

Verbal Equinox

Fall 2005

Coordinator's Corner

by Claire Hughes
Writing Center Coordinator

Welcome to *Verbal Equinox*! In this issue, five talented tutors have addressed writing topics we hope will be useful to you. In serving students, we appreciate our continued connection with and support from departments, such as English, History, Geography, Women's Studies, Communications, Botany, Nursing, and Health Sciences. You have welcomed us into your classrooms and encouraged your students to visit the Writing Center for feedback and support from tutors. In this issue, we continue the fall tradition of publishing tutor articles on subjects we hope will support student writers as well as teachers who encourage writing in their coursework.

We express our gratitude to Dr. Scott Rogers who has vigorously trained our newest tutors to be quick of mind and light on their feet in adjusting to the various writing needs of their fellow students as those earnest students learn to navigate academic writing. Tutors have thrived within the rigors of the tutor

training class requirements to read, write, and rehearse tutoring best practices. We are glad to be allied with and to be taught and supported by Dr. Rogers.

Each year the Writing Center participates in our regional tutoring conference, and this fall, the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association resumed its efforts to restructure our eight-state region. The new RMWCA website is up, hosted by USU, and we are currently working to contact member organizations in neighboring states that can absorb and support some of the outlying programs so that we can focus on strengthening our outreach to high school and community writing centers within our purview.

The Writing Center continues to thrive under the direction of Carl Porter, who guides and supports our efforts to help tutors succeed as well as to identify best practices and measure our efforts so that we can grow toward more effectively serving more of our student population. It is a mission we take seriously and pursue with creativity and energy. Please enjoy this *Verbal Equinox* edition, created for you from us this fall season.

Developing the tools needed for tomorrow

by Samantha Balaich
Editor-in-Chief

The school year is definitely underway, and the beautiful oranges, yellows, and reds carpeting the mountains signal the beginning of fall. For many college students, the cool temperatures and falling leaves warn of upcoming writing assignments in classes across campus.

In this issue of *Verbal Equinox*, we hope to ease students' minds when it comes to writing papers by providing them with the information included in the following articles. Each article featured in this journal focuses on a specific type of writing, or area of the writing process. In addition to this, each article encourages students to step outside of their normal way of thinking in order to grow as writers on and off campus.

Writing is perhaps one of the most powerful tools we, as humans, possess. It is amazing to realize how a few characters on a page can inspire a smile halfway around the world from a person the author will probably never meet.

University study is the breeding ground for such realizations, so it is important that students get excited about writing *now*. With this journal, we hope to supplement the professors who ever so elegantly help students to refine the tools they will take with them out into the exciting and adventurous world that awaits them.

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Quality sources make a world of difference

by Tyler Telford
WSU Writing Center Tutor

The standout problem among writers at the undergraduate level, from English 101 to upper-division courses in every major, is the inability to find quality sources on which to base a thesis. The good news is this problem is easily fixable. And what is even better, quality sources actually make writing a paper quite easy.

Having weak sources is a problem rooted in procrastination and lack of time. (If we are honest, we all know this to be true—myself included.) We think browsing the Internet to find sources will save us an enormous amount of time, as well as saving us that dreaded trip to the library. In reality, we come away with a handful of terrible sources, which provide small blurbs and little info. We read

through them, finding a sentence or two that says nothing we didn't know before. The six pages we have to write starts to look daunting. What, after all, is there to say? Our web-source says nothing interesting, and therefore why should we?

If we could only find those quality sources, writing our paper would be much easier. This is because quality sources are written by people *who do*

have something interesting and important to say. So when you find those articles, create a thesis that interests you, but one which is also related to the idea in the articles you were able to find. Now you have

something meaty enough to fill six pages. Give the writer credit and cite the source, but use it as a beginning for your own ideas.

This is not plagiarism. As long as you are careful to thoroughly explain in your paper which ideas are whose, where you got them, and where your own ideas begin—you are just fine. We are learning to become scholars, and as such no one expects us to base our paper on an idea so groundbreaking in its originality that it is ours alone, without aid from previous scholarship. Ideally our papers synthesize a group of sources. The synthesis is our own original idea, commenting on and connecting our foundation of sources. This is what makes the paper your own—it is not that you have read *The Sun Also Rises* and found something no one in the world ever has.

Now, for the second part, where do

we get these quality sources? The best place to find sources that will supply you with enough fodder to write a long paper is an up-to-date journal. This answer may seem obvious, but we students rarely use them. We imagine that going through journals will take an enormous amount of reading, requiring us to

make temporary house and home of the library, never to be seen for an entire weekend.

There is a simple way to avoid this. Find just one article, and use its works cited page. Have you ever taken the time to read through an article's bibliography? It is

"If we could only find those quality sources, writing our papers would be much easier."

worth your time. In the ten minutes it takes to read through it, you will find at least twenty relevant sources. And it gets even better. The works cited page in a professional article usually comes with comments by the author. These comments will actually tell you what topic connects a group of articles, what whose stance is, and then list several sources.

If you are willing to go into the library and browse through the journal, or use their e-journal database (which contains 24,151 titles), you will save yourself a lot of time in the long run. When you find a good article with a good bibliography, all you have to do is track down the sources. And once you have those sources, you will have enough information to get started on your six blank pages. Writing your paper will be so easy, it won't be a question of what to put in, but what to leave out.



"I have rewritten -- often several times -- every word I have ever published. My pencils outlast my erasers."
-Vladimir Nabokov

A personal ...what??

by Ammon Nelson
WSU Writing Center Tutor

So your professor wants you to write a personal essay, huh? Well, remember that contemplation, creativity, and clarity are all essential parts of the generation of a personal essay.

Personal essays are just that, personal. The idea is to take a personal experience, from stopping to tie your shoe on a busy sidewalk, to skydiving or watching birds, and link it to some truth or epiphany. Beth Lavine says, "The most effective essay takes a small moment and lets it be a microcosm of a larger truth, a truth that resonates with all, even though the

moment is personal to just you" (1). In order to do this you must take time to contemplate the events in your life.

Take a minute to think about your experiences and what they could mean.

Could the ant you saw trying to carry away an abandoned potato chip be a metaphor for your own struggle to achieve the American dream? Who knows? But the success of your essay will depend on your ability to take these simple experiences and do as Sarah Montante says to do, "...help your reader walk a mile in your shoes" (1).

In order for someone to walk a mile in your shoes they need to FEEL what it is like to be in your shoes. Writing creatively is the way to do this. Montante states, "If you give your reader things to see, smell, touch, and hear, he will stick with you longer" (2). The ant trying to carry your potato chip away was not merely an ant carrying a chip but an ant alienated by the society it aimed to help, pulling at a pancake-sized ranch flavored potato chip that left a thin trail of salt and flavored dust near your toe. And as the cool autumn air breezed past your face, you felt hungry, and wanted chips. Suddenly the reader is stuck in your story and wants to know first, what happens with the ant, and second, why in the world you are writing about an ant. Remember also that you want to give a generous creative description of your experience to be in the beginning of your essay where it can grab the reader.

Now that you have had an epiphany about some event in your life, and you have creatively described that experience to the reader, it is critical that you clearly link

"...think about your experiences and what they could

mean."

your personal experience to the rest of your essay. Many believe that the art of the personal essay is to lure their point behind so many over-intellectual ideas that the reader finishes it wondering if the author wrote the essay from an insane asylum in Nebraska. But, the truth is that "You don't want the reader to know exactly where you are ending up until you get there. On the other hand, don't veer so far off the track that you leave your reader puzzled" (Montante 2). Basically, you want to make the connections between your story about the ant, and your disillusionment from the American dream, clear and smooth. Remember, "A well-constructed essay will have a

clear beginning, middle, and end, and will flow seamlessly from one to the next" (Montante 3). One run in accomplishing

this is to maintain the same tone throughout the entire essay. Bentley warns, "Consistency in tone is compelling; leading your reader through your essay with sweet conceptual

biscuits only to have them fall hip-deep in a polemical cesspool at essay's end is

counterproductive" (38).

So, don't be intimidated by an assignment to write a personal essay. Remember, the key to a solid, intriguing personal essay is not overly intellectual language or ideas, but contemplation, creativity, and a clear connection between your personal experience and the message you are trying to convey.

Works Cited

- Bentley, Tom. "Crafting a First-Person Essay." *Writers Digest*. Aug. 2005: 36-39.
- Lavine, Beth. "Take Your Experience and Give It a Universal Twist." *Writer*. Feb. 2002. *Academic Search Premier*. 30 June 2005. <http://web22.epnet.com/citation.asp?tb=1&_ug=sid+E6FF9642%2DC364%2041E2%2DB...>
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"Words - so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them."

-Nathaniel Hawthorne

APA format is not as da

by Jesse Dragonheart
WSU Writing Center Tutor

So you're in college. High school is behind you-maybe far behind you if you're a "non-trad." You've made it through English 1010 and 2010, and you're pretty good now at writing your papers and citations in MLA format.

Relieved to have that behind you, you decide to major in Psychology. You write your first psychology paper. You take your time; you want to impress your professor with your perfect fit into your chosen program of study. Your margins are perfect: your citations are perfect; three different relatives have corrected your spelling and punctuation. You confidently hand the finished product to your professor, who hands it back to you two days later, *bathed* in red ink. WHAT?! It was perfect! At the top, your instructor has written, "Check your syllabus-APA format." What the heck is APA format?

APA is the official format of the American Psychological Association, and it is the format you will be using for the rest of your life, if you're going to be a psychologist. What about MLA? Forget about MLA-MLA is for English majors and the Humanities.

Take heart: it's not that bad. Punctuation is always punctuation, and spelling is always spelling. You're in the habit now of citing your sources, so all you need are a few changes in how you do so.

The first step is to format your paper. APA uses one-inch margins all around. The preferred fonts are 12-pt. Times New Roman or 12-pt Courier. Some instructors allow Ariel, but be sure of your instructor's preference. Bullets are plain dots or squares; APA papers do not showcase individuality. Double-space between all lines of your paper, headings included.

APA uses headings, and those headings vary in format, depending on how many subcategories the paper has. The five basic levels of headings are:

Level One. Centered uppercase and lowercase headings.

Level Two. Centered, italicized, uppercase and lowercase subheadings.

Level Three. Flush left, italicized, uppercase and lowercase subheadings.

Level Four. Indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph subheading, ending with a period.

Level Five. Centered uppercase heading.

If the paper is simply separated into sections, use **Level 1** headings to title each section, using the format described above:

Subject Research

If each of the main sections is separated into subsection, use **Level 1** headings to title each section, and then **Level 3** headings to title each of the subsections, using the format described above:

Subject Research

Method

If each of the subsections is separated into further subsections, then use **Level 1** headings to title each main section, **Level 3** headings to title each subsection, and then **Level 4** headings to title each further subsection, using the format described above:

Subject Research

Method

Procedure.

Don't worry: three levels is usually the furthest you'll need to go.



"Convince yourself that you are working in clay, not marble, 011 paper, not eternal bronze: let that first sentence be as stupid as it wishes."

-Jacques Barzon

unting as it may seem

The next thing is citations. Your "Works Cited" page is now a "References" page. Entries within the reference page are single-spaced, with a double space between. An APA in-text citation requires three pieces of information: the author's last name and the year of publication (always), and the page number (if quoting an article directly). Example: (Dragonheart, 2005, p. 3).

An APA reference citation looks like this:

Book:

Lamott, A. (1994). *Bird by bird*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Notice that only the first word of the title is capitalized. Also, APA uses the author's first initial instead of first name. If the entry were long enough to wrap, it would require a hanging indent of five spaces.

Magazine article:

Kellogg, R.T. (2001). Competition among writing processes. *American Journal of Psychology*, 7, 175-192.

For an article, do not italicize the article title, and capitalize only the first word. Italicize the journal title, and use uppercase and lowercase.

Online sources:

In-text, an online source requires the same three pieces of information as a print source: author's last name, year, and page number if applicable. One problem you'll run into is that often no author is listed. In this case, you would use the first few words of the title instead.

Newspaper or magazine article online:

Staff and wire reports (2005, September 22). Fleeing from Rita is oh- so-slow going. *The Houston Chronicle*. Retrieved September 22, 2005, from <http://www.chron.com>

Journal article retrieved from a database:

Brodin, J. (2005). Diversity of aspects on play in children with profound multiple disabilities. *Early Child Development & Care*, 175:7/8, 635-647. Retrieved September 22, 2005, from EBSCOhost.

Obviously, each type of resource has its own required citation method. A reference book is indispensable. If your chosen field uses APA, an APA manual is a worthy investment. Until you get one of your own, come by the Writing Center. We have those and any more.



References

The American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American psychological association* (5th ed.). Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Weber State University Writing Center. (2005). *APA documentation quick reference guide* [pamphlet]. Ogden, UT: Katie Hinds.

*The Writing Center fully acknowledges its relationship to the Humanities and is very pleased to be a part of this area of the arts. In addition, the tutors who work in the Writing Center are always pleased to work with students in regards to *any* format in which they may need to write a paper.

Mere literary talent is common; what is rare is endurance, the continuing desire to work hard at writing."

-Donald Hall

Ideas are everywhere

by Gregory Sawyer
WSU Writing Center Tutor

Writing an argumentative essay is never easy. The research alone can be staggering, and once compiled, the writer needs to be objective and break down the research into points that can be easily summed up. The writer must be concerned about having a strong thesis statement and supporting conclusion. The main body of the paper must demonstrate points that support the thesis and give examples toward the argument being made. Then there are issues of grammar, prose, style, and pertinence that the writer needs to consider. Even the works cited page can be a pain in the neck. No one really memorizes how to properly cite every kind of source. All things considered, these issues merely pale in comparison to one nagging dilemma: what to write about.

Whatever the topic is going to be, it must be shaped into the form of an argument. In argumentative essays, writers are making a claim. So they must be careful that whatever they choose, the topic is neither too narrow nor too broad. If the topic is too narrow, then content may be difficult to generate. If it is too broad, a writer may end up biting too big a chunk and deviating from the original thesis.

For declared majors, this dilemma may not be as daunting. Since they know what they want to study, deciding on issues to write about is narrowed down by these factors: they

know what they're interested in, what they're passionate about, what they're good at, and even what they're experienced in.

Undeclared majors, however, may not be sure of those factors and may have trouble in English classes deciding what to write. Contrivances tend to occur in papers written by authors who are not interested in their topics. So how can people who are uncertain approach this problem?

Current events are a start. The world is a tumultuous place, to say the least, and one can get ideas

simply by listening to the news. Start with the regular informative news. If that isn't

thought provoking enough, the opinionated news columns and programs are loaded with heated debates. The good ones will even effectively lay down the pros and cons of

an issue, giving a writer lots of ideas regarding which side of the issue to take. Lots of controversial debates fill the news all the time, but some of these topics have been driven into the ground, and choosing a fresh topic to put before the teacher is a good idea.

If this approach isn't helping to formulate ideas, then the writer can look to oneself for guidance. Students' being undeclared, doesn't mean they don't have interests and hobbies. Surely people who enjoy cooking have often wondered about where the food comes from and how it is processed. There are many ethical, moral, and environmental

issues surrounding the food industry: genetically engineered food, methods of raising cattle, excessive farming of the oceans. Students who enjoy hiking are likely concerned about trail conservation. Do trails have enough protection? Do they need more?

If the student's biggest hobby is writing itself, a multiplicity of arguable topics present themselves: how best to teach writing, the validity of writing as an academic process, writing as a form of communicating, or even whether or not writing is a natural process.

Whether it's sports, movies, music, or computers, any given thing or idea that interests a student is always going to have topics that surround it.

Starting with a single hobby or interest as a point of reference gives way to the externalities that surround it, and this should help the writer come up with compelling arguments to write about.



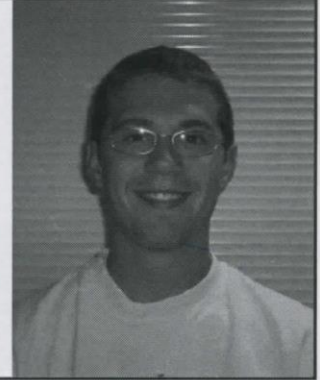
"...everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt."
-Sylvia Plath

A peek at our authors

Tyler Telford is an English major. He spends his winters snowboarding, and his summers firefighting. He also loves to rockclimb, and he thinks that everyone should definitely see the movie *Donnie Darko*. This is Tyler's third semester as a tutor in the WSU Writing Center; during this time, Tyler has accomplished the status of Certified Master Tutor.



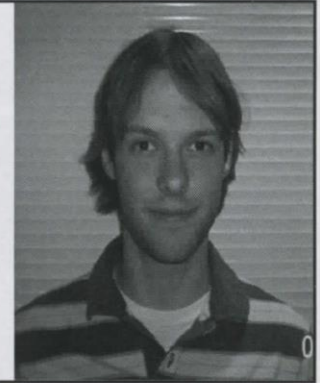
Ammon Nelson is a Creative Writing major. He enjoys M&M's, Modern/Contemporary literature, basketball, some video games, and boxing. He thoroughly enjoys eating chicken and beef at any given time of the day. This is Ammon's third semester as a tutor in the WSU Writing Center, and he has earned his Master Tutor Certification.



Jesse Dragonheart is an Elementary Education major. Her hobbies and interests include bodybuilding, art, crochet, and music. She is very proud of her dog, Marty, who has recently published a children's book entitled, *When I Grow Up*. This is Jesse's third semester as a tutor in the WSU Writing Center, and she is also a Certified Master Tutor.



Gregory Sawyer is a Political Science major. He loves reading, hiking, cooking, golfing, and writing. His favorite holiday is Halloween, and he loves this creepy time of year. He wants everyone to call him the "office dullard." This is Greg's first semester as a tutor in the WSU Writing Center, and he is currently training to become certified through CRLA.



Samantha Balaich is a Physics major. She spend her time playing the french born, writing, learning about airplanes, studying physics, and being with friends. She loves everything that is Irish, hopes to one day live in Ireland, and she hopes to one day be a fluid physicist. This is Sam's third semester as a tutor in the WSU Writing Center, and she is a Certified Master Tutor.



Claire Hughes is the Writing Center Coordinator, and every single tutor is her favorite. While her background is in English Literature and Sociology, she has a healthy respect for all there is to know and for those who strive to know more of it. She delights in the thriving, evolving efforts of Academic Support Services & Programs to support student success.



Verbal Equinox Staff

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"Words are the most powerful drug used by mankind."

-Rudyard Kipling

The next issue of Verbal Equinox is a special issue that will feature the winners of the 2005 WSU Writing Center Contest in the areas of

- poetry
- fiction
- non-fiction

written by WSU student authors.

*Watch for the new issue
in Spring of 2006!

The Writing Center is here to assist you!

Our quality tutors are trained to help students with any part of the writing process, in any area of writing, for any class. Please feel free to drop by. We look forward to seeing you!

Hours:

Mon.-Thurs.: 9:00a.m.- 4 p.m.

and 6:00p.m. - 9:00p.m.

Friday: 9:00a.m. - 4:00p.m.

Saturday: 10:00a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Please visit our website:

<http://departments.weber.edu/writingcenter>

Weber State University Writing Center

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