Greetings from the UND Writing Center! We love all things writing and we are excited to present our first issue of “Notes from the Margins.” It is our hope that writers on campus find valuable insights and tips for navigating the joys and perils of the writing process through the reflections of student writers.

If you are unfamiliar with the Writing Center, come visit us in Merrifield 12! It is a unique and incredibly valuable space for student learning and engagement (and it’s free for students!). Our staff is made up of experienced undergraduate student writers and graduate students with experience teaching writing. The consultants work with students (both on campus and from a distance) in one-on-one, collaborative appointments on writing from any discipline and at any stage of the writing process. During the academic year 16-17, we served students from 99 majors and programs in every college of our university! When asked about their experience using the Writing Center, 94% of students indicated that they were more confident than before the session.
CONFESSIONS OF A WRITING CONSULTANT

Diane Newberry

English was always my best subject in school. Not a ground breaking statement considering I’m currently an English major, but yep - in my extremely average suburban public high school, I was the wunderkind of the English program.

When I came to college, I continued to get As, and continued to live under the delusion that I didn’t need help. I didn’t take peer editing seriously and I never properly revised a paper. No one ever forced me to, and I am in my heart of hearts, a deeply lazy person.

My hubris probably should have been reaffirmed when one of my professors recommended me to the director of the Writing Center and I fell into my job here. But oddly enough – becoming a Writing Center consultant didn’t reassure me of my literary superiority. It only made me feel insecure. Thank god.

In my initial training, I was constantly afraid of saying the wrong thing. What if I looked over a paper and found no fault? What if all of my suggestions were contrary to advice the writer had gotten from other sources? Also, who was I to be giving this advice anyway?

As to the first question: I never looked over a paper and found no fault. As Bill Condon says, “No piece of writing is ever finished. It’s just due.” When I began to realize this about all of the work of my fellow writers, I had to accept that it was true of my own writing as well.

As for the second: Sometimes my advice is contrary to other advice the writers have gotten. Sometimes they defend their choices and I poke holes in their argument. Sometimes they defend their choices and they actually sway me. Whatever the outcome, the conversation in itself is helpful to both of us. There is no one way to write; there are only helpful guidelines and anecdotal success stories.

And as for the question of “Who am I to be giving writing advice?”: well, I haven’t quite figured that out yet. But I feel like every day I work in the center, I get closer to the kind of person I want to be for students.

Oftentimes, I can see the trepidation in students’ eyes when they come to the Writing Center. Opening your writing up to criticism can be legitimately scary. But believe me, I’ve seen the benefits for both the writers I work with and myself.

APA Tip

First Level Heading

The first level heading is centered and boldface in title case (the first letter of significant words are capitalized). The content of the section begins the line below the heading and is indented.

Second Level Heading

The second level heading is flush left (left-aligned) and boldface in title case. The content of the section begins the line below the heading and is indented.

Third level heading. The third level heading is indented and boldface in sentence case (the first word in title is capitalized and all subsequent words in title are in lowercase) ending in a period. Content of the section begins immediately after the period at the end of the heading.

Fourth level heading. The fourth level heading is indented, boldface, and italicized in sentence case ending with a period. Content of the section begins immediately after the period at the end of the heading.

Fifth level heading. The fifth level header is indented and italicized in sentence case ending with a period. Content of the section begins immediately after the period at the end of the heading.
AGONY & WRITING
Conrad Kranz

I find writing absolutely daunting most of the time. “I’ll do it tomorrow.” “It won’t take me that long,” and “It’s only ____ pages” are just a couple of the excuses I still use to avoid writing. Wait… I can’t tell you any of that. My name is Conrad Kranz and I am a Writing Center consultant who enjoys free writing on a daily basis. No that’s not right… I can’t lie. To be completely honest I have a desire NOT to write more often than I have a desire TO write. And then there’s the matter of finding time to actually do it. Now you’re probably wondering why I would even want to work at a place like the Writing Center, on top of asking whether or not I ought to in the first place. Before you, ahem, write me off as a writing consultant for my conflicted composition feelings, I would like to make a clear distinction: my desire to write (or lack thereof) is in no way an indication of my feelings while actually writing.

The desire NOT to write really stems from the agonizing act of opening a blank Microsoft Word document and wondering how in the Dickens (Charles) I’m going to get the pages full. So what do I do? I check my margins; I adjust my font to the required style (Times New Roman) and size (12 point); and for good measure, I set my line spacing to just enough above double so that our professors can’t tell that I’m 200 words short of what actually would be the required page length—not that I’ve ever actually tried this. But it sounds promising, right?

At this point, I personally like to take time listing the names of yours truly, the instructor, their course, and obviously the date on which I would like my professor to think that I responsibly wrote my paper, when in reality it’s 10 P.M. the night before the entire paper is due and I just drank a pot of coffee.

MLA Tip

If you have two authors with the same last name how do you indicate which author is being cited in an in-text citation? Use their first initial along with their last name in the in-text citation.

Here is an example from the Purdue OWL: “Although some medical ethicists claim that cloning will lead to designer children (R. Miller 12), others note that the advantages for medical research outweigh this consideration (A. Miller 46).”

This sequence of events just describes my entire writing experience through all of middle/high school and college. The amount of stress this process caused me was something I never regarded as optional; it was just HOW WRITING WORKS (for all you 110/130 people out there).

College gave me more opportunities to take classes on topics I actually cared about: i.e. politics, philosophy, economics, and others. Yes, I am boring and I am okay with it. My first semester I took Introduction to Political Philosophy, over the course of which I wrote weekly journals on our readings and two semester papers. Now… I want to stress that weekly readings and journals added up to a LOT of pages at the end of the semester. Because I was forced to write almost daily, I really didn’t have time to make the usual excuses; and because I didn’t have time to make the usual excuses, my writing experience was no longer bound up in procrastination and anxiety. My most important discovery during the course was how enjoyable the act of writing can be when you’re not trying to write everything in one sitting.

Now, some of you might say that the only reason I liked to write was because I enjoyed the class. You’re somewhat correct. If you’re a student, you might say that you don’t enjoy any of your classes, at which point I would ask you if you’ve considered switching majors. Regardless, if you’re like me, postponing the assignment until the very end is your unintentional intention. You may not ever truly enjoy the process of writing, but it might help if you’re not cramming an entire 6 to 10-page paper into one coffee-fueled night.

Here are three suggestions for dealing with the procrastination and the agony of the blank page:

1) Start with whatever point you know most about. I usually write my introduction last, and my body first. 2) Leave your room! Go anywhere that makes you uncomfortable to avoid dozing off: the union, the library, or even outside (Mini-Tip: Wait until it’s not – 100 before trying #2). 3) Make a plan and set reminders on your phone for when you know you’ll have 30-60 minutes of free time. Then use that time to write.

Now, every good piece of writing has to have a killer conclusion that gives the reader a sense of empowerment. (Insert here). Unfortunately, I am here to tell you that just reading a testimonial (even one as scintillating as this one) won’t change a darn thing. The only way to change your writing habits—and in turn, your writing itself—is to take action.