

# By Our WTS

Issue 7.2, April 2013



THE IU WRITING TUTORIAL SERVICES ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

## WTSing through grad interviews

*From learning to handle silence to learning major multitasking skills, being a tutor for WTS has more professional applications than one senior thought*



BY ANNA CONNORS

Graphic By Dana Koglin

From the beginning of my career as a writing tutor at WTS—a long three years ago—the benefits of the job seemed abundantly clear to me.

There were the intrinsic value of helping others learn a discipline that I find fundamental to being a successful student and thinker, the ways that I would improve as a writer myself by helping others with their work, and the joys of working with people who were incredibly thoughtful, hilarious and caring.

I knew that being a WTS tutor would look wonderful to employers and would make me a better student and person, but there was one thing that I did not expect it to help me with—graduate school interviews.

Graduate school was always in the cards for me, driven by a mix between my obsession with research and academics as a whole, and, perhaps even more strongly, my crippling fear of attempting to join and contribute to the real world when I feel I know so little about really anything.

Thus, to graduate school I go! As an English and psychology major, I have been able to entertain visions of being an English professor, a poet, a lawyer, a neuroscientist and a therapist.

However, I eventually settled on organizational behavior because it focused on some of the most interesting social and cognitive psychology theories within a fascinating context.

When a job is on the line or

an organization is under fire, the stakes are always incredibly high, which essentially makes people do really strange (and often unethical) things.

After months of frantically applying to 12 graduate schools varying from Indiana University and Purdue to the Wharton School of Business and Harvard, I was overjoyed to receive eight interviews.

Though this news was incredibly exciting, I also felt overwhelmed and uncertain of how I would be able to make it through these interviews. The format for business school interviews for doctoral programs runs on the intense side.

The most typical system is to

### GRAD SCHOOL

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# Armed with spoons ... and a hatchet

*Teaching middle school is challenging enough*

BY MADELINE GREEN

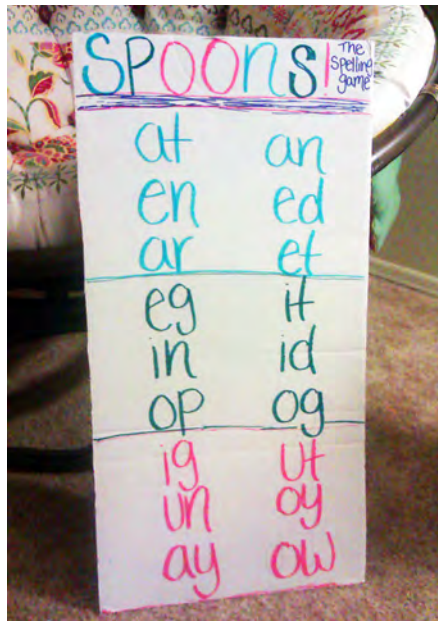
Okay, so you have to tutor. Easy. So you have to tutor seventh-grade boys—no problem. So you have to tutor seventh-grade boys in reading....at a first grade reading level. What!? Challenge accepted!

More or less, that was my initial thought process when I was assigned to help tutor four, seventh-grade boys at a first grade reading level at Batchelor Middle School in Bloomington.

Then I began thinking of all the other aspects of this semester-long tutorial. As a pre-service English teacher, I had always adored reading and had been an avid reader.

So how could I help these boys who not only struggle with reading, but almost fear it? That was the greatest challenge. How could I develop activities and find reading materials for seventh-grade boys? How could I adapt reading materials designed for first graders to appeal to 14-year-olds?

All of this made tutoring apathetic college students seem easy. These boys “hated” reading. In fact, when I asked one of them what the first thing that came to mind was when someone mentioned reading, his response was sleep. Instead of being disappointed by this utter and complete



Green created her own SPOONS board in order to make learning how to read fun for her students.

Photo by Dana Koglin

lack of enthusiasm, I decided to use this as a direction. So, it's excitement they want!

Thus, I revamped the game SPOONS into my reading game, SPOONS. I created a game that allowed the boys to form (and, therefore read!) words in a competitive format.

So, I wrote a total of 18 word endings such as “AT,” “UN” and “OY” on a piece of cardboard. Then, I wrote letters such as “S,”

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# Volunteering in a Denmark school

BY INGRID FEUSTEL

When I chose to study abroad, I knew I wanted to do some form of volunteer service. Lucky for me, since coming to Denmark I've had the opportunity to work in English classrooms at a school in Copenhagen.

The experience has not only allowed me to apply my tutoring experience and love of English to a new setting, but it has also helped me to engage as fully as possible with the culture of my host country.

The past few months I've been going to the private school, Christianhavn's Døtterskole, every Friday to help in various English classes.

In Denmark private schools are still funded mostly by the government and follow nation-wide curriculum standards, but they have more freedom to spend tuition money as they please.

Most private schools are founded by parents in the community. Christianhavn's Døtterskole started out as a girls' school in 1799, where they could learn about Danish culture, mythology, trades and manners. It has since expanded to a liberal academic school and includes boys and girls, ages 4 to 14.

I have a class of fourth-graders, a class of fifth-graders, and a class of seventh-graders. I've never worked in a classroom atmosphere

**DENMARK**  
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## GRAD SCHOOL

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have an initial interview (on Skype or the phone) with two or more faculty members, then fly to the campus and have about two days of back-to-back meetings, presentations and further interviews.

I averaged anywhere between eight and 15 mini-interviews in any given day of any program. Even for a somewhat extroverted person like me, this situation is—for lack of a better term—a nightmare.

What do you talk to these people about for 16 hours a day? How do you make small talk? How do you ask them difficult questions about their programs without offending them?

These questions and many more would flood through my mind for days leading up to my interviews, and hilariously enough, despite my extensive preparation and general enthusiasm for these programs, I think it was my WTS training that got me the surprisingly high number of offers I received.

As a tutor, every day we are faced with someone we have often never met before, talking about

something this other person is incredibly invested in. And ultimately we are trying to be truthful and honest without appearing rude or unprofessional.

I found this also to be true of my interviews. But what I found after sitting down with person after person was that I was actually prepared for this. Because of tutoring, I knew how to have a conversation with someone about next to anything.

I could be friendly without being unprofessional, confident without being arrogant, and excited without overwhelming the other person or making him or her feel uncomfortable.

I found myself being able to ask questions that were challenging or difficult in a way that was non-threatening to the other person.

In the minutes before meeting with a professor, I could glance over one of his or her articles and get the gist of his or her research, which allowed me to ask informed and relevant questions that appeared much more extensively researched.

My thoughts were also organized, and like any good tutor, I could navigate and balance multiple

goals for our meeting at once without getting overwhelmed.

I was unafraid of moments of silence between us when I needed a minute to answer a question or the professor took time to respond.

And finally (and perhaps most important) I felt it wasn't my job to know the answer to every question about an article or a particular subject because I had already come to terms with that impossibility through tutoring.

All in all, though the experience of meeting with stranger after stranger for days on end was overwhelming, I found that I was much more prepared for this stage of my life than I had expected.

And though I realized that tutoring had been one of the most beneficial experiences of my college career, I see now that it did more than make me a confident writer, it made me a confident scholar, professional and individual.

In a world where I will constantly be asked (and ask others) for professional advice on articles, research and presentations, I now know that I am well trained in those conversations, and moreover, will love having them.

***By Our WTS* is produced for the peer tutor alumni of  
Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University's writing center.**

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# Do WTS tutors take their own advice?

*One tutor goes behind the lines to discover tutor strategies*

BY DECKER CAVOSIE

"I really wish you had brought in your assignment sooner, not the day before it's due."

It's a phrase every WTS tutor has undoubtedly uttered some version of multiple times throughout his or her WTS career. And most of us have probably seen at least one assignment merely hours before its deadline.

Of course we want what's best for our tutees, so the more time they have to make the adjustments discussed during their tutoring sessions, the better their assignments will likely be and the more they will learn from the experience. This is something tutors emphasize in most tutorials.

But do WTS tutors follow their own advice? I surveyed the undergraduate tutors regarding their paper-writing habits to see if we really are the perfect paper-writing angels many of our students probably envision us to be.

We're actually doing pretty well. Seventy percent of tutors polled prefer to start working on papers ranging from five to seven pages in length at least two days before the deadline. A slim majority, 60 percent, also claims to frequently utilize outlines for writing assignments, which is a common suggestion given to struggling tutees. Overall, our professors, tutees

## When do tutors write their papers?



Graphic By Decker Cavosie

and AIs would probably be proud of our academic writing habits.

However, 70 percent of tutors do claim to work better under pressure, but "pressure as in within the week or so but not the day before kind of pressure," one tutor said. Assuming our scores also reflect this result, we appear to be effective time managers!

At the same time, we lack in other areas of the paper writing process. Only 20 percent of undergraduate tutors frequently schedule WTS appointments for themselves. As tutor trainees, we all had to be tutored by current WTS tutors, so despite our all being above average writers, we still know the benefit of outside opinions and perspectives. But

## ADVICE

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# Taking my own writing advice

BY FRANK TRECHSEL

As a writing tutor, I have seen essays spanning the spectrum on length and style, from one-paragraph essays to thirty-page scientific research papers.

However, my own work never even came close to this type of diversity. Throughout my college career, my average has been two-to-eight-page analytical papers for my many comparative literature classes.

So naturally, when I made the decision to write an honors thesis my senior year, I was stepping into uncharted territory.

The fall semester went swimmingly—establishing my primary sources, collecting scholarly works, and conducting research so that when the spring semester rolled around and it was time to begin the actual writing process, my confidence was high.

That is until I actually tackled the task of constructing a forty-page document that encompassed three primary texts and explored a literary genre over time.

Luckily for me, I was well versed in many types of pre-writing through my years at WTS. This allowed me come up with a brief outline of ideas and put them in a logical order from start to finish.

I ran into many issues along the way as any writer does when examining such a wealth of material.

## THESIS

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## DENMARK

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before, but I have been a summer counselor for kids in this age group. In some ways my teaching experience has felt more like working at camp than working at WTS.

If the kids get fidgety, they can take a five-minute break in the yard. In between every class they open the windows for fresh air—it's January, and it's cold.

The teachers are never stressed about not finishing everything they had planned for a session. The belief is that the kids will do what they can and work best when they have lots of opportunities to be active and collaborative.

There is another unusual thing about the Danish classroom. Throughout Scandinavia, school systems lack a classroom hierarchy.

In the classroom, this means that the teachers and students are on equal ground.

They tease each other and make sarcastic comments. They rough-house on the way to recess. The kids are free to get up and walk around the room whenever they need something. While I'm used to working with peers, this dynamic has been interesting for me to observe and a little hard for me to adjust to.

The most difficult thing about this experience has been learning how to communicate in creative ways across a language barrier.

By the time they are adults, all of my students will be fluent in English, Danish, and probably German or Swedish. I, on the other hand, speak no Danish and even have trouble parroting words back

to people and pronouncing the name of the street I'm living on.

Learning to be comfortable with Danish chatter in the classroom and becoming proficient at charades has been a big help, and I hope to keep improving these skills.

While my experience at Christianhavn's Døtterskole has been different from my other volunteering jobs, in the respect that these kids don't actually need my help, I can still enhance their classroom atmosphere by being motivational, enthusiastic and showing that sometimes even native English speakers don't know how to spell every English word.

These are some of the things that make peer tutors so valuable, and while I really miss my WTS job right now, I feel lucky to have the opportunity to exercise my WTS skills overseas.

## ADVICE

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most of us fail to take advantage of the resource with which we are already so familiar. Maybe we take our assignments so seriously, we feel vulnerable when showing our work to others.

Or perhaps we're all overachievers, participating in so many activities we don't have time for WTS tutorials. As successful students, perhaps we're allowed to break some of our own rules. Regardless of whether we utilize WTS or not, we still follow our own advice by starting assignments well in advance of the due dates. No procrastination in the WTS department.

## SUPPORT WTS!

**Have you ever wished you could do more for Writing Tutorial Services even after leaving IU?**

Writing Tutorial Services is an affinity group, just like a greek house or Little 500 team. As tutors, we come together with a common interest and shared pride in our school. (After all, we help our fellow students succeed!)

You can now directly support WTS with a contribution to the IU Foundation. Check out the link on the WTS homepage: [www.indiana.edu/~wts](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts)

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

## THESIS

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How can I include this section of my research without going off topic? What even is my main topic? After the occasional brief moment of panic, I was always able to rely on my WTS experiences to get me out of a jam.

I could always ask myself what I would do during a tutorial if a student came in concerned about this very issue. How would I tutor myself? Upon asking these questions, I was always presented with the answer.

During the pre-writing stages of my writing process, I frequently had issues figuring out in what order I wanted to present my material.

Looking back on the many tutorial sessions I have done, organization has always been a big concern for tutees.

I was always able to assist them with their organizational issues, so

maybe it was time to practice what I preached and put into practice the tips that I always told my tutees. It worked.

Then I thought to myself, if my pre-writing advice worked so well, maybe I had better put into practice the advice I give tutees on the drafting phase as well.

Examining what I was telling my tutees most often over the course of a couple of weeks, I found that topic sentences and transitions were almost always a part of my spiel even when students came in with work that already contained good topic sentences and/or transitions.

I found that these concepts could make or break a paper, and that for my honors thesis, it was imperative that I take my own advice and put heavy focus on them.

Using the topic sentence to not only introduce the topic of the paragraph but also to transition from the previous one, and, most importantly, explain the topic's

relevance to the overarching theme of the paper, had been my advice to students from day one.

So I began to include this advice in my mental checklist throughout the writing process.

Consequently, the praise I received most often from my advisors was on my organization and transitions, which allowed my first and second drafts to flow much more efficiently than if I had not taken my own WTS advice.

Until writing my honors thesis, I had never had an issue with writing, and therefore, never needed to think back upon my tutoring experience.

However, with such a demanding and complicated project ahead of me, I hit pitfalls that I had never encountered before. Luckily, I was prepared for this eventuality because of my WTS experiences.

They allowed me to tutor myself and reflect on my techniques in order to create a more effective final product.

## SPOONS

from page 2

”B” and ”J” on spoons, and decorated the board as colorfully as I thought any 14-year-old boy could stand.

The boys had to draw one of the spoons from a cup, and then place it next to one of the word endings on the board in order to make a word. The first person to make a word got the most points.

Let me tell you, the last word they would have used to describe my version of SPOONS was *sleep*. They *loved* the game. Even the

shyest boy of the group was getting super into it. I was one proud tutor!

Over the course of the semester, this once daunting assignment evolved into my most rewarding tutoring experience. Of course, I wasn't a miracle worker. These boys didn't walk away ready to read chapter books. But as Jo Ann would say, "you at least helped them, and their (papers) will be better than they were before the tutorial."

And this fact couldn't have become more apparent than when I asked the boys what entertainment genres they liked. One boy liked "stuff about the wilderness and

hunting."

Immediately, I thought of one of my favorite books, *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen, and began enthusiastically explaining the synopsis. When I was finished, another boy looked right at me, and asked, "Could you come in and read it to us?"

After taking a moment to collect myself, I practically shouted "Absolutely!" And now I come in and read to them for an hour every Friday, as they read along.

And even though they may not be reading it themselves, the only thing they complain about is when we have to stop reading.

# Seniors leaving the world of WTS

*This spring's seniors are moving on to jobs, grad school and new adventures*



## Anna Connors

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East Lansing, Michigan

I am graduating from Indiana University with a Bachelor of Arts in English literature and psychology.

After spending the vast majority of my life living in Bloomington, Indiana, I am excited to start the next leg of my journey at Michigan State University (in East Lansing, Michigan) where I will be getting a doctorate in management with a concentration in organizational behavior.

My research interests lie in behavioral ethics, the attribution of justice and responsibility in managerial and group settings and how affect and emotions come into play in the workplace.

I would ultimately like to rid the world of bad bosses. I have immensely enjoyed my three years of being a WTS tutor and a wrangler.

The friendships I've made and tutoring experiences I've had have been incredibly transformative, and I will sincerely miss all of my coworkers and the wonderfully entertaining conversations had in the bull pen!

I've really enjoyed working at WTS because it's taught me so much and helped to develop my skills in listening and speaking.

Listening is an underrated skill, but it's the most important one for verbal communication.

The second skill is talking to people from diverse backgrounds. That diversity refers to both country of origin and academic field.

I've learned crazy things from tutees that I would never come across in the real world.

My favorite example is the Pakistani who succinctly explained how the Pakistani irrigation system contributed to the severity of the flood-induced devastation in Pakistan.

Another example comes from my tutoring today: I learned about

structural unemployment of college graduates in South Korea. Listening and openmindedness are two of the best skills that I learned at WTS, though they are definitely not the only skills.

With my WTS-enhanced skill set, I have a couple of different options for my future. I'm currently applying to jobs, but I'm still considering the Foreign Service. I might also get a job in healthcare software in Wisconsin.

I know that my future job will probably not be as fantastic as WTS has been. I have loved my WTS coworkers and the funny and sometimes surprising conversations that I've had at WTS.

I'd like to thank all of you for contributing to a great work environment.



## Caroline Luu

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### Lauren Bridges

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After graduation I will be moving to Spain to begin a master's degree in European studies at the University of Deusto in Bilbao, studying European integration—and hopefully learning to *salsa*!

While in Spain, I'll be interested in the current economic situation and how it affects individual citizens. I'll spend the following semester at Palacky University in Czech Republic, studying the capitalist transition process evolving in Eastern Europe.

Working at WTS has been one of the most rewarding experiences during my time at IU. It has strengthened my knowledge and passion for the writing process and for teaching others.

I love challenging others to strengthen their ideas and allowing their perspectives to challenge mine as well.

Working with international students especially has improved my cross-cultural communication skills and taught me to be more understanding of cultural differences.

I have to thank WTS, and especially Jo Ann, for giving me such a wonderful place to work!



### Aidan Crane

I have no non-university email address at this time.

I don't know where I'll be living in six months, let alone what will constitute a "permanent" residence. Possibilities include Washington and Colorado; I will fight to the death to escape Indiana after twenty-two years in purgatory.

I have no immediate or long-term plans for the future. After spending the majority of my life locked into the educational system and always knowing exactly what awaited me, I'm anxious to no longer have the prospect of another semester hanging over my head.

To continue plotting one's life in meticulous detail when the opportunity to escape has finally arrived strikes me as perverse.

Working at WTS has been enjoyable at times, but I'm leaving convinced that we function as a bandaid for a gaping wound in the American educational system. Writing, even academic writing, is an art that requires a loving attention that cannot be learned by rote

or coerced with the sharp edge of a grading curve. As long as the university continues to operate as a factory for degrees rather than a home for self-directed exploration, peer tutoring will be mechanistic rather than holistic, through no fault of our own.

## Interact with WTS!



WTS Alumni



@IUB\_WTS\_Help



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**Neil Klodzen**

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This next year I plan on participating in a graduate program here at IU called Transition to Teaching. It's a one-year program that allows students with their bachelor's degrees to obtain a teaching license here in Indiana.

After I complete this program, I hope to teach high school English. In time, I hope to possibly teach English in China, as I love Chinese

students, Chinese culture and food!

WTS has helped immensely in cultivating the passions that lie behind all of these plans. Through tutoring, I have learned so much about teaching. I've seen how different people learn in different ways, and I've learned to adapt to each person's learning style.

I have also worked with a lot of international students, many of whom are Chinese. This has only grown my love for Asian culture. It's staggering how many of my tutorials have led to conversations about where students are from and what they miss about their homes.

The world seems smaller at WTS because we get to work with such a diverse group of students, all of whom are seeking a better understanding of the great gift that is writing. Overall, WTS is a terrific place to work, and I'm definitely going to miss it.

**Frank Trechsel**

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Nashville or Los Angeles



It is looking like either next year or the following year I will be entering law school to study entertainment law.

This field excites me because

it combines the critical thinking and analytical skills I have gained from my undergraduate degrees in Comparative Literature and Spanish with my love of music, which I broadened with my music minor.

I know that the strong writing background I have gained from my WTS experiences as well as my major will be an invaluable asset in this field. Writing and communication skills are valuable in any area but especially in the law when the meaning or interpretation of a single word can make all the difference.

My WTS experiences have helped me build these skills to succeed, and I am eternally grateful for the experience and opportunity.

**Lauren Conkling**

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Newburgh, IN (hometown)



I'm still in the job searching process, so my future plans have not quite coalesced yet. My area of interest, however, is the publishing industry, particularly in the region of editing. I'm looking to find a job with a publishing company or magazine, though I'm keeping my options open!

As I search for jobs, I am recognizing the benefits of having been a tutor for WTS. This role has provided me with some excellent experience in the areas of communication, time management and writing skills.

Specifically, being a tutor for WTS has helped me learn how to prioritize the issues that ought to be addressed in a tutorial and cover as many of them as possible in the limited time available.

Likewise, as in any other service job, tutoring requires us to adapt in our interactions with tutees, since what works for one person may not for the next.

# Our WTS Alumni Directory

*Updated April 26, 2013*

Tutors listed by training year

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Over the years, we've lost contact with many of our friends from WTS as jobs have changed and moves have been made. If you know of a former tutor who's fallen out of touch, please forward this newsletter and have the alum email us at [byourwts@indiana.edu](mailto:byourwts@indiana.edu).

Thanks!

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