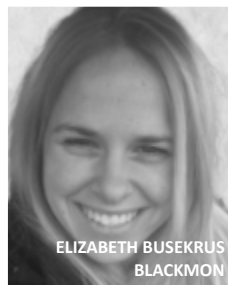


## “I Just Need a Green Sheet”: Generating Motivation for Required Visits

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“I just need a green sheet,” the student mumbles, sliding into the chair next to the tutor. This statement has become a classic line at my writing center where we use the green sheet to prove the student came to the writing center. As evidenced by this example, some students seem unmotivated during the session, only present to receive the credit. At my community college, many instructors require their entire classes to visit the College Writing Center (CWC). My writing center has a long-standing history of debates regarding the validity of these required visits and if these visits benefit our students. The staff has concluded that sending entire classes is beneficial for the community college student body. Our diverse student population, varied in languages, abilities, educational backgrounds, race, age, and gender, uniquely perceives the value of a required CWC visit in light of their prior experiences, but some may question the value of a required visit because the many demands they have to manage. Some writers, particularly those pursuing a mathematics or science degree, have said they do not see writing as applicable to their lives or future careers. Other students have mentioned their lack of time due to other commitments such as a full-time job or family obligations. Finally, some writers have shared their negative prior experiences with writing or with English instructors and tutors. For those who seem unmotivated, some may view the writing center as a remedial service they do not need, or they procrastinate and view visiting the writing center as a burden. Since writers may come to sessions unmotivated, I developed a heuristic called the Writing Motivational Assessment Pathway (MAP) that may support tutors in motivating reluctant writers, providing tutors with strategic questions to move past writers’ lack of motivation barrier in the first few minutes of a tutoring session. While my CWC tutors are professional writers or professionals with master’s degrees, the process outlined may benefit peer tutors as well.



## REQUIRED VISITS AND MOTIVATION

Empirical writing center research has found required visits to be valuable. Beth Rapp Young captured archival data for one such study. Looking at 83,045 records of student appointments, she notes that one-third were required visits. The results of her study emphasize that the required visit “encourages writing center use without negative effects.” In another study, Wendy Pfrenger et al. analyzed students in developmental English classes, showing that students who were required to visit the writing center had a higher chance of passing the course than those who did not come. Required visits also lessened the intimidation students felt about the writing center space and increased their sense of agency and understanding of the importance of revision. Rapp Young and Pfrenger et al. found that those who were required to visit one time had a higher chance of coming back. Other scholars have cited the advantages of mandatory visits in that they might motivate procrastinators (Rapp Young and Fritzsche) or show students the significance of the writing process. Gwendolyn Osman describes how required visits increase the confidence and skill level of students. L. Lennie Irvin conducted research at the community college level, showing that a higher percentage of students passed if they were required to come to the writing center three or more times. This study also revealed how required sessions increased student retention and persistence.

Since many students care about the grade in their class, tying the required writing center visit to the grade encourages them to attend. However, grades as an extrinsic motivator may not be enough to promote engagement in the session. Heather Robinson suggests that tutors should foster intrinsic motivation in writers to help them learn how to experience pleasure from the act of engaging in writing. While students may initially come to the writing center seeking assistance with lower-order concerns, tutors can move students toward intrinsic motivation by encouraging them to brainstorm and develop effective topic ideas that connect their experiences, expertise, and background to their writing. Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson emphasize how important it is for writing center tutors to be aware of students’ motivation since it can encourage their effort, engagement with a task, and writing performance (“Motivational Scaffolding”). Students’ motivations impact their thinking about their writing, perceptions of themselves as writers, and various writing habits and behaviors, and tutors can help writers unpack their motivations to better engage students. In the tutoring session, questioning becomes the intervention that aids tutors in reflecting on a student’s motivational habits in order to help them engage in the revision process.

## THE WRITING MOTIVATIONAL ASSESSMENT PATHWAY (MAP)

Because I wanted to learn how to engage students in more effective ways, in 2014-2015, I conducted an IRB-approved research study, examining the writing motivations of four students when they took English Composition 101 (fall 2014) and English Composition 102 (spring 2015). Although this research study was conducted several years ago, the Writing MAP was developed from the initial results of this study and has continued to transform through additional research and application. This case study approach involved interviewing these students at the beginning and end of each semester, surveying them before and after each tutoring session, and audio recording each session in the writing center. Two students exhibited a low self-efficacy that decreased their effort at writing. Three students emphasized an extrinsic goal framework which focused their attention on pleasing the instructor. While overlap existed in their motivations, they varied in their personality types, identification as writers, and interest level in the writing assignment and writing center. Applying motivational theories to this study challenged me to create an approach that would benefit tutors in a writing center context. Using the Writing MAP, tutors seek to (1) pay attention to what motivates students and (2) determine tutoring strategies that could motivate different types of students. This approach allows tutors to identify the most prevalent motivational traits during a student session and apply strategies that encourage students to avoid procrastination, consider new writing habits, build their confidence, and/or generate metacognition.

Markus Dresel and Nathan Hall define motivation as “the processes underlying the initiation, control, maintenance, and evaluation of goal-oriented behaviors” (59), and Mackiewicz and Thompson connect motivation to three essential concepts: interest, self-efficacy, and self-regulation (*Talk about Writing*). Applying these concepts, the Writing MAP helps tutors discover writers’ underlying motivations to find out how they can encourage and engage these writers. Mackiewicz and Thompson’s strategy presents many parallels to the Writing MAP in its purpose. Motivational scaffolding centers on using strategies to “build rapport and solidarity with students and to engage students and keep them engaged in writing center conferences” (47). Similarly, the Writing MAP works toward facilitating motivational habits and developing students as writers. The difference lies in the Writing MAP’s systematic approach to identifying the student’s motivational framework and responding to those needs. The Writing MAP offers a way to assess a given writer’s motivation so tutors can respond to them.

To motivate students, tutors first must understand students’ under-

lying motivations (i.e., the first step of the Writing MAP). The Writing MAP examines three areas: a student's goal framework, perception of competency, and level of engagement in a session. In our writing center, a session using the Writing MAP starts with rapport-building, where the student typically reveals their requirement to come to the writing center. The tutor then asks the student, "What is your goal for your writing?" From these required-visit students, common responses include wanting a good grade, making sure they are following the teacher's expectations, or checking to make sure their grammar is correct; these responses identify whether the student has extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. Reluctant students are often extrinsically motivated, coming to the writing center because of the requirement. Tutors then work toward understanding how the student feels about their writing competency. Students often convey a low or high perception of competency, and at times, this self-perception affects the student's level of engagement in the tutoring session. While the questions listed in Table 1 are provided for tutors, they are taught to improvise questions based on student responses.

Based on these initial questions, tutors parse students' motivational habits, such as a tendency to procrastinate or a lack of interest in writing. Tutors then use tailored strategies in the first few minutes of a session to move to the second step of the Writing MAP. If the student has revealed nothing about their goal framework, competency, or engagement level in the first few minutes, the tutor can use any of the questions listed in Table 1. Dealing first with the students' motivation helps move past barriers that cause resistance to the assignment or with their writing process. The tutor can continue asking directed questions, as identified in Table 1, to investigate past writing behaviors. Asking questions about the past can help tutors understand obstacles to a student's current and future writing processes. For example, when a student expresses a focus on the grade, the tutor can investigate what the student considers to be the purpose of that writing assignment and what past experiences correlate with the writer's focus on the grade. Understanding students' motivation can help tutors to empathize and relate to these students' experiences.

As the tutor reflects on the student's motivational attributes, the tutor considers the purpose of the session and decides what strategies to use to move the session forward. The Writing MAP investigates the motivational habits behind students' behaviors and encourages them to self-reflect on their own processes. While these strategies have worked effectively at our community college writing center, each institution has its own population and culture, and the

Writer's Observable Behavior	Tutor Strategies	Questions for the Student
<b>Opening Questions: Explore Students' Goal Framework</b>		
Procrastinates on the writing assignment	Discuss the assignment's purpose and investigate reasons for procrastinating. Emphasize how to improve the writing process to save time.	When you receive a writing assignment, how do you determine when to start the assignment?
Focuses on receiving a good grade and positive comments from the instructor	Discuss why the student thinks the instructor created this writing assignment.	What do you think the purpose of this writing assignment is? What does your instructor want you to learn from this assignment?
Displays a fixed mindset about writing	Ask the student questions about their prior writing experiences.	What have been some of your past experiences with writing assignments in school? Are these experiences more positive or negative?
If the student exhibits extrinsic motivation, continue questioning to discover their perceptions and level of engagement.		
<b>Discover Students' Perceptions of Competency</b>		
Displays confidence and/or competency when writing	Highlight students' strengths since this student is a confident writer.	Why do you feel like a confident writer?
	Determine how the student views a successful writer.	What are important attributes of a good writer? What writing attributes do you have? When you complete a writing assignment, how do you evaluate your success? Do you evaluate success based on your grade, learning the task, or both?
Displays little confidence or agency when writing	Emphasize how writing relates to decision-making and ownership.	What are your strengths as a writer? What essays have you written that you relate to?
Reveals a narrow view of the writing process	Show students the importance of revision.	What is your writing process like? How do you typically approach a writing assignment?
<b>Determine Students' Level of Engagement in the Writing Center Session</b>		
Lacks interest in the topic	Engage with the student's writing, ask questions, and express a desire to hear more.	Why did you decide to write about this topic? What about this topic interests you?
Reveals a lack of engagement in the session	Discuss the goals of the session and the purpose of the writing center.	What do you see as the purpose of the writing center visit? (For "just need a green sheet" students, the answer can lead into a conversation about the purpose of the center.) What goals do you want to set in this session? Are there any obstacles preventing you from completing this writing assignment?

Table 1: Strategies for Required Visits<sup>1</sup>

techniques listed in Table 1 may need to be modified. The questions serve as a guide and are not comprehensive. In a session, questions can arise organically according to the situation.

The types of questions tutors ask can aid in understanding writers' motivations and guide tutors in how to strategize their sessions. These questions are not meant to take the entire session but to assist with initial rapport-building in the first few minutes of the session. While Table 1 presents a set of strategies for those who are required to come to the writing center, these strategies can easily be altered to fit non-mandatory sessions.

### **THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF THE WRITING MAP**

Helping students to improve their motivation begins with identifying obstacles that are preventing them from having productive writing habits. Beginning the session with questions should be purposeful; each tutor should be transparent about why they are asking these questions. Several tutors at St. Louis Community College have commented on using the Writing MAP. According to one professional tutor, the Writing MAP "helps to raise the writer's awareness of writing as a process and as connected to identity rather than writing as functional or a way to receive a grade. It moves students into a different space, creating a narrative of improving as a writer as lifelong." In working with one writer, this tutor foresaw some vestigial self-doubt the student had by asking a few questions outlined in Table 1. The tutor had the opportunity to validate the student's experience and build an alternative narrative to what the student told herself.

Another tutor mentioned two scenarios where the Writing MAP came into play. One session started with the writer mentioning that he had never written an evaluation essay, which he was recently assigned. With this statement, he constructed a wall between his self-perception and his capabilities, showing low self-confidence in his ability to succeed on this new project. To circumvent this resistance, the tutor encouraged the student to become more personally invested in the topic. In another session, a student began by asking, "What's the point of this assignment?" This student appeared apathetic about the assignment and displayed a low perception of competency. The tutor asked and answered questions about the student's writing process to help the student understand the relevance of this writing assignment.

For my writing center, the Writing MAP is a starting point toward understanding students' motivations and offers numerous potential benefits for tutors. Due to the complexity of motivation in each

student case, the Writing MAP might not always be successful. However, by assessing students' writing motivation, tutors can encourage them to consider what is motivating them and to reflect on ways past experiences have affected these motivations. I have learned that a student's motivation can limit or enhance the strategies they use, diminish or increase their confidence, and hinder or strengthen their progress as writers. Tutors can use the Writing MAP to understand the mindsets of those required to come to the writing center and other students as well. Getting to the heart of what motivates a student is complex, but questions can serve to explore students' motivations and help tutors engage students in productive work.

## NOTES

1. These strategies were created with the assistance of Niara Jackson, a former professional writing tutor at my community college.

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