

THE SOUNDING BOARD

the newsletter of the writing colleagues program

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THE ROLE OF THE WRITING COLLEAGUE: MENTORSHIP AND THE PEER TUTOR

Students entering higher education are asked to negotiate their place in the academy, adopting the academic voice—the voice with which they will try on the role of sociologist, economist, scientist or literary theorist, just to name a few. For many, the transition from their familiar discourse to academic discourse is quite a leap. They must also learn the proper essay format and citation of sources. Additionally, many shift their focus from learning through memorization and performing well on tests to intellectual curiosity and thinking independently.

As a graduate of HWS, I know this is a special place where professors and students are profoundly connected both academically and personally. I also grew from my connections with my peers. As a first-year, I distinctly remember my Writing Colleague. She was a “Rosetta Stone” of sorts, who not only helped me understand what college level writing looks like, but also how things work around here.

Writing Colleagues are more than writing tutors. They are intellectual mentors. They are translators of discourses. They are sounding boards for ideas. As Professor James McCorkle states, “The Writing Colleague is instrumental in first-year seminars. The assistance with a student’s writing varies according to the student’s efforts and sense of responsibility, but the Writing Colleague can help turn the student toward assuming responsibility in ways professors may not be able to... Also, WCs serve to help acclimate a student to the Colleges’ academic/intellectual life, and this is a vital service.”

There are a number of writing challenges

Writing Colleagues commonly address with their peers. One challenge students face is identifying their audience in order to define their essay’s focus. Many students are initially intimidated by the idea of writing with authority on a topic on which their audience (the professor) is vastly more knowledgeable. More generally, audience is a challenge for writers at every level. Writing Colleagues have many approaches to helping students develop a focus in their essays. For instance, they will ask students to address several questions. Who wants to read this? What kind of discourse is appropriate? When have you gathered enough information about your subject? How do you make this interesting?

“Having multiple drafts and a second opinion took a lot of pressure off of assignments. I was less stressed, and I feel that my writing improved.”

Essentially, the structure of the Writing Colleagues Program allows room for students to experiment with their ideas and explore different approaches to their papers before they receive a grade. As one student who participated in the Writing Colleagues Program said, “Having multiple drafts and a second opinion took a lot of pressure off of assignments. I was less stressed, and I feel that my writing improved.”

Another hurdle for students to surmount is thesis construction. For some students, the issue is clarifying what they already know. Many have a thesis in mind and their Writing Colleague

will then help them “talk it out.” Last semester, one first-year said that the Writing Colleague “helped me to understand what I was reading.” Writing Colleagues learn to ask questions that lead their peers to composing a thesis. Some take notes during the meeting and read what was said aloud. All Writing Colleagues are trained to model what intellectual inquiry looks like through asking questions that lead a student to make connections and, in many cases, make the first step to finding their place and voice at the Colleges. •

Heidi G. Beach '02, *Coordinator*

THANK YOU, WRITING COLLEAGUES FALL 2006

Amanda Bartlett '08
Stephanie Bishop '07
Rachael Claudio '07
Felipe Estefan '08
Katherine Faherty '09
Lauren Gary '08
Erin Giantomasi '07
Emily Gordon '07
Alicia Gregory '09
Alexandria Hanson '08
John Heavey '09
Sydney Hess '09
Courtney Jones '09
Jennie Seidewand '09
Elizabeth Silver '09
Rachel Stephansky '09
Danielle Ryan '09
Kate Ustach '07

“The beautiful part of writing is that you don’t have to get it right the first time, unlike, say, a brain surgeon. You can always do it better, find the exact word, the apt phrase, the leaping simile.”

Robert Cormier (*The Chocolate War, I Am the Cheese*)

**CONGRATULATIONS,
WRITING COLLEAGUE
CANDIDATES
SPRING 2007**

The Writing Colleagues Seminar will have 14 students this spring because of the keen eye of last semester’s Writing Colleagues and Faculty Colleagues.

You know who works well with their peers as well as professors. You also know who can write. So, please send their names to Heidi Beach, WCP Coordinator, and encourage those students to apply.

- Jamie Billington
- Molly DiStefano
- Michael Ellis
- Corey Gallagher
- Libby Greene
- Julie Isaacson
- Sam Koval
- Jonathan Shaker
- Shane Simon
- Margaret Stirling
- Deana Stuart
- Maria Trainor
- Regina Triplett
- Michele Viterise

Interested in a Writing Colleague for your course next semester? Interested in becoming a Writing Colleague? Please contact us:

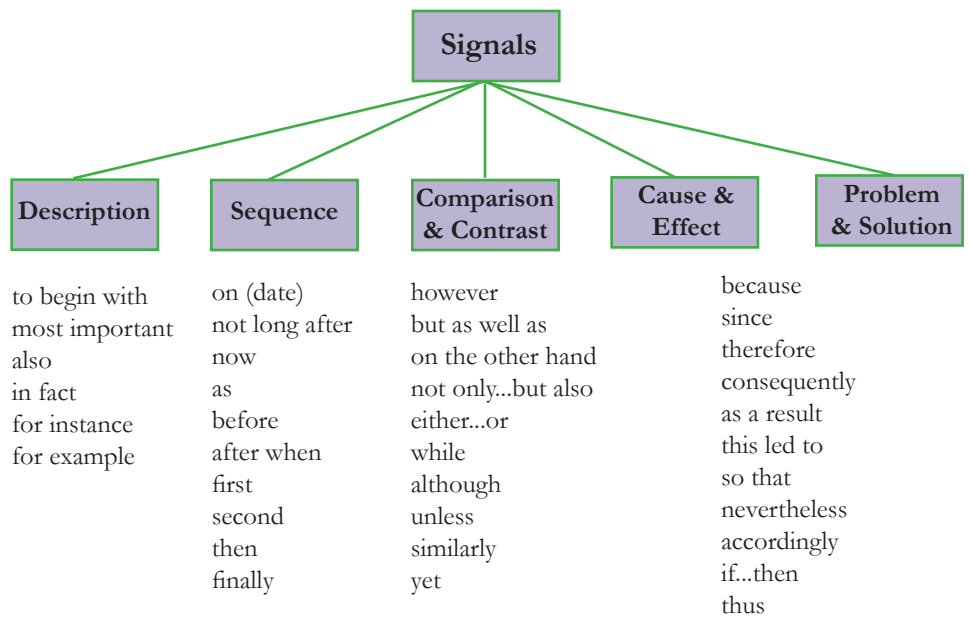
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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: As a Writing Colleague, I often find myself not only working with students on writing assignments, but also reading comprehension. Do you have any tips for students who want to retain more of what they have read?

A: Research has shown that good readers approach a text looking for a “text pattern” or organization that ties the ideas in a passage together. Good writers know how to tell, show, describe or explain using signals that lead readers to understand the information in the text. There are five common text patterns: *description, sequence, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and problem and solution.* Please see the chart below for words that signal these text patterns.



WRITING THE “HOOK SENTENCE”

As P. L. Travers said, “The writer is, after all, only half his book.” What is the other half? The reader, of course!

One of the primary challenges facing every writer is hooking his or her reader. Below is a short list of ideas you might try the next time you are working on an opening paragraph:

- Begin with an intriguing question.
- Contradict a commonly held opinion.
- Use a metaphor or analogy.
- Narrate an interesting story.
- Refer to a situation with which your audience can identify.
- Tell a joke.