

基調講演 1

“Supporting the College Writer: The Emily Balch Seminars for First-Year Writers and the Writing Center at Bryn Mawr College”

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Thank you all for attending. I also want to thank Tsuda College and Kansai University for the honor of participating in this writing center seminar. I extend greetings from Gail Hemmeter, the director of the Writing Program at Bryn Mawr College. She wants me to let you know that she's very sorry she can't be here, and that she hopes we have more opportunities for exchange in the future.

My presentation is in three parts. First, I'll talk a very little bit about myself; then, I will move quickly to discuss my experience with the Writing Center at Bryn Mawr College; finally, I'll talk about my own first-year writing course.

I am currently a lecturer in English literature at Bryn Mawr College, where I have taught many different literature courses, including seminars on Jane Austen, Romanticism, and eighteenth-century topics. I've also taught writing on every level of college education, including struggling writers, first-year writers, and senior English majors on their capstone thesis projects. I was the interim director at Bryn Mawr College Writing Center for a year; prior to that I was, a few years back, the co-coordinator of the Writing Program with Gail Hemmeter.

As a way to begin, I thought it might be useful to look at what I think are some of the unique qualities of students at Bryn Mawr. My colleague [Jeannine Johnston] might disagree with this generalization, but I think Bryn Mawr students are unique and perhaps not typical of the entire American landscape.

First off, there is a certain homogeneity of experiences and behavior. Students often arrive at Bryn Mawr with strong academic backgrounds and also with strong ambition. They don't come to Bryn Mawr because it is their second or third choice; usually it is their first choice. Also, again generalizing, students at Bryn Mawr tend to be good at being students. What I mean by that is that they are polite, prepared, attentive, and, most importantly I think, they understand that to learn means possibly or probably to change what they know. This is not true in some larger institutions in American education, unfortunately: in some of these schools, students don't imagine they are changing themselves in significant ways by going to school.

Students at Bryn Mawr do bring a diversity of backgrounds, however, so there are economic extremes represented at Bryn Mawr. We have very wealthy students, whose parents are able to pay the whole tuition themselves. But we also have scholarship students who pay almost no tuition and are subsidized by the college. Then of course we have many middle-class students who use a variety of funding sources. The language or writing-skill level is usually high. There is also now an influx of students from many countries, especially from China. Often they need extra support with their writing in English. As a world-class school, of course, we have many geographical regions represented.

Turning now to the Writing Center at Bryn Mawr College, I'm going to talk about some of its foundational concepts and the way that the Writing Center especially impacts first-year writers.

You have some of the language from the website at Bryn Mawr Writing Center, which is pitched to students, on your handout. It aims to get students to understand and appreciate what the Writing Center can offer them. For starters, the writing center strives inculcate or encourage habits of seeking out and using feedback.

Often ambitious students will not seek help. We try to get students to envision writing as a process; that, in addition to simply getting the initial idea out on the page, writing also means revising.

The Writing Center encourages collaboration, both between the tutor and the student, but also between the teacher and the tutor, which is something we'll talk more about tomorrow. Finally the Writing Center is very interested in supporting the first-year writing classroom, or the EMLY classrooms, which I'll talk about a little more later.

The Writing Center encourages an atmosphere of feedback, so that feedback becomes a normal part of thinking and writing. We know that feedback is what experienced writers crave. The Writing Center tries to show students that this is the case; for instance, as an academic writer, if I were to send an article out for publication, I would always have other people look at it; I would read and appreciate their feedback. Students need to learn that this is the way the world works. In addition, the Writing Center supports instructors who encourage students to use peer-reviewing and to build it into their writing process. As first-year writing instructors, we encourage teachers to have their students read and comment upon each other's writing. So the three kinds of feedback that I have identified here are instructor to student, peer-review (students to each other), and between the tutor and the student. The Writing Center supports all three.

Writing as a process is something I mentioned a few slides ago. Basically, for me at least, writing as a process means thinking about what revision means. There are at least three components to this: first, an initial drafting, which might include producing many different kinds of writing: free writing, transcribing your notes, taking quotations from different texts; the second component involves outlining, reorganizing, redrafting; the third component, crafting the final revision, involves something I call turning writer-based prose into reader-based prose, which I'll talk about more later. Basically, it's about transforming your writing into something that people want to read.

Based on the work of Linda Flower, this transformation of writer-based writing into reader-based prose is a conceptual framework that the Writing Center uses and that I also use. It provides a way to think about helping students to understand that writing isn't just about putting words on a page, that it's about re-envisioning, re-imagining, re-seeing what you write.

Writing with an audience in mind means giving the reader a context, a clear structure, and some guiding expectations for what to expect in the paper. These elements, however, do not come naturally. They are skills that have to be learned. Writer-based prose, what we all produce at the outset, doesn't transform itself: we have to revise it actively. It's important for students to understand this—it's important I think for any writer to understand this. It's a good moment, actually, when you can let students know that the place they are coming from is where every writer is coming from.

Flower prefers, thus, to think of writers as experienced or inexperienced, instead of using value-laden labels such as good and bad. She discovered through her research that experienced writers believe that writing really only begins when you get the words on a page. Inexperienced writers, by contrast, think that that is the endpoint; in other words, that when you get the words on the page, you're finished. So this is a good way to think of your students as not making mistakes but as just not understanding that the process works in a different way than they have previously imagined.

Writer-based prose is something we want student writers to move beyond, however, so I'm not encouraging this to be the endpoint. As Flower shows us, writer-based prose often has an egocentric focus, a narrative organization that might be chronological, and a kind of a list or survey structure. (I'll talk more about this later.)

So, with these limited attributes, what is good about writer-based prose? Why do tell students they have to go through the phase of accepting their writer-based writing? Why do we have to accept it? Flower explains. She discovered that, for one, it's a natural way of trying to impose order on experience, one of the first ways that we do this. It is not just error. Writer-based prose, she also discovered, develops from the inner speech of early childhood; it's the outward articulation of thinking, maybe the first one. It's evidence of something that the psychologist Piaget called "episodic memory." Again, it's our very first attempt to transform our inner voice to an outward expressive voice.

Writer-based prose allows the writer to think in what Flower calls "complexes," which describe loose collections of related objects. It's a rational way to think, but it still lacks the abstract, logical relationships of *concepts*.

Finally, writer-based prose provides an order for writers, a kind of conceptual structure with "slots" into which you can place things. Let's say, for instance, you have a list that's numbered 1, 2, 3, 4. You know that something has to go into every slot, for every number. So often the

conceptual structure offered by writer-based prose is chronological--“first this happened, what happened next was”--or it’s serial—“the next item on the list is....” It is rational, but not particularly deep or interesting.

Again, writer-based prose is where we all begin. Yet I think we’re all starting to see some of its limitations. Writer-based prose is often characterized by an egocentric focus, a single point of view that doesn’t conceive of other perspectives, that doesn’t imagine that readers are more interested in issues and ideas rather than the writer’s own process of discovery. Egocentric expression is often marked by “saturated” language, Flower’s term for words that have really clear meaning for the writer, but which may be ambiguous for the reader.

If somebody, for instance, reports on a tour of a factory, they would write down everything they observed, from watching the raw materials go in, to the output of the finished product, and in the order in which she saw it. Such a chronicle would be logical, but not interesting for a reader. In literature this might translate to a student analyzing a Shakespeare play by taking the reader through all five acts sequentially, one act at a time, describing every line. Also logical, but not insightful or interesting, and does not reveal evidence of any deeper thought.

Finally, writer-based prose relies on a kind of survey structure, in which you can see that information seduces or overwhelms the writer in her desire to get it all down on the page, and ends up trumping her ideas and her intentions to explain them. The writer in this case again will make lists and she’ll imagine revising as simply a process of adding items to them.

Reader-based writing, which is what we want to lead the students to produce, shows evidence of a shared goal, a hierarchy of ideas, explicit conclusions, and clues to the reader.

Evidence of a shared goal, as I tell students, can take many forms. It’s as if the writer is saying to the reader: my thesis answers questions that I bet *you* are interested in, too. It’s about thinking of the reader as somebody you are talking to, that you’re having a conversation with, that you share interests with. A hierarchy of ideas means it is as if you are saying to the reader: there are lots of parts to this thesis and potential ways to digress. I am going to prioritize and focus its topics for you. It means you’re doing the work for the reader of organizing the material; you’re not leaving it up to the reader to do it herself.

In reader-based prose, conclusions are explicit, (conclusions in the broader sense of findings). So a reader-based essay or paper will present its finding, its thesis, at the forefront of the paper; in a short paper this will often mean in the first paragraph. An inexperienced writer might not have developed a thesis when she begins to write. And, furthermore, they might not know that it’s OK not to know. And that’s something I work with students on doing: recognizing that a thesis is something they have to *arrive* at, not something they should impose on their writing—their thinking—from the very beginning.

And finally, clues for the reader are just ways for the writer to help the reader understand where she is taking them in the paper. I’m not going to talk about this one; I’d like instead now to shift topics and discuss the ways in which the writing center is part of the class that is outside of the classroom. I’ll skip to the next slide.

I think this might be a helpful graphic after all that text, to help us imagine how the writing center, the instructor, the student, and the student’s peers all work together. Many relationships are possible in this model, with the exception of that between the Writing Center and the student’s peers.

The instructor of course has a direct relationship with the student. The instructor and the Writing Center collaborate, which is something that I’ll talk about tomorrow in the second presentation. And the instructor and the student’s peers collaborate in that the instructor has the peers review each other’s writings. So the writing center is conceptualized in this model as a way to extend the classroom beyond the classroom. To effect this, the Writing Center is very committed to working with the first-year writing program, the so-called EMLY classes. That may be something that’s different that we can discuss from the way that the writing program operates at Tsuda College.

I have a couple of examples here, which you may look at your leisure. Some detail the ways in which the writing center collaborates with the instructor. The Writing Center posts information on its website; this example shows faculty how to help students learn to proofread.

Proofreading errors and writing errors are two different things, of course. I think that's important for a teacher to know as well as for students to know. As a teacher you can begin to recognize the difference between somebody who's not paying attention in terms of polishing a final draft, and more significant problems in presentation like grammar, expression, syntax, and so on.

The Writing Center supports the EMLY classroom, and we work on things like how to build a thesis, organization, conclusions, and the use of sources. These are all things that we work on both in the first-year writing classroom and in the writing center. The Writing Center, though, is not a place for punishment. It is not a place for remediation. It's not a place for schooling students about errors.

One important point here is that instructors can get a sense from the Writing Center of how an assignment works from how the tutor reports back to the teacher. In the normal course of day-to-day tutoring, the Writing Center tutor draws up a brief report on the student's progress (this is also pedagogically useful for the student tutor) If the student consents, that report will be sent on to the teacher, who can then evaluate how the student is with the writing assignments (and thus provide a means of evaluating the assignment's effectiveness). The main point here that I'll end with in this area is that instructor expectations drive the tutors' agendas. The tutor does her very best to be on the teacher's side, to help the student understand that this is what the teacher has assigned for her to do, and that she needs to work to make her own sense of it.

First-year writing seminars at Bryn Mawr College are called the Emily Balch Seminars. You have some text from the website that you may read on your own. I will say, though, that Emily Balch was a 1946 Nobel laureate and also a Bryn Mawr College alumna. We named our first-year writing seminars after her quite recently.

Emily Balch seminars focus on reading texts, perhaps more narrowly and more deeply than they had previously, and are designed to help students become more fluent readers and writers, help students to make connections among texts, helps them hone their critical thinking skills and engage with the community of thinkers, helps them to work with using evidence and to improve verbal expression and practice of the mechanics of writing.

It's important to note, however, what EMLY seminars are not and what they do not do. They are not research courses. We do not spend any time talking about methods or methodology of research. As an EMLY teacher, I select all of the texts that they read. They are not lecture courses, they are seminars. They are not about mastering content; the student is not tested on her knowledge of any particular topic. And they are not discipline or genre-specific. In my class I have a variety of texts from diverse fields: sociology, anthropology, philosophy, law, cultural studies, as well as literature.

The operating assumption with EMLY courses is that you are writing to think. That means that you have to think differently about how you think; to gain fluency of thought and expression; explore new and divergent ideas; work on reflective thinking. How you think about the process by which you arrive at an argument; how you make authentic connections to your reading; how you interact with the text; how you create meaning in community with other writers. It's not about correctness or right answers.

I'll end with a quotation from Michel Foucault, which I was delighted to find in preparing this presentation: "I'm an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before." Our students are so focused on performing and being skillful and maybe even assertive with what they've learned and what they say, that they don't always consider writing to be part of their process of intellectual experimentation. Thank you.