

Tutors' Column: "Some Things to Consider"

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Working in the writing center is both a rewarding experience and an opportunity to learn. Since I was a first-year MFA student at the University of Maryland (where I was trained by the wonderful Dr. Leigh Ryan), I've worked for five different writing centers at both community colleges and two large tier-one research universities. I've worked with students preparing for the GED all the way up to graduate students working on their theses and dissertations. I have seen my fair share of writing assignments across many different courses and levels. And these experiences have taught me a lot about not only my own reading, writing, and learning but also about how other students read, write, and learn. So, I offer some things to consider for new and returning tutors:



First, accept your knowledge base. You don't have to know everything! Really! In fact, when you lack knowledge and expertise in a specific field, this can be an advantage for you and the student. If the key is clear communication, and it often times is, then your not knowing a particular field forces the writer to better understand how they are writing and communicating. That is, often times, a student, when explaining through talking with you, will solve some problems out loud. This has often been the case, for example, with subjects I don't know well such as Anthropology, Biology, and History. Remember, too, that you have talented colleagues all with different backgrounds. Some even have a similar background but different ways of looking at things, so don't hesitate to ask when you have a question, need another opinion, or want to confirm something. Trust yourself and trust your colleagues.

Second, be mellow. You will have great days and you will have less than great days tutoring. Great days might be when you and the student are in sync, when you get through a lot or all of the desired material, when the writer wants to name their first-born child after you because of your assistance (though this might be a bit of a stretch). Conversely, you will have bad tutorials and even bad

days. You will have days where it seems that nothing you say will reach the student or nothing you do results in him or her or them understanding and moving forward on an assignment. You will have bad days because the writer may be having a bad day in general and does not really want help. Rather, they might merely want to vent. That's okay. Let them. As you will find out, writing consultants wear many kinds of hats and fulfill many different roles, as do the students. You will learn how and when to adjust. Remember, as bad as a tutorial can go sometimes, it's timed and the time will end. But always be positive, charitable, constructive. Always listen.

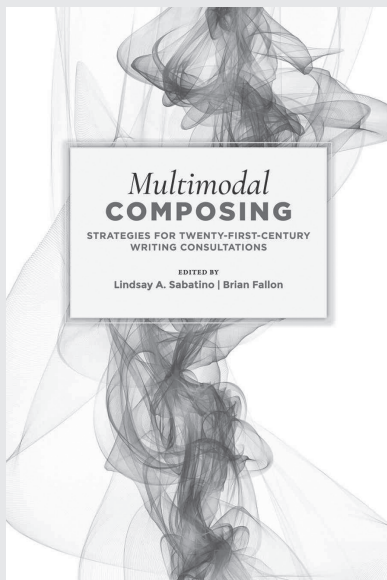
Third, be practical. You will oftentimes try to accomplish much more than you and the writer can manage in the allotted time, whether this is thirty minutes or a little more. You might even overwhelm the student with all of your great suggestions. (I have certainly done this! I might be doing it now.) So, be mindful of this. Remember, you are not the teacher here. Remember, you do not need to solve and/or point out all of the "problems" inherent in a paper or assignment. You are more like a consultant offering suggestions to improve a writing student's communication. And sometimes, you are a person to bounce ideas off of. Don't lecture, but do have a conversation. Do ask questions.

Fourth, reflect. Treat each tutorial as an opportunity to learn and grow as a person. One-to-one tutoring can allow you to experience much empathy because writing, as we all know, is not an easy endeavor; it is a process. You'll read some interesting papers, have intense conversations, see students grow throughout the semester. And sometimes things won't work out well. In fact, expect that. Nevertheless, reflect on those moments. For example, whenever a tutorial doesn't go well, I often take notes and ask myself, "What could I have done differently?" Ask yourself how you can improve, how you might better handle a certain situation, how these moments are necessary for your growth in the writing center and for the student writers.

Fifth, be humble. Never talk ill about a student (or really anyone) in the writing center. Yes, we all have to vent from time to time. Yes, you will get a student writer who rubs you the wrong way, who says something offensive—who is resistant to anything and everything you say. You will have students who don't really seem to want help, who have come only because the professor instructed them to do so. But, how is this different from life in general?

Multimodal Composing: Strategies for Twenty-First-Century Writing Consultations

edited by Lindsay A. Sabatino and Brian Fallon



Multimodal Composing provides strategies for writing center directors and consultants working with writers whose texts are visual, technological, creative, and performative—texts they may be unaccustomed to reading, producing, or tutoring. This book is a focused conversation on how rhetorical, design, and multimodal principles inform consultation strategies, especially when working with genres that are less familiar or traditional.

Multimodal Composing explores the relationship between rhetorical choices, design thinking, accessibility, and technological awareness in the writing center. Each chapter deepens consultants' understanding of multimodal composing by introducing them to important features and practices in a variety of multimodal texts. The chapters' activities provide consultants with an experience that familiarizes them with design thinking and multimodal projects, and a companion website (www.multimodalwritingcenter.org) offers access to additional resources that are difficult to reproduce in print (and includes updated links to resources and tools).

Multimodal projects are becoming the norm across disciplines, and writers expect consultants to have a working knowledge of how to answer their questions. *Multimodal Composing* introduces consultants to key elements in design, technology, audio, and visual media and explains how these elements relate to the rhetorical and expressive nature of written, visual, and spoken communication.

Paper: \$28.95; Ebook: \$23.95. Utah State University Press