SALUTATIONS

With spring in the air you may find it hard to stay focused on assignments, but here at the UND Writing Center we're ready to help you work on any drafting, writing, or revision questions you may have. In the latest issue of “Notes from the Margins” we have quick tips on APA and MLA formatting, because, really, who hasn’t had a question about making sure your header is properly formatted or if that in-text citation is properly cited? We’re also featuring a writing testimonial from one of our graduate student consultants, Jenifer Polson, who reflects on how she came to terms with the realization that no writing will ever be perfect in her piece “To Be Revised…” Marcie Woehl, an undergraduate consultant in the center, also talks about how some of the best words are not always the most well prepared or well edited, but instead the ones that go “off the grid” in her piece “Write What You Want to Read.” As a reminder, we’re located in the basement of Merrifield in Room 12. Please stop by, and don’t forget to tell your friends and students about our services. We’re always eager to work with those who are new to the Center.
“TO BE REVISED...”

Jenifer Polson

In the last edition of “Notes from the Margins,” several writing consultants wrote about their struggles in getting started writing, revising, and taking criticism about their writing. Since I’ve gotten a BA and an MA in English and am apparently enjoying the stress enough to get a PhD, one might think that I haven’t had any of those experiences. Yeah... time to Hulk Smash that myth into oblivion.

Hi, my name is Jenifer Polson and I am a third-year PhD student and Graduate Writing Consultant. Reading and writing have not always come easy to me, nor is academic reading my favorite pastime. Truth be told, even getting me to read as a child was a struggle. When I FINALLY started to enjoy reading, the struggle shifted toward getting me to read the assigned seemingly boring stuff when all I really wanted to do was read the “fun” books.

But even if I struggled with reading, I must at least have loved to write all my life, right? Not a chance. I had the same misconception that so many others have, which is that you are either a good writer or you aren’t. And with the feedback I was getting from my teachers, I was clearly NOT a good writer. Imposter syndrome set in early on in my undergrad when I was convinced that all of my peers wrote better than me, could read faster than me, and seemed to have more intellectually stimulating things to say. Those are still thoughts that will often creep their way into my mind even now.

So, you may ask, why did I stick with the English major? Why didn’t I change my major? Or finish my BA in English, but then go on to an MA and PhD in something else? The simple, yet annoyingly complex, answer is that I enjoy being an English major (don’t let the frequent stress complaining fool you). But enjoying the work I do in the major doesn’t mean that I miraculously became a great writer overnight. Improving my writing skills has not been something that happened by some wish upon a star or a genie that granted me three wishes, however nice it would have been if that did actually happen.

I’ve come to realize that I will likely always think that my peers write better than I do. But that doesn’t mean I haven’t been continually working at my writing skills – not to perfect them, but to make the skills I have more effective. Throughout my entire educational career I have been working on different components of my writing skills such as wordiness, clarity, organization, transitions, and grammatical mistakes coming out of the woodwork. Don't even get me started on comma splices. Just don’t (shudders with anxiety).

The point is, even at the PhD level my writing is still a work in progress. I still work with instructors to talk about different moves I can make, what move might be more effective in a particular situation, how I might experiment with a writing move I have never tried before and the like. Yes, listening to what isn't working can seem more daunting than getting a piece of writing started, but getting that feedback is also beneficial toward making the most effective revisions.

It is through years of education that I have come to realize and accept that writing isn’t a magical process and it certainly isn't clean and tidy. Trust me, when I am working through a paper every work surface honestly will look like the Hulk came through and smashed them all to pieces. Then, even when that draft is passed in (yes, I am calling the paper I passed in a draft), I am convinced that it could still use another dozen revisions. Ultimately, no writing is perfect, no process is ideal, and really, no writing is ever truly done. Our first instinct may be to check the grade as a representation of our writing skills, but I have found that my writing skills have developed most significantly when I push through the fear and use the instructor comments and feedback for the next draft.

Thus, you have my secret to successful writing: never ending revisions.

(P.S. ...to be revised...)

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As a writing consultant and English and Philosophy double major, I’ve seen a lot of words. I’ve seen words that have made good sentences, words that have formed good papers, and plenty of words exercising their freedom as individual units without regard for the content around them. For the most part, I’ve observed that words are often simply doing what they need to in the education system: they’re fulfilling the assignment. However, the words that I’ve found most important and most memorable were not the words that worked towards precise thesis statements, pristine lab reports, or comprehensive lit reviews. They were the ones that…went off the grid a bit.

When I say the words “went off the grid,” I don’t mean that the writer threw all the rules of spelling and grammar into the air and went wild. I mean that the writer skillfully used their abilities for a more artistic purpose. They created a compelling narrative. They picked a bolder topic. They made unique choices for language and layout. And because of these choices, they went beyond the standard assignment/topic/list of requirements and created a unique piece of writing, and more importantly, one worth remembering. These situations, I think, are those where words are fulfilling their greatest purpose. Because, to quote that great (and eminently memorable) writer Socrates, what’s the point in writing if it isn’t worth remembering?

**WRITE WHAT YOU WANT TO READ**

Marcie Woehl

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**MLA Tip**

According to MLA 8 guidelines, a paper’s identifying information should be placed on the left side on the top of the first page. Each line of identifying information should be double-spaced. The text should use twelve point, Times New Roman font. The student’s name should come on the first line, followed by the professor’s name, followed by the class title and course number, followed by the due date. The title should follow, centered, capitalized, and double-spaced.

**Example:**

Severus Snape

Professor Tom Riddle

English 199

15 April 2018

Title Centered and Capitalized, but Not Listed in Bold
APA Tip

How to Insert In-text (1) and Parenthetical (2) citations in APA:

1) Authors' last names listed using the Oxford comma and “and” spelled-out, year in parentheses after final author’s last name.
2) Both the authors’ last names and year contained within the parentheses using the Oxford comma and ampersand symbol.

Reference Section Citation Example

Author 1, F. M., Author 2, F. M., Author 3, F. M., Author 4, F. M., & Author 5, F. M. (year).
Title of article. Journal Title, volume (issue), page rage. doi:

1) Author 1, Author 2, Author 3, Author 4, and Author 5 (year)
2) (Author 1, Author 2, Author 3, Author 4, Author 5, & Author 6, year)

If a work has six or more authors the citations should look like this: only include the last name of the first author followed by “et al.” (which means “and others” in Latin).

Example:

1) Author 1 et al. (year)
2) (Author 1 et al, year)

If there are two or more references that have six or more authors and have identical citations when reduced (i.e. they have the same first author and were published the same year), then the citation would look like this:

Example:

1) Author 1, Author 2, Author 3, et al. (year)
2) (Author 1, Author 2, Author 3, et al, year)

Notes:

- Last name only- no initials.
- When citation is at the end of a sentence, the period is placed after the parenthesis.
- If the article has one or two authors, cite all names whenever referring to the article.
- If the article has three to five authors, cite all names in the first citation and use the abbreviated format (first author et al.) for all subsequent citations.
- If the article has six or more authors, use the abbreviated format for all citations.
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