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### Writing Centers: International Student Writing Issues and Resources

Mandi E. Haag

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This thesis submitted by Mandi E. Haag in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved

WRITING CENTERS: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT WRITING

ISSUES AND RESOURCES

by

Mandi E. Haag

B.A., St. Norbert College, Wisconsin, 2009

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

St. Cloud, Minnesota

Dean

School of Graduate Studies

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This thesis submitted by Mandi E. Haag in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

Mandi E. Haag

Forty-two to 49% of tutorials at St. Cloud State University's writing center are conducted with international students. A percentage this large demands that direct attention be paid to those writing issues specific to international students. This document describes a discovery project investigating the common resources used by St. Cloud State University's writing consultants in dealing with writing issues specific to international students. This project seeks to better understand where gaps exist between student need and resources currently available in the writing center. A survey of the writing consultants and an analysis of tutorial notes over the course of eight weeks revealed the following major writing concerns: article usage, punctuation, word choice, structure, organization, preposition usage, development, coherence and cohesion. This research resulted in the following recommendations for developing supportive writing resources: 1) that the writing consultants provide relevant examples, 2) that workshop student audience focusing on sentence level issues, and that writing consultants make use of Purdue's OWL (Online Writing Lab).

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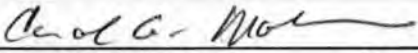
## WRITING CENTERS: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT WRITING ISSUES AND RESOURCES

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*September 2014*  
Month                      Year

Approved by Research Committee:

  
Carol Mohrbacher                      Chairperson



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unfamiliar with international student writing challenges, students can also be judged harshly, possibly leading to undeserved consequences like insecurity about writing ability, plagiarism, lower grades and possible failure. As Emerson, Hoon, and White state, "Writing in English is a difficult literacy to acquire in both first and second-language contexts. Students must write reasonable well in English to succeed in university education. Yet, their lack of writing competence has been a perennial pain, and is affecting their academic and career advancement" (2006). As a result of a fear of failure, some students get frustrated and plagiarize, getting family and friends to do the writing for them or copying and pasting from electronic sources.

Writing centers are alternative learning sites beyond the traditional classroom setting that can reduce this anxiety by encouraging student independence and assisting

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

#### Introduction

When teachers and peers are unfamiliar with the specific problems international students face, these students may fail to receive adequate help in the general classroom setting. Without consistent identification of on-going problems and suggestive correction, writing issues common to international writers often become ingrained and require additional writing support. Because many teachers are unfamiliar with international student writing challenges, students can also be judged harshly, possibly leading to undeserved consequences like insecurity about writing ability, plagiarism, lower grades and possible failure. As Emerson, Hoon, and White state, "Writing in English is a difficult literacy to acquire in both first and second language contexts. Students must write reasonable well in English to succeed in university education. Yet, their lack of writing competence has been a perennial pain, and is affecting their academic and career advancement" (2006). As a result of a fear of failure, some students get frustrated and plagiarize, getting family and friends to do the writing for them or copying and pasting from electronic sources.

Writing centers are alternative learning sites beyond the traditional classroom setting that can reduce this anxiety by encouraging student independence and assisting

in developing student ability. To understand how this is accomplished, it is important to understand the pedagogical methodology in a typical consultation. The process consists of the following:

- Students bring their papers or assignments into the tutorial.
- The consultant asks questions about the following: the assignment, due dates, the genre, their concerns, and what they want to work on.
- The student reads the paper aloud. If the student is not comfortable in reading aloud, the writing consultant reads aloud.
- The consultant asks questions for the purpose of error recognition and clarification of ideas.
- The consultant often uses writing handouts and other resources to demonstrate grammar/punctuation rules and academic writing conventions.

A consultant does not correct or proofread the paper because that does not help create a better writer. Instead, the consultants teach proofreading skills because they want students to be able to analyze their own writing (Shin & Cimasko, 2008). They help international students to identify their patterns of grammatical errors and consider how they can correct them on their own.

All writing consultants are trained to work with second-language writing; some even specialize in this area ("About Our Staff", n.d.). To help them accomplish this, they use a variety of resources including handouts, workshops and online resources. For the purposes of this exploratory study, consultants were interviewed about the resources they use. The Write Place already offers various handouts on article usage,

punctuation, word choice, structure, and organization. In addition to the consultant interviews, I analyzed the artifacts of this study, handouts and client notes. Although handouts are consistently updated, providing an understanding of what works and what does not would create better aids for consultants and students.

### Research Questions

In order to further examine this issue and investigate the gap between student needs and resources, I explored and attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the major international student writing issues for the Write Place?
- How can support materials be more effective in supporting international student writing?

### Background of Writing Centers

Writing centers began as writing labs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since that time, most universities writing centers have offered students free assistance for any form of writings. Students can come to the center to work on graduate school applications and senior theses, as well as first-year composition papers. The main objective of writing centers is helping writers to better understand the conventions of academic and professional writing. Writing centers try to provide non-proscriptive and non-corrective response. The consultant usually does not proofread and edit student work. Instead, the consultants support students in revising their own work. This process is done by conversing with the student about the writing and helping the student in identify patterns of grammatical error in their writing.



Elizabeth H. Boquet's (1999) "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions" states, "Foucault shows us, in the first pages of *Discipline and Punish*, that to extend power is to put it at risk" (p. 465). Giving the students the power over their writing skills can have negative implications when they are unsure how to utilize the power being given. However, the writing center's primary focus is on the individual rather than the social nature of composing, and in the past, individual improvement was seen as necessary only for beginning students. And structurally, writing labs remained closely tied to the classroom and became integral parts of the institutional desire to track students according to ability. The problem is that many university colleagues still see the writing center as a disciplinary measure. The Write Place at St. Cloud State University works hard to break away from this stereotype by actively promoting workshops and giving tours to groups, classes and even individuals to explain the goals and methods of the writing center.

The most significant effort by writing centers to break free of such negative connotations occurred when writing centers gained acceptability through correlating with the psychological field (Berlin, 1987). By doing so, the field of composition relied on its association with psychology to reinforce its claims about language development and acquisition. Psychology offered writing center tutors another means of thinking about the ways of regulating behavior and focusing on cognitivist principles. Using nondirective counseling provided yet another way for tutees to be held accountable for their own achievements by making students responsible for accessing information that they had avoided in the past (Boquet, 1999). Through a

therapeutic closed-door policy, writing centers began to create a positive writing environment that allowed a support system which offers professionalism and encourages consultants to take an unbiased position (Berlin, 1987; Boquet, 1999).

According to their website, the Write Place follows several Core Principles;

We respect the intellectual and experiential knowledge that students bring and commit to working to help them to more fully realize their potential and to support their academic success.

We believe that multiple literacies exist and must be recognized in our tutoring and in the variety of programs which we sponsor (writers' groups, conversation circles for English Language Learners, and workshops).

We believe that all of us best learn to write effectively in a collaborative and supportive environment that is committed to individual growth and individual authorship. (<http://www.stcloudstate.edu/writeplace/faculty.asp>)

Within this kind of environment, the space of the writing center is characterized as active, and consultants are portrayed as having as much to learn as they have to teach. The course taken by all Write Place consultants offers students a chance to understand their roles as helpers, not instructors. Each student must observe and complete practice tutorials before they can fully take on the task of consulting. It is positive for consultants to have this style of interaction, considering the tutees are also peers. Peer consultants understand student writing in a manner that their faculty counterparts cannot, simply because of their different relationship to the academic system. It is for this reason that the training the consultants receive is so important; they are given a background for understanding just how diverse their tutorials and tutees can be. Having an education about multiple cultural writing styles will offer the most impactful assistance to each tutor and tutee.



My interest in this study comes from the course English 353/654 Writing Center Theory and Practice, and my experience as a Write Place tutor and as a writing instructor for international students all within the last 4 years. The positive focus on the writing center at St. Cloud State University represents the constructive work which has already been accomplished and should help students obtain helpful resources.

While collecting and analyzing the data from the client notes and surveys, I found textual resources that help support my research. Historical and research articles be reinforced, and new resources will be produced to provide for the needs of international student writing.

are useful for providing meaningful background information that help me create suggestions for improving the writing center experience for international students. Further research analyzing the processes for working with international students scaffolds the best possible writing center environment for current and future students.

The online data collection program provides demographic information about the international students, which is essential to understanding student learning. Ilene Rubenstein (2006) wrote her article "Educational Expectations: How they Differ Around the World: Implications for Teaching ESL College Students" to explain the variances that exist in ESL educational standards. It is important to recognize that not every student who has completed high school has the level of literacy and language necessary for college work in their own language or English. Understanding these differences can be critical to enhancing the academic success of international college students, as well as providing proper assistance within educational spaces such as writing centers. The article looks at the fundamental implications for the teacher-student relationship, the degree of educational advancement that is available to

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

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students, and the formulation of curriculum. Introducing and analyzing such cultural differences is important when working in a writing center because establishing a better understanding of what tutors may encounter in the work place helps in working with the differences.

Another article that provides more specific information on the unique essence that a student may bring into writing centers is Ilona Leki's (2009) "Before the Conversation: A Sketch of Some Possible Backgrounds, Experiences, and Attitudes Among ESL Students Visiting a Writing Center." This article supports Rubenstein's argument about the importance of understanding that international writers come from many backgrounds and may have very different strengths and needs based on their prior experiences with English and writing. Leki's study is important because there is very little research on lexical issues in writing center tutorials with international writers. Briefly, Leki conducted a small-scale study of four students to examine whether, and how, native and non-native speaking students exhibited differences in lexical strengths and needs during writing center tutorials. The study aimed to explore the consultants' focus on the linguistic aspects of students' texts. The findings were that US-educated learners demonstrated strengths in the areas of lexical facility, flexibility, and intuition. International students and tutors spent relatively more time on discussing lexical issues in their sessions, but tutors did not articulate this in post-

tutorial reflections, which is why the Write Place takes their client notes<sup>1</sup> seriously. By understanding the differences, a stronger method of leading tutorials can be established because consultants will have background on what is needed for progress with both types of students. This article is extremely helpful for representing what goes on in a tutorial for international students because some students may have amazing speech skills, but may lack in basic linguistics skills when writing and consultants need to have an understanding for the reasoning behind such “problems.”

Along with understanding the background of common students utilizing writing centers, it is also important to understand the attitude towards the responsibilities of consultants. Muriel Harris (2008) “Cultural Conflicts in the Writing Center: Expectations and Assumptions of ESL Students,” uses the attitudes expressed by international writers to compare and contrast the theories and pedagogies of many writing centers so that the information can be shared with tutors. By having students respond to a questionnaire, Harris found that the students’ ideas about what should go on in a tutorial often differ from tutors’ ideas. International students tend to see a consultant as someone whose primary role is to answer questions and solve problems, so they do not expect a consultant to ask questions that allow for collaboration.

Conflicting expectations can impede learning. To help remedy this, students give advice to consultants as to how most effectively interact with students from

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<sup>1</sup> Client notes are forms that consultants fill out after each tutorial. These forms include information about what the consultant and client work on during the consultation. The Write Place sends these forms to the clients’ instructors and they are also used for data collection.

different cultures. The suggestions were that consultants be patient, try to learn something about students' cultures, and realize how hard the students must work in order to succeed in an unfamiliar environment. Harris shows that by understanding the assumptions and expectations of international students, writing centers can avoid misunderstandings, resulting in more effective collaboration.

Collaboration between the client and consultant can easily be compromised by the way consultants read the student's writing. Michelle Cox and Paul K. Matsuda's (2009) article "Reading an ESL Writer's Text" focuses on reading as a central act of communication in the tutorial session. The authors explain that because international writers often come from different linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, some aspects of international writers' texts may stand out. The problem is that readers with little experience in working with writers may be drawn to surface-level errors and differences that they see as problematic. By explaining and exploring some of the sources of these differences in writing, the authors present strategies that writing consultants can use to work effectively with international writers. Although the process of reading may seem to be the least important part of a tutorial, it is one of the most important because it is during this process that consultants start to formulate responses to the writing, and these responses are generally part of the client notes.

A common practice among consultants is to ask writers to read their draft aloud during the tutorial, but this strategy is more effective for native writers who can use their understanding of grammar and the flow of English to assess their own writing. One of the major problems tutors have with reading texts written by



international writers is that they are not radically different than from native English-speaking writers, but it is also important to realize that differences are not necessarily signs of insufficiency. The language skill level of each international student determines whether or not they should read their paper aloud. Lower level students tend to internally translate while reading aloud and this impedes their ability to recognize their own errors. This article stresses the usefulness of understanding some of the general characteristics of many international writers' texts and various sources of influence. An analysis of these characteristics helps consultants to understand that each writing center session demands different approaches, even if there is a general process of reading international writing that can be useful. Ultimately, reading is an act of communication, and the art of listening can help both the student and the consultant. Stressing the importance of understanding the differences between non-native and native writing styles represents the importance of the work done in writing centers.

Sharon A. Myers (2008) explores the practical and ethical challenges consultants face when working with second-language writers in her article "Reassessing the 'Proofreading Trap': ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction." Myers argues that tutors cannot expect ESL writers to learn in the same ways or at the same rates as native writers. The problem with consultants' recognition of sentence-level errors is that they actually involve deeper levels of creating and processing meaning. By helping international students correct these errors consultants can help students gain deeper understandings of English so they become better readers and writers of the

language. Myers takes particular issue with writing center scholars and others who view sentence-level revision for students as unethical. International writers present a common dilemma to writing centers: the desire for sentence level interventions from their consultants. Myers uses the article to show that giving students correct grammar or more appropriate vocabulary is perceived as "fixing" the paper, something understood to violate the autonomy of the writer and the integrity of the work's authorship. The problem is that while the ability to speak a given language does not necessarily predict a person's ability to write in it, it is useful to note something about the time involved in spoken second-language study in order to adjust the dimensions to understand students' struggles.

Very often, not having the English necessary to express something, students simply translate directly from their native language. A much more relaxed attitude about "error," one reflecting an appreciation of second language acquisition processes, and better training in the pedagogical grammar of international student would go a long way toward preventing either students or consultants from feeling frustrated with the tutoring process. Consultants need to help students with any level of problems they may be having and there is nothing wrong with taking a more directive approach when students have sentence level errors. Students come into the writing centers giving consultants very little background information about their prior education and it is difficult to not simply teach them where and why to use punctuation and grammar.

In Joy M. Reid's (1987) "The Learning Style Preferences of ESL Students," she follows reviews of the literature that are on learning styles for both native and

nonnative speakers of English. This article presents the results of a questionnaire that asked 1,388 students to identify their learning style preferences, then using statistical analyses of the questionnaires to indicate that non-native learning style preferences often differ significantly native speakers. It examines the fact that international students from different language backgrounds sometimes differ from one another in their learning style preferences as well. To better understand the results, she examines other variables such as gender, length of time in the United States, length of time studying English in the U.S., field of study, level of education, and age. Modifications and extensions used for international student learning styles occur with changes in academic environment and experience. Considerable research in the general area of learning styles has been done with students whose native language is English and with English speakers learning a second language in the United States and Canada.

Reid essentially summarizes a generation of research on learning styles. The results of this study showed that international students strongly preferred kinesthetic and tactile learning styles. These findings lead to two major problems: matching students' learning style preferences with teaching styles, and whether or not student learning style preferences are flexible. If educators can assume that learning styles are adaptable, that learning style preferences can be identified and modified, and unconscious or subconscious learning styles can become conscious learning strategies, then students need to be exposed to the concept of learning styles. The research strongly suggests that if students are able to use multiple learning styles, they have greater classroom success. Reid argues that students should have the opportunity to



assess their own learning style preferences. This study helped facilitate an interest in what the common errors are in international student writing and what steps writing centers can take to help their clients.

Interest in discovering ways to help international students from the Write Place with the problems emerging from the client notes led to David Schwarzer's (2009) "Best Practices for Teaching the 'whole' Adult ESL Learner." This article is based on research of adult ESL students and whole-language principles to create better practices for teaching adults in classrooms. Schwarzer speculates that building a community in the classroom helps provide a safe environment where learners can interact and try using the new language. When students interact in class, they receive comprehensible input and feedback from each other. Whole-language implies that adult learners need to be understood as whole persons rather than just international learners. He uses a vignette to present a typical scenario for an adult instructor to analyze what can be done to improve instruction.

Schwarzer suggests tapping into learners' motivation by using popular media in the form of television programs, films, newspapers and magazines that they encounter in everyday life. The problem is that for a long time, researchers thought of teaching international students just in terms of four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The author discusses how researchers agree that vocabulary development, learner motivation and meaningful interaction are more important in adult learning. The article analyzes how teachers can incorporate resources into class assignments and discussions, such as drawing vocabulary from

programs that are popular in U.S. culture or from programs the students suggest. Schwarzer reminds the reader that adult international students in community programs are a shifting population—they move and change jobs often. When adult learners see their English class as connected to their real lives, they are more likely to invest the effort it takes to attend class or tutorials.

Each of these articles is helpful in understanding the challenges and frameworks associated with working in tutorials with international students. Past research informs this project assisting in the analysis of the data from the client notes, surveys and interviews. With information harvested from my analysis, a set of strategies can be recommended for tutoring ESL students at St. Cloud State University.

### Contributions of Research

Weaknesses in writing competency are a continuing problem in the university setting, affecting international students' academic and career advancement. This problem underpins the importance of this discovery project which attempts to develop a more effective tutoring approach for academic writing instruction. An alternative strategy comes from within the Writing Place's own approach. This paper looks at the appropriateness of the writing center approach as writing pedagogy, learner support and an immersive environment.

The success of existing writing centers seems to lie in the pedagogical approach of "improve the writer, not the writing" (North, 1984), and the practice of

non-directive and non-judgmental individualized student-centered one-on-one tutoring (Harris, 2000). As confirmed by the Learning Pyramid research conducted by National Training Laboratories, the “Lecture” method has the least retention rate of only 5%, while the “Teach Others/Immediate Use of Learning” method, commonly used by writing centers has the largest retention rate of 90% (see Figure 1).

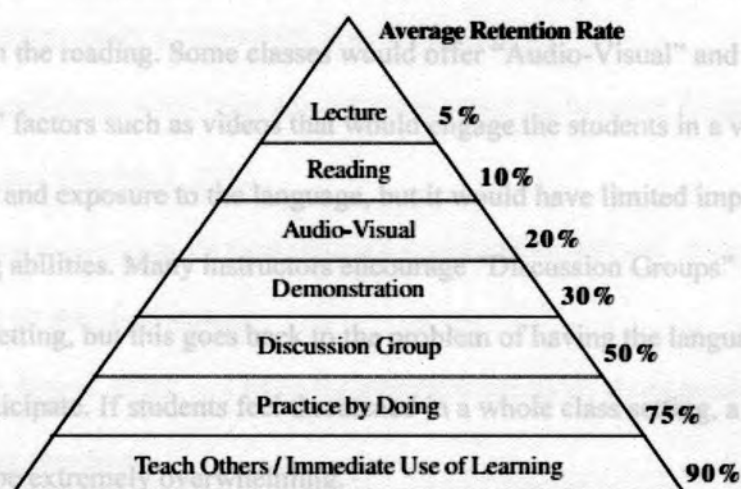


Figure 1: Learning Pyramid

(Source: National Training Laboratories, Institute for Applied Behavioral Sciences, 300N. Lee Street, Suite 300, Alexandria, VA 22314, 1-800-777-5227)

Figure 1

#### Average Retention Rates

The traditional writing class would fall into the category of “Lecture,” which consists of the teacher and the extrovert, native English students dominating the writing handouts and client notes are examined for providing evidence, support and discussion and lessons. This creates limited interaction for international students. The majority of international student are quiet and passive, this is because they do not have

the ability or confidence to ask questions or to talk about their writing. A classroom atmosphere this threatening would inhibit them from asking questions. Some students would probably talk if encouraged, but the teacher may not have the time to assure everyone is given a chance to talk, even in an ESL class. This type of class setting may also include some "Reading" within the class, but mainly outside of the class in the form of assignments. Therefore, students would do what is assigned, but not retain any information from the reading. Some classes would offer "Audio-Visual" and "Demonstration" factors such as videos that would engage the students in a visual form of learning and exposure to the language, but it would have limited impact on the students' writing abilities. Many instructors encourage "Discussion Groups" in this type of writing setting, but this goes back to the problem of having the language necessary to participate. If students feel threatened in a whole class setting, a small group may also be extremely overwhelming.

The Write Place and most other writing centers offer "Immediate Use of Learning" approach combined with "Practice by Doing" that allows students the best form of retention for writing improvement (Emerson et al., 2006). Consultants help students to figure out their struggles and immediately recognize error patterns, then the students can fix the reoccurring errors throughout their writing. This document will look at how to improve this already useful approach to the writing tutorial. The writing handouts and client notes are examined for providing evidence, support and resources.

### Chapter 3

## METHODS AND RESEARCH

### Methodology

This discovery study's chronology is as follows:

1. Gathered client notes from consultations occurring between August 27, 2012 and October 3, 2012.
2. Created a list of top 10 most frequent issues in international student writing based on the client notes.
3. Used the top 10 list as a basis for interview questions about available writing resources.
4. Completed IRB requirements for informed consent for interviewees.
5. Interviewed consultants.
6. Used interview responses to determine gaps between international student needs and resources available in the writing center.

### Interviewees

Understanding the role of the consultants is important. Since the role of the consultant is much more complex than simply tutoring the students one-on-one, St. Cloud State's Write Place refers to the employees as *writing consultants* or simply,



*consultants.* According to the Write Place website, many writing consultants are undergraduate and graduate students just like tutees, and they have first-hand experience with the kinds of writing assigned in university courses. Writing consultants work with students on any writing problems, from developing ideas to learning the conventions of American academic writing. Consultants are trained to meet immediate student needs in addition to long-term assignment goals.

The interviewees were a convenience sample consisting of 10 consultants drawn from the pool of consultants. St Cloud State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was consulted for legal reasons; however, consultant names were not used within the actual document because this information was not as essential as the answers to the interview questions. The interview answers, not the consultant's identity supported recommendations.

The 10 consultants were interviewed to gain an understanding of what resources are used in consultations with international students. Then they were asked about what resources were used for each of the top 10 errors that emerging from an assessment of the client notes. This information helps answer the second major research question: "How can support materials be more effective in supporting international student writing?" The results of the interview come from consultants who have worked at the Write Place for one semester, up to 3 years. Each consultant interviewed for this project has at least one international student who comes in on a regular basis for consultations, some had several regulars.

## Artifacts

For the purposes of this discovery study, two types of artifacts were examined: client notes and writing handouts.

**Client Notes.** To answer the first research question: “What are the major international student writing issues?” the study’s artifacts for analysis were 144 client notes from consultations occurring between August 27, 2012 and October 3, 2012. Each client note states the student’s first language and country of origin. Information was used from client notes which stated that the client’s first language was not English, and they each came from various countries around the world. The client notes used for this study come from consultations with international students with a variety of majors, who are both graduates and undergraduates. Also, the consultations analyzed addressed assignments for more than just ESL and composition courses. Students brought in assignments from a variety of classes, like psychology, biology and political science.

In order to find the main issues the international students at St. Cloud State University face, the Write Place client notes are the main focus of analysis. Here is a visual example of a client note:

To start the client note process, a small sheet of paper is used to collect the specific information from each client, including the course number, the instructor of the class, the client’s native language, country of origin and what the client wants to work on. At the end of each tutorial this information is put into a client note within the writing centers’ scheduling system. Consultants use these notes when students return for further tutoring and the information provided in client notes is used for on-going research addressing client needs. Then, a tally was started of every issue that showed up in the client notes for these students, see Figure 3 below:

St. Cloud State University Writing Center - Google Chrome

https://stcloud.mywconline.com/tn\_view.php?report=18041&action=VIEW&member=sc15229f

Date: October 04, 2013: 2:00pm - 3:00pm

Actual Length of Session: 60 minutes

Resource: Consultant 14 (Main Location, Fall 2013)

Assignment: Essay \*

Instructor: [REDACTED] \*

Course : [REDACTED] \*

Native Language: Japanese \*

Country of Origin: Japan \*

Comments: Worked on understanding the assignment and fully grasping what to write about and how to write it. The client seemed to gain a better understanding of how to go about writing her essay. \*

Email Options: ☐ Email Client Report Form to Client/Student. ☐ Email Client Report Form to Resource. ☐ Email Client Report Form to Administrator.

Figure 2

### Sample Client Note

To start the client note process, a small sheet of paper is used to collect the specific information from each client, including the course number, the instructor of the class, the client's native language, country of origin and what the client wants to work on. At the end of each tutorial this information is put into a client note within the writing centers' scheduling system. Consultants use these notes when students return for further tutoring and the information provided in client notes is used for on-going research addressing client needs. Then, a tally was started of every issue that showed up in the client notes for these students, see Figure 3 below:



• Grammar	III
• Verb tense	II
• Article usage	III
• Plurality	III
• Proper Nouns	I
• Sentence Structure	III
• Punctuation	III

Figure 3

### Example of the Early Research Process

This process was continued until all of the client notes from international students during the allotted time period had been checked. Despite being a smaller population of this semester's Write Place tutorials, international students are still some of the larger populations of the demographics at St. Cloud State University. The client notes of approximately 144 international students were read through. Several of these students were regular clients in the Write Place, with a range of 5 to 15 client notes under their names, which is a high amount of returns for early in the semester.

Once the tally was completed, the categories were defined. As there were about 70 or so issues initially identified as showing up at least once in the client notes, some categories were combined under a more generic title to compact the data. For example, some tutors would list "punctuation" as the main issue addressed in a tutorial, which could cover semicolons, colons, commas, and periods. Other tutors would specifically define "semicolons" as something they worked on in a tutorial. Issues with semicolons and colons only had two or three tallies, and thus were combined into a category titled generically as "punctuation." As comma usage showed

up as a topic from tutorials so often, it was kept separate from “punctuation.” The category of “word choice” also included topics from client notes such as “vocabulary,” “diction,” “syntax,” or “word order.” As all of these terms apply to the choice of words, the categories were combined under one main heading.

**Handouts.** To answer the second research question “How can support materials be more effective in supporting international student writing?” writing handouts were analyzed for effectiveness. Handouts are a very popular resource for consultants working with international students. So, based on interviews, five of the most popular handouts were selected, which represent some of the issues that emerge from the top 10 list generated by the client notes.

The following chapter discusses findings from a study of interviews, client notes and handouts.

3. Organization/Formatting 63

4. Citations 56

5. Tense 47

6. Structure 46

7. Brainstorming 45

8. Content 44

9. Clarity 38

10. Article usage 24

With such writing problems being noted as discussed or worked on in a large majority of the sessions that were documented, a definite and tangible trend has been

established regarding international student writing errors. Since word choice and grammar in general are common problems, the focus in tutorials involving international students should focus on these areas. A study done by Vann, Meyer, and

Lorenz (1984) showed that word choice and article use writing issues were seen as less tolerable and were judged more harshly by university professors across the entire

**Results** aphic polled. The study showed a general trend of less tolerance being shown

Of the approximately 144 client notes for the international student clientele, the top 10 issues that were commonly worked on during tutorials were in order of frequency:

**Client Note Results** tials between the Write Place tutors and international

1. General Grammar/Punctuation 113
2. Word Choice 102
3. Organization/Formatting 65
4. Citations 56
5. Tense 47
6. Structure 46
7. Brainstorming 45
8. Content 44
9. Clarity 38
10. Article usage 24

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After the common errors were understood and broken into the list, the 10 available consultants were interviewed using the questions mentioned in Methodology section. Based on the results of these interviews, a list of helpful hints for future consultants was created to help in scaffolding a resourceful environment for international students. Below is an analysis of the results from the 10 interviews. Each consultant was asked the following questions:

1. How long have you worked at The Write Place?
2. Do you have any international students who are regulars?
3. Do you feel that having international students read their writing aloud is beneficial for the student?

4. What suggestions do you give new consultants for working with international students?
5. Based on the client notes from 8/27-10/3, these are the top 10 issues discussed in consultations with international students. What resources do you use to help students with each of these issues?

The answers to these questions were used to compile a list of the resources being used and analyze the most popular handouts in order to make restructuring recommendations to make handouts that better fit the needs of international students. And Questions 1-3 were used to create a list of helpful hints for future consultants.

Of the 10 interviews, eight consultants felt that having international students read their writing aloud is beneficial for the students. Some of the reasons for this is that it shows true comprehension of their own writing and that the students are better able to catch their own mistakes. The two consultants that did not answer Question 3 with a definitive "Yes" stated that "it depends on the student". The reasoning for this type of answer is that some students are self-conscious and others just find it better to have the consultant read so they may catch the mistakes through listening to their own writing. All the consultants suggested asking what the students have learned at the end each consultation. Some said that they also ask questions throughout the consultation to make sure that the student understands what has been discussed before moving on. Giving exercises, asking questions to check whether students are paying attention and not just reading, asking what they have learnt at the end of the consultation, and asking

are all great suggestions for consultants to use to help while students or consultants are reading the works aloud.

Advice for future consultants is one of the main focuses of this discovery project and Question 4 inspired a list of Helpful Hints for Consultations with International Students:

1. Be Patient
2. Go slowly or slow down if you are noticing some confusion
3. Listen carefully
4. Ask students to repeat if something is unclear
5. Ask questions, reiterate and check
6. Offer visual aids and handouts
7. Review handouts together and practice
8. If there are a lot of word choice issues, ask if the essay was done using an online translator
9. Offer to read aloud
10. Don't be afraid to use a slightly more direct approach

#### Analysis

The final step of the interview involved asking each consultant what resources they use during consultations to remedy the top 10 issues. The answers were put into simple lists, as shown in Appendix G. The list of interview answers was used to tally the resources used to create a simplified list. Below is a list of the main resource for each issue:



1. General Grammar/Punctuation: Handouts
2. Word Choice: Thesaurus
3. Organization/Formatting: Handouts
4. Citations: Purdue OWL and Handouts
5. Tense: Handouts
6. Structure: Handouts
7. Brainstorming: Discussion
8. Content: Assignment sheets
9. Clarity: Have students read aloud
10. Article usage: Handouts

This list shows that handouts are a very popular resource as they were used by consultants when working with 6 of the 10 issues. The Write Place has a wide variety of handouts to offer consultants and students for various writing issues and needs. So, based on this list, five handouts were chosen that represent some of the problems referred to in the artifacts, as well as the textual research.

### Analysis

Based on the studies of Vann, Meyer, and Lorenz (1984), writing issues such as word choice and word order are judged more harshly by instructors than issues such as comma splices and preposition errors, which are commonly seen in native-speaker writing as well (p. 431). Given that word choice and word order are common problems in international student writing, negative impacts on their future writings could result.

Even the most dedicated and driven students may be unduly criticized and penalized for exhibiting these common errors. The potential for international students' education to be negatively impacted by common issues served as a further exigency to examine the writing support resources currently available at the Write Place.

There are several important points to consider when choosing materials to use with consultations:

- It is best not to use material with too many pages, so that students are not overwhelmed with more reading.
- Consultants need to remember to choose materials that are appropriate for the students' level. However, a certain amount of adjustment can be made depending on the type and level of the student. Some examples of adjustments are picking only a particular and relevant portion of a handout to use with the client and finding resources to print out from the internet if the handouts available do not meet the needs of the international student.
- After tutees have been given the handouts, consultants should give a brief explanation and point out, for example, the importance of small print and other parts of the material that are easily missed.
- For handouts to be effective, the content and examples must be appropriate, culturally sensitive, and well-constructed.

Having appropriate handouts gives international students the opportunity to practice English while they gain confidence in their English ability and can also expose international students to cultural differences in writing, and help the students develop



their ability to find important information quickly (Kelly, Kelly, Offner, & Vorland, 2002). Based on the information given during the interview process, five handouts have been selected. A few are good examples of what handouts should look like, while others contain informational gaps and design weaknesses.

The first handout can be found in Appendix A titled Colons and it is a representation of a useful handout for international students. This handout is laid out in an easy to read format on a single page that is nicely spaced. The bolded sections provide the students with the rules for when to use colons. An example or two follows each rule, and the examples provided are simple, easy to read and relate to a variety of assignments. Consultants could then use the back of the sheet to provide examples specific to the international student's assignment. This handout is a great resource to provide for students to help them become successful proofreaders in order to deal with the number one issue, General Grammar/Punctuation.

To accompany a handout like the one in Appendix A, the Revising and Proofreading handout in Appendix B would be useful for consultants to provide international students who come to the writing center seeking these skills. The design of this handout displays the level of importance of the parts within a writing assignment. If an international student comes into a consultation for the first time, this resource could help explain what the Write Place consultants are there to do. It can be used to ask students what they would like to work on during their consultation so that they can see if they are dealing with big issues or if they just need help with fine tuning. This handout would also be effective resources support during the workshops

and presentations with small groups. Students could also take the handout home and use it as a checklist for the steps they take during their writing process.

A good handout is designed in a way that does not waste the consultant or the student's time by filling up the space with nonessential information or examples.

Unlike lectures, content-rich handouts are documents that students can actually learn from, later, on their own. According to Brody (1999), there are four steps to follow for improving your handouts:

1. Stay focused on your goal—always customize your handout around what you are trying to accomplish.
2. Avoid an information glut—avoid the temptation to overload audience members with information simply because it's possible. Delete any material that does not directly support your message.
3. Don't be afraid of white space—wide margins and lots of room for taking notes is advisable. A good guideline to follow is to fill no more than 2/3 of the page with words.
4. Make sure it looks good—the appearance of your handout is vital. When people pick it up, the handout should feel good (paper quality) and look good (printing or copying quality).

Consultants cannot treat handouts like an afterthought; they are an effective learning tool that international students can re-use for other classes and other writing assignments. When handouts are poorly designed, they will very likely be discarded.

By contrast, quality handouts are used and ensure that international students will gain valuable knowledge through their use.

The handout in Appendix C is titled Comma Rules, which shows page one of a two page document. This document is designed much like the Colons handout, but contains a lot more information. It consists of seven rules and multiple examples. This may work as a great handout for native speaking students, but international students may get confused by the amount of content. To help international students struggling with comma usage within their writing, it would be helpful to see which rule they are struggling with and have a handout specific to that type of comma usage. If there were handouts for each rule, consultants could provide students with examples, discuss the rule in regards to their own writing, and then the student would be able to better catch this issue on their own.

“Article and preposition errors are also some of the most difficult for the second language learner to master. These seemingly simple grammatical forms are also among the most difficult for native speakers to explain” (Ritter, 2005). Although Article Usage was 10<sup>th</sup> on the list of top 10 issues, during the interview, many consultants expressed frustration with explaining articles. Most said they used verbal examples and handouts, but when each answered this final question, it was done with hesitation. For example, one when asked this question one of the consultants interviewed rolled her eyes, paused and said, “Well, typically I use an example that would come up in conversation. Other times I try to use our handout on articles, but sometimes that just causes more confusion.” Appendix D represents part of the

frustration expressed by consultants for dealing with the issue of article usage. The handout, *The Use and Nonuse of Articles*, is two pages of complex vocabulary and confusing examples. When students are introduced to new and complicated terms during a consultation, they will be hindered from learning how to properly use articles within their writing. Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides students and consultants with a better resource for explaining article usage. This resource can be printed to be given to a student struggling with article usage or they can access the site from home. Also, article usage is one of the issues that may cause consultants to use a more direct approach<sup>2</sup> during a consultation with international students because it is such a complex grammatical rule, which only has a minor effect on the overall meaning within writing.

Finally, Appendix E is a handout on Brainstorming. The issue of Brainstorming is number seven on the list, but many students come to the Write Place for this step in the writing process. This handout consists of many words in paragraph form, so it would just be more reading for an international student. Instead of using this handout, consultants should be encouraged to have student use idea maps, like the one on the following page:

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<sup>2</sup> A direct approach to consultations involves the consultant doing more of the talking and giving instructions while the client passively makes the changes suggested.

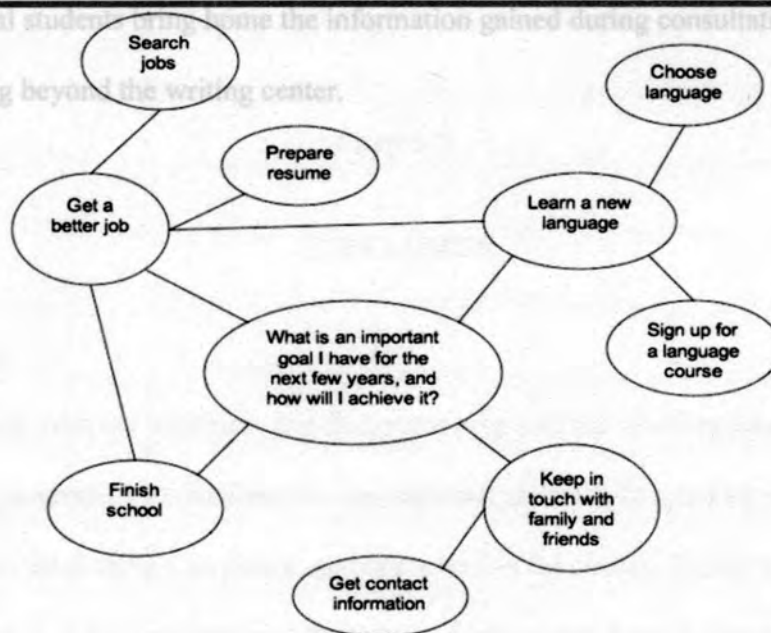


Figure 4

## Sample Idea Map

Mapping out ideas in this way will provide international students with a starting point for their writing, instead just a wordy handout about how to brainstorm. Allowing students to see a visual representation of their thoughts will help them to add more ideas and sort through them on their own.

Handouts carry some of the burden from consultants for conveying grammatical information that can be difficult to explain. They also help students to learn complex material presented in real time while taking notes and practicing their newly acquired proofreading skills. To properly do so, handouts need to meet certain standards of length, provide relatable examples and not confuse student with too much reading or new vocabulary. Consultants use these handouts as tools to help



international students bring home the information gained during consultations improve their writing beyond the writing center.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

#### Implications

Along with the handouts, this document proposes the development of a workshop, presented by consultants to international students, focused on article usage, punctuation, word choice, structure, and organization for classes. Doing so will be instrumental in aiding international students in dealing with these issues in consultations because they will have prior knowledge of the issues that will be gained by taking part in these workshops. Presenting this information in a workshop setting at the beginning each semester would help students become familiar with these issues before their first major writing assignments. The workshop groups would include small group workshops with five to seven international students who would work on specific writing skills specific to their needs. These workshops can be conducted with groups of students of similar proficiency level from similar disciplines (Emerson et al., 2006). It would work well to allow for whole group and individual instruction, set for an hour in length, and to meet the needs of the students both individually and in the small groups.

Like all workshops provided by the Write Place, a PowerPoint presentation would be created and students would have access to this document upon request.

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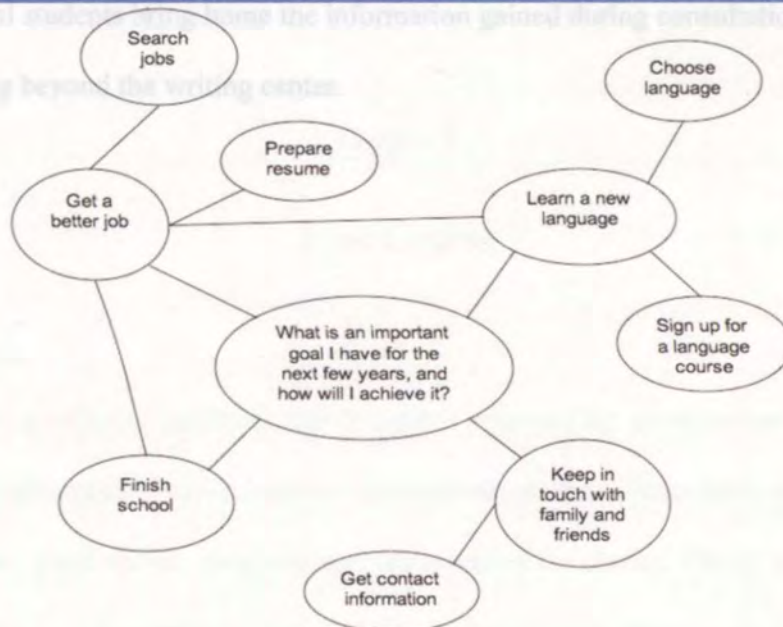


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Providing students access to these tools improves their access to writing resources that help them to revise their own papers, while also helping consultants in explaining possible issues that may come up in an international student's writing during a consultation. These tools would help consultants by allowing them to go through those issues more quickly in the tutorials so they can address higher order concerns.

Another resource that should be considered with regard to international student writing is Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL); consultants often utilize and recommend this site to students. Presenting students with OWL addresses two areas of concern in meeting the needs of second language writers as they relate to practices: error correction and increased interactivity which would meet international student writer expectations and create independent proofreading skills (Angeli et al., 2011). OWL is a site that offers resources that students can read or copy. Some of the materials are interactive, like short quizzes. It also offers information to prevent issues of plagiarism by international students. These resources provide learning opportunities to help students deal with writing issues, learn what plagiarism is and how students can avoid both within their writing. According to Anderson-Inman (1997),

As the Internet and World Wide Web become increasingly accessible to students, writing teachers are exploring ways to use this technology to expand the types of feedback and writing assistance available to students. One such strategy is the use of an Online Writing Lab or OWL.

OWLs provide support for students' writing struggles and efforts by providing accessibility to electronic resource. By providing access to innovative writing



resources, Purdue OWL (2012) promotes accessibility to writing resources for students and consultants around the world.

Through proper use of this site, consultants can utilize a wonderful writing resource during consultations, while providing students with a resource that they can use on their own time with the help of Smartphones, tablets or laptops. According to De Szendeffy (2008),

To understand the value of computers in education, especially language learning, we must first distinguish between the two functions, or modes of use, of these machines: tutor and tool. Teachers use computers in class as tools for producing collaborative or creative projects that encourage authentic student-student and student-teacher interaction. (p. 10)

Consultants can also use OWL as a positive reinforcement for the handouts and as easily accessible resources to make international students feel like they can work on many writing issues independently.

### Main Argument

For international students, whose first language is not English, the writing center provides writing support not provided by the traditional writing classroom. The Write Place consultations can give international students additional writing support that is needed for them to become proficient writers through available and well-designed handouts. According to Harris and Silva (1993), international students "have written and enhanced their understanding of writing as a process of communication and a diversity of concerns that can only be dealt with in the one-to-one setting where the focus of attention is on that particular student and his or her questions, concerns, cultural presuppositions, writing processes, language learning experiences, and



conceptions of what writing in English is all about" (p. 525). Therefore, the consultations performed at the Write Place can meet the varying needs of the international students seeking writing help. By providing handouts with the changes prescribed in Chapter 4, consultants can provide resources for the students that will allow them representations of how to correct many of the issues that come up in their writing. This allows international students to have the skills necessary to proofread on their own and use the writing center to focus on the content and clarity of their writing assignments. This reinforces the writing center's philosophy that, "the goal of tutors who work in the center is to attend to the individual concerns of every writer who walks in the door—writing process questions, reader feedback, planning conversations, and so on" (Harris & Silva, 1993, p. 525). Consultants should be encouraged to let international students know that issues are a natural part of language learning and that most readers will be more interested primarily in what writers have to say. So providing students with workshops and handouts designed specifically for dealing with the top 10 issues will allow for more academic consultations that will meet the higher level needs of each student.

Another resource to use when dealing with the top 10 issues is OWL Purdue. Anderson-Inman (1997) states, "The goal, of course, is to improve students' skills as writers and enhance their understanding of writing as a process of communication and collaboration" (p. 650). Since the ESL site was designed from a user-centered perspective it contains vast amounts of writing information in diverse media for clients and consultants to explore together. According to Moody, "[besides] links to on-line

dictionaries, information about writing modes, sample essays or letters, most of the resources provided by OWL center on grammar” (1996). The grammatical categories on the site include; articles, verbs, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, nouns, possessives, pronouns, punctuation rules, sentence combining guides, and spelling guides. These are great resources for a consultant to use for explaining English grammatical structures. With resources like those mentioned, OWL Purdue’s ESL portion is highly beneficial to both writing consultants and international students. Helm, Guth, and Farrah (2012) “Technology has undeniably broadened access to education” (p. 106). The availability of electronic or virtual “handouts” designed to give students guidance on word usage and specific components of the writing process will help students become independent proofreaders. Consultants can help show international students how to access and use these readily available resources.

The problem of plagiarism can be a difficult topic during consultations and OWL offers students a positive understanding of how to avoid this huge issue in the field of writing. Plagiarism is a prevalent problem that needs special attention when working with the writing of international students. Plagiarism is a common problem for international students because copyright laws are different in other countries. Consultants can show international students this section of OWL because it offers a detailed description of plagiarism and the common terms used in relation to plagiarism. Byrne (2011) states,

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (*OWL*) ([owl.english.purdue.edu/owl](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl)) is the number one place I refer students and parents to learn not only about plagiarism, but about all aspects of the writing process. From conducting

research to creating citations in MLA, APA, or Chicago style, Purdue OWL has it all. (p. 11)

Having students read this section and take notes would be a positive activity to do with students during a consultation to help them understand the terms when they are brainstorming or beginning the process of writing a research paper to prevent plagiarism issues right away.

Consultants will also need to consider their students' English proficiency when choosing resources in OWLs. Many international students benefit most from resources developed specifically for non-native English speakers. Areas to look at include the simplicity of explanations, vocabulary choices, sentence construction, and language used in example sentences or essays. For example, resources to help international students master "the," "a," and "an". While these three words can be very difficult for international students to master, resources are written for different English proficiency levels. A more advanced international student may benefit from "An Overview of English Article Usage for Speakers of English as a Second Language" by John R. Kohl. Kohl, which offers a detailed look at articles. A less advanced international student may benefit more from a resource which focuses on definite and indefinite articles and has short sample sentences, simple vocabulary, and brief explanations (Moody, 1996).

The resources available on OWL provide consultants with aids to show students for developing writing skills and provide a place for students to find answers to common questions with their writing. A few resources that consultants could really

utilize are; writing across the curriculum, writing in the disciplines, links to OWL workshops, exercises useful for ESL instruction, links to ESL resources on the Internet that student and instructors can access outside the classroom. If consultants were to gain an understanding of this site during the course English 353, they would be provided a positive resource to better understand the resources they could offer international students. Then, they can show students how to use the site, instead of just recommending it.

During the course English 353: Introduction to Writing Center Theory and practice, “[when] tutors ask how to prioritize among errors, they should be encouraged to begin by looking for what has been done well in the paper, acknowledge that, and go from there” (Harris & Silva, 1993, p. 525). Regardless of their level of skill in collaboration or interpersonal interaction, consultants will not be able to elicit knowledge from international students if the students do not have that knowledge in the first place.

Since writing center pedagogy has given high priority to working collaboratively and interactively, a major goal of a tutor is to help students find their own solutions. Tutors thus don’t see themselves as “instructors” who “tell” things. (Harris & Silva, 1993, p. 533)

Consultants are there to help with a whole range of writing processes, not just to provide help with grammatical issues, but they can give tips and provide resources for students to deal with those issues on their own. By providing international students with the proper handouts and other resources, such as OWL, they are giving students tools necessary for becoming independent proofreader and stronger academic writers.

### Limitations

One of the minor limitations of consultations with international students comes from how they react to the environment of the writing center setting. Unresponsive students can create a very uncomfortable consultation. As Harris states, “You recognize the student’s sense of being withdrawn from the tutorial by the student’s body language, voice tone, the long silences that meet your attempts to chat, the monosyllables that pass as answers, and the shrugs that follow” (2008). There are multiple reasons that can cause a student to be unresponsive, here are a few of the major reasons;

- The student is forced to be there.

- Writing is not important to this writer.

- The writer may be anxious about revealing ignorance or poor writing to anyone and nervous about being critiqued.

- The student is overwhelmed by other concerns.

The writer doesn’t have the language to talk about her writing (Harris, 2008).

The final reason on this list greatly impacts international students. Consultants need to go into consultations with international students understanding that “[without] such abilities, which are often lacking in beginning writers, they don’t know how to explain to someone else what they want to work on or what their problem is” (Harris, 2008).

The scheduling form, shown early, provides international students one resource to provide them with a voice and take control of what needs to be done during a consultation.



Ritter's study found the following:

Negotiation not only allows the tutor to understand the message more clearly, it also provides the speaker an opportunity to develop language proficiency. The implication for the writing center context is that we should negotiate both the meaning and the grammatical forms of the text in order to assist ESL students in improving their writing and grammar. (2005)

Consultants can use the schedule forms to create questions that would help create a conversation with the student about what they want. Taking this step would show the international student that the consultant takes time to look over this form and that the choices made by the student on this form impact the atmosphere of the consultation. As Severino stated, "Tutors need to get to know their students so they can find the level or point at which they can relate to the issue at hand" (2005).

Getting to know what the student wants out of the consultation by reading over the schedule form before the student comes in creates an open communication during consultations that positively impacts the outcomes and leads to repeat consultations with international students.

Another minor limitation that was brought up by consultants after the interview is that many students struggle to understand their assignments. This limits data on how consultants deal with the top 10 issues because a majority of the consultation time is spent figuring out the assignment or reading through the articles or reading assignments that the writing assignment is based on. As Severino put it "a U.S.-based curriculum often not only baffles, but disempowers international ESL students, forcing them to perform in a field that is not only linguistically uneven, but culturally full of potholes. The cultural challenges facing international ESL students also pose

challenges for their tutors in the writing center” (2005). Therefore, the consultants’ “goal is to help find points of contact and intersection between the students and the assignment” (Severino, 2005). Consultants and international students can work together to read, analyze and find claims and supporting details in the first few pages of a reading. Then students can outline the rest of the essay on their own time. Also, consultants “can fill in the context with what [they] do know or remember, ask other writing center instructors for background, or look it up together...” (Severino, 2005). Severino states, “Tutors’ roles as Contact Zone Contact Persons and culture-crossers often involve exchanges with students about meanings, uses, and forms of words, as words and their equivalent or approximate translations have resonances and connotations that vary by culture, language, and experience” (2005). When a Write Place consultant and international student negotiate meanings and forms in the student’s text, this helps international students improve their proficiency in English. However, this does not always work with certain kinds of issues because although many international students will acquire grammatical aspects of academic writing to a certain point, their knowledge may never go beyond that level. As Ritter said, “When it comes to local errors like this, there is not much to negotiate and the best thing is simply to tell the writer which word to use” (2005). Therefore, when working with international students, consultants may need to take a slightly different approach to consultations by being slightly more direct to help students meet the larger goals of their writing assignments.

As the data from the client notes was gathered, an issue was discovered that could affect future research. Each consultant had their own terminology for what was worked on in the consultations with the students. The variations in terms made it difficult to tally the common errors. The early stages of this research consisted of collection of exact wording from each client notes which were then organized into the more generalized categories to tally how often the errors occurred from 8/27 to 10/3. A recommendation, to help with future data collection, is that consultants use a checklist, see page 42, for their client notes so that there is consistent terminology used for recording what is worked with in each consultation and what resources were provided to the clients.

Category	provided/used?
today?	
Grammar	
Article Usage	
Pronouns	
Comma Use	
Word Choice	
Word Order	
Organization	
Sentence Fluency	
Transitions	
Phrasing	
Citation	
MLA	
APA	
Sources	
Brainstorming	
Developing ideas	
Content	
Thesis	

Figure 5

## Sample of Checklist

This change would be very simple, but also allow staff to maintain consistency with record keeping. Following the same format as the appointment form on the schedule website would work really well. An example of the digital form, found on the following page, would be filled out by students prior to their consultation:

What was worked on today?	What resources were provided/used?
<b>Grammar</b>	
Verb Tense	
Article Usage	
Plurality	
Pronouns	
<b>Punctuation</b>	
Comma Use	
<b>Diction</b>	
Word Choice	
Wordiness	
Word Order	
<b>Sentence Structure</b>	
Clarity	
Organization	
Sentence Fluency	
Transitions	
Phrasing	
<b>Citation</b>	
MLA	
APA	
Sources	
<b>Brainstorming</b>	
<b>Developing ideas</b>	
<b>Content</b>	
<b>Thesis</b>	

Figure 5

## Sample of Checklist

This change would be very simple, but also allow staff to maintain consistency with record keeping. Following the same format as the appointment form on the schedule website would work really well. An example of the digital form, found on the following page, would be filled out by students prior to their consultation:



**What would you like to work on today?**

- ☐ understanding the assignment
- ☐ brainstorming ideas
- ☐ researching
- ☐ thesis statement
- ☐ transitions and flow
- ☐ introduction
- ☐ conclusion
- ☐ punctuation and grammar
- ☐ logic
- ☐ rhetorical strategies
- ☐ organization
- ☐ argument
- ☐ APA
- ☐ MLA
- ☐ Chicago
- ☐ IEEE
- ☐ CSE
- ☐ other citation format
- ☐ clarifying ideas
- ☐ tone
- ☐ vocabulary
- ☐ paragraphing
- ☐ document design
- ☐ using visuals (charts tables graphs and other images)
- ☐ quotations
- ☐ formatting paper (margins titles and page numbers)
- ☐ wordiness
- ☐ being more specific
- ☐ adding detail
- ☐ academic voice
- ☐ expanding your writing
- ☐ polishing final draft
- ☐ other

\* You must select at least one of the above answers.

**What kind of writing are you working on?**

- ☐ essay
- ☐ outline
- ☐ reflection paper
- ☐ response paper
- ☐ literature review
- ☐ film review
- ☐ lab report
- ☐ business report

Figure 6

### Student Appointment Form

It is important to create a mutual plan and set of goals for the consultation. For a majority of international students grammar is considered a higher-level concern. By using this form, the consultant can see what the student expects and share with them what is realistic. So, using the same format for the client notes, consultants would be able to better track what was addressed in the tutorial, check if the goals of the students are being met, and create an organized system that will not be influenced by word choice of the consultant.



### Future Research

Another step in understanding how to improve the tutorial experience for international students would be to conduct a survey about their positive and negative experiences while working at the Write Place staff. By creating a survey focused on the Write Place, students could provide feedback about the positives and negatives of the writing center, while also providing tutors and instructors with information about student writing struggles. This survey would give information to help with the design of handouts and presentations.

International students and writing center consultants need to keep interacting with and learning from each other. They each have insights, methods, research, and experiences to share. For consultants within writing centers, it is useful to know that they can pull information from both research and language teaching approaches used in ESL classrooms. Writing center directors can share with ESL teachers one-to-one pedagogies that work in the writing center as well as our perceptions of how individual differences interact with various classroom pedagogies on different students. They can work together to share knowledge of the kinds of questions students ask, first-hand observations of how students cope with writing assignments and teacher responses, and information about encounters with non-native differences that interfere with learning how to write in classrooms in the United States. Such information can only serve to improve the writing center experience for students and staff.

Following the implementation of this study's suggestions, I recommend that a similar follow-up study can be performed approximately one year from first implementation. The study would consist of another analysis of the revised client note system.

After the results of the current study are analyzed by the Write Place staff and a possible workshop, PowerPoint, and/or handouts on the "common international student writing problems" are created and presented, the future study should seek to identify the problems of international students by looking for changes in the frequency of the identified problem areas to determine the effectiveness of the changes.

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#### APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
APPENDICES

Use of Colors Handout

## Colons

Use colons:

- after an independent clause that precedes a list

The use of these punctuation marks often confuses students: commas, semicolons, colons, and dashes.

- to separate an explanation, rule, or example from a preceding independent clause

After a sleepless night, the senator made her decision: she would not seek re-election.

- To emphasize an item that follows a complete sentence

The preoccupied burglar didn't notice who was standing right behind him: a smiling police officer.

## APPENDIX A

- after the salutation of a business letter

Dear Mr. Peterson: Dear Faculty Member:

## Use of Colons Handout

- in the heading of a business letter

To:  
From:  
Subject:  
Date:

- between chapters and verses in the Bible

Genesis 1:18-20 Vol. 2:34

- as part of a title

Moods and Methods: Writing in the 50s

The Writer's Place © 2004  
by Nancy Kupperman

## Colons

Use colons:

- ✦ after an independent clause that precedes a list

The use of these punctuation marks often confuses students: commas, semicolons, colons, and dashes.

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*The preoccupied burglar didn't notice who was standing right behind him: a smiling police officer.*

- ✦ after the salutation of a business letter

Dear Mr. Peterson:

Dear Faculty Member:

- ✦ in the heading of a business memo

To:  
From:  
Subject:  
Date:

- ✦ between chapters and verses in the Bible

Genesis 1:18-20

Vol. 2:34

- ✦ as part of a title

Moods and Methods: Writing in the 80s

The Write Place © 2006  
By Petra Neumueller



# the Write Place

## REVISING AND PROOFREADING

### REVISING

#### THE BIG PICTURE

theme

thesis statement

introduction

logic sentences

conclusion

#### BUILDING BLOCKS

paragraphs

\*proof

\*evidence

\*support

\*data

## APPENDIX B

### PROOFREADING

#### Revising and Proofreading Handout

#### FINE TUNING

Punctuation • commas, semicolons,

colons, periods, apostrophes,

capitalization, quotes

Sentences • subject

verb agreement,

pronoun-noun

agreement,

fragments,

wordiness,

spelling

#### TYPING

type

#### THE CLEAR BIG PICTURE

# *the Write* Place

## REVISING AND PROOFREADING

### REVISING

#### THE BIG PICTURE

theme                  thesis statement                  introduction  
topic sentences                  conclusion

#### BUILDING BLOCKS

paragraphs  
•proof   •evidence   •support  
•details   •examples

### PROOFREADING

#### FINE TUNING

Punctuation • commas, semicolons,  
colons, periods, apostrophes,  
capitalization, quotes  
Sentences • subject  
verb agreement,  
pronoun-noun  
agreement,  
fragments,  
wordiness,  
spelling

#### TYPING

typos

THE **CLEAR**. BIG PICTURE

## Comma Rules

### Use a comma...

1. before a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, nor, yet, for, so) that separate two independent clauses:

*She is a very smart young lady, but sometimes she cannot see what is right in front of her.*

*David is really good at soccer, and he is an excellent student as well.*

2. after an introductory word, phrase or clause that comes before a main clause:

*However, I find the curtains in Mrs. Schied's house to be tacky and distracting.*

*Because we were having so many computer problems, everyone in the lab lost their papers.*

*Clearly, Amy doesn't know how to tie her shoes.*

*If you get this last question right, you will win \$1,000,000; if you get it wrong, you walk away with nothing.*

## APPENDIX C

3. around words, phrases and clauses in the middle of a sentence when they are not essential to the meaning of the sentence:

*My new friend, Marcus, always brings his dog to class.*

*Kanye West, a famous performer, took a big risk during the 2009 VMA awards.*

4. between items in a series:

*She broke the chair, the fridge, the toaster and my maffin pan!*

*If she starts paying attention in class, gets her work in on time and does some extra credit, she might be able to pass.*

5. before and after a quotation within a sentence:

*"There are many strange things in the world," he said. "I think your brother is one of them."*

The Write Place ©2010  
Last Revised by Colleen Hites

## Comma Rules

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*Because we were having so many computer problems, everyone in the lab lost their papers.*

*Clearly, Amy doesn't know how to tie her shoes.'*

*If you get this last question right, you will win \$1,000,000; if you get it wrong, you walk away with nothing.*

3. **around words, phrases and clauses in the middle of a sentence** when they are not essential to the meaning of the sentence:

*My best friend, Marissa, took me out to dinner for my birthday.*

*Kanye West, a famous performer, took a big risk during the 2009 VMA awards.*

4. **between items in a series:**

*She broke the chair, the fridge, the toaster and my muffin pan!*

*If she starts paying attention in class, gets her work in on time and does some extra credit, she might be able to pass.*

5. **before and after a quotation** within a sentence:

*"There are many strange things in the world," he said, "I think your brother is one of them."*

## THE USE AND NONUSE OF ARTICLES

The articles *a* for *an* and *the* are signals for four distinctions:

1. countable vs. noncountable
2. definite vs. indefinite
3. first vs. subsequent mention
4. general vs. specific

For more information about the countable/noncountable distinction see the Write Place's handout *Count and Noncount Nouns*.

### Definiteness

- *A* and *an* signal that the noun they modify is indefinite, that it refers to any member of a class.
- *The* signals that a noun is definite, that it refers to one particular member of a class.

Thus, specifying phrases occur freely with *the*, but only in certain contexts with *a*. The exception is when a noun is mentioned the first time. (See the next section on newness.)

### APPENDIX D

Indefiniteness	
a dog	the dog
in any dog	in the one in the room
a book	the book
in any book	in the one on the shelf

### The Use and Nonuse of Articles Handout

Note: *The* is also used when talking about a specific person or thing.

The White House
The theory of relativity
The 1995 federal budget

### Newness

- *A* and *an* are used to introduce a noun when it is mentioned for the first time in a piece of writing.
- *The* is used afterwards, each time the noun is mentioned.

An award ceremony at the Metabolism could not specially focus attention on such attention. Nonetheless, when it was asked that Clinton would be presenting medals to their officers, interest in the ceremony intensified.



## THE USE AND NONUSE OF ARTICLES

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Indefinite	Definite
<b>a</b> dog ie: any dog	<b>the</b> dog ie: the one in the corner
<b>a</b> book ie: any book	<b>the</b> book ie: the one that I'm reading

**Note:** **The** is also used when what its noun refers to is unique.

The White House The theory of relativity The 1996 federal budget
--

### Newness

- ♦ **A** and **an** are used to introduce a noun when it is mentioned for the first time in a piece of writing.
- ♦ **The** is used afterwards, each time the noun is mentioned.

An award ceremony at the Metrodome would not normally have attracted so much attention. Nonetheless, when it was leaked that Clinton would be presenting medals to three athletes, interest in the ceremony intensified.
--

## Brainstorming

You have to write a paper. You may or may not have a topic about which you have some ideas. In any case, you know you don't have enough ideas to write your paper. Brainstorming is a technique that may help.

If you don't have a topic, brainstorming can help you find one. Think of any and all possible ideas on which you could write. At this point, don't worry if the ideas seem unreasonable or absurd. The purpose of brainstorming is to give you as many ideas as possible. You can sort them out later.

When you discover a topic for which you already have some ideas, you can brainstorm to generate ideas about your subject. Just think of any and all words, examples, ideas, events, etc. that relate to your subject.

You may do your brainstorming in a group like most people, the more likely, with your teacher or writing coach, or alone. Just make some provision for recording your ideas. You may have someone write down what you say as you brainstorm about, you may write about as you think of them, or you could brainstorm about into a large piece of paper and write down ideas as you can.

### APPENDIX E

Here is an example of one student's brainstorming. The assignment is to analyze a problem in the student's life.

#### Brainstorming Handout

go home this weekend? school tonight class? boyfriend what to wear to dance  
need a ride home this weekend parking on campus no class now  
money - not enough need another job job party, getting my allowance  
don't food at home - time to sleep?

As you can see, the ideas generated ranged from reasonable to the absurd, but the student did come up with a topic - her need for another job. When she brainstormed on this idea, she came up with the following:

job - hate it - why Betty always talking about it behind my back? That hurt  
make customers who love it - need more money - what could I do? Maybe  
bookstore or other job on campus - would have breaks off too and not have to  
drive so much - campus won't pay as well - mother? NO!

The student was able to analyze her problem and come up with a solution in only a few minutes of brainstorming. Try it. Brainstorming can work for you, too.

The Write Place student © 1995

## Brainstorming

You have to write a paper. You may or may not have a topic about which you have some ideas. In any case, you know you don't have enough ideas to write your paper. Brainstorming is a technique that may help.

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When you discover a topic (or if you already have one), you can brainstorm to generate ideas about your subject. Just think of any and all terms, examples, ideas, areas, etc. that relate to your subject.

You may do your brainstorming in a group (the more people, the more ideas), with your teacher or writing coach, or alone. Just make some provision for recording your ideas. You may have someone write down what you say as you brainstorm aloud, you may write ideas as you think of them, or you could brainstorm aloud into a tape recorder. Set yourself a time limit and come up with as many ideas as you can.

Here is an example of one student's brainstorming. The assignment is to analyze a problem in the student's life. This is what she wrote:

go home this weekend? school-English class? boyfriend what to wear to dance  
need a ride home this weekend parking on campus nuclear war  
money—not enough need another job job-petty, gossiping coworker  
diet food at dorm time to sleep?

As you can see, the ideas generated ranged from sensible to the absurd, but the student did come up with a topic—her need for another job. When she brainstormed on this idea, she came up with the following:

Job hate it why Betty always talking about me behind my back? Feet hurt rude customers who never tip need more money what could I do? Maybe bookstore or other job on campus would have breaks off too and not have to drive so much campus won't pay as well matter? NO

The student was able to analyze her problem and come up with a solution in only a few minutes of brainstorming. Try it! Brainstorming can work for you, too.

## Interview Question Results

### 1. What suggestions do you give new consultants for working with international students?

- Go slow listen very carefully have them repeat things and ask if the essay was a translation.
- Slow down.
- Be patient and don't get frustrated.
- Be patient and be aware that they may act like they know but they don't.
- Be patient.
- Ask questions, reiterate, and check.
- Don't be afraid to be a little more direct with the students.
- Talk slowly use visual aids and use handouts with explanations.
- Patience, take your time, and offer to read aloud.
- Review the handouts and practice.

## APPENDIX F

### Interview Question Results

## Interview Question Results

### 1. What suggestions do you give new consultants for working with international students?

- Go slow listen very carefully have them repeat things and ask if the essay was a translation.
- Slow down.
- Be patient and don't get frustrated.
- Be patient and be aware that they may act like they know but they don't.
- Be patient.
- Ask questions, reiterate, and check.
- Don't be afraid to be a little more direct with the students.
- Talk slowly use visual aids and use handouts with explanations.
- Patience, take your time, and offer to read aloud.
- Review the handouts and practice.



### Resources Commonly Used for Top 10 Issues

1. General Grammar/Punctuation 113: written demos, handouts, background, handouts, handouts, knowledge and handouts, handouts and examples, handouts, punctuation pattern sheet, exercise handouts based on the specific issue, handouts and handbooks
2. Word Choice 102: synonym finder book, thesaurus, thesaurus on word, talking, knowledge and dictionary or synonyms, knowledge and Word and thesaurus, handouts and thesaurus, Word and google, Word, thesaurus
3. Organization/Formatting 65: handouts and assignment sheets, handouts, handouts, OWL, handouts, 5 paragraph format and outlining, APA handouts and have students use the handouts depending on handout, 5 paragraph essay handout and intro and conclusion handout, handouts
4. Citations 56: Purdue OWL Reworks handouts, manuals and Purdue, Purdue or handouts, OWL, OWL and guides, handouts and OWL, style handbook, OWL and the books, APA vs. MLA sheet, handouts
5. Tense 47: SVO examples, background as a native, handouts, linguistic class information, handouts and top of head, handouts and general knowledge, examples, asking questions, handouts
6. Structure 46: assignment sheets, handout, handouts, knowledge, SVO, good writing tips and general knowledge, punctuation pattern sheet, same as #3, handouts

### APPENDIX G

### Resources Commonly Used for Top 10 Issues

## 7. Resources Commonly Used for Top 10 Issues

1. General Grammar/Punctuation 113: written demos, handouts, background, handouts, handouts, knowledge and handouts, handouts and examples, handouts, punctuation pattern sheet, exercise handouts based on the specific issue, handouts and handbooks
2. Word Choice 102: synonym finder book, thesaurus, thesaurus on word, talking, knowledge and dictionary or synonyms, knowledge and Word and thesaurus, handouts and thesaurus, Word and google, Word, thesaurus
3. Organization/Formatting 65: handouts and assignment sheets, handouts, handouts, OWL, handouts, 5 paragraph format and outlining, APA handouts and have students take notes, handouts depending on handout, 5 paragraph essay handout and intro and conclusion handout, handouts
4. Citations 56: Purdue OWL Reworks handouts, manuals and Purdue, Purdue or handouts, OWL, OWL and guides, handouts and OWL, style handbook, OWL and the books, APA vs. MLA sheet, handouts
5. Tense 47: SVO examples, background as a native, handouts, linguistic class information, handouts and top of head, handouts and general knowledge, examples, asking questions, handouts
6. Structure 46: assignment sheets, handout, handouts, knowledge, SVO, good writing tips and general knowledge, punctuation pattern sheet, same as #3, handouts

7. Brainstorming 45: what they know, experience, just talking, collaborative interaction, questions, outline handout and notes, charts, drawing and mind maps, discussion
8. Content 44: discussing topic, personal sources, just talking, assignment sheet, assignment sheets, assignment sheet and question the writer, assignment sheet, depends on the student and restate sentence to check meaning, handouts and rubric/assignment sheets, close reading
9. Clarity 38: ask "do you understand?", ear as a native speaker, talking, having students read it, SVO and handouts, general knowledge, reading the sentence aloud, talking, read aloud
10. Article usage 24: act like you are practicing conversation, handout, talking, handouts, alternative sentences and examples, handouts, general knowledge and example, direct instruction and handouts, handout and examples, handbooks

## Informed Consent Form

### Title: Writing Centers: International Student Writing Issues and Resources

You are invited to participate in a research study of *Writing Centers: International Student Writing Issues and Resources*. You were selected as a possible participant because of your experiences as a consultant at The Write Place. This research project is being conducted by Mandi Haag to satisfy the requirements of a Master's Degree in English at St. Cloud State University.

### Introduction

This study accompanies a discovery project which investigates the common practices used by consultants to deal with the writing issues international students address during tutorials, in order to better understand where gaps may exist in the strategies and tools offered.

### Purpose

By analyzing what works and where there are problems, a set of recommendations can be created for current and future consultants to efficiently provide support and maintenance of composition skills for international students.

### Study Procedures

In order to find the main issues the international students at St. Cloud State University face, the Write Place client notes will be the main focus of analysis. Client notes are data that is collected within the tutorial by each tutor. In the client note process, a small sheet of paper is used to collect the specific information from each client. Examples of this include the course number that the tutorial is for, the instructor of the class, the client's native language, and country of origin. At the end of each tutorial this data is then put into a client note within the writing centers' scheduling system. A short note for each client's session that is also saved to the digital database. These notes include information regarding what was discussed during the tutorial. In the notes, the assignment title is often included, and the main concerns/issues that a tutor notices or talks about with a client in a tutorial are also recorded. Tutors can use these notes when students return for further tutoring and the information provided in client notes is used for on-going research. Then, the final step of this discovery project would be talking directly to experienced consultants. By creating a couple interview questions, the consultants would be able to provide useful insight into the frameworks and gaps involved in working with international student writing. An institutional review board (IRB), would be initiated for legal reasons; however, consultant names would not be used within the actual document because this information is not as essential as the answers to the interview questions.

### Benefits

Benefits from this study include providing accurate recommendations for consultants working with international student writing.

### Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the information gathered during your participation in this study will be maintained. Your personal identity will remain confidential. You will not be identified by your name in any published material. All data will be kept in a file cabinet in a locked office.

### Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University or the researcher.

## APPENDIX H

## Informed Consent Form

## **Informed Consent Form**

### **Title: Writing Centers: International Student Writing Issues and Resources**

**You are invited** to participate in a research study of *Writing Centers: International Student Writing Issues and Resources*. You were selected as a possible participant because of your experiences as a consultant at The Write Place. This research project is being conducted by Mandi Haag to satisfy the requirements of a Master's Degree in English at St. Cloud State University.

### **Introduction**

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### **Benefits**

Benefits from this study include providing accurate recommendations for consultants working with international student writing.

### **Confidentiality**

The confidentiality of the information gathered during your participation in this study will be maintained. Your personal identity will remain confidential. You will not be identified by your name in any published material. All data will be kept in a file cabinet in a locked office.

### **Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University or the researcher.



## Informed Consent Form

The study investigator may stop your participation at any time without your consent for the following reasons: if you fail to follow directions for participating in the study, if the study is canceled, or for reasons deemed appropriate by the research coordinator to maintain subject safety and the integrity of the study.

### Research Results

At your request, I am happy to provide a summary of the research results when the study is completed.

### Contact Information

If you have questions right now, please ask. If you have additional questions later, you may contact me at 920-471-5166 or [hama1006@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:hama1006@stcloudstate.edu), or my adviser, Carol Mohrbacher, at 320-308-5472 or [camohrbacher@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:camohrbacher@stcloudstate.edu). You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

### Acceptance to Participate in the Write Place consultant study

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consent to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty after signing this form.

Subject Name  
(Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Subject  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_