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 accredits 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, 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 my own 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 sexual- ity?” 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.

An Essay is Like…

BY CLAIRE MULLANEY

Analogies to use while tutoring

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 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!

Interact with WTS!

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

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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 MICHAILL 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.
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!

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

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