103). The student trained in the American academic style would find such discourse nearly impossible to follow, perhaps much like the extended metaphor that a detailed fiction writer might employ before returning to the plot of a story, but for Germans, it is the norm.

After discussing the differences in Chinese and German cultural writing practices, it is easy to say, "Well, they come from foreign cultures, so that makes it easy to be on guard." What about finding that problem right here in America? Everyone in America writes the same way, right? Well, not according to Charlotte Brammer: "When we compare the rhetorical patterns of the five-paragraph essay to the rhetorical styles of African American or Latino or lower income White groups, we realize that these groups develop arguments along different, although not necessarily less effective or even less correct, lines" (18). Within this

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country, people are likely to encounter dozens of cultures, hundreds of subcultures, all communicating in a different way and, essentially, all writing in a different way, constructing arguments and defending them in different ways.

I do not mean to paint a picture of hopelessness. Yes, there are a lot of different cultural writing practices in the world. Yes, the typical American college is full of students from diverse cultures likely to write after the manner of many of these different cultural writing practices, but even though a consultant has no idea what cultural writing practice a student with whom they have a consultation follows, there is still plenty he or she can do to help that student.

Muriel Harris identifies three specific guidelines consultants can follow to identify "possible cross-cultural problems in communication" (107):
- Look for patterns of thinking that seem at odds with accepted patterns in American discourse conventions.
- Look for hidden unarticulated assumptions.
- Look for tendencies to create stereotypes in our thinking. (107-108)

These guidelines are a great start. Thinking about them allows consultants to focus on the individual student without automatically assuming that they are having trouble simply because English is his or her second language. But Harris mentions something else in the article that got my attention, something that I decided to employ in my own pedagogy.

While referencing the difference between Asian cultural writing practices, Harris explains: "I have in a log I keep of my tutoring an entry about yet another Asian student who was told he needed to work on the organization of his paper" (102). Almost in passing, she mentions a log that she keeps of her tutoring. That log has become an important tool, not only to help me share what I have learned, but also to help me remember the needs of individual students and make connections between them and students of other cultures.

I had a consultation with a young student, just starting out at the college level. She spoke with an obvious foreign accent. I was immediately on guard, but this time I forced the language barrier from my mind and focused on the content, focus, organization, and, perhaps most important, the development of her essay and its ideas. Her assignment: write a personal essay about an experience that had a profound effect on her and explain what she learned or gained from that experience. I asked her to read the essay out loud. I listened carefully and followed along too. She related a story that began when a police officer, knocking at the front door, woke her up one morning. Essentially, her mother had lost some books that the officer had recovered in the middle of a busy road. He did not know anything about her mother; he had only found the books and discovered the address inside. This student feared the worst and woke her father, who suggested they call her mother at work. Unfortunately, they could not contact her, but they did leave a message. The essay did not go beyond a simple narrative structure. Not once did she make any mention of feelings for her mother, and she did not address the "what if": "What if my mother is hurt; what will happen then?" By the conclusion of the essay, all that the writer had addressed was a play by play of the actions that she took during the day to find out whether her mother was safe. For those of you hanging in suspense, the student's mother eventually called home from work because she had received the message to do so. She had mistakenly left her books on top of the car when she left for work that morning.

In the conclusion, the student, referring to what she had gained from the experience, essentially said, "My mother is important to me." The problem with her conclusion is that she never qualified that statement. She never initially explained to the reader that she was about to describe an experience that helped her learn why her mother was important to her, nor did she explain why she learned that in the course of her essay. But before I drilled the thesis idea into her head, before I jumped to the language barrier conclusion, I sat back and asked her a few probing questions beginning with the obvious, "Why is your mother important?" Her

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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quick reply, "She's my mother," came with surprise. Her eyes upbraiding: How could you not realize that by reading the essay? There was something missing, more than likely a cultural barrier. After several more questions, she finally admitted that her mother was like her best friend, someone she could talk to, go to for advice. I explained to her that the reader needed to see this aspect of her relationship with her mother in order to understand why the possibility of losing her mother could have such a profound impact on her.

The student's native language is Farsi. Her native country is Afghanistan. I jotted down some quick notes following the session, referring to the trouble she had understanding why the connections were not being made for the reader. Does that mean that all Afghan students will have the same problem? No, but it is a possibility. If I work with other students from that part of the world, I will be able to compare notes and look for a common barrier that I might better address in the future working with those particular students or others from their culture. I could just as easily have said, "Well, how many students will I actually help from Afghanistan?" That same day, I helped two.

Coming back to the western world, I helped a student from Mexico one Saturday afternoon. He was having trouble writing a response paper to a piece he had to read for a literature class. We briefly discussed the piece, which I was familiar with, and discussed what a typical response might entail. Because of the writing style (it was a translation of Homer's *Iliad*), he had a hard time understanding the text, which complicated the issue. I was able to help him understand a few ways to engage the text, but then he asked how he might do that on the level of a more formal and longer critical paper. We discussed ways to expand on issues and observations through examples and commentary, but I lost him when I started to talk about secondary source material. He then proceeded to explain what he saw as a fundamental difference between the way Mexicans write and Americans write. The best way to describe it is no outside narration or commentary. He said that the best way to tell the difference was to watch a movie from America and a movie from Mexico. As an example, he used the movie *Titanic*. He explained that if that movie had been made in Mexico, it would have ignored the outside narration of the old woman, from whose point of view the story is told. The story would stand alone without it.

I thought heavily on the subject and discussed it a little further with him to make sure I understood. It made perfect sense. I have seen a lot of movies from different cultures made in different ways than movies are made in America. Did I understand everything that was going on in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon?* No, but that doesn't make it any less of a movie, neither does it make the development or presentation of it wrong. Did I understand what the symbolic significance was of the prominent colors in the movie *Hero?* No, but I am sure the Chinese do.

Every culture has its own way of doing things. Whether it's music, movies, or writing, what one culture prefers isn't necessarily the same as what the American academic institution prefers, and it doesn't make it any less effective. There is no right way to write from a cultural perspective, only different ways to write. The most important thing we can do as writing consultants, tutors, and teachers is to seek first to understand what those differences are and why. Once we know these important differences, we can explore ways to help students understand them. In the end, rather than uprooting their cultural preferences and forcing them to conform to a practice they are not comfortable with, we are offering them the opportunity to expand their own understanding of writing, preparing them with a world-wide awareness, and helping them maintain their own practices, even if they have to modify them for a while to write within an American academic institution, so that if they choose, they can still have success in their home cultures. By taking the time to listen and carefully observe the cross-cultural students we tutor, we can learn to avoid the assumptions and focus on their individual needs, and by keeping a log or journal of specific consultations, we can better prepare for individual students and start to see specific patterns that might emerge from their own cultural writing practices. ✦

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WLN HAS NEW MANAGEMENT

As most of you know, the RiCH Company is proud to be the new home of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. While Muriel Harris will continue to be the Editor of the *WLN* and will continue to handle all editorial content, the RiCH Company and WCOnline will print and mail *WLN* each month and will handle all business-related issues (such as subscriptions, conference displays, and renewal management).

If you are a current subscriber, you can check the status of your subscription via the new *Writing Lab Newsletter* Web site at <www.writinglabnewsletter.org>. You can also renew online via credit card, or have an invoice e-mailed to you instantly. To do so, simply go to the Web site, click on "Manage Account," and log in with your first name, last name, and mailing zip code.

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If you are not already a subscriber to *WLN*, you can also subscribe via the new Web site (<www.writinglabnewsletter.org>). Subscriptions to *WLN* are $20 per year within the U.S. and U.S.$25 per year for subscriptions mailed to Canada. International and digital subscriptions are also available by request. To subscribe, go to theWeb site and click on the "Subscribe" link.

The Web site also contains PDF copies of past *WLN* issues, as well as manuscript submission information. In the near future, we will be adding bios of the editor and staff, and will be making the archives keyword searchable. We will also be sending renewal notices via the U.S. Mail and invoices via e-mail.

As I stated above, the staff of the RiCH Company are always proud to support the community that supports it. While the *WLN* coffers are extremely low, and while your timely renewals and new subscriptions will help immensely with this transition, rest assured that the important work that you do will continue to be published in the *WLN* forum.

As always, if you have any questions, comments, suggestions, or concerns, feel free to send those to me directly at richardhay@therichco.com or to my staff at support@writinglabnewsletter.org.

Thanks and take care,
Richard
Richard C. Hay Founder/CEO and personal *WLN* subscriber since 1998.

✦

(*Editor's note:* I deeply appreciate all the efforts made by colleagues to find a supporting institution for *WLN*. They worked diligently to draw together proposals and meet with adminstrators to seek funds to have *WLN* move there. I'm not sure who said this, but I'll quote that person anyway: "Be thankful for difficult times; that's when you find out who are true friends."

Over the last few years, at the previous home of *WLN,* the subscription list has not accurately reflected funds sent in or expiration dates. Some people have been getting issues long after their subscriptions expire, others have been getting two issues at a time, and others who paid have not been receiving issues. We ask for your patience while the RiCH Company sorts through all this and brings order to the list. This process will assure that you *will* get issues you paid for and will restore *WLN* to its former financial solvency. And a very public thanks to the RiCH Company for taking on the management of *WLN* at no cost to *WLN!*) ✦

AN INTRODUCTION TO CASCADING STYLE SHEETS FOR WRITING CENTER WEBMASTERS

◆ Summer Leibensperger
University of Houston-Victoria
Victoria, TX
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More writing center directors and managers are discovering the importance of having a Web site for the writing center. A Web site can serve relatively simple purposes such as advertising services, listing hours of availability, explaining policies, and providing contact information, or it can have more complex purposes such as providing a storehouse of sorts for handouts, allowing students to sign up for appointments online, or serving as an entryway for asynchronous or synchronous online tutoring. In some cases, directors and managers are also struggling with learning HTML to develop Web sites, while others may have staff devoted to the project.

If you are involved in designing, updating, or maintaining a Web site more than a few pages long, Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) may help you save time. They're often used in desktop publishing or word processing to define a consistent look for your pages and assist in applying those benefits to your HTML-based Web sites. With CSS, you can create one file containing information about the appearance of your Web site and direct your many content pages to read that one file. While CSS can get pretty complex, I'll explain some of their advantages and limitations, introduce the different levels and types of CSS, provide information about external style sheets, and explain the basic rules of CSS (selectors and declarations). A basic knowledge of HTML is needed to understand this discussion.

ADVANTAGES & LIMITATIONS OF CSS

CSS can work to your advantage because it helps separate style or appearance from content. Let's consider one example: you have 25 pages where you have several <H3> size headings; you want the headings to appear as Arial font, color blue. You could individually code that information into each of your 25 HTML pages. But then what happens if you decide that all <H3> headings should be Courier font, color green? That's a lot of re-editing of your 25 pages. CSS will allow you to make changes to one file, and those 25 pages will read that CSS file to know how to display.

CSS has other advantages:
- It creates smaller and faster-loading pages.
- It reduces the likelihood of introducing errors into HTML code.
- It helps maintain consistency from page to page and creates a common look and feel to your Web site.

CSS does have its limitations, however. Generally, only version 4 and later browsers support CSS, and not all browsers interpret CSS selectors or declarations precisely, largely because the two most used browsers (Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator) don't comply completely with the World Wide Web Consortium's guidelines for CSS.

The good news—older browsers tend to ignore CSS (rather than refusing to display the pages), and both IE and NN continue to improve their CSS support. (For the most up-to-date information about browser compatibility, do an Internet search for CSS/browser compatibility.

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing.

DIFFERENT LEVELS & TYPES OF CSS

CSS has different levels, including level 1, level 2, and level 2.1 (a level 3 is under development). Generally, each level builds upon the previous level. CSS level 1 enabled Web developers to have control over stylistic elements (such as font, color, and spacing). Level 2 added things like page breaks and automatic numbering, and level 3 will add fancy backgrounds and vertical text, among other things. (Visit the World Wide Web Consortium for a more complete description of the different levels at <http://www.w3.org>.)

Likewise, different types of CSS exist, including inline styles, embedded styles, and external styles. Inline styles are placed within the HTML element they describe and can affect a paragraph, sentence, or word. Embedded styles (also known as document style sheets) define the styles of a single HTML document and are placed in the <HEAD> section of the document between <STYLE></STYLE> tags. External styles are the types of styles that we've already talked about: they allow you to create a separate file that contains your information about style or appearance and to link to this separate file in many of your Web pages. To put it another way, external styles are contained in a separate file that is then linked to your HTML documents by placing a <LINK> tag in the <HEAD> section of your document.

Each of these different types of styles has its uses, but for our purposes, we'll focus on external style sheets and look at two basics for headings: fonts and colors.

EXTERNAL STYLE SHEETS

Essentially, CSS (whether you're using external, inline, or embedded style sheets) is a kind of language that pairs attributes (like font and color) with values (like 26 pt. and #660033). External style sheets have the most ability to impact your site because (unlike inline or embedded style sheets), a change in your CSS file will result in changes to your entire site, or rather to every page linked to your style sheet. They make managing your site much easier. You begin an external style sheet as a text document (in Microsoft Notepad, for instance) and save it as .css (rather than .txt). Within that .css file, you'll use CSS to create rules for your Web pages to follow. CSS rules consist of selectors and declarations.

SELECTORS AND DECLARATION

A CSS rule is composed of two parts: selectors and declarations. The selector component of the rule consists of an HTML tag. The declaration component of the rule consists of a property and value. Let's look at an example of a complete rule, including the selector and declaration.

EXAMPLE RULE

H2 {color: green}

In this example rule, the selector is H2. The declaration is {color: green}. The property part of the declaration is color, while the value is green. This rule is very simple. It indicates that level 2 headings should be green. Notice that the rule is surrounded by curvy brackets {} and that a colon appears after the property. Now let's look at another, more complex example, involving both font and color in a heading:

Example Rules:
H1 {color: red; font-size: 26pt; font-family: Arial, sans-serif}
H2 {color: silver; font-size: 18pt; font-family: Century, serif}

In this example, we've set two levels of headings and made declarations for both level H1 and H2. And, like our previous example, we've also specified the color in each case (red for H1 and silver for H2). For value, you can use either the color name or the hexadecimal equivalent. We've also specified the font-size and the font-family of our H1 and H2 headings. You can specify font size in terms of points (as we have done) or pixels. You can also list both a specific kind of font or font family (Arial, Century, Times, Courier, Garamond, etc.) or a generic family (serif or sans serif). In our case, we listed both. If the user's browser doesn't have Arial, H1 will default to another sans-serif font face, and likewise for H2 (except the font-family will default to a serif font face).

Note that unlike HTML [and code like <HTML> and </HTML>], you don't have any special code that says the style sheet is a style sheet. Remember to save as .css.

There's obviously not space here to provide a complete list of all the selector/declaration properties. However, here are a couple of basic CSS guidelines to keep in mind as you begin working with CSS:
- Every statement must have both a selector and a declaration and must follow proper syntax.
- The declaration can have more than one property (additional properties should be separated by a semicolon).
- Each property should have both the property name (color, in our first example) and a value (green).

CSS AND HTML: IT ALL COMES TOGETHER

Once you've created your style sheet or sheets, all that remains to be done is to tell your HTML pages where to find your style sheet and to upload your .css file to the same location as your HTML files. The following line of code should appear between your <HEAD> tags so that your HTML pages know where to find your style sheet.
<LINK REL="stylesheet" TYPE="text/css" HREF="stylesheet1.css">
Of course, "stylesheet1.css" should be whatever you named your style sheet.

CONCLUSION

These are some of the basics of CSS by considering selectors and declarations and looking at font and color as examples, but we've barely scratched the surface of the possibilities of CSS. CSS can give you more design and type control than HTML does and save you a lot of time. Ideally, this introduction has given you enough information to decide whether or not CSS will be useful to you.

If you're interested in learning more about CSS, the World Wide Web Consortium is a wonderful place to start. You'll find information about online resources, tutorials, and books, as well as a CSS validator. You can visit W3C at <http://www.w3.org/>. ✦

$10.5 MILLION GIFT TO MIAMI UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER

✦ *Paul Anderson*
Miami University

We are very excited about the opportunities provided by the magnificent gift of $10.5 million that two alums, Roger and Joyce Howe, have provided the Center for Writing Excellence here at Miami University (Ohio). Among other things, the Howes' generosity and vision will enable the Center for Writing Excellence to expand our faculty development, research, and assessment efforts. We will also open a new student writing center, which will coordinate with the three longstanding writing centers at our Oxford, Ohio, campus: the Howe Writing Initiative in our business school, the Windate Writing Center created for our School of Interdisciplinary Studies, and the Writing Center in the Bernard B. Rinella, Jr. Learning Center (<http://www.muohio.edu/saf/lrn>). Later this fall, we expect to begin a national search for a director of the new student writing center, which will open in fall 2007.

This is the second time the Howes have made a major contribution in support of writing at Miami. Ten years ago, their first gift of $1.8 million enabled us to hire Kate Ronald as the Roger and Joyce L. Howe Professor of English and Director of the Howe Writing Initiative. Kate's outstanding work with business faculty and students was a major factor in persuading the Howes to extend their commitment to writing. In addition to our good fortune in having such wonderful alums, we are also blessed with a president, provost, and other administrators who are strong advocates for writing. For more details about the Howes' gift and about Miami's deep commitment to student writing, you are invited to visit our website: <http://www.muohio.edu/cwe>. ✦

SOUTHEASTERN WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATION AWARDS

The SWCA is accepting nominations for their 2007 Achievement Award and Tutor Award. Each award is presented annually on a competitive basis to outstanding members of the SWCA community, and each winner will receive a plaque and $250 at the SWCA conference in Nashville, TN, Feb. 8-10, 2007.

Nominees must be currently working in a writing center at an educational institution (including high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year college/universities) in the SWCA region. Nominees should also be current members (student, individual, or institutional) of the SWCA.

Writing center director, administrators, staff members, and tutors may nominate someone for either award. Self-nominations are also accepted. Please forward the name, award, institution, address, phone, and e-mail of the nominee to Deaver Traywick, Awards Committee Chair, by November 1, 2006, at deavertraywick@bhsu.edu. For further details and questions, contact the Awards Committee Chair with questions or concerns at (605) 642-6922 or <deavertraywick@bhsu.edu>. ✦

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NORTH EAST WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Call For Proposals
March 31, 2007
Storrs, CT
"Sustenance and Sustainabilty in the Writing Center"

Proposal Submission Deadline: November 23, 2006. Contact: Leslie Van Wagner, lvanwagner@rivier.edu, Rivier College. For more information about the conference, see <http://www.newca-conference.com/>.

MID-ATLANTIC WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
March 30-31, 2007
St. David's, PA

"Growing More Attentive to the Manner of Writing": Looking at the Writing Center through the Spectacles of Franklin" Keynote speakers: Jon Olson and Corinne Thatcher.

For more information, contact John Nordlof, at jnordlof@eastern.edu or 610-341-1453. Information and a call for papers will also be available on the MAWCA Web site: <http://www2.mcdaniel.edu/mawca/>.

TUTOR'S COLUMN

PRATTLE OF THE SEXES: A DEBATE REGARDING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE WRITING CENTER TUTORS

✦ *Lauren Gillispie and Alexander Olden*
Villanova University

Tired of "writers" over-dramatizing the differences between men and women just to get their names in print? We are too, so instead we are going to over-dramatize the differences between male and female writing center tutors. In your tutoring session you will have your fair share of punctuation and grammar lessons, but what you may not learn are the intriguing differences between male and female tutors. So forget about commas and semicolons for the next few minutes and brace yourself for the sex talk. *Disclaimer: we do not underestimate nor trivialize the significance of the stylistic differences between male and female tutors. But we cannot be held responsible for adopting those stereotypes in the composition of this article.*

COFFEE TALK: AN EFFECTIVE ICEBREAKER OR JUST A WASTE OF TIME?

2, 4, 6, 8…who do we appreciate? Writers! Writers! I speak on behalf of most female tutors when saying that we are not only concerned with the paper you have brought in, but we are also concerned with making you feel welcome in the writing center and having your session be as comfortable and as relaxed as possible. A brief, two- to-three minute prelude will act as an icebreaker, showing that you can be open and honest with your tutor about your paper, writing style, and life in general. Ben Rafoth, in his article entitled "Sex in the Center: Gender Differences in Tutorial Interactions," mentions the fact that a female "wants to build rapport or get emotionally closer to the person she is talking with" (Rafoth 2). As a visitor to the writing center, you will be pleased with the likelihood that your female tutor will not only ask you about your paper assignment, but also about where you purchased your totally cool Sketchers sneakers. A small, yet uplifting compliment will show that the tutor does not have the upper hand in the relationship, but is instead a peer or a friend eager to learn more about you, your writing style, and your writing assignment. 5, 6, 7, 8….we're going to make your writing great!

Male tutors don't mess around. We will introduce ourselves, shake your hand, and start asking you about your paper before you sit down. For example, "Hi, my name is Alexander, and I'll be your tutor this afternoon. What would you like me to go over with you?" It's plain, simple, and straight to the point, much like this paragraph. We don't care about your shoes.

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM: SUGAR-COAT OR BITE THE BULLET?

While we certainly admire males' focus on the task at hand, we female tutors also have the tutee's self esteem in the back of our minds. The last thing we want to have is you leaving the writing center feeling as if your writing ability barely meets that of a second grader. If we spot a dangling modifier in your paper, we will gently point it out to you with our pink fuzzy pen instead of circling the error with a harsh red mark of death. Boys can be so cruel sometimes. In a study comparing ten male and female graduate student writing tutors, researcher and professor of linguistics Therese Thonus found that "Female tutors…favored first- and second-person modal strategies (such as, approaching a correction by saying, "I think you should") rather than the imperatives chosen by male tutors" (1). We as females understand the importance of pointing out errors and being "straightforward and to the point," but we certainly do not want to be your catty friend who points out that your hair tie does not match your shoelaces. Instead, let's grab some tasty treats from the candy jar, start a clustering session, and whip that thesis into shape!

It's not that male tutors don't care about our writers' self esteem, but we're more concerned with the task at hand—your writing. Thonus's study also notes that "male tutors were more likely to select the most forceful suggestion type, imperatives" (Thonus 15). Honestly, which would you rather have, compassion or effective feedback? By being warm and fuzzy, females are "more likely to mitigate their suggestions" (Thonus 21). Save the heart and soul for the piano.

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing.

"DON'T SIT SO CLOSE TO ME"

In the case of most female tutors, the paper is placed in a neutral position where we are able to read and correct together as a team. In my own observations during training, I have witnessed both effective and ineffective body language between the tutor and tutee. Those sessions in which the body language was apathetic (i.e., the tutee is slouched down in the chair, the tutor is hovering over the paper as if it were a pot of gold, etc.) made me want to take each by the hand and form a circle around the paper like a happy game of Duck Duck Goose. There is no need to sit ten feet away from one another. Come on, "cooties" are so second grade….

This is a writing tutorial, not a playground. There is no need to bond, so respect my comfort zone and I'll respect yours. Based on my training experience, if a tutor happens to keep the paper in front of him, it is just because it is easier for him to write on it. The tutee is welcome to write in his or her own comments, but there is no need to resort to preschool games in order to be productive.

"HEY, WAIT YOUR TURN!"

According to Thonus, "females were more likely to resort to interruptions than were their male colleagues" (6). However, I must say that we interrupt only because we are either: a) eager to point out something you did correctly and sounds fantastic in the paper or b) excited to share with you a fabulous suggestion for your assignment. As Ben Rafoth states so accurately, "a common female conversation style is to maintain equality and to avoid any obvious show of power" (2). We are never trying to cut you out of the conversation or dismiss any idea you may have. So, despite the randomness of our mid-tutorial outbursts, we really do have a good heart and are only trying to make your session as energetic and fun as possible. After all, we want to see the return of your smiling face in the writing center really soon!

An interruption is an interruption, no ifs, ands, or buts about it. By constantly interrupting your tutee, not only will you make them feel as if his or her ideas are useless, but you will delay the flow of the academic conversation and most likely not be able to cover as many points in the paper as you had originally hoped. As a writing tutor, it is necessary to have some patience and let tutees finish speaking before you jam your ideas down their throats. After all, it's the tutee's name on the paper, isn't it?

"TRUCE"

Regardless of where we place shoes on our priority list, when it comes to tutoring writers, both male and female, tutors place improving your writing process first. Although our approaches and casual conversation, or lack thereof, may be different, we want nothing more than to see you leave the center feeling encouraged and satisfied with your work. While it would be impossible to completely change an individual tutor's style, it's both necessary and beneficial for each gender to be aware and respectful of the typical habits of the other sex. This general understanding will be beneficial not only to the tutors, but their tutees as well. Whether your tutorial session is characterized by male assertiveness or female compassion, we promise you sound instruction…and a gold star! ✦

WORKS CITED

Rafoth, Ben, et al. "Sex in the center: Gender Differences in Tutorial Interactions." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 24.3 (1999): 1-5.
Thonus, Terese. "Tutors as Male and Female: Gender Language in Writing Conferences." American Association for Applied Linguistics. March 23-26, 1996. Chicago, IL.

✦

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

OCTOBER 26-28, 2006

Midwest Writing Centers Association, in St. Louis, MO
CONTACT:
Susan Mueller at smueller@stl-cop.edu   or Dawn Fels at dfels@earthlink.net. Conference Web site:
<http://www.ku.edu/~mwca/>.

FEBRUARY 8-10, 2007

Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Nashville, TN
CONTACT:
E-mail: SWCA@Comcast.net
Conference Web site: <www.mtsu.edu/~uwcenter/swca2007>.

MARCH 3, 2007

Northern California Writing Center Association, in Sacramento, CA

CONTACT:
Cheryl Smith at smithc@saclink.csus.edu and Dan Meltzer at melzer@saclink.csus.edu. Conference Web site: <http://ncwca.stanford.edu/>.

MARCH 30-31, 2007

Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Radnor, PA
CONTACT:
John Nortlof, e-maiL jnordlof@eastern.edu, phone: 610-341-1453. Conference Web site:<http://www2.mcdaniel.edu/mawca>.

MARCH 31, 2007

North East Writing Centers Association, in Storrs, CT
CONTACT:
Leslie Van Wagner, lvanwagner@

rivier.edu. Conference Web site: <http://www.newca-conference.com/>.

APRIL 12-14, 2007

 South Central and International Writing Centers Associations, in Houston, TX
CONTACT:
Dagmar Corrigan at corrigand@uhd.edu. Conference Web site: <http://ahss.ualr.edu/iwca>.

APRIL 27-29, 2007

Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Bellingham, WA
CONTACT:
Sherri Winans at Whatcom: http://faculty.whatcom.ctc.edu/swinans. Conference Web site: <http://www.acadweb.wwu.edu/writingcenter/PNWCA.htm>.