

# Writing Around Richmond

## Writing Fellows to "Retreat"

Issue 2,

January/February 1999

No such thing as a free lunch ? Not this time. On Saturday, February 20, WAC will hold its first-ever Writing Fellows Retreat. Not only will the fellows and tutors be treated to a free lunch, but they will also be paid a \$50 stipend to attend.

WAC fellows will meet in the Interfaith Room at the Wilton Center at 10:00 and begin the morning with ESL specialist Beth Bradford. Ms. Bradford will offer advice and training geared toward working more effectively with students for whom English is a second language. Many fellows have mentioned how challenging it can be to assist students with content oriented issues and

also help students develop their skills in written English. Ms. Bradford promises to help with practical ideas and even some practice for the



fellows and tutors.

After lunch, participants will break into small groups to discuss samples of student writing that they have brought with them, collaborating to develop effective commentary and advice. We especially encourage

fellows who work together to also attend together. this gives busy writing fellows a chance to talk and improve the consistency of their commentary for a particular class assignment.

Everyone will have a chance to share what they have experienced with the whole group, and Joe Essid will lead a discussion on suggestions fellows have for making the WAC program run more smoothly and better serve Richmond students.

To make your reservation, please email or call Terry Dolson, x6432.



## Special Thanks

To the 1998-1999 WAC Committee:

Dr. Dona J. Hickey, English  
Dr. Joan L. Bak, History  
Julie Laskaris, Classics  
Dr. Michael G. Kerckhove, Mathematics  
Dr. Scott T. Allison, Psychology

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## ***“Casey at ...the Foul Line?” Why One Style Doesn’t Fit All***

***Jennifer Harrison, Graduate Writing Fellow and Tutor***

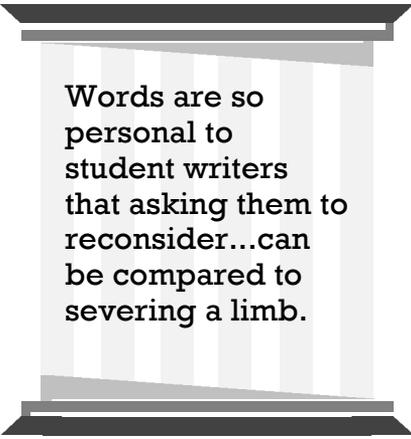
My work in the Writing Center has reminded me that we often have an image of what a sample of ideal writing should look like. We think of prose by “the Greats” such as Aristotle or Charles Dickens, and in trying to write like our ideal images, we often lose sight of the task at hand.

That scenario is repeated frequently when students bring their papers to the Writing Center. At first, the papers seem to vary a great deal, suffering from a variety of problems. Sometimes, the basic components are evident, but the organizational style and grammar is lacking. Or, in other instances, the student’s argument is unclear, leaving the reader with a hollow feeling. In a research paper, the student may provide the skeleton of research, but leave out the structure and analysis.

I am conscious of the need to work with students on their inconsistencies in style, structure, or grammar, and provide some sort of guidance for improvement. Accomplishing this task is akin to delicate surgery; words are so personal to student writers that asking them to reconsider word choice or rearrange paragraphs can be compared to severing a limb. Tutors must “show,” not “tell.” I try to ask the student specific questions to force them to think

about their topic, and often with a little bit of a “tug of war” technique, the student will outline the basic points that he or she needed to mention. It’s amazing what can come of a tutoring session, especially when, to use a cliché, “the lightbulb goes off” in the student’s head.

One student I remember, “Casey” we’ll call him, dropped by the Writing Center



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during my tutoring hours. He did not have an appointment, but since I did not have anyone scheduled for that particular hour, I was able to work with him. He needed assistance with a CORE paper on the topic of a personal experience, and I immediately sensed his nervousness and apparent reluctance to hand over his paper for me to read. For Casey, his paper was a part of him, and my tampering with it was obviously going to cause some pain. Sensing this, I read the paper without com-

ment, picking up on his difficulties with comma usage, overall disorganization, and misspellings. I could tell that this paper had been extremely difficult for him to write. So I tried the technique that had always worked for me, asking questions to try and delve more deeply into his topic. His responses were vague, however, and I found myself against a brick wall in trying to assist him. I had noticed, however, occasional references to his love of the sport of basketball in his paper, and these were the most development. I tried a different line of questioning, hoping to draw some sign of interest out of him. Bingo! Once we began discussing a topic he knew well, Casey was like a different person. I was able to use the information he provided to assist him in reworking his paper.

While Casey’s paper may not have been the “ideal” piece of writing, it was uniquely his. My experience with Casey proved that each student writes in his or her own unique style, and encouraging the student to work within his or her own “expertise” or voice is often the best solution. Casey may do a lousy imitation of Aristotle, but he can slam dunk in his own voice!

Each session I meet a new person and hear a new voice. It keeps me looking forward to my next “Casey.”

## For Faculty: A few Tips for Making the Semester Run Smoothly

Being assigned a Writing Fellow for the semester carries with it the promise that your students will receive lots of individual attention, and improve their writing. But, unfortunately, a few logistical snags can sour some students to the process and can sometimes make the work of faculty and fellows less effective. Fortunately, lots of these “snags” can be prevented by setting up a system with your fellows early in the semester.

Meet with your fellows early in the semester and lay out procedures that will work for you and your students. Fellows expect to comment on two sets of papers in a semester. We recommend

that conferences with the fellows are mandatory and are provided with the written commentary. To eliminate confusion, have your fellows give you a schedule chart of their available times which the students fill in when they turn in their papers. Make sure the fellow indicates where conferences are to be held.

It is important to then leave some time after the conferences before the revised draft is due. Students need time to absorb the comments and thoroughly revise their papers. An average stretch of time between first and revised draft is ten days.

Clearly communi-

cating your expectations and grading criteria to the fellows will improve their ability to guide students. Go over the assignments with your fellows, and be sure to mention pitfalls you foresee in a particular assignment, and even inform them of your “writing pet peeves.” After they have commented on one set of drafts, have a debriefing session with them and let them know where their comments were “on the money” and where they might have been stronger.

There are many good tips for working effectively with fellows. Do you have some of your own? Let me know!

—TD

## Nominations Sought for WAC Outstanding Fellow Awards

Writing Fellows at U of R are a well trained and conscientious group. The comments and assessments from faculty and students are far more positive than negative. But over the years, there have been some exceptional writing fellows who stand out, who do a really superior job helping students and faculty. To recognize excellence in the WAC program, the WAC Committee will award the first ever Outstanding Fellow

Awards.

Joe Essid, Director of the Writing Across the Curriculum program, recently sent a message to all WAC faculty requesting nominations for this award. In it, he described the standards for this award: “Fellows might be nominated for their sensitivity to students' needs, for strong critical-thinking skills, for writing outstanding commentary, for solving a particular vexing

problem, or for going “above and beyond” while working with students.”

The members of the WAC Advisory Committee will select two winners, who will receive gift certificates





## A Writing Tip...

Ever had this experience: You've worked and reworked a piece of writing. You've come up with brilliant ideas you never thought possible, each word, sentence, and paragraph flows one to the next. Next you'll do that one last Spell Check and print a clean copy to turn in or send off. Done? Stopping at this point could leave you with errors that could cause your reader to lose all faith in what you say. Spell

Check is a wonderful tool, but it cannot catch usage errors. How about too, to and two? Their and there and they're? And are you sure you've gotten all that punctuation right?

Try this trick: examine your clean draft word for word by placing the ruler or paper under the first line of text. Slowly draw your pencil across in light underline, forcing your eye to see each word as the tip passes beneath. When you have finished the first line, move on to the next, marking any errors as you go.

All you are really doing is slowing yourself down so as to read what is really on the page and not what your eye and

brain believe is on the page. But as proofreaders know, that is not an easy task, especially when you're reading your piece for the hundredth time!

We've all had those late nights when the deadline fast approaches, and we hear the pillow calling. Take it from me who's won last look at your writing could make a real difference!

For more help with composing, revising and editing, visit Writer's Web at: <http://www.urich.edu/~writing/wweb.html>

—TD

# WRITING across the Curriculum

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