



## Statement on Writing Centres and Staffing (endorsed May 30, 2016)

### Preamble/introduction

As writing specialists, members drawn from the writing studies community of Canada (instantiated in academic writing-related associations such as CWCA--Canadian Writing Center Association, CASLL/Inkshed, CASDW, ACWCA, CAWS, WSSO) have put together the following statement on writing centres and staffing. Our goal in writing this statement is to promote academic excellence for all students. We believe that writing centre staff require knowledge of writing studies research and proven instructional models. The Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing endorses this document.

Those providing writing instruction need to have expertise in writing studies to engage in evidence-based pedagogies. Excellent writing support requires instructors who have local knowledge of the students at their institution and who can collaborate with faculty from many disciplines to develop better writing assignments and effective and clearly communicated grading practices and policies.

To ensure best practices at writing centres we endorse the following principles.

### Best Instructional Practices for Writing Centres

#### **1. Students who work with writing specialists at writing centres should improve their writing and critical thinking.**

When students work with writing specialists at writing centres, they improve both their writing and their thinking (Bean, 2011; Sanchez & Lewis, 2014; Williams & Takaku, 2011). Students in all disciplines at all levels (including graduate students) benefit from assistance aimed at improving their writing abilities (Jones, 2001; Lunsford & Ede, 2011; Williams & Takaku, 2011; Yeats, Reddy, Wheeler, Senior & Murray, 2010). This finding is also seen in studies on learning trajectories of English as an Additional Language (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Babcock & Thonus, 2012; Huang, 2010; Snow & Kahmi-Stein, 1997).

#### **Rationale:**

Students enter university programs with little knowledge of disciplinary writing expectations. As they adapt to their programs and learn the ways of thinking as well as the knowledge in the field, they begin to write like members of the community (Pare, 2002). Writing centre specialists have teaching expertise and knowledge of writing in a variety of disciplines.

## **2. Writing centres are fundamentally teaching units.**

Writing centres are fundamentally teaching units where writing specialists are engaged in teaching activities (Munroe, 2003; Graves & Graves, 2006). Responsibility for the teaching of writing must be undertaken by writing specialists who hold faculty-level appointments similar in rank to the course instructors they work with. In the case where a writing centre uses peer tutors, those tutors must be guided and supervised by a writing specialist.

### **Rationale:**

Working closely with course instructors and their students allows writing centre instructors and peer tutors to adapt to changing expectations, changing disciplinary interests, and changing program needs. Using a developmental approach to teaching writing, writing centre instructors and tutors help students adapt and succeed in their programs. The centres must be closely aligned with academic units in order to support student learning and maintain collaborations.

## **3. Peer tutors need to be educated and mentored.**

Students who work as peer tutors in Writing Centres need to be educated in the field of Writing Studies, and mentored by professionals with expertise in Writing Studies (Maloney Grimm, 1996; Howard & Barton, 1986).

### **Rationale:**

While students who work as peer tutors can be effective, the quality of their work depends almost entirely upon the quality of mentoring they receive. Mentors must be writing specialists with a demonstrated academic interest in the academic field of writing studies. They demonstrate their commitment to the discipline of writing by, for example, belonging to one of the major writing studies academic organizations listed at the end of this document; contributing to online forums associated with these groups; writing articles for publication by one of these groups or in other scholarly media.

## **4. Writing support is best attended to in disciplinary contexts.**

Writing support is best provided in disciplinary contexts, where writing specialists work with faculty in the disciplines to share expertise about the local disciplinary genres in which students are asked to engage (Bean, 2011; Sanchez & Lewis, 2014; Williams & Takaku, 2011).

### **Rationale:**

Writing is not simply a matter of learning to follow grammatically correct patterns of expression; rather, it is a tool to enable all the thinking and adapting that students must do in their studies (Bean, 2011; Hillocks, 1984, 1986). Writing expectations must reflect the important role of apprenticeship in learning to write in a discipline. Writing is an integral part of students' disciplinary learning and development.

## **5. Writing competency is a degree outcome for all university students.**

Writing competency (as part of communication) is a degree outcome for all university students across the country. Writing centres are always critical agents within universities as they strive to

ensure all students are competent writers, including students who bring with them a variety of language backgrounds and proficiency levels. Writing centres need to be recognized for their important role in addressing this degree outcome. (Yeats, et al., 2012).

**Rationale:**

While it is natural to associate disciplines such as English and History with teaching students to write, it must be acknowledged that all students write at university and in the workplace. Writing centres are able to play a vital role in increasing awareness of this reality, in encouraging faculty members to participate in the role of “teachers of writing”, and in aiding students in their growth as thinkers and writers across the disciplines.

**6. Writing professionals use and apply research from writing studies.**

Writing professionals are committed to using and applying research from writing studies and related fields to improve their practice and provide students and faculty with effective writing instruction. (Graves & Graves, 2006)

**Rationale:**

Not every educated person will sit down and immediately be able to help students develop their thinking and writing skills. Explicit knowledge of writing theory and practice allows writing instructors and mentored peers to teach writing (Segal, Pare, Brent, & Vipond, 1998). A writing scholarship background enables writing instructors to improve their practice informed by the ongoing scholarship of writing.

**National Writing Studies Organizations in Canada**

[Canadian Writing Center Association \(CWCA\)](#)

[Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing/Association canadienne de rédaction \(ACR/CASDW\)](#)

[Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Literacy \(CASLL/Inkshed\)](#)

**Regional Associations**

Atlantic Canadian Writing Centres Association (ACWCA)

Campus Alberta Writing Studies (CAWS)

Writing Studies of Southwestern Ontario (WSSO)

## Annotated bibliography

Arkoudis, S., & Tran, L.T. (2007). International students in Australia: Read ten thousand volumes of books and walk ten thousand miles. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 27(2), 157-169.

Babcock, R. D., & Thonus, T. (2012). *Researching the writing centre: Towards an evidence-based practice*. New York: Peter Lang.

The authors report that writing center usage correlates with higher grades for international students (p. 161).

Bean, J. (2011). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. New York: Jossey-Bass.

Graves, H., & Graves, R., (2006). *Writing centres, writing seminars, writing culture: Writing instruction in Anglo-Canadian universities*. Winnipeg MB: Inkshed Publications.

Hillocks, G., (1986). *Research on written composition: New directions for teaching*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1986. (ED 265 552).

Hillocks, G. (1984). What works in teaching composition: A meta-analysis of experimental treatment studies. *American Journal of Education*, 93, 133-170.

Howard, V.A. & Barton, J.H. (1986). *Thinking on paper*. New York: William Morrow.

Huang, L.S. (2010). Seeing eye to eye? The academic writing needs of graduate and undergraduate students from students' and instructors' perspectives. *Language Teaching Research*, 14(4), 517-539. Doi: 10.1177/1362168810375372

Jones, C. (2001). The relationship between writing centers and improvement in writing ability: An assessment of the literature. *Education*, 122(1), 2-21.

Lunsford, A., & Ede, L. (2011). Reflections on contemporary currents in writing center work. *The Writing Center Journal*, 31(1), 11-23.

Maloney Grimm, N. (1996). Rearticulating the work of the writing center. *College Composition and Communication*, 47(4), 523-548.

Monroe, J. (2003). Writing and the disciplines. *Peer Review*, 6(1), 4-7.

Research in our field attests to the value of housing writing in academic areas. In the words of Jonathan Monroe: "[E]ffective writing is central to the work of higher education. The responsibility for this work should be vested in the disciplines where this work takes place and the faculty who the ultimate arbiters. . . . [A]n expanded sense of faculty ownership of questions of writing and disciplinarity at all levels of the curriculum must be continuously cultivated." (4).

Pare, A. (2002). Genre and identity. In *The rhetoric and ideology of genre: Strategies for stability and change*. Eds. R. M. Coe, L. Lingard, & T. Teslenko. Creskill, N.J: Hampton Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2015, January 23). Impact Evaluation: Best Practices Aren't. Blog post. *Better Evaluation: Sharing Information to Improve Evaluation*. Retrieved from [http://betterevaluation.org/blog/best\\_practices\\_arent](http://betterevaluation.org/blog/best_practices_arent)

Administrators like to say they are basing their decisions on best practices. We would like to point out the critique of this phrase emanating from the evaluation literature. Patton, for example, writes: "Designating something a 'best practice' is a marketing ploy, not a scientific conclusion. Calling something 'best' is a political and ideological assertion dressed up in research-sounding terminology."

Sanchez, B., & Lewis, K. (2014). Writing shapes thinking: Investigative study of preservice teacher reading, writing to learn, and critical thinking. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 2(1), 55-68.

Segal, J., Pare, A., Brent, D., & Vipond, D. (1998). The researcher as missionary: Problems with rhetoric and reform in the disciplines. *College Composition and Communication*, 50 (1), 71-90.

Snow, M.A., & Kahmi-Stein, L.D. (1997). Teaching academic literacy skills: A new twist on the adjunct model. *Journal of Intensive English Studies*, 11, 93-108.

Williams, J.D., & Takaku, S. (2011). Help seeking, self-efficacy, and writing performance among college students. *Journal of Writing Research*, 3(1), 1-18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17239/jowr-2011.03.01.1>

Williams, J. D., Takaku, S., & Bauman, K. (2006). Effects of self-regulatory behavior on ESL student writing. *Tohoku Psychologia Folia*, 65, 24-36.

Yeats, R., Reddy, P., Wheeler, A., Senior, C., & Murray, J. (2010). What a difference a writing centre makes: A small scale study. *Education & Training*, 52(6/7), 499-507.