HELPING BEGINNING WRITERS SUCCEED IN THE ACADEMY

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the Department of English

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May 2015

Dr. Frank Napolitano, Thesis Advisor — Date 4/17/2015

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Abstract

Many students entering college are underprepared for the level of writing expected of them, and therefore they struggle through their courses beginning with first year composition. These students are called beginning writers and they need one-on-one help and specialized assignments to help them understand and learn how to write on the college level. This thesis provides and explains the benefits of three methods that can be implemented in a composition course to help beginning writers succeed in the academy. These three methods are one-on-one conferencing, peer tutoring, and specialized/scaffolded writing assignments.

One-on-one conferencing is beneficial to all students, but particularly beginning writers because it gives students the personalized help and attention they need with surface level concerns and writing process problems that they may not get in class because those issues are not class wide. Spending time with beginning writers allows teachers to observe their writing process and listen to their writing problems, which can be done both in class and out of class repeatedly throughout the course. Peer tutoring is effective with beginning writers because it is informal and conversation-like. Also, a peer tutor's availability can make her particularly helpful for a beginning writer because she can serve as his support system as she helps him move from being worried about surface level concerns to content level concerns throughout repeated sessions. The specialized assignments presented were not created expressly with beginning writers in mind; however, they can still be implemented to help beginning writers ease into traditional academic writing, while at the same time not making mainstream writers feel like they are being taught down to. Beginning writers should be eased into writing a formal academic essay by using reading and creative nonfiction assignments throughout the class. This will help them feel more comfortable with academic writing when they leave the course.

Basically, in order for beginning writers to succeed in the academy, they need help during the writing process in order to receive help when they want it, and receive encouragement when they need it. They need support, whether from teacher or tutor, to guide them through learning this new way of writing they've never encountered before. They need to be taught how to write on the college level through assignments which give them a foundation and then build from it, rather than assignments that presume they already know how to write this way. Understanding the needs and realities of beginning writers is a great first step in helping them not only learn college-level writing, but also learn that they are just as capable as their peers of flourishing in college. By conducting frequent one-on-one conferences, encouraging students to get help from a peer tutor, and by creating course assignments with their preparedness level in mind, composition instructors in all colleges can help beginning writers succeed in college and beyond.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all the students I've taught and tutored in the past two years. Without them, I would not have known about the plight of the beginning writer. Watching their struggles inspired me to want to help them succeed in college and beyond. Those students and beginning writers everywhere are the reason for this thesis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Frank Napolitano and Dr. Carolyn Mathews for their encouragement and support throughout the writing of this thesis, as well as throughout my time spent at Radford University as a graduate student. They opened my eyes to the world of composition pedagogy and inspired me to get involved in that field.

I would also like to thank my parents, Mary Jo and Colin Cooper, for supporting my academic endeavors and allowing me to follow my dreams, wherever they may take me. Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge my siblings, Ashley and Grant, and thank them for completely trusting my writing expertise and allowing me to help them become better writers themselves.

Table of Contents

Introduction

At this moment, all across the U.S., students are sitting in college classrooms learning the skills and knowledge they'll need to attain their goals beyond college. Many of those students are college freshmen, just beginning their long journey to graduation. One of the classes those freshmen will be required to take is college composition. In this course, students will learn how to write in the academic community, how to write with a particular audience in mind, and how to write for their future occupation. Unfortunately, many of these students have arrived at the college composition classroom underprepared for the work expected of them. These students are beginning writers, writers who are just beginning to learn the ways of academic writing and who have not been exposed to it previously. Beginning writers are also referred to as "basic writers," "writers who need to learn to command a particular variety of language—the language of written, academic discourse" (Troyka 5). For the purposes of this thesis, I will be referring to these students as beginning writers because they are just beginning to learn about writing and because the term "basic" has a very negative connotation.

Beginning writers are students who arrive at college underprepared for the level of academic writing expected of them. In *Errors and Expectations*, Mina Shaughnessy explains that by the time a beginning writer enters college, "he both resents and resists his vulnerability as a writer. He is aware that he leaves a trail of errors behind him when he writes…But he doesn't know what to do about it" (Shaughnessy 7). These students "are those who, due to gender, race, socioeconomic or other factors, have not had access to the discourse methods of those in power" and so do not know how to respond to or implement those methods in their own writing (Bir 56). These methods are brand new to them, and so they focus on the skills that, to them, matter the most, such as making sure

the writing looks the way it is supposed to in order to get a good grade. In her study on tutoring centers and basic writers, Heather Robinson found that the "students are, first and foremost, concerned with the presentation of their papers" and often come to tutoring centers for "help with responding to instructor comments" (83). Most of them also ask for help with punctuation, spelling, organization, and grammar (Robinson 83). Beginning writers are very focused on and concerned about lower-level concerns, concerns which they can see, rather than the higher level concerns which they can't see.

Contrary to beginning writers, mainstream writers come to college better prepared for academic writing. They are more prepared than beginning writers and have a higher chance of success in a typical composition course. Most instructors have mainstream writers in mind when they build their course assignments. They are not the ones who need the extra attention and specialized assignments in order to succeed in college. It is the beginning writers who, because they have come to college underprepared and focused on the surface problems they can see, need more help when it comes to writing in the academy, and the intention of this thesis is to provide three methods, discussed in three chapters, through which beginning writers can get the help they need to succeed in the academy.

Chapter One focuses on one-on-one conferencing and how that helps beginning writers succeed in the academy. One-on-one conferencing is a well-known method for helping students individually with their writing. It is, basically, a formal out-of-class meeting between a teacher and a student to discuss the student's work in regard to what should be done next and what has been done so far. This method of assistance works well because it allows the teacher time with individual students so that she can determine their

learning needs and address them. Instead of giving the entire class a lecture on comma splices, for example, a teacher can have one minilesson on them with the student who actually needs it in a conference. This one-on-one time is beneficial to all students, but particularly beginning writers because it gives students the personalized help and attention they need with surface level concerns and writing process problems that they may not get in class because those issues are not class wide. Spending time with beginning writers allows teachers to observe their writing process and listen to their writing problems, which they may not have time for in the classroom. Teachers can also see the impact their comments have on the student and learn to adjust them so that they can be more easily understood and implemented. Beginning writers need this type of one-on-one instruction with their teacher in order to get a better understanding of what is expected in academic writing and how to satisfy those expectations.

Along with recommending the one-on-one conference to help beginning writers, I also suggest having it much more frequently throughout the course. Since it is difficult to find time to meet with students outside of class and have these conferences more than once or twice a semester, I suggest having short, in-class conferences frequently during the writing process. Helping students in their time of need will prevent a piling up of writing issues saved for the out of class conference. Particularly since the time allotted for an out-of-class conference is typically fifteen minutes (Newkirk), it would benefit both teacher and student if there are only a few major concerns to work on, rather than many minor ones. Since beginning writers have a tendency to get stuck on a writing problem, it would behoove the student to get help at that moment in order to continue the writing process. By helping students throughout the writing process, teachers can provide

beginning writers with the encouragement and support they need to believe in their writing ability. Having informal, in-class conferences frequently throughout the writing process will make infrequent out-of-class conferences more productive for beginning writers, thus making the one-on-one conference beneficial.

The second chapter of my thesis extols the benefits of beginning writers receiving peer tutoring at their college's writing center. Peer tutoring is learning assistance/instruction given by a knowledgeable peer on a particular subject, such as writing, to another peer who is struggling with that subject in the context of a certain class or class assignment. Typically, the peer tutor will have demonstrated advanced proficiency in a subject, such as receiving an "A" in courses on a particular subject. Much like one-on-one conferencing, peer tutoring provides individualized instruction and attention to beginning writers. However, unlike one-on-one conferencing between a teacher and a student, peer tutoring provides peer-to-peer conversation, frequent availability, and continual, noticeable progress. With peer-to-peer conversation, beginning writers feel more comfortable questioning a tutor's suggestion or asking a question about their paper. With a teacher, they may feel compelled to follow her advice despite their doubts about it. Also with a teacher, beginning writers may not know how to express their concerns or how to answer a question about their paper. Not all beginning writers will have that inability, but for those who do, getting peer tutoring is a better option and/or a great supplement to the teacher's advice. Peer tutoring is more conversational than a teacher-student conference may be, thus allowing the student more freedom to express himself and to take or leave the advice given by the tutor. Tutors teach using the social constructionist method, which involves both parties in the learning

process with neither doing more work than the other (McAndrew). It feels less like the student is being taught a lesson and more like he is an active agent in the fate of his paper. If a beginning writer does not care for the teacher-centered approach of a one-on-one conference, peer tutoring is something he should consider when he needs help with his writing.

Two more reasons why a beginning writer would benefit from a peer tutor are that a peer tutor is available whenever the student needs help and he can meet with her repeatedly throughout the course for multiple assignments. If a teacher is unable to meet with the student for every writing concern, a beginning writer should get help from a peer tutor because she is available more frequently and can fit into the student's schedule more easily than a teacher's office hours can. Tutors are also able to meet with the student multiple times throughout the semester for weekly appointments. Even if the student may not need help that week, he can still check in with his tutor and discuss his progress so far and what assignments are coming up. A peer tutor's availability can make her a beginning writer's support system as she helps him move from being worried about surface level concerns to content level concerns. Tutors acknowledge, through observation, questioning, and developing rapport over several sessions, the beginning writer's concerns and, after addressing them, try to move the writer forward so that he may become tutor independent by the end of the semester.

The third chapter of my thesis presents and explains assignments that would help beginning writers succeed in the academy. These assignments come from composition scholars who used them with much success in their own classrooms. Most of them were not created expressly with beginning writers in mind, but they can be used to help those

students ease into traditional academic writing while, at the same time, not making mainstream writers feel like they are being taught down to. The majority of the assignments presented call for creative nonfiction, with a formal academic essay as the final assignment. A few examples of creative nonfiction are memoirs, letters, diaries, and personal essays. Like creative nonfiction, a formal academic essay is based on real-life possibilities or events. Unlike creative nonfiction, a formal academic essay has to follow a certain set of academic expectations, such as format, grammar, and subject matter. A formal academic essay is the standard essay used in a college composition classroom, whereas the creative nonfiction assignments are not.

The main concept behind the assignments presented in my third chapter is the connection between reading and writing. Beginning writers, like all students, will become better writers as a result of reading frequently. Compositionists such as Bean, Bartholomae, Hoffman, and Salvatori advocate the use of reading in a composition course by having students write about what they've read in order to develop critical thinking skills. The assignments chosen for this chapter involve writing about reading in ways that teach audience awareness (Hoffman) and persuasive writing strategies (Brady). The assignments also teach metacognition (Bartholomae and Bean), how to research (Bishop), and understanding that the writing process is recursive and imperfect (Wyche-Smith and Anderson).

The assignments selected for this chapter not only follow the idea that reading and writing are connected, but they also follow the concept that writing creative nonfiction can give students formal nonfiction writing skills. Creative nonfiction assignments such as letter writing and letter responding (Hoffman), reflection and formal exploratory

essays (Bartholomae and Bean), and research driven personal essays (Bishop) provide students with many of the skills they need to write academically, such as audience awareness, critical thinking, and developing a successful argument. After having students complete such assignments in a composition course, I also recommend completing the course by having students write a formal academic essay. This final assignment allows students to take the skills they learned when composing creative nonfiction and apply them to an academic essay. When doing so, the teacher can use this assignment to teach any remaining writing skills that students may need in future classes, such as advanced academic moves, research source analysis, and source incorporation. By easing beginning writers into a formal academic essay by using reading and creative nonfiction throughout the class, teachers will help students feel more comfortable with academic writing when they leave the course.

These beginning writers, whose success is the focus and goal of this thesis, are students who, because they need the extra help or specialized assignments suggested here, have been a concern of colleges for many decades. This concern began when some colleges started open enrollment admissions in the 1970s in an effort to provide a college education for all students regardless of socioeconomic conditions (Bir 42). When the underprepared students entered a college classroom, it became apparent that the teachers were also underprepared. And so colleges developed basic/developmental writing courses to help those struggling students. These courses continued into the late 1990s and the mid-2000s, but were then gradually phased out by most colleges in favor of placing beginning writers into the standard composition course with the mainstream writers, otherwise known as "mainstreaming." In "The Future of Basic Writing," George Otte and

Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk state that, according to Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason, who are the directors of an effective mainstreaming project at CUNY's City College, "teachers who are not trained in teaching basic writing need extra resources and support in the form of professional development workshops, mentoring programs, and tutoring services for students" (Otte and Mlynarczyk 17). Basically, mainstreaming beginning writing students can work, but they need extra resources and individualized attention in order to do so, and that is what my thesis recommends.

These recommendations come from my own experiences as a college composition instructor and writing tutor, and from extensive research into what scholars have to say about beginning writers. They also come from what my experiences and research have taught me about beginning writers themselves and current composition writing assignments. By observing beginning writers as both an instructor and as a writing tutor, I began to notice their writing concerns and their struggles to understand academic writing. I wondered just how prevalent this type of student was and what sort of help they would need to succeed in college. After seeing that such students are quite common, I realized that something needed to be done to help these students stay in college and achieve their academic goals. If nothing is done to specifically help them, college retention and graduation rates will drop as these students incorrectly begin to believe a college degree is out of their reach. By combining my own experiences with the research of composition scholars, three solutions developed which will help beginning writers succeed in the academy.

As a composition instructor, I saw beginning writers in my own classes struggle with writing and had no idea how to help them. I did not know what a beginning writer

was or that such a student existed. I went into the classroom assuming they were all mainstream writers and planned my course accordingly. I was stunned by how problematic their writing was, and I became so frustrated by their lack of writing skills that I inserted grammar and style minilessons into lectures on how to create an academic argument. By the end of the first semester, I realized that the best way to help my struggling students was one-on-one. I saw the most progress in the students whom I had spent the most time working with through both informal in-class conferences and formal out-of-class conferences. This progress is what led me to research the benefits of one-on-one conferences for beginning writers and really understand why beginning writers need this type of individualized assistance.

This understanding continued during my time as a peer tutor, through which I helped a variety of students in different classes with their paper assignments. Most of them came for help with their composition assignments, but others came with papers from courses on technology, social work, and biology. No matter what the paper was on, there were usually similar issues each student had, particularly the beginning writers. I had one beginning writer in particular who really opened my eyes to the main element such students are really worried about: surface level concerns. She would bring in a draft and after I gave my suggestions regarding organization or the structure of her introduction, she would ignore them and ask about her spelling, grammar, and the general appearance of the paper. That is when I realized that beginning writers, since they are unfamiliar with academic discourse, think that if it looks like an academic essay, it must be an academic essay. And so, I decided to research how to move beginning writers past that focus and make them understand the problems they were having with content. I knew

from my experiences as an instructor that individualized instruction was helpful for beginning writers, but I needed to learn how to use that instruction in a peer tutoring session to the student's advantage.

My experiences working with beginning writers opened my eyes to how much help they need in order to succeed in the academy. Once I determined that one-on-one conferencing and peer tutoring could be particularly beneficial to beginning writers, I began research into those two methods and found out why they work for mainstream writers and how they really work for beginning writers. I then wondered about the types of assignments given in a composition course and questioned whether others could be implemented which eased beginning writers into academic writing while teaching them the same skills the standard assignments would have. I found creative nonfiction assignments to be particularly beneficial, but I could not ignore the value of the standard academic essay. My research and experiences have helped me see that this issue of helping beginning writers succeed in college is a big one, one that should matter to all composition instructors in all colleges because it is an issue which touches all colleges. The following three chapters are three small ways composition instructors can help their struggling beginning writers succeed not only in their classroom, but beyond as well, all across the U.S.

Chapter One: The Benefits of One-on-One Conferencing for Beginning Writers

Introduction

One-on-one conferencing between teachers and students is a tried and true method of assisting students with various academic subjects, but it is most often associated with teaching writing. Examination of the effectiveness of writing conferences has shown that this method of one-on-one instruction is beneficial to both struggling and successful writing students. It allows more personalized instruction for students, and it helps the teacher see what her students are struggling with in order to improve her teaching. One-on-one conferencing can be done in different ways, but the most common is the scheduled, out-of-class conference where the teacher goes through the student's paper, discussing questions, concerns, and problems with the paper. Scholars disagree on how often conferencing should occur, but they all agree[1] it is a necessity and should happen at least once during the course. During one-on-one conferences, teachers make comments on the student's paper as a result of their discussion. These comments can be verbal, written, or, most effectively, both.

This type of conferencing, though helpful to all students, is most helpful to beginning writers because they struggle more than most with writing on the college level. Beginning writers are students who are new to academic writing and have a harder time than their peers[2] understanding how to adopt this new style of writing. Such writers could also be called "beginning writers" because they are "those just starting out to learn about writing in any serious way" (Carnicelli 88). Conferences help beginning writers because they allow them to get the personalized attention they need with the writing process,

[1] Harris, Newkirk, Carnicelli, Lerner, and Black.

[2] The reasons why beginning writers have a harder time than their peers with learning how to write academically include previous educational history, such as what was/wasn't taught at their previous learning institutions, and their socioeconomic status.

surface and content level errors, and disciplinary conventions. Beginning writers would benefit most from having these conferences frequently throughout the course and especially while they are in the process of writing papers, rather than after the fact. Being able to talk with the teacher about their struggles and get immediate feedback in these conferences will also help beginning writers succeed in a college composition course because they will receive the individual attention they cannot get from regular class meetings.

Successful Conferencing

One-on-one conferencing is a very successful way to assist students with their writing. Muriel Harris, a major scholar in the field of writing instruction, urges that, "[c]onferences, opportunities for highly productive dialogues between writers and teacher-readers, are or should be an integral part of teaching writing" (3). Carnicelli agrees with Harris and takes it a step further when he writes, "[i]f a teaching situation requires a choice between classes and conferences, classes should definitely go" (Carnicelli 105). For the conference, students come with questions and leave with answers. Conference time is when teachers can really see what students struggle with and have the time to work with them. Without conferences, teachers are unable to help students individually, and the ones who really need it, like beginning writers, fall through the cracks.

Though conferencing is one of the main, dependable methods for assisting students with their writing, it is not always successful. The success of a conference depends on the way the teachers run it. When conducting a conference with a beginning writer, or really any student, it is important to have a set agenda. Successful writing conferences put the student's needs first and have a set, agreed upon agenda, because "a

conference can run on aimlessly and leave both participants with the justifiable feeling that they have wasted time" (Newkirk 318). The main difference between the agenda for a conference with a beginning writer and the agenda for a conference with a mainstream writer is the type of concerns to address. Since a conference is typically fifteen minutes, it is imperative that the teacher working with a beginning writer determine early on what he really needs help with rather than try to cover everything. A quick skim, roughly five minutes, through the paper would be enough to see the main concerns so that the rest of the conference can be spent addressing those concerns. With mainstream writers, teachers often have time in a conference to address both content and surface level errors. According to Carnicelli, "The conference will be far more useful if the teacher focuses on one or two of the most important matters and makes sure the student understands them. Other problems can always be discussed in subsequent conferences if they are still present in the revised drafts" (Carnicelli 103). With the little bit of time afforded the teacher in a conference with a beginning writer, once she has determined the concern, the remainder of the conference could be spent on instruction. For beginning writers, a conference would be best spent addressing mainly content level errors, with the intention of discussing surface level errors at a follow up conference or during an in-class writing session.

A conference is also successful when the focus is "on the student and the student's work, with the teacher evaluating the work and both eliciting and articulating clearly the criteria for that evaluation" (Black 27). Scholars agree that whether the conference is scheduled and out-of-class, informal and in class, with one student or with three, the best type of conference is one in which the student's work is put first. If

conferences do not have an agenda and if the teacher does not focus on the student's work, conferencing will not help the student. With beginning writers, it could be very easy for a teacher to take over the conference, but letting them lead and understanding their concerns will make for a much more productive conference.

Letting students lead is very important in order to have a successful conference. Of course, any conference would be better than none at all. Without conferences, many students would be left behind, struggling to properly argue for or against an issue, or even how to begin such a paper. Conferencing allows teachers to reach individuals outside of whole classroom instruction in a more personal way. Regarding the success of conferencing, Black states that, "conferencing is not just part of teaching, it *is* teaching" (20). In a one-on-one conference, a teacher can determine students' individual needs and cater to them in a way that works for each individual student. Because of increased enrollment and the variety of students entering college, teaching writing in a way that reaches each student has gotten harder, and so teachers use one-on-one conferencing in order to help with students' individual needs (Lerner). Carnicelli explains that "individualized instruction in writing is more effective than group instruction," which makes conferencing "not only the most effective way to teach writing, [but] it is also the most efficient" (Carnicelli 105, 110). Instead of taking time out to teach a lesson to an entire class on how to write an introduction, a teacher could use a conference to teach that lesson to students who need that information. The personalization of a conference is what struggling students, especially beginning writers, need in order to succeed academically.

The personalized instruction that students get from a one-on-one conference greatly benefits beginning writers because it gives them a better understanding of the

standards of academic writing. This instruction is key because beginning writers come to academia with little to no understanding of how to compose to the standards of high school, let alone how to compose a college level paper. They got by in high school with an understanding of the standard five paragraph essay, but now that they are in college, they need additional instruction. Through conferencing with such students, teachers can give them that something more to help them succeed in academia. Conferencing will allow teachers to help beginning writers write on the college level without making them feel out of place and without involving the entire class in a lesson on, for example, apostrophe usage when only one or two students actually need it.

Teaching through Feedback

In a one-on-one conference, a beginning writer can fully express his concerns and get instructional, pertinent feedback in a non-condescending manner. However, in order for a beginning writer to feel comfortable enough to express himself, the wall between teacher and student must be addressed. One way to do address this is to have a "get to know you" type of conference. Connecting to the student is the first step in helping a beginning writer in a one-on-one conference. If there is not time for such a conference, a teacher should either try to get to know the student through class activities, or she should spend a few minutes at the beginning of the first conference to show the student that she cares about him as a person and is receptive to what he has to say. This relationship development will create a sense of appreciation for the student and he will then be more receptive to teacher feedback.

To make individual instruction as beneficial as possible, a teacher would be wise to consider Harris' method for conferencing, in which she recommends listening to what the student has to say, questioning him about it, observing how he writes, modeling for

him how to handle his writing struggles, and telling him the best way to write (55-69). Of listening, Carnicelli writes, "To encourage student participation, and get the full benefit of it, a teacher must also listen. Of all the skills a conference teacher needs, the ability to listen is easily the most neglected, yet it may well be the most important" (117). When teachers listen to students in a conference, they will hear fear of inadequacy, inability to explain the problem, misguided ideas about what teachers want, lack of interest in writing, and lack of understanding with the writing process (Harris 60-61). Hearing these concerns will better enable teachers to address them and come up with an individual lesson for that student during their conference which will ease their worries.

In a one-on-one conference, students' worries may be accidentally overlooked or overshadowed by teacher talk. Teachers do not hear students' writing fears and confusion in a conference because, "We [teachers] all tend to talk too much. The little lecturettes that pop up in writing conferences usually bring things to a grinding halt" (Newkirk 327). In a conference, the teacher is the one with the knowledge and the authority, and so she can easily end up in more of a lecturing role than in the role of an advice giving listener. Along with listening, Harris suggests using "open questions, which have the virtue of inviting fuller, more useful responses" thereby inviting "real inquiry with students, searching for answers not yet apparent" (Harris 62). Teachers should avoid closed questions because they seek a yes or no answer and don't allow students to express what they are trying to write about (Harris 62). Asking a student if he sees a run-on or not will not get the conference very far and the student will feel like he is being quizzed rather than helped.

Observing, showing, and telling are also important when conferencing. By observing, teachers can see their students at work, see what they struggle with, and how they can step in and assist or teach. Showing students how to write by modeling "is particularly effective in the one-to-one setting of the conference because students can ask questions and get instant feedback when they try the process" (Harris 67). When all of the above fail to help or when they do not fit the situation, Harris suggests just telling the student the correct format. Telling should be reserved for those items that cannot be taught, such as APA citations, not for things the teacher simply does not want to explain. According to Harris, those five conference activities will help teachers and students have a successful writing conference. Of those five, listening and observing will really allow teachers to help beginning writers.

Through observing in a conference, a teacher can see firsthand exactly what the student is struggling with if he cannot articulate it. She can also see the cause of grammar and punctuation errors and determine how to best address those issues with the student. Unlike beginning writers, mainstream student writers can usually tell the teacher exactly what they are struggling with using the proper terms. They may ask if their paper flows or if their thesis statement makes sense. Unlike mainstream writers, beginning writers typically struggle with both writing and talking about their writing because they don't know how to talk about their writing. They don't know how to explain a problem with something like a fragment because they don't know what it is called or even what it looks like. This is why listening and observing, two conference activities suggested by Harris, are so important with that student.

By listening to and observing beginning writers, teachers will be better able to teach those students about writing. If a student says that he cannot get his ideas on paper, a teacher can talk through the ideas with the student and verbally determine what the student wants to write by tapping into his inner speech (Harris 8). Listening to the student's struggles will reveal to the teacher the best way to address them. This is where listening and observing go hand-in-hand. For example, if a teacher sees that a student is confused when she comments, "Your paper is full of comma splices," she can then alter the comment so the student understands what she's saying. By altering that comment to explain what a comma splice is and showing him how to fix it, the teacher can better aid the student's revision. Without observing and listening, such comments are made and ignored for sheer lack of understanding, rather than acknowledged and intentionally not followed. A teacher who's been making such comments and thinking that the student is deliberately ignoring them can see in a conference that is not the case and then go from there.

Written and Spoken Commenting

A successful conference not only depends on the activities conducted, but also on what the student leaves with as far as advice, or, in other words, what comments they receive. Comments in a conference are typically either written, spoken, or a combination of the two. When marking students' papers, either with pen or in Microsoft Word, teachers must be sure to make comments that are specific and clear. They should make readerly rather than writerly comments in order for the student to understand what the problem is with what they have written: "By revealing the thoughts of a reader, such statements may remind students that their words have effects" (Smith 258). This type of

commenting shows the student what the problem with their writing is in a way that makes sense to them as writer/reader.

When conferencing with a beginning writer, a teacher needs to ask herself, "What's the best way to give this student writing advice while still acknowledging that the work done so far is worthwhile?" Regardless of whether or not her comments are spoken or written, they need to be given in words that both encourage and advise the student. While this statement is true for all writing students, beginning writers require extra understanding. For example, a comment on a mainstream writer's paper can be slightly blunt and a bit more critical because the teacher knows the student has the knowledge and ability to take it as constructive criticism, rather than as a personal attack. For instance, a teacher may write, "Your paragraph is overwhelmed by grammatical errors" and a mainstream student will recognize that as a criticism, rather than as a personal attack.

Unlike that mainstream writer, a beginning writer is keenly aware that his writing is not up to par and very well may take that same comment to mean that his writing is worthless because he does not understand how the teacher wants him to fix it. With beginning writers, teachers should really think about how they write or say a comment: "Even the most tactfully phrased written comment may seem destructive to a beginning writer" (Carnicelli 108). Using the example above, instead of telling a student that they are overwhelmed by errors, the teacher should write, "I know what you are saying in this paragraph, but there are a few grammatical problems that tripped me up while reading. Try reading this out loud to catch them and then correct them." The teacher should also

keep in mind that for this type of student, criticism wrapped in praise will get her farther than blunt suggestions.

While making those praise-covered critical comments on a beginning writer's draft, the teacher may not think about how those comments will be construed later when the student is alone with the draft. Without realizing it, the teacher may end up with written statements that confuse the student and/or verbal statements that the student does not remember later. Though this forgetfulness may not be a problem for most mainstream student writers because they will work around those issues, beginning writers are more likely to need clarification and reminders. One way to help students with this problem is by allowing them to tape record conferences. Laurel Johnson Black has had success with that method because it "allows us [teacher and student] both to reflect on the conference further" and it "allows more freedom so the student can interact instead of focus on taking notes" (35). This way, both the teacher and student are mentally present during the conference, and the student isn't in a panic over wondering how he will understand all of the comments later on.

Beginning writers will, more than other students, want to write down everything a teacher says about their paper instead of really listening to the advice and asking important questions. A tape recorder would allow them to talk to the teacher and hear what she has to say. Also, if a written comment is no longer clear a few hours later, by listening to the tape, the student can hear the teacher explain that comment in more detail. A newer type of recording that would also help beginning writers is Screencast-O-Matic. This program, which is available online, allows teachers to record, on the computer screen, their comments on a student's paper both in Word and out loud. This program

would be excellent for beginning writers because it allows them to see their paper and their teacher's response after the conference. This idea also ties into Kahn's ideas about connecting the comment to the paper in a concrete way because the student is seeing exactly where and what the teacher is talking about regarding an issue in his paper. Like a tape recording, this method helps students focus on their needs, rather than on what they need to remember later.

All of the comments that students receive in a conference from their teacher should be, whether spoken or written, recorded or copied, positive, constructive feedback. This type of commenting lets the beginning writing student know in a non-critical but instructive way that what he has written has value and has the capability of becoming a college level paper. For example, a teacher could start her comments with all the positive aspects about the paper, then emphasize the potential for improvement on the issues while, in a sense, reassuring the student that he is on the right track. This type of commenting would be best done verbally rather than on paper, because the teacher can talk out the issues instead of making complicated written suggestions. Also, by talking the comments out, the teacher can observe the student's reaction and judge the effectiveness of how that comment was explained: "The presence of the student allows the teacher to tailor a response to the student's needs" (Carnicelli 107). Talking out comments is a difficult task, but one that can be done, and should be done, in order to let beginning writers know that just because what they have right now is not college level, it won't someday be.

End Comments

Written comments throughout is a good idea, but so is leaving the student with something encouraging at the end. Summer Smith's "The Genre of the End Comment"

argues that teachers should reconsider the impact of their end comments, particularly in regard to the order of praise and criticism: "The teacher possesses the institutional power in the relationship and can use comments to motivate, educate, or chastise her students" (Smith 250). One way to leave encouragement and criticism at the end of a student's paper is by using a compliment sandwich, which is a type of commenting at the end of a student's paper in which the teacher wraps the criticism in the praise to soften the blow, so to speak. Smith suggests that teachers increase the impact of such an end comment "by following it with related reader response or coaching statements, rather than moving directly to negative evaluations" (262). Doing so will make the compliment sandwich more conducive for student revision and show that, unlike the standard end comment, the teacher is concerned with helping on an individual, student by student level.

As for spoken comments, which can come both during and at the end of the conference, Khan advocates for a more conversational response method when conferencing with students. This method uses verbalized comments that respect the student's work while still making suggestions for revision. He states that when commenting on student work, teachers should tie it to the actual text because "attaching your comments to specific pieces of their text helps writers retain a sense of authorship because you're showing respect for their text" (349). Smith agrees with Khan when she writes that such comments "also give the teacher a presence in the comment other than [as] evaluator or writing coach" (258). Showing the student that a teacher's comments have a purpose will better relay to them why such comments were made and how they will help the paper overall.

Making the connection between comment and text is important, but so is letting students know their work has a purpose and potential. Doing so, verbally and in writing, is important in helping students with their writing. Especially with struggling writers, it is important to recognize that it took a great deal of effort to get something on paper, and by talking out the issues and being specific about suggestions, teachers can use the writing conference to both their and the student's advantage. Talking out issues is important with all students, but especially with beginning writers because they have a hard time explaining what they are struggling with. Writing, "This is a run-on sentence," on their paper will not do them any good because the term "run-on" means nothing to them, nor does it offer them a solution to their problem.

Frequency of Conferencing

The likelihood of a conference's success is not only determined by what the teacher and student do during the conference, but also by how often and why the conference is held. Scholars and teachers of writing disagree on how often to hold conferences, but they agree that conferences should be held during the student's writing process and not after the fact. Carnicelli states that, "Conferences are especially effective in a process approach because they occur when the student needs and appreciates the teacher's help" (Carnicelli 102). The process approach is good for beginning writers because they need encouragement and assistance along the way even more than the average student writer. Teachers should strive to provide opportunities for conferences during the writing process. There is little point in explaining a student's errors to him after the fact. The grade has been given, and that is the extent of his concern.

As for how often to conference, at least once a semester is recommended, but the more often conferences can be held the better, especially as assignments increase in

difficulty throughout the semester and involve new writing concepts. Having conferences often and during the writing process will best serve the needs of beginning writers and will help them succeed in academic writing. And regarding the length of conferences, Newkirk suggests that they last "about fifteen minutes and, in some, part of this time is used for reading the paper" (318). Though fifteen minutes is not much time, some time is better than no time, especially when considering the number of students that one instructor must conference with each semester. Even a short, fifteen minute conference with a beginning writer can make a difference in how he approaches and understands a particular writing assignment.

Since having multiple scheduled, out-of-class conferences with all students is not feasible, a way to help beginning writers during the writing process is by having informal, in-class conferences. An effective way to do this is by having students brainstorm paper ideas in class for the next paper. While they are working, the teacher will go around the room and assist students who are struggling. This type of conferencing is immediate, quick, and can be repeated throughout the semester.

Times to have this conferencing are when students are brainstorming, working on introductions/thesis statements, drafting a paper, and revising a paper. This way, the teacher is involved in every step of the writing process and those students who need help for any or all steps can get the help they need in class, right away, before they bring a rough draft to an out-of-class conference. Being involved in the writing process would also make it easier for teachers to focus on both content and surface level concerns, since many of the problems with content would be worked out in the informal, in class conferences. Also, having time in class for students, in a freshman composition course for

example, to work on the parts of their paper, and the paper as a whole, will emphasize to them the importance of the writing process and they will see that a paper is always a work in progress. This type of recognition by beginning writers that academic papers do not come out fully formed and perfect will make them feel better about their own writing struggles and accept their status as novice writers. Acceptance is important for all writing students, but more so for beginning writers because they are even more worried about their ability to write on the college level than their mainstream peers may be.

By emphasizing the importance of the writing process and the evolving nature of paper drafts, beginning writers can focus more on what they are writing in their paper than how they are writing it. In other words, they can focus on getting ideas on paper, rather than whether their paragraphs have topic sentences. Their inner speech will not be impeded and conferences will become more productive because all the ideas are there on paper to manipulate according to academic conventions.

What Gets Taught Matters

Instruction in a conference will vary depending on the concern itself and how the student handles working on it. Once the teacher has observed and listened to the student, she can then provide the appropriate instruction. For example, if a student is struggling with run-ons and does not see them in his paper, instead of finding all of them and marking "RO" next to them, the teacher can ask the student to read the paper out loud. This instruction will help the student catch them better than by just telling him where they are. Then the teacher can work with the student in figuring out how to fix such a problem. In doing so, Harris states that the teacher's "task is twofold. First, they have to help the student recognize the problem, and then they have to help the student acquire the particular skill needed to solve it" (42). Recognition of the problem and acquisition of the

method to fix it are the main focuses of the personalized instruction given by teachers to beginning writers in a writing conference.

Depending on the type of assignment, the teacher's attention to, and assistance with, certain types of writing issues change. With a personal essay, for example, the teacher will focus more on lower order concerns, such as punctuation and transitions, because the higher order concern, which is the subject matter and how it is conveyed, is the focus and knowledge point of the student. However, if time allows, teachers can also help students best express their personal ideas and experience by offering suggestions for organization and by helping students delve deeper into their subject.

With the research or argumentative essay, which is the essay students will use beyond the composition classroom, the conference concerns of the teacher change to focus on the content. Concerns like punctuation, grammar, and transitions are still important, but here the subject matter is what students are more unfamiliar with and need the most help with. For such papers, beginning writers struggle with making their writing academic and with asserting their opinion on an issue. These are the concerns teachers should address with those students when conferencing on those papers. Pointing out and correcting every comma splice, run-on, and fragment will not help the student in this case. The conference for that paper would be best spent helping beginning writers develop their argument, create a thesis statement, organize their ideas in conjunction and/or opposition to others, and even help them find sources. Unlike mainstream writers who come to a conference with a not-so-rough draft that serves as a good foundation to build on, beginning writers come with a very rough draft that has some ideas and a semblance of academic structure. They need that conference to really work out how to

write this kind of paper, and in that conference the teacher must teach them how to do just that.

Conclusion

One-on-one writing conferences between teachers and students are imperative in helping beginning writers succeed in the academy. Through personalized instruction, teachers can better help such students with the exact writing problems they are struggling with. By determining early on in the conference the areas that the student needs the most help with, teachers can help beginning writers get more out of the conference regardless of how short it is. And because out-of-class conferences are few and far between, assisting beginning writers in class during the writing process will help them work out both higher and lower level concerns before coming to the official conference on the rough draft, thus making better use of what little time there is. Emphasizing the importance of the writing process and the ability of drafts to change will reassure beginning writers that their writing is a worthwhile work in progress. Focusing on particular concerns depending on the assignment at hand during the conference will allow beginning writers to work on what really matters for that assignment and not worry about smaller problems. Acknowledging the good and emphasizing the potential of the not so good in a paper will help beginning writers become more comfortable with, and accepting of, constructive criticism. If teachers keep all of the above suggestions in mind when conferencing with beginning writers, then conferencing should help beginning writers succeed in the academy.

Chapter Two: The Benefits of Using Peer Tutoring for Beginning Writers

Most, if not all, colleges and universities provide a tutoring or writing center to help their students with their academic struggles. A writing center has consultants who focus solely on assisting students with their writing concerns, whereas a tutoring center offers peer tutoring for subjects that students struggle with the most, such as science and math courses. Both types of centers assist students with their writing in a variety of disciplines, including English, Psychology, History, and Social Work. Both consultants and peer tutors are adept at working with students' writing regardless of subject because their writing problems are just that, *writing* problems. Organization, grammar mistakes, coherence, and a lack of transitions are just a few of the problems student writers bring to a center. Writing tutors/consultants are capable writers themselves who have the additional ability of helping students with the above problems, thus assisting them with their brainstorming, early drafts, and in their final revisions. Many researchers[3] have found that this type of one-to-one teaching/learning conversation is beneficial for all students who choose to employ it in their learning. And if this type of teaching/learning is constructive for all students, it is extremely advantageous for beginning writers. Heather Robinson writes, "[w]riting centers, therefore, are useful spaces for students in general and basic writers in particular, if they can provide a venue where students can ask for help with" those areas in which they struggle the most, which include "finding something to write about, engaging with and developing upon someone else's ideas, and…seeing grammar and language as something more integrated with a student's sense of identity as a writer (Robinson 78).

[3] Bell and Frost, Brazeau, Jackson, and McAndrew.

In a writing center, it is the job of the writing consultant to help students with finding a writing topic, building on what others have said, and understanding the important role of grammar in helping others understand what has been written. By working with a writing consultant in a writing center[4], beginning writers will increase their chance for success in college. As explained in the previous chapter, beginning writers benefit from one-to-one instruction, and tutoring is exactly that, but with the added benefits of peer-to-peer conversation, frequent availability, and continual, noticeable progress.

It is easy to assume that there isn't much difference between one-to-one conferencing between a teacher and her student and tutoring between a peer and a student. Indeed, the two methods have much in common. Rebecca Jackson states, "Like student-teacher conferences, writing center consultations (or tutorials) provide students with highly individualized, supportive, one-to-one assistance with all aspects of writing, from planning and brainstorming to drafting and revision" (Jackson 373). In both settings, students are receiving individualized writing assistance, but how they receive that assistance and implement changes depends on who is giving it. In student-teacher conferences, students "feel compelled to agree with our [the teachers'] suggestions, to follow our advice, to let us take the lead" (Jackson 373). The teacher is not only the source of authority, but she is also the source of anxiety for grade conscious students. Students will quietly do as the teacher says in order to get a good grade. They will neither refute nor question a suggestion, despite their uncertainty or confusion.

Peer tutors provide the knowledgeable authority of teachers, but lack stress-inducing grading authority. Therefore, with peer tutors, "students feel freer to engage in

[4] For the purposes of this chapter, the type of learning assistance center discussed will be a writing center; however, the same ideas and rules for how and why a writing center is helpful for basic writers also apply to a general tutoring center.

'real' conversation; to start, stop, back up, and start again; and to agree, disagree, and negotiate. Through this dialogic process…students acquire the self-critical skills they need to become more effective writers and revisers" (Jackson 373). By talking out their thinking process during the writing process, beginning writers can bounce ideas, both good and bad, off of their tutor and see, on paper, how they would work out. Instead of struggling to get something down on paper, they learn the value of taking their time with their writing, and so they learn the process of revision in a judgment free zone. Simply put, with a peer tutor, students are more comfortable. They are willing to discuss, question, and work through writing issues that they would have ignored otherwise. Casey Jones states that, according to Muriel Harris, "because peer tutors do not possess the authority of composition instructors, their use reduces student anxiety and stress while facilitating open, collaborative interaction" (Jones 13). They do not feel judged or unintelligent when they present a problematic paper to a peer tutor. That is not to say students are not vulnerable, because they are, but a tutor knows how to approach writing issues in a way that demonstrates understanding and demonstrates understanding without harsh judgment.

Because peer writing tutors are non-judgmental and know how to approach writing issues in an understanding way, they are an excellent resource for helping beginning writers succeed in the academy. In fact, many students who seek this type of assistance with writing are basic/beginning writers. Along with being non-judgmental, peer tutors are helpful because of the type of teaching they employ. Tutoring works because it is based on two major learning theories: social constructionist and collaborative learning. Social constructionist theory works on the premise that by

working with others, people will learn better than by working on their own. Working with others is exactly what occurs in a tutoring session. According to Donald McAndrew, during a tutoring session there "is a social interaction that's focused on literacy and learning, a dialogue between the more experienced tutor and the less experienced student writer that takes place in the wider context of language and culture" (McAndrew 2). This idea follows the collaborative learning theory because the tutor and the writer are working together "as they question, propose, and evaluate both the draft and their interaction" (McAndrew 6). Combined learning between tutor and student produces results.

Unlike in a teacher-student conference, the tutor is not there to tell the student what to fix to get a better grade. Her job is to work with and talk with the student to create a work of writing that expresses the student's ideas in an academic fashion. Jasna Shannon summarizes the purpose of a writing center perfectly when she writes,

> Writing centers are and should be seen as places where students of all levels and writing skills can congregate to seek additional help and support in order to become better writers, where tutors act as sounding boards and listen and encourage without being judgmental, and where together they can engage in productive dialogue about writing. (Shannon 372)

Personally, I've seen firsthand that very same *productive dialogue* between myself and students during a tutoring session. Students feel so proud when, in conversation about their writing, they come up with the very thing they've been struggling to say. They leave

the session knowing that, through simple talk about their ideas and their writing progress with a tutor, they are the source of their success.

This dialogue between tutor and student is incredibly important, not only for the assignment at hand, but also with the student's writing fears in general. In a tutoring session, writers can really explore their ideas without fear of being wrong, without worrying over small things like commas. The lack of fear over writing problems makes peer tutoring sessions beneficial for all struggling writers, but especially beginning writers. As mentioned previously in the chapter on conferencing, beginning writers have a hard time getting their inner speech on paper. They get hung up on correctness and the right way to express their ideas. In order to help students unlock their ideas without fear over how it will sound, tutors think before they speak and determine the best way to alleviate that fear.

The comfort level of the tutoring session is very important, as it determines the success of the session. The fact that the learning is taking place between a student and a peer creates an initial atmosphere of comfort. In order for that comfort to increase, the tutor must take on the role of the interested listener by engaging in harmless small talk. McAndrew explains, "[t]he talk that's involved in tutoring affects the relationship between the tutor and the writer. A writer who spends time talking to a tutor cannot help but understand that the tutor cares about her" (McAndrew 5). When peer tutors show even a small interest in their classes or in how their day is going, students will know their feelings are being considered. Knowing that the person they are talking to cares about them as a person and not as just a piece of writing will make students, especially beginning writers, more willing to open up to the tutor. A basic human connection

between tutor and student is necessary for collaborative learning to occur. After becoming the interested listener, a tutor should note the types of concerns the student has about his writing and why he believes he has come to the session. Through reading the student's work and by observing how he works, a tutor can, much like a teacher in a one-on-one conference, determine where to go in terms of instruction. The tutor is dependent on both a student's verbal and nonverbal reactions and must use them to determine the best way to help that student: "The tutor must be alert to the writer's reactions to the session" (Wingate 13). For example, a student may say he understands a concept, but his frustrated twitching says otherwise. Alicia Brazeau found that, "in an individual setting, it may be helpful for consultants to pay attention to students' reactions to questions and alter their approach accordingly" (53). The questions that tutors ask students guide the session and predict its success. Such questions come from a type of questioning preferred among writing tutors called Socratic questioning, which leads the student to think deeply about what he is writing, rather than how he is writing it. For example, asking students, "What does this mean?" and "Can you give me an example?" gets them thinking about what they've written and what they are trying to say. It helps them see writing possibilities they did not see on their own. With beginning writers, this type of questioning is effective because it does not focus on surface level concerns, which is often why they come to a writing tutor. They believe their writing is "bad" because it has comma splices or missing apostrophes. They neglect their content because they believe their problem is on the surface.

The idea of surface/lower level concerns vs. content/higher level concerns is one that tutors must tackle more with beginning writers than with other writers. Reasons why

student writers come to a writing center include needing to meet "with a consultant to talk out plans for an upcoming paper assignment—to explore possibilities," seeking "help understanding particular assignments," "creating outlines, developing important ideas, or constructing effective introductions" (Jackson 376). In a study on the relationship between student motivation and writing center use, Heather Robinson hypothesized that beginning writers would go to a writing center for help with "organization, interpreting assignments, and, of course, sentence-level work: all things that have to do with fulfilling the requirements of an assignment, or with satisfying what an instructor wants an assignment to look like" (Robinson 79). More specifically, Robinson found that when beginning writers came to a writing center for help, they came with concerns regarding "grammar, punctuation, spelling, and organization, with a big jump to the next-most popular requests, help with responding to instructor comments, to the assignment question, and reading comprehension" (83).[5] Robinson's hypothesis proved true, and so it is evident that beginning writers come for help with surface level problems, despite the fact that what they really need help with is their content. Beginning writers' concern with surface level problems makes sense, but it is the job of the writing tutor to get them past that focus in order to really improve their writing. And, it was proven by Robinson that tutors are capable of carrying out that task, though it takes about three sessions to do so (83). The more often a writing tutor works with a beginning writer, the better able she will be to help that student think more about content and less about format.

By meeting frequently with a beginning writer, a tutor can gradually begin to work with the student on content and move away from lower-level concerns. Robinson

[5] For the exact breakdown of how many students in the study asked for help with each of those areas, see Robinson's "Writing Center Philosophy and the End of Basic Writing: Motivation at the Site of Remediation and Discovery," page 83, Table 2.

suggests, “writing center staff can use those surface concerns, and helping students address them, to move students into a deeper understanding of how writing works” (Robinson 86). The reason there is a focus on surface level concerns first in a writing center is because those are the concerns students bring in. If tutors ignore the student’s concerns and focus on what they see are the problems, the student may feel he is not getting the help he came for. He may feel that his writing problems are being ignored because his focus is on how the paper looks, rather than on what it says. This is not to say that lower level concerns are the sole focus of a tutoring session, but by covering those first, the tutor addresses what the student came for, and then she can dig deeper into the paper with the student and talk about higher level concerns. This type of approach is useful for all students, but particularly beginning writers because by beginning with surface-level concerns and moving gradually into content-level concerns, tutors will help beginning writers transition from worrying about commas to worrying about the examples they’re using.

In the first tutoring session with a beginning writer, a tutor will notice his insistence on fixing grammar and making it “look right.” After addressing those concerns, the tutor may then try to get the student to think about adding more information to a certain section or moving a paragraph somewhere else, but this directness may lead to a shutting down type of response from the student. He may act disinterested and ignore all comments, or he may get angry and leave. In either case, the tutor should begin the next session by talking to the student about the assignment, possibly verbally brainstorming further ideas or exploring the current ones, thereby allowing the beginning writer to see possibilities for his writing without feeling pressured to accept them right

away. Writing may or may not take place during that session; however, in the third session the student will return after having thought about those ideas and will want advice from the tutor on how to implement them. This gradual discovery of information and eventual acceptance of assistance from a tutor should move the beginning writing student from lower-order concerns to higher-order concerns.

Having multiple sessions with a beginning writer in which the tutor follows the above steps is only part of what makes a tutoring session productive. In following those steps, there is often an implied contract between the tutor and beginning writer that connects them on a personal, yet professional, level. This connection is based on rapport developed in the first and/or second session and builds throughout the semester. In a one-time session, developing rapport is nice, but not completely necessary. In a semester-long commitment, rapport is critical because it allows the tutor to give advice to the student in an instructive, understanding manner. However, rapport could be mistaken by students to mean friendship, and so the tutor must always make clear that the session is about learning, not "hanging out." Beginning writers, in particular, may try and steer the session off course when they are uncomfortable with the advice they are being given. The tutor will recognize this digression and bring them back to what's at hand. When beginning writers deviate from their work or sit motionless at the keyboard, the tutor will be tempted to take over the session: "What might otherwise seem like a perfect setup for a great session becomes unproductive as the tutor makes the project too much her own" (Wingate 12). To prevent giving in to this temptation, tutors must recognize the difference between working with mainstream writers and beginning writers. Doing so will make the session more productive for the student.

In my experience, it is best to carry out a tutoring session in a way that caters to a particular student's writing needs or ability. However, McAndrew argues, "[t]he best way to work with writers of varying ability is to treat them all as if they are high ability writers" (McAndrew 91). He provides strategies for treating all writers like high ability writers, such as having tutors "(f)ocus on discourse-level topics," meaning the type of writing expected, "as a priority," "(u)se an appropriate register for speaking," "(e)nthusiastically invite all to return," "(i)gnore antiwriting or antischool comments," "(t)alk around inappropriate back channel cues," and "realize that what happens during a conference is the product of the two people who are interacting, a synthesis of their speech and behaviors" (McAndrew 91). Those are all good strategies for any tutoring session, except for his strategy of focusing *first* on discourse-level topics, such as the proper way to write a research paper or the right way to write an argument essay. Jumping right into the topic/assignment at hand by focusing on the "right way" to write may end up causing beginning writers to shut down and/or leave and not return. In tutoring sessions that I've held with students, it is the beginning writers who need the most guidance and understanding. Throwing them into the deep end of writing right away is only going to drown them. McAndrew's suggestion to treat them the same as mainstream writers makes sense; as educators, we know this. The problem is the student does not. Their focus is solely upon lower order concerns. Students do not know that the more they revise, the more likely they are to fix those concerns on their own through focusing on the higher level concerns. This is why, as advocated above, it is helpful to first help the student with those lower level concerns in order to reveal to them the higher order concerns. A mainstream writer knows that what makes his paper great is not how

many commas he has in the right place; however, a beginning writer does not. To a beginning writer, revision involves moving commas and adding a sentence or two. Telling a beginning writer to revise will not get the same results as a mainstream writer who has revised, which is why it is important to acknowledge the beginning writer's focus on lower level concerns and take care of those first before expecting changes on the higher level. The important thing is for tutors to keep this concept in mind and help students gradually see that while grammar is an important part of revision, the most important part of college-level writing is getting ideas on paper. The student may not see this at first, but with repeated sessions eventually this change will occur to him with additional encouragement from the tutor.

In order to help beginning and mainstream student writers understand the importance of higher level concerns over lower level concerns, tutors use one of three tutoring styles: student centered, teacher centered, and collaborative. With mainstream writers, tutors are free to use any of those three styles because all three will help the student in some form or another. With beginning writers, tutors should use collaborative tutoring in which, "The tutor encourages the writer, often with open-ended and probe-and-prompt questions, to engage in off-the-paper exploratory talk and to expand upon undeveloped themes in the paper" (McAndrew 26). If a tutor were to use teacher-centered tutoring with a beginning writer, it would be more like a teacher-student conference, and if the student found the tutor's authority to be intimidating, he might not return. If a tutor were to use student-centered tutoring, which requires that the student do most of the talking and the work, the student may feel like he's in class and not getting the hands-on help he needs (McAndrew 25). By working together on the assignment, as advocated in

social constructionist theory, the student will get the most out of the session. Molly Wingate writes that, in order "(f)or a tutoring session to be considered productive, it is essential that the writer does the bulk of the work and learns something that can be used in future writing projects" (Wingate 9). The goal of a tutor is to make the student tutor-independent by the end of the course, and the best way to do that is by working side-by-side through the writing process.

Working with a writing tutor is beneficial to beginning writers, and all student writers, who take advantage of it. Most college campuses have a writing or tutoring center in which students can receive help with their writing assignments in all courses. However, not all students take advantage of this resource because they do not know about it, they do not think they need it, or they are too embarrassed to ask for help. Beginning writers sometimes fall into that last group, and so they are missing out on a resource that could greatly benefit their academic success. In their study of the impact of writing centers on student retention, Bell and Frost found that the more often students use a writing center, the more likely they would remain at the university: "participants who engaged most often with the writing center, did fare better than the rest of their basic writing cohort who did not participate regularly in writing center support" (Bell and Frost 23). As seen in Bell and Frost's study, students who use the services provided by their writing center have a higher chance for success at their university than they would have if they had not used that resource. This result helps prove that if beginning writers attend writing sessions at their writing center, they will succeed in the academy. Barbara Lynn Gordon suggests having courses require their students visit the writing center to get help on different assignments in order to familiarize them with the resource (159). This

method would reveal to all students, particularly beginning writers, how useful a tutoring session can be. Aside from requiring visits, teachers could offer extra credit to students who visit the writing center. Also, teachers could ask writing tutors to come to their classes to give a quick, informative presentation on how a session with a writing tutor can help students. By visiting the center themselves, and/or by learning more about the types of assistance offered through a presentation, all students, especially beginning writers, will see that this resource will help them succeed in college.

Beginning writers benefit from both teacher-student one-on-one conferencing and peer tutoring because both help students on an individualized level when they most need help: during the writing process. At a writing center, tutors "provide what writers need most: intervention in the writing process, feedback and dialogue, experience with writing, and a safe, nonthreatening environment" (Jackson 375). Working with a writing tutor, students get the help they need when they need it from someone who has been in their shoes. Students need someone to talk out their ideas with, someone to let them know they are on the right track and keep them there. Tutors have the experience beginning writers don't, and they are willing to share it without judgment. Writing tutors, much like composition instructors, understand that students improve their writing by writing, "not by hearing lectures about writing or completing grammar exercises" (Jackson 377). It would be strange to see a writing tutor give a lecture to every student on how to construct an argument. It would also be pointless because such teaching is not what students come to the center for, and such teaching in the classroom could be why students come to the center. Writing tutors encourage writing because that is what the student is there for, and

they know from experience that the best way to teach a writing skill is by having students practice it in writing.

At a writing center, beginning writers will experience a learning conversation with an understanding peer tutor who will do her best to not only help in the desired areas, but will also help in new areas, such as organization, transitions, and content itself. By working continually with a beginning writer throughout the semester, a tutor will gradually move him from concerns over commas and fragments to concerns over what types of examples best support his argument and what kind of thesis statement would be the most effective. Tutors have the availability to meet with students frequently and focus on the same issues that could be covered in a teacher-student conference, but they can do so without the stigma of authority. They can serve as secondary instructors by teaching beginning writers the lessons that their instructors don't have the time to cover or re-cover. These are the reasons why tutoring sessions are beneficial to beginning writers. They, in conjunction with, or in place of, conferences can be more beneficial to beginning writers than just attending class alone and will help increase their chances for success in the academy.

Chapter Three: Writing Assignments that Benefit Beginning Writers

Many factors are considered when it comes to creating assignments for a course. The first factor is what the institution requires instructors to teach in order to make sure all students complete the course having achieved the same skills. The second factor is the students taking the class. For example, if an instructor is teaching a beginning biology class, he would not expect his students to bring much prior knowledge to the course, and would consider spending the first part of the course bringing the students up to speed. An example on the opposite end would be if an instructor is teaching an upper level literature class. She would not waste time teaching students about the elements of literary analysis because they would have learned those in a lower level literature class. And while instructors can be more restrained than they'd like to be by their institution's course requirements, it is still possible to mold a course to fit the needs of their various students. This idea is particularly true for composition instructors preparing their course for their students, many of whom may be beginning writers. Since it is difficult to know beforehand the skill level of each student in the course, a composition instructor may create generic assignments that she believes new college students can accomplish without difficulty. This type of approach would work for the majority of the students in the course, but it is possible the beginning writers would struggle because they have not come to college with the same level of writing skill as their peers; therefore, they will come to hate writing and possibly just give up.

To combat that problem, instructors should consider including assignments which allow beginning writers to build their writing skills without making them feel like outsiders. The last thing any student wants is to be singled out for doing poorly, and so to prevent that, the assignments should not feel like remedial exercises, but rather

interesting, challenging exercises which help beginning writers and mainstream writers as well. Such assignments come from composition experts, such as John Bean, David Bartholomae, Leonore Hoffman, Lenore Brady, and Wendy Bishop. They are assignments which benefit both beginning and mainstream writers without making either group feel singled out or slowed down, respectively.

Teaching composition to a variety of students is a challenge, and because of the subtle disappearance of remedial writing courses in colleges across the U.S., it has become even more so. Beginning writers are being placed in composition courses they are not prepared for; often they are pushed along, and treated as if they have the same knowledge and skills as their mainstream peers. This is both a good and a bad thing. It could be argued that it is best to treat all students as if they have the same level of learning ability, meaning don't teach "down" to students, because they are capable of rising to the occasion. This is true for the most part as all students are capable of improvement and learning. However, beginning writers need just a bit more assistance reaching the level of their peers. They have the knowledge and the ability, but they don't know how to access it: "We don't have to go very far to believe—to find the potential in student writing that is there, as yet un-activated" (Bishop 268). For them, the teacher needs to do more than hand out generic assignments and correct common mistakes. She needs to understand her students' needs and reach each one to raise them to a new level of thinking and writing that they have never experienced before.

This understanding is a tall order since the majority of composition instructors are adjuncts or graduate students. They are overworked and low on time to meet the needs of each student they teach. To help them, and beginning writers, I've compiled composition

pedagogy methods and assignments which can be easily inserted into a composition course. These assignments come from composition scholars who claim that these methods or assignments benefit all students, and I take some[6] of their claims a step further to show how they also benefit beginning writers. Many of the ideas may sound like common sense; nonetheless, they are included to prove their usefulness to composition instructors who aren't using them.

The overarching idea throughout these assignments is that reading and writing are inseparable. When examining the problems of remedial writing courses, Mike Rose points out that reading and writing have been separated: "Yes, reading and writing are different processes, but it is simply not true that they are unconnected" (Rose 113). Reading and writing go hand in hand, and by separating them, something is lost in the understanding of either. Mariolina Salvatori's research on the issue of reading in a writing course "suggests that although the two activities are interconnected, the activity of reading seems to subsume the activity of writing to a greater extent than most composition pedagogy presumes" (185). She believes that by teaching students how to read and respond to a text, they will also learn how to understand and respond to their own writing: "by enabling students to tolerate and confront ambiguities and uncertainties in the reading process, we can help them eventually to learn to deal with the uncertainties and ambiguities that they themselves generate in the process of writing" (Salvatori 180). In other words, to help students see that others' writing can be problematic and worth a second look, teachers should provide reading materials which interest and appropriately

[6] Most of the scholars used in this chapter do not suggest using their methods/assignments for basic writers; however, Wendy Bishop, Kristine Anderson et al., and Susan Wyche-Smith do tailor their ideas towards a basic writing classroom.

challenge their students, reading materials on their reading level that also improve their academic reading ability.

Salvatori is not alone in her assertion that reading and writing should be taught hand-in-hand. David Bartholomae asserts, "[t]eaching reading, then, is teaching invention, that skill defined as most 'basic' to the development of these students as writers" ("Teaching" 99). Teaching invention is extremely important in a composition course because that is where students first begin to explore college-level writing. Without such teaching, student writing cannot grow or improve. Susan Wyche-Smith argues, "[a] course emphasizing invention shifts the weight to the beginning of the [writing] process. The teacher provides the students first with strategies for producing texts" (471). Such teaching of invention can be done through implementing reading alongside writing. In a course of his own design called Basic Reading and Writing, Bartholomae involved books very heavily to help students not only with their reading skills, but also with their writing skills. In the course, students read books of their own choice and then wrote their responses in a journal (Bartholomae, "Teaching" 97). Those responses were guided by Bartholomae to teach students about analysis. "The students use writing, then, to locate a stance in relation to a book and to locate something to say," which helps students learn the invention process involved in writing a paper (Bartholomae, "Teaching" 99). Through encouraging reading, Bartholomae was able to encourage writing and the students could see the correlation between the two.

Some may argue that if students are struggling with writing, then they are probably struggling with reading as well. This struggle is very likely to be true since the more people read, the better they write, and if the writing is suffering, there is likely little

reading going on. To combat this, John Bean offers many methods to help students who are struggling with reading. He suggests that to help students with reading, instructors should develop assignments that "require deep rather than surface processing" (Bean 167). For example, quiz students about ideas, themes, and concepts in the reading, rather than who said what. Also, Bean suggests that teachers should show students how they personally take notes and respond to reading as a sort of model (170). Teachers can also create reading guides which "define key terms…, fill in needed cultural knowledge, explain the rhetorical context of the reading, illuminate the rhetorical purpose of genre convention, and ask critical questions for students to consider" (Bean 174-175). These are all small ways[7] that teachers can improve students' reading comprehension, thereby also improving their writing.

As for what to have students read, that is up to instructors, as many of them choose a theme for their course and the reading follows that theme. Instructors may often choose novels and have students write on the themes or problems within them, thus turning that writing into an academic essay. For example, students reading Lois Lowry's *The Giver* may write about the idea of a utopia and how it is impossible to achieve. They may argue that the way of life presented in the novel has both its pros and cons. They may even do research on failed utopias or try to come up with one and argue as to why it would succeed. When reading academic essays on timeless issues, such as racism and sexism, the students may then take those issues and write a personal essay on how they've seen those issues in their own lives. The possibilities are endless when it comes to what students should read to improve their writing. What matters most is that they are

[7] For more information, see Bean pages 181-182. He provides a chart which tells teachers which teaching strategy works best with which reading problem.

reading[8]. In addition, when teaching literature alongside writing, Salvatori explains that it "should be taught as a way of exploring, understanding, and reflecting on the strategies by which readers—all readers—generate meanings in the act of reading" (177). She states that by doing so, "the teaching of literature become[s] a useful means for composition teachers to foster in their students those reflective habits of mind that can, and will, contribute to the students becoming better writers" (Salvatori 177). In other words, do more than just have them read a text. Have students explore a text through class discussion, in-depth reading quizzes, and, most importantly, writing. Learning how to explore a text and their ideas about that text will help students become people who want to know more about a subject, people who are curious about an issue, as opposed to being people who merely report facts or summarize articles.

Using this method when they are reading, students are also writing about that reading. There are many ways for students to write about reading. Bean suggests that students use double entry journals to write about what they have read. Double entry journals "require students first to reflect on course material and then later to reflect on their own reflections" (Bean 135). The right side is for students to make notes about the reading, because "putting course material into one's own words enhances learning," and on the left side students are "posing questions, raising doubts, making connections, seeing opposing views, linking course material with personal experience, expressing confusion, and so forth" (Bean 135). The double entry journal helps students keep track of what they've read and allows them to spend some time really thinking about what

[8] An instructor's choice of reading material for the course should be informed by the level of reading most college freshmen have achieved by admission. For beginning writers, reading guides can be used to help them understand the reading. These can be given out to all students so as not to draw attention to those who need the extra help.

they've read. These are useful for particularly difficult reading assignments and would really help beginning writers since they are allowed to ask questions about the reading along with the mainstream writers. They are included in the analysis of the reading and can then even engage in class discussion without worrying about being wrong. They can see that they are not the only ones struggling with an aspect of the reading. The great thing about this type of reading/writing assignment is that it works for academic, nonacademic, nonfictional, and fictional literature.

Double entry journals work well when students write about personal narratives. They range from journals and letters to autobiographies and personal essays. In "Using the Letters, Diaries, and Oral Testimonies of Ordinary People to Teach Writing," Leonore Hoffman argues that "the major advantage of using the letters, diaries, and oral testimonies of ordinary people is that they demystify reading and writing" (465). Through having students read everyday documents, they will "see that writing is significant to people for a number of reasons, not the least of which is to learn about oneself and one's world" (Hoffman 465). This type of reading helps students see the value in their own writing and see it as more than just fulfilling an assignment. According to Hoffman, there are four reasons why this assignment helps students. These reasons are that it validates writing, it helps students become sensitive to voice in writing, it helps students see the stages of the writing process in action, and it stimulates imagination and response (Hoffman 465-468). Much like when responding to an event or a character in a novel, students can connect to the writers of these everyday narratives and it helps them write in a variety of ways (Hoffman 468).

Hoffman includes a few examples of writing assignments that students can complete after reading such literature. She suggests that students "[r]espond as the recipient of a letter, writing in reply—questioning, suggesting, consoling, assisting, or arguing with the author," or that students "Present the 'true' version of the writer's life, citing evidence from interviews with living relatives, historical research, or simply a close reading of the text of the writer's extant works," or "Write a paper based on historical allusions in the diary, such as the relationship between white plantation owners and black workers in the South in the late 19th century" (Hoffman 468). All of those are excellent ways to get students engaged with a text and work on their writing skills at the same time. The above assignments can be completed by all students, including beginning writers, because it won't seem like traditional academic writing to students and so they will be willing to express themselves without fear of being wrong. This method is a comfortable way to ease students into academic writing without causing fear or panic.

Not only does reading and working with others' letters help students become better writers, letter writing itself helps as well. In Lenore Brady's essay, "To Whom It Might Actually Concern: Letter Writing as Invention in First Year Composition," she describes an assignment she created for a composition course in which the students had two letter writing activities. The first "focused on letter writing as a persuasive/explanatory/positioning act in which students drafted a letter to a parent or significant person in their lives explaining why they were "doing something in opposition to the recipient's ideological stance," such as dropping out of school (Brady 250). The second letter writing activity focused on proposing a solution and involved writing two letters. The first letter was written to "a specific person or department on campus about a

specific problem the student had encountered in the campus community and proposed a solution to that problem" (Brady 250). For the second letter, the student pretended to be the person to whom he had sent the letter. In this letter, they had to critique their own proposed solution. Of the assignment's success, Brady states that what she "noticed about these letters was that they seemed to enable the students to write clearer, more focused essays that included many elements of argument" (250). In other words, "[t]he students felt in control of the essay/subject matter—it did not control them" (Brady 250). It is almost as if Brady managed to get students to unknowingly write an argument essay, and, much like Hoffman's assignment, the students succeeded because it did not seem formal to them and they were not concerned about writing academically.

Letter writing is something students are familiar with, but not something they've thought about in this way before. Brady's reasoning behind using the letter writing activity is that a "letter is an authentic conceptual and textual communication between writer-thinker and audience; it's a social act, not an isolate one" (251). The letter writing teaches students to consider many factors, the most important of which is audience. Brady explains, "[t]he audience response, even though fictional in this case, reshapes, reviews, and perhaps even reinvents the original idea, which in turn clarifies the composition of the essay" (251). Students are considering audience without realizing it. Instead of completing the assignment for the teacher, they are completing it for themselves, wondering how they would respond to such a letter, role playing in their writing to explore the opposing viewpoint, if you will. The assignment described above, much like involving reading in a composition course, helps teach students the process of invention. Wyche-Smith gives many methods for teaching invention in a basic writing

class, and three of them are in Brady's assignment: write to be read by people other than the teacher, develop multiple strategies for writing, and write with the help of others (talking to peers, writing with peers, etc.) (Wyche-Smith 477-478). This type of assignment works well for beginning writers because it takes a skill they already have, letter writing, and adds a new level to it without pressuring them to fit a set format. At the end of the assignment, they've written an argument essay, whether they realize it or not, and they have learned how to take their own ideas about an issue and determine (invent) how to both present it and respond to it.

In all of the above writing assignments, reading is critical. Reading more frequently and writing about that reading proves that the two are so interrelated that doing one greatly improves the other. Reading one's own writing can also be a learning experience, and it is one both students and teachers often do not consider. Reading your own writing can involve writing about your writing process or writing style. While writing about writing is a seemingly redundant exercise, it can help writers learn more about their writing styles and about the areas that need improvement. It can also help instructors know what writing skills their students need the most help with, or see if an assignment was unknowingly problematic. Bartholomae suggests that students should "consider writing as an experience by asking them to analyze and describe their experience with our assignments" (Bartholomae, "Teaching" 88). This type of writing could be called a reflection essay. Instructors could assign this type of writing in conjunction with an involved research project so that students will have to keep track of everything that they do.

But, this essay is not just a record of student progress; it is the place for students to give their experiences, both good and bad, with the assignment and report on what worked and what did not. They could even use this essay to explain a choice they made regarding their organization, or they could simply vent about their struggles. This type of assignment provides students with a better sense of their writing process and helps them better understand the choices they made with their writing. They may even get an idea halfway through and revise their paper. This reflection essay is really an extended freewrite, one that allows students more practice with writing, while allowing them to better understand their writing. Another way to assign a reflection essay would be to have students write about the course at the end of the semester, or they could complete it at the beginning as they reflect on how they feel about writing and their expectations for the course. This is an effective, no pressure activity for both mainstream and beginning writers, one that permits them writing freedom and allows the instructor a look at what she can do for those writers.

All of the above writing assignments ask students to write academically, but in non-academic ways. Regarding non-academic writing in an academic context, Bean states that, "[t]he best teaching strategies for accelerating students' growth are tasks that ask students to consider multiple points of view, to confront clashing values, and to imagine, analyze, and evaluate alternative solutions to problems" (Bean 28). Those are all requirements of the letter/diary reading, letter writing, writing about reading, and reflection writing assignments. Bean recommends reflection essays because they are "often assigned to elicit students' responses to complex, difficult, or troubling readings and invite the writer to 'speak back' to the reading" (Bean 117). The writing that students

do in such essays "is more exploratory, tentative, and personal than the standard closed-form academic essay" (Bean 132). This writing is important because it allows students writing freedom where they can practice writing about something they know in a new-to-them academic format and because it allows the student to connect to what he's done and relate it to how he works as a student. Another type of essay Bean suggests which gives students writing freedom is a formal exploratory essay. This type of essay "asks students to provide a chronological account of their thinking process while wrestling with a problem. It records the evolution of their ideas-in-flux…the subject matter…is the student's thinking process while doing research" (Bean 116). This type of writing, much like the reflection essay, "encourages and rewards critical thinking while giving teachers insights into the intellectual lives of their students" (Bean 116). Aside from an actual formal essay, Bean lists a few other forms of exploratory writing for students, such as blogs, discussion posts, in-class writing, and journals (132). Exploratory writing allows students freedom to express themselves, and it helps them write about academic subjects in a less intimidating way.

Creative nonfiction, which is really what all of the above assignments are, can really help beginning writers succeed in a composition course. All the writing they will do in such a course is nonfiction, but adding the creative aspect to it engages beginning writers on a more comfortable level, which bridges their previous writing instruction, or lack thereof, to a place where they can accept learning the ways of college-level writing. When teaching beginning writers how to write creative nonfiction, keeping the word "creative" at the forefront of all assignment planning and carrying out is helpful. "Creative" applies not only to how students write, but what they are allowed to write.

Wendy Bishop explains that when students are "allowed to explore literary nonfiction-essay, memoir, personal journalism, and the other literatures of fact" they "will develop a substantial set of strengths from which to undertake other disciplinary writing challenges" (273). These strengths include the ability to think more in-depth about issues instead of just glazing the surface, the ability to take their time with literature and look at it from different angles, and the ability to write as an empowered student whose words and voice matter in the academic community. Basically, through exploring different types of creative nonfiction assignments, Bishop believes that students will then be prepared to write beyond the composition classroom.

In order to prepare students for writing past first-year composition, Bishop has students engage with the standard personal essay in a variety of ways that allow students to write personally, but also in a way that requires them to do more than, for example, relate a childhood experience. For instance, Bishop asks students to "focus on life-history research (asking students to research world events from the day they were born)" in order to have them write personally, but without inserting their own personal life into the writing (270). That assignment also asks students to do a bit of research, which, if they have not learned how to do so previously, they should learn how to do while in college composition. Wyche-Smith states that to help students improve their writing, they should be taught the importance of investigation, including the use of research, interviews, observation, and others' opinions (475). This is a skill that they have, but have not been taught how to use, or how to use it to their advantage. By combining personal, creative nonfiction with somewhat academic research, beginning writers will learn how to both

express themselves academically, and learn how to express what others have to say about their topic/idea with ease.

Allowing students to write out of the box and teaching them the art of investigation can help students see their full range of writing potential and not be discouraged when they struggle with the standard academic essays. Part of this creative writing exploration involves helping students see that everyone, even famous writers and everyday teachers, struggles with the writing process. Helping students understand that writing is a process everyone goes through can be done by teaching students the importance of writing process ritual. Wyche-Smith suggests three ways to do so. The first is telling students the writing rituals of professional writers in order to show them that even the greats get writer's block (Wyche-Smith 473). The second is modeling and discussing with the students our own writing rituals: "Reading about it, looking at a finished product, or having someone tell you how to do it does not convey the same information as seeing it done" (Wyche-Smith 473). The third method is by having students write frequently, because "[w]hen students write often, the fear that comes from engaging in an unfamiliar activity disappears" (Wyche-Smith 474). By doing those three things, teachers can help students understand the recursive writing process and remove the stigma that they've attached to revision and editing. Kristine Rae Anderson et al. explain that "[o]ne misconception students have is that they think 'real' writers do the work perfectly the first time" and so they feel like failures when they cannot achieve such writing perfection (164). However, once they realize that is not true, "it diminishes the imagined gulf between the student writer and the professional," and the student "stops

expecting perfection" (Anderson et al. 164). When students see that they are not alone in their struggle with writing, they become more accepting of change and advice.

In order to show students that professional writers revise, too, Anderson et al. suggest showing students a work of literature in progress. The class first reads the finished product, in this case, a poem, as a whole and examines how it is put together. Then the students are shown four or five early drafts of that poem, "handwritten and from the typewriter, full of notes and cross-outs and commentary" (Anderson et al. 165). Showing students the "behind the scenes" writing of a completed work of literature will help them become more comfortable with the actual act of revising, rather than skipping it in favor of surface level editing. This "reveal" also works when teachers model their own writing process for their students. Presenting both examples helps all students, but particularly beginning writers, for they might not have ever been taught how to revise, or they were taught that revising and editing are the same thing. Beginning writers may never have known that a second draft was more than adding a sentence here and there and taking out a comma or two. Their fear of revising is legitimate but easily conquered when teachers take the time to address it using the previous techniques.

The above assignments and suggestions for helping beginning writers succeed in the academy are great ways to ease students into more academic writing. This type of writing is exemplified by the traditional academic essay, which all college students are expected to know how to write by the time they complete a course in college composition. For beginning writers, the best way to have them achieve that objective would be to have such an assignment toward the end of the course. By the time the traditional essay is assigned, students have had practice exploring ways of writing,

revising, and considering audience. They are prepared for such an assignment, and they need such an assignment in order to move them past composition and into whatever writing tasks are ahead in other courses. In, "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae explains that beginning writers need to learn how "to extend themselves, by successive approximations, into the…rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections…and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community" (Bartholomae, "Inventing" 634). This is the purpose of the academic essay, to introduce students to what is expected of them when they leave the composition classroom.

By capping off a course with a standard academic essay, beginning students will prove their capability to succeed in the academy because it is a culmination of all the skills learned through the reading and writing tasks suggested above. Linda Flower believes that the reason students, like beginning writers, have difficulty with academic writing is because they haven't yet learned how to "transition between 'writer-based' and 'reader-based' prose" (Bartholomae, "Inventing" 627). By having students think like readers and consider their audience, like they would in the assignments created by Bishop and Brady, they are learning how to switch to writing "reader-based" prose because they are being asked to think from the viewpoint of a certain audience. Flower goes on to say something similar in regard to revising: "[t]eaching students to revise for readers, then, will better prepare them to write initially with a reader in mind" (Bartholomae, "Inventing" 627). This idea is carried out in the revising assignment created by Anderson et al., and is also recommended in the article by Wyche-Smith. Keeping the reader in mind is a big part of learning how to write in the academy, but so is learning the language

of academia. According to Bartholomae, students must "appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse," and they have to act as if that is something they are used to doing by copying what they think academic language is in order to find "some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other hand" ("Inventing" 624). If students have been exploring what they think academic writing is through assignments like formal exploratory and reflective essays (Bean), by the time they get to the academic essay, they are well aware of what is academic and what is not.

Ending the course with the academic essay assignment leaves students with an idea of the writing they will, most likely, be doing from then on. While students are working on this assignment, the teacher can get an idea of what's left to help individual students with during one-on-one conferences. She can teach minilessons on skills that need some work, and/or teach minilessons on brand new concepts to students who've mastered everything thus far. This assignment can be used for assessment of the students' learning thus far while providing them with one more opportunity to practice academic writing. When giving this assignment to students, then is the time to cover a few new things that the previous assignments did not. For example, while Hoffman, Bishop, and Bean's assignments do require research, it may not be the same type of research students will use for an academic essay. Because of this lack, students will also need to be taught where to find sources and how to tell the difference between a trustworthy and untrustworthy source, since this is a more formal assignment that needs reliable sources. Also, though Brady's letter writing activity does teach persuasive strategies, it may not teach all the strategies they'll need and it does not teach how to back up an argument

using sources. And so, students will need to learn how to incorporate their reliable sources into their argument to back up their points. Since the assignments suggested in this chapter do teach many of the skills students need to succeed in the academy, such as reading comprehension and critical thinking about reading (Bean), audience awareness (Hoffman), persuasive writing strategies (Brady), metacognition and concept exploration (Bean), research skills (Bishop), and writing as a recursive process (Wyche-Smith and Anderson), there are only a few loose academic ends (advanced persuasive moves[9], source analysis, and source incorporation) to tie up when presenting students with the academic essay assignment, which makes the academic essay the ideal assignment to sum up a college composition course which will benefit both mainstream and beginning writers.

Beginning writers come to the college composition classroom underprepared for college-level writing, afraid of writing the "wrong" way, and worried that their first/final draft is the best they can do. They are surrounded by peers who are prepared and do not feel comfortable drawing attention to their inadequacies. And so they muddle through the course, fixing surface level errors, skimming through the readings, and acting like they understand each lesson. These students need extra help, and one way to give them that help is through the types of assignments given and the way writing skills are taught. Bishop states, "I believe in instruction. I believe assignments can be structured and sequenced so learners improve their ability to remember, to observe, to reflect, to analyze, and to write" (270). I agree with Bishop in that through what is taught to and expected of students, they can learn to write academically. Give students more to read,

[9] An excellent source for teaching these strategies can be found in Gerald Graff's *They Say/I Say*. It provides students with templates for advanced persuasive situations and it helps them incorporate the tricky counterargument.

and have them read often. Have them respond to and really delve into what they read so that they will better understand how to handle problems they come across when they write. Get them involved in the writings of others to better understand the value of writing, and have them write to others to see that there is more than one person (the teacher) to direct their writing to. Allow them to write about their writing in a no pressure situation in order to explore their personal writing process and writing ritual. Ask students to write in different creative nonfiction genres which will help them remain in their comfort zone of personal writing, but also push them a step further into academic writing by showing them the types of creative nonfiction genres they may experience in their later courses, such as an interview. Share your and others' writing processes and reveal the power and possibility of revising a rough draft many times over. Instructors should let students know that writing is a recursive process that they should embrace, rather than hide from. In the end, allowing students to see what's been written through constant reading, having them respond creatively, personally, and critically to others, and taking away the fear of not writing the "right" way in the first draft will give beginning writers a better chance for success not only in composition but also in future college courses.

Conclusion

The three methods proposed above, one-on-one conferencing, peer tutoring, and specialized assignments, to help beginning writers succeed in the academy, are small but powerful. Teachers can implement these methods in their courses without putting an extra strain on their time or extra coursework on their students, and these methods work for all students, but especially beginning writers. They are built on the idea that individualized attention and teaching will help these students not only ease into academic writing, but also increase their writing ability so that when they leave a composition course, they are prepared for future academic writing. Understanding the struggles of the beginning writer and incorporating them into a composition course will not only help those students succeed in the academy, but also prove to those students that they are capable, intelligent people who have just as much right to be at a college as anyone else. Beginning writers come into college underprepared for academic writing, but that does not mean they can't achieve that preparedness through engaging in academic writing. According to Elizabeth Bir, "[i]n order to reach that point [where students can succeed academically], they must have time to write, to rewrite, to develop, and they have to be supported in that effort by their teachers and tutors" (Bir xi). Achieving preparedness is possible, and it can be achieved by using methods which focus on the individual student working with a knowledgeable, understanding instructor who considers an individual student's current level of academic under-preparedness during assignment creation.

Beginning writers are students whom teachers tend not to think about when creating their syllabi, but, in reality, these students are whom they should be considering. More and more underprepared students are trying to make their way through college the hard way since the gradual elimination of remedial writing courses. They are thrown into

the standard freshman composition course whether they can truly handle it or not. They struggle through the writing assignments that the mainstream writers breeze through. They don't get the lessons as quickly as the mainstream writers, and there usually isn't time in class to get their individual writing questions answered. Some manage to muddle through the course and barely pass, while others stop trying and drop out. These students are the ones teachers often dismiss as being not smart enough for college and so they don't see the purpose in spending more time than they have to work with them. Bir explains, "[t]he teachers that Shaughnessy is reacting to, then, believe that these students are not worthy of being in a college or university classroom; they are unteachable and are offensive to those who see themselves as insiders, members of the academy" (Bir 42). Teachers must learn about beginning writers and their individual struggles to get past the idea that some students belong in college and some students don't.

Through the composing of this thesis, I have become aware of those teacher attitudes as well as the general dilemma of the beginning writing student. I have learned that beginning writers are not a "problem" to be solved, but rather a group to be helped. They are not students who somehow squeezed through the admissions process by the skin of their teeth. They want to be at a college and deserve to be there just as much as the mainstream writers. They deserve success and will work for it as long as someone is there to help them and encourage them, which is why I suggested more conferencing and more peer tutoring. They have the ability to write academically. They just need some scaffolding in order to get there, which is why I suggested the specialized assignments in Chapter Three. By researching and understanding the needs and struggles of beginning

writers, I have determined these three methods to be ways to help them succeed in the academy because they are the most effective, though not the only ones.

These methods are based on research and experience, not an extensive study with participants and quantifiable results. The proof of their effectiveness comes from what others have done and from what I have seen firsthand. Through conferencing with beginning writers, their struggles with writing became clear. Their struggles with writing is the reason why I, along with many others, have been in the awkward position of wondering whether or not they belonged at a college. However, with frequent conferencing, both in class and out of class, the beginning writers began to improve. After tutoring almost 200 students, the majority of whom were beginning writers, their struggles with the composing process as well as the revision process became evident. Through trial, error, and research, effective tutoring methods that work best for them were found and implemented. To help these students in the classroom and combat my own helplessness about how to best serve them when I was a composition instructor, I researched possible solutions which turned into alternative assignments. I have not yet used the assignments I suggest in Chapter Three, but based on the credibility of the assignment creators (David Bartholomae, John Bean, Lenore Brady, and Lenore Hoffman), it can be assumed that they are effective, or are at least a good place to start for teachers looking for assignments which will help beginning writers. I, for one, do plan on implementing those assignments the next time I teach a composition course.

Since these methods have not yet been confirmed in an official study, I suggest that future research, whether by myself or others, be conducted in order to do so. More research should also be done on ways to further scaffold composition assignments for

beginning writers since the assignments in Chapter Three are not the only options. A study on the effects of such assignments on both beginning and mainstream writers in a composition course would also be a great idea in order to determine if both groups of students are being challenged enough in the course without feeling overwhelmed or bored, respectively. Research should be done on the benefits of having beginning writers assigned to their own personal peer tutor in order to help them throughout the semester, to be a support system from day one so the student does not get discouraged by the level of work expected. This would also be beneficial. In addition, it would be interesting to discover the benefits, for beginning writers, of creating a composition course which is 60% in class learning and writing and 40% out of class conferences. Lastly, in order to start understanding beginning writers and their needs, all composition instructors, including adjuncts, GTAs/GTFs, and tenured professors, should be required, at some point in their careers, to participate in a workshop or class which teaches them about beginning writers. It can then be determined, through interviews and observations, whether or not this type of instruction benefited the instructors and/or the beginning writers in their classes.

Though much has been done to understand and help beginning writers, there is still much to do and much to learn. As for myself, I have learned a great deal about these students who I didn't even know had an "official" label until a year ago. My ideas about them have changed significantly through my experiences and my research. In the beginning, I was that teacher who assumed that if a student could not make it through a composition course, then they did not deserve to be there. Mistakenly, I used to think that they had somehow gotten in by sheer luck and now it was my job to figure out what to do

with them. Looking back now with what I know, I regret that I felt and thought that way, but I was not alone. I was one of many instructors with an elitist attitude about the academy. Thanks to my experiences working with students who I now know are called beginning writers, an understanding that their failings are not a result of unintelligence, but rather a lack of preparedness for academic writing, began to form. Once that was realized, my thinking about my students, both as a teacher and as a tutor, changed. Conventional ideas about what makes a paper "good" had to be changed in order to accommodate their struggles with higher order concerns. Instead of focusing on the lower order concerns and thinking the students were incompetent, a realization that what they really need help with are the higher order concerns developed. Previous tutoring writing strategies shifted dramatically after learning to look at the bigger picture in a beginning writer's paper. Becoming more collaborative and patient, becoming more like a peer than an authority figure, was an easy, effective change. The assignments from my own composition course needed to be changed after I saw why the beginning writers had struggled with them. There was no scaffolding, nor was there much reading in the course. It was very focused on the format of academic writing, rather than on what the students had to say or how they should be learning to express their ideas academically. Overall, researching for this thesis greatly changed my ideas about teaching, tutoring, and beginning writers in general. Because my ideas have changed for the better, I hope to be a more effective teacher and tutor.

Beginning writers are students who have just as much of a chance of success as the mainstream writers. Their level of under-preparedness can be improved through understanding their needs and meeting them on a level they can understand and be

challenged by. Teachers need to understand that beginning writers need the most help and get it the least. They should make it a goal to assist those students as often as they can through individual assistance and through teaching academic writing with scaffolding. Beginning writers should be a major concern in the field of composition pedagogy, and they should be considered when colleges create the master syllabi for composition courses. These are the students colleges should not only just accept, but also assist. Through working with them one-on-one and scaffolding assignments to help meet their academic writing needs, tutors and teachers can prepare beginning writers for success in the academy. Beginning writers can succeed in the academy. They just need more help than others in order to do so.

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