

By Our WTS

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THE IU WRITING TUTORIAL SERVICES ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

Saying goodbye to a graduate

BY HANNAH MURRAY

Abby Werner has been a member of WTS for the past year, training in the spring of 2015 and tutoring the following fall. Before Abby's graduation in December of this year, I got the chance to ask her about her experience as a WTS tutor.

During our discussion, Abby reminisced on her favorite memory: an early tutorial in the spring when Jo Ann observed her. "It was a brainstorming session," Abby says, "and the girl had a really big 'aha' moment." For Abby it was "really exciting" getting "to see the results that early on."

Other elements of WTS that Abby will miss include the working group meetings, enlivened by discussion and pizza, and the camaraderie between grad and undergrad students. "When we have no-shows or time between tutorials there's a lot of chat going on," Abby recalls fondly. For Abby, these experiences have helped build a sense of community.

As for Abby's next adventure post-WTS, she has secured a position at Oracle Corporation in the Greater Boston Area as a Sales and Business Development Representative. "Sales consulting involves being able to communicate and connect with a customer. Essentially, you must open your ears to what they need, evaluate their situation and then sell them a solution catered to that situation" Abby says. This ability to connect through listening, evaluating, and offering a solution, be it through advice or a product, is something she credits WTS for helping her develop between tutees.

As Abby progressed through the lengthy interview process, she reflected on how the communicative training she's had at WTS helped prepare her for the challenges of interviewing. "The scariest part of an interview is when the interviewer doesn't look like they understand what you are saying," Abby says. When they are stony faced, it's hard to know when to stop talking. Similarly, the dynamic of a tutorial runs more smoothly when students are more responsive.

Regardless of what endeavors Abby pursues in the future, she thanks WTS for providing her the skills to communicate with those around her, and looks forward to using these skills when she begins her career in February.



When we disagree with tutees

BY AUSTIN HOCHSTETLER

As writing tutors, we are often asked to tutor students whose philosophical and political ideas differ from our own.

I recently encountered this in one of my own tutorials when a tutee brought in a paper that asked him to analyze the movie *Dear White People* by drawing upon class sources such as bell hooks' theory on the exotification of *People of Color* in film. In his paper, the tutee claimed that the movie reversed this exotification and in turn exotified white people. As I read his paper, I was overly distracted by what he was saying in his analysis because I personally disagreed with his argument and found it to be quite racist. As a peer tutor, I know that I have to effectively tutor his writing to develop

his skills and not attack his argument simply because I personally disagree with it. Additionally, as writing tutors we are there to help develop a tutee's writing skills and not to cast personal judgment or to attack the paper because of our own political beliefs.

Since I was overly distracted by what he was saying, rather than how he was saying it, I made a point to write out my thoughts as I was reading so that I could ground myself in the writing techniques being used and not so much the content that the techniques produced. This was especially difficult because the two are often intimately intertwined. However, for the parts of the argument that I did not agree with I tried to pose interrogative questions that exposed the holes

and gaps of his argument. For example, he argued that a scene in the film where a Black woman had sex with a white man exotified this white man because she later chose to sleep with a black man. To counter this, I asked him, "Couldn't this be representing a Black woman who has agency in and gains power from her sexuality?" The tutee struggled to answer my questions and I suggested that he reexamine his argument so that he can better address questions like the ones that I was posing to him.

Through this experience, I learned how to better detach my emotions in tutorials. Additionally, I learned how to ask questions that don't attack the tutee's character, but to ask questions that challenge the tutee to critically examine her or his own writing.

Interact with WTS!



WTS Alumni



@IUB_WTS_Help



byourwts@indiana.edu

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

WTS Executive Staff

Jo Ann Vogt, WTS Director
Anita Shields, WTS Site Manager

By Our WTS Staff

Managing editor and designer
Nicole Krasean

Writers and researchers
Hannah Murray
Austin Hochstetler
Claire Mullaney
Michelle Myers
Sarah Friedline
Anne Riley

Please read, think and write back to us. Any comments on this issue or updates you wish to be included in upcoming issues may be directed to:
byourwts@indiana.edu

An Essay is Like...

Analogies to use while tutoring

BY CLAIRE MULLANEY

When in the middle of a tutorial, I often find that simply explaining the job of an essay – that it is supposed to prove an argument, that each paragraph needs to argue a digestible, relevant aspect of that argument – does not fully convey how to construct a well-designed piece of writing. In high school, and occasionally in college, my instructors would present us with concrete (and quirky) analogies to help us wrap our minds around what a clear, solid essay should accomplish. During almost every tutorial, I scramble to come up with these analogies, and every tutorial I come up empty. For all those moments where the perfect comparison eludes us, I discuss four different analogies that I hope will aid students of a variety of backgrounds and majors.

...A Hershey's chocolate bar. Like a chocolate bar, an essay is made up of individual parts that mimic the whole; each paragraph makes a contestable statement and proves a point, just as the essay makes an overarching claim and proves a larger argument. This comparison is especially good for tutees that have trouble zeroing in on one idea – just as you cannot eat a whole Hershey's chocolate bar at once, neither can you try to discuss all the aspects of an essay in one paragraph or section of a paper.

...A logic or geometry proof. This analogy is ideal for a tutee that is studying math or science. By comparing their writing to a proof, you can frame their essay as an orderly and logical construction, perhaps removing the tutee's focus from the more subjective parts of writing. Just as the steps of a proof must be linked to each other, so must each statement and piece of evidence in an essay logically follow each other; if any are missing, the theorem (thesis) is not proven (comparing the essay to climbing a set of steps also highlights these same aspects of essay writing).

...Fabric and thread. With pieces of fabric as paragraphs and a needle and thread as the thesis, this analogy is ideal for the tutee whose essay starts in one place and, a few meandering paragraphs later, ends in another. Emphasizing the idea that their thesis needs to be the thread that holds their entire essay together will help keep them focused on their argument.

When I am having trouble with my writing, I sometimes pull out one (or all) of these comparisons to keep myself on track. I hope that they will be just as helpful for tutees, and maybe even some tutors.

Happy tutoring!

Improving Through Writing Tutorial Services

Peer tutors spend hours of training and then tutoring searching for success stories - here's the story of one:

BY MICHELLE MYERS

The overall goal of WTS is to aid both graduate and undergraduate students at Indiana University in attaining better writing abilities through one-on-one consultations with tutors.

Amanda Mankovich, a senior majoring in criminal justice, French, and psychology, has utilized WTS for her papers since her freshman year at IU. She began using WTS services due to a recommendation from her Resident Assistant. Throughout her many one-on-one tutorials, Amanda feels that she has improved significantly. "WTS taught me how to recognize and eliminate passive voice in both English and French writing," she said.

In her sophomore year, Amanda discovered WTS foreign language tutors. With her French major, she had many papers in French that had passive voice problems similar to her papers written in English. However, very few tutors for foreign languages, even those that are paid, will aid a student writing in a foreign language other than with simple grammar issues. With WTS foreign language tutors, she was able to receive the same caliber of in-depth tutoring, even in another language. She said, "Cody has been invaluable in helping me express myself in French." Cody, a graduate foreign language tutor, has been tutoring Amanda for over a year on her French papers.

"WTS tutors are well versed in all aspects of writing. They are always patient and have enhanced my writing ability. I am so glad that I found their services," Amanda said.

Throughout her time attending WTS tutorials, Amanda has been able to improve her writing abilities overall and in two languages.

Summary vs. Analysis: Questions to Ask

BY SARAH FRIEDLINE

Asking questions is a huge part of tutoring at WTS, especially when it comes to W131 papers. Two papers typically written in the W131 course are summary papers and analysis papers. These are some of the questions I typically ask to get students to figure out the difference between the two types.

Summary

Summaries are deceptively simple. It seems like they should be hardly any work at all; after all, you're just summarizing someone else's thinking—no original thought required! In practice, though, summaries are devilishly clever at highlighting all the things students don't understand about the article. The questions I ask about summaries try to address those gaps in understanding. "What's the main point of this paragraph/section?" This question averts a sentence-by-sentence rehashing of the article under consideration and encourages the student to think about larger chunks, about argument rather than examples. "If you had to summarize this article in one sentence, what would you say?" If I were to ask for the "thesis statement" or "main argument" of the article, nine out of ten students would freeze in sheer terror. However, students' instincts are often correct.

Analysis

Most students who bring in analysis papers begin the tutorial with an apology: "I'm not very good at this" or "I have no clue what's going on in W131." My questions about analytical papers try to get away from the scary idea of "doing analysis" and into the mechanics of what students actually need to do when analyzing a text.

"What point are you trying to make with this detail?" These details often take the form of beautiful, moving quotes, but there is no explanation of why this quote landed in this particular paragraph and not a paragraph two pages away. This question encourages students to tie their details into their argument.

"What detail from the text supports this point?" This question is the reverse of the preceding one. I ask it when a student has an interesting, provocative, and non-obvious claim about a text (as encouraged in W131), but does not provide any textual evidence to support that claim.

Working at the ASCs and Wells: A Comparison

BY ANNE RILEY

All peer tutors work in at least one of the three Academic Support Centers on Sunday–Thursday nights, located in Briscoe, Teter, and Forest – one in each of IU’s three residence hall neighborhoods. As you might expect, tutoring in the Academic Support Centers is pretty different from tutoring at Wells.

As a “satellite” location, not as many students visit the ASCs as do Wells, so the amount of students that visit is manageable by just one or two tutors. Additionally, while at Wells students are required to sign up for 50 minute-long appointments ahead of time, the ASCs offer walk-in appointments that can be either 25 minutes or 50 minutes in length. Most students seeking help at the ASCs elect to sign up for a 25-minute hour appointment rather than the full 50 minutes.

The nature of the shorter appointments poses some unique challenges for the WTS peer tutors. Peer tutors have half the time to help students with papers that are just as long as in a typical 50-minute appointment. Because of the time constraint, tutors have learned to efficiently use the tutorial to best address the students’ concerns and needs in half the time. Doing so is not to imply that we speed through tutorials; rather, tutors have become experts in identifying and addressing the highest needs of the assignment, and in doing so, effectively and efficiently communicating with the student in a way that helps him or her learn how to improve.

Due to the nature of the WTS ASC locations catering to a “walk-in” audience, there is a tendency for more students to visit the ASCs that may be short on time, as opposed to the nature of the “by appointment only” system in Wells, which generally caters more to students that plan in advance and schedule appointments ahead of time. This also poses a unique challenge to ASC tutors, as it can be more difficult to help students whose assignments may be due in as soon as a few hours, especially if the student is particularly struggling with the assignment. Working often in the ASCs has allowed peer tutors to develop a knack for working with stressed students whose deadlines may have approached more quickly than expected. Although, as would be the case with tutorials in any location, we always encourage tutees to seek help early and often.

Our WTS Alumni Directory

Updated Jan. 7, 2016

Tutors listed by training year

1992-1996

Ann Francis Jenson
Nashville, IN
mjenson@indiana.edu

Jen DeRosa

Doug Anderson
Chicago, IL

Helen (Grant) Glaze

Craig Kuehnert

Deb Schussler
Havertown, PA

Angela (Zahn) Tharp
Bloomington, IN
anzahn@indiana.edu

Joanna Walters

1996

Sarah (Gliemmo) Nichols
Sacramento, CA
curioussjg@yahoo.com

Marcia Ireland
Northbrook, IL

Tracy (Jensen) May
Chicago, IL

Tricia Kenfield
Greenfield, IN

Lisa McBride

Elisa (Overholtzer) Maxwell
Fresno, CA

Jonathan Purvis
Bloomington, IN
jpurvis@indiana.edu

Grace Waitman
Evansville, IN

Kevin Wilson
Evansville, IN

1997

Jeremy Davies
New York, NY

Christy Doherty
Ciudad Juarez, Mexico
siob.doherty@gmail.com

Alexander Kahn
Gettysburg, PA
alexander_kahn@hotmail.com

Amy Parker

James Spicer
St. Louis, MO

Bill Watson
Indianapolis, IN
colts_fan76@hotmail.com

Leeanna Werner
Indianapolis, IN

1998

Jamie Aprile
Los Angeles, CA
jamieaprile@yahoo.com

Erin (Elkins) Radcliff
Albuquerque, NM
eradclif@unm.edu

Cara Frison
Dunlap, IL

Mindy Ho
Carmel, IN

Abby (Hunt) Ghering
Cincinnati, OH
abbyandrob@sbcglobal.net

Gayle Niemeyer

Claire Ross

Jamie Snyder

Devin Thomas
Westport, CT

Ebony Utley
Long Beach, CA
utley@hotmail.com

Miranda Wagoner
Chicago, IL

1999

Jennifer (Beyer) Wilkey
Cincinnati, OH
jenniferwilkey@yahoo.com

Sarah Helmig
Tennyson, IN

Dana (Miller) Malkus
St. Lous, MO
danamill@sbcglobal.net

Ben Motz
Bloomington, IN
bmotz@indiana.edu

Kelly Newton
Naperville, IL

Christine Pacold
Elmhurst, IL

Robin Schaber
Jasper, IN

Jin Han
San Jose, CA

Erica Jeffrey
San Francisco, CA

Jenica Schultz
Columbia City, IN

2000

Andrew Cook
Louisville, KY

Heather Danielewicz
Chicago, IL

Alison Lefkovitz
Chicago, IL
alefkovi@uchicago.edu

Kelly (McShane) Colby
Indianapolis, IN
kelly@colbyequipment.com

Allison Mikkalo
Minneapolis, MN
acmikkal@hotmail.com

Heather (Murphy) Coddington
South Hero, VT
solace_us@yahoo.com

Vanessa Vreeland
Chicago, IL

2001

Megan Anderson
Indianapolis, IN

Katie (Beyer) Zarich
Indianapolis, IN
katiezarich@yahoo.com

Namrata Gandhi
Iselin, NJ

Geoff McGregor
Bloomington, IN
gmcgrego@indiana.edu

Adam Paré
Rochester, NY

Miriam Pullman
Alpharetta, GA

Kyle Springman
Rochester, MN
kspringman@gmail.com

Garth Stahl
Adelaide, South Australia
garth_stahl@hotmail.com

Bill Trovinger
Minneapolis, MN
william.trovinger@gmail.com

Morgan Wescliff
Indianapolis, IN

Kyle (Wittstein) Pullman
Helsinki, Finland

2002

Jennifer Bartloff
Medford, Oregon

Michael Blumenthal
Northbrook, IL

Jae Chung
Indianapolis, IN
jaepcv@gmail.com

Laura Clapper
Bloomington, IN
lclapper@indiana.edu

Melissa House

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.

Thanks!

Lisa Inks
Brooklyn, NY
lisa.inks@gmail.com

Lindsay Lambert
Indianapolis, IN

Lisa Maltz
Gross Pointe, MI

Hayley Piper
Hawi, Hawaii

Alexis Pool
Evanston, IL

Michael Quilligan
Silver Spring, MD
mquillig@yahoo.com

Chris (Sego) Caldwell
Indianapolis, IN
csegocaldwell@gmail.com

Matt Stevons
Spencer, IN

Theresa Yaecker
Chicago, IL
tyaecker@gmail.com

Jon Zarich
Indianapolis, IN

Jen (Woodall) Johnston
Los Angeles, CA
jenjohnston@mac.com

2003

Marc Baumgardt
Arlington, VA

Andrew Bean
Indianapolis, IN

Rebecca Bloch
Las Vegas, NV

Ashley Bouque

Caleb Cole
Boston, MA
caleb@calebcolephoto.com

Michelle Creech
Louisville, KY
mncreech@gmail

Nicholas Durcholz
Ferdinand, IN

Danielle Penny
Northridge, CA

Emily Ragsdale
Chicago, IL
ecragdale@gmail.com

Stephen Rahko
Bloomington, IN
srahko@indiana.edu

Emily Sekine
Brooklyn, NY
elsekine@gmail.com

2004

Adrienne Carroll
Bloomington, IN
adrienne.carroll@gmail.com

Martha Hunt
Arlington, VA
marthunt@gmail.com

Greg Ingram
Bloomington, IN
ringram@gpstrategies.com

Peggy Larkin
Indianapolis, IN
mslarkin@gmail.com

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

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Michael-Lyn McBride
Lompoc, CA
micha224@yahoo.com

Cameron Oehler
Indianapolis, IN
coehler@gmail.com

Erin Romine

Kehla West
Washington, D.C.
kehlawest@gmail.com

2005

Lauren Belles
Arlington, VA
laurenbelles@gmail.com

Gamble Kersey
Mary Esther, FL

Erin McGuan
Omaha, NE
erinmcguan@creighton.edu

Jo Minnich
Fort Wayne, IN
jo.minnich@gmail.com

Joe Roy
Chicago, IL

2006

Heather Coffman
Avon, IN
hlcoffman@avon-schools.org

Jason Covert
Newburgh, IN

Carole Goetz

Diane Gumina

Brandon Haffner
Greensboro, NC
orangeroark@yahoo.com

Jonathan Hill
jonathan.caleb.hill@gmail.com

Lindsey Kee
Phoenix, AZ
lindseykee@gmail.com

Rowenna Miller

Josh Robinson
Chicago, IL
jolrobin@gmail.com

Sam Ross
New York, NY
samcharlesross@gmail.com

Cecilia Wolford
Chicago, IL
cecilia.wolford@gmail.com

Emma Young
Bloomington, IN
eayoung@indiana.edu

2007

Brian Clark

Chris Frisz
Boston, MA
chris.frisz@gmail.com

Rebecca Gabriel

Maggie Grimason

Swathi Hemachandra
Pittsburgh, PA
shemacha@indiana.edu

Lisa Huang

Robyn Klingerman

Sarah-Anne Lanman
Bloomington, IN
slanman@indiana.edu

Caitlin Lloyd

Stefania Marghitu

Caroline McIver

Kelsey Nash
Chicago, IL
kelsey.t.nash@gmail.com

Jennifer Thompson

Ted Wells

2008

Jane Barr
Waltham, MA
janebarr28@gmail.com

Sri Chatterjee
Chicago, IL
sc7@indiana.edu

Nicole Horvath
Sevilla, Spain
nhorvath@indiana.edu

Elana Kelber
New York, NY
ekelber@deloitte.com

Shabrelle Pollock
Pittsburgh, PA
shabrelle.pollock@gmail.com

Chelsea Sipes
Anderson, IN
cvsipes@indiana.edu

Callie Taylor
New York, NY
callinda.taylor@gmail.com

Caitlin Zittkowski
Cleveland, OH
czittkow@gmail.com

2009

Doug Foster
Bloomington, IN
docfoste@indiana.edu

Melissa Georgiou
Chicago, IL

Claire Kruschke
Chicago, IL
claire.a.kruschke@gmail.com

Maryn Liles
New York, NY
marynstacyliles@gmail.com

Amanda Mast
Keystone, CO
amandacmast@gmail.com

Ben Smith
Bloomington, IN
csa@strangershillorganics.com

2010

Kelsey Adams
Tampa, FL
kadams318@gmail.com

Stephanie Barton
Federal Way, WA
stephabart@gmail.com

Nancy Coner
Newark, NJ
nconer@gmail.com

Leigh Hardy
West Lafayette, IN
lhardy@purdue.edu

Emily McGowan
Columbus, OH
ennaree@me.com

Alexandra Moxley
Chicago, IL
a-moxley@hotmail.com

Rachel Saltsgaver
Greenwood, IN
rachel.saltsgaver@gmail.com

Kristina Vragovic
Chicago, IL
k.vragovic@gmail.com

Liv Wafler
Bloomington, IN
owafler@indiana.edu

Rebekah Sims
West Lafayette, IN
rebekah.e.sims@gmail.com

Caroline Luu
Carmel, IN
carolinehluu@gmail.com

2011

Laura Sibley
Cleveland, OH
lauraesibley@yahoo.com

Anna Connors
East Lansing, Michigan
connors.anna@gmail.com

Neil Klodzen
Bloomington, IN
nklodzen@gmail.com

Frank Trechsel
Nashville or Los Angeles
frankrtrechsel@gmail.com

Lauren Conkling
Newburgh, IN
leconkling@sbcglobal.net

Katie Beasley
Madrid, Spain
kbeas110@gmail.com

Kelly Miller
Palo Alto, CA
knmiller15@yahoo.com

2012

Lauren Bridges
Bilbao, Spain
laurenjanebridges@gmail.com

Aidan Crane

Emma Vice
Indianapolis, IN
emvice@uemail.iu.edu

Ingrid Feustel
The Philippines
ingrid.feustel@gmail.com

Preethi Manohar
Preethi.m.manohar@gmail.com

Decker Cavoise
Bloomington/Indianapolis, IN
dcavosie@uemail.iu.edu

Emily McKnight
Arkansas
ekmcknight@gmail.com

Dana Koglin
Bloomington, IN
dkoglin@indiana.edu

2013

Amber Hendricks
Seattle, WA
ambernicholehendricks@gmail.com

Kimberly Smith
Louisville, KY
kmsmith442@gmail.com

Belle Kim
Seattle, WA
bellebomkim@gmail.com

Katherine Swintz
Indianapolis, IN
ktswintz@iemail.iu.edu

Rashmika Nedungadi
Appleton, WI
rasnedun@indiana.edu

Anjona Ghosh
Los Angeles, CA
ghosh.anjona@gmail.com

Megan Foley
megfoley@indiana.edu

Victoria Fater
Elkhart, IN
vrfater@gmail.com

2014

Vincent Bailey
Bloomington, IN
viabail@indiana.edu

Ian Goldsbrough
Milwaukee, WI
ian.goldsbrough@gmail.com

Jordan Goodmon
Bloomington, IN
jlgoodmo@uemail.iu.edu

Allison Hendrickson
Bloomington, IN
akhendri@indiana.edu

Ann McCallum
Chicago, IL
annmccallum92@gmail.com

2015

Abby Wagoner
abbyw.4994@gmail.com



Campus Writing Program
Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning
1320 E. Tenth St., Bloomington, IN 47405
Phone: 812-855-6738