 Seeking Faculty Readers

The success of the Writing Proficiency Examination program in evaluating the writing of about 12,000 students each year as part of the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement relies on the participation of faculty from all departments in the University as paid readers. We’re inviting all interested faculty to work with us scoring the WPE. Readers earn a minimum of $210 for a full day of reading.

Full training is provided. For further information, or to sign up for training, please contact Fiona Glade, GWAR Coordinator, at fiona.glade@csus.edu.

3rd Biannual Sacramento State

Reading & Writing Across the Curriculum Conference

Writing Across the Curriculum invites all full-time and part-time teachers to propose an individual presentation or panel for a half-day conference on successful approaches to reading and writing across disciplines.

When: Friday, February 29, 2008
10:00-3:00

Where: University Union Orchard and Forest Suites

How to submit a proposal for the conference:

To submit a proposal, send a 150-200 word abstract with presentation or panel title to wac@csus.edu. Please include your name and department (and names of other presenters for panel proposals).

The deadline to submit a proposal is December 1, 2007

Questions about the conference? Send an e-mail to wac@csus.edu.

Proposal topics could include:
• Effective writing assignments or approaches to student reading and writing
• Departmental initiatives and projects that have been successful at improving student reading and writing
• Using technology to improve reading and writing
• Research or theory relevant to reading and writing across the curriculum
• Any other topics relevant to improving student literacy (including oral, visual, and information literacy)

Individual presenters will be given 15 minutes, and panel presentations will be given 45 minutes.

A conference program will be available in January at http://www.csus.edu/wac/conference.
Responding to Multilingual Student Writers

By Dana Ferris
Professor, English Department

MULTILINGUAL (ML) WRITERS

An Overview. Response to student writing is a challenging task for instructors in all contexts, but the task becomes even more complex when students come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Multilingual (or ESL) writers at Sac State fall into several different categories, including international (visa) students, recently arrived immigrants establishing permanent residency, and “Generation 1.5 students,” referring to those who were either born in the U.S to first-generation immigrants or who arrived here with their parents at an early age. What all these students have in common is that their primary/home/first language was not English and that compared with native English speakers (NES), they arrive at college with relatively less exposure to and experience with the English language and especially with reading and writing English texts.

WORKING WITH ML WRITERS

These observations lead to at least two practical questions: Should we lower or alter expectations for ML writers? One common response to the understanding that second language acquisition takes time is simply to expect less of second language writers, to “cut them some slack” if they make errors in word choice, sentence structure, grammar, or punctuation. Though this may appear to be a sensitive or enlightened teacher attitude, a way of leveling the playing field, in the long run the lowering of standards harms L2 students. The answer is not to lower expectations but rather to improve the conditions for success. These conditions include adequate time for writing, structure and support, and timely, constructive teacher feedback.

Given time and expertise constraints, how can teachers effectively provide language feedback to ML student writers? ML writers unquestionably have linguistic challenges that put them at a disadvantage when completing academic literacy tasks, and the "real world" will expect appropriate levels of accuracy and clarity in their written texts. Thus, the question for teachers is not if, but how, to provide helpful language feedback to ML student writers. Though entire books have been written on the topic of responding to L2 writers’ language errors, the best suggestions for instructors across the disciplines can be summarized as follows:

SUGGESTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO MULTILINGUAL STUDENT WRITERS

1. Do not tinker with style. In most instances, rather than spending time and energy rewriting student papers so that their word choice or sentences sound more sophisticated or elegant,
teachers should focus their feedback on actual errors—incorrect word choice and ungrammatical constructions.

2. **Make most corrections indirect.** “Indirect” feedback refers to pointing out that an error has been made rather than providing the correct form. Indirect feedback is quicker, provides less opportunity for teacher error, and it gives students more responsibility for their own progress.

3. **Be selective.** Marking every single problem in a student paper can be exhausting for teachers and overwhelming and demoralizing for students. It is better to focus on errors which interfere with the comprehensibility of the message and on errors that are frequent and repeated throughout a paper.

4. **Make a summary comment with a few examples marked.** It is not always possible, necessary, or desirable to provide extensive error feedback on a student paper. One helpful alternative is to make a comment at the end of the paper about a problematic error pattern(s) seen frequently (“Check your verbs to see when they need to be in past tense”) with a few examples marked.

5. **Locate errors rather than labeling them.** Some teachers like to use correction codes or symbols in marking student errors. However, research suggests that there may be several potential problems with this practice. Simply underlining or highlighting an error lets the student know that there is a problem. The writer can then decide how to solve it, whether by attempting a correction, rewriting the phrase or sentence, or even deleting it from a revised draft.

Time, support, and effective feedback are critically important to the success of ML writers in classes across the curriculum. They provide the “conditions for success” that help teachers and students to cope with the daunting task of developing high levels of academic literacy in a second language. Though meeting the specialized needs of ML students in our classes can seem like a frustrating addition to our workload, taking the time to provide extra assistance, especially through feedback, can be one of the greatest gifts we can give them.
The Writing Center provides free one-on-one writing help for your students.

Tutors can:

- Help students learn to be better writers
- Give students feedback on focus, organization, and clarity
- Help students brainstorm ideas for their paper
- Help students locate and correct errors

Tutors can’t:

- Edit papers for students
- Address all aspects of a student’s writing in one session
- Tell students what to write

**FALL 2007 WRITING CENTER HOURS**

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<th>Day</th>
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