

TEACHING WITH WRITING

THE OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY WRITING INTENSIVE CURRICULUM (WIC) NEWSLETTER

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Pre/Views

by Vicki Tolar Burton, WIC Director

When students in the College of Science write poetry, I take notice. In a recent email, Pat Muir (Botany and Plant Pathology) told me that after an Ecological Science field trip to Fitton Green Natural Area near Corvallis, she asked her WIC students in BI 371 to write not only a scientific report but also a haiku reflecting on their experience.

Having lived in Japan, I am a great fan of the haiku, with its focus on nature and its spare, three-line verse form of 5 syllables/ 7 syllables/ 5 syllables. The simple elegance of the haiku blends art, mathematics, and nature. Readers can enjoy the poetic efforts of Environmental Science students on pages 4 and 5 of this issue.

Poetry can have a place in any WIC class. Greg Rorrer often asks his students in a Chemical Engineering WIC course to express a concept of the course in poetry. Poetry invites students to play with language, with images, with sound and sense. I'd encourage OSU faculty to consider poetry writing as a low-stakes, informal writing experience in their next WIC course. Or any course.

The sentence that precedes this one is not really a sentence but rather a fragment. Is it an error, or is it a stylistic choice? Over twenty-five faculty gathered at a WIC lunch in May to discuss such questions and to learn about the twenty most frequent grammatical errors in student writing, based on research by Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors covering thousands of student papers.

In the lead article, "New Grammar Tools for WIC

continued on page 8

Spring Term WIC Lunch Draws Record Crowds...



As the end of the term approaches, desperate OSU faculty flock to the WIC conference room in record numbers for a discussion of...grammar, of course. For story, see page 2.

Fall 2003 WIC Faculty Seminar: Call for Participants

Faculty interested in the fall 2003 Introductory WIC Faculty Seminar should ask their department chair to send an email nomination to Vicki Tolar Burton (vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu). The seminar, designed both for faculty who plan to teach WIC courses and for those who want to learn to use writing in non-WIC courses, will meet five Wednesday afternoons from 3 to 5 pm, beginning on October 15 and ending on November 12. Faculty who complete the seminar receive a \$250 honorarium. The seminar generally fills quickly, so early nominations are advised.

New Grammar Tools for WIC Classrooms



The 25+ OSU faculty who attended the May WIC grammar lunch introduced themselves by name, department...and pet grammar peeve. Many of the errors mentioned in this entertaining round of introductions coincided with items in Lunsford and Connors's top twenty listing, including (but not limited to!) the seven that appear below, which have been pulled from the WIC handouts and are listed here in order of frequency.

The 20 most common grammar errors in college writing were identified by Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors, in research examining thousands of student essays written in the late 1980s.

*In 1999, working from the explanations of these errors found in Lunsford and Connors's *Everyday Writer* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1997), students in Vicki Tolar Burton's "Teaching of Writing" WIC class developed a series of handouts with discipline-specific examples of these errors. This year, we edited and updated a number of those handouts for use as a teaching tool in WIC classrooms. The revised handouts were available at the May WIC grammar lunch and will be posted on the WIC website (<http://wic.oregonstate.edu>) later this summer.*

Missing comma after an introductory element (most common error)

Many sentences begin with one or more introductory elements—clauses, phrases, or single words that lead into the main body of the sentence. To show where an introductory element ends and the main part of the sentence begins (thus helping your readers move more easily through the sentence), insert a comma after the introductory element. If the sentence includes multiple introductory elements, use a comma after each one.

Wrong: Unless otherwise noted the annual rate must be adjusted to reflect the length of the compounding period.

Right: Unless otherwise noted, the annual rate must be adjusted to reflect the length of the compounding period.

Wrong word (4th most common error)

Most instances of this error arise from confusion or carelessness regarding homonyms or other words that either sound similar or have similar meanings. Wrong-word errors may also result from overly casual use of a thesaurus. (Be sure to consult a dictionary if you're not sure of the exact meaning of a word you find in a thesaurus.)

Wrong: The main affect of seasonality on vegetation in the tropics is that leaves are generally shed quickly and replaced in the dry season.

Right: The main effect of seasonality on vegetation in the tropics is that leaves are generally shed quickly and replaced in the dry season.

Comma splice (8th most common error)

Inexperienced writers sometimes combine two or more independent clauses (clauses that are capable of standing independently as separate sentences) into a single sentence by inserting a comma between the clauses. This error can be corrected in several ways: (1) by separating the clauses into stand-alone sentences; (2) by replacing the comma with a semicolon; (3) by following the comma with a coordinating conjunction such as *and*, *but*, *so*, *yet*, *nor*, or *for*; or (4) by rewriting the sentence to subordinate or eliminate one of the independent clauses.

Wrong: The splendid Stuart masques were staggeringly expensive, one such production cost 21,000 pounds at a time when a skilled worker's annual earnings were about 25 pounds.

Right: The splendid Stuart masques were staggeringly expensive. One such production cost 21,000 pounds at a time when a skilled worker's annual earnings were about 25 pounds.

or

The splendid Stuart masques were staggeringly expensive; one such production cost 21,000 pounds at a time when a skilled worker's annual earnings were about 25 pounds.

or

The splendid Stuart masques were staggeringly expensive, and in fact, one such production cost 21,000 pounds at a time when a skilled worker's annual earnings were about 25 pounds.

or

The splendid Stuart masques were staggeringly expensive, one such production costing 21,000 pounds at a time when a skilled worker's annual earnings were about 25 pounds.

Lack of subject–verb agreement (14th most common error)

The verb form used in a sentence may vary depending on whether the subject is singular or plural and whether the sentence is written in first-, second-, or third person. When you are looking for subject–verb agreement errors, be mindful that the noun closest to the verb may not be the subject.

Wrong: That set of beliefs fly in the face of reason.

Right: That set of beliefs flies in the face of reason.

Fused sentence (18th most common error)

Fused, or run-on, sentences occur when clauses that could stand alone are joined with no linking words or punctuation. Correct this error in one of four ways: (1) Separate the clauses into two (or more) sentences; (2) insert a semicolon between the clauses; (3) insert a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction (e.g. *and*, *but*, *so*, *yet*, *nor*, *for*) between the clauses; or (4) rewrite the sentence to subordinate or eliminate one of the independent clauses.

Wrong: Light microscopy uses visible light to illuminate an object in microbiology, this tool is particularly useful for determining gross morphology of bacterial cells.

Right: Light microscopy uses visible light to illuminate an object. In microbiology, this tool is particularly useful for determining gross morphology of bacterial cells.

or

Light microscopy uses visible light to illuminate an object; in microbiology, this tool is particularly useful for determining gross morphology of bacterial cells.

or

Light microscopy uses visible light to illuminate an object, and in microbiology, this tool is particularly useful for determining gross morphology of bacterial cells.

or

Light microscopy, which uses visible light to illuminate an object, is particularly useful in microbiology for determining gross morphology of bacterial cells.

Misplaced or dangling modifier (19th most common error)

To prevent sentence misreadings, place modifying words and phrases as close as possible to the word or words they modify.

Wrong: These plantings demonstrate that a pesticide-free, income-producing cashew crop can be successfully grown within areas where government agriculturists consider pesticides an absolute necessity on a pure cost basis.

Right: These plantings demonstrate that on a pure cost basis, a pesticide-free, income-producing cashew crop can be successfully grown within areas where government agriculturists consider pesticides an absolute necessity.

Its/It's confusion (20th most common error)

Its indicates possession; *it's* is a contracted form of *it is* or *it has*.

Wrong: Its an interesting study, but the researchers' methodology definitely has it's flaws.

Right: It's an interesting study, but the researchers' methodology definitely has its flaws.

READ THIS AND TRY IT OUT:

Richard Haswell's MINIMAL MARKING STRATEGY

"...All surface mistakes in a student's paper are left totally unmarked within the text. These are unquestionable errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar (including pronoun antecedence.) Each of these mistakes is indicated only with a check in the margin by the line in which it occurs. A line with two checks by it, for instance, means the presence of two errors, no more, within the boundary of that line. The sum of checks is recorded at the end of the paper and in the gradebook. Papers, with checks and other commentary, are then returned 15 minutes before the end of class. Students have time to search for, circle, and correct the errors. As papers are returned to me I review the corrections, mending those errors left undiscovered, miscorrected, or newly generated. Where I feel it is useful, mistakes are explained or handbooks cited. Within those 15 minutes I can return about one third of the papers in a class of twenty-five, and the rest I return the next session. Until a student attempts to correct checked errors, the grade on the essay remains unrecorded..."

"The simplicity of this method belies its benefit. First, it shortens, gladdens, and improves the act of marking papers. [...] The method perhaps goes a long way toward dimming the halo effect of surface mistakes on evaluation, since much of this negative influence may arise from the irritation that comes from correcting and explaining common errors (its and it's!) over and over. On the second reading the teacher does not lose the time gained initially, for according to my count students will correct on their own 60 to 70 percent of their errors. [...] Conservatively, I would say the method saves me about four minutes a paper. That is nearly two hours saved with a set of twenty-five essays."

excerpted from Richard Haswell,
"Minimal Marking," College English 45
(1983), 600-604

TO: Vicki Tolar Burton, WIC Program
FROM: Pat Muir, Botany and Plant Pathology

Dear Vicki,

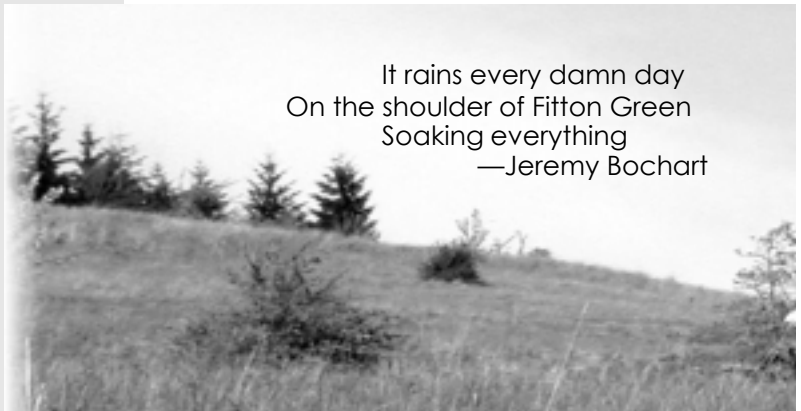
I wanted to share with you the haiku written by students in BI 371, "Ecological Methods," last week. Two students preferred not to have their haiku made public, so their efforts are not included here.

For context: I asked them to write a haiku (as well as more standard "scientific" material) about our field trip to Fitton Green, a new Benton County Park up Cardwell Hill way. It was not raining when we began the trip, and we had clear views of Marys Peak and Philomath from our ~1,000' vantage point up there. However, we could see rain to the west, and we watched it come over until we were well immersed. The place is a lovely mosaic of prairie, ex-oak savannah, and nice Douglas-fir/grand fir forest, and their tasks were to sample various areas, recording vegetation and abiotic site variables such as aspect, slope, canopy cover, and so forth. I also asked each group to choose a place that was interesting to them and do what I call "historical sleuthing" there; that is, gather whatever evidence they could to figure out the relatively recent history of the place. This included looking for stumps they could identify as to species and approximate years since cutting, taking increment cores (for aging), looking for clues that come from tree form, and so on.

Though I did tell them about the 5-7-5 syllable format of traditional haiku, I tried in my writing out of what they turned in, to let their own styles of construction come through--that is, I capitalized words that they did, and so forth.

Take care,
Pat

Beyond the Field



It rains every damn day
On the shoulder of Fitton Green
Soaking everything
—Jeremy Bochart

Dentist Appointment Mishap:

Too late, they left me
Confused and alone I go
Drive, hike, there they are!
—Christina Canto

Rain, Rain
In
My
Face
Wash away my D
B
H
Soggy toes____escape!
—Will Sheppy

The poetic function is not just poetry and other literary genres but a way of writing and speaking about experience, a way quite distinct from "transactional" writing (i.e., to transact business). In the poetic we are spectators on experience, while in the transactional we are participants in experience. ...

As I see it, the role of poetic writing in composition courses is not to educate potential professional poets but to develop students' writing abilities and their imaginative and critical faculties as well. Poetic writing activities give students opportunities to reflect on the value of new knowledge and experiences. And when such activities are made social by sharing in groups or public readings, they often enable students and teachers to build classroom communities based on a respect for language and on a connection to texts and to each other in which further learning and growth occurs, sometimes in surprising ways.

Art Young, "The Poetic Function of Language,"
<http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/tc/pt/young/young.htm>

Notebook in Biology 371: Fitton Green Haiku

Proud, tall, reaching up
Lonely home covered in moss
Wake, sleeping giant
—Colt Lunsford

Bright, then dark, then wet
We see you come from the hills
Rain falls on the land
—Zach Tjernlund

The big leaf maple
Withstands wind on the ridge
Because it sheds leaves
—Scott Young

Meadows full of plants
It is poison oak that lasts
In my memory
—Laura Planck

On oak savanna
We view the mountains and hills
And the rain falls down
—Amanda Peterson

As the time passed by
wind pounded the Douglas-firs
creating their form
—Adam McLeod

Gravel path crunches
Steep hills, long grass, poison oak
Shade in moss lined trees
—Christina Canto

Burning and grazing
were regular long ago
Now there's poison oak.
—David Ruark

The tree core samples
With varying bands imply
The presence of man
—Katie Gipple

When raindrops stay home
forest streambeds get lonely
But wait patiently
—Brock Ferguson

The sky became dark
The wind started to howl
Trees began to weep
—Leslie Ahlgren

Cycling
embrace the prairie
inhale the approaching mist
while blooms stain the hill
—Rebecca Huot

Whispering leaves
falling from all of the trees
float by on the breeze...

The rain approaches
Sweeping over green mountains
Now my socks are wet
—Katie Gipple

Giving unto me
the feeling of myth and lore
there is a magic...

The history so old
man is the insipid child
who could end it quick
—James P. McLain

Photographs courtesy of Benton County Department of Natural Areas and Parks. *Above:* View from Fitton Green Natural Area to Marys Peak. *Above left:* Trail near top of Fitton Green. Fitton Green Natural Area will be opening to the public in September 2003, with access points from Wren and Corvallis (via Cardwell Hill Dr) and Panorama Drive.

Speaking Across the Curriculum: Expert Tips for Successful Oral Presentations

by Robert Iltis, *Speech Communication*

In April, Dr. Robert Iltis of the OSU Speech Communication Department addressed WIC faculty from a variety of disciplines on issues related to speaking across the curriculum. If you've implemented an oral speaking component into your WIC class or are considering doing so, here are some public-speaking "thought-bytes" from Dr. Iltis's talk, and an Oral Presentations Basics handout he uses in his Argument and Critical Discourse classes that you may wish to share with your students.



On Fear of Public Speaking

According to several national surveys, many Americans fear the act of public speaking more than they fear their own death. Why is the prospect of public speaking so frightening to so many of us? The bottom line is that we're afraid of judgment, and in public speaking situations we can't avoid the knowledge that we are being judged. The way to deal with this fear, then, is not just to acknowledge the audience's judgment but actually to embrace it. Doing so communicates respect for your audience. An audience that feels respect will not only learn more from your talk and be more easily persuaded by your point of view, but it will also be much more forgiving of problems with your delivery.

On Public Speaking as Conversation

Public speaking is a particular type of conversation—one concerned with "arriving at a mutual decision about the best thing to do." All of the things that we expect in a

comfortable and productive conversation—spontaneity, relaxation, mutual trust and respect for one another's ideas, opportunities both to talk and to listen, good eye contact, and so on—are present in a successful public speaking situation.

Tips for Leading a Discussion of Oral Presentation Strategies

Start the discussion by recounting some of your personal favorite oral presentation horror stories. [Iltis, for example, likes to tell the story of The Student Who Fainted.] Then invite students to share some of their own horror stories with the class. From here, move in to a discussion of audience-related issues—audience as judge, audience as multiple audiences, and so on—and of the four common misconceptions about public speaking (see next column). Finally, pass out copies of the handout on page 7 and talk through each item in the checklist.

Four Common Myths about Public Speaking

- 1. Good public speaking is a "knack,"** a "gift" that some of us have and some (most?) of us don't. In other words, effectiveness as a public speaker cannot be learned. This false belief lets us off the hook of working to improve our speaking skills. "I'm just naturally shy, so I don't have to work at this because I'll never be good at it."
- 2. "Good information is all you need in public speaking"—**i.e., regardless of how it's delivered, the information will speak for itself. The idea that one's audience is only here for the information masks a materialist assumption about information and is insulting to listeners. If information were really all the audience was after, why would they choose to attend a talk on the subject rather than read about it?
- 3. The converse belief, that public speaking is "all style and delivery"—**that a speech's content doesn't matter as long as it's delivered with stage presence, glibness, and humor—is also untrue. Audiences expect a speaker to have an intelligent perspective; they expect the speaker to respect them enough to offer such a perspective. Speakers are judged on their capacity to effectively present their perspective. A perfect delivery without good information is never enough.
- 4. Public speaking is like acting.** People operating under this assumption may write out their speech and either read or memorize it. But because these delivery strategies are non-conversational, they impede the establishment of rapport between speaker and audience.

The illustration for this article was copied from the "Giving Oral Presentations" page of the University of Canberra (AU) Academic Skills Program's Study Skills website: <http://www.canberra.edu.au/studyskills/oral.htm>

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

(A Handout for COMM 114)

Effective speech delivery has the same qualities as high quality conversation, but differs a bit from conversation because an audience expects preparation and professionalism in a speech. Put another way, audiences like to see speakers who are thoroughly prepared and who seem to have the audience's best interests in mind. These qualities show (or sadly, don't show) in your delivery. Most important is that the speaker treats the audience like someone with whom he or she is having a serious conversation. So...

- DO** have **good eye contact**. Look directly at the eyes of your listeners. Don't read your speech. Don't look away from your listeners. Success here will come from speaking extemporaneously, which means you speak from notes—notes you've practiced with and with which you are very comfortable.
- DO** have **effective vocal qualities**:
 - Speak at a rate that's neither too fast nor too slow. People need to understand you, but they also don't want to be bored.
 - Use *vocal variety*. Vary your pitch; avoid speaking in a monotone; strive for the liveliness you'd have in conversation.
- DO** have a **neat, professional appearance**. You don't have to dress up, but you should respect the audience's expectation that they'll hear from someone who has respect for them. Lose the gum. Lose the hats. Lose the Copenhagen. (Believe it or not, some speakers think they can pull this one off!)
- DO** practice the verbal pauses ("uh," "um," "you know," "totally," "really," "like totally") out of your delivery. The best approach here is to listen to yourself in conversation, and eliminate the bad habits there.
- DO** have **good posture**. Don't shift your weight back and forth; it shows nervousness. Don't lean on or sit on the desk or lectern.
- DO** have a **good attention-getting device**. Your instructor can offer suggestions here.

REMEMBER:

The audience wants to hear your well-prepared thoughts. Prepare thoroughly, then *practice, practice, practice.*

Pre/Views continued from page 1

Classrooms,” you can read more about a WIC project that provides faculty and students with tools that encourage better grammar in student writing. Faculty attending the project roll-out luncheon discussed their own grammar error pet peeves, including run-on sentences, misplaced modifiers, comma errors, and word confusions (its/it’s, affect/effect, and so on). While we all agree that correctness is not the most important aspect of writing, we also know that errors reduce the effectiveness of our students’ writing.

Informal surveys of OSU students indicate that most receive little direct grammar instruction in Oregon schools K-12, though that may change as the state writing tests for Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) begin to double-count “Conventions” (punctuation, spelling, capitalization, paragraphing, grammar, and usage) in scoring. Other writing categories evaluated in the CIM include Ideas and Content, Organization, Sentence Fluency, Word Choice, and Citing Sources.

The WIC grammar project involves the development of Twenty Grammatical Errors sheets for seven disciplines, all of which will be available on the WIC website (<<http://wic.oregonstate.edu>>) by the beginning of fall term. We will also offer a cross-disciplinary version that can be used in any course. I am most grateful to WIC TA Tracy Ann Robinson for her work on these handouts, which built on earlier student work in my WIC course WR 411/511.

See the page 3 inset on “Minimum Marking” for a teaching method that has reduced grammar errors in final papers by as much as 70%. Haswell’s research shows—and my own experience leads me to concur—that most students *can* write more correctly than they typically *do* write. Perhaps one positive effect of a teacher’s introducing the Twenty Errors sheet in a WIC class is that it can open a conversation about the fact that correct grammar will add value to student writing in the course. Using the sheets also indicates that the teacher does care about these things.

The most significant research finding regarding grammar is that improvement is most likely to take place when students have to revise their writing, not only for ideas and organization but also to eliminate errors.

I want to close by recognizing the contribution WIC GTA Tracy Ann Robinson has made to the WIC program this year. Tracy Ann’s artistic eye has made the newsletter more inviting, and her intelligence and insight have enhanced the content of both the newsletter and the WIC website. When the WIC program was asked to help organize an academic advising workshop during winter term, Tracy Ann served as workshop coordinator. From videotaping WIC seminars for our distance learners in Bend and LaGrande to revising and improving the Twenty Errors handouts, Tracy Ann has been magnificent, and I want to say a public thank you.

Reminder: All Category II proposals, including WIC, are now submitted online. The Curriculum homepage for new proposal submission is <<http://curriculum.bus.oregonstate.edu/default.aspx>>. A recent proposal as a model is available at <<http://curriculum.bus.oregonstate.edu/XmlViewer.aspx?requestID=563>>. If you have any trouble with this, please contact Vicki Tolar Burton at 737-3711.

2003 WIC Grants Announced

Congratulations to the following departments and faculty, who have been awarded Department Development Grants from the Writing Intensive Curriculum (WIC) program for the 2003-2004 academic year.

Faculty, OSU Cascades Campus

Deborah Padgett Coehlo, Proposer

Goal: To improve the WIC offerings available at OSU Cascades by offering a two day WIC training program to Cascades faculty in the fall of 2003. At present, HDFS 461 is the only WIC course offered in Bend. Students in Liberal Studies, Natural Science, and Business need WIC courses as well, as will the majors in forthcoming degrees, such as Education and Ecosystems and Tourism. The WIC director will travel to Bend to facilitate this workshop in which Cascades faculty will develop their ideas about writing across the curriculum.

McNair Scholars Program

Ataa Akyeampong, Proposer

Goal: The McNair Scholars Program prepares students from under-represented groups for graduate education, the ultimate goal being the attainment of the Ph.D. The WIC grant will fund Writing Mentors (trained in WIC teaching) to work with McNair Scholars during the Summer Research Institute and the academic year.

About Teaching With Writing

Editor: Vicki Tolar Burton

Assistant Editor: Tracy Ann Robinson

Teaching With Writing is the newsletter of the Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum Program. As part of the Baccalaureate Core, all OSU students are required to take an upper division writing intensive course in their major.

The content of the WIC courses ranges from radiation safety (for Nuclear Engineering majors) to golf courses design (a Horticulture option). While subject matter differs by department, all WIC courses share certain commonalities defined by the Faculty Senate:

- Informal, ungraded or minimally graded writing is used as a mode of learning the content material.
- Students are introduced to conventions and practices of writing in their discipline and use of borrowed information.
- Students complete at least 5000 words of writing, of which at least 2000 words are in polished, formal assignments.
- Students are guided through the whole writing process, receive feedback on drafts, and have opportunities to revise.

For complete information on WIC guidelines, contact Vicki Tolar Burton by email at vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu, visit the WIC web site at <<<http://wic.oregonstate.edu>>>, or consult the OSU Curricular Procedures Handbook.