



SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Writing Center launches online scheduling tool
- Inspired by Writing art show runs through Dec. 5
- Grant will fund pilot project to offer online tutoring
- Writing Center serves faculty and students

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The Write Note

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The Power of the Prompt

The top priority of Writing Center tutors is to ensure that students understand and respond appropriately to the task, or prompt, assigned by the instructor. They know that no matter how eloquent the composition, if students don't understand and follow instructions, they can't produce a successful paper. Unfortunately, addressing the prompt can be a significant challenge. Each semester, a substantial percentage of tutoring sessions focus on clarifying the prompt. Instructors can help students write successfully by ensuring that prompts are explicit and clear. In addition to indicating the topic students must address, a clear prompt will offer the following information:

Purpose

A prompt should tell students what goal they are trying to accomplish. Should they de-



scribe a process? Explain their reasoning? Defend a position? Define a set of terms? Persuade someone to take action? Analyze an argument? If students know what effect their writing must achieve, they will be better able to formulate an argument and present valid evi-

dence to support it. Sometimes even specific instructions can be confusing if students don't understand the vocabulary they include. The meaning of words like *describe*, *summarize*, *analyze*, and *synthesize* may not be obvious to students, and the tasks that such words imply may vary from one discipline to another. A student who produces excellent analyses of laboratory data, for example, may not know how to transfer that skill to the analysis of an historical text. Instructors can help students by explaining what such terms mean in the context of a specific field or assignment.

Audience

Most professionals charged with a writing task know who their audience is: a manager, a colleague, a client, the general

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Class Presentations

During the fall semester, Writing Center staff visited 45 classes representing 13 campus departments or programs. We introduced hundreds of students to the free tutoring services available at the Writing Center, and we worked with faculty in various disciplines to design presentations that have

helped students prepare more effective essays, lab reports, research projects, and more.

Employers in all fields— from civil engineering to business and beyond— tell us that they need employees who can communicate effectively. The Writing Center is here to help you prepare your

students for this challenge. Tell us about the kinds of writing that your students will face in the classroom and in their professional lives, and we can design presentations to help them produce effective results.

Grant Will Fund Online Tutoring Pilot Program

Distance learning opportunities are expanding at Missouri S&T, and the Writing Center is working to ensure that students taking distance classes have the same access to tutoring services that on-campus students enjoy. In September, we received a generous grant from the University of Missouri system's Office of Distance Education and E-Learning based in Columbia. The grant will fund a pilot project, allowing the Writing Center to purchase the technology necessary to support online tutoring and to fund the additional training tutors will need to use this technology effectively. Initially, online tutoring will

be available only to students enrolled in distance education courses. In cooperation with faculty from the Missouri S&T composition program, our staff will monitor the project and share our results with the University of Missouri system community. The information gathered during the pilot project will allow Writing Center staff to evaluate the feasibility of expanding online tutoring to serve other S&T



students.

The Missouri S&T Writing Center will be the first in the University of Missouri system to offer synchronous online tutoring. Our goal is to support the efforts of the campus and the system to offer effective online education.

We're Hiring!

The Writing Center is planning to hire four new tutors for the spring semester, and we need faculty input to identify candidates for these positions. We recruit tutors from all majors to ensure that our staff represents a range of disciplines. If you have mature and responsible students who are also outstanding writers, please forward their names to us; we will send them an invitation to apply. We are especially eager to hear about talented freshmen and sophomores who have the potential to remain with us for at least two years. Tutors will receive paid training and valuable experience that can be an impressive addition to a resume.

Did you know?

Writing Center staff are available to visit your classes at any point during the semester to introduce students to our services or provide information on writing-related topics. Just ten minutes of class time is all it takes to tell students about our free tutoring services. Longer presentations can be designed to address the requirements of specific subjects, courses, or assignments. If your students could benefit from tutoring services or specialized writing instruction, contact us at wac@mst.edu to schedule a presentation or to discuss your students' needs.

9th Annual Inspired By Writing Art Show

The Writing Center's ninth annual *Inspired By Writing* art show opened on November 3 with a reception in the Writing Center. Since 2002, this event has showcased creations inspired by the written word. Missouri S&T students, faculty, and alumni, as well as members of the Rolla community, submit work in a variety of media.

Inspired By Writing is an effort to show that writing, technology, and the visual arts can complement and inform one another. This year's exhibit includes photographs, oil paintings, ceramics, stained glass, and more. Many of the works exhibited are available for purchase. The art work will remain on display at the Writing Center through December 5th.

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public. This knowledge simplifies the writer's task, dictating the tone, the vocabulary, and the amount of background information required to make the document intelligible and effective. Unlike professionals, however, students are often at a disadvantage because they don't always know who their audience is. They may be unsure whether they should write for their instructor, their classmates, or some other hypothetical group. This uncertainty can be paralyzing. What tone is appropriate? What can they assume their audience already knows? What information must they provide? Instructors can eliminate this confusion by including in their prompts a description of the audience for whom students should write.

Format

Most instructors provide clear directions regarding the number of pages required, the size of margins, and other formatting details, but it is often easy to leave out information that professionals take for granted. For example, students may not be aware that an abstract is a standard element of certain types of documents, and they may need some guidance on

how to write an effective abstract. They may also be uncertain of what information to include in figure captions and where to put such captions. Detailed formatting instructions, accompanied by examples where appropriate, can reduce confusion.

Citation Style

If students will be expected to cite sources in a paper, they'll need to know what citation style to use (footnotes, parenthetical citations, endnotes, etc.). Assignments that involve source citations also offer a great opportunity to familiarize students with the style conventions of the field. Instructors can encourage students to consult the appropriate style guide (Chicago, APA, MLA, IEEE, etc.) and become familiar with its requirements. If the guide is available online, consider supplying the URL. Otherwise, point out that such guides are available in the library's reference room and in the Writing Center.

Models

Although a clear writing prompt should provide sufficient information to direct student efforts, a prompt that is too long can be daunting to students. Samples of good writing can provide guidance without over-

whelming students with lengthy and detailed instructions. Consider selecting one or two excellent examples of the type of writing you have assigned and indicating what is exemplary about them. A model can also be an effective way to communicate format requirements; just bring to your students' attention the relevant aspects of the model and ask them to mimic the format it uses.

If students have a clear understanding of the assignment, they will approach their task with confidence, able to focus closely on content and expression. Tutors can then use tutoring sessions more effectively, spending more time on writing skills like organization, paragraph structure, or transitions. Finally, clear prompts can allow instructors to focus more of their comments on content rather than on issues of style or format.

For additional information about writing prompts, contact Writing Center staff; we are happy to help instructors evaluate and improve their writing prompts.



Writing Across the Curriculum Program

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The Writing Center is located in Room 113 of the Campus Support Facility. Our goal is to help undergraduate students write more effectively in any course. Our talented undergraduate tutors are trained to guide their peers through all stages of the writing process. They use a variety of techniques to help students evaluate and improve their own work. Our director and assistant director are available to support instructors by offering presentations tailored to specific classes and consultations on the development and evaluation of writing assignments. We are happy to work with you to ensure that the Writing Center meets your students' needs. Give us a call!

Fall 2011 Tutoring Hours:

Mon.-Thurs. 10-6

Fri. 10-2

Sun. 12:30-5

writingcenter.mst.edu

Online Scheduling Now Available!

Students have been asking for a way to make Writing Center appointments online, and we're listening! In September, Writing Center staff worked with IT to implement an online scheduling tool. The response from students has been positive; over half our appointments are now made online, and we expect that percentage to rise as word gets around.

The tool is available on our homepage, <http://writingcenter.mst.edu/>. With just a few clicks, students can now make appointments at their convenience. If your students use the Writing Center, you can help us get the word out by telling your classes about this new option.

