I simply say “Yes”  
*By Amanda Burgess*

*Grand Valley State University*

As my second semester at the Writing Center unwinds, I have had plenty of opportunities to tell people about my job. When asked about what I do, I recite the usual spiel about working with students on improving thesis statements and organizing their papers. But it is always the question "Do you like your job?" that makes me pause and think. I mean, not only do we as writing tutors get the chance to be a positive influence on students who may be lacking confidence in their writing ability, but we also gain knowledge about different subjects by reading papers written by students from a variety of disciplines.

Aside from these benefits, though, comes the possibility of sharing a truly personal moment with someone who visits the Writing Center. The best example I can think of is a student who came to me with a paper about his best friend and their time spent in the Marine Corps. As I was reading his paper (which started out as an account of their experience with military life), it became obvious to me that this was not just a benign narrative about fun times with his best friend. You see, this student's friend was hit by a reckless driver while they were on leave and bled to death while lying in his arms.

Up until then, the student's writing had been expressive and fluid, but at this point in the paper, his words became very choppy and strained. I suggested that he take out a piece of paper, shut his eyes and reflect for a moment, and then rewrite the scene. I watched him squeeze his eyes shut as they welled up with tears, and I saw pain begin etched in his features. Slowly he swayed back and forth, and then he began to write with such ferocity that I could barely read what he was writing. The words streamed out of him almost as freely as his tears did, and when he was finished, he slid the paper over to me and I started to read. I felt tears spring up in my own eyes as I read this second account of the tragic death of his best friend. The difference in his prose was striking, and the grief and emotion with which it was written tied my stomach in knots.

After I had finished reading, I wiped my eyes and we looked at one another. I took a deep breath as words ran across my mind. I had planned to tell him how much better this account was and how much his writing had improved. What I ended up saying was, "Thank you. Thank you for sharing with me, a perfect stranger, such a personal moment."  
Even as a first-year tutor, I realized that experiences like this one come along once in a great while. The feeling of sharing something so special and emotional with a student whom I had never met, and possibly may never see again, is what I wish I could express to people when they ask me if I like my job. Instead, I simply say "Yes."
Cut and Paste…In College?

By Suzana Krstevski
Walsh University

It was my very first tutorial. Before his arrival, I feared the worst: his paper was due in ten minutes, and he wanted me to fix all the problems in it so he could get an A. No, worse yet, he didn't even have a topic. Oh, what if he didn't even know the assignment?!?!?! Luckily, the writer walked in and saved me from my torturous and unfounded game of "what if."

"Hi," he said.

I thought, “So far, so good.”

'This is my paper. I know I have all the information, but I just don't think it sounds good.” With a few probing questions, I learned he meant, “I guess I need help putting it in order."

Ahhh, organization. This was something I could handle.

We started at the beginning by examining his thesis. I explained that a good thesis would organize the paper for him. He was amazed. We worked with his main ideas and put them all together in one sentence. I congratulated him on writing an excellent thesis. He could not believe that was all it took to write a thesis. From there we knew where we were going.

If the writer would have had his paper on disc with him, we could have used the cut and paste feature in Word Perfect to put his paper in order. However, since he did not, we decided to cut and paste literally. The reorganization started to get too complex to draw arrows and refer to other page numbers. So I pulled out the tape and the scissors. He must have thought I was crazy but followed along anyway, probably hoping his time was almost up.

We cut apart his paper, then played with the pieces. I kept referring him back to his thesis. My question, 'Does this follow the order you set at the beginning in your thesis?" became a familiar one. When we were satisfied that the organization was coherent, we taped all the pieces together.

I found that by using the actual physical pieces of the paper, he had a better grasp of his ideas. Each part of the paper had its own corresponding physical piece. By relating the thought to something concrete, I think the writer understood the process and was able to internalize what we were doing. He viewed his paper as a puzzle. The thesis was his guide to putting the puzzle together. When he finished taping his eight-foot-long paper together, he smiled triumphantly.
"Wow," I thought, 'it worked, and it wasn't so bad after all."

**Good Conversation**  
*By Jessica Query*  
*Grand Valley State University*

When I began the year, I said that I was interested in tutoring an ESL student. Being a Spanish minor, I felt I could understand some of the difficulties of trying to learn a new language. The ESL student I ended up working with was a graduate student from China. She came to Grand Valley to obtain her master's degree in education.

During our sessions together, we spent the majority of the time talking. Jane told me what was going on in her classes, and we went over ideas verbally. We went over drafts of papers, and I helped her with the written portions of her assignments, but she felt talking to me was what helped her the most. I was worried at first about this because I didn't know if I was giving her the help she needed. At the end of the semester, Jane came in and told me that she found out that her grade in her hardest class was an A. She said she couldn't have done it without our "talks."

My experience just reinforces the idea that the basis of writing is communication. My job as an ESL tutor was to help Jane become a better writer and a better communicator. Jane had to feel comfortable talking about her ideas before she could write about them. So I guess the point of this little story is to emphasize that it's OK to only loosely focus on writing when working with ESL students. Learning a language can be an extremely frustrating experience, and any method that helps a second language learner to communicate better should be used.

**The Importance of Demeanor**  
*By Glenn J. Bergeron II*  
*Nicholls State University*

The topic of which I write is probably something already obvious to most writing consultants; however, the power of its results seemed a revelation to me which I feel worthy of writing. As a writing consultant at the Writing Across the Curriculum Lab at Nicholls State University, over the past two years I have been involved in consultations which have stemmed from completely wretched to absolutely exhilarating. Of course, many factors can contribute to the subsequent success or failure of a writing consultation, but I have had a tendency to always question what part of that success or failure might be attributed to my participation. Strangely, or perhaps, naturally, successful consultations occupy a minimal amount of space in my memory, while I often place a great deal of meditation on consultations gone awry. Because volumes can be written on the various aspects of peer writing consultations (and have been already), I will relate one aspect...
which I have subconsciously been putting into practice without fully realizing the impact of its assertion until a recent consultation where it seemed rather revelatory. I write of maintaining a pleasant demeanor.

The role of demeanor in a writing consultation is a double one in that both the consultant's demeanor and the student's demeanor can bear fruit affecting the outcome of the meeting. Yes, students can have bad days, and because writing consultants are students too, we are not exempt from an occasional bad day ourselves. Also, I adhere to the philosophy that a student's paper is the ultimate responsibility of that student. However, as a writing consultant, I am constantly aware of the responsibility which I have accepted to uphold to students seeking assistance. I do not insinuate that this elevates the consultant to a higher position of authority over the student, but I do mean to suggest that a writing consultant must set aside any outside matters which may disagreeably affect the progress of the consultation. In short, a writing consultant must maintain a pleasant demeanor while on duty.

For example, a student may enter the writing center for a consultation with you on an essay on which he has scored poorly. To top it off, this student has arrived under less than favorable circumstances, i.e., he dropped his Egg McMuffin in his lap on the drive to school, arrived late to his first class due to difficulty in finding a parking space, and was caught off guard by a pop quiz for which he was unprepared. Of course, all these circumstances are completely beyond your control and by no means are they your fault. Nonetheless, the student is agitated and the consultation is in jeopardy before it even begins. What should you do? Is it your responsibility to cheer this student up? Well, in a way, yes. In no manner are you obligated to take blame or, possibly, abuse for any unfortunate mishaps which may have occurred prior to his arrival, but a sincere “I’m sorry to hear that” is within reason. And it often works wonders. I state this opinion because, regardless of the student's demeanor, as a consultant, you should see your way through any unpleasantness with one goal in mind: a successful consultation. And aside from good writing and listening skills, a pleasant demeanor is probably the most effective, though not always the easiest, way of focusing the student on what he had initially come for.

Similarly, you, the writing consultant might be experiencing a rather questionable day yourself. Should you convey this to the student with whom you are consulting, the student will almost always be affected by this tension. Your indifference, agitation, or lack of focus is almost sure to hamper the productivity of your time together. Remember that an assistance-seeking student's time is as valuable as yours. Besides, by not assisting a student effectively due to an unpleasant demeanor, you can be legitimately accused of neglecting your responsibilities to the student, the writing center, and yourself as a consultant.

Demeanor can be a decisive factor in the outcome of a writing consultation. I have only attempted to introduce its importance; yet it's easier to recognize than apply. Yes, not all students will enter a writing center full of eagerness and mirth. However, I believe a writing consultant bears the heavy burden of maintaining a pleasant demeanor because he
or she has accepted the role of one who offers assistance and is more thoroughly familiar with the writing consultation process.

More Funnies to Tickle Your Humor

*Here are a few more bloopers that someone sent the editor off the internet; we believe they were taken from student papers at some point or another.*

- Columbus was a great navigator who cursed about the Atlantic.
- Many of the Indian heroes were killed, which proved very fatal to them.
- The government of England is a limited mockery.
- Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address while traveling from Washington to Gettysburg on the back of an envelope.
- Henry VIII had an abbess on his knee, which made walking difficult.
- *The Scarlet Letter* gripped me intensely.
- Shakespeare wrote tragedies, comedies, and errors.
- Milton wrote "Paradise Lost"; then his wife died and he wrote "Paradise Regained."
- Magna Charta said that the King was not to order taxis without the consent of Parliament.
- They gave William IV a lovely funeral. It took six men to carry the beer.
- Staying married to one woman is known as monotany.
- A polygon is a man who has many wives.
- Acrimony is what a man gives his divorced wife.
- A Senator is half horse and half man.
- An illiterate child is one whose parents are not married.
- in the middle of the nineteenth century, all morons moved to Utah.
- Herrings go about the sea in shawls.
- Socrates died from an overdose of wedlock.
- Three shots rang out. Two of the servants fell dead, the other went through his hat.
- The witness was warned not to purge himself.

Confessions of a High School Cheater

*By Amiena Mahsoob
Penn State University*

I will never forget my tenth grade algebra teacher. Ms. E. not only claimed to be a female mud-wrestler, but also gave extra credit to students who correctly guessed her hair color of the week and one time asked me to attend a "new age" conference with her. She left quite an impression on all of us, not only personally, but also academically. You see, when we asked her questions about algebra or things other than her hot dates, she evaded our questions by stating, “Well, maybe if you studied, you would know.” She left us with the impression that asking questions implied academic
impotence, so we responded with our primitive form of collaborative learning: blatant “cheating.” We “illegally” discussed how we solved problems, came to consensus, and handed in the work as thoroughly our own.

When I entered college, I was amazed to find that not only was what I considered to be blatant cheating running rampant in the school, but the University actually paid certain students to work in centers throughout the campus in order to instigate it. These “learning centers” aided students in anything from math to writing and actually provided it as a free service.

Needless to say, I frequented the Math Center religiously and learned not only how to perform the desired tasks in calculus, but also how to ask questions, answer questions, and help other students in the Center when the tutors were busy. Overall, I met some fun people and enjoyed my time studying for one of the most difficult classes in my college career. Oddly enough, I did the same thing in the Math Center as I did in tenth grade: I explored a bit of academia with fellow students. I must admit, I felt a twinge of inspiration. So I acquired the other Centers on campus, searching for something more up my alley, and found the Writing Center.

Today, I'm training to become a writing tutor. Surprisingly, I find that students come to the Writing Center with the same types of questions that I asked next door at the Math Center. Writers need assignments and questions clarified, help with their logic and reassurance when they are on task. Not only are these writers trying to learn, they exemplify the spirit of a true student or laborer in today’s society: they do not isolate themselves under the guise of hard work, but rather gather together to share a wealth of common knowledge.

The Director’s Chair

By Mary Dossin, Writing Center Director

Plattsburgh State University of New York

I've witnessed some inauspicious beginnings. Jeannine sat in the back row of my tutor-training class and shielded her eyes with her hand for much of the period. Dave missed class half the time and never handed in assignments. Erin always swept in late in a tumble of books, skirt, and hair, disrupting us while she settled into her seat. I've learned to have faith.

Jeannine was recently told that an essay she wrote in the class (and later presented at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing and published in the Writing Lab Newsletter) will be included in a book on training writing tutors by Toni-Lee Capposela. Dave presented at the NCPTW one year too, and his topic was a telling one: "From Goof-Off to Dynamic Tutor.” When he worked as a tutor, he energized the center with his presence: humorous and easy-going while purposeful and perceptive. Erin is now planning her second presentation at the NCPTW and has also spoken at regional and local conferences. She has gained particular expertise working with students for whom English is a second language, and she eagerly shares her knowledge with others.
The recent National Writing Centers Conference in Utah reaffirmed my belief that ours is a profession that offers unbeatable opportunities for professional and personal growth. The peer tutors whose presentations I attended there were poised and knowledgeable. In their training and their work, tutors learn about writing and talking about writing, of course, but they also build less obvious but crucial skills as they learn to develop productive working relationships, use body language effectively, initiate communication with new people, work with people they don't like, deal directly and unemotionally with problems, take initiative rather than waiting to be told what to do, and use authority effectively. These are good things to know how to do.

None of these accomplishments and skills would be possible, however, without the qualities of curiosity and energy—the *sine qua non* for writing tutors. Awakening and directing these powerful forces begins in the tutor training course, where all of us do the things that professionals do: read, write, observe, practice, and discuss in our field. Curiosity prompts honest questions as tutors work with writers, and it also prompts tutors to ask questions about their tutoring encounters and to energetically pursue answers.

Questions that my tutors need to answer for themselves are often questions other people are asking too, and I am pleased that so many Plattsburgh tutors have been able to share their knowledge in all of the wider contexts named above—and, of course, in this publication also. I've been at this long enough that I hear from former tutors who are now teachers, counselors, Ph.D.s, and directors of their own writing centers—among many other interesting pursuits. They are unanimous in praising the background and skills that they gained from their tutoring experience. (The number one skill they acclaim is attentive listening.) Watching all this happen makes mine the best job in the world!

*What's going on in your Writing Center? I'll bet there’s something interesting happening. Tell us about it... We want to know! Are you starting to take on new responsibilities? Are there any new and exciting changes happening within your Center? Are there any current controversies in your Center? Or did you just have a really good session the other day? Tell us about any or all of these topics.*

Everything I Could Have Hoped to Learn About Writing, I Learned by Becoming a GVSU Writing Tutor...

*By Shauna Swantek*

*Grand Valley State University*

Since this will be my final contribution to the (Grand Valley) center newsletter, which I have yet to learn how to pronounce or spell, I want to share a little about my tutoring experiences with hopes that my words may help in recruiting new tutors. In all honesty, my only regret about becoming a writing tutor at Grand Valley State University is that I did not do it sooner. I have learned more about writing by being a writing tutor for two semesters than I have in all my years of being a writer and a reader. Just as I believe everyone should spend a day teaching in a public school, I believe everyone should spend a day as a writing tutor. Working with varied levels of writers on various types of writing...
has helped me to gain a greater respect for the power of words and an understanding of writers from many backgrounds. This continues to reinforce my belief that writing is one of the most powerful talents anyone in any field can have.

As a writing tutor, I have worked with freshman writers, ESL students, and upperclassmen from various disciplines. I have helped decipher professors' assignments, organize oral speeches from papers, calm English 150 (first year comp) students preparing to turn in portfolios, read many resumes and cover letters, and keep frustrated English 098 (pre-college comp) students writing for an entire 50 minute meeting. I have also learned about international espionage in the families of GVSU students, cried while reading English 150 papers, watched love blossom in a 098 group, and learned to pronounce many foreign words and medical terms. I was not only able to convince a 098 group on the verge of anarchy to talk to their professor, but I helped them get the things they wanted to say written in words so they had something in front of them when they went to talk to her. There is something exhilarating about helping another person communicate an idea clearly, and tutees feel that as much as their tutors. A writing tutor does not proofread; a writing tutor draws out the thoughts of each writer and helps each writer organize those ideas into written words.

I am finishing my schooling at Grand Valley and will soon be a full-fledged secondary English teacher. My experiences as a writing tutor have helped me to gain a better feel for how prepared college students are as writers. I now have a better understanding of where my students need to be when they enter a university and hopefully have a bigger bag of "tricks" to use to get them to that point. Most of all, I know now that good writing is about organization and clarity of genuine thoughts. The word "genuine" is the key; to be a good writer, one must care about what one is writing. Sometimes the job of a good writing consultant boils down to simply helping a writer find an angle of their topic that they care about. I am certain that I have learned more about the levels and types of writing and writers from my five hours tutoring a week than in any of my methods courses or even in my interaction with students in the classroom.

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