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From the Center of Change

Beth Carroll
&
Tonya Hassell

Ancient philosopher Heraclitus writes, “All is flux; nothing stays still.” This aphorism resonates in the University Writing Center, where change has kept us busy and excited about new developments. Some of the major changes include the development of on-line writing assistance, the purchase of assistive technologies for greater accessibility of our services, and the welcoming of many new members to our staff. These changes will enhance our ability to assist all writers, both on and off-campus, and to meet a growing need for our services.

In the fall, Tonya Hassell filled the position as our new assistant director. Tonya is an ASU alumna (MA, English ’05) and PhD candidate in rhetoric and composition at UNC Greensboro. As a graduate student at ASU, Tonya served as the University Writing Center’s assistant director in 2004-2005, a role she has returned three years later to fill as she completes her doctoral work. Along with Tonya’s background in writing center scholarship, she brings knowledge of our institutional context and the needs of writers in ASU’s community.

This semester we hired a new online services and technology coordinator, Jamie Goodman, who is also an ASU alumna. Jamie received her BA in English with a minor in technical photography. She served as art director and technical consultant in a local media outlet for close to ten years, and from 2002-2005 worked as the associate webmaster and then webmaster in the ITS department at ASU. Aside from her work in the University Writing Center, Jamie is a freelance graphic artist and photographer. As such, she brings creativity and technological expertise and has become a valuable member of ASU’s Writing Center, particularly as we expand our use of technology in our on and off campus services.
Our new writing consultants this year include: Amy Barwick (Psychology), John LoCurto (Gerontology); from the English department, we have Maryanne Grimmett, Dean Blumberg, Wade Gum, Suzanne Ingram, Megan Lease, Tina Romanelli, and Travis Rountree. Mark Williams (English) is filling a position devoted to writing assistance for off-campus students.

New initiatives this year have focused our efforts toward using technology as a means of improving our services. Currently we are piloting a new program: online writing assistance for students in off-campus cohorts, and we hope to make this service available next year for all off-campus ASU students. Additionally, we are in the process of upgrading our space and assistive technologies to comply with the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) and to better meet the needs of disabled writers at ASU.

With the talented new members on staff and support for upgrades in technology, the University Writing Center is changing quickly to meet growing needs for writing support at ASU. We look forward to the challenges and rewards that will surely come as we expand into new areas of writing center work.
The Thesis Writing of
J. Lennon Bradshaw

John Bradshaw

Let us write then, you and I,
When the text is spread out upon the table
Like a frog pinned down and disabled;
Let us write, through definite half-exhausted ideas,
The blubbering sheets
Of restless nights in semester-long libraries
And smoky restaurants with beer-bottles:
Sheets that speak of an ambiguous topic...
Oh, do not write, "What it means."
Let us write and make our defense.

In the classroom my students come and go
Talking of I-Don't-Know.

The yellow sticky notes rub their backs upon my brain,
The yellow notes that rub their lines on my troubled brain
Bit their tongues in the corners of my evening,
Perched upon the drafts and drivel I have made,
And fell upon their backs and seized and fell from chimneys,
Sopped up a vague thought, made a huge leap,
And seeing that my thesis perhaps may not be right,
Nested all about my house, and I fell asleep.
And indeed I do not think there's time
For the yellow notes that won't be written down on sheets,
Irksome thoughts that won't materialize;
There won't be time, there won't be time
To prepare all the forms for the School of Graduates;
Me, I'm sure, they will murder and castrate,
No time for all my work for that by other's hands
That pour and plop ideas upon my plate;
No time for you, no time for me,
No time yet for a hundred professional decisions,
No time for a hundred draftings and revisions,
Before the graduating in the May.

In the classroom my students come and go
Talking of I-Don't-Know.

And indeed, there is no time
To ponder, "Do I care?" and, "Do I care?"
Time to turn and rethink, laid out and bare,
With a head-ache in the middle of my day –
[They will say: "How his beard is growing scruffy!"
My morning hasty, my polo ruffled and cleanly unwashed,
No necktie tied on at 8:00 am, no time to get dressed –
[They will say: "But how his lessons and thoughts are thin!"
Do I care
To Disturb this text?
In a minute there is no time
For forms and formalities that a Grad School may reject.

For I have not done them all already, not done them all: –
Have not applied to graduate, forget to mornings, afternoons,
I have not measured out my thesis in prospectus;
Turned in the dead idea that died in the fall
Beneath the reading of much scholarship.
So how should I resume?
And I have not done already, have not done –
Job applications that formulate me with praise,
And when I am formulated, applied therein,
When I am written and wriggled out by my pen,
Tell me, how should I begin
To spit out the validation of my grades and ways?
So how should I resume?

And I have not done already, have not changed –
My program and projected course of study
[But I've taken the damned courses and passed on already!]
Is it deadlines from an administrator
That makes me so distressed?
Those that pass or fail me on their desk, or wrap about my soul.
And should I then resume?
And how should I begin?

* * * * *
Shall I say, I have gone at night down old King Street
And watched the frat boys smoke like pipes
Like vacuous men with rubber hopes, at bars and drinking? . . .

I should have been a High School teacher
Scuttling students out and in my classroom door.

* * * * *

And the afternoons, the evenings, write not-so-gracefully!
Hammered out by black keys,
Ticking . . . tired . . . the topic ugly lingers,
And spills out on the page, here in front of you and me.
Could I, after beer and a basket of fries,
Have the strength to freewrite into a crisis?
But though I have wept and feasted, wept and played,
Though I have seen my head [grown lightly pained] brought in to the Graduate School on a platter,
I am a mere student – do you think they eat grey matter?
I have seen the moments of my writing flicker,
And I have felt those Removed People hold my thesis, and snicker,
And in short, I am afraid.

And will it really be worth it, after all,
After the booze, the liquor, the wine,
Among the intellectuals, all my forms in on time,
Will it have been worth some written feces,
To have analyzed Eliot down to pieces?
To roll him toward some presumed cultural answer,
To say: “I am Thomas Sterns, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you what my poem means” –
If one, reading the eventual little black book,
Should say: “That is not what he meant at all.
That is not Eliot, at all.”

And will it really be worth it, after all,
Will it all have been worth the while,
After the drafting, the defense and the scrawled-on sheets,
After the reading, after the beer bottles, after the thoughts that are discarded along the floor –
All this, and so very much more? –
It is impossible to write out just what I mean!
But as my nerves grow frazzled looking at the letters on the screen:
Will it all have been worth while
If one, sitting down with a pillow and the long poem,
And turning, thought back to my complex text, should say:
“That is not it at all,
That is not what Eliot meant, at all.”

*****
No! I am not T. S. Eliot, nor was trying to be;
Am a child on a sled, crying out “Marie!”
Will swell a typist, thunder a stanza or two,
Mourn by the Thames; departed nymphs,
Despondent, or blended Tiresias,
Thirsty, chess, Philomela;
At times, I am under the red rock –
At times a lengthened shadow.

I'll graduate... I will graduate...
I shall frame my diploma upon my wall.

Shall I fix my CV? Do I dare to publish a piece?
I shall wear my academic hood, and come out, Shantih.
I have seen the graduated drinking, each with each.

I damned sure hope that they will drink with me.

I have seen them drinking forward in the bars
Combining well-groomed hair, carrying money in stacks
And when the bill comes they pay as the night goes black.

We have graduated from Appalachian State
By others wreathed with beautifully wrought degrees
Till an adjunct’s pay shocks us, and we drown.
Why Do I Even Care About E-mail Etiquette?

Suzanne Ingram

E-mails are tricky things, difficult to write. I am always so careful that I’m writing exactly what I want to say, hitting the right tone, using my own voice, and being concise and to the point, mindful that I might be clogging my recipients’ already pregnant inboxes. E-mails are tricky to read, too: What is he implying? What does she really mean by that? Is he asking me a question? Tricky e-mails have caused problems and stress in my life. In this technical age of rapid-responses, an impulsive person like me is likely to get in trouble. It’s so easy to hit “Reply” and shoot back a message you’ll later regret. Such e-mailing can create violent cycles and horrific reactions. When I was in graduate school, one of my misread e-mails initiated a response from a professor that led me to seriously consider dropping out. And I recently found myself in an e-mail frenzy with a potential boyfriend. I can’t help but think that if I had approached that professor in person, there never would have been such a misunderstanding. And if e-mail weren’t an option, that potential boyfriend and I would have had time to calm down, think, take a breath or two, and talk things out.

As a teacher, I am often perplexed by tricky e-mails from students. I consider myself a fairly laid-back teacher, one who wouldn’t judge a student solely on a bad e-mail. But then again, I am a writing teacher, particularly in tune to the written word and how my students use it. I have talked myself out of caring about this “netiquette,” or lack thereof, for about a year because I hate to hear myself sounding so uptight, so like my parents: These kids today have no respect! But let me share with you what I am referring to. Here’s an example, contrived for this article but an accurate example of what I see on a weekly basis nonetheless:
I have a question about my paper. Can I use more than one internet site? Thanks <3

Now don't get me wrong. I am glad that students feel comfortable with me, that they communicate and keep me updated and are trying to stay engaged in the class even when they have to miss. But these e-mails just get my goat. Why do I let them bother me? Why do I even care?

Is it the informality that bothers me? A couple weeks ago, a friend of mine from the business world—a place that scares me with its formality and high heels—was telling me about her experiences with netiquette in her company: "E-mail doesn't have to be as formal as you might think," she explained, "because the To: line takes care of your greeting, and the topic of the message is already spelled out in the Subject: line." This makes total sense in the business world, where peers are writing to peers, where people are trying to be efficient and to "get the job done." Surely businesspeople still capitalize the beginnings of sentences and proper nouns, and surely they use punctuation? The answer has to be yes, because they want to be perceived as professionals, because they are addressing peers or higher-ups, people from whom they want respect. Indisputably, bad netiquette can be found everywhere, even in the business world, but if a smart businessperson has a great idea, she wouldn't want that idea to get lost in the midst of a sloppy, tricky e-mail. She would keep her audience in mind.

This conversation with my business friend and the line of thought it provoked have helped me get to the bottom of my question. No, it's not the informality that bothers me. E-mailing is like having a conversation, so there's no need to be so formal. I like to have conversations with my students; I don't want them to feel like they always have to be formal with me, and I want them to be comfortable coming to me with questions. I have so much to learn from them, so conversations go both ways and are mutually beneficial. But even though e-mails might be informal and like conversations, they are still happening between Student and Teacher. I teach writers to be conscious of their audiences. When students sit down to write e-mails to teachers, just as when businesspeople write e-mails to peers or higher-ups, they should have their audiences in mind.

The student who wrote that e-mail above did not have me in mind. I am a teacher—a writing teacher nonetheless, so I doubly cringe at such writing—but even though students know this, it
doesn't seem to be enough: lacking any sense of care or forethought, they still send atrocious
e-mails to me. So let's take it one step further: I am a teacher, so naturally I'm looking for
students to take responsibility for their own learning. On one level, the student who wrote this
e-mail might argue that she is taking responsibility, that the mere fact she wrote it was her
attempt to do that. But like I said, I am a teacher, and the harsh reality is that I have to give
grades and I am forced to make judgments. An e-mail like this tells me that this student cannot
put forth the little effort it takes to write two sentences correctly. An e-mail like this leads me
down this train of thought: How engaged and invested is this student? If writing one e-mail
correctly is so difficult, will this person put any effort into my course? Does this student respect
me or our student-teacher relationship? If the answer to that last question is no, then why not?
If that answer is no, this student probably won't put forth the effort to learn anything in my
course. This might seem like a drastic line of logic, but these are the questions I ask myself and
conclusions I make when students turn in assignments of poor quality. It's the same thing. I
would never want a professor asking such questions or making such conclusions about me.

And that is why I care about e-mail etiquette, why I bring it to my students' attention.
Because even if I try not to, I judge my students' e-mails. That means other professors do too. I
care for my students—my freshmen. When I look at them, I see really cool people who could be
even cooler and more open and more exciting after four or five years of learning and success in
college. I want them to thrive. I'm not saying you can't succeed in college or in life, if you write
bad or tricky e-mails, but don't you want to give yourself the best shot?
Technological Process?

Megan Lease

When I first thought about technology and the writing process, I was all for bashing technology. Of course I wouldn’t want to go back to the “dark ages” before we had electricity or indoor plumbing, but in a lot of ways technology has become a disease infecting every area of our lives. Because we spend more time in front of the TV or computer and less time outside exercising, people are becoming increasingly overweight, and the growing number of cars and factories is ruining our environment. Due to technology, there is also the mysterious disappearance of the all-too-important Word document that we spent hours completing. However, what does technology have to do with writing? And is it good or bad or both?

I recently read Wendy R. Leibowitz’s 1999 article “Technology Transforms Writing and the Teaching of Writing” in The Chronicle of Higher Education. The professors in this article claim that word processing may encourage students to write more but not necessarily better. They complain that students are less inclined to revise their writing, relying solely on spell-check; therefore, the professors see less polished papers written in the “unstructured, chatty style of e-mail discussions, but not in formal prose.” To combat the fast-paced world of computers, these professors encourage students to slow down by requiring that second drafts of papers be total rewrites—for example, rewriting an essay as a poem or creating a new narrator for a story. They also focus on teaching critical thinking skills, which they hope will carry over to the students’ writing, causing them to step back and really think about what they are writing.

While the article didn’t claim that technology was all bad and the only reason students
write poorly, one quote really made me think. Kathleen Skubikowski, an assistant professor of English at Middlebury College, says of handwriting, “The real loss, students tell me, is the physical attachment to their writing—pressing down on the pen, thinking and feeling the word as your hand writes it out.” She also says, “Students who write essays on screen say they would never write a poem on screen.” Why is this and is it true for most people? Is it because students feel less emotionally attached to their essays than they do poems? Is the computer screen a barrier for students, preventing them from engaging with their writing in a meaningful way? We all know that a handwritten note or letter is more personal than a typed, distant email. But is the physical distance really affecting students’ writing?

Perhaps students’ lack of interest in their essays is a symptom of a larger problem in our society. Maybe it has to do with a growing attitude toward college education—the attitude that a college degree is only worth the amount of money students will be able to earn afterward. We live in a consumer-driven, capitalistic society, so it only makes sense that we see education as a commodity. Therefore, students see their essays as means to the end: a passing grade that will allow them to graduate and make money.
UWC Consultants Attend Conference in Savannah

Christina Romanelli

The University Writing Center sent delegates to the Southeastern Writing Center Association Annual Conference in Savannah, Georgia, earlier this month. Entitled “Work in Progress, Destination Unknown,” the Savannah conference focused on issues surrounding writing center practice and theory. The conference was held at the Armstrong Center of Armstrong Atlantic State University. Consultants Becky Woodard, Kevin Young, Tina Romanelli, and Eliza Kotzeva presented a panel discussion on Respect and Difference in writing center consultations.

Young’s humorous discussion of a consultant’s tendency to formulate preconceptions about the writing product based on the appearance and social status of clients was well received. Romanelli displayed a diagram for navigating client identity in discussing the dominant white middle class, and Woodard presented her thoughts on the complicated term “peer tutor.” Kotzeva’s presentation on contrastive rhetorics and writing center work with ESL students was a fascinating conclusion to the panel and the conference.

Former UWC consultant and ASU instructor Wyatt Reynolds spoke about “Establishing Writing Centers that Meet Unique Institutional Needs.” His discussion of setting up a new writing center at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute’s Watauga campus focused on the need for new writing center administrators to make their presence felt on campus and in classrooms.

The conference provided numerous opportunities for reflecting on and expanding writing center work. Several panels focused on the needs for paradigmatic shifts in the tutor/consultant approach to sessions. Overall the SWCA Conference brought home the fact that writing centers and consultants do not work in isolation. The writing center concept has spread from the university to the high school level. All over the Southeast, administrators, consultants, and clients collaborate on writing at every level.
Traditional Handwriting Instruction: A Necessary Component in Elementary Classrooms

Allison Cate

Sitting on the blue carpet of my kindergarten classroom, I glance through every story that is tucked neatly under the loft. After perusing hundreds of books, I make my choice, sit on the beanbag in the corner, and divert my eyes to the lines and curves of each letter. During my free time, I always read a new story and am never disappointed. No matter the plot, I enjoy every book as if it is my favorite. In my young, developing mind, the idea that I am reading on my own and don’t need anyone to read to me is monumental. Early advancement catapults me to a deeper understanding and passion for the literary arts.

Attending Catholic school for all of my elementary education instilled in me the basic fundamentals of traditional learning. I was not affected by the congregation’s attempts at locking my faith to Catholicism, but I found the stories of the apostles and saints highly entertaining. Reading and writing about this religion aided my literacy and ultimately created my enthralment with the English language. In kindergarten, my class dealt with basic, manuscript handwriting. We would spend at least two hours a day on large-spaced, loose-leaf paper, practicing each letter until perfection. Early in the year, I would, on average, read two books per free-time, but after I began learning all of the ins and outs of the written word, I consumed six books per our free-time allotment. Even though I was only reading short sentences, I was beginning to create a blueprint in my mind about how blocks of language should sound.

After I mastered the art of manuscript writing, my third grade class boosted me to a new level when I was exposed to the beauty of cursive. Learning cursive was like an art class, the particular curves and lines of our language dressed in its Sunday best. I remember how special I felt when my teacher told me that my writing was beautiful. It felt amazing to not have to take the pencil off the paper, and as in my kindergarten class, we would spend many hours each
week practicing on oversized loose-leaf paper. I was now able to read chapter books and would sit cross-legged on the carpet digesting as many words as I could in the designated free-time.

In our current age of the word processor, children are learning language in a completely different way. Although twenty is still considered young, I am old enough to remember a time when life did not revolve around computers or technology, when the phone was still plugged into the wall, and you had to watch the Weather Channel to see how much snow was foretold. We only spent one hour a week staring at the green-tinted Apple computer screens, which blinked throughout my “Reader Rabbit” game. New studies have emerged that claim that handwriting is an integral aspect to a child’s learning process, thus serving as a key in sparking the initial strengthening of brain function. Not only is handwriting an integral tool in enhancing the ability to write, it is also essential to the reading process. If we don’t know the letters, words, and pleasant patterns of a sentence, how can we learn to read and communicate? Handwriting is the physical, visible component necessary for academic success, and instruction begins in elementary school.

Today, a major conflict in elementary schools is the amount of time students receive handwriting instruction. According to Zaner-Bloser, a handwriting resource for teachers, in the 1970’s forty-five minutes a day was recommended for the teaching of handwriting (Kelley 1). According to Handwriting without Tears, another handwriting resource, the average time of instruction in 2000 was ten minutes a day (Kelley 1). Ten minutes of handwriting instruction is not enough practice for students beginning their education.

An increased level of technology in our classrooms is transforming early education. It pains me to think that teachers are substituting time in the library or free-writing in class for computer-based activities, which can stimulate the mind, yes, but only to a certain extent. Technology cannot substitute for the basic building blocks of education; it must be used hand-in-hand with other activities in order to fully teach the child: “No one has suggested that the invention of the calculator means we don’t have to teach kids how to add…. If we stop teaching penmanship, it will not only hasten the dreaded day when brides acknowledge wedding gifts by email; the bigger danger is, they’ll be composed even more poorly than they already are” (Kelley 2). Hopefully, educators will realize how important it is to master the skills of handwriting at a young age, and the hands of future generations won’t be dependent solely on the keyboard for individual expression.
Is the Pen Mightier Than the Keyboard?

Brian Henson

There’s no question whether technology has had an impact on writing or not. It has! For most institutions ranging from universities to large corporations, communication via e-mail has become the new standard, replacing telephones, fax machines, and the good old-fashioned envelope. Even our personal journals have been replaced by a new web-creation called a weblog. These new blogs are rapidly becoming the new way to keep friends and relatives up to date on your activities, to share your thoughts and opinions with the world, or to even rant about why McDonald’s is better than Burger King (or vice versa).

But what does all of this mean for the writer? Should the ‘mightier pen’ raise its white flag and surrender to the ‘mightiest keyboard’? Well, it depends.

I have some friends who when writing a paper jump right into the process with a blank document in a word processing program without ever picking up a pen or pencil. At the other end of the spectrum, though, I have friends who wouldn’t ever start the process of writing a paper without at least scribbling down their ideas first. I’m definitely positioned more closely to this end of the spectrum than the other. Whenever I sit down at my desk (or lie down on my bed) with a blank sheet of paper in front of me and my favorite pen in my hand, ready to write, something inside my brain just clicks and I start to pour out words onto the paper.

As a current freshman at ASU, I’ve been given multiple study methods and tips. One of my favorite and most used tips is to find a place where I can study without distractions and still feel comfortable. This single piece of advice has helped me not only with studying, but also with writing. While finding a good place to write is important, the medium in which I write is just as
important, if not more so. When I’m writing with the traditional pen and paper, my entire world is composed of only me, the paper, and the pen, with no or limited distractions to hinder my train of thought.

However, when I’m typing on my own computer, I’m constantly distracted by all of the shiny buttons and gizmos. I become so easily distracted by random instant messages that pop up out of nowhere or by Microsoft Office Outlook informing me that I have a new e-mail message (imagine that) or even by my constant urge to poke all of my friends on the all-too-addictive social networking site Facebook. It just becomes so easy for me to end up doing something other than writing. When this happens, I have to force the writing out of me and then it becomes a chore, losing all of the magic and fun.

It’s impossible for me to say what will and will not work for everyone. This is only what works for me. Writers have to experiment and find out what works best for them. For some, typing on a keyboard will be the way to go. For others, traditional writing will be it. And for some, maybe writing on a tablet PC will be the key to success. No matter what your chosen style or preference is, just remember to experiment with different techniques and methods. After all, experimentation is a crucial step in all great writing.
i’d rather be doodling

drawing little circles & stars
graphs & bars
scrawling itty-bitty cars
with mirrors & wheels
& people with ears
i can hear their squeals
as they pursue their careers.

i’d rather be poodling:
walking a dog
& scooping its poop
taking it shopping or making it soup
waxing its ears & shining its knees
calming its fears & eating its fleas.

i’d rather be canoodling
with my significant other
on the couch or under the covers,
or on the covers & under the couch
in front of the tv or in the fire
on the mountain when it's cold & blizzardy
i can't get out, my feet are frozen
& I'm ready to eat my own arm.

I'd rather be toodling
down the road in my nissan versa
driving 8 or 18 or 44 hours
at 5 or 10 or 100 miles an hour
over hill & dale
raccoon & squirrel
through tennessee & kentucky & even to mars
in a snow or thunder storm
hurricane, tornado or cyclone.

I'd rather be toodling
on a flute though i can't play one
doing a jethro tull imitation
& having some fun
rooting & tooting
& even rootie-kazootie.

I'd rather be doing the whole kit-&-caboodle—
putting my kit
beside my caboodle
so that I'll always know where to find it
& it will stay dry & warm
in the snow, thunder, or hail storm.
i'd rather be noodling or strudeling
clobbering a cobbler
or eating pasta of chinese or italian persuasion
slurping loudly
& making a disgusting mess
of my t-shirt with Che on it
staining him a brilliant red commie.

i'd rather be doodling a poodle
canoodling a noodle or strudel
canoodling with poodle noodles
yankee-doodle dandyng or
polly-wolly-doodling all day
tooling, toodling or rootie-kazooting
i'd rather be doing the whole kit-&-caboodling.
instead i'm moodling.
We May Lose Something Too

Christina Romanelli

I grew up around computers. I remember getting our first Gateway computer for Christmas when I was five. By the time I realized that I wanted to be a creative writer, I was already using my computer for all my writing. All my poetry is typed and neatly placed into a three-ring binder. Fragments of short stories are stuffed into various binders and books on my shelves, but they are all typed. All the academic papers that I keep are in files with the teachers’ comments floating over the pages in untidy scrawl. These pieces of my writing history are important to me, and they are no less important because they are typed than they would be if I had handwritten them.

Just the same, I am a highly kinesthetic individual. If these papers and poems were not printed out for me to touch, I would feel as though I had lost something. I know people who read books online and store all their documents electronically. I could never do this. I can’t imagine a loss greater than forgetting how to hold a book. I love the way the spine of Bulgakov’s Master and Margarita or Alcott’s Little Women curls backwards around my index finger when I pick up the books to read them a second, third, or fourth time. I love the way pages feel between my fingers. When I consider Megan’s thoughts on technology coming between the writer and the kinesthetic aspects of writing, I wonder if I would feel the same way about my own handwriting as I feel about books if I had not grown up with the computer. Would I miss the bumps on the pages that my pen made while I wrote too enthusiastically or the folded corners of pages I flipped back to too often? Would I miss the record of my handwriting: slanted, affected, the ridiculous hearts over the i’s in middle school?
Technology has an immediacy that handwriting cannot have. I can write and write without worrying about each sentence, each word as I type. If I were handwriting this, I would have to really think about each sentence before I put it on paper in order to avoid having to recopy the entire thing. In this way, technology frees me. I can write anything because it can be easily erased. On the other hand, because those thoughts can be erased easily, I do not have the record of my changes that Emily Dickinson had. As for whether or not I feel less attached to my words, I do not believe this is true. Once I feel something is finished, I am very, very attached to my words, my sentence structures, my ideas—the whole shebang.

What amazes me most about working in the writing center is the lack of attachment so many others have for their words and sentences. I do not think this has anything to do with technology but with the way we view academic or assigned writing in general. Often we feel we have no voice in our academic writing; we are simply regurgitating what the professor wants. Somehow, as professors, instructors, and consultants, we have missed the opportunity to engage students in a conversation in their writing. Their lack of interest in their own words betrays their lack of engagement with the subject matter.

Some students seem to feel the writing earns the grade, and when a writing center consultant suggests a change, it must be to help them earn a better grade. I have always felt that I earn the grade and that the writing speaks for me. I try hard to engage with everything I read and write. I talk to myself on paper, but more importantly I talk to other critics, theorists, and academics in my writing. My writing is my voice—me—on paper. If I were to speak to a professor for an hour and have that professor tell me when my hour was up that my thoughts earned an "F," I would be devastated. I would feel inadequate, under-appreciated, perhaps unloved. My writing voice is no different from my speaking voice in this respect. My writing and I are together on this issue: we are intimately linked.
Technology and Process: A Conversation

Jennifer Flaherty

We were talking about themes for The re-Visioner and came up with “The Paradox of Progress.” In terms of writing and education in general, are things like the word processor and Wikipedia making writing and research “too easy”? Are our methods of learning conducive to apathy? Has the widespread use of the word processor extinguished important steps in the writing process? If so, what specifically about technology is impeding us?

This issue extends outside the writing world, of course: we are connecting with people more, but why do we feel so disconnected?

I’m not really interested in writing “I hate Facebook” articles or how 70% of students immediately whip out their cell phones between classes (which is true), but there is a larger issue: Are we progressing? If so, to where? And is this a good thing? What issues are students facing in education, especially concerning the writing process and its obstacles, that they weren’t in generations past?

Kevin Young

“. . . are things like the word processor and Wikipedia making writing and research ‘too easy’?”
I wonder if monks in the Middle Ages railed against Gutenberg: “That damn printing press is making the replication of books too easy!” No more labor of love, bent over the palimpsest by candlelight, painstakingly creating a work letter by letter.

Dennis Bohr

Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff say in A Community of Writers that “writing is easy; writing is hard.” It’s easy to spew words on the paper, but what’s hard is making it make sense, making the words foment a revolution, woo a potential lover, or convince someone to vote for me! And if the computer can make that part of writing “easy,” well, hurrah and huzzah, etc. Writing is hard enough as it is.

People who say technology makes writing too easy believe that suffering is tantamount to enlightenment. Students are required to jump over hurdles or through hoops in order to become ‘educated.’ My job in the writing center and my classes is to help people over or around the hurdles/hoops without pulling any brain-groin muscles.

Writing is no easier because of computers, but revising is. If I write a play about the end of the world and I don’t like my method of destruction, I can press a few buttons and try something else. I used to have to start over from page one. Of course, now I run the risk of it disappearing completely. I love my computer; I hate it; it is indifferent about me.

Tonya Hassell

I wonder if the influx of technology to relate information (i.e., PowerPoint, handouts, email, IM) has pushed students to think about language as easily transferrable and able to be condensed into bullet points. But students still have problems with the infamous five-paragraph essay in the sense that they can’t even replicate that (evidenced by more than one point in each paragraph, etc.); so things aren’t completely bulleted.

Does the requirement of typed writing, even for drafts, force students to write one draft and commit to only surface-level errors instead of “provocative” or radical revision?

I also wonder about TV-watching and internet-surfing, both of which provide over-stimulation that requires people to pay attention only for five minutes or five seconds before they are in-
fused with another image/idea. How does this over-production of text and/or over-stimulation contribute to (a) students’ conception of what a reader needs, and (b) students’ ability to organize writing or go into detail? In effect, do students’ writing processes correlate at all to the kind of media they are exposed to?

**Allison Cate**

Young, fresh writers, aka children, should not have access to word processor programs until they have mastered writing papers by hand. Processors inject fear into us, overwhelming particular channels of the mind and creating sporadic spasms in our thought processes. Because people can type and erase and type again so quickly, their thoughts get too jumbled, blockading the bridge between thought and paper—or screen. With pen and paper, people have to focus on writing one statement at a time and can’t erase it too easily, which provides them with enough incentive to actually THINK and FOCUS and write sentence by sentence until they finish.

Another issue that ties in to the “Processor Debate” is the newly emerging internet lingo, used by many-a-cheezy cell phone company. My little brother is in the heat of this “L-O-L” generation, and I can see the effect on his writing. A typical school day for him consists of waking up gruesomely early, sleeping through morning classes, going to lunch, goofing off with his friends in the afternoon because of a drastic intake of high fructose corn syrup and artificial sugar, and returning home, only to get online and talk to his “friendz” on AOL. Kids who don’t pay attention in their English classes and then are subjected to constant AIM communication are getting a warped lesson in the English language. What’s the fun in cutting down your lingo to an individual lettering system? It’s fun to use big words! Or is that an outdated opinion? Kids these days (I feel old, now) are completely defacing the English language.

BUT—the counter-argument: the English language has been morphing for centuries, and even if I personally don’t agree with the direction that it is going, it is still going to go. All I can do is speak as articulate as possible and hope that some internet-less child in the crowd will respond in the proper way. I just hope that children today won’t turn into “LOLZ” and “OMGZ” robots—I can see it now. LMAO!
Christina Romanelli

I can't imagine writing without a computer. I keep windows up to check information, get inspiration, and take breaks. Actually windows is a great word for the different screens on the computer monitor: I see into different things at different times. While I'm writing, this is an unbelievably valuable resource. I can't imagine reading or writing without the ease of dictionary.com or wikipedia.

I've also decided, through much ridiculous reflection of myself (my favorite kind of reflection—no one pays attention to me like I do), that I am a very recursive writer. I love word processing because I can make things disappear with the backspace key. When I don't like the way I've started, I just erase and start over. I also cut and paste a lot. I recently wrote an introduction to a paper on Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse. I couldn't make it work the way I wanted, but I had invested too much time to just scrap it. So after I let it bother me for a while at the top of my paper, I cut the paragraph and moved it to the bottom of the page. It looks like it's going to be a great conclusion. How fun! I had my conclusion written first. Of course, it may not stay my conclusion, but that's not the point. The point is that the glory of word processing provides not only the finality of appearance but the flexibility of writing stages. I can mess around all I want, and the paper still looks professional on the screen. I LOVE IT!

However, I would like to add that nothing, no technology, can replace the fabulousness of conversation. I spent two hours talking to a friend about his paper recently. It was great, just tossing around ideas for fun. Or at least it was fun for me. I think he was a little tired at the end.

Allison Cate

This evening, when I returned to the writing center for my second shift, I gave a friend a ride to class. We talked about a paper he had to write and how his teacher had said that he could write it by hand. But he doesn't like to write by hand because "It just doesn't turn out very well." He really didn't know why but said it wasn't because his handwriting is illegible: "It's just annoying to have to write with pen and paper."
Before word processor and typewriters, everything was written by hand. Books, poems, manuals, history, scripts, jokes, music. Everything. If Shakespeare had heard my friend complaining about "writing by hand," what would he have thought?

Some of the best works were written by hand or typewriter. Are works of genius better because they were written by hand, thus allowing more thought as a result of the writing fashion? Is fantastic literature as we know it fading fast with technology, thoughts quickly morphing into blogs?

Forty years from now: 2nd grade class. All children have their own, built-in computer-desks, allowing them to quickly and efficiently get through their spelling exercises, do their math homework, and feed their virtual pets—all in homeroom. Pencils have been banned as they can be weapons, and lead causes cancer. Writing is strictly limited to a 5x5 keyboard, sticky with jelly from the day’s pre-packaged, artificial lunch.

Jennifer Flaherty

I don’t like to start out writing on the computer, especially if it’s creative work. I can’t get over the feeling that I am being rushed. And worse, I feel like I have to type in the perfect sentence formula the first time. I really can’t revise until I have printed out my first draft and can mark it up in my hand. It makes everything more real. Of course, these are just my personal intuitions about the process. And growing up with only this mode of writing, I am so accustomed to the perks that they simply become normal standards. The negatives, conversely, can be glaring.

An issue I often see during writing center sessions is the daunting task of transferring what one can say out loud into a sentence. Of course, this is just the difficulty of beginning to write. Some of us cannot say precisely what we mean out loud, but on the page we are endowed with a strong voice. For many students who come to the writing center, the issue is the former. I cannot get over the feeling that writing ONLY on word processor may contribute to the gap between the spoken word and the twisted confusion in writing those thoughts. I find the gap shortened when I can hold the writing and the writing tool in my hand. Somehow it lets me catch my breath and I can see and hold, touch and smell the writing process. That’s probably weird, but it feels less permanent and rigid, which allows me more freedom to revise.
Dennis Bohr

Someone said, "Writing is easy: you just open a vein and let it bleed." (Google tells me it was sportswriter Red Smith.)

I usually do first drafts by hand: I open a vein and bleed blue-black ink onto the pages. I can compose email and potty-wolly-Moodle all day on computer, but I have to feel the pen scratch to start "cooking with diesel" (to quote Martin, my Derry friend).

Hemingway said, "The first draft of anything is shit." All of my first drafts are worthless except for the fact that first drafts precede second drafts. I have to un-clutter my brain's hard drive, and then I am free to spew interesting stuff on to paper. I don't like my process, but it works for me. Once I have spewed my guts, I take it to Georgia, hoping that by the time I get it to her the words will have magically rubbed together and procreated new, wonderful things. That never happens, and Georgia says, "Well, it's a start." And that's all it is: a germ, an amoeba of an idea. Once I have this start though, I can proceed to a second, third, or eighty-fifth draft that gets less crappy until it emerges into something semi-wonderful.

My Macbeth play took well over ten years from idea to production. I still have the first draft somewhere—but the only amoeba I kept is that the witches are 'real people.' And once I had a 'semi-wonderful' draft, I had to let somebody else read it. I was too close and no longer knew if it made any sense, so I got readers, here and in Ireland. I realized (as usual) how wordy it was, so I cut it and gave it to more readers (or maybe the same ones) who again offered suggestions. I realized I had a lot of facts that were in the play only because I had done the research and wanted to show off. But they didn't move the story along, so I cut them—my precious children, cast adrift in cyber space or scrawled in notes. And just before the first production, I realized there was a scene missing, so I wrote it and inserted it into the play while we were doing rehearsals.

My process is slow and chunky: even after I have a draft, it undergoes many changes. Technology allows me to write multiple drafts—something I never did in college.
Will computers and other technology change the way we communicate? Sure. For the good? Who knows? We can now contact people in Japan damn-near instantly, but can we really communicate better?

Wyatt Reynolds

I know exactly what Jenny means about the (symbolic) weight of paper. One of my first experiences with writing creatively was with a zine a friend of mine and I published back in high school.

I was hopelessly in love with her—hopelessly—all skinny and awkward and unable to speak to her in a remotely intelligent fashion. It was terrible. Not that too much has changed since then. (Well, except the weight.) But in between me mumbling a bunch of incoherent witty phrases toward my shoes, we used to talk about writing. Maybe that was why I was so in love with her—she was the first person I was ever really able to talk to about writing. About poetry. About fiction. About great authors. About what words did to me. About what they do to me still.

Before long, we were co-editing that zine (Fallen Angel). And one of the things we agreed on—besides Ginsberg and Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell and Dylan—was that we preferred hand-written submissions. You could see the passion, see the heartache, and feel it. The way the writing would change, the feel of the paper. So, yeah, I can dig it, Jenny. It seems somehow more real. Authentic. Truthful. That much closer to that ever elusive vein (to allude to whomever it is Dennis always quotes).

...

When I started graduate school, I took a class with Georgia and it was the first time I reflected on who I was as a writer and how I composed. One of the things she urged us to do was to just write. Just compose. Then come back and revise, edit, etc. Re-write and all. And not to be scared of cuts. Or re-writes. Or re-starts.
The Revisioner

That shift in attitude was essential to me, someone who labored over each word, treasured and caressed a careful turn of phrase. And it was liberating ... to just write. To write and write and write some more. To know that it would not be perfect, but that the words would come. That it was work as much as talent.

So for the last two years I've slogged away at the book. Something I never could have done without this new mentality. Wrote and wrote and wrote—all on the computer—cutting and pasting, etc. And then this summer I realized I was stuck. 122,000 words. For nothing. It didn't work. It needed to be completely re-written. For the third time.

And so I cut 122,000 words to 4,500. One chapter/episode/fragment.

And now I'm learning I need to slow down, and I'm re-approaching not just the book but the whole method of composition.

I always carried a little book in my pocket—partially for practical reasons ("Wyatt, will you pick up some milk [or beer or pickled herring snacks] on the way home?")—but also to scribble down anything that came to me. A phrase I liked, an opening sentence, something I overheard. Whenever I felt blocked and the cursor would taunt me, I'd flip through that book and there'd be something to get me going: "It was the wind that brought it back to me."

So now that I've stalled out, given up, tried again, failed, and picked myself up for one more, one last time, I'm going back to the old school. Now I have a bigger, full-sized notebook. I hand-write my first drafts, writing slowly, choosing the right word, the right image, the right phrase.

Then I type it up. Print it up. Mark it up. Re-write. Share it with Sara. Re-write based on her suggestions. Print it up. Mark it up. Move on.

But I have to slow down. Make myself see the words, see the story take shape. Because I want to go further, push myself past that elusive threshold, because day by day that vision becomes a little closer, a little clearer, a little less elusive.

I run my fingers over the ruins of the day, the tattered remnants of that broken world, of the book that failed, and I know the words will come. One by one, day by day, a new word, a new
story, a new world is born. I can see it. I can feel it, see the scratches from the strokes of my pen, see the growing document in my computer in its lonely file and every so often I let myself believe in that world again.

Jennifer Flaherty

So often we associate technology with speed. It's a familiar image and even a cliche: the speed of technology, high speed internet and the cartoon roadrunner, the unstoppable train barreling down the tracks.

Speed is often used in a positive sense (efficiency, stream of consciousness, unbroken thoughts) and just as much in a negative sense (panic-stricken, cursory, confused). In my more frustrated moments, I associate such predicates as 'rabid/foaming at the mouth' and 'chaotic' with 'the speed of technology.' But this is probably extreme.

If we equate technology with speed, what does speed mean for the writing process?

Many of us have talked about speed already: Allison talks about sporadic spasms often induced by processors, Wyatt wants to slow down his writing process in order to make it more thoughtful, and Dennis's process is slow and clunky.

So is there anything good about all-around speed for the writing process? Probably: Free-writing, unbroken thoughts, efficiency in revising.

But there is also as much good (arguably more) about the slowness of writing, especially for beginning stages (and writers). If we are immersed in an environment of speed that cannot slow down much less put on the brakes entirely, then it seems we must extricate ourselves and our writing processes from technology in order to achieve the necessary "slowness" that any good writing process needs.

Then again, maybe we don't need to slow down; maybe we can find the brakes in technology itself. (But somehow I don't think so.)
Wyatt Reynolds

Technology.

I have a working theory, maybe it’s a joke, but like most (good) jokes, I’m kinda being serious. Most of you are familiar with the idea of ‘the other.’ As in, we create ourselves, at least in part, by what we are not: I am not a woman, French, and so on, and I’m sure we know that language can be ‘othering’: “You,” “They,” etc.

Often, this practice of othering is a reflection (product?) of cultural anxiety, so my working theory is this: enter the Technological Other.

Technology is growing so fast that by the time I write this, it’s already obsolete. And that freaks a lot of us out on one level or another. I mean, I don’t own a cell phone. Don’t have cable. Don’t have Blue Tooth in my car. And don’t really want any of those things. Partially because I’m scared of them. And partially because they don’t make this experience any more Human.

As humans, we seek to Other ourselves from technology. Think Darth Vader. Think Y2K. Think about all the anxiety directed at Microsoft. That’s what makes us human and them [technology] not human. The difference between a robot and a human is pretty substantial, between me and my TV even more so. (I hope.)

And there’s probably a discussion to be had about technology and authenticity and connectiveness. The whole idea of “virtual friendz” that Allison alludes to. On the one hand, yeah, I’m sure you can have a beautiful, meaningful and rewarding cyberfriendship. But is that as human an experience as an “actual” friendship? [Note that I didn’t use the word “real.” Even if it exists solely in cyberspace, that friendship is no less “real.”]

That’s the great cosmic irony of it all: Technology created by humans to make this sad, strange, exhilarating, weird human endeavor a little more manageable, to bring us all together in some great imagined community. (But aren’t all communities imagined, Wyatt? Didn’t you learn anything from all that Rushdie?)
Yet—the human drive to connect still has to be there.

The phone in and of itself is meaningless. It's how we use it that gives it meaning. It can only connect us if I (and you) want it to. The computer itself is meaningless. We empower it; we imbue it with significance and beauty and meaning. But at the close of day, it is what we do with it that determines its meaning. Otherwise it's just a bunch of plastic and silicon and shit that I don't claim to really understand.

So the question I would pose is this: If we accept that computers have shaped our human experience, possibly for the worse, for the shallower, for the frivolous, what does that say about us, about this generation, about those of us who came of age in these times?

And, yeah, that's a big thing to accept.

So here's something else: How has technology shaped our consciousness?

Have we been reduced to the mental equivalent of pop-up ads? Headline News? Instead of novels, will we create avatars and blogs? (Is that what I've been doing wrong?) What is the fate of the good ol' print novel in an increasingly digital world?

**Dennis Bohr**

I don't care how much technology improves; a computer program is not going to enable me to play the guitar like Jimi Hendrix or Eric Clapton, write like Vonnegut or Blake or Woolf, or paint like Monet, Klimt, or Van Gogh. Playing the guitar, writing, painting, or even hitting a curveball all have two prerequisites that I cannot buy at WalMart and download: practice and inspiration. There is still genius at work. Because of or despite technology, genius will emerge.
Statistics for the UWC during the Fall 2007 Semester

Total number of clients served in Fall 2007: 736
Total number of sessions conducted in Fall 2007: 1313
Total number of majors/disciplines of clients in Fall 2007: 36
Percentage of sessions conducted with nonnative English/bilingual speakers: 12%
Number of clients based on academic level:
273 Freshmen
91 Sophomores
132 Juniors
141 Seniors
89 Graduate Students
17 Other (staff, faculty, alumni, community)
Top Ten Departments/Subjects represented by number of client visits:
360 English
168 Non-academic (resumes, applications, etc.)
104 History
83 University Studies/Freshman Seminar
73 Political Science
48 Interdisciplinary Studies
44 Accounting
43 Communications
43 Psychology
39 Sociology

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