



Logo by Terry Dolson

Richmond Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

Issue 24, Spring 2010

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome back from Spring Break. This issue focuses on end-of-term concerns as well as a feature by a Writing Consultant and a faculty member.

Surveys

Soon we'll be asking all faculty, Writing Consultants, and students to complete online surveys. These data help us conduct our mandatory annual assessment of the program. In the same surveys, we'll also be collecting preferences for the fall from all of you, including those graduating in May.

Please take a few moments to complete the survey when you receive an e-mail notification.

Recruiting for Next Year

We will need your assistance recruiting new consultants for one section of Eng. 383 in the fall and two sections for Spring 2011. Please ask first, second, or third-year students who would like to join us to contact Joe Essid.

New at Writer's Web

This page covers how to craft thesis statements or paragraphs using a technique Joe Essid developed for Eng. 103. Teach writers to reason to a claim, not from one.

More New Online Resources

We will soon release "I Don't Get It!" This new video is part of The *Training for Tough Tutorials* series, and it simulates how Writing Consultants can ask follow-up questions when writers misunderstand a question or task.

Finally, check our blog linked from the writing.richmond.edu main page. In it Lee Carleton reflects on the role radio has played in communication and Joe Essid critiques the idea that only Latin abbreviations, such as e.g., are appropriate usage.

Upcoming Workshops

Sponsored by the School of Continuing Studies.

Preregistration required. Sign up & get location at:

<http://scs.richmond.edu/about/events.html>

Writing from Sources: Pitfalls, Padding, and Perfection!

5:30-6:30 Monday, March 29

Marshalling and employing credible evidence remains one of the hardest aspects of academic writing for those new to it. This workshop will introduce the basic rules for employing sources once a writer has done some research on a topic.

Compositions on Air and Paper

5:30-6:30 Wednesday, April 14

How is listening to a scary story around a campfire different from reading that same story alone in your house? Why do we struggle with writing but we rarely have "speaker's block?" What is the relationship between speech and print?

Reflections on Consulting

by Katy Einerson

My experience as a Writing Consultant has taught me that learning to write well is really a matter of learning to read well, which is why I begin my appointments by asking writers to read a passage from their own paper out loud. In most cases students are surprised to find themselves revising their own work without any initial help from me. In my mind the purpose of the Writing Center is not to fix or even offer feedback on papers, but rather provide a space that encourages writers to consider their own work from a critical distance. An effective writing process requires interplay between the writing and reading mind—a continual back and forth between generative and critical thinking. I often find that college writers get so caught up in finishing papers and filling page requirements that they don't allow themselves enough time to reflect on what they've created.

Appointments at the Writing Center not only encourage students to meet deadlines before their papers are due, they also set aside an invaluable hour dedicated to the revision process. At the end of the day, constructive criticism from Writing Consultants can only take writers so far. All writers still have to make final edits and decisions on their own, and as a Writing Center, teaching students how to evaluate these writing decisions on their own is our main objective.

Feature

Sundance to Enhance Analysis
by Wendi Berry, Eng. 103 Program

Over the past two semesters, I've noted a particular reluctance on my students' part to examine words closely and watched their hesitancy over questioning why authors use

particular words to make certain points. For example, they might take for granted what Paulo Freire means by the “banking’ concept of education” or treat as self-evident Richard Rodriguez’s interpretation of Richard Hoggart’s the “scholarship boy.” If asked what ways do Freire’s and Rodriguez’s definitions of education compare, students might dip back in their chairs or hide behind computer screens.

I was looking for an interesting assignment that would help them focus on words, cogitate about the ways words make meaning, and gain confidence in their ability to synthesize and make comparisons. How could I do this and meet them on the familiar ground of the Web and multi-literacy that so many, but not all, are versed in? I’d taught digital storytelling last semester. How could I weave it all together? I just so happened to be gearing up to attend to Sundance Film Festival in January, where I volunteer for three to five days each year. Just as clearly as the e-ticket appeared on my computer screen, an idea materialized for a multi-literate project.

For my second paper this semester, I would assign an extended definition paper based on abstract concepts examined in the films. Although Sundance, in recent years, has been associated with more commercial films, this year’s promised a return to its roots. With a festival theme of “Rebel,” indications were good that this year’s selections would present abstract ideas in fresh and controversial ways.

My students and I were not disappointed. My first morning in Park City, through Ken Warren’s assistance, I was able to Skype my 9 a.m. class using free software, a headset, and an “eye” that I simply clipped to the top of my laptop. Students could see the jetlagged me and I could see them in Boatwright 320 (the Center for Learning, Teaching, and Technology classroom) as they waited to talk to Ken about part two of the assignment, their digital projects.

I pointed out the premises of some of the films, shared “buzz,” and reviewed abstract concepts, raising questions about layers of meaning. Corporate downsizing, freedom rides, “fracking” (a hydraulic drilling process for gas), no child left behind, and head of household were a few I highlighted. I also brought to their attention films about displacement and unrest in the Middle East including *Bus, Fix Me*, and *The Imperialists Are Still Alive*. I named a number of films about terrorism, including *The Oath*, *Bhutto*, and one feature film that even risked a “comedic” look at four bumbling terrorists: *Four Lions*. The Grand Jury Prize for a documentary this year eventually went to *Restrepo* for its insights on Americans fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

I gave students the link to preview the films and read the descriptions on their own time <http://sundance.bside.com/2010/films>. To generate ideas for the assignment, students could use Sundance’s online catalogue for inspiration, and once they decided on an abstract term, were asked to use the Oxford English Dictionary and other online dictionaries to explore the etymology of the words. Next, they were required to track down three sources through the library databases to explore different uses of the abstract concepts. For the thesis, each student built an argument stating what definitions would be emphasized and why.

For part two of their projects, the digital storytelling genre gives students heightened reasons to assess the rhetorical situation carefully. Knowing that they will tape their voices and post on youtube, they want to persuade and sound informed. Based on experience from last semester, students revise (most without my nagging them) to sharpen their focus and to select the most significant examples. Creating a digital project gives the added benefit of bragging rights to their e-portfolio and, if their work is exemplary, the piece may be nominated for CTLT’s Digital Storytelling Initiative.

I am currently in the midst of grading

part one of the essays, and so far, most students seem to have found an abstract concept that interests them and have attended to the words and built arguments. One student from Paraguay, initially at a loss what to write about, has fervently defined multicultural education. Another, a grade school teacher, examines the effect of standardization in elementary education and considers the play on words *No child ahead*. A third focuses on displacement as a crux of the Middle East conflict. A fourth looks at a particular type of terrorism: street terrorism. I’ve also noted interesting papers on unemployment, “lucky” lottery winners, and Southern hospitality. The main “complaint” I’ve read in cover letters is that they wish they could have written more pages. Now that’s one complaint I wouldn’t mind hearing more often.

Have a photo, announcement, or idea for our next newsletter?

Please contact Joe Essid (jessid@richmond.edu) or Lee Carleton (lcarter@richmond.edu)