

THE PAPER CHASE

A NEWSLETTER FOR WRITERS AT AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE

Spring 2005

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Romancing the Inner Nerd

By Emily Norman

After five months abroad writing lengthy academic papers in Spanish, and preparing for what would undoubtedly be a writing-intensive senior year, I relished having the remainder of my summer break to write whatever I wanted. I wrote some decent creative nonfiction, blogged everything down to memorable sneezes, embarked on a novel that was doomed from the start, and even tried my hand at poetry—mostly haikus about my cat.

As I was beginning to draft my personal statement for grad school, it dawned on me that I should find a way to write for profit. After all, I need a job to help pay my tuition, and writing beats retail hands down. Most writing jobs claim you need “experience” or “a degree,” but whatever—I’ve got a pen and some paper, what else do I need? In the grocery store checkout, I realized my calling: writing and publishing a dime store romance novel.

Attracted to a call I encountered online for sexy novels about traveling to foreign lands, I began my

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Maybe Hemingway's Protagonist Wasn't That Apathetic

By Lisha Daniels Storey,
Acting Director of the Writing
Center

Have you ever worked on a group paper or project? Was it successful...or a dismal failure? What contributed to that success or failure?

And how many people were in that group?

Imagine fifteen people planning, researching, writing, and presenting a research project. The tutors at the Writing Center did just that, for the Southeastern Writing Centers

Association conference in February, and though the process was difficult, it was productive. At the conference, another group of tutors talked about their learning experiences with collaborative writing. As they spoke, I thought back to our own collaborative process, and how it relates to what we do every day in the Writing Center.

As a new tutor five years ago, I learned that we work collaboratively with writers, but didn't fully understand the axiom. The operational premise of each session is that the writer brings

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Editors: Cailin Copan-Kelly, Erica Jarrell, Megan Morris

Maybe Hemingway's Protagonist Wasn't That Apathetic

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knowledge about the assignment, the text, and her own ideas, while the tutor also brings knowledge – about how to write a thesis, better organize



a paper, or questions to ask to generate ideas. The experience is collaborative because the tutor and writer are

both students, no grades are being handed out, and both are actively involved.

That idea of collaboration didn't exactly line up with the process of developing our research project, though. The tutors started with an equal lack of knowledge as well as the same goal – to create and explore a thoughtful and innovative research question, and present our results to a group of professional peers. No one had a vision of exactly how we would get there, so in order for us to effectively use our time, at least one person had to take some control and try to direct each of our sessions, to keep the group accountable to its goals. While those persons acted the part of the tutor in a writing conference, the main difference was that during the writing process, we created shared knowledge that was equally important to all of us.

Comparing the tutors' collaborative writing experience with collaborative sessions in the Writing Center has made me think about this ideal. In order to work, it has to be a malleable methodology that liberates each person despite different contexts. As a tutor, my goal for a writer might differ from hers – I want to help her write a clear thesis, while she just wants a good grade on the paper. If we are

flexible, we can both accomplish our goals, and they really aren't all that different – a thoughtful, argumentative thesis cannot hurt someone's grade.

One difference between these two kinds of collaboration is the type of investment, i.e., who is doing the writing. As the tutors worked to develop the presentation, we wrote together and made directive suggestions. Sometimes one person's thought or sentence ended up in the final product, almost word for word.

That doesn't work for the conferences we have in the Writing Center. I am not going to tell a writer, "Hey, you should say that Hemingway uses the protagonist's apathy to question the very nature of human relationships...and you should say that right here." We know the applicable p-word. The writer's ideas belong to her, and my investment should be in helping her explore, develop, and say them – in her words.

We are now approaching murky water. The questions I ask to help a writer find something better than my ridiculous idea about Hemingway have contributed to her own thesis about what that brilliant man is doing. What if she talks to her professor about it – and what if she receives more direct guidance than I gave?

What happens when she's talking to her roommate (because the night before the paper is due, who else can you rope into helping you revise?) who says, "Hey, you should say that Hemingway uses the protagonist's apathy to question the very nature of human relationships"? Does she say, "Whoa, stop, let me think about this on my own"?

Somewhere amidst group papers, Writing Center conferences, conversations with professors, and the roommate read-over, is collaboration. It's constantly happening, and it takes many forms – maybe more than we recognize. I would never condone using someone else's ideas as my own, but when two or more people come together to talk about ideas and writing, there is inevitable overlap. As long as each person is equally invested in learning (rather than one person passively receiving ideas), it's difficult to draw the line between collaboration and plagiarism...and plagiarism might not always be the right word for non-collaboration.

What emerges from my reflection is the importance of ownership. Collective ownership distinguishes the tutors' project and group papers from roommates talking about a paper late one night. It's what justifies taking someone's ideas or words and injecting them into the work. Collaboration happens in a variety of ways, but when the ownership changes, so should a person's direct influence on another person's final ideas. In the group paper, the goals are exactly the same, not just neatly aligned as they are in a one-on-one conversation. While dialogue may spark new ideas, the writer is responsible for their development, final shape and presentation. A tutor may need to guide the conversation – the 15 of us certainly needed it. In every case, though, each writer needs to be a thinker, needs to draw her own ideas from the conversation and be committed to her own understanding.

Spotlight: Kristin Rooks

By Michelle Turney



While our courses may require us to explore the minds of already established literary voices, the Writing Center likes to recognize new emerging talent. Kristin Rooks is a junior Creative writing major who carries the craft of writing

outside of the classroom, and finds it to be an integral aspect of her identity. For this current issue, we would like to pull her face from our crowd of 1,000 and offer readers a periscope into her imagination.

When did you begin writing?

About two years ago.

Why did you start?

I always like reading, I started rewriting books in my mind and decided that I could write them.

What was your first piece of writing?

A one act play, "Impasse"

Where do you get your ideas?

A lot of ideas come without warning when I am doing something else.

What are some of your influences?

That's hard to say. There are so many. Sitcoms.

What is your favorite and least favorite part of the writing process?

Well, my favorite part is coming up with ideas and characters. My least favorite is revision. It always hurts to get a paper back that is completely written over by my professor.

How do you find your characters?

Many of my characters are similar to me. They are often different aspects of my personality and it is like different parts of me interacting.

If that is the case, then how do you generate conflict or tension?

Generally, one character is very open and honest. Another character is the exact opposite and doesn't know how to express herself. The conflict comes because I usually try to make them friends.

What does writing give to you?

I enjoy fiction. It gives me the satisfaction to make good fiction.

What do you hope that people gain from your writing?

I hope it gives them entertainment or inspires them to rethink the way that they look at the world.

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So You Got a 5 on the AP Exam...

By Laura Tuttle

You took the AP English Literature or English Language test so that you could get course credit for college classes and save some time and money. After skipping Agnes Scott's English 110, are you feeling a little lost? Or do you feel as confident in your writing and secure in yourself as a writer as ever?

Though the AP test purports to assess English ability, the criteria that the test uses are not the skills that lead to successful college writing. The AP test is a standardized test, and the trained graders are not looking for individual, unique, thought-provoking arguments or discussions. They are grading hundreds of tests and so often use correct grammar and usage as good-writing indicators. While these elements are important in communicating through writing, they are not as central as a strong thesis and solid content.

Unfortunately, many high school AP English classes teach in preparation for the test so that students will get high scores. However, with no instruction on topics such as the importance of a thesis and the practice of argument, many students left with limited analytical writing abilities. College writing, especially at Agnes Scott, is analytical and idea-driven. In contrast to the prompts that appear on the AP exam, Agnes Scott professors often assign shorter writing reflections, in addition to longer analytical essays or research papers, in order to generate class discussion and facilitate critical thinking. This practice emphasizes that the AP test may not measure your ability to think, whereas well-crafted writing can.

Of course, not every student who scores well on the AP exam will face a writing crisis in college. However, requiring the intro-level English course and the First Year Seminar for all incoming first-years, regardless of test scores or ability, informs each student of the expectations she must meet during her career at Agnes Scott. This course also exposes students to the valuable experience of peer-tutoring. Also, every writer can benefit from practice.

For students who have exempted out of the first-year English course because of a high test score and are struggling, some advice: Talk to your professors! You

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Best Places to Write 2005

By Mollie Barnes

Krispy Kreme

What and Where:

A fabulous doughnut shop on Ponce. If you haven't been, go immediately. Now. Get in the car and go.

Hours: 24 hours



For Better:

It smells like heaven inside.

You can see the doughnuts come twirling down this roller coaster cart thing and the (slurp) glaze and sprinkles get all sparkled on. The coffee is really good and really cheap. The little condiment table has all the best things—half and half, skim milk, and two percent milk, but by far the most exciting is that they have sugar in the raw, so that you can have sweet and crunchy coffee. There are lots of windows and the people watching is really good. All in all, I get a little romantic about the whole scene. I feel so very urban there—traffic, streetlights, boxes (and I mean boxes) of freshly baked donuts . . . ahh . . . so good to live in Atlanta. Also, and I may be pushing it here, but those 1930s-looking paper hats are exactly what I picture when I think of thinking caps.

295 Ponce De Leon Ave.
Atlanta, GA 30308

For Worse:

There is some good background noise. Late at night it is not as busy, so the craziness on the street outside should be the only distraction.

Best Brain Food

Where to begin? With and without chocolate frosting. Plenty of the sugary glaze stuff. Sprinkles. Definitely try the pumpkin kind next year around November. There is coffee for sure, in four "signature flavors" (smooth, rich, bold, and robust decaf), but for non-coffee drinkers, there are plenty of juice options and, of course, chocolate milk.

Write About:

That biology lab report that is about . . . uh . . . complex carbohydrates . . . and . . . uh . . . requires you to draw sugar structures . . . or the paper that requires a good snackish reward after every two pages. Lisha encourages me to abide by the slogan, "Finish your paper in a dozen doughnuts."

Einstein Bros. Bagels

What and Where:

Kind of like a bagel café. Think Subway with flavored cream cheese.

Hours:

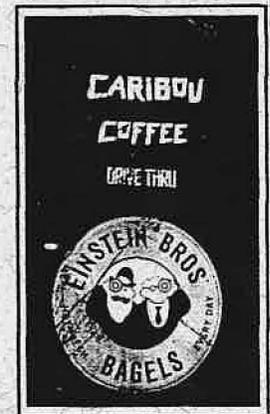
Weekdays: 6:00 am to 5:00 pm

Saturday: 6:30 am to 5:00 pm

Sunday: 7:00 am to 3:00 pm

For Better:

A nice alternative to the typical paper-writing coffee house scene, but if you need a jolt, Caribou Coffee is next door. There is a fabulous little patio outside. I am not saying that it is the most picturesque patio, but it might be a lovely change of pace this spring when it finally gets warm. Also, they toast your bagels for you. That is what I call customer service.



2870 N. Druid Hills Rd
Atlanta, GA 30329

For Worse:

I don't know if the Einstein Bagel Brothers are quite ready for the vortex of productivity that Agnes Scott students promise. Also, there aren't too many plugs for laptops, so unless you are a pen and paper writer, writing sessions may be limited to however long your battery lasts. The other drawback is that bagels are a breakfast food, so the hours aren't conducive to late night writing. Still, Caribou is next door, and open later.

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What's Your Biggest Writing Sin?

By Kristen Parks

*This quiz does not express the views of the Writing Center as a whole and is intended for entertainment purposes only

1) You are most likely to begin your paper with which of the following sentences?

- Since the dawn of time, all humans have struggled to reconcile the apparent contradictions between faith and reason.
- Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies.
- This paper will explain why the pop culture icon, Britney Spears, is a slut; and therefore a bad role model for teens.
- In Marsha Norman's play, the main character suffers from a clinical depression that I can relate to, especially since I came to college.
- According to leading scholars, the concept of *weltanschauung* facilitates an academic approach to religious politics.

2) What role does textual support tend to play in your papers?

- I use quotations to make my important points.
- None.
- It helps make my papers longer.
- I use quotations sparingly.
- I find it necessary to support my arguments with as much text as possible.

3) Which thesis would you be most likely to write?

- As an example of failed legislation, Proposition 187 reflected an era of anti-immigrant sentiment and was destined to be repealed.
- Frost's poem calls our attention to the crucial elements a neighborly relationship.
- Popular religion in Cuba demonstrates the historical syncretism of indigenous and Catholic practices.
- Shakespeare's weak and submissive female characters clearly indicate his hatred of women and his inability to recognize their true capacity as human beings.
- Emerging in early modern Europe alongside the birth of a new bourgeoisie, the fashion of the hoop skirt can be seen a tactic used by women to protect themselves from the outside world, as well as a limiting device with respect to the female gender role.

4) What's your general philosophy about writing?

- You sit down and do it until you're finished.
- Procrastinate and then beg for an extension.

c. It's pretty easy when you know what your professor wants.

d. If you've taken AP English, you know what you're doing.

e. Longer is always better.

5) Writing one page, double-spaced, usually takes you how long?

- Twenty minutes—you can barely type as fast as you can think
- Days—because you put it off
- Forty-five minutes max—you already know exactly what you're going to say
- About half an hour—you just have to get into it
- Upwards of an hour—every sentence has to be perfect

6) How do you utilize the Writing Center?

- All of the below, except d)
- For sleeping in the comfy chairs
- For free printing
- You got tutored once but it wasn't helpful
- You get tutored several times for each assignment

7) Where are you most comfortable writing?

- Anywhere
- In bed, using your laptop
- A computer lab
- Your dorm room
- Library

8) At Javamonkey, you order:

- Mocha
- Red wine
- Chai tea
- Black coffee
- A luscious slice of carrot cake and Italian soda

9) When writing on a computer, what websites do you find yourself browsing?

- Google.com—you want to search everything related to your topic
- homestarrunner.com, comics—you have a short attention span
- cnn.com—you have to know what's happening in the world
- livejournal.com, your five email accounts—you've got to stay in the loop
- dictionary.com, thesaurus.com—diction is a top priority for you

10) Identify the main problem(s) in the following sentence: But, even the media is unable to explain why

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SWCA 2005

By Katherine Mohney

On February 10th at 7:30 in the morning 17 writing center tutors embarked on their journey to the Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference held this year in Charleston, South Carolina. You may wonder what goes on at a conference just for writing centers. Well, I'm

here to let you know. The conference is put on by the Southeastern Writing



Emily and Mel

Centers Association. This organization was formed in 1981 and is open to all writing centers in the southeast. Each year a college or university will host the conference and it is held in a hotel near that institution. A theme is chosen and there is a call for presentations having to do with the theme. This year the conference was hosted by the Writing Center at the Citadel in Charleston, and the theme was critical thinking.

As soon as the call for presentations was announced the Agnes Scott Writing Center was on top of it to propose a topic for their own presentation. After much discussion on the role of critical thinking in our Writing Center we decided on a topic and made an initial proposal. The proposal was approved and we hit the ground running. We developed a presentation entitled "Tutors as Teachers: Becoming Flexible Agents of Critical Thinking." The forty-five minute presentation, given by

the tutors, dealt with the role of the tutor in the Writing Center using both collaborative and teaching methods to become an agent of critical thinking for the student. We gave the presentation to several other writing center directors and tutors literally right when we got to Charleston, and after that we got to play.

While at the conference all of the tutors attended several sessions and presentations which dealt with various aspects of the writing center. The presentations themselves ran the gamut from the ordinary, such as methods of tutoring, to the odd, such as "punk pedagogy" within the writing center, which chronicled one writing center's fundraising effort via a punk rock concert in a local bar. While not all of the sessions were necessarily applicable to Agnes Scott's Writing Center, we all took something away from the information presented as well as the contact with other Writing Centers.

Besides attending sessions, the tutors also had a great time exploring Charleston. We were lucky enough that the conference took place right downtown. With the added bonus of beautiful weather, at the first sign of a break, we were off! While some of us roamed around the beautiful, antebellum College of Charleston, others roamed a bit further to explore the shops, galleries and parks of downtown Charleston. Since most of us had never ventured into this part of the South we marveled at the unique architecture, fascinating history and beautiful scenery. We ended our day with a great meal together to discuss everything that we had seen that day.

By the last day of the conference we were sad to leave, but anxious to apply all of our newly acquired



Phillip Gardner and tutors

knowledge to our own Writing Center. We hope that the trip will help to improve our ability as both tutors and as a more efficient center.

Adding Oomph to Academic Writing

By Cailin Copan-Kelly

Here you are: the blank page of academia. You are ready to let all your genius on Virginia Woolf well forth in a flourish of intellectual vigor spanning 4-6 pages. And with a most noble stroke upon the keyboard, you compose that first sentence, then your first paragraph, and then, 2.75 hours later, you have the beginnings of an insightful scholastic take on prophetic figures in Mrs. Dalloway. Fabulous! You sit back – oh wait, a new episode of "Pimp My Ride" is on! — and then begin to read over your masterpiece in the making. Hmm. Bothersome. It's so dry! You have great ideas, but the writing tastes like a chicken wing left out in the Sahara. How can we add some spice to academic writing?

1. First, always pick a topic you are interested in. If you really don't care about Barbara Kingsolver's position on imperialism in The Poisonwood Bible, then your reader won't care, either.

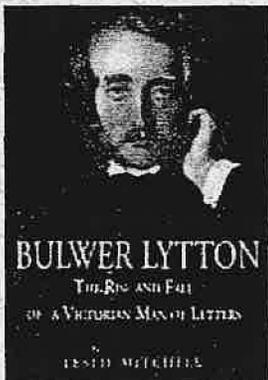
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Sigh No More, Ladies: At Least We're Not This Bad

By Mel Lasseter

Believe it or not, even your friendly neighborhood Writing Center tutors have problems communicating exactly what we're thinking in our writing. Sometimes we don't think we'll ever get that one phrase in our paper just right, and we despair. Then we go to <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com>, and we feel much better about our own writing ability.

The kind folks of the San Jose State University English department have been running the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest since



1982. The objective: write the worst possible opening sentence for a work of fiction. The contest is named for Victorian author Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the writer who came up with the now cliché phrase "It was a dark and stormy night." According to the BLFC website, Bulwer-Lytton is also responsible for "the pen is mightier than the sword", "the great unwashed", and "the almighty dollar".

Bulwer-Lytton's most notorious stinker from *Paul Clifford* (1830): "It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents—except at occasional intervals, when it was

checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness."

Think that's bad? Participants in the contest regularly manage to outdo Mr. Bulwer-Lytton. Try these on for size:

A small assortment of astonishingly loud brass instruments raced each other lustily to the respective ends of their distinct musical choices as the gates flew open to release a torrent of tawny fur comprised of angry yapping bullets that nipped at Desdemona's ankles, causing her to reflect once again (as blood filled her sneakers and she fought her way through the panicking crowd) that the annual Running of the Pomeranians in Liechtenstein was a stupid idea. (2001 winner)

As the newest Lady Turnpot descended into the kitchen wrapped only in her celery-green dressing gown, her cream bosom rising and falling like a temperamental soufflé, her tart mouth pursed in distaste, the sous-chef whispered to the scullery boy, "I don't know what to make of her." (1992 winner)

On reflection, Angela perceived that her relationship with Tom had always been rocky, not quite a roller-coaster ride but more like when the toilet-paper roll gets a little squashed so it hangs crooked and every time you pull some off you can hear the rest going bumpity-bumpity in its holder until you go nuts and push it back into shape, a degree of annoyance that Angela had now almost attained. (2002 winner)

Don't you feel better already? We certainly do.

Should you be unable to resist the impulse to enter, the deadline for the contest is April 15. Instructions for submission, and the full rules of the contest, are available on the website.

Want to be Published?

By Rachel Darr

Say you wrote an outstanding research paper for your senior seminar, or you had an awesome internship and wrote a paper for that too. What are those papers doing now? Chances are, they are probably sitting in an old folder under your bed collecting dust. Get out your flashlight, find that paper, and dust it off because there is something better you can do with it.

Have you ever considered getting your writing published? Well, you should. You've done a lot of hard work already researching and writing it, so why not try to publish it? Getting writing published is not just for creative writers. There are hundreds of journals and periodicals where academic work is published. One Agnes Scott student, Ruth Napier, is in the process of getting her work published right now.

Ruth is a senior biology major and business/economics minor. During the summer of 2003, she had an internship at the CDC in one of their molecular genetics labs through the Department of Infectious Diseases at the Emory School of Medicine. As part of her research, Ruth analyzed samples of *Haemophilus influenzae* from five Atlanta area hospitals. At the end of the summer, she co-wrote a paper on her findings called "Residual Capsule Specific DNA in Nontypable *Haemophilus influenzae*."

Her supervisors and professors liked her research paper so much that they encouraged her to publish it. Currently, Ruth and her colleagues are engaged in that process.

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For the Fiction-disinclined

By Gingle Lee

One of the most obvious forms of nonfiction writing is that thing you do when you apply for college. But personal essays don't even begin to cover the scope of nonfiction. There are many different avenues to a career in nonfiction for those who love to write, but have no interest in fiction. Sure, everyone knows about newspaper journalism, but nonfiction writing reaches as far as educational materials, corporate writing, newsletters, brochures, biographies, how-to books, essays, travel writing and science writing.

For people who can't decide whether they're left-brained or right-brained, scientific writing is a growing and promising field to pursue. Although writing and science tend to get lumped into separate categories and career fields, they have inevitably merged together. As scientific discoveries get more advanced, there is an increasing need for clear communication of those discoveries. As a result, it's not surprising that there are so many different forms of science writing. Science journalists can work as staff writers for magazines such as *Astronomy Magazine*, as reporters for newspapers, or for pharmaceutical companies, just to name a few.

Writing for corporations and businesses has also become a major avenue for nonfiction writers. When working for a corporate company, a writer has the opportunity to practice many different forms of writing (though the content may not be incredibly thrilling). A corporation may need you to write a blurb for its web site, articles for a newsletter, or a company brochure.

I also heard that the salary is not too shabby.

If you're interested in something slightly more personal, you may want to explore biographical writing. Biographies are like interviews taken to a much deeper level. I'm sure you've read plenty of biographies—junior high history projects come to mind—but did you ever consider that as a career field? Well, you should. If you like to learn about different types of people, or if you find other people's lives more interesting than your own, you might also like to get paid for it.

Want a little more independence and flexibility? Freelance writing is an option for weathered writers who decide that they no longer want to anchor themselves to one company. Once you have gained experience, made valuable business connections, and are ready to break out on your own, you may choose to become a freelance writer. As a freelance writer, you would have the opportunity to work with a mélange of businesses and forms of writing. After establishing connections within the nonfiction writing community, you could contact those businesses and offer your writing services. Once you get your name out, you may be writing an article for a law firm one day, and a feature story for a magazine the next.

There are countless forms of nonfiction writing, but because "500 words" is looming overhead, I could only graze a few. If you have a passion for writing, but you don't think fiction is for you, try researching career fields in nonfiction. The fact that you see nonfiction on a regular basis—newspapers, magazines, school brochures, etc.—is an indication of the number and variety of opportunities out there.

Want to Be Published?

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If you are interested in getting your work published, get in touch with your professors or supervisors. Most likely, they have been through the process before and will know how to help you. You can also contact some of the journals or periodicals you have used to see if they publish undergraduate research. Good luck!

So You got a Five on the AP Exam

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came to a school with a low student-teacher ratio, so take advantage. While having a conference with a professor may seem intimidating, remember that their job is helping you develop as a student. Before meeting with a professor, plan ahead.

Have an agenda and know what you want to accomplish. While in the conference, be attentive and receptive of comments, as the professor knows what she is looking for. Many students at Agnes Scott talk to their professors about their writing, so ask around for more advice.

As a writer, you know your comfort and your skill level, so don't be afraid to ask for help from your professors or the Writing Center if you need it. Even if you don't think you need help with your writing, writing is never finished and a writer is never fully developed, so come see us!

A final word on test scores: they don't mean everything. Forty-four percent of the Writing Center tutors who took the AP English Literature/Language Exam received a 5.

Best Places to Write

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Best Brain Food:

The pumpernickel bagel with honey almond cream cheese. I heard that almonds are brain food, so almonds with honey must be even better.



Inside the luscious Krispy

Write About

Writing Center guru Gingle says that Einstein Bros. would be a great venue for response papers, thinkpieces, and starting nonfiction projects.

Oakhurst Garden

What and Where

Oakhurst is a community garden in our very own neighborhood. They sponsor “intergenerational programs” for Decatur-area students and families. The space is also open to the public.



529 Adams Street
Decatur, Georgia 30030

Hours

It's an outdoorsy place. There are no specified hours.

For Better

A great way to get off campus without having to go very far. Located only blocks from Agnes Scott (start at public safety and walk south), it is definitely within walking distance. While the butterfly garden is lovely, I must admit that the goats are my favorite park of the Oakhurst Community Garden. Who knew that Decatur goats could live outside of the retention pond? Next time you have a free afternoon, pack a blanket and a bag of cookies and get in touch with your transcendental side.

For Worse

There isn't really a specific area for paper-writing. It is more of a snuggle-down-on-the-grass kind of an atmosphere.

Best Brain Food

Whatever you choose to pack. I am thinking granola (with raisins and M&Ms of course).

Write About

Oakhurst Garden is the perfect place to find inspiration for a paper about environmentalist movements, grassroots politics, or goats.

Adding Oomph to Academic Writing

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If you are stuck in an assignment where you have to write on a certain work or topic that simply didn't set you atwitter, then try your best to get interested. Read through the work again, looking for even the most seemingly minor aspect of the work that catches your attention. If you are interested in a topic, you'll be more willing to think of an in-depth argument to back it up.

2. Know what words you are using. It sounds simple, but this is one the most deluding components of academic writing. Real academics write in very elevated language and cram their sentences with words like “arabesque” and “obsequious” and “capitulate,” right? Why, what a dubious profession the aforementioned sentence purports: No! If you really want your reader to get your point, use words that you are genuinely comfortable with. Don't be seduced by the biggest, flashiest words in thesaurus or the “Shift- F7” function! If you think the word “conceal” is not important enough for your paper, don't be fooled into using the “synonym” the thesaurus gives that actually hasn't been used since the 14th century. If you have a few favorite words that are kinda cool and that are relevant to your argument, then go ahead and use them. There is nothing wrong with expanding your vocabulary; just don't do it for the sake of sounding “smart.”

3. Keep it short. Another common misconception is that high-falutin' academic writers use sentences that never really end. Whoa, there, Faulkner. If your sentence is so long it would make an anaconda feel stubby, then you need to cut it back. You will lose your reader's attention. One of the best ways to combat this is to read your paper out loud (or with a WC tutor). If you need to take very deep breaths just to make it through one sentence, that's a sign you should keep it short. Think of your paper as a conversation: if your paper could talk, would it be one of those people who talks for five minutes before they get to their point? Make your paper a stellar conversationalist; don't let it ramble.

Essentially, there is no magic oomph pill at the end of this article. Clear, honest writing will always be more effective than snobbish, convoluted writing. If you write in a style that is genuine to your voice, your paper will not only make more sense to your reader, but you will probably also take more pride in it. The biggest oomph you can add to your paper is yourself!

Success with Travel Writing



By Erica Jarrell

Here are a few key points to make your travel writing experiences productive, effective, and memorable.

The Clock: There are two types of travel writers: those with ridiculously excellent memories and those without. Writers with excellent memories usually record their experiences when they get back to their rooms that night. For the rest, it may be useful to bring your journal with you. Having that immediate contact with the paper allows you to be “more honest” with yourself. Editing and filtering are at their least when you write immediately as you’re experiencing. On the other hand, writing immediately does not give you time to mull over the most effective word choice.

Times arise where yanking out a notebook and pen may be cumbersome. Consider technology, such as your cell phone. Text message yourself key phrases that will allow you to construct your idea in full. Some phones are also equipped with voice notes, which allow you to speak into the phone and record a few ideas.

Nuts and Bolts: The most emphasis in your travel writing should be placed in detail. The strongest effect lies not in adjective like “beautiful” but in using verbs to describe: “From the rich soil of the rolling hills springs numerous red, yellow, and purple buds.” Granted, that was sappy, but it is better than “there are many pretty

flowers.” Make your passage as ‘active’ as possible.

What you choose to describe in such excellent detail is completely up to you. Some writers like to focus on the senses: landscape, smells, temperature, architecture, atmosphere and nature. People in your travels also provide interesting topics worthy of detail descriptions. Someone’s appearance, stride, or mannerisms can all bring the exact moment back to memory whenever you reread your text. Keep in mind that you are not writing for an encyclopedia or atlas. Maintain your voice and your perspective. Introspective prose is useful. You know how you felt at that time, and while describing how you feel may not come to you in eloquent, grammatically and structurally correct sentences, using whatever descriptive detail necessary will likely evoke those feelings again.

The Mighty Pen: Of course you do not want to get so bogged down with finishing school penmanship that you can’t let yourself get lost in the moment, but think of how tragic it would be if you couldn’t read about your amazing experiences later!

Practice Makes Perfect: You don’t need to be abroad to try practice travel writing. During summer break or next time you run errands around town, bring a notepad with you. This short-distance writing will allow you to get used to traveling with writing in mind.

Romancing the Inner Nerd

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account of Sarah Demarco’s exploits in sultry Buenos Aires.

My experience with romance novels is limited to passages ridiculed after a co-worker received one of the steamy novellas as a gag gift; however, I’ll arrogantly assume that strong familiarity with the genre is unnecessary to write a few hundred pages of cheesy romance.

When I mentioned this to my mother, she said, “I thought you were a legitimate writer, why would you want to write trash?” Granted, trash novels define themselves in their moniker alone, but practice is practice; I’m not above any one type of writing at this stage in my authorial development. I am also of the opinion that no piece of pop culture is totally devoid of value. We can infer all kinds of things about society from popular fiction.

Most publishing companies won’t look at your manuscript without an agent, but I wouldn’t let that put a damper on my zeal. Websites like eHarlequin.com have writing advice and contests one can use to get exposure. Subscribers can read weekly tutorials, and communicate with other future romance queens via message board.

My romance novel, unfortunately abandoned shortly after Fall semester began, was no work of literary genius, but I was right as far as it being decent writing practice. It served as a warm up, of sorts, for other creative writing over the course of the summer. As a fiction writing novice, it introduced me to the pitfalls in developing a character and a cohesive plot. I doubt my work will ever bring fame and fortune, but any practice helps.

The Myth of the Athena-Paper

By Megan Morris

It's a shockingly common misconception that papers spring fully formed from the minds of your tutors. When I started working at the Writing Center five semesters ago, I believed that . . . somehow . . . my new position would miraculously ease the writing process for me, resulting in perfect, stress-free papers. To my great dismay, I found that exactly the reverse was true: I developed an internal tutor who ruthlessly complicated my ideas and mercilessly hauled me out of bed at 3 AM to rewrite a suddenly inadequate thesis statement.

Until recently, I dreamed of the day when I will (eventually) achieve English professorship, believing that my struggles would magically end, giving way to blissful theorizing. Then, a few weeks ago, Dr. Christine Cozzens shattered my illusions. She mentioned that her current writing project was actually giving her trouble! Intrigued, I consulted other English professors about their personal writing struggles, and, with their permission, am sharing their confessions and advice with you.

Introductionitis

Peggy Thompson

"I'm never quite sure how much I need to acknowledge other scholars. I also have trouble identifying the most appropriate theoretical framework for my argument. Sometimes I read lots of introductions; concrete examples are always helpful."

Incipititis

Rachel Trousdale

"It's always the wrong moment. There's always a class to prepare, dinner to cook, a walk to take, the cat to play with. I've found that the best solution to this is writing e-mail, which seems to serve as a warm-up."

Conclusionphobia

Charlotte Artese

"I usually feel like I've finished presenting my case and I have nothing more to say, yet a paper feels so naked without one. Because I know I tend to balk at writing them, from the very beginning of the project, I look for ideas or quotations that don't quite fit in the body of what I have to say, and then I hoard them up as possible inspirations for a conclusion."

The quote and run syndrome

Charlotte Artese

"I quote a nice juicy passage and then don't analyze it fully. I think sometimes I feel the passage speaks for itself (which I always tell my students not to do) and sometimes I feel like I'm getting off-point if I go into too much detail. My strategy is to write much more about a quotation than feels necessary to me at the draft stage, telling myself I can cut later. Usually I cut very little."

Proliferation

Rachel Trousdale

"Extra ideas, completely irrelevant to my topic, demand inclusion in my article. The only solution I've found is exorcism: I have to write them out anyway, and then cut them out of the paper afterwards. Sometimes they become pieces of the next article."

Aversion to the delete key

Brian Artese

"I still struggle with the habit of becoming too attached to what I've put on paper. If you want to improve a piece of writing, you have to be willing to throw it out—not just "edit" it with your word processor—and go at it again."

Self-doubt

Rachel Trousdale

"What if my idea is unoriginal/insufficiently researched/foolish/wrong/obvious? The best solution to this is reading the work of other critics until I find one who's saying something completely wrongheaded. This makes me feel intelligent by comparison; it also gives me an easy target to attack in my work."

The evidence is now incontrovertible: giving birth to an exquisite essay is difficult even for English professors. Really, though, it's the struggle that makes our work interesting; if we didn't have to labor over the details, we'd miss the fascinating subtleties of our ideas and the vast satisfaction of creation.

What's Your Biggest Writing Sin?

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such variegated movements came together, in the name of anti-globalization.

- a. Passive voice
- b. Begins with "But"
- c. Comma use
- d. There are no problems
- e. All of the above, except d)

11) **When it comes to plagiarism, you might be guilty of:**

- a. Forgetting to properly cite your sources once in a while
- b. Downloading a paper
- c. Using someone else's general ideas, or specific terms to describe something
- d. Nothing! You are 100% original.
- e. Consulting several sources when the assignment asks only for your own analysis

12) **Your professors says that your paper:**

- a. Lacks clarity
- b. Has major grammatical issues
- c. Doesn't make an argument
- d. Needs more revision
- e. Is wonderful, but a bit wordy

13) **You consider yourself:**

- a. A kaleidoscope, full of various ideas and approaches to life
- b. A couch potato, you don't mind if life passes you by
- c. Just a normal girl
- d. A goddess, strong, brilliant, beautiful
- e. A workaholic

If you answered **mostly As**, your biggest writing sin is **Anarchy**: Your papers are often chaotic because they don't have one ruling idea. This often leads to chronic disorganization. But don't fret. Your creative mind just needs to be reined in. Try choosing narrower topics and consider making outlines before and after you write.

If you answered **mostly Bs**, your biggest writing sin is **Sloth**: Maybe you should be called "The Rebel Without a Comma". We all suffer from some degree of laziness, but your lack of attention to detail may ruin a paper with tons of potential. Take the time to learn proper guidelines for grammar, punctuation, and citation styles. Treating writing as

a process allows you to spend more time in each stage.

If you answered **mostly Cs**, your biggest writing sin is **Superficiality**: Superficial writing tends to make observations rather than arguments. You may have heard the old adage "less plot summary, more analysis". This is the advice for you. Don't be afraid to take risks with your ideas and do more than regurgitate what someone else has already said.

If you answered **mostly Ds**, your biggest writing sin is **Self-absorption**: Because your writing tends to convey your opinions, you are often closed off to criticism. You need to learn to become less attached to what you write and embrace the process of revision. Your thoughts contain seeds of greatness, but they only develop when they are challenged. Consider letting someone else give you feedback on your writing.

If you answered **mostly Es**, your biggest writing sin is **Gluttony**: You are a good writer, and you know it. However, maintaining this reputation doesn't require Charles-Dickens-length sentences or thesaurus abuse. Make your goal succinctness and strive for it. Then, consider going to that party on Friday night rather than better from here.

Spotlight: Kristin Rooks

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What have you learned about yourself through your writing?

I have learned that it doesn't matter if you have incredible writing talent, you still have to work very hard.

What are you working on now?

I am working on a screenplay, *Ellis Bory*, about a group of grad students forming unions. I also have notes for a novel, *Lucas*, which is more of a romantic drama.

Why do you continue to write?

It is something I could see myself doing forever, and I would like to make a career out of it.

What advice can you offer?

The biggest advice is that nobody is good when they start. It is like becoming a really good athlete; it takes a lot of work.

We would like to thank Kristen for her insight and like to encourage her and other writers to continue their exploration of life through writing.