



Friday @ the Center: February 2, 2007

Writing Notes for Everyone

In a recent survey, 305 executive companies were asked what they looked for in a job candidate. The top three choices were “teamwork skills,” “critical thinking and analytic reasoning skills,” and “oral/written communication.” One of the frequently touted values of a liberal arts education is its ability to develop these skills in all of its graduates, no matter what the major. Furthermore, one of SPU’s undergraduate learning outcomes is the ability to communicate effectively. This is a teaching responsibility that we all share; it is not limited to the English and Communication departments. This week, *F @ C* begins a series of postings on effectively teaching good written communication skills. If we want our students to write well, we have to teach them how to write well. And that is the responsibility of the entire faculty.

Each week’s “Writing Notes” will feature two components: 1) a discussion of an aspect of the global process of writing, and 2) an explanation of one of the most common “finishing” errors that college students make. In working with students on their writing, it is important to pay attention both to global issues of focus, clarity, logic, and organization, as well as to the finishing details of grammar, punctuation, documentation style, etc. Each discipline has its own kind of writing assignments, expectations, and documentation, yet there are some common elements in good writing on which we can all focus.

GLOBAL TIP: The official SPU writing guide and handbook is *The Everyday Writer*, by Andrea Lunsford. This text is used in all the University seminar courses and writing courses, and it would not be unreasonable for you to list it as a required text for any course. You could use it as a guide for preparing writing assignments and commenting on them, making reference to particular sections. If a lot of instructors repeatedly referred to this text, students might become accustomed to consulting it when writing. *The Everyday Writer* identifies twenty surface errors that most commonly appear in American college writing. These kind of errors give the impression of sloppiness and ignorance, and they might doom a job application if the competition is tough. Each week’s finishing tip will focus on one of these errors. **FINISHING TIP:** According to Lunsford’s research, the most frequent punctuation error in college writing is **missing a comma after an introductory element**. Sentences can open with three different kinds of introductory elements: a word, a phrase, or a clause. Students don’t really need to identify which kind of introductory element is involved. Rather, they simply need to think about introductory elements.

Hmmm. . . What if everyone on campus who assigns writing in the next week took five minutes in class the day the assignment was and focused on introductory elements? What if instructors gave a few examples, and then ask students to read through their papers looking for introductory elements and inserting missing commas before they turn in the paper? What if when the instructors read these papers, they all paid special attention to this rule, just for this week?

Advising Q & A: Changing Advisors

Q: I want to let my USEM students know how to change their faculty advisor next quarter. How do students do that?

A: Students can make that change in Banner. They would log into **Banner**, click on **Student Menu**, then to **Academic Progress Menu**, and click on **Change your advisor(s)**. If they run into any issues regarding that form, feel free to have them check with their corresponding academic counselor in Student Academic Services for assistance.

February Events Sponsored by the Center:

- **Women's Tea:** "Mentoring Women Students"
Faculty Panel: Cindy Price, Kerry Dearborn, and Chris Chaney
Feb. 5, 3:30-5:00 pm, Library Seminar Room
- **Alfred S. Palmer Lecture:** "God and the Art of Happiness"
Dr. Ellen Charry, Margaret W. Harmon Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary
Feb. 12, 7:30-9:00 pm, Upper Gwinn
- **C. May Marston Lecture:** "Keep it Short! Writing and Teaching History in the Roman Empire"
Dr. Owen M. Ewald, C. May Marston Assistant Professor of Classics
Feb. 12, 7:30-9:00 pm, DH 150
- **Faculty Workshop:** "Effective Office Hours"
Susan Gallagher, Director of CSFD
Feb. 20, 12:30-2:00 pm, Library Seminar Room

Susan

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