

Verbal Equinox

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY

WRITING CENTER JOURNAL

SPRING 2018



THE WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY
WRITING CENTER JOURNAL

Verbal Equinox

SPRING 2018

Verbal Equinox Staff

Editor-in-Chief

Gwyn Allred

Copy Editors

Nic Muranaka
Andrea Mancilla
McCall Robison

Editor-Elect

Sarah Taylor

Writing Center Director

Claire Hughes

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

by Sarah Taylor and Gwyneth Allredv

Essays

Where is Mario Now?
by Breanna Huntsman.....2

Formatting Dialogue
by Shawn Atkinson9

A Thirty-Minute Session and Beyond
by Katie McKinnon12

The Art of Direction and Connection
by Rebekah Stout20

Poetry

Saving Grace
by Emily States23

I before E Except after C
by Miranda Spaulding24

The Best, Clearest, and
Most Brilliant Comma
by Khristie Tuttle.....25

To the *Verbal Equinox* Staff and Contributors,

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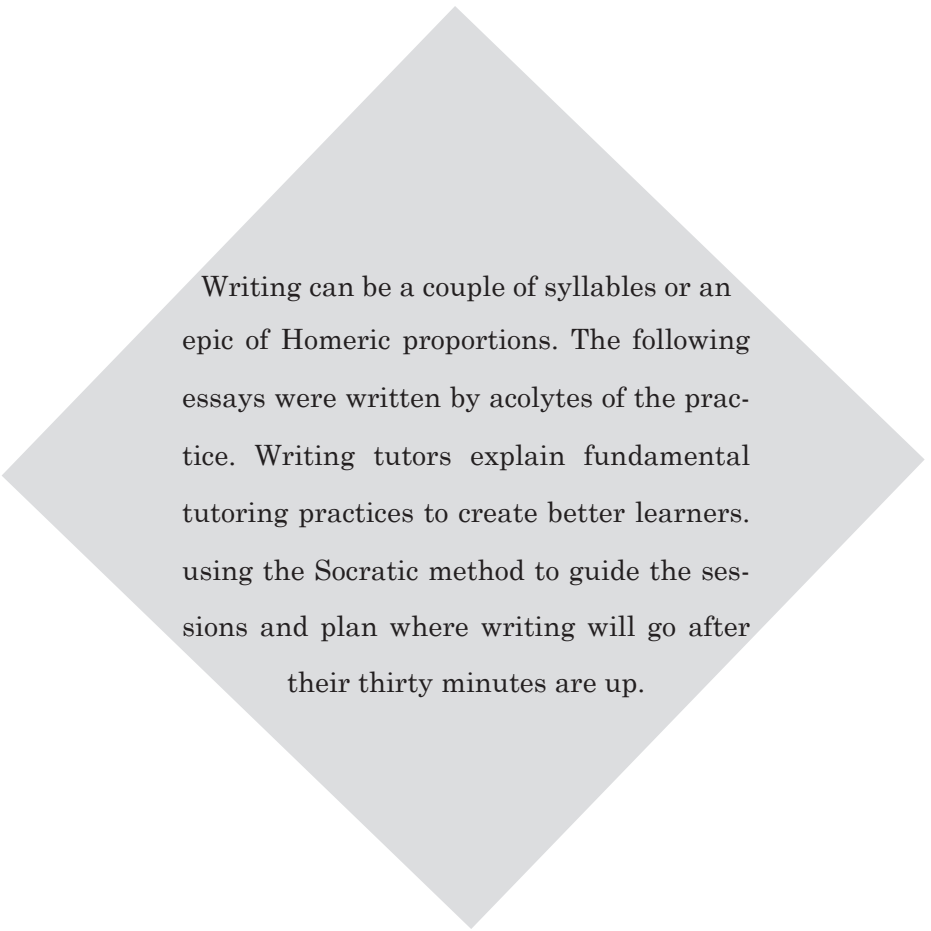
Finally, we would like to thank Claire Hughes for being the benevolent and exceptional Writing Center Director that she is. Her devotion to tutors and students alike is always incredible and inspirational. She has been nothing but helpful and encouraging. Thank you for your unwavering support.

Sincerely,

Sarah Taylor, Editor-Elect

Gwyneth Allred, Editor-in-Chief

Essays



Writing can be a couple of syllables or an epic of Homeric proportions. The following essays were written by acolytes of the practice. Writing tutors explain fundamental tutoring practices to create better learners. using the Socratic method to guide the sessions and plan where writing will go after their thirty minutes are up.

Breeanna Huntsman

WHERE IS MARIO NOW?

Writing Consultant, Weber State University

I am sitting in my tenth grade English class listening to Mrs. Defriez, my teacher, drone on and on about how to read Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Mrs. Defriez keeps telling us what the author means when she says this here or what she means by saying that there. Mrs. Defriez tells us, "This interpretation of the story will be on the test, so listen up." Everything is about what will be on the test. Every lesson, every hour I spend sitting here in this class or the next one, is about "the test." Even our tests prepare us for tests, and that is when I think to myself, Why? The educational world I have lived in since pre-school seems to have one goal: Pass the test. Get to the next level of schooling, then the next.

School is almost like a video game in the sense that there are small tasks to accomplish throughout each level, but the ultimate goal is to beat the game. Does anyone ever wonder what happens to Mario, to Sebastian Castellanos, to Master Chief, to ourselves when the game itself is finally completed? I find this question haunting me as I go from grade to grade, level to level. I think about where I will end up when the game is over. What I really want to know is why school is important and what it is going to do for me in the future. As the train stopped at each of these stations in my head, it ended up at the question: Am I being educated or

trained in high school?

In Alejandro Zambra's story "Reading Comprehension: Text No. 1," the narrator explains, "After so many study guides, so many practice tests and proficiency and achievement tests, it would have been impossible for us not to learn something, but we forgot everything almost right away and, I am afraid, for good," (75). As I passed each level in school, I did this exactly. I would eat up the information I was being fed, regurgitate it during an exam, and leave it there to rot. This is not education: this is training a group of people to pass an exam or class in order to push the next group through. It is as if high school students are cattle being herded through a factory to make way for new livestock.

To me, being educated means being taught how to think independently. It means forming my own ideas on the matters at hand and knowing what to do with them. Being educated is valuable because it is what changes the world. Society depends on original ideas and innovative thinking in order to develop new ideas, enabling us to swim forward instead of tread water or even sink. Education means exploring avenues or ideas that have never been seen or thought of before, just as Steve Jobs did when he threw out his college textbooks to develop a form of technology that impacted the way in which people communicate and stay connected to the world.

Training, on the other hand, is the process by which one is taught how to perform a particular skill or action in a specific way.

Just as driver's education demonstrate, training can be extremely valuable within society. Without the training involved with the preparation of driving, it would be nearly impossible for a society to successfully function in the motorized world we live in today. Having people know how to accomplish certain tasks and do them well or behave in acceptable ways allows for a more livable society.

While mere training is valuable within society, when it comes to schooling, training becomes limited. People adapt and evolve to their surroundings. In a school environment, the idea of adapting and evolving is distorted by teaching people to perform actions the same way on repeat. Pink Floyd once sang, "All in all, you're just another brick in the wall," referring to the idea that teachers are part of a wall blocking students from innovative and creative thinking. High school seems to leave students with what are deemed to be "correct" answers when it could really be leaving them with more insightful questions.

This brings us to the question: Is education more valuable than training? Society currently values training over education in such a way that it rewards those who follow the system and stay inside the box. This is because training is the oil in the wheel of society; it keeps everything going in a comfortable rotation. Just as the narrator in Zambra's story was told, "I was the best in my class, in my whole school. I never cheated on an exam, but I bombed the aptitude test, so I had to study religious pedagogy. I didn't even believe in God" (76). This type of training happens routinely in

public education.

Zambra's point that we are trained in high school is a strong one, but it does not necessarily mean we should give up. I still had hope that there was something after the game for me. By the time I reached the twelfth and "final" level, I found myself searching for a new game: college. I became so consumed with completing each level, I did not really think about why I wanted to go to college in the first place. I assumed it was because I needed a degree in order to get a certain job, which is true; I do need one, but it is not necessarily why I applied. I found myself craving education, craving the "ah-ha" moment when I finally understood something I previously had not. So one might ask what college is for, then. For some, college is the place that teaches the skills and information needed to perform a certain action or job. It is to train people how to do something.

For others, like me, college is not really there for a training purpose; it is not just another game. A degree in English requires me to think and question what I am being taught. It educates me in the sense that the degree asks for my opinions and thoughts on literature and demands I find my own interpretations. I have found it is acceptable, even encouraged, to voice my own opinions and interpretations within a classroom.

For example, in one of my English courses, I wrote a response paper using my own interpretation of an anonymous poem of a young woman in the eighteenth century: "Women Born to be

Controll'd." My interpretation of it just so happened to be one that went against what my professor taught in class. I thought I would get scolded or get a lower grade because of this. However, when the paper was graded and returned to me, I was surprised at the comment she left on it: "This is a wonderful interpretation of this poem. It changed my mind about it. Well done." This experience encouraged me to develop original thoughts and continue innovatively thinking. Education is a powerful thing, and it should start in high school, or sooner, but it does not always seem to be the case.

As Zambra wrote, and as my tenth grade English class alluded to, "We didn't have to write anything or form opinions or develop any ideas of our own; all we had to do was play the game and guess the trick" (75). Even though Zambra was right about this in terms of high school, this is where my opinion differs from his. Like him, I too feel like the education system in high school trains students to know how to get around learning; it teaches them how to just get through school. It has become a game or a way to herd students like cattle, not really slowing down for the weak or keeping up with the strong. It focuses on pushing the majority through. While I believe high school can work well as a training ground, college works best when it is a place where education resides.

Zambra's story concludes with the idea: "They prepared you for this, for a world where everyone fucks everyone over. You'll do

well on that test, very well, don't worry: you all weren't educated; you were trained" (76). He is right in many cases, but, as in a videogame, the cognitive task changes. The first few levels are there as a tutorial of what button to push when and what technique to use where in order to complete each small task. As we progress, the levels become more challenging, causing us to adapt the techniques we were trained on and apply them with new, layered strategies for the next ones.

When I was in high school, I felt I was ready to "level up" a littler earlier than the majority of my classmates. However, Mrs. Defriez did not have the resources nor the authority to challenge me further within her classroom walls. Her class was designed to flow at a certain pace, and it was not meant to keep up with those who were ahead or slow down for those falling behind. I felt like I was being molded to fit a particular place or slot in a puzzle of standardized testing. This is when I decided to become proactive within my own education instead of being herded at a steady pace when all I wanted to do was run. I started searching for a way out of the corral. Finally, I found Itineris Early College High School and transferred right away.

This new school pushed me to do exactly what I had always wanted: to think for myself. It is what jump-started me into a series of educational events and helped me more fully develop the multiple skills and techniques I was trained and drilled on in Mrs. Defriez's class and use them in more innovative ways. If it was

not for my decision to take control of my education, I would not be where I am today. I was challenged to work hard and attain my goals at Itineris, and I was encouraged to graduate with an associate's degree. Because of this, I was hired on as a tutor in the Writing Center in my freshman year at Weber State University due to the effort I had made to complete the required credentials for the job beforehand. Currently, I am graduating with my bachelor's degree at the age of nineteen. By making the decision to become involved with what and how I was being taught in high school, I have changed the entire course of my life and future for the better. We all deserve the opportunity to make this change in our lives and pave the way to enable innovative thinking earlier on for those, like me, who are ready for it.

Contrary to Zambra's main point, training is clearly an important aspect of education; they go hand in hand. There are parts of the educational system and society dedicated to the training aspect, but there are other parts that focus on the actual education as Itineris has shown me. Training and education each reinforce one another in a rotative way. Just like a video game's levels, the training portion is best kept integrated in the lower or beginning of a level whereas the education portion is best done in the upper or more advanced portion of a level. Overall, education and training have valid places in society.

Shawn Atkinson

FORMATTING DIALOGUE

Writing Consultant, Weber State University

When I enjoy a good book, I love being swept up by the story. As the story comes alive, the words on the page seem to become transparent, and the turning of pages becomes automatic. It is a stimulating and enjoyable phenomenon when the words on the page become temporarily incomprehensible as their meaning paints the story in my mind. I am sure other readers understand this process of reading for enjoyment so deeply that the structure of the writing gets lost in the experience. Early in my study of creative writing, I thought I knew how to properly format dialogue, but as it turned out, I had overlooked the proper structure even though I had been exposed to it over and over. Knowing the correct way to structure dialogue gives readers a way to sink into the composition uninterrupted by faulty formatting and become engulfed by the story.

Placing lines of dialogue in new, indented paragraphs when a character begins speaking gives an obvious impression of a change. Additionally, it looks awkward if quotations close and immediately open again without a break, so I typically do not see this error in other creative writers' early work. Furthermore, one less obvious error is not creating new paragraphs when dialogue spoken by one character is separated by descriptive prose. How-

ever, the one structure that typically creates problems for new creative writers is the proper use of dialogue tags.

The most common mistake with dialogue tags is ending a written sentence at the same place the quoted dialogue ends. The proper way to use these clarifying phrases is to attach them to the rest of the spoken sentence. For example:

Incorrect - "Jack and I are going to run up the hill." Said Jill.

Correct - "Jack and I are going to run up the hill," said Jill.

Notice that Jill's spoken sentence ends after the word hill when the dialogue is written, but we do not end the sentence until we clarify who was speaking. Therefore, there will be a comma after the word hill, and the word said is not capitalized. To make this a bit more complicated, examine the following sentence:

"Why does Jack want to run up the hill?" Jill asked.

Here, Jill's dialogue is in the form of a question, and proper punctuation requires the use of a question mark, but the sentence has not yet ended. Additionally, the proper noun Jill is capitalized, but the dialogue tag is still attached to the spoken words. While the second example follows the same rules, the punctuation and capitalization can be misleading as to the proper structure of these types of sentences.

The proper structure of English, while important, is not always the first concern for creative writers. I often need to get ideas onto the page before I stress about cleaning up the syntax, and a large part of the creative process is also rewriting and editing, in which punctuation can be fixed or improved. However, in a workshop environment, using the basic rules of dialogue correctly can help our peers focus on the more important aspects of their creative works.

Katie McKinnon

A THIRTY-MINUTE SESSION AND BEYOND

Writing Consultant, Weber State University

Introduction

Thirty minutes does not seem like a long time. Thirty minutes is a commute, an episode of a T.V. show, a quiz, a lecture, and many more things that seem to be fleeting. Thirty minutes is also the amount of time a tutor has to aid a student with a writing assignment when the center is busy. In this half hour, both students and faculty hope tutors will ascertain what the student needs help with, create a roadmap to guide the session, read through the paper, check for organization, structure, and development, and address what students often refer to as “just grammar,” all while helping the student notice and mark patterns of error. As a tutor, I felt accomplished if I managed to get through half of these tasks and help the student to best of my ability in those precious thirty minutes.

The Socratic Method

I soon came to learn that the mechanics of the paper, the procedures, the rules of English, and the pedagogy of tutoring are always subordinate to two principles: the Socratic Method and the tutor-tutee relationship. Tutoring is not just about checking boxes during a session, filling out a confirmation slip, and sending the student on his or her way. Tutoring is about professional peer

relationships. Tutees' perception of the campus Writing Center and perhaps their relationship with student services on campus can be determined in those first thirty minutes with a tutor based on what the student learns and how he or she feels during that tutoring session. While thirty minutes seems fleeting and, in one day, a tutor could meet with dozens of students, each tutoring session presents itself as an opportunity to provide a kind, courteous, and supportive interaction for students who bring their own background, culture, needs, and experience to the tutor-tutee relationship.

I remember that perhaps the most difficult aspect of tutoring was not over tutoring. In other words, I had a tendency to talk and help too much when I should have been listening and asking questions. The Socratic Method is the anchor of each tutoring session, but it takes practice and skill to effectively utilize this method in a tutoring session. The Socratic Method is comparable to a dance. The tutor and tutee are partners for thirty minutes. Together, they must have equity in the session and participate in a constant waltz of give and take. The tutor, the lead dancer with more experience, cannot yank the tutee around and force them through the motions. Yet, the tutor cannot be passive and neglect to guide the student through the steps of the writing process. It requires both tutor and tutee to be present, but, ultimately, the tutor must know when to guide more firmly or hold back, so the tutee can try to take the lead in the session and at home. The

tutee needs to be familiar with the steps of the tutoring session and be flexible, so the tutor can gently guide them through the dance of the session, helping the student make adjustments and improve his or her writing technique. With this metaphor, I was able to step back and check my behavior as a tutor. Was I helicopter tutoring?

In my earnest effort to make sure my tutee knew “all the things,” was I depriving them of the opportunity to come to these realizations themselves? If I had to ask myself these questions, most likely, I was exhibiting those behaviors. I was letting my intense desire to help smother the tutee and disrupt the delicate balance of the session. The Socratic Method helped me become a better tutor because it gave me perspective and prevented me from getting bogged down by the list of things to achieve during the session, giving me the opportunity to pull back and focus on the tutee while allowing them to be my partner in the session rather than my student.

Tutors should use the Socratic Method because it allows tutees to learn for themselves with guided help, aiding them at improving their English skills for the rest of their college careers and beyond. Tutors are not editors, which is why tutees cannot just drop off their papers and pick them up later fixed and error free. It is not the paper that matters. What matters in every tutoring session is the tutee and the academic journey. Sometimes, thirty minutes is not enough time to fix all the errors in a paper or

help a student understand all of the nuances of rhetoric, argumentation, and grammar. In thirty minutes, a tutor can provide each student with the opportunity to get used to the drafting and revising process, helping them gain the skills they will need to effectively tackle any paper that comes their way. The Socratic Method allows tutees to receive enough guidance to not feel overwhelmed or lost, but it gives them enough confidence and self-efficacy to progress on their own.

Patience, Compassion, and Emotional Support

However, the essence of tutoring goes beyond the Socratic Method. Ultimately, tutors are there for tutees emotionally during every session. Every day, tutees come into the Writing Center feeling inadequate as writers or consumed by the stress of learning how to write effectively. While tutors cannot take away the stress of college or struggles of writing a paper, they can provide support, advice, and empathy for the tutee. A kind word of encouragement or a sincere inquiry of “how can I help you?” means the world to students.

These positive and prosocial interactions not only help tutees, but these interactions create a positive and welcoming environment for all students on campus. As a tutor, it is all too easy to focus on the paper and on how to guide the student through the session that the essence of the tutor-tutee relationship can get lost. These relationships are the lifeblood of each Writing Center. There is a business principle that applies to these relationships

which states that twenty percent of one's regular customers generate eighty percent of one's business through word of mouth. While the Writing Center is not a traditional business, it is a service, and tutors are in the business of student service. If students have a positive and elevating experience in the Writing Center, they will spread the word, but the opposite is true as well. Students will tell their friends and classmates about a negative experience during a tutoring session. For this reason, in every session, tutors must remember to not only aid students in developing critical English skills but to also brighten the tutee's day or lighten the load of work. It takes a great deal of courage to bring papers in for someone to look at and evaluate, and tutees often feel vulnerable when coming into the Writing Center. Each tutor must, in his or her own way, learn how to bring tutees out of their shell and help them gain confidence in their writing abilities through patience and compassion.

These skills of patience and compassion are utilized by the tutor in every session, but they are especially vital when the student's emotional state or content of the paper can add another layer of stress and vulnerability. Sometimes students are asked to write personal narratives, which can be extremely personal. I tutored students who discussed harrowing topics such as death, addiction, sexual abuse, and many others. In these situations, the tutor must always be sensitive to the tutee's mental and emotional state. Little gestures of this compassion come when tutors ask kindly

if they can read the paper aloud or thank tutees for being brave enough to share their experiences.

Sometimes, the emotional support and solidarity found in sharing personal and academic struggles with a tutor defines a tutoring session rather than actually talking about the specifics of the assignment. There was one specific tutoring session that highlighted this principle for me. I worked with a woman who was coming back to school and was taking developmental English courses. When I asked about her assignment, she told me that she had not written it because she could not figure out how to navigate the online website for the college that allowed students to see their assignments and grades. The next thirty minutes were spent helping her figure out how to use the website and creating a plan on how to organize her paper, which was a personal narrative. She also told me that the topic of her narrative involved the death of her husband in the line of duty while serving with the Air Force and how she was coming back to school, so she could provide for her children. There were times when she almost cried from the depth of her sadness, and I remember trying to remain professional while still providing the emotional support that she needed. After she left, I felt like I had failed her because we did not cover any of the usual topics that come up in a tutoring session nor did that session go as I had anticipated. However, I soon realized that what this student needed was not a crash course in independent and dependent clauses or a transition sentence workshop. She

needed support in learning how to use university resources, and she needed someone to help her formulate a way to talk about the hardest event in her life, a task she felt overwhelmed to tackle alone. In this session, I learned that the difference between a good tutor and a great tutor is a great tutor knows when to stick to the procedure or a tutoring session and when to change the structure and focus of the session to fit the needs of the student.

Any tutor will tell you that a tutee will say that they want one thing, but it becomes clear that they really need something else that they cannot ask for or do not know how to ask for, and it is up to the tutor to read between these lines and get to the heart of what the student really wants and needs. At the end of the day, students are human, and they bring their history, background, feelings, anxieties, and stresses with them to each tutoring session. Tutors should always aspire to see the student not as another session or another paper but as a human being with needs and real-life problems. When tutors acknowledge the human element within tutoring, they are ready to help every tutee in any situation.

Conclusion

Maya Angelou said it best: “People will forget what you said, they will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.” The same is true of every single tutoring session. In reality, tutees might not remember all of the comma rules or MLA formatting that the tutor explained. They probably will not

remember the paper they brought into the session a year from now. What they will remember is the experience that they had in the Writing Center and how they felt during those thirty minutes they spent with a Writing Center tutor. Tutors are the front line of the Center, and it is their kind conduct and respectful manner that defines the job and makes tutees feel welcome. Tutors' behavior is what makes students feel safe and supported in every thirty-minute session and beyond.

No matter how many sessions, no matter how long the shift or how tired a tutor is, the tutor's number one responsibility is to preserve the tutor-tutee relationship. Relationships are what define every Writing Center and tutoring experience, so making those thirty minutes count in every session, every day is what makes all the difference in the world for the tutor and the tutee. A student's college experience can be greatly affected by their experience with a tutor, even if that time is as short as thirty minutes.

Rebekah Stout

THE ART OF DIRECTION AND CONNECTION

Writing Consultant, Weber State University

Part of our job as writers is to keep our readers completely engaged. Our introduction must interest them enough to continue reading. We begin broadly to draw them in. Then we become more concise and straightforward with our thesis. Our paragraphs support and explain the one thought, or concept, of the thesis. Every section connects and supports the others. With every paragraph, we are reminding the readers why they should care and compelling them to continue. Then, our conclusion echoes the thesis, with the added power and persuasion of every paragraph that came before.

The ultimate purpose of writing is to convey meaning. Although many components, such as syntax, grammar, and punctuation are imperative, their power to persuade or enlighten is dimmed without proper organization and structure. I have experienced this already in many tutees' papers.

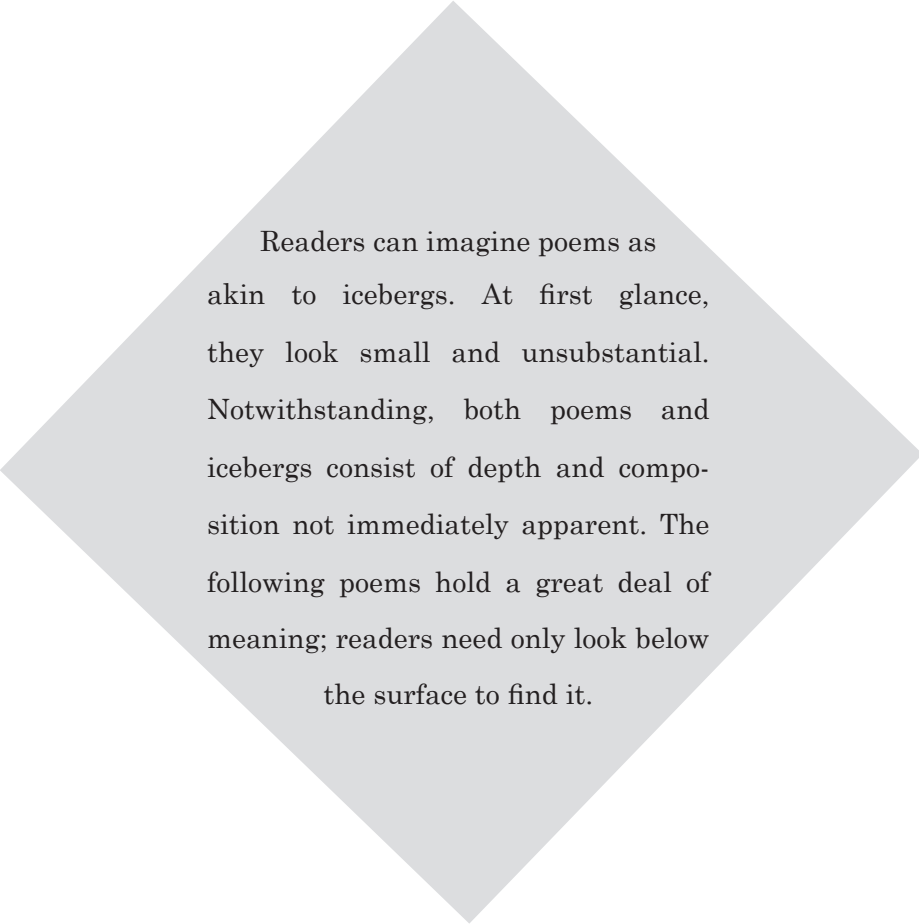
During these sessions, it becomes clear that their writing is eloquent, persuasive, or engaging. However, their papers often lack direction or cohesion within paragraphs. When this happens, I find it best to ask the tutee questions about their main goals for the paper. We discuss the main idea they wish to explain or persuade the reader of. Once we have found the heart of the pa-

per, everything becomes clearer. Often, tutees will then be able to assign topics to particular paragraphs on their own.

However, sometimes tutees will have clear direction and structure while lacking transitions within, and between, paragraphs. This disrupts the flow of the paper because the power within each section is halted, rather than moving on to the following section. When I find this in a paper, I like to supply the tutee with an example of two seemingly unrelated thoughts. Each thought is interesting, yet there is no connection between them. Then, I provide a transition, or connection, between the thoughts. Once the tutee understands how to provide these connections for the reader, the flow of thought within the paper runs smoothly, gaining power of conviction and clarity, until it reaches the conclusion.

Some people may struggle with this concept more than others. To them, I might suggest spending some quality time focusing on transitions. They could compare and contrast articles, books, or movies. They might try finding connections in their own lives and that of someone living in another country, eating different foods, and speaking a different language. This is necessary because in order for writers to convey true connection to the reader, they must understand it for themselves.

Poetry



Readers can imagine poems as akin to icebergs. At first glance, they look small and unsubstantial. Notwithstanding, both poems and icebergs consist of depth and composition not immediately apparent. The following poems hold a great deal of meaning; readers need only look below the surface to find it.

Emily States

SAVING GRACE

Writing Consultant, Weber State University

Dear Oxford comma,

You are my life,

my salvation,

and my sanity.

Miranda Spaulding

I BEFORE E EXCEPT AFTER C

Center Assistant, Weber State University

It's an **ancient** tradition to follow this rule.

It came into **being** back in elementary school.

These **weird** **policies** have long **reigned** the halls.

It's been tested by **science** and **deified** by all.

When **weighing** the **efficiency** of this **foreign** rhyme,

One encounters **veiled** lies that it attempts to disguise.

This **heinous** law is **sleight** in its imposture.

It for**feits** all logic and **seizes** definition with **leisure**.

Al**beit** sounding **fancier** than most grammar commands,

Using **either** e or i should be fraught with **surveillance**.

So when your **neighbor** tells you **their** **caffeine** **heist** is on,

And there are **eight** **feisty** **foreign** **freights** on your lawn;

When a **species** **deindustrializes** a **sovereign** nation,

Herein know that **agreeing** with this rule would be wrong.

Khristie Tuttle

THE BEST, CLEAREST, AND MOST BRILLIANT COMMA

Writing Consultant, Weber State University

It is simple, clear, and straightforward.

When I use it, I am happy, content, and satisfied.

This comma improves my life, sentences, and writing,

And prevents literary confusion, ambiguity, and fighting.

It is clean, crisp, and fresh.

It makes lists understandable, work, and flow.

Lists and meaning need not be dirty, unclear, or muddy,

The Oxford Comma cleans like soap, cleaner, or shampoo, real
sudsy.

Intention, understanding, and meaning are clear.

This comma saves lives, sanity, and precious time.

Avoid confusion, strife, and drama,

#savetheoxfordcomma.



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