WRITE FREE OR DIE

Volume 11, Issue 1 The Newsletter of the UNH Writing Program **Fall 2024**

IN THIS ISSUE

"Low Stakes" Writing Assignments

Meaghan Dittrich, PhD
Director, University Writing Programs

In last fall's issue of our newsletter, I made brief mention of low stakes writing in a piece devoted to "unplugged" writing practice. Now seems like a good occasion to delve deeper into this method of writing-as-learning. So, let's address several reasons why you should assign low stakes writing in your courses. And, because writing happens in *all classes*, not just Writing Intensive ones, we encourage implementing these pedagogical methods in all curricula, regardless of designations or attributes.

What is "Low Stakes Writing"?

Our Guidelines for Writing Intensive courses at UNH includes criteria for informal (heuristic) writing assignments "designed to promote learning, such as invention activities, in-class essays, reaction papers, journals, reading summaries, or other appropriate exercises."[1] In any case, what we want to offer students is a chance to "write to learn." Our very own Donald Murray impresses upon us the importance of discovery: "The process of writing—of using language to discover meaning and communicate it—is a significant human act. The better we understand how people write—how people think—the better we may be able to write and to teach writing."[2]

In being provided the space and time to write to learn, students should have little fear of failure (remember, for some students even a B is a failure). We thus emphasize writing as a desirable mode of expression, regardless of how difficult it is. Don Murray mentions in his writing that, despite the work being hard, it should still be fun.

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[1] See the full text of the University Writing Requirement.

[2] Boynton/Heinemann. (2009). Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery. In *The Essential Don Murray: lessons from America's greatest writing teacher (p.142).* essay.

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Future Tense: Upcoming Writing Across the Curriculum Events

To stay up to date, please visit our Events page on our website

Faculty Workshop Series on Academic Project Design. The Writing Programs have partnered with the Educational Excellence & Effectiveness (E3) office to provide a series of workshops for faculty who work with student writers on large projects, such as capstone projects, honors, masters, or doctoral thesis, and other research outside the traditional classroom writing assignments. Two workshops remain in the series (11/15 & 12/4) and registration is still open.

Connors Writing Center J-Term Operations. Virtual appointments will be available Mondays & Tuesdays from 10:00am – 12:00pm and Wednesdays & Thursdays from 11:00am – 1:00pm.

January Online Workshop on Therapeutic Writing: Tuesday, January 14 from 10:00am – 11:00am. The WAC office and E3 will be presenting a workshop titled "To Feel What You Write: Therapeutic Composing in College Classrooms." We will help guide instructors in attending to the whole student experience—not as therapists but simply as helpers. We will discuss approaches for supporting and responding to student writing as a recuperative and expressive act, mindful of our roles and training. Zoom link sent with registration form. Register HERE.

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WAC(ky) People

UNH Writing Program

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Assistant Director, University Writing Programs

Matthew Morrison
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College Representatives, Term End

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(Business Administration)

COLSA—Davida Margolin **2025**
(Molecular, Cellular, and Biomedical Sciences)

CEPS—David Feldman **2025**
(Mathematics & Statistics)

COLA 1—Clara Castro-Ponce **2025**
(Literatures, Languages, & Cultures)

COLA 2—Tom Alsip **2026**
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CHHS—Lauren Ferguson **2026**
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Elizabeth Smith (Registrar)

*Faculty Chair

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As such, we should help them welcome the challenge: "We do not know what we will write until we write; therefore, we must as teachers continually invite writing, keep the game of writing going in the front of our students, make it so interesting they will want to join in and, by repeatedly waving them over, make sure the know they are welcome."[3]

On the Matter of Grading

Low-stakes writing is typically un-graded. However, if evaluation or credit is called for, it can be in the form of a credit/no-credit completion grade, offered as part of the day's participation grade, or a grade that is worth very little—something that would not have a significant impact on the student's overall grade. That way, students do not have the added pressure of producing something for evaluation. In addition, assessment of such writing can also vary. Instructors can apply strategies such as portfolio grading and student self-assessment.

It can also be helpful if you provide some chances that you don't collect at all, such as a five-minute free write on a topic to prime them on class discussion or to reveal what they already know on a subject.

I'm often asked, "What if I simply don't grade drafts of my major paper assignments?" While we would recommend this practice anyway—since drafts establish a habit of writing in stages—the draft is still technically part of a higher-stakes assignment. I'll provide more specific examples of low-stakes writing further down.

Frequent readers of this newsletter will know that, from time to time, we like to post excerpts from the ever-useful text titled *Bad Ideas About Writing*. In that text, Mitchell James prompts us to think about whether grading itself is the problem. Think about the difference between qualitative and quantitative data collection. Writing is a qualitative endeavor, not easily assessed because we value different things at different points of development and in relation to various factors. It's contextual, and therefore complicated.

Beyond the practical complication lies the efficacy itself. What do students actually get out of grading? How do they translate a grade into a skill that requires continuing practice? What exactly does a percentage or letter grade tell a student about their strengths and weaknesses as writers? Often the comments we use to "justify" a grade don't always add up in the student's mind as it does in our own. Best practices in the writing community emphasize formative over summative feedback so students are offered a chance to revise, which also reinforces the idea of writing as a process.[4]

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[3] Houghton Mifflin Co. (1985). Inviting Writing: Activities and Environments. In *A Writer Teaches Writing* (Second, p. 107). essay.

[4] For more on writing as process, see: Murray, Donald. "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product." The Leaflet (November 1972): 11-14. Rpt. in *Rhetoric and Composition: A Sourcebook for Teachers*. Ed. Richard Graves. New Rochelle, NJ: Hayden, 1976. 179-82.

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As James prompts, "[F]ormative evaluation creates safe spaces for student learning because students are not focused on trying to avoid failure but, instead, are searching for insight and growth."[5]

Examples of Low-Stakes Writing

Many instructors might be relieved to know that most low-stakes writing innately circumvents (or removes incentive) for the use of A.I. in student writing. Why? Because most of it takes place in the generative metacognitive realm of a student's learning process. That isn't a place where A.I. thrives. It can only "generate" from pre-existing data. If you're still concerned about A.I. use, many of the following activities can be done in-class.

Invention or Pre-writing Activities:

- Outlines, word clouds, or concept mapping.
- Students post research questions on white board, then circulate to comment or offer suggestions on those questions.
- Free write for 2-3 minutes on 2-3 topics, guide them to narrowing down which they are most interested in.
- Fact or fiction? Students take stock of their assumptions and what they already know about a subject before researching it.
- Informal "interviews" – students chat to a classmate about their topic and jot down notes about what others think/know about the subject. This not only has them gather information, but engages them in the skill of asking questions.
- Make it a competition – how many topics or questions can each student or group produce in a timed period? Group with the most is the winner. (We at the Connors Writing Center find that candy is always a good incentive.)

Reaction Papers, Journals, Reading Summaries:

- Blog posting.
- Genre-switching: Ask students to write in a new format – a case study, or a personal essay, or an emailed memorandum. As students translate between genres, they learn how to be flexible communicators and demonstrate deep understanding of course content.
- Field Observations: For example, have students visit an on-campus event or gallery, then describe what they see and draw conclusions about it. This can be great practice for disciplines that require case studies and/or observation notes (nursing, social work, etc.).
- Choose your own adventure: Students often struggle with conclusions. During final-draft stages, have them draft several versions of their conclusion and discuss in pairs the pros and cons of each. You can do the same for introductions.
- Reflection Papers: At the end of an assignment, ask students to reflect on what they would do differently if given the chance to do the assignment again and how they might apply that to the next assignment. These reflections engage students in metacognition by identifying their own strengths and weaknesses. This saves you time, since the student's self-assessment can highlight places for you to note.

If you need a more digestible takeaway from all of this, Don Murray offers these guidelines:[6]

- Keep it fun.
- Failure is ok.
- *Do not* expect students to use what they produce on their next drafts and do not make it part of a large formal assignment.
- Keep the subject matter as open as possible.
- Do the activity yourself – participate and model for them .
- Supplement the activity with a handout.

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[5] Mitchell R James, "Grading Has Always Made Writing Better," essay, in *Bad Ideas About Writing*. (Morgantown, WV: Digital Publishing Institute: West Virginia University Libraries, 2017), 259.

[6] Murray, Don. Houghton Mifflin Co. (1985). Inviting Writing: Activities and Environments. In *A Writer Teaches Writing* (Second,. pp.108-125).

Future Tense: Upcoming Writing Across the Curriculum Events *(continued)*

To stay up to date, please visit our Events page on our website

TA Training. The WAC program provides specific training to TAs on how to give feedback on student writing. We offer three separate sessions at the beginning of the semester. Register HERE for sessions offered on the following dates and times:

Monday, January 27 from 11:00am – 12:30pm
Tuesday, January 28 from 12:30pm – 2:00pm
Wednesday, January 29 from 2:00pm – 3:30pm

WAC Guest Speaker Lisa Blankenship from CUNY Baruch: "Empathetic Writing Across the Curriculum." Thursday, March 27 from 12:40-2:00pm. Lisa's book *Changing the Subject: A Theory of Rhetorical Empathy* explores empathy as a rhetorical concept for engaging with and connecting across difference. She currently is co-editing a collection about empathy in writing classrooms. This event made possible by the generosity of the Dey Family Gift Fund. Location and registration will be available on our EVENTS webpage in the coming months.

Writing Invested Faculty Retreat at the Browne Center: June 3 & 4, 2005. The annual WI faculty retreat is open to any faculty member interested in integrating writing into their courses. Among the goals will be to give faculty more complete awareness of the principles underlying WI courses, to equip them with practices to enhance student writing, and to promote exchange and forge connections among faculty. Breakfast & Lunch provided. 12 available spots. Click HERE to APPLY by March 31. For more information, email unh.writing.programs@unh.edu.

"Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people who never knew each other, citizens of distant epochs. Books break the shackles of time. A book is proof that humans are capable of magic."
~ Carl Sagan

Tranquility Corner

A Snippet to Help Ease Your Pedagogical Anxieties

A Clip from *Lovett or Leave It* Podcast about the limitations of A.I.:

Kumail Nanjiani [00:37:08] "...I think A.I. is against the very foundational philosophy of making art... Art, to me, is an expression of a person. It's their soul. It's their experience. And when I read a book or see a painting, I'm like that person. Only in that moment they could have made that. And when I see that, I get a sense of who this person was and there's intention behind it, an intention to communicate what's inside of you to outside of you. And I think A.I. doesn't have an intention. I feel nothing when I look at air."

Jon Lovett [00:37:59] "So. I agree with you to a point where I agree with you as I believe art must be. Art is created by people. Yes. And because art has meaning, I think there is... But I do think A.I. can be a tool for creativity. And I have played around with ChatGPT and I played around with the image generators. And I don't think it's right to use these things to replace an artist. But there is something that happens when you have this tool at your disposal to put things together and see them so quickly. That makes ideas where there wasn't an idea before and the idea doesn't come from the computer, it comes from you... [00:40:43] But all I'm getting at is the possibilities that the tool presents makes your mind think of new things. And that's what a tool can do. And so as long as it's a tool and not an end, as in you are the artist, this is a tool. As long as you think of it as a paintbrush and not a career and not a painter. I think it's okay is what I'm getting at."

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Jon Lovett (Host). (September 14, 2024). "Jane Fonda & Friends," *Lovett or Leave It* [podcast].

Ask Butters & Pippin:

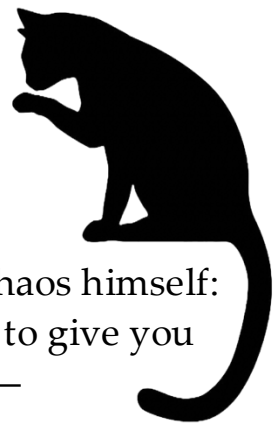
A conversation between two purrrrfect kitties

As Transposed from Purr to Person by Elizabeth Drummey, Assistant Director, University Writing Programs

Dear Butters & Pippin,

I want to use group writing assignments in my class, but every time I try, I end up fielding constant complaints from students! How can I incorporate these assignments more effectively?

-Sincerely,
Perplexed on Partnership



Dear Perplexed,

B: Hi, Perplexed! It's the Captain of Chaos himself: Butters the tuxedo cat! I'm back again to give you advice along with my trusty sidekick—

P: I am not your sidekick! We're co-writers!

B: Same thing.

P: No, very much *not* the same thing. And we're going to talk about why. But anyway…Pippin the orange cat at your service, *Purr*plexed. You've come to the right place to learn about group writing, which is also called collaborative writing.

B: Because we're collaborative writing now!

P: A *cat*laboration, you might call it. Let's start with a basic definition for those who may not know. Collaborative writing is when two or more people work together to produce a single text. This can be done in several ways. They can have a single document where they write each sentence together, or they can write sections separately and synthesize it later. It's good to provide examples for them, so show them how they can work together in a Google Doc and walk them through the process of smoothing out a document written by multiple people. You could even give them time to work on it in class so you can be available to answer any questions. The most important part is that everyone is contributing equally. Did you hear that, Butters? *Equally*. No one is the sidekick in collaborative writing.

B: Okay, okay! No need to have a hissy fit! There are lots of benefits to collaborative writing. Neomy Storch found in a study of ESL students that the papers written in pairs were clearer, more accurate, and more complex than papers written individually. The students also learned from each other since they were pooling their knowledge.

P: This can work for courses in any field whether it's science, humanities, or business. Students will always have strengths and weaknesses in a subject, and collaborative writing allows them the chance to work with someone who has different strengths and weaknesses than their own. But now we get to the difficult part of collaborative writing: the students themselves and their willingness to do group work.

B: Studies show students have mixed reactions to collaborative writing assignments. Some like it a lot because they notice an improvement in their writing. Some find it frustrating and even embarrassing to write with others.

P: And sometimes you can't blame them for being *fur*ustrated. There is always that group member that doesn't pull their weight and gets everyone's tails in a knot.

B: Not always. We don' t have that problem.

P: Those who think there is no problem often find that they *are* the problem.

B: What do you mean?

P: Never mind…There are strategies to avoid this though. One possibility is that when the groups are first assigned, have them decide on what role each student will play. Maybe they divvy up who reads and takes notes on each source. Or maybe someone takes notes while someone else does the final read-through before passing it in. Just remind them that the distribution of work must be equal. To ensure this, some instructors like to assign the roles themselves instead of having the students choose. We even recommend having the students draw up a contract laying out everyone's role. This can help hold them accountable for their parts of the project.

B: And make sure to have periodic check-ins with each group to see if they are working well together. Starting these check-ins early can help head off any problems before they start scratching each other's eyes out. Hey, Pip, what kind of assignments can involve collaborative writing anyway?

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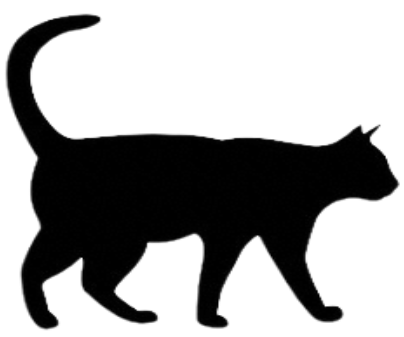

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P: It can work for most any kind of assignment: a research essay, a lab report, or even a video/podcast project. But many instructors have had great success with collaborative blog posts and Wikis. According to Vu Phi Ho Pham and Ngoc Hoang Vy Nguyen, these types of assignments can help clarify the concepts and objectives discussed in class. Since it is less formal than a traditional paper, students were more comfortable and even found the assignment fun.

B: That seems a lot less stressful than trying to write a ten-page research paper as a group.

P: An excellent point! Especially since many students find group work frustrating. Managing a long writing project as a group can get difficult and confusing. And if the assignment counts for a significant part of their grade, an uncooperative partner or group member will cause a lot of trouble and anxiety. For both students and you as the instructor. A short assignment that won't weigh heavily on their grade will help them have a more *paw*sitive experience. We have one more point to talk about: grading.

B: Yuck! That's the worst. The human never pays any attention to me when she's grading, no matter how many times I jump on the table.

P: Yes, but it is a necessary part of the process. This is one of the trickier parts of collaborative writing. The idea is that everyone in the group gets the same grade. But what happens if, despite their efforts, a student doesn't contribute?

B: It doesn't seem fair for a student who did nothing to get a good grade. Or for a student who put in their best effort to get a bad one…

P: And it would cause difficulty for you as the instructor since students would almost definitely complain. That's why we suggest having an individual, reflective writing assignment asking students to talk about what they contributed and what their group members contributed. You can read through these and take everyone's comments into account when putting the final grade on the project.

B: That way if all the group members say one student didn't do anything, you can grade them on their efforts and give a separate grade to that student.

P: Of course, you should also have a conversation with that student to see what they have to say for themselves.

B: Good idea! You know, Pippin, I really enjoy writing these columns with you.

P: Why thank you, Butters. I suppose you aren't such a bad *cat*laborator yourself. I'm sorry for implying so earlier.

B: It's okay. I know I'm kind of annoying sometimes. I think I'll go run some laps around the apartment now, maybe knock some stuff off the table. Oh! Or I could shred and claw all those papers the humans left lying around! Bye-bye!

P: I don't think my afternoon nap in the laundry basket will be as peaceful as I had hoped…Ah well. If you want feedback on your collaborative writing assignments, you can always contact the humans at the University Writing Programs (UWP) by emailing them at unh.writing.programs@unh.edu. And you can also remind your students that the Connors Writing Center works with groups on collaborative assignments. If they find themselves stuck, they can make an appointment here. Farewell, *Purr*plexed, and best of luck.

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Pham, Vu Phi Ho, and Ngoc Hoang Vy Nguyen. "Blogging for Collaborative Learning in the Writing Classroom: A Case Study." *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology, and Learning*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2020, pp. 1-11.

Storch, Neomy. "Collaborative writing: Products, process, and students' reflections." *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 14, 2005, pp. 153-173

Talib, Tarmizi and Yin Ling Cheung. "Collaborative Writing in Classroom Instruction: A Synthesis of Recent Research." *The English Teacher*, vol. 46, no. 2, August 2017, pp. 43-47.

"A word to the wise is infuriating. "~ Hunter S. Thompson

The Grammar Box:
Why *Wouldn't* You Use the Oxford Comma?

Elizabeth Drummey, Assistant Director, University Writing Programs

Would you believe that one missing comma caused a $13 milling lawsuit? Strange, but true! The 2014 Maine case *O'Connor v. Oakhurst Dairy* was due to the lack of an Oxford comma in a legal contract. The Oxford comma, also known as a serial comma, is the comma that comes before the conjunction in a list of three or more. Here's an example: "You invited your parents, Prince William, and Kate Middleton." This all seems rather straightforward, but the Oxford comma is the subject of heated debate in the grammar world.

Those in favor of the Oxford comma argue that it removes any ambiguity. Let's go back to our example. Here it is without the Oxford comma: "You invited your parents, Prince William and Kate Middleton." When written like this, it could be a list of three or it could be saying that Prince William and Kate Middleton are your parents. And you are presumably not part of the British Royal Family. Using the Oxford comma ensures there is no confusion about the sentence's meaning. This is what happened with the *O'Connor v. Oakhurst Dairy* case. The sentence in question referred to the "canning, processing, preserving, freezing, drying, marketing, storing, packing for shipment or distribution" of goods. It was unclear whether this meant distribution was included or if it was only packing for distribution. A simple comma would have saved Oakhurst Dairy a lot of money.

If the Oxford comma is so great, why wouldn't you want to use it? Those against the Oxford Comma believe it can introduce ambiguity in some situations. Let's use a new example: "You invited your mother, Taylor Swift, and Ed Sheeran." While this could be a list of three, it could also mean that only two people were invited; one is Ed Sheeran and the other is Taylor Swift, who is your mother. Again, that is presumably not the case. Writing it as "You invited your mother, Taylor Swift and Ed Sheeran" removes that possibility. The anti-Oxford comma side also sees it as redundant and sometimes pretentious. How can a comma be pretentious? Your guess is as good as ours.

Some style guides do not require it and even advise against the Oxford comma. This includes many style guides for journalism, such as the Associated Press Stylebook. It is also frequently not used in British English. Some styles that require it are APA, MLA, and Chicago. Make sure to check with the style guide for your field to see whether or not you should use the Oxford comma.

"You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive."

- James Baldwin

Dangling Modifier
The Purpose of Peer Review

Matthew Morrison, Assistant Director, University Writing Programs

Many writing instructors have experience with peer review as a method that can help improve student writing in a writing intensive course. Two or more students exchange writing with one another, read closely, and provide feedback to each other on where the piece they read already shines and where it might be improved—the more specific and constructive the feedback the better.

Through investigating the work of classmates, students get practice in engaging a scholarly conversation—one that expands what they're accustomed to. Conversing with others as scholars, something professors are accustomed to doing, is a useful mode for students, too, to enjoy. Teaching students to converse as scholars helps them develop respectful, professional relationship skills, respect for contrary beliefs, friendly and collaborative rapports, and provides firs—hand evidence that two (or three or four) minds can be better than one.

It's not hard to see what so many instructors turn to peer review. Peer review can benefit both the writer, the reader, and the piece: "The writer profits from the feedback they get. In the act of reviewing, the peer-review reader further develops his/her own revision skills" ("Peer Review" WAC Clearinghouse). Peer reviewing can also reduce the need for an instructor to comment on every exercise or draft they assign, so long as expectations for the student's development as they move through the process are clear and realizable.

While the focus of peer review is understandably on the benefits to the writers and their writing, auxiliary purposes and benefits of peer review are worth considering as well. Students are often asked to begin with the process of peer review within weeks of the semester's commencement. So why not devise peer review to help students master new course concepts and build relationships in addition to improving writerly skill?

Establishing Communal Goodwill

Healthy practices for peer review include prompting the student reviewer to consider that "this writer is your peer, so treat [them] with the respect and acre they deserve" ("Peer Review" WAC Clearinghouse). Since peer reviewers are most often given guidance by their instructors in what to look for when reviewing, building elements into that guidance that promote respectful and caring exchanges can be helpful for establishing communal goodwill.

When reviewing drafts of each other's essays, this might take the form of prompting like "After having read your partner's essay, what strikes you as a most significant element of their work, something that must not be left out in their final copy? Why must it be there? Quoting a standout portion of the text, please give them a feel for what's essential: a meaningful essence of their essay."

Anchoring the review in the text ensures that the review is concrete and specific. Coding the responses to positive elements like "standout portion" and "meaningful essence" allow a writer to relish something about their partner's work while being specific about that element's value—something students that tend to the effusive or tend to the critical each can value from. Setting a precedent of goodwill like this as an instructor, through the prompt language, helps assure students that peer review is going to be a positive experience for the reviewer personally. It gives them the satisfaction, too, of being a cheer-inducing peer.

All these benefits can contribute to healthy exchanges when and if students verbally share their feedback to one another, as well, and lessen the likelihood of awkward or even fraught exchanges. As students converse in class or work together in future groups, a tone is set that respect and compassion are guiding class values.

Mastering Course Concepts

In addition to establishing communal goodwill, peer review "can reinforce course-specific criteria for writing assignments" ("Conducting Peer Review Illinois Writers Workshop). While peer reviewing gives students experience in close reading and revision, why not leap two mountains with one jump and help them master course concepts along the way.

This can be as simple as noting to a psychology class to look for proper APA in-text citations as they read a classmate's work. Or it could further a more advanced form of conceptual acumen, like having aspiring historians identify and assess the contestability, reasonability, and specificity of their classmate's thesis statements.

Though not relying on an exchange from student-to-student, scientists Otto, McDowell, Balgopal, and Lijek, in "Preprint Peer Review Enhances Undergraduate Biology Students' Disciplinary Literacy and Sense of Belonging in STEM" (2023) discuss a class where students actually write "professional" peer reviews of preprint biology journal articles. Most importantly for our purposes, this shows just how much students can grasp, conceptually in their discipline and as pre-professionals in community, when sophisticatedly

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reviewing the right guidance.

Practice Delivering Critique

Whether as pre-professionals or simply as positive contributors to community, students conducting peer review get valuable practice in delivering critique; modeling for students that good critique protects and enhances their partner's self-concept while empowering them to resolve difficulties is key to developing both their every day and pre-professional identities. Working with a real reader can provide the conditions for achieving this ideal, enabling students giving live critique to et feedback on how their suggestions land. In gauging this, they can learn to adjust their style for future peer reviewing encounters.

Peer reviewing can also help students decipher the primary concerns presented by a text from secondary ones, as they begin "…to attend to larger issues [in the piece] first (audience, purpose, organization, detail, etc.)" before they "[t]alk about sentences, word choices, punctuation…late in the peer review process" (How Can I Get the Most Out of Peer Review?" WAC Clearinghouse). This, too, can teach valuable coworking and relationship skills. The reviewer might consider how an audience would feel if they attended only to minutia in critique, or considered big issue without an eye for finer points. If given the opportunity, the *recipient* of the review gains more skill in how to receive critique graciously, point to what they need help or clarification with, and even voice contrary perspective constructively to stimulate ongoing conversation.

As students improve their skills in critique, they can learn to wear different hats, such as knowing when to assume a more advisory role as they make specific suggestions as knowing when to respond as simply another reader. The WAC Clearinghouse recommends to peer reviewers, "[d]on't hesitate to respond as a reader, especially early in the review process, for example, 'I got confused here.' 'I saw your point clearly here.' 'I was convinced by your example or analogy or argument'" ("How Can I…?"). Students can learn that a personal response, and a frank reaction (worded kindly), can go a long way, and supplement the more evidential claims they make.

In Conclusion

While a peer review might unfold best when all the features discussed are operating, another element shouldn't be overlooked: fun. If students enjoy the process, it seems the positive and constructive nature of the review session is more automatic. Facilitators might consider pairing particular writers with particular readers to help ensure symbiotic tandems. If writers can enjoy the act of reading, reviewing, and being read, they have a quality which can serve them well over the course of a lifetime.

And if students need more support for their writing or TAs need more support for providing feedback on writing, the Connors Writing Center offers free peer review consultations with trained writing consultants as well as trainings for TAs every semester in how to give productive feedback. Please encourage them to stop by!

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"Conducting Peer Review." *Illinois Writers Workshop*. https://writersworkshop.illinois.edu/resources-2/instructor-resources/conducting-peer-review/

"How Can I Get the Most Out of Peer Review?" *WAC Clearinghouse,* The WAC Clearinghouse, https://wac.colostate.edu/repository/teaching/intro/peer/

Otto, Josie L., et al. "Preprint Peer Review Enhances Undergraduate Biology Students' Disciplinary Literacy and Sense of Belonging in STEM." *Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1128/jmbe.00053-23.

"Peer Review." *WAC Clearinghouse*, The WAC Clearinghouse, https://wac.colostate.edu/repository/writing/guides/peer-review/. Accessed 17 Sept. 2024.

"Always remember that it is impossible to speak in such a way that you cannot be misunderstood; there will always be someone who misunderstands you."
- Karl Popper

Faculty Profile: Florianne "Bo" Jiminez

Mathew Morrison, Assistant Director, University Writing Programs

Florianne "Bo" Jimenez

Professor Florianne "Bo" Jiminez is the newest member of the English faculty in Composition Studies. Bo comes from the University of Massachusetts-Boston (UMB) where she worked as Assistant Professor of English and Co-Director of the Writing Center. She got that job right out of her doctoral program—which was also at UMass, but in this case the flagship Amherst campus. During her two-year tenure at UMB, Bo wanted to take the next step. She wrote to me, "I really enjoyed my time there—I loved the students, and loved living in Boston. But I was also missing the intellectual and personal challenge of mentoring PhD students, and wanted to devote more time and energy to my research." Fortuitously, it wouldn't take long for Bo to actualize her wish.

The UNH Composition Studies contingent of the English department hosted Bo in the winter of 2023 as they fielded openings for a third professor of Composition Studies. Upon making her campus visit to UNH, Bo's professionalism, eagerness to pitch in, and upbeat energy instantaneously struck a positive chord with graduate students.

Needless to say, faculty in the English department were impressed too. Reflecting on the opening of the UNH job, Bo wrote, "I was really excited and intrigued by the opportunity…and the right things aligned, and here I am." Bo has big plans for her time here. In addition to helping "grow and enhance the PhD program [in Composition Studies]" and support graduate students, she wants to devise writing and rhetorical theory courses for upper-level undergraduates and graduate students.

She's already had much success. English Composition doctoral student Mali Barker wrote, "…I can't help but recognize that we are incredibly fortunate to have her as a member of our department. In class, Bo frequently encourages students to look at material from a new or different perspective, which often leads to lively and lingering discussions that follow us outside the classroom."

Bo's colleague, Professor Cristy Beemer, agrees, affirming "Professor Florianne 'Bo' Jiminez is such a welcome addition to our program in Composition Studies…She's a terrific scholar and teacher, and I'm just delighted by her immediate dedication to our students. Bo meets with our students, listens to them, and advocates for changes and innovations that are improving our program already."

I was curious to ask Bo how she approaches the academic writing of those students as teacher commentator. Speaking to the before mentioned concern for graduate students, and knowing that graduate students have unique needs as pre-professionals and budding scholars, Bo wrote, "Writing at the graduate level means inhabiting a voice and entering a discourse community of discipline, so I really aim to support grad students in joining and feeling included in those disciplinary communities. Writing-wise, that means studying academic texts not just for content, but also for genre and structure and voice."

To that end, as part of her service to the English Department, Bo has begun meeting with advanced doctoral students to coach them on writing cover letters and research statements as they venture onto the job market. Barker provides insight on Bo's facility with this role: "Bo is also a proactive mentor; she consistently sheds light on the hidden curriculum we face as graduate students and within our field at large…Bo doesn't just welcome graduate students into the field, she ushers us in and takes us seriously while doing so."

Well-positioned to help in many roles, Bo also brings a wealth of experiences shepherding writers through the nuts-and-bolts of their composing processes. She talked about just how much she relishes providing writing support, "…really getting to know what a writer's challenges are and helping them come up with a plan." Even before her tenure as Co-Director

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"Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people who never knew each other, citizens of distant epochs. Books break the shackles of time. A book is proof that humans are capable of magic." ~ Carl Sagan

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at UMB, Bo worked at the UMass-Amherst Writing Center, serving as Assistant Director for three years during graduate school. Reflecting fondly on experiences there, she wrote, "I especially enjoyed meeting graduate writers on a recurring basis, and seeing them move through milestones and translating their research interests into different genres."

To help advance her craft with undergraduates, Bo has begun building one-on-one conference time into her teaching-–to offer live, writing feedback to those early on in their college careers. Interested in and open to any tips, she wrote to me, "If anyone has had success with that sort of model, I'd love to hear your thoughts." Confirming an openness to giving *and* receiving mentorship, Bo offered a window into her approach to the "giving" side of things, one characterized by approachability and attention to the "whole student." She wrote, "As a mentor, I believe in offering examples ('Here's what I do, try it and see if it works') and in listening to mentees' needs."

Of course, Bo's purpose at UNH extends beyond teaching and mentoring. I asked her to tell us a little bit about how she approaches her own writing—her guiding philosophies and processes. Bo said, "I really believe that academic writing can and should be an extension of one's personal interests and voice," while adding, "[t]hat doesn't mean writing about one's personal life, necessarily. I think it means writing about questions and issues that matter to you, in a voice that you yourself would understand and enjoy reading."

It seems the process to write through that voice is as unique as the voice itself. After suggesting that a writer should be open-minded but selective about the process they choose to undertake, Bo offered, "My process can look a little odd, maybe even circular, but it works for me. I draft in longhand a lot, and will even draw diagrams and little comics to explain theory myself. Sometimes I'll use the Dictation tool in Microsoft Word, especially for conference papers while I will be speaking what I write. I draw on different tools and options depending on the day…"

While Bo is quite obviously dedicated to her craft, she has her pulse on how to sustain it. She closed on exchange with words of wisdom: "Lastly: I believe that guarding zealously against burnout is also part of being a successful writer. I personally don't work on weekends, and aim to stop working by 5pm (overtime is a "break glass in case of emergency" measure)." Perhaps that's a secret to Bo's success, and necessary for all that she accomplishes.

Professor Beemer's words reflect the vastness of Bo's contributions already: "I am eternally grateful for her can-do attitude, presence in the program, deep knowledge of the field, interesting and engaging research agenda, and fabulous sense of humor." Undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty all stand to benefit from Bo's conviction to that achievement necessitates attention to personal wellbeing. It seems that example set, and the other accomplishments already presented, are just the beginning of so much more that will unfold during her tenure in Durham.

Past Perfect: *Director's Notes*

Meaghan Dittrich, Director, University Writing Programs

This year marks the University Writing Center's 30-year anniversary. To mark the occasion, we hosted an Open House on Friday, October 18, 2024, in Dimond Library. SVPAA Kate Ziemer and Interim Library Dean Kimberly Sweetman kicked off the event by welcoming visitors that included fellow colleagues, distinguished alumni, prominent composition and rhetoric scholars, and establishing members of the Writing Program. Among our guests were the Dey family, whose generosity has sustained efforts of the WAC and Writing Center program throughout the years. Founding faculty member Cinthia Gannett and former graduate assistant director of the Connors Writing Center Katherine Tirabassi expounded on our history and the expanding impact of the UNH Writing Programs have had not only on our own institution, but at the national level. Both Gannett and Tirabassi drew on our original mission, the university's values and goals, and the labored efforts that have brough us to where we are now. Later, during our lunch hour, folks convened for an open conversation dedicated to the National Archives of Composition and Rhetoric (NACR), where we were happy to officially debut the launch of our new website. The day's celebration brought together familiar faces, as well as generative ideas for future scholarship collaboration. We thank everyone involved for a successful 30 years and look forward to the next 30!

"One of the principal reasons that writers write is to relive life."
~ Donald Murray

The UNH Writing Program invites applications for the Writing-Invested retreat at

The Browne Center: June 3 & 4, 2025

Sponsored by the UNH Writing Programs
through the generosity of the Dey Family Fund

Writing-Invested faculty are instructors interested in improving student writing in their courses.
Spaces available for up to 12 faculty participants.

INCLUDES

- **2-day** seminar at the Browne Center in Durham, NH
  (with optional 3rd day workshop)
- **Breakfast & lunch for 2 days**
  (refreshments also provided for 3rd optional day)
- **2 follow-up lunch sessions** at UNH (in December 2025 and May 2026) to discuss progress of your work and continue the discussion of improving student writing

HIGHLIGHTS

- Learn current, research-based best practices to enhance student writing
- Understand and discuss the multiple roles of writing in the classroom
- Create assignments aligned with the core competencies of your course
- Discuss assessment and revision strategies
- Gain a network of writing-invested faculty colleagues at UNH

TO APPLY CLICK HERE

Please fill out our application and send to
UNH.Writing.Programs@unh.edu
by March 31, 2025