

The Writing Center

A FREE Resource for Undergraduate Student Writers

Our friendly and enthusiastic peer tutors receive intensive training so that they can help you produce your best written work. Whether you're brainstorming ideas, outlining a paper, or proofreading a final draft, they can offer valuable suggestions and feedback. Tutors can help with:

- Essays
- Proposals
- Résumés
- Short Stories
- Abstracts
- Lab Reports
- Research Papers
- Newsletter Articles
- Cover Letters

and more!

To make an appointment, visit us at:

writingcenter@mst.edu



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HOW THE WRITING CENTER CAN HELP

By Seth Bull

Writers bring all kinds of documents to the Writing Center. Tutors have helped students with everything from English 20 essays to personal statements to senior design projects. Although the writers and their work may have little in common, they can all count on one thing: the Writing Center can help.

Tutors do more than point out grammatical errors or spelling mistakes; we offer a reader's perspective. By helping writers understand how their words sound

to others, we give them the tools they need to communicate more effectively. Writers learn to recognize opportunities for improvement. They may need to clarify explanations, add detail, rearrange supporting material, eliminate repetition, or modify tone. Whatever changes are necessary, they learn to make them while retaining their own unique style and ideas.

One of the hardest parts of the writing process is getting started,

and the Writing Center can help with this step too. With a tutor's help, you can start to put the ideas you already have on paper or come up with new ones.

Our goal at the Writing Center is to help every student become a better writer. We can help by giving feedback or providing tools that allow writers express their ideas more effectively. Whether you need help getting words on paper or revising a draft, the Writing Center can help.

Meet Our New Tutors

The Writing Center welcomed six new tutors to its staff this semester. throughout the newsletter. Leann Krieger introduces them and offers a glimpse of the skills and interests they bring to the job. Look for their profiles throughout the newsletter.

New tutor profiles by Leann Krieger

LEANN KRIEGER

Leann is a freshman, and currently undecided on her major. She is a proud member of Zeta Tau Alpha sorority. She also spends her time as a member of the Solar House Team, a member of the Society of Women Engineers, and a volunteer for many organizations around campus. Her favorite activity is dancing. Leann chose to work at the Writing Center because she loves to make an impact on people's lives. Better writing skills are something they can benefit from for the rest of their lives. Her favorite part of the tutoring process at the Writing Center is

when students read their papers aloud. Sometimes she and the student get a laugh when they catch silly writing mistakes the student didn't see before. Leann wants students to know that "Writing is a process. It is a process that takes time and a lot of work. While it may seem like a hassle at times, writing is a vital skill that everyone can excel at if they put in the effort. Any career you decide on, writing will be an aspect. Being able to write effectively will help you succeed tremendously."



MAY 8TH IS WRITE TILL MIDNIGHT

Need some last-minute help?
Join us!

The last week of classes is often the most stressful week of the semester. With the rush to complete assignments and the need to study for finals, who couldn't use a little help?

Fortunately, the Writing Center is hosting its traditional Write Till Midnight event again this semester! We will be open from 10 AM until midnight, and tutors will be available to help with writing concerns of any kind. Both walk-ins and appointments are welcome.

According to Freddy Dugard, the Writing Center's self-described premier tutor, Write Till Midnight is "crazy." He says, "There's free food, and it's really awesome to get free pizza at around midnight." Erica McFarland, one of the more serious tutors, remarks that "it's the last chance for students to get help on a paper if they've put it off."

Regardless of assignment, all S&T undergrads are encouraged to stop by for personalized feedback on their writing from the Writing Center's insightful tutors. Don't let this opportunity slip away; give that last paper the attention it needs with Write Till Midnight.



Summary Versus Analysis: What's the Difference?

Three steps that clarify the goals of analysis and make the task less daunting

By Sarah Padgett

It happens every semester: Students become frustrated because professors insist that a rhetorical analysis do more than summarize a story, article, film, or other source; it must analyze. But what does that mean? If you've asked yourself this question, you are not alone. These guidelines can help.

The confusion between summary and analysis is understandable because summary is a component of analysis. To analyze is to identify and explain key elements without passing judgement, and this task includes summary. The three steps described here may make the goals of analysis clearer and the task less daunting.

#1: Understand the source

Failure to understand the source is often the first obstacle to analysis. Be sure you can explain what the author's thesis and supporting points. Remember that every sentence was composed and every detail chosen deliberately to support a central point. If you don't understand that point, then you need to read again. If

necessary, take notes, ask your peers, or consult your professor because understanding the source is your first goal.

#2: Understand the method

The next step is to ask yourself how the author attempts to prove or demonstrate his thesis. He may use several methods. For example, he may rely on tone to convince his audience. Is the tone conversational? sarcastic? humorous? angry? What is the effect?

Additionally, the author may organize information in a way that leads the reader toward a specific conclusion. How does the order in which he makes his points support his thesis?

Perhaps most often, authors use evidence to support an argument. Evidence may include:

- Statistics or data
- Personal testimony or anecdotes
- Logic or deductive reasoning

What kinds of evidence does this author present? Why does he choose

these types of evidence?

#3: Put it all together

Now that you understand the author's goals and methods, you can start writing. Your own thesis will identify the main argument and indicate how the author attempts to prove it. The body of your paper will address the author's methods, starting with the most important. To help your reader understand the context, summarize the parts of the text you mention, but

"Understanding the author's thesis is your first goal."

don't let the summary take over your paper. Explain how the author uses these parts of the text to convince

his readers. Be careful not to judge the legitimacy or effectiveness of the argument unless your instructor has asked for an evaluation.

By identifying the author's thesis and explaining how he makes it convincing, you'll provide the analysis your instructor requires. You'll include some summary, but by going beyond it, you'll demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the source.



WHY DO I HAVE TO READ MY PAPER ALOUD?

Reading your paper aloud is a crucial step in the tutoring process. Understandably, many writers are self-conscious about having to read aloud, but in the end they are usually glad they did. By reading aloud, writers are able to see the paper from the point of view of the reader. They can hear and correct areas that may need work.

Some problems are easier to detect when reading aloud: repetition, grammar errors, awkward phrasing, abrupt transitions, inappropriate tone, and more. Reading aloud lets writers hear problems they miss when writing, typing, or reading silently. This tactic works best when the writer has a pen or pencil in hand to mark problems while reading. He or she can then come back to those points and address them later. Ideally, the writer should read at a moderate pace which forces closer examination of sentence structure and the flow of the paper.

Reading aloud is an easy and effective way for writers to get a new perspective on their paper—and that can only help.

The Tutor as Student: A Graduating Tutor Reflects

By Nathan Tramel

As a 4th-year writing tutor, I've had the opportunity to interact with many of my fellow students. I've helped them format resumes, clarify papers, and understand signments. When I signed up to be a tutor, I expected to do these things; what I didn't see coming was that I would also learn from each student that I tutored.

Being a writing tutor has helped me to keep my own writing skills sharp, which isn't always easy to do as an engineer. Many of the improvements I've made to my own writing style have come from helping other students improve their papers and from recognizing that I sometimes make the same mistakes that I correct in others' work. And tutoring has been a huge confidence builder; I see that I can make a difference for others, and I see others trust me to guide them towards more effective writing.

Tutoring has also helped me become a much more effective communicator. I was never good at public speaking, and I often had a hard time finding the words to say

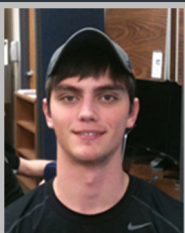
what I meant. But once I started working at the Writing Center, I slowly became more comfortable talking to anyone who walks through the door. Talking with students about their papers helped me learn how to quickly organize what I wanted to say and efficiently convey important information.

Looking back, I had no idea what I was getting into when I applied to be a tutor. I knew that I would help my peers with their writing, but I never suspected that I was also signing up for four years of self-improvement. Tutoring has changed my life, making me more confident and expressive, and helping me to take charge. My time at the Writing Center will continue to be of use throughout my life and career.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

By Gus Steurer

As a writer, you anticipate how an audience will interpret your words to ensure that you communicate thoughts and ideas clearly. You consider readers' familiarity with the source material and their expertise in the subject. By explaining ideas that are likely to be new or unfamiliar, you avoid frustrating your readers by talking over their heads. Conversely, by avoiding explanation of things that are common knowledge, you avoid insulting their intelligence by explaining the obvious. Explaining the new or obscure prevents confusion; avoiding discussion of the trivial or well-known maintains their interest. You write to communicate and, often, to persuade. You can do both more effectively if you take the time to evaluate the needs and knowledge of those most likely to read your words.



**SETH
BULL**

Seth is a sophomore majoring in mechanical engineering. Outside of the Writing Center, he is involved in the Mars Rover Design Team, the Rock Climbing Club, and Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity. He knows that at the Writing Center, all the tutors are also students. They have been through the same struggles in developing their writing as the students they tutor, so they are useful assets. Seth has this advice for students on writing essays: "Start a paper the day it's assigned. Even if it's taking a piece of scratch paper and writing a possible thesis down, just beginning the thought process required will help in the end." Seth also wants students to know that tutoring is available at the Writing Center for any type of writing.

HOW NOT TO EMAIL YOUR PROFESSOR

By Natasha Stoneking

When emailing a professor, it is important to be... well, professional. Emails should be formal, correct, and to the point. Here are some mistakes to avoid when emailing instructors, staff, and others with whom you have a purely professional relationship.

1. Use language correctly.

Of course, incorrect spelling and grammar will create a poor impression. Best case scenario, the professor will forgive the mistake. Worst-case scenario, the mistake results in a miscommunication, or even a negative impression of the sender's intelligence. Many email services have automatic spell check, but typos can still occur. Also, even Microsoft Word won't catch all grammar mistakes. To be sure that your instructor isn't left wondering how you got into college, re-read the entire email carefully before pushing the Send button.

2. Avoid slang.

The tone of your email should be professional. There's no need to be stiff, but avoid abbreviations like "lol," and *definitely* skip the foul language. On the same note, do not use emoticons. Emoticons are for text messages and communicating with friends or family.

3. Use an appropriate title.

When writing to instructors, avoid using *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, or *Ms.* If the professor has a doctoral degree, *Dr.* is fine. When in doubt, *Prof.* is the best bet because it is true, formal, and respectful, no matter the education, sex, or marital status of the addressee. Additionally, never address a professor by a first name (unless you have explicit permission to do so). No *Bob*, *Mr. Bob*, or even *Prof. Bob*. Use the last name.

4. Avoid informal salutations.

Do not use informal salutations or closings. *Dear Prof. X* is best for a salutation. *Sincerely* is usually a good choice for a closing. Steer clear of *Hey*, *Prof. X*, *Keep it real*, or *Love*. And don't leave out the salutation or closing altogether.

5. Include a concise subject line.

Never leave the subject line blank; your email may end up in the trash. A short, descriptive subject line allows a professor to skim and sort email quickly—important to someone who may receive dozens of emails each day.

6. Ask nicely.

Refrain from demanding anything. Say *please*. And if your request is granted, remember that



SHERRY SMITH

Sherry is a junior majoring in English. She is also a member of the English honor society, Sigma Tau Delta. Sherry knows that coming to the Writing Center doesn't mean admitting defeat, and it doesn't mean that the students are "bad" at writing. It means the students are willing to go the extra mile to turn in the best work they can. Her biggest struggle as a

writer is sitting down and getting her paper started, but after she overcomes that hurdle, she finds writing enjoyable. She encourages students to read well-written books to help them improve their writing skills. Sherry gives advice on dealing with writer's block: "I take a break, preferably with an activity that takes my mind completely off the paper. Then I come back to it and just start writing. Sometimes the very process of writing about a subject can lead you to a breakthrough."

a quick *thank you* demonstrates your maturity and professionalism.

In general, do not be informal, presumptuous, rude, or insincere. Be polite to those who spend their careers helping dozens or hundreds of students each semester. If nothing else, remain cordial to keep on good terms with those who determine your grade and provide references when you apply for scholarships, jobs, or other opportunities.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Writing Center is open six days a week. Tutors are available during the following hours:

M-Th 10 AM – 6 PM

F 10 AM – 2 PM

Sun 1 PM – 5 PM





Brainstorming

By Kaitlin Travous

Spending hours at a computer with a blank page is not uncommon for many students; one of the most difficult parts of writing anything is just getting started. In my experience, once the first paragraph is written, the rest seems to fall into place with relative ease, but getting those first sentences down on paper can be brutal.

Starting the writing process does not need to be this hard; sometimes all you need to do is talk about the topic. Some of my favorite tutoring sessions are when a student comes in and has no idea how to start. Most brainstorming is just a casual conversation to ask how, when, where, why, and what. By getting the student thinking about all the different angles of the assignment, they start to form connections and ideas they normally wouldn't have put together. Students usually just need someone to bounce ideas off of and ask the questions they wouldn't have considered. Whether the assignment is a summary, an analysis, or a research paper, brainstorming helps students to move in the right direction and understand the full scope of their topic. An extra set of eyes or ears can be helpful no matter what stage of the writing process.

Omit Needless Words

By Erica McFarland

Mathematicians know that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Effective writers apply this concept regularly, carving deliberate paths from introduction to conclusion. Although twists and turns can be riveting in a short story or novel, a feeling of suspense is inappropriate in academic writing. Unnecessary phrases boost the word count of an essay at the expense of clarity. Some simple strategies can help eliminate excessive words to make a point clearly and concisely.


Adverbs are often the easiest words to eliminate. Writers overuse words like *very*, *really*, and *slightly*. Used sparingly, they can add emphasis;

used too often, however, they lose their impact. In most cases, a single word can replace phrases that use adverbs. For example, is proofreading an essay *extremely important*, or is it *crucial*? Is an event *slightly scary*? Or is it *disconcerting*? Replacing adverbial phrases with single words often strengthens a sentence.

Forms of the verb *to be* can also signal opportunities to make a sentence more concise. For example, these forms appear in passive voice sentences in which the subject receives the action of the verb. Although passive voice has a place in scientific writing, it can

create clutter. Consider this passive voice sentence: *Struggling writers are assisted by tutors*. Rearranging the phrase so that the subject is doing the action eliminates clutter: *Tutors assist struggling writers*. This version of the sentence is both shorter and clearer.

Reading a passage with a fresh perspective can reveal wordiness. To get this perspective, visit the Writing Center, or just take a break from your writing and return to it later. Sometimes you'll find whole paragraphs that can be condensed in a sentence or two, then incorporated into other paragraphs.




ARCH KELLEY

learned to look at problems in his own papers more objectively. For any students in English classes, he says, "Start thinking about what you want to say in your paper a few days before you actually begin to write, never start writing the day before the paper is due, write a paragraph at a time with breaks in between, and seek outside help if you have even a shadow of a doubt about any aspect of your writing."

Arch is a sophomore currently pursuing a degree in computer science. If he's not in the Writing Center, you may catch Arch being a Show-Me Anime Librarian. He strongly believes that tutoring can allow students to have a new perspective on their papers that gives them a chance to become better writers. Since becoming a tutor, he's

LARA EDWARDS

Lara is a junior studying biological sciences. One of her favorite past times is writing comic strips. Lara enjoys working at the Writing Center. She takes the time to bounce ideas for papers off a



neutral listener because she knows that it's helpful in solving problems she may encounter in her writing. She thoroughly enjoys writing and says, "I think of a paper as a piece of art, a device designed to direct the thoughts and emotions of those examining it. My favorite part of the writing process is crafting the first draft of the paper itself once the research and outlining are complete."

Writing Center Tutors & Staff

Tutors:

Seth Bull
Mechanical Engineering

Zach Burke
English

Cortney Chapman
Psychology

Freddy Ray Dugard
Mechanical Engineering

Lara Edwards
Biological Sciences

Arch Kelley
Computer Science

Kirsten Kelly
Biological Sciences

Leann Krieger
Undeclared

Erica McFarland
Biological Sciences

Nick McGraw
Engineering Management

Sarah Padgett
Civil Engineering

Sherry Smith
English

Joseph (Gus) Steurer
Computer Science

Natasha Stoneking
Psychology

Nathan Tramel
Computer Engineering

Kaitlin Travous
Metallurgical Engineering

Administrative Staff:

Dr. Kate Drowne
Director

Jeanine Bruening
Assistant Director

Brandi Washburn
Senior Secretary



Writing Center

Get the Most from a Writing Center Visit

By Cortney Chapman

Your first visit to the Writing Center can be intimidating. You may not know what to expect, and you may worry that you won't be able to address all the questions and concerns you have about your assignment. Luckily, there are a things you can do to make your tutoring session more comfortable and effective.

First, when you come in, take a deep breath, relax, and try to smile. Your tutor isn't there to make you feel like a bad writer or to embarrass you in any way, and he or she won't judge you based on your mistakes. Our goal is to help you improve your writing, and part of that process is making you feel welcome.

Similarly, we understand that sometimes professors require you to make an appointment, and you may feel that your visit is an inconvenience. But your tutor isn't the bad guy! So, as annoyed as you may be, remind yourself that since you have to come to the Writing Center anyway, you might

as well get as much out of the visit as you can. We're actually pretty nice people, and we genuinely want to help you become a better writer. Just relax, do your best, and you might be surprised at how much you can accomplish.

Another thing to remember is that, as helpful as we tutors can be, we can't write your paper for you; we're here to help *you* write the best paper you can. To accomplish that goal, it's best to bring a draft with you—no matter how rough. If you're not sure where to start and haven't written anything yet, we can still help, but be sure you've read any source material you may be using in your paper; otherwise, you won't get far with brainstorming sessions or other strategies we can use to help you get started.

One final thing step to ensure that your visit is as helpful as possible: set goals. Before your appointment, make a note of anything you're struggling with or have questions about. Maybe you know you often write run-on sentences, or perhaps you're concerned about your thesis statement. Having a specific list of topics to discuss can help the tutor address your concerns fully. It also gives the tutor an idea of where your strengths and weaknesses may lie so that he or she can catch mistakes more easily as you work together.

If you relax, have a good attitude, bring a draft with you (or at least read your sources carefully), and have a set of goals in mind, your tutor can be be much more effective at helping you improve as a writer. The effort you put forth to be prepared will go a long way toward helping you get the most out of your Writing Center visit. Hope to see you in at *the Writing Center soon!*



KIRSTEN KELLY

She loves being able to meet new people at the Writing Center. She wants students to know that "we are all extremely nice! As far as I know, none of us breathe fire." She is also a representative for the Ballet and Dance Club, and the Academic Excellence Chair for Kappa Delta sorority.

Kirsten has decided to major in chemistry pre-med, and she is currently a freshman. She wanted to work at the Writing Center because she enjoys helping students.

Why I Tutor: Thoughts of a New Tutor

By Sherry Smith

Why do I tutor? Well, being pretty new to the job, I'm still in the process of answering that question for myself, but I'll tell you what I know so far.

The main reason I applied for the position in the first place was because I thought it would be good for me. I wanted a challenge, and that's certainly what I got; this job constantly pushes me to improve both my own writing skills and my ability to help others improve theirs. More importantly, as I've started working with individual students, I've realized that the most rewarding part of it all is making a positive difference (as cliché as that sounds). As a peer tutor, my job isn't to write papers for others or to hand out quick grammar tips.

Our goal at the Writing the Writing Center is always to help students find their own unique ways of expressing their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. The greatest satisfaction for both me and the students I tutor comes at the end of a session when I know that I've helped someone find his or her own way to the words and forms of expression needed. Writing is sharing a piece of yourself on paper, and if I can help others share themselves more clearly and meaningfully, then I'm doing something worthwhile.

So why do I tutor? I suppose the short answer is that I'm making a positive difference for both myself and others. I count myself lucky to have such a job.