

WRITING @ CENTER

PUBLICATION OF THE GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER AND WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM PROGRAM

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NEWS FROM THE CENTER

As of March 31, the Writing Center has seen a total of:

 **1,186** clients in

 **2,182** sessions

plus

 **56** workshop attendees

In Spring 2004, the WAC committee conducted its third review of syllabi from 2003-2004 WI courses as part of its ongoing review of the WI requirement. Syllabi were collected from departments in CVPA, SOM, CNHS, ITE, and CAS, and from the Recreation, Health, and Tourism department in GSE.

51 of the 71 syllabi (72%) collected from the departments fully met the guidelines for WI courses as outlined by the Senate. 20 of the syllabi submitted did not fully meet the requirements for one or more of the following reasons: they did not state on the syllabus that the course fulfills the WI requirement for the major; they did not indicate the ways in which the course meets the WI requirements and/or contained no description of the writing procedures and assignments by which the course fulfilled the requirement (e.g. 3500 words, drafts, feedback, revision, class
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HONESTY THROUGH OWNERSHIP: INCREASING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT TO REDUCE PLAGIARISM

by Tamara Maddox, Esq., Assistant Chair, Computer Science Department

In the computer science curriculum, ethics is far more than a reminder to students not to cheat. We begin with the basics of different forms of philosophical ethics, and then work to apply them to some of the many ethical issues involving computers and technology. Students study intellectual property rights, computer crime, privacy issues, free speech, and more. Usually the difficulty is in what to leave out rather than in how to fill a semester class. Helping our students to understand and deal with ethical concerns that they are likely to encounter in their future jobs is very important to our department.

That being said, cheating and plagiarism seem to be pervasive issues in so many classes that perhaps you are thinking that an entire semester discussing them may not hurt! To a certain degree, dealing with this topic directly does help, and, as I like to remind my students, "Cheating in an ethics class is really bad!" However, I far prefer to find ways to encourage students not to cheat, so I can spend my time helping them learn and recognize their own capabilities rather than proving their misdeeds.

What, then, can we do to discourage cheating while avoiding an atmosphere of doom and gloom in the classroom? I will not pretend to have found a magic formula, but I have developed certain approaches that seem to help enormously. First, I deliberately create unique and interesting assignments that make cheating difficult. Students who are actually interested in an assignment are far more likely to do honest work to complete it and often are motivated to do their best work as well. At the same time, a unique assignment is far more difficult to plagiarize. Students may find plenty of good sources, but if every other line must be original in order to actually respond to the assignment, the temptation to cheat loses its luster. Why cheat when you've already done the extra work? You've already been told that showing good research will help your grade.
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TUTOR AS TEACHER A TYPICAL WRITING CENTER SESSION, DRAMATICALLY CONDENSED

by Matt Kollmeyer, Writing Center Tutor

Setting the Session Agenda

[The tutor introduces himself to the client]

Tutor: So, what are we working with today?

Client: It's a compare and contrast paper for my Government class. We're supposed to compare and contrast the structure of American representative democracy to an example of European parliamentary government. I picked Britain. It's due a week from today.

Tutor: Any area in particular you want to concentrate on today?

Client: Structure and organization, I guess.

Tutor: What gives you the sense that those areas could use some improvement?

Client: Well, when I read it, I know what I was trying to say, but it seems kind of jumbled up in places. My teacher said I need to work on organization.

Tutor: Okay. Why don't you read the first two pages out loud, and if I hear something I'd like to go back to I'll make a note of it. You do the same.
continued on page 5

PREVENTING PLAGIARISM

continued from page 1

Designing interesting assignments is especially important in the area of ethics, where students come prepared to find everything snooze-worthy. I will admit that I do not shy away from racy material if it seems a good way to deal with issues and engage students. I look for topics where issues of technology and ethics appear as real-world problems, relevant to students' lives. I then construct a hypothetical situation incorporating several issues, and I ask students to respond to very specific questions involving the scenario presented. These questions: (1) motivate students to think about the issues involved, (2) help to focus students on what their papers should discuss, (3) provide a guideline for evaluation of the paper, and (4) make plagiarism (using internet sources or papers written for other assignments) extremely difficult. The combination of different questions is also intended to encourage individual student thought on the ethical issues, careful analysis of the legal issues, and overall comprehension of the substantive material involved.

For example, this semester, my scenario for the individual paper for CS 306 (Ethics and Law for the Computing Professional) involves a student ("Gary Gamesmaker") who creates a popular computer game. When students begin to copy his game without permission rather than paying the small fee required, Gary decides to take matters into his own hands and bury a type of virus within his own software, which is launched when someone tries to play the game using a pirated copy. This virus threatens to erase the user's hard drive if the game is not removed within a short period of time. In actuality, the "virus" does no harm to the user's hard drive, but a technophobic student does not realize this and unwittingly destroys another student's important data while bungling an attempt to remove the copied game. The assignment asks students to analyze whether the harmed student can legally recover as well as whether it was ethical for Gary to include the virus in the first place. Students are required to conduct research on the legalities and to discuss the matter from the perspective of different ethical theories as well as from their own viewpoints. (For the full assignment, including links to the honor code pledge and citation explanation mentioned above, see the online posting at: <http://cs.gmu.edu/~tmaddox/cs305/Paper.html>.)

I also try very hard to help students understand what I expect for each assignment. **Providing students with tools to help evaluate their own work** helps to relieve anxiety and usually results in a better final product. For large assignments, I typically either provide a structure for the overall submission, or I set forth some type of evaluation criteria -- sometimes both. When time permits, I favor the use of in-class peer reviews of written work. Peer reviews help students in multiple ways, such as learning to evaluate their own work by attempting to honestly assess that of a fellow student's. For my more advanced classes, I prefer an open-ended rubric that encourages specific student comments rather than simple ratings (See the example at the bottom of the next column).

Finally, I've learned that I need to **be as clear as possible in explaining to my students what I consider a product of their own work and thought processes** and what I consider an honor code violation. Whether students truly do not understand what constitutes plagiarism, or whether they simply use miscomprehension as an excuse, making a point of explaining your expectations helps avoid such discussions after the fact. It's not easy to mix simplicity with thoroughness, but I do make it my goal. For example, I use a **custom-made honor code pledge for my assignments, which includes a link to a basic explanation of citation and quotation requirements with simple examples** (Since my classes do not have strict citation form requirements, I tend to focus on giving appropriate credit to the source together with sufficient information that it can be found by the reader). I also remind my students that there are two important reasons for citing and quoting properly, aside from honor code issues. First, it is always appropriate to give credit to the person(s) from whom you are borrowing information. Second, from an academic standpoint, citations and quotations demonstrate the degree of research a student has incorporated into the assignment.

Designing interesting, focused assignments with multiple issues can be time-consuming, and sometimes it stretches my own creative faculties. However, the rewards are manifold. In addition to student motivation and reduction in plagiarism, I find that creation of such assignments gives me a fresh perspective of the material I am teaching, making me more effective in the classroom. And by the way -- grading these types of papers can be a lot more fun, too.

Persuasive Paper Peer Review

Reviewer's Name: _____ Writer's Name: _____

As the peer reviewer, first read the author's paper, making any grammatical changes and notes you feel are appropriate. Then, answer the questions below in as much detail as possible, adding any comments you feel would be helpful.

1. How well does the paper cover the chosen question(s) and issue(s)?
2. How persuasive is the discussion? Are arguments innovative & convincing?
3. How well is the paper written? Consider whether the introduction & conclusion are clear; whether the ideas flow logically; whether the paper seems easy to understand; and whether the conclusions flow logically from the facts, research, and reasoning.
4. Does the paper demonstrate clear and effective research? Consider whether: the research seems thorough, sources appear to be reliable (was the 5-part reliability analysis performed properly for each source?), proper credit is given to sources through citations (even when quotes are not used), overall research makes sense in context of the topic, the bibliography includes all req'd info.
5. How professional is the paper? Consider the overall form, including: grammar and spelling, whether typos are present, whether proper citation form is used, organization of Bibliography, etc.

In Preventing Plagiarism, an Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Cure—and Supports Other Teaching Goals, Too!

by Shelley Reid, Director of Composition, English

Chasing or “cracking down on” plagiarists can be counterproductive to good teaching: it can eat up your time, cause you (and any student who is “caught”) some emotional distress, and create a climate where students seem to be presumed guilty before any wrongdoing occurs. On the other hand, some simple strategies for preventing plagiarism will reinforce many teachers’ best practices without extravagant “costs” in terms of class time, preparation, or grading.

Prevention and Strategy	Costs and Challenges	Additional Educational Benefits	Examples and Suggestions
<p>Teach explicit guidelines: Remind students what general academic or disciplinary conventions require of them as they use sources.</p> <p>Tell them about your own specific expectations.</p>	<p>Cost: 15-20 minutes of class time, plus time for preparing written instructions or examples.</p> <p>Challenge: Helping students understand the reasons for using sources this way, not just the consequences</p>	<p>Increased student awareness of broader discipline and course expectations:</p> <p>Citation styles and expectations often reflect and can reinforce a discipline’s other research values as well as your own values.</p> <p>Discussion of how/when to cite involves discussion of the role of the student writer’s larger goals: e.g. class or discipline, when and where are his/her own conclusions expected? what is his/her overall audience or purpose?</p> <p>Whole class discussion will help students and save you time later in the grading process.</p>	<p>Ask students what must be quoted and what constitutes a “legal” paraphrase. Discuss options and disciplinary rules as a whole class.</p> <p>Have students work in pairs for five minutes to paraphrase a difficult passage and/or use a citation style; discuss 2-3 examples.</p> <p>Have students glance over and discuss 1-2 journal articles in the field to see how often, at what length, and in what style outside sources are referenced.</p>
<p>Require early commitments:</p> <p>Ask students for mostly-firm topic choices several weeks before an assignment is due.</p> <p>Require written requests and/or a new paper-trail for major topic changes.</p>	<p>Cost: Time to review, note, or comment on topic choices. Class time for discussion or peer-review concerning topics</p> <p>Challenge: Providing enough detail about the assignment early enough for students to make an informed choice</p>	<p>Increased student engagement can lead to having more interesting papers to read:</p> <p>Students who choose a topic early are more likely to pick something they are engaged with rather than whatever’s “easiest.”</p> <p>Teachers can nudge students toward more complex or interesting approaches to a topic.</p> <p>Identifying poor topic-choices and requiring changes is most efficient for both teacher and student at this point, allowing time for thoughtful revisions and re-engagement.</p>	<p>Topic-choice assignments can range from one-liners to more developed pieces of writing: short paragraphs on why they’ve chosen this topic and what the major issues are, tentative theses or outlines, memos, initial bibliographies, or short proposals.</p> <p>Students can peer-review these assignments before or instead of teacher review: they can make suggestions, ask questions, imagine contradictory or alternative views to investigate, suggest evidence.</p>

For a thorough compendium of links to sites dealing with plagiarism prevention, detection, and general information, visit “Resources for Plagiarism: Prevention and Detection” on University of North Carolina, Charlotte library website at: <http://library.uncc.edu/display/?dept=instruction&format=open&page=920>.

Prevention and Strategy	Costs and Challenges	Additional Educational Benefits	Examples and Suggestions
<p>Assign problems, not topics:</p> <p>Create assignments that require students to (begin to) solve a problem: to choose a best or most important idea, to recommend an action to a specific audience, to answer “how” and “why.”</p>	<p>Cost: Assignment preparation/revision time</p> <p>Challenge: Developing a problem that matches course content and student-abilities</p> <p>Challenge: Helping students to move from a “report” mode to an analysis mode, and/or helping them to narrow a large problem to a manageable one</p>	<p>Increases engagement and critical thinking:</p> <p>Students can be alerted to “real world” questions or issues in the field that need expert attention—or, alternately, to local or personal implications of larger issues.</p> <p>Students’ research can be driven by the question rather than the required number of sources and may require interdisciplinary research or consulting a range of source-types.</p> <p>Students begin to develop advanced reasoning strategies: synthesis, analysis, evaluation.</p> <p>Students can learn tolerance for ambiguity, partial answers, and/or small steps toward solutions.</p>	<p>Add an evaluative component to a question: which item or aspect is better or most important, & why? based on what criteria?</p> <p>Require a recommendation for (local) action: who should take the next steps, and what are they?</p> <p>Ask students to translate ideas from one setting, time period, genre, or audience to another.</p> <p>Describe a large problem and ask (groups of) students to investigate different aspects of it.</p>
<p>Emphasize a theme or angle:</p> <p>Choose an idea or question relevant to class materials and require students to address it in some way in their writing over a sequence of assignments and/or from several points of view.</p>	<p>Cost: Syllabus and/or assignment preparation or revision time; some class time spent on discussion</p> <p>Challenge: Developing an angle that is specific and intriguing without limiting topic-choice too much</p> <p>Challenge: Helping students see both the limits and the options available to them</p>	<p>Increased depth of study; common ground during individual project work:</p> <p>Students are asked to contextualize knowledge, to integrate facts into a larger conversation.</p> <p>Students learn to choose or create connections that they can see, not just respond to a topic.</p> <p>Students working on individualized projects can continue to contribute to (and take advantage of) in-class conversations and workshops.</p>	<p>Choose a question or two to integrate through an entire term</p> <p>Ask students to vote on an issue or theme to address in a larger project, or allow clusters of students to choose their own</p> <p>Define how closely the paper and the theme must/may be related: will you allow imaginative or “stretched” connections?</p>
<p>Go step by step:</p> <p>Break the writing process down using interim deadlines and/or multiple documents; collect all pieces at some point.</p>	<p>Cost: Time to verify multiple steps, plus possible time for peer review sessions or presentations</p> <p>Challenge: Defining and/or rewarding steps so that students see benefits rather than just “busy work”</p>	<p>Increased time for discovery, reflection, and revision; more learning from one assignment:</p> <p>Students have time to change their minds or adapt to newly found questions or information.</p> <p>Students can practice representing the same information in different ways (proposal, speech, abstract, report).</p> <p>Students may have time to review each other’s arguments and learn ideas or give feedback.</p> <p>Students have time to use multiple skills: gathering information/ideas, and then organizing and presenting them.</p>	<p>In addition to the suggestions listed above, consider asking for freewriting or rants, summaries, annotated bibliographies, one-minute speeches, white papers, letters, early drafts, research logs, progress reports, etc.</p> <p>Remember that peer reviewing on steps can increase student engagement and decrease instructor grading time.</p>

TUTOR AS TEACHER*continued from page 1***Working with Structure as the Focus of the Session**

Tutor: All right. You've got some solid points here, and I think we can strengthen their presentation. Did you have a pattern in mind, an overall structure for the paper, when you started out?

[The client explains how he intended to structure his comparison and contrast]

Tutor: And you do that quite well. Sometimes, though, as you said, your points get a little lost in the overall flow of the paper. Overall flow is a bit vague. Basically, there are a couple of ways to organize a paper like yours, to make it flow. One way is often called block style, and the other is often called point-by-point. Block style treats one subject completely before addressing the other; whereas point-by-point structures the paper around individual points of comparison and/or contrast. Does that make sense?

[The client seems unsure and asks for an example of what the tutor means]

Tutor: Using your paper as an example, let's begin with block style. In your paper, what are the two things you compare and contrast?

Client: The British and American forms of government.

Tutor: So, in block style, the first part of the paper, after the thesis, would deal entirely with the British form of government. And the second half would focus on the American system, contrasting it to the points you made about the British system.

Client: How does that differ from point-by-point?

Tutor: Let's use your paper as an example again. In what ways do you compare the two systems of government, and in what ways do you contrast them?

Client: The comparison is that they're both representative forms of government, and the contrasts are that they hold elections differently and how the majority interacts with the minority party.

Tutor: To simplify, we'll call them points one, two, and three. Writing your paper in point-by-point style would mean dealing with:

first—point one as it relates to both the British and American forms of government; second—point two as it relates to both forms of government; and third—point three as it relates to both forms of government.

Client: So I'd only have three body paragraphs?

Tutor: Not necessarily. Each point might take several paragraphs to develop. Take a look at your paper again. What style do you think you used?

[The client looks over his paper again]

Client: I started out with block style but forgot to contrast the same points when I got to the American form. I can see how that might confuse my readers.

Closing the Session

Tutor: Which style do you think you might use on your next draft?

Client: I'll probably fix my block style.

Tutor: I think that's a good idea. And if you're not happy with it, you can always write another draft in point-by-point style. Before the session ends, do you have any more questions?

Client: Should I mention my points in my opening paragraph, in my thesis statement? Or should I just write that I'm going to compare and contrast American government with British government?

Tutor: Ideally, a thesis statement gets your reader interested in what you've written. If you're too vague, you risk losing his interest, but you also want to avoid being too specific. So, you can preview your individual points of comparison and contrast, but don't begin supporting them at that point. That should come later, in the body of your paper.

[The client and tutor review and wrap up the session]

LIBRARIAN'S CORNER**EndNote®****More than one-click bibliographies!**

by Kevin E. Simons,

Instruction Coordinator, University Libraries

GMU now has a site license for **EndNote**, the powerful knowledge management software that allows students (yes faculty too) to organize research in their own personalized database of resources.

The “hook” for students is EndNote's ability to format papers and bibliographies easily through MS Word or WordPerfect with a few clicks of the mouse. What should inspire faculty is EndNote's ability to help teach discipline-specific critical thinking in the writing intensive classroom. One example is teaching the criteria used in a discipline to evaluate information. After classroom discussions, students

can include keywords in their EndNote database, called a library, that identify evaluative criteria—e.g. “professor at Northwestern” (for the author's authority), “respected publisher” (for the quality of a source), and “methodology questionable” (for the quality of research). These keywords may be searched in the student's library to retrieve appropriate records for a specific disciplinary need.

Library catalogs from across the country, including Mason's University Libraries, may be searched using the EndNote software so references can be imported directly into one's EndNote library. Also, many online databases work with EndNote to export references directly into an EndNote library.

EndNote is available through download at <http://cas.gmu.edu/tac/endnote/endnote.html> (broadband connection recommended) or on disc from Patriot Computers for a nominal media fee.

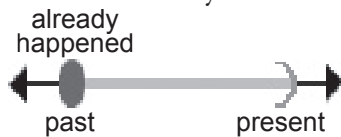
GRAMMAR CORNER: PERFECT ENGLISH

by David Beach, Assistant Director, English Composition

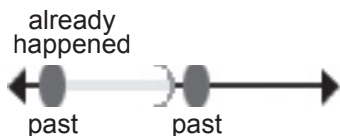
Native English speakers may recall the “perfect” verb form from foreign language class, but they may be hard pressed to define perfect forms. Simply, a perfect verb shows an action relative to another point in time. The construction of perfect verb forms is simple—a form of have plus the past participle of the verb. E.g., they **have completed** the book.

If we put verbs on a timeline of past, present, and future, the action of the verb will relate to another time before or after the point of reference. The illustrations below (from <http://depts.gal-laudet.edu/Englishworks/>) indicate action in relation to another point in time:

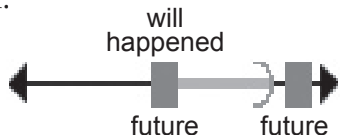
Present perfect: The value of my house *has doubled* in six years.



Past perfect: The value of my house *had doubled* before the last assessment.



Future perfect: The value of my house *will have doubled* before I sell it next year.



Perfect verbs can also take a **progressive form** (a form of have, the past participle of be, and the present participle of the verb).

Present perfect progressive: I *have been living* in the DC area for 24 years.

Past perfect progressive: I *had been living* in Sweden when I moved to DC.

Future perfect progressive: I *will have been living* in DC for 25 years this October.

WRITING @ CENTER

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NEWS FROM THE CENTER

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time given to instruction in writing the assignment). Only two departments failed to submit syllabi for their WI course(s). The number of syllabi fully in compliance with the requirement is slightly up from the last review cycle in academic year 1999-2000.

Overall, the committee is pleased with the high level of compliance to the requirement. Further, our follow-up on non-compliant syllabi enabled us to detect and address wider issues, e.g. WI courses listed incorrectly or missing in the catalog. We believe that our continued high national ranking in the *U.S. News and World Report College Issue* and the recognition given to our program by the National Education Association *Advocate Online* (Feb 2004) speak to the success of the program and the hard work of our faculty.

Current WAC Committee Members: Stanley Zoltek, Chair; Terry Zawacki, Director; Susan Durham, CNHS; Tamara Maddox, ITE; Tom Owens, CVPA; Beth Schneider, SOM. Consultants: Chris Thaiss, English; Shelley Reid, Composition; Ashley Williams, NCC; Don Kelso, Biology; Kevin Simons, Library; Megan Kelly, Writing Center.

The WAC Program and the Center for Teaching Excellence hosted **North Carolina State professors Michael Carter**, composition and rhetoric, and **Miriam Ferzli**, biology, who gave a half-day workshop on **LabWrite**, a website they developed with a National Science Foundation grant. LabWrite is designed for a wide range of sciences and has been used for all levels of undergraduate education. A control-group study showed that students who use LabWrite learn science more effectively than those who use typical lab report instruction. This free online resource is available at: <http://www.ncsu.edu/labwrite>.

Chris Thaiss and Terry Zawacki presented a keynote address in February at Delta State University on “Writing Well in College: What We’ve Learned from Faculty and Students.” Their talk was based on research they conducted for their book on faculty and student writing in the disciplines.