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UNH Writing Programs

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WRITE FREE OR DIE

The Newsletter of the UNH Writing Programs

Volume 3, Issue 1

Fall 2016

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Quality vs. Quantity in Student Writing

Ed Mueller
Director, University Writing Programs

How much writing is enough? The UNH Writing Intensive Guidelines state that writing should be “substantial,” but they don’t specify a page count. In fact, the guidelines state that writing may take many forms, depending on the context, to include multiple short assignments as well as traditional longer writing projects, such as term papers and theses. Although many WI courses at UNH do employ these longer assignments, especially in the humanities, there has always been some uneasiness about the amount of writing that is (or

should be) accomplished in a WI-designated course, sometimes expressed in a desire for a guideline specifying a minimum page or word count. Although it is not the intent of this piece to weigh in on this question in the WI Guidelines, recent research sheds some light on the issue. The findings of “The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-institutional Study” suggest that the approach to writing is a more significant factor than the length of the assignment.

In the study, a prominent team of composition researchers collaborated with the Council of Writing Program Administrators to append a module about

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Future Tense: *Upcoming Writing Across the Curriculum Events*

•**January 5, 2017 Workshop: Incorporating Attention to Documentation/Citation in Writing Assignments (9:00a-1p, Memorial Union Room 330/332).** Citation and documentation are among the most often mentioned concerns of both students and faculty. Not only about format, attention to citation and documentation happens at the confluence of multiple issues, such as information literacy, academic convention, and questions of plagiarism. In this workshop, there will be a panel with representatives from the Writing Programs, Dimond Library, EN401, and a cross-disciplinary group of faculty who will share their practices. Attendees will workshop with colleagues on developing or revising their own materials or approaches. Please bring an assignment (or an idea for an assignment), a rubric, or some other feedback system (or an idea for one) that you'd like to discuss, develop, or revise. Offered through CETL: please watch for their announcement in order to RSVP. Lunch will be provided.

•**March/April (TBA) 2017: Grammar for Grown-Ups: Dealing With Error in Student Writing. Guest Speaker Dr. Tom Carnicelli.** Non-English teachers (and even some English teachers, in private) often voice concerns about feeling ill equipped to characterize and respond to “grammar” (error) in student writing. This presentation and workshop will help to inform faculty of the conventions of grammar and usage and equip them to better recognize and more meaningfully respond to error in student writing. Dr. Carnicelli, Professor of English (Emeritus) in the English Department of the University of New Hampshire, has been a Director of First-Year Writing and taught a popular grammar class at UNH.

•**Spring 2017: Student Exit Interviews (TBA):** The Writing Committee will again be conducting exit interviews with a panel of graduating seniors on their writing histories at UNH. Faculty are invited to join in this event. Watch for an announcement in the next newsletter.

•**WI Faculty Retreat, June 2017:** See page 3.

•**WI Course Proposals:** Fall 2017 Semester proposals are due by March 31. See: <http://www.unh.edu/writing/uwr/faculty/WIproposal/>

WAC(ky) People

UNH Writing Program

Ed Mueller, Director
 Molly Tetreault, Writing Ctr Dir.
 Brad Dittrich, Associate Director
 Matt Switliski, Associate Director
 Corey McCullough, Associate Director

Writing Committee:

College Representatives:	Term End
PCBE - Vacant	2019
COLSA - Iago Hale (Biological Sciences)	2016
CEPS - John Gibson (Math and Statistics)	2018
COLA-1 - Marcos Del Hierro (English)	2019
COLA-2 - Petar Ramadanovic (English)	2017
CHHS - Robert Barcelona (Recreational Management and Policy)	2019
UNHM - Gail Fensom* (English, Director of First-Year Writing Program)	2017

* Faculty Chair

Permanent Representatives:

Writing Program Director
 Ed Mueller (Academic Affairs)

Director of Composition
 Christina Ortmeier-Hooper (English)

Center for Teaching Excellence
 Catherine Overson (Academic Affairs)

Discovery Committee
 Kathrine Aydelott (Dimond Library)

Ex officio (non-voting):

Committee Secretary
 Elizabeth Smith (Registrar)

The best writing is rewriting.

-E.B. White

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writing to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) administered at eighty baccalaureate institutions, garnering responses from 29,634 first-year students and 41,802 seniors. The aim of the study was to determine "how and to what degree writing is associated with learning and development," with specific attention to examining the effect of the amount of writing compared to instructional practices (204). Although it does not measure actual outcomes, the NSSE is a well-established, large-scale instrument that measures student participation in educational activities that have been linked to desired outcomes.

More specifically, the NSSE gauges "Deep Approaches to Learning" based on student responses to questions about activities experienced in the curriculum. It also asks for self-reported information on "Perceived Gains in Learning and Development."

The added writing module consisted of 27 questions shaped around three constructs: *Integrative Writing Processes*, students communicating with others between receiving the assignment and submitting the final; *Meaning-Making Writing Processes*, students engaging in activities associated with integrative, critical, or original thinking; and *Clear Writing Expectations*, instructors communicating what students should show in their writing and their criteria for evaluating student writing. To capture the amount of writing done, the study used questions in the standard NSSE that ask students to report on the number and length of papers written.

The study used various models of regression analysis to determine the

correlation between the writing module constructs and the page counts to the NSSE components on deep approaches to learning and perceived gains. The findings not only demonstrated that "in every case, the effects of the constructs were much greater than the effects of the number of written pages," but also that the effect of page count was "0% in all but one variable" (228). These findings are also consistent with what student panelists in our annual exit interviews have reported about their levels of engagement with writing assignments at UNH.

The authors acknowledge that the study deals in correlation and not causation, and that the NSSE relies on self-reports, "so its results must be viewed as provisional until a similarly large-scale study using direct measures of students' activities and writing can be conducted" (204). Certainly, the authors would also acknowledge that that there are legitimate learning goals and forms of writing that do require longer products. The findings suggest, however, that assigning more writing is not necessarily a corrective (or even a virtue) in itself.

Coming back to the UNH WI Guidelines, it is interesting to note that they have much to say beyond the "substantial writing" question and include activities in support of the constructs (such as scaffolding, revision, feedback, write-to-learn, among others). It could be that shifting emphasis to the approach, process, and other uses of writing could not only be more efficient, but more effective—at least worth thinking about when the paper stack looms.

For more information, please contact Ed at: edward.mueller@unh.edu. ▲

Works Cited

Anderson, Paul, et al. "The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-institutional Study." *Research in the Teaching of English* 50.2 (2015): 199-236.

Annual Writing Intensive Faculty Retreat, June 2017



The UNH Writing Program is looking forward to reprising the well-received WI Faculty Retreat experience at the Omni Mount Washington Hotel in early June 2017 (followed by a 1/2 day session at UNH in August). Among the goals of the retreat will be to give faculty a fuller awareness of the principles underlying WI courses, to equip them with practices to enhance working with student writing, and to forge connections among WI faculty. Watch for an announcement with application instructions early in the Spring Semester.



Participants in the 2016 Writing Intensive Faculty Retreat getting “serious” about grammar.

For more information, please contact Ed Mueller: edward.mueller@unh.edu. 📧

I am looking for a perfect pen, a Bucephalus, a Joe DiMaggio, a Sarah Vaughan of a pen...from it ideas would flow in orderly profusion. It would blot when breaches of good sense, self-deceptions, and lies were written with it. Held loosely, it would toss off charmingly written sentences; pressed down upon, it would touch the profound. It would permit no dull patches; only brilliance would issue from it: penetrating insights, fantastic formulations. Writing with such a pen would be like cantering along the Pacific Ocean on a palomino, instead of what writing really is— stopping and starting in a junk wagon down a thousand broken-up alleys.

-Joseph Epstein

The Dangling Modifier: Open-Source and Free Resources for Instructors of Writing and Writing-Intensive Courses

Corey McCullough

Associate Director, University Writing Programs

The democratizing function of the Internet has led to the proliferation of information on any given topic—and writing, grammar, and punctuation are certainly no exception. Fortunately, within that universe are useful writing resources (gratis) for teachers and students, including online writing handbooks, open-source writing textbooks, writing & punctuation exercises and quizzes, PowerPoints and other instructional videos/vidcasts, and podcasts. For faculty who might desire the material support of a writing handbook but who would be reluctant to require their students to buy one, these resources can provide an alternative.

Open-Source Textbooks on Writing and Writing in the Disciplines

Though there are advantages to traditional, hard-copy writing handbooks, a growing number of alternative, free, online versions are available. *College Open Textbooks* (<http://collegeopentextbooks.org/>) is a large collection of open-source, college-level texts, PDFs, and links to resources in 25 different disciplines including writing. Comprising Wikibooks, Creative Commons-licensed texts, PDFs, and embedded links, materials are generally sound and reliable, despite occasional broken or expired links. Some resources, particularly full-length texts, have a suggested donation. *Writing Commons* (<http://writingcommons.org/>) is a “comprehensive, peer-reviewed, award-winning Open Text for students and faculty in college-level courses that require writing and research.” Content covers topics such as information literacy, writing processes, research methods and methodologies, writing theory, collaboration, genre, and style. While continuously updated and easily searchable, *Writing Commons* contains banner ads, which some may find distracting or annoying.

Online Sources That Equate to Handbooks

There are also a number of free online resources that provide content similar to handbooks. The oldest and most popular is the *Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab)* (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>). Structured more like a website than a traditional handbook, it is capacious, continually updated, and easily searchable within the categories of general writing, research and citation, teaching and tutoring, subject-specific writing, job-search writing, and ESL writing. Many first-year students report already being familiar with the *Purdue OWL*, which includes print-friendly resources. Some topics, including comma usage, are even accompanied by PowerPoint presentations and vidcasts.

Other colleges and universities have also created their own virtual online writers’ handbooks covering general college-level writing issues, writing in the disciplines, writing for the workplace, and resources tailored to particular courses. Two of the most comprehensive and broadly useful college websites are the University of Illinois (<http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/>) and the University of Wisconsin (<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/index.html>). The University of Illinois Center for Writing Studies site includes grammar resources, citation styles, ESL resources, writing tips, and links to other institutions’ resources, including the *Purdue OWL*. The *UW-Madison Writer’s Handbook* consists of a website that works more like a typical handbook, offering content about academic and professional writing, writing process, structure and style, grammar and punctuation, and citation within a single index. The *UW-Madison Writer’s Handbook* features convenient hyperlinks that open dialogue boxes containing definitions of terms and pages that can be saved and printed as PDFs.

Online Writing Handouts

Handouts on particular topics are much easier to come by than single-source comprehensive sites. The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill has a strong selection of handouts (<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/>) along with some useful macro-level tips for teachers of writing and writing-intensive courses. Likewise, the University of Chicago has regularly updated resources pertaining to grammar, punctuation, style, and usage, as well as ESL and science/technical writing: <http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/grammar.htm>. Of course, the University of New Hampshire Connors Writing Center has handouts as well, available in hard copy at the writing center and also for download in PDF form via the website <http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/handouts/>.

Interactive and Print Lessons and Quizzes

There are also options for interactive content. One of the better ones, established in 1997 by a college English teacher, is *Grammar Bytes! Grammar Instruction with an Attitude* (<http://www.chompchomp.com/menu.htm>), which offers explanations of grammatical terms and (print-friendly) exercises. The exercises come complete with cheeky feedback, including virtual prizes—for instance, a wrong answer may get you a purring guinea pig as a consolation prize (rather than a sports car), followed by an explanation of the error. A word of caution: grammar exercises can backfire. Given the range of conventions, it is not uncommon to find yourself disagreeing or being confused by an answer. Therefore, faculty should review exercises before using them to ensure that they fit the intent and can be explained. Also, to be effective, exercises should be incorporated into context and used as learning opportunities, as opposed to being assigned as stand-alone events or tests.

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Multimedia: Podcasts and Videos

Finally, there is the world of podcasts and vidcasts/instructional videos. The popular and award-winning *Grammar Girl* podcast series, now in its 10th year and closing in on 500 episodes, features a combination of topics generated by listeners and topics chosen by the host, Mignon Fogarty. Topics cover basic issues of grammar and punctuation, style and usage issues, etymological tidbits, and updates on neologisms (new words). The podcast, including all previous episodes, can be downloaded for audio playback on iOS and Android devices or accessed at <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl>, where embedded audio can be played alongside a transcript of the podcast. Again, as with many open-source resources not affiliated with an educational institution, *Grammar Girl* is ad supported, with banners on the webpages and brief spoken ads at the outset of each podcast.

Though some searches for instructional videos link to embedded content, most lead to YouTube, where some of the aforementioned players are represented: *Grammar Girl* has a playlist of recent podcasts combined with some video available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheGrammarGirl>.

The *Purdue OWL* has a large selection of highly informative vidcasts that lean heavily on skits and a bland, if classic, PowerPoint design: <https://www.youtube.com/user/OWLPurdue>; and *Grammar Bytes!* has a limited selection of predictably zany videos at <https://www.youtube.com/user/GrammarBytes/videos>. Evocative of vintage *Schoolhouse Rock!* videos, Ted-Ed has a few good videos on grammar/punctuation and writing, substituting a *Schoolhouse Rock!* emphasis on catchy lyrics with lots of moving images: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsooa4yRKGN_zEE8iknghZA. Under each Ted-Ed video is a link to a full lesson on the subject, comprising comprehension questions, further resources, and discussion questions.

Because college writing centers and a number of dedicated educators are regularly adding more content while other resources disappear behind broken links, the best advice would be for instructors to search YouTube and/or Google for the best, most relevant, and most recent content that suits their needs.

For more information, please contact
Corey at csf45@wildcats.unh.edu. 📌

Ask Matt:

Your writing concerns addressed by our very own Matt Switliski

I've heard that MLA introduced a new edition recently. What do I (and my students) need to know to make this transition smooth?
—Malcontented over MLA

You just have to glance back at previous newsletters to see that citation and plagiarism perpetually concern instructors and students alike. A style update can thus seem like introducing unnecessary complications. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick writes in the preface to the eighth edition of the *MLA handbook*, however, the most recent revision shifts the focus on formatting “to the overarching purpose of source documentation: enabling readers to participate fully in the conversations between writers and their sources”—a purpose applicable across disciplines and citation styles (xii). As more publication formats emerge, the new guidelines aim to stay flexible in the face of change.

Thankfully, not everything has changed. In-text citations, for instance, remain the same; they include whatever element is first listed for a works cited entry (usually an author's name) and the page number, as below:

Identifying writing course aims before all else “can help transform what might otherwise be construed as a series of unconnected acts of reading and writing into a unified sequence” (Sullivan 19).

When the author or source is mentioned in the sentence, you omit it from the citation, as below:

According to Patricia Sullivan, identifying writing course aims before all else “can help transform what might otherwise be construed as a series of unconnected acts of reading and writing into a unified sequence” (19).

Block quotes remain the same in *MLA 8*: for prose over four lines long or poetry longer than three lines, indent one inch from the left margin, omit the quotation marks, and place the citation after the final punctuation.

For a works cited entry, the general template should include the following information in this order (note the punctuation):

1. Author.
2. Title of source.
3. Title of container,
4. Other contributors,
5. Version,
6. Number,
7. Publisher,
8. Publication date,
9. Location.

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Most of the above headers are likely familiar regardless of the citation style you've used. Some are unusual. "Container," for instance, refers to a whole—an anthology, a TV series, a website, and such—from which the writer is using only a small piece. "Location" typically refers to page numbers, the Web address (or doi), or a work's physical location (as in the case of a piece of art).

Let's look at some examples.

Sullivan, Patricia A. "Charting a Course in First-Year English." *Nuts and Bolts: A Practical Guide to Teaching College Composition*, edited by Thomas Newkirk, Boynton/Cook, 1993, pp. 17-42.

Notice the above example doesn't list the city of publication or medium, as MLA no longer requires those. In addition, the editor isn't abbreviated as in the seventh edition. (Other contributors such as illustrators, translators, and the like should be similarly identified in full.) Page ranges are signaled by pp.

McFarland, Ron. "An Apologia for Creative Writing." *College English*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1993, pp. 28-45. *JSTOR*, doi: 10.2307/378363. Accessed 29 Sept. 2016.

The above example is an article taken from a database (which means you have yet another container and location; see the Resources). If I'd consulted the printed version, it'd read as:

McFarland, Ron. "An Apologia for Creative Writing." *College English*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1993, pp. 28-45.

Resources

- At \$12 and a little over one hundred pages, the current MLA handbook is cheaper and more reader-friendly than previous editions. Rather than starting with a search for the details of a specific kind of source, as in past editions, the reader starts with the source in hand and is guided to categorize available information into the template. As in the past, the handbook does have the usual listing of sources as well. It also covers some of the finer points of the update that are too minute to address here. If you're serious about familiarizing students with MLA, consider requiring them to purchase the book.
- The *Purdue OWL* (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>) has been updated to reflect the latest changes to MLA, so if the handbook is outside anyone's budget, the OWL is available for free 24 hours a day.
- The Connors Writing Center has developed a handout available on its website (<http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/>) distilling some of the essentials for MLA 8. If you use the handout, you might go over it in class with students and practice some examples.
- The Modern Language Association has a site with teaching resources, sample papers, and practice templates for the latest edition (<https://style.mla.org/>).

When it comes to citation style, spending time practicing it in class and explaining its significance rather than presenting it as a set of rigid rules to follow may lead to more student engagement. Remember that students are becoming part of a new academic community, and the more support they get, the more they'll feel like they belong and be willing to contribute. Good luck!

For more information, please contact
Matt at mjr254@wildcats.unh.edu. 📧

Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Anthropology or Economics or English. He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, or to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, seeing, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community.

-David Bartholomae, "Inventing the University"

“I’m Lucky Because I Get to Set the Stage.”

Ray Cook, Professor of Engineering

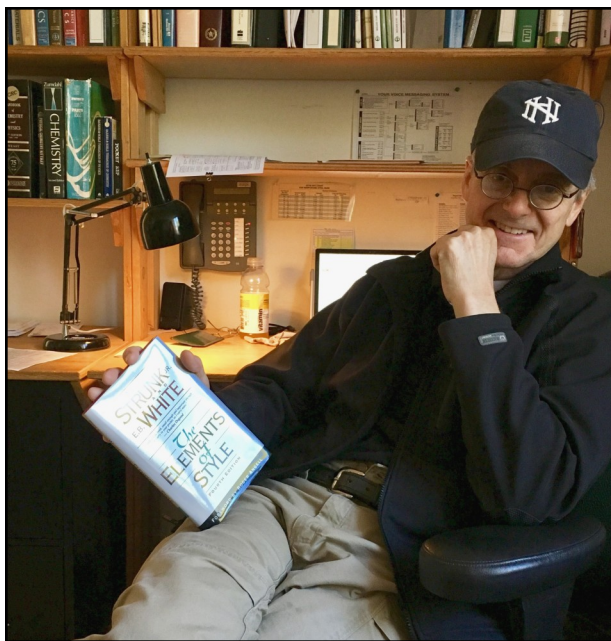
Corey McCullough

Associate Director, University Writing Programs

Students in Professor Ray Cook’s Introduction to Civil Engineering class are usually surprised by how much talk there is about writing. The texts for the course are Raymond Landis’ *Studying Engineering: A Road Map to a Rewarding Career*, a broad-ranging text that covers technical writing, and Strunk and White’s classic *Elements of Style*, a bona fide, old-school writing handbook. Students discuss and are quizzed on the content of the books throughout the semester, but Cook notes a certain shock effect of Strunk and White, in particular, that seems to stick with students, as does the message that, despite what they may have previously thought, engineering students need strong quantitative skills *and* strong writing skills. Given the detail-rich nature of engineering documents and the high financial and safety-related stakes of engineering projects, clear, concise, and accurate written communication is crucial, as it was for Professor William Strunk when he self-published the first edition of *The Elements of Style* for use at Cornell in 1918. With E.B. White’s subsequent updating and revision in 1952 and 1979 of the “little book” written by Strunk, who had been his English professor, *The Elements of Style* intentionally strays little from the original.

Professor Cook believes that Strunk and White’s emphasis on clarity and concision, as well as the categorization of rules into different types, is well suited to young engineers who will have to compose highly technical documents that include calculations, figures, photos, and other textual elements. *The Elements of Style* embodies the concision it preaches, breaking down the universe of writing into: 11 “elementary rules of usage,” 11 “elementary principles of composition,” 11 “matters of form,” 21 reminders about style, and over a hundred “words and expressions commonly misused.” Despite the fact that Cook’s Introduction to Civil Engineering course is not designated as writing intensive (WI), students have identified it as having impacted their development as writers. In the 2015 exit interviews conducted by the University Writing Programs, one graduating civil engineering major noted that his writing confidence increased after reading, being quizzed upon, and applying the content of *The Elements of Style* and Landis’ engineering textbook to his writing, revising, and time management strategies.

“I’m lucky because I get to set the stage for what’s to come,” says Cook, who serves as Undergraduate Coordinator in UNH’s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE), advising first-year students, students with dual majors, transfer students, and international students.



Engineering Professor Ray Cook and his copy of Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*.

For Cook, who also helped to shape the CEE undergraduate program, foregrounding writing and subverting stereotypes that emphasize differences between STEM fields and liberal arts are important.

He argues that exposure to a liberal arts curriculum can enhance engineers’ rhetorical skills and better prepare them to address the needs of various audience members, including important stakeholders in the community. Reflecting on his own experience, Cook, who graduated from the University of Illinois with bachelor’s degrees in both civil engineering and Spanish literature, cites his Spanish literature background with, among other things, helping him better understand English grammar. The spirit of providing engineering students with opportunities to expand their academic horizons despite the demands of the CEE curriculum is prominent at UNH. CEE students have the option of pursuing minors in architectural studies, art, business administration, or international affairs; a cognate in technical writing and/or public speaking; dual majors in international affairs or sustainability; and the opportunity to study away from UNH.

Professor Cook’s presentation of writing, as well as his notion of liberal arts as a complement to engineering, may have been influenced by forces beyond his own diverse professional and educational experience; Cook’s mother is a retired librarian and literacy educator who has published

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different genres of books—most recently a walking guide to Portland, Oregon and *Drawn Together: The Biography of Caldecott Award-winning Authors Berta and Elmer Hader*—and his brothers are also published writers.

Professor Cook's writing in the field of Engineering varies depending on whether he is writing for an academic engineering journal or as a professional engineer working on a particular project. Cook knows that rhetorical awareness and strong writing skills are crucial to the success of young engineers. UNH's undergraduate CEE curriculum has addressed this by including seven courses designated as writing intensive.

Beyond Technical and Professional Writing, which takes a rhetorical approach to the principles of technical writing, the CEE curriculum features lab- and project-focused writing in students' third and fourth years. Engineering students, including the aforementioned 2015 graduate, have cited in exit interviews the importance of various labs and group projects in preparing them to write like engineers in the field.

While writing intensive courses and courses like Cook's Introduction to Civil Engineering prepare engineers for writing in their field, feedback mechanisms such as periodic accreditation reviews, an annual conference with UNH engineering alumni, Civil and Environmental Engineering Advisory Boards, and established regional networks provide Professor Cook and his colleagues with an opportunity to gauge how well prepared UNH engineers are for writing in their field. Though the emphasis on writing throughout the curriculum generally leaves students prepared for the workforce, Cook notes that, when young engineers are not adequately prepared for the writing tasks required of them, it can put a strain on a firm. The question of how to best prepare engineering students for the writing demands of their careers is an open and ongoing one, but what is more certain is that UNH engineering students get the message that writing is crucial. As Professor Cook says, error and excess only add "noise" to the transfer of already complicated information.

For more information, please contact Corey at csf45@wildcats.unh.edu. ▲

Facilitators and Graduates of the Second WI Faculty Retreat at the Mount Washington Hotel, June 2016



Back, left to right: Corey McCullough, John Lacourse, Collette Powers, Audrey Ashton-Savage, Nick Mian, Vanessa Grunkemeyer, Michele Loos, Bill Ross, Kari Dudley, and Dev Dutta. Front, left to right: Ed Mueller, Jim Lewis, Barbara Jago, and Marieka Brouwer Burg.

The Grammar Box—The Incredible, Versatile Dash

Matt Switliski

Associate Director, University Writing Programs

Like the comma, the dash is one of the most versatile punctuation marks and thus one of the least understood. Dashes can often be confused with hyphens, which link two or more words together, typically to construct adjectives. Consider the following difference:

The man eating shark is dangerous.

This sentence as written refers to a dangerous man who is currently consuming shark. But let's bring in a hyphen:

The man-eating shark is dangerous.

Here, "man-eating" becomes a single grammatical unit to describe the dangerous shark. If two words function as an adjective and follow the noun, no hyphen is needed:

a ten-foot pole vs. a pole ten feet long

Hyphens are also used with spelling out numbers (e.g., fifty-five; forty-two) or with certain names (e.g., Ann-Marie; Smith-Jones).

The dash comes in two varieties: the en dash and the em dash. The en dash is longer than a hyphen but shorter than an em dash; it's also pretty uncommon. Its most popular use is to signal a range of dates or numbers, like so:

April 6–June 1 pp. 16–28

The em dash has several functions, and can be created in most word processing programs, including Microsoft Word, by typing two hyphens followed directly (no spaces) by another word. The most common use of an em dash is to interrupt a thought with a brief aside before continuing:

Artists can—and would, given the chance—tinker indefinitely with any one piece of work.

While the above example could have used parentheses instead of paired dashes, the effect would be different. Parentheses convey an under-the-breath quality to an aside,

whereas dashes tend to be more dramatic, compelling the reader to pay attention to the break.

Another use for the dash is to summarize preceding ideas:

Death, loneliness, and public speaking—these are many people's greatest fears.

A third use of the dash is to introduce something:

They have only one thing on their minds—the weekend.

A colon would also work in the above example. According to most style guides, a colon is more common in formal writing situations, whereas the dash is supposedly less formal. The colon can also introduce a series of items; the dash typically introduces one.

Besides a sudden shift in thought, the dash can also signal one speaker interrupting another as in dialogue:

"Well, the truth is—"

"You can't handle the truth!"

Some might argue the dash could be replaced with an ellipsis (...) but, as with the parenthesis example, the effect on the page is different. The ellipsis in written speech conveys a trailing off; the dash, meanwhile, illustrates that the first speaker hadn't finished the thought.

Finally, the em dash can substitute for omitted letters or words, for instance to maintain anonymity:

Dear Mr. Z—

The dash opens up opportunities in writing—afterthoughts, asides, and more. Even when it seems like another punctuation mark can handle the task, using the dash results in different stylistic effects. Take care in using it, however. Too many dashes can lead to choppy writing, leaving readers confused by too much shifting.

For more information, please contact Matt at mjr254@wildcats.unh.edu. ▲

I like the dash because it's the perfect example of how the human mind works.

-Steven Frank

Past Perfect:

Director's Notes

Ed Mueller

Director, University Writing Programs

The second WI Faculty Retreat was held June 6-8 at the Omni Mount Washington Hotel, with twelve participants (two more than last year). Building on the momentum of the retreat, we have expanded the scope of the experience through the WAC Faculty Network. The foundation of this new initiative consists of faculty who have completed the retreat and who have volunteered to be identified as core members. The heart of the WAC Faculty Network is the informed activity among members--colleagues connecting with colleagues to exchange ideas, provide advice, share resources, and discuss teaching and writing in their courses and disciplines. Members remain connected both on their own and through events facilitated by the Writing Program during the semester.

Core members are also available to talk about teaching and writing with colleagues in their departments and colleges. With 21 core members, this grass-roots network will continue to expand with each iteration of the WI Faculty Retreat. Feel free to get in touch with one of them and join the conversation.

For more information, please contact Ed Mueller: edward.mueller@unh.edu.

WAC FACULTY NETWORK CORE MEMBERS

HHS: Jim Lewis, *Health Management and Policy*
Michele Loos, *Nursing*

COLA: Marieka Brouwer Burg, *Anthropology*
Nathan Webster, *English*

Stephanie Harzewski, *English*

Sarah Hirsch, *Spanish*

Bill Stine, *Psychology*

Kari Dudley, *Psychology*

Joan Glutting, *Psychology*

Nena Stracuzzi, *Sociology*

CEPS: John Lacourse, *Electrical and Chemical Engineering*

Collette Powers, *Computer Sciences*

COLSA: Vanessa Grunkemeyer, *Biology*
Katherine Lockwood, *Molecular, Cellular, and Biomedical Sciences/Nutrition*

PAUL: Audrey Ashton-Savage, *Marketing*

Dev Dutta, *Management*

Kevin McLaughlin, *Accounting and Finance*

UNH-M: Barbara Jago, *Communication Arts*

Michael Jonas, *Computer Science*

Nick Mian, *Psychology*

Dimond: Bill Ross, *Special Collections*

Read over your composition and, when you meet a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out.

-Samuel Johnson

WAC(ky) Resources: *Tools for Faculty*

•**PDF Handouts:** The Writing Programs website has a range of PDF handouts that faculty may find useful to assist with managing writing in their classes: <http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/handouts/>

•**Writing Center Videos:** The Connors Writing Center has informational videos as well as a video on peer review on its website: <http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/videos/>

•**Revised Writing Programs Website:** Watch for a new Writing Programs website sometime in the December/January timeframe.

•**Other:** Feel free to contact the Director of the Writing Program for consultation on managing writing in a course, department, or program: edward.mueller@unh.edu.