

THE SOUNDING BOARD

the newsletter of the writing colleagues program

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WRITING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE A SHORT GUIDE FOR WRITING COLLEAGUES & STUDENTS

There certainly is more than one way to approach a writing colleague meeting regarding a paper assignment. However, when addressing the challenges of a student who is writing in English as a foreign language, it's useful to have a plan.

Focus on the Assignment

Cultural differences can sometimes lead a student to misinterpret the assignment. Begin your session by asking the student questions about his or her understanding of the assignment and the professor's expectations. Ask the student how he or she tried to meet these expectations in his or her draft.

Ask Why

"Tell me what your paper is about," is a good request to make during a session because you'll find out why they chose to respond to the assignment in a certain way. Oftentimes, this will help both the writing colleague and the student notice differences between what the writer has told you and what is on the page, which you can then negotiate together.

Begin with the Big Picture First

There are times when going through a student's writing line by line will be appropriate and necessary. However, it helps to have the student or the writing colleague read the paper out loud at the beginning of the meeting. This allows the writing colleague to see the overall focus and organization and address and problems or questions.

The Facilitative Approach

The role of the writing colleague offers students an opportunity to lead their peers through exploration of the course material as well as the writing process. They do this through asking questions and fueling in-depth discussions. This role is least effective when the writing colleague tells a student what he or she has to do to complete the assignment because this shuts down the process of modeling intellectual inquiry. This is especially important to avoid when working with non-native speakers because what may

be intuitive to a writing colleague who is a native speaker of English may not be intuitive to the student. If the student is allowed to negotiate the conventions of a genre with guidance, he or she will become more successful doing so on his or her own.

The Writing Process

1.) Include more work on planning to generate ideas, text structure, and language in order to make the first and second drafts more manageable.

2.) Have non-native speakers write in stages. For example, begin by focusing on content and organization in one draft and linguistic concerns in a subsequent draft.

3.) Separate revision and editing into two different stages. Spend time focusing on the rhetorical aspects of the paper and then the linguistic to avoid taking on too much at once.

Additional Resources

The UAEU-UGRU Concordance is a free, growing, interactive resource that offers help to non-native English speakers learning how to use words in context. It can be found at:

www.ugru.uaeu.ac.ae/concordance/

Dave Sperling, an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher, developed a comprehensive web site that includes many links and book recommendations in addition to 15 teacher forums covering class activities, adult education, linguistics, bilingual education, computer-assisted learning, elementary education and employment.

The site also has 15 student forums on such topics as hobbies, holidays, current news, movies, computers, literature, music, learning English, etc.

www.eslcafe.com

Adapted from Bruce & Rafoth, *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* (2004)

WRITING TIPS: A FEW COMMON CHALLENGES FOR NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Understanding How Languages Differ

- Ask a writing colleague or peer who is a native English speaker to respond to your first draft, focusing on your main ideas and purpose.
- If your reader can summarize your main ideas, discuss organization and the essay structure most commonly used in the United States.
- Address grammar, vocabulary and mechanics.

Understanding Verbs and Modifiers in English

- To show ongoing action, *be* verbs are followed by the present participle, which is a verb with an *-ing* ending.
- Check that modal auxiliary verbs (will, would, can, could, may, might, shall, must and should) are followed by the simple form of the verb (She **should study** tonight.).

Conditions that Modals Express

Speculation: If you had flown, you **would** have arrived two days ago.

Ability: She **can** run faster than Jennifer.

Necessity: You **must** know what you want.

Intention: He **will** wash his own clothes.

Permission: You **may** leave now.

Advice: You **should** wash behind your ears.

Possibility: It **might** be possible to go early.

Assumption: You **must** have stayed up late last night.

Expectation: You **should** enjoy the movie.

Order: You **must** leave the building.

A Note on Sentence Structure

- Altering the basic subject + verb + object word order in English often changes the meaning of a sentence. As a general rule, try to keep the verb close to its subject, and the direct object close to the verb.

Adapted from Faigley, *Writing: A Guide for College and Beyond* (2007)

“A writer must be careful to choose the right words, rejecting some and welcoming others, and place them so skillfully that even the common ones seem fresh.”

Horace, *The Art of Poetry*

**CONGRATULATIONS!
WRITING COLLEAGUE
CANDIDATES
FALL 2007**

The Writing Colleagues Seminar will have students this fall because of the keen eye of last semester's Writing Colleagues and Faculty Colleagues. You know the students who work well with their peers and as professors. You also know who writes well. So, please send their names to Heidi Beach, WCP Coordinator, and encourage those students to apply.

**Elisabeth Brower
Lila Feldman
Christina Lam
Jessie Meyers
Kelly Morrell
Mark Owen
Joelle Rudnick
Stephen “Augie” Smith
Kristin Stascavage**

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

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Check out *The Sounding Board* online:
www.hws.edu/academics/enrichment/writingcolleagues.asp

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: I just finished my paper and am citing references. How do I cite a reference contained in another one?

A: APA and MLA request that you cite the original sources rather than citing a secondary source. This gives you more credibility since you are using the original source material rather than relying on a secondary use of that source, which may have misrepresented it. A librarian should be able to help you track down those sources. If you cannot find those sources, you put only *your* original source on the works cited page.

DO YOU KNOW STUDENTS WHO LIKE TO WRITE AND HELP OTHERS WITH THEIR WRITING?



NOMINATE THEM FOR THE WRITING COLLEAGUES PROGRAM!

How does one become a Writing Colleague?

After completing an application to the Writing Colleagues Program, a student enrolls in WRRH 305, the Writing Colleagues Seminar. Upon successful completion of this preparatory course, a student becomes a Writing Colleague and is assigned to her/his first placement with a professor.

What are the benefits of being a Writing Colleague?

- You experience the intrinsic rewards of helping others.
- You strengthen your own writing ability.
- You make new connections with professors and students.
- You gain practical experience that looks great on your resume.
- You earn a full unit of credit for each placement.
- You can complete a minor in the Writing Colleagues Program.

CONTACT US!

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