Tutoring Writing in Neuroscience: Piloting a New Approach to Writing Tutoring
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Tutoring Writing in the Disciplines (TWID), Boston University Undergraduate Program in Neuroscience

Introduction
- Students, teachers, and professors alike have recognized the great utility of having tutoring options available for a number of courses.
- At Boston University there were already programs specific to CAS writing courses and the ERC offered private tutoring in subjects such as chemistry, physics, and language.
- However, there was a deficit in tutoring focused on specific styles of writing such as in the scientific manuscript.
- The neuroscience department puts a large emphasis on teaching students to write about the experimental process in a style appropriate for a scientific audience.
- Many students struggle to make this transition in writing at first, thus creating a need for a new directed program of tutoring.
- With the new addition of the BU Hub, more emphasis is placed on writing, adding new writing specific requirements to general education requirements.
- This spring served as a semester long project in piloting a new writing program, discipline specific, for neuroscience

Self Promotion
- Create and distribute flyers
- Talk to professors and get them to promote in class
- Visit all courses that involve writing in neuroscience and talk about
- Post the link for writing appointments in the neuroscience weekly email

Neuroscience Writing Tutors

Appointments available at: https://neuroscience.tutoring.bu.edu

A way to help to help fellows who understand writing specific to the neuroscience

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Method

Background

We hypothesized that by advertising and implementing this new program we could encourage students to take the opportunity to receive additional mentorship in challenging writing assignments and learn strategies that they could use throughout their writing career.

We also hypothesized that utilizing neuroscience majors who have experience in the courses and could act as peer mentors in the process would be effective, particularly in conjunction with a supportive educational writing course for the tutors.

Hypothesis

At the beginning of our course we watched a series of videos and discussed some of the strategies we could employ as writing tutors and some of the common mistakes we should try to avoid.

- Some positive strategies:
  - Smiling, asking about how the course is going; listening intently and confirming understanding of what the student is saying; giving the student ample time to answer questions; a review of what was discussed at the end

- Some common mistakes:
  - Prodding, asking a question and not giving the student enough time to answer; sitting across the table and taking the draft, nit picking

Methods

We found that by advertising and implementing this new program we could encourage students to take the opportunity to receive additional mentorship in challenging writing assignments and learn strategies that they could use throughout their writing career.

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The Flow of Charts

WR 597 Instructional Course in Tutoring Writing in the Disciplines
- Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors
- Thematic Writing Guide by Amanda Greenwell
- Undergraduate’s Guide to Writing Therapy
- Paragraph by Bonnie Kanarek
- Tutoring Big (Writing): Shattering the Myths by Therese Thura
- Documentation Styles and Duplicity Methods by Susan Marmer

Create promotional material

Class Visits
Share Flyers

Begin multiple tutoring sessions each week

Students begin to sign up. Within a week of advertising nearly all sessions are booked

Observe a CAS Writing Tutor; Get pointers from experienced tutors

Instructor observations and feedback on current tutoring

Continued tutoring appointments and thinking of future directions for the program

Future Directions

Based on student input and course content, some actions we can take to better the program include the following:
- Advertise earlier in the semester
- Survey for NE102 students to indicate:
  - Which time slot is most compatible with their schedule
- If they have any feedback for tutors
- Schedule more appointments after Spring break
- Interact with Lab Assistants to receive input on what students struggle on

Special Thanks

This semester students and faculty worked in implementing a new format of writing tutoring targeted to specific disciplines. Within the neuroscience major, students are taught about scientific writing – which can often prove very challenging. By immersing current neuroscience upperclassmen in a writing course aimed to provide insights and techniques on how to use knowledge of the courses and content to help students, the TWID program provided a new opportunity to help improve this critical skill. Advertising using posters, classroom and lab announcements, and endorsements from professors proved highly effective in making the program known to students. During the sessions we could then implement what we learned during the course. Many students return for multiple visits and new students try out the program. In the future this program could consider expanding hours as many students were unable to sign up because of the minimal number of available time slots. Further, we could possibly expand to weekend hours which would increase flexibility for students and tutors. Also, the program could consider group sessions. Overall, the program was a great success.

Conclusion

FIG 1. Example of the flyer that was created and shared throughout the neuroscience department. This flyer appeared in weekly emails with the link to sign up for writing appointments.

FIG 2. The BEAM framework is a strategy we learned about in class that could help explain to students various components of strong writing and provide writers with a structure that could allow them to evaluate their work. In class we discussed the ways in which this strategy could be applied specifically to the scientific manuscript as seen in in lab portion of NE102, Introduction to Cellular and Molecular Neurobiology.

FIG 3. This is an example of the client form that allows students to sign up for a tutoring session. It includes space for the students to provide information on the assignment, what they would like to work on, and a spot to upload any relevant documents ahead of time if they would like to. A similar report form is uploaded by the tutor that recaps what was done in the tutoring session and provides space to write about the next steps for the students.

FIG 4. This depicts a paraphrased statement from Dr. Pastorino when asked about how to approach working with students for writing tutoring. Each of the writing tutors interviewed a faculty member in the discipline involved in scientific writing.

FIG 5. These statistics are based on 107 appointments from 55 client reports. A. Based on the monthly report statistics, the majority of students scheduled sessions in March and April, and the other months. Students in NE102 begin the writing process the week after spring break, when the first component of the scientific manuscript is due. Allotting more time to these months might increase access to the program for more students. B. The start time statistics indicates that the majority of students scheduled sessions from 12-1:30, and at 3:30. Since students seem to be more free during the middle of the day, perhaps we should consider creating more workspace so that multiple tutors can work. Additions based on student feedback, it is beneficial for students to schedule a session directly after their lab.

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February
March
April