

For Inquiry

1. If a history of your writing tutoring program has already been written, consider it in the context of the studies of writing processes and history of authoring that have been addressed in this chapter. How are writers and writing presented in this history of your program? You might also want to refer to Chapter 10, and particularly the discussion of Lyotard's historical narratives on pages 226–29 as well as the larger history of writing centers and writing studies outlined in Chapter 2 and in other sources.
2. If a history of your writing tutoring program has yet to be written, you might wish to refer to Chapter 10 to help you with this process. First, you'll want to survey the materials and resources you have available to you. These can include archival and administrative documents, program leaders (current and past), and the history of your institution and writing instruction there. (Remember that for any interviews you would want to conduct for oral histories, you will need to work through your Institutional Review Board. You'll want to discuss this with your program's administrator or your instructor, and you might want to refer to Chapters 8 and 10.) Writing the history of a program is potentially a very large endeavor, so, as suggested in Chapter 10 and according to the guidance of your program administrator or instructor, you might wish to collaborate with several other tutors—including future tutors who might build on your archival work later on.

CHAPTER 5



Tutor and Writer Identities

For Discussion

1. First, make a list of all the groups you belong to, interpreting the concept of "group" broadly. Include everything from the ethnic group(s) with which you identify to social circles you enjoy to academic or (pre)professional organizations you are a member of. Share your lists with your peers and discuss what groups you have in common and what groups make you distinct. Which of these group affiliations affect you as a tutor? As a writer? Why?
2. Describe to your peers a writing situation in which you wrote using a persona very different from your academic writing voice—perhaps when creating a blog post or an email or text message. What elements of your personality or experience did you include in this writing that you do not include in your academic writing? What did these elements bring to the text that is not present in your writing for school?

INTRODUCTION

Here, we focus on the work that writers and tutors do together in terms of the key concept of this chapter, **identity**. What do we mean by identity in this context? Writing researchers Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs define it as comprising "an individual's characteristics or personality; it consists of those factors that create a sense of 'who you are.'" They note that "individuals may not have one 'true,' stable identity but might have multiple and/or changing identities" (797). Rebecca Day Babcock and her colleagues discuss writing center scholarship that considers how distinguishing characteristics of individuals and/or groups "contribute to the creation of the tutoring session" and the relationships of tutors and writers (13). They found that these studies addressed race, sex, gender, age, language backgrounds, physical and learning abilities, and cultural identity (15–23).

In his book *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring*, Harry Denny adds social class as well as sexuality/sexual orientation to the list and argues that “Identity is central to writing centers” (149).

Although we will address ways in which such identity characteristics can affect tutoring sessions, the point of this chapter is not to define these identity categories or to suggest that you try to place the individual writers and tutors you work with into them. As rhetoric and diversity researcher Stephanie Kerschbaum has argued, such categorization never tells even part of the story about a person. For one thing, we are all complex conglomerations of many identities; for another, these conglomerations are dynamic and change over time and in relation to other people, partly because these other people might or might not share, understand, or be aware of our identities. And finally, although it can be useful to be familiar with how identities might influence, for example, a writer’s or tutor’s expectations for how the session should run or the writing they might produce, if we pay too much attention to such categories, we can end up noticing only the identity(ies) and losing touch with the writer, her uniqueness, and her own motivations. In other words, instead of asking, “What categories do individuals belong to?” or “What categories can be ascribed to particular individuals?” Kerschbaum suggests we ask such questions as, “How do individuals position themselves alongside others? How are individuals positioned by others? How do individuals acknowledge similarities and differences between themselves and others?” (631). What matters, as much as the identity categories, is the relationship—however short lived—that you and the writer form out of what the two of you have in common and what differentiates you: how you work together on building commonalities and bridging gaps (a phrase that you’ll notice in many of the undergraduate tutor-researcher articles collected in Section IV and cited in this chapter).

Here, as in previous chapters, we know that you likely come to this discussion with prior knowledge, experience, and, given the nature of the topic, perhaps even concerns and hesitations. For example, you might

- **Already know a lot about identity:** You might be aware of how someone’s identity can affect how she writes, reads, and interacts with others, perhaps because you are confronted with your own identity every day, or because of experiences with family or friends or a class you’ve taken or reading you’ve done.
- **Have doubts about the relevance of identity to writing and tutoring:** Even if you answered the questions that begin this chapter, you might not think of yourself as having a particular identity, or you might not understand how it could be relevant to being a student.
- **Wonder about how to address identity in a tutoring session:** Imagining doing so might feel both too personal and too political, and you might worry about making the writer or yourself uncomfortable.

- **Be concerned about tutoring someone whose identity is different from yours:** What if you can’t find common ground? How will you move forward on working with the writer on his writing?

This chapter aims to address such concerns, questions, and doubts as well as help you apply what you already know about identity by expanding your repertoire as a tutor. We have organized this chapter so that it moves from general to specific, offering

- An overview of how all of us—tutors, writers, program directors, and book authors—have identities and what they can mean for tutoring.
- Additional general strategies that might be useful for any writer or tutor.
- More detailed strategies that writing center scholars and researchers have found useful for working with writers across differences of language, culture, and physical and learning abilities as well as through academic writing in the United States.

You might well note that the list of identity categories that we discuss below does not begin to cover the longer list that Babcock et al. and Denny enumerate at the beginning of this chapter. In part, this is because we are not able to address all the possible permutations of identity in writing tutoring sessions. Instead, we have chosen to focus on those categories that scholars and researchers in the field have said the most about and to offer general strategies that we think will enable you to be more flexible with your tutoring and therefore help writers across a range of identity differences. Again, throughout this chapter, we focus less on trying to define the “kinds” of writers that you’ll work with and more on offering strategies that tutors and writing center scholars and researchers have found to be useful for communicating across many differences in the tutoring session. These strategies build on the tutoring practices we offer in Chapter 3 in particular. Moreover, we believe our last topic, U.S. academic writing, which is perhaps the most difficult and the most controversial since it involves a critical look at “standards,” can serve as a good starting point for discussions about—and your own research into—ways identity affects writing, writers, and writing tutors in ways we do not address here.

For Writing

1. Pick one of the identity categories you listed for the first “For Discussion” question above and find two or three articles that show how this identity category has been treated in writing center studies. (For starters, search for the identity category in the online archive for *The Writing Lab Newsletter*. Next, search for “writing center” and the identity category on Google Scholar, ProQuest, JStor, and CompPile.) Summarize these characterizations briefly and describe how they compare with your firsthand experience.

2. Write a brief descriptive narrative that explains how you acquired a new discourse—a new set of vocabulary, rhetorical moves, and ways of presenting information valued by a group that you joined. This group might comprise colleagues at a new job (such as writing tutoring), at church, one of the groups you joined when you started college, a new set of friends, or a sports team. Focus on how you acquired this discourse, missteps you made as you did so, or the event(s) that made you feel like you could successfully navigate in this community. How might this compare with learning to write in a new language or dialect?

IDENTITY AND WRITING TUTORING PROGRAMS

In writing tutoring programs, “identity” as a category includes everyone and can affect many aspects of tutoring. As writing center scholars Jean Kiedaisch and Sue Dinitz hold, “tutees aren’t the only ones bringing ‘differences’ to a session. . . . [A]ll of us, directors, tutors, and tutees alike, bring aspects of our identity to tutoring” (“Changing” 49, 44).

Identity and the Authors

We start with two examples, namely “us,” the authors of this book—the abstract and disembodied “we” who have been talking to “you” in these many pages and are contained and informed by our own identities and the identities of the people we work with in the writing centers we direct:

Melissa has been aware of her differences throughout her time in university as both a student and a faculty member. As the first person in her family to go to college, she comes from a home culture that simultaneously valued higher education and devalued its use as anything but job training. Her blue-collar background contrasts with that of much of the student body of her current institution, who generally come from more affluent, educated families. She is aware, too, of the conflict between her outspoken, highly direct rhetoric and the common cultural expectations often associated with middle-aged, middle-class, Anglo womanhood. She tries to use these differences to help her tutors better understand students from the working class, to help put tutors and writers from other underrepresented groups at ease, and to open discussions about the range of real experiences that lies outside assumptions about how we “all” grew up. But she worries that she’s oversimplifying the lives of the tutors and writers in her center when she compares her experiences to theirs. And she worries that she’s not doing justice to her tutors or her own experiences when she “passes”—remains quiet on issues of difference and lets others assume she too is from an affluent, educated background.

Lauren directs a writing center in which identity is foregrounded every day. Because of the religious and cultural identity of Yeshiva University, the first and

largest U.S. institution of higher education under Jewish auspices, all of the undergraduates on her New York City campus are Jewish and almost always Orthodox men, which means they follow biblical law concerning Sabbath, diet, interactions between men and women, prayer, and other aspects of day-to-day life. From the outside, it might be hard to imagine a more homogeneous writing center, and, indeed, tutors’ and writers’ shared identity can make their work together easier. Due to their religious practices, for example, undergraduate tutors and writers usually have a familiarity with one-to-one collaborative learning as well as, as tutor Efrayim Clair points out, a “larger shared vocabulary that gives us more options for communicating and making ourselves clearer to each other.” On the other hand, this center is a crossroads for many different identities, in terms of class, educational background, language, nationality, race, culture, sexual orientation, learning abilities, and physical abilities. And that’s just in terms of undergraduate tutors and writers. If directors (including Lauren, a middle-aged female Caucasian Protestant from Oklahoma), faculty tutors, and writers from YU’s nonsectarian graduate programs are included, age and gender become part of the mix too. This intersection of identities has caused confusion, tensions, and difficulties over the years but also, as we have become more aware of them and how to build on them, insight, enlightenment, and excitement.

Identity and Tutors

In programs across the United States, undergraduate writing tutor-researchers, too, have paid attention to their own identities and how this affects their work—in terms of, for example, their economic privilege (Brecht; this book) or disadvantage (Bielski Boris), race and ethnicity (Varma), sexuality (Doucette; this book), religion (Rich), and disability (Ryan). Anita Varma, for example, reflects on times that, prompted by assumptions based solely on her outward appearance, writers have asked her when she “learned to speak English”:

[M]y physical appearance includes visual cues that telegraph “foreignness” to the all-American student beside me, who might assume that the brown-skinned woman with gold Indian jewelry and bangles must be an immigrant. In the case of immigrant families or students, appearance might also suggest bilingualism, and bilingualism might signify membership in a subaltern minority group. Therefore, it is understandable—though perhaps not entirely pleasing to the person on the receiving end of the question—that a naive college student who has not had much exposure to members of subaltern groups might make some incorrect assumptions about a writing partner during a consultation. (32)

Discomfort and even anger can arise when assumptions are made about someone’s identity based on limited (or merely presumed) information. But this isn’t the only way that tutor identity can affect the tutoring session. As Claire Elizabeth O’Leary maintains in her study of the impact of gender in the writing

conference, tutor and writer identities are in dialogue together in a variety of ways:

A tutor's spontaneous conversational responses are influenced by more than the content of the conversation. . . . [T]he flow and development of the conversation are also affected by how the tutor and student enact and respond to each other's social identities. . . . [T]he social identities that could affect conversation often correspond to physically apparent characteristics that identify different persons as belonging to different social groups. Such outwardly visible characteristics lead others to make conclusions, correct or not, about an individual's status "at first glance." (483, this book)

O'Leary, like Kerschbaum, suggests that at least as important as the identity categories themselves are the relationships that writers and tutors form together, based on a range of information, assumptions, and cues.

Identity and Writing

The identities that tutors and writers share or that differentiate them affect their work together in a number of ways. The writing that a writer and tutor work on together might, for instance, look different from what might be called "Standard" English or "Academic Writing." These differences can include sentence-level matters such as grammar and vocabulary as well as more global issues such as organization, how the writer positions himself in relation to his material and addresses his audience, and, as we discuss in Chapter 4, whether and how the writer uses and cites sources. Additionally, the writer's or tutor's spoken language might not match the writing and both might not fully convey his intelligence. Therefore, assumptions we make about writers based on how they speak or write can be incorrect.

Identity and Behaviors

Another way that identity can affect the session is in terms of how tutors and writers behave during a session. When a writer and tutor have similar expectations, the session can get off to a smooth start, but when they don't, both can act in ways that might be surprising to the other. For instance, both will probably have expectations about how much authority the tutor and writer should have in determining the agenda for the session. Similarly, both will likely have expectations about personal space (how much is too much, how much too little), which might or might not align. And both might well have expectations about what constitutes politeness in this setting and whether directness, in particular, is considered impolite and to be avoided or so important that how polite it is might be irrelevant. Finally, as Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth H. Boquet point out, "because time is experienced differently in different cultures, one person's timekeeping may be uncomfortable and unfamiliar to a person from another culture" (35).

Identity and the Session

As a result of these dynamics, the shape of the tutoring session might be affected too. Writer and tutor might spend substantial time at the beginning and, indeed, throughout the session getting to know each other and negotiating how their work should proceed. They might focus much of their attention on particular aspects of the writing such as sentence-level issues or organization. They might work on helping the writer understand the reading, including the instructor's assignment. The tutor might transcribe, writing down for the writer his ideas or revision plans or both.

For Writing

1. Interview one or more tutors about tutor identity: ask about the group affiliations that shape their own identities and how they see these categories affecting their tutorials. How do their identities appear to be understood by the writers with whom they work? Do they perceive their identity as affecting the tutoring session and, if so, how?
2. Using the data available from your tutoring program and from your institution, compare the demographic makeup of writers at your institution to the pool that uses your services. What groups are over- or underrepresented? Now compare this data to the demographic data of who works in your writing tutoring program. What identity categories appear to be over- and underrepresented? Reflect upon changes that might make your center more accessible to underrepresented groups.

IDENTITY AND TUTORING STRATEGIES

Because the strategies described in Chapter 3 will be useful as you work with writers across identity differences, then worth revisiting in Table 5.1 (next page). Several of these strategies can be expanded on in general ways so that they are more flexible for a wider range of writers. Following the lead of Kiedaisch and Dinitz as well as graduate student tutor-researcher Allison Hitt, whose article is included in Section IV, we reconsider these strategies in terms of a "universal design" approach to tutoring that advocates for redesigning services "so that they are suited to a broad range of users" and aims to make all tutoring sessions "accessible to the widest audience possible, reducing the need to treat any writer as having 'special needs'" (Kiedaisch and Dinitz "Changing" 50–51). As Hitt clarifies, this approach "does not eliminate the need to identify students' individual needs." Instead, it asks us "to acknowledge that *all* students have multiple ways of learning and knowing and to be flexible to those different needs" (387, this book).

Table 5.1 Revisit Tutoring Strategies from Chapter 3.**Engage in Interpersonal and Motivational Conversation**

- Get acquainted
- Ask (and answer) questions
- Make statements
- Offer your perspective as a reader
- Take an interest
- Praise
- Listen
- Consider nonverbal cues

Scaffold the Writer's Learning and Decide Together on the Agenda

- Ask the writer what the agenda should be
- Analyze the assignment and context
- Read the writing
- Negotiate the priorities for the session
- If the writer has no writing, help her get started
- Wrap up
- Reflect

Ask Additional Questions to Help You and the Writer Get Acquainted

If the writer herself does not tell you about her identity and how it might affect her writing, finding out can be complicated. For instance, you wouldn't want to make assumptions based on how someone looks, similar to those made by the writer Varma worked with. Instead, Kiedaisch and Dinitz suggest adding the following questions to your repertoire because they "give every student the opportunity to share, and tutors to listen for, information that will help the tutor decide what approaches and strategies might work best for that individual"—and without requiring either of you "to directly use the language of identity or difference":

- "Before we get started, is there anything else you'd like me to know?"
- "Have you worked with a tutor before?" If the student answers yes, . . . ask what worked or didn't work . . . in those sessions. If the student replies no, ask . . . what ideas the student has for how [you] might best work together.
- "Tell me more about how you usually go about writing papers, and what parts are easy for you and what parts are difficult." ("Changing" 52–53)

These questions could be useful for your work with any writer.

Make Direct and Explicit Statements

To ensure that their sessions are effective, tutors sometimes need to be more direct and explicit than they might usually be comfortable with. Undergraduate

tutor-researcher Frances Nan, whose article we've included in Section IV, points out that tutoring programs often encourage indirectness (e.g., "asking leading questions, allowing writers to say what they think rather than tutors thinking for them") and hedging ("speech that 'uses terms that soften the message such as *maybe, might, kind of, could possibly*'") (468, 464–65, this book). In the United States, certain cultural expectations can make such indirect, hedging language seem more polite and formal than direct and explicit language. In their empirical study of questions, Isabelle Thompson and Jo Mackiewicz note that although such language "implies that the tutor is aware of and respects a students' ownership of the conference agenda," such concerns must be balanced with those "for clarity and students' understanding" (62). Questions and hedging, for example, might take for granted knowledge about cultural expectations that the writer might not have. As a result, in some situations using more direct and explicit language can be helpful.

Use a Range of Communication Strategies to Engage the Writer's Learning Style

Hitt advocates for a **multimodal toolkit**, "multiple and flexible practices—that allow [tutors] to adapt to different communicative interactions" (386, this book). "Multimodal" refers to the different ways we communicate information, whether

Table 5.2 Multimodal Tutoring Strategies.**Strategies that appeal to different learning styles (from Ryan and Zimmerelli):**

- **Visual strategies** for working on writing include pointing and other hand gestures, underlining or highlighting parts of the writing, taking notes or drawing maps or diagrams, and anything else that can serve as "visual reminders" for the writer after the session (60).
- **Kinesthetic strategies** highlight the physical activities involved with the visual strategies of gesturing, marking the writing, and drawing and mapping, and can include having the writer cut up a hard copy of her paper or writing out ideas on index cards or PostIts and rearranging them (60). Play-Doh, Legos bricks, and blocks can also help writers represent and physically shape their ideas.
- **Auditory strategies** include reading aloud (by the tutor or writer), repeating and rephrasing, explaining and "verbally reinforc[ing]" any visual and kinesthetic strategies you and the writer use, restating what you and the writer have discussed so far, and recording your conversation with the writer (60).

Other strategies for your expanded multimodal toolkit:

- **Make use of grammar resources**, such as handbooks and online resources, such as the Purdue Online Writing Lab. You can work through these with the writer in visual, auditory, and even kinesthetic ways.
- **Have sample student papers on hand** so you can show writers concrete examples of how information can be presented and what "good" academic writing looks like.
- **Work online**, by way of synchronous or asynchronous online tutoring (see Chapter 7) or use a word processing or text messaging program.
- **Work in small groups** rather than with individual writers, and see Alicia Brazeau's article in Section IV for a study of some writers' preferences for working in small groups over one-to-one.

through written text, visual means, or sound. (This is a concept we say more about in Chapter 7.) In this context, multimodality can include using techniques that appeal to what are commonly known as **learning styles**—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (related to movement) summarized in Table 5.2.

In the sections that follow, we discuss in more detail strategies that might work for writers with particular identities. As we mention above, in this chapter we focus less on trying to define “kinds” of writers and more on offering a range of strategies that tutors and writing center scholars have found to be useful across several (although certainly not all) identity differences among both tutors and writers. You might find that any of these strategies might work with any writer you tutor.

For Writing

1. What language(s) have you studied or otherwise acquired (for instance, in a bilingual home)? How do you view the differences in your primary language and the other language(s) you've learned? Are there particular situations in which a language other than your home language seems better suited to your goal? What kind of “business” is best transacted in this language? What kind of social play? Family bonding? Something else?
2. What, if anything, do you know about academic writing forms other than U.S. academic prose? Read two or three articles on a form of academic writing beyond those common in the United States, such as Dirk Siepmann's “Academic Writing and Culture: An Overview of Differences between English, French and German” or Ewa Donesch-Jezo's “Comparison of Generic Organization of the Research Paper in English and Polish: Cross-Cultural Variation and Pedagogical Implications,” and compare the writing you accomplish in your own courses with the forms described there.

TUTORING ACROSS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE DIFFERENCES

Of the many kinds of identity differences that tutors work across, those most often discussed by writing center scholars have to do with language and culture, and more specifically writers who are referred to as ESL (English as a second language), ELL (English language learner), NNS (non-native speaker), L2 (second-language learner), international (educated outside the United States), and “Generation 1.5” (people who are “in between” as English users, perhaps because they learned English in the United States but do not speak it at home). We prefer the term **multilingual writers** because although it's less precise than the others, it has more positive connotations; this term reminds us that knowing more about languages is a benefit rather than a deficit. For these writers, operating in more

than one language is part of their identities, but because these writers or their families often come from non-English-speaking countries and because language always contains cultural aspects, cultural differences may affect their writing and tutoring sessions as well.

What Is *Your* Language Background?

How you approach working with writers across language and cultural differences might well depend on your own linguistic and cultural background(s). For instance, if you are multilingual yourself, you might be aware of language diversity, not only in terms of vocabulary and grammar, but also how speakers of a language prefer to present ideas and themselves to readers or listeners. And you likely know how writing in a second language can result in additional opportunities for cognitive overload, since making writing look like that of a native speaker can be difficult. This knowledge will serve you well as you help writers who are working to improve their English. In addition, this knowledge can help other tutors in your program if you choose to share your insights and experiences with them.

On the other hand, you might have very limited or no experience learning another language: maybe English is the only language you know and the United States the only country you've lived in, so you might be nervous about the prospect of working with someone with a different cultural background from your own who is still learning English. But there's little reason to worry, because

- **There is a lot of useful research and advice available** for helping multilingual writers, some of which we summarize below. We especially recommend the video *Writing Across Borders*, directed by Wayne Robertson, as well as Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth's edited collection, *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*.
- **One-to-one tutoring can help multilingual writers.** New tutors sometimes feel that the individualized help they offer will be a distant second to classroom-based instruction. But ESL researcher Iлона Leki holds that “Writing centers may be the ideal learning environment for students whose first or strongest language is not English: one-on-one, context rich, highly focused on a specific current writing need, and offering the possibility of negotiation of meaning (i.e., conversational back-and-forth that is thought to promote second language acquisition)” (1).
- **You don't have to be a grammar expert.** According to Terese Thonus, being able to correct errors and recite rules is less important than prompting multilingual writers to see their own errors, validating corrections they make, and following “through to revision of grammar, lexis [vocabulary], and discourse features” (qtd. in Babcock and Thonus 99). To learn some of the basics you'll need, you might read the ESL sections available in many writing handbooks or online, in the Purdue Online Writing Lab and other writing center websites.

Or it might be that you are somewhere between: maybe members of your family know and speak a language other than English at home that you might or might not be fluent in. Or maybe you've studied one or more languages at school and, again, have some familiarity but aren't comfortable speaking or writing in them. You might, therefore, have a good idea about how much hard work and time language learning takes, and how easy it is to make the same mistakes again and again. These experiences might give you extra patience for the time involved with negotiating meaning. The good news is that this extra time will be beneficial to the writer. As Thonus says, "research suggests [that] taking more time results in more durable and transferable language and writing skills" (qtd. in Babcock and Thonus 99).

Strategies for Working Across Language and Culture Differences

Here, we refine some of the strategies discussed in Chapter 3 as well as the "multimodal toolkit" described above so that they are more appropriate to working with writers across language and cultural differences. Again, however, you might find that they'll be useful for a range of writers.

Get Acquainted

It won't necessarily be apparent whether a writer is or is not multilingual or, more precisely, whether his language and/or cultural background have any impact upon his writing. If the writer doesn't tell you or you don't know through some other means (such as information he included when he signed up for an appointment), perhaps Kiedaisch and Dinitz's open-ended questions (e.g., "Is there anything else you'd like me to know?") or something else later in the session will prompt the writer to talk about his background. Once a writer does so, Babcock and Thonus suggest finding out how proficient in English the writer is (or considers himself to be) (105), and Nan recommends asking about the writer's education so far (466, this book).

Consider Nonverbal Cues

Nonverbal cues are especially important to keep in mind because they too are culturally determined. Specific gestures, such as ways of nodding one's head, or matters of personal space can differ dramatically across cultures, so it will be useful to try to be aware when you are making assumptions about someone's emotional state or level of engagement based on her facial expressions and how close she sits to you. Nan points out another dimension of nonverbal cues that will be useful to be aware of. Multilingual writers, she holds, "are much more likely to pick up on the tutor's body language or tone of voice as a substitute for listening to a tutor's words. They will be able to tell when a tutor is merely being polite or when she or he is consciously trying to speak slowly" (469, this book).

Her advice is, again, to be direct and explicit:

Rather than sugarcoat anything, a tutor must be honest and clear. Asking, "Do you need me to repeat what I just said?" is better than assuming that the writer

does not understand unless spoken to slowly, or telling the writer that his or her English is better than it is. A lack of transparency from either tutor or writer can lead to negative results. (469, this book)

And, again, this advice might be useful for any tutoring session.

Ask the Writer What He Wants to Work on—and How He Wants to Work

Although multilingual writers might want to work on grammar and other sentence-level issues, it's important not to assume this will always be the case. As in any tutoring session, start by finding out what the writer wants to work on. If he says he wants to work on grammar, find out what he has in mind; as we discuss in Chapter 3, when writers do not have experience talking about writing, they might use the word "grammar" to describe a variety of writing issues, including vocabulary or word choice, clarity of expression, and use of idioms, punctuation, and a host of other issues that aren't, strictly speaking, related to grammar.

Also relevant here is that writers from cultural backgrounds different from your own might not share your perspective on how the session should proceed. Nan and other researchers observe that because writers unfamiliar with writing tutoring in the United States might see tutors as authority figures, they might assume that tutors will make the decisions about what to work on and not allow writers to ask questions or disagree (467, this book). As Nan goes on to suggest, this is a key area in which being direct and transparent is especially important (468–69, this book). Gillespie and Lerner recommend talking openly with writers about tutoring sessions—for instance, by explaining what expectations your program has for how tutors and writers should work together (119).

Analyze the Assignment/Context

If you are tutoring in an institution in which faculty assume that students have a strong understanding of English and familiarity with U.S. academic writing, a crucial aspect of the assignment and context will be the conventions and rhetorical features of this writing, including, as we touch on in the previous chapter, citation practices. Nan notes that U.S. academic writing "emphasizes a strict point-evidence-explain structure, as well as original thinking and creative engagement with multiple academic sources" (467, this book). By contrast, academic writing in other countries can follow other organizational structures and address readers quite differently. Chinese writers, for example, typically "do not state their thesis until the end so that readers realize the writer's intentions themselves" (Nan 467, this book).

To get a sense not only of the diverse ways cultures structure writing and social interactions through language—that is, **rhetoric**—but also some of the limitations of U.S. academic writing styles, we recommend watching the video *Writing Across Borders* (which, as of this writing, is available on YouTube). Such comparison makes up an area of study called **contrastive rhetoric**, which

“suggests that writers’ linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds may influence [their] texts in various ways” (Matsuda and Cox 44). Tutors can find it useful to know that there are differences among writing styles across cultures, not least because this knowledge demonstrates that rather than natural or universal, the conventions of U.S. academic writing are, as ESL and writing center scholar Amy Jo Minett says, “no better or worse than other conventions” (68). In addition, it’s been argued that contrastive rhetoric can lead multilingual writers to “enlightenment about their writing in English, as students suddenly become conscious of the implicit assumptions behind the way they construct written ideas and behind the way English does” (Leki qtd. in Minett 68).

But in *Writing Across Borders*, director Wayne Robertson explains that the theory of contrastive rhetoric is controversial because it can serve as another way of making assumptions about writers based on their backgrounds. As ESL researchers Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox caution, we shouldn’t overgeneralize about individuals’ writing based on their culture or languages because “not all differences can be attributed to differences in ESL writers’ native language or cultural background” (44). There might be many reasons why a writer’s text does not follow a conventional aspect of U.S. academic writing, such as what was emphasized (or not) in the writer’s previous education (44–45) as well as the processes he used to produce his text. Because we cannot describe the full range of culturally informed rhetorical styles without making such overgeneralizations, instead we focus below on a few key conventions of U.S. academic writing that might be useful for you and the writers you tutor to be aware of.

Characteristics of U.S. Academic Writing. By discussing key characteristics of U.S. academic writing, we don’t want to suggest that it has one unified style that follows the same format no matter what the discipline or level. In fact, as you’ll see in the next chapter, we believe that differences among different kinds of academic writing are crucial for tutors to know about. Here, however, we look at what these different kinds of writing often have in common—and what readers and writers of this writing tend to value—because learning to recognize the commonalities can be the first step in understanding the differences.

One generalization that tends to hold true across different kinds of academic writing in the United States is that it is **reader centered**. That is, the aim of much of this writing is to make its ideas as clear as possible to its intended readers (which we touch upon in the previous chapter in terms of Flower’s valuing of “Reader-Based” over “Writer-Based” prose). Of course, what’s “clear” to writers and readers who belong to a discipline that uses specialized language will not necessarily be clear to those of us outside of the discipline. But, in general, “clarity” in U.S. academic writing is achieved by focusing these ideas around a central argument that is stated explicitly at the beginning and reiterated and supported with evidence throughout. Readers are also kept on track in this writing through the presentation of distinctly delimited units of information in the form of

paragraphs and/or sections with topic sentences, transitions, and headers that link these units together and move the reader forward. As a result, this writing is described as “linear” and is often contrasted with the work of writers from Asian cultures that might “withhold the thesis statement until the very end,” making the reader “work harder to understand the writer’s meaning” (Minett 67, 69).

Helping Writers Navigate U.S. Academic Writing. Scholars Jennifer E. Staben and Kathryn Dempsey Nordhaus offer two useful suggestions. First, they recommend discussing with multilingual writers “the directness of US culture, where phrases like ‘get to the point’ and ‘time is money’ are frequently used and show them how these values are reflected in our rhetorical choices.” Doing so can be a good way to explain “why main ideas tend to be frontloaded at both the essay and paragraph level in US academic writing” (83). Second, they recommend spending time working through the instructor’s written instructions as a culturally informed document. This includes alerting writers to the features we discuss in Chapter 3—key words, directions about the kinds of evidence needed and formatting, and information that’s relevant to the assignment but external to it, such as a grading rubric or instructor comments. But Staben and Nordhaus point out that you might need to make clear “assumptions that are not usually directly addressed.” To do this, they suggest reading the assignment, asking the writer to explain how he understands what it is asking him to do and how he tried to meet those expectations, and comparing the writer’s understanding to your own: Where was he on track? What did he miss? (81). Nan cautions against lecturing multilingual writers on U.S. academic writing, suggesting that it is more productive to scaffold the discussion in the way that Staben and Nordhaus outline, “gaug[ing] the writer’s level of knowledge” by asking questions about what he knows already about academic writing in the United States: “What do *you* think a thesis statement is in college writing?” (468, this book).

Read the Writing (If There Is Any)

As in any tutoring session, reading through the writer’s text and encouraging the writer’s participation in this process are crucial. But working through a multilingual writer’s text might involve additional subtleties. First of all, as Matsuda and Cox observe, for native speakers who can draw on their extensive and intuitive knowledge of English to gauge the correctness and effectiveness of their writing, reading aloud can be a useful strategy. For writers with less than native fluency, this strategy might not be as useful. Matsuda and Cox suggest instead that the tutor try reading aloud, with the writer following along and noticing when the tutor has difficulty, adds missing words, or changes the words, as well as when the reading goes smoothly. However, they caution that “if the number of errors prevents the tutor from reading aloud without stumbling too often, it may be more effective for the tutor to read silently, focusing on sorting through meaning” (47). In addition, they strongly recommend reading the writing twice,

with the first read-through reserved for getting the gist—what the writer is trying to say with her writing—and understanding “how the paper is organized on its own terms” (48).

Negotiate Priorities for the Session

As we mention in Chapter 3, negotiating priorities begins from the onset of the session, when the writer tells you why she has come for tutoring in the first place. However, after you've read through the writing and talked about it would be a good point to check in with the writer to see what she thinks she most needs help with. The following questions can provide both you and the writer with a checklist of potential areas to work on:

Are There Global Issues That Need Work? Even if the writer's work contains sentence-level issues, she might see the need to work on other matters, so it's important to find out what her priorities are. These global issues might be related to those we describe in Chapter 3, such as ensuring that the writing conveys the main point or focus that the writer had in mind, addresses the assignment, and organizes ideas and evidence. But as we explain above, these issues might include additional subtleties such as addressing both the explicit instructions and implicit assumptions of the assignment and presenting the argument and evidence in ways that meet the expectations of readers familiar with U.S. academic writing. Global issues too are culturally determined.

Are Some Sentence-Level Issues Global Issues? Another subtlety to keep in mind is that multicultural writers' texts often underscore the ways in which the sentence-level issues can themselves be global issues—and that there is sometimes not a clear distinction between them. After all, it is through a writer's individual sentences and words that readers develop a sense of the whole piece of writing, including its main focus, relationship to the assignment, and organization. To help you and the writer negotiate this subtle work, prioritizing certain kinds of errors over others can help. Below, we provide more detail about the different levels of error you and the writer might come across, starting with those that might most influence the reader's understanding of what is happening at the global level.

Are There Errors That Prevent Readers from Understanding the Meaning? Most important of the kinds of errors you might find are those that prevent the writer's intended readers from understanding what she is trying to say, errors that likely have to do with word choice, word order, and verb tenses (Matsuda and Cox 47). To locate and alert the writer to such errors, Matsuda and Cox recommend looking for and putting small marks next to “features or details that seem surprising or those that jar the reading process: the unexpected” (48). Doing so, they hold, requires an extra level of awareness of your own

expectations as a reader, along the lines of the reflective work tutors do when they offer metacommentary:

For instance, if a particular passage seems disorienting, the reader can take advantage of this situation by focusing on where he or she started feeling lost and why. What in the text caused the reader to wander? What is it about the reader's own expectations that contributed to the feeling of disorientation? The reader should also focus on areas where he or she feels “stuck”—unable to generate meaning from the text—and use this experience as an opportunity to consider what would be needed to move forward in the reading process. Does the reader need to ask the writer a question? Does the reader need to mark the area and then move on with reading, in the hope that another section of the paper will help the reader negotiate the challenging section? (48)

In an article included in Section IV, undergraduate tutor-researcher Cameron Mozafari puts this process more bluntly, holding that as tutors read multilingual writers' work, “they should avoid trying to understand what they cannot” because doing so “is equivalent to translating the text from what the student is saying to what the tutor is interpreting it as” (54). Mozafari reports on a strategy that takes Matsuda and Cox's recommendations one step further. He asked a multilingual writer, Kim, to read her text aloud and to do this prioritizing herself, by “mark[ing] only the parts of her paper that confused her or the parts where she wasn't sure if she was being clear.” According to Mozafari, this process “motivated Kim to actively read her paper and look for disconnects between what she meant to say and what she was saying”—“places where she felt that her text . . . was not accurately communicating what she meant (her motive for writing the text)” (460, this book).

Are There Word Choice Errors? Carol Severino and Elizabeth Deifell argue that attention to word choice and vocabulary is especially important for multilingual writers because errors in this area are often more common than those having to do with grammar. Vocabulary is crucial for “readers' comprehension and evaluation” as well as for the writer's “ability to function successfully in a second language academic environment” (49). Their case study of a multilingual writer demonstrates that his vocabulary improved because of focused work in this area, which included both direct correction of vocabulary errors and the reflective “meta-discourse that explains them” (e.g., “Why should you use ‘look at’ rather than ‘look?’”) They argue that because these discussions can help multilingual writers become more consciously aware of their language, they can foster “explicit and purposeful learning” (49).

Are There Patterns of Error That the Writer Can Learn to Correct on Her Own? Next on the list of errors to address might come errors that appear several times in one piece of writing and that writers can correct themselves. Cynthia Linville describes these errors as usually having to do with “subject-verb agreement, verb

tense, verb form, singular-plural noun endings, word form, and sentence structure" (119). She admits that the work involved with this process—for instance, asking the writer to underline each subject and verb pair—can be slow going (122–23). She recommends becoming familiar with and using relevant grammar resources, samples of which are available in her chapter (123–29) and at the Purdue Online Writing Lab.

What If You Can't Explain the Errors You See? If you're like us and the tutors we've worked with, you might come across an error that you can't explain or find in a resource. First and foremost, and as with all tutoring situations, we have to be honest about the limits of our knowledge and admit when we don't know why a verb should take a particular form or why a particular article or preposition belongs where it does. If other tutors or administrators are around and aren't busy—and if this feels important enough to stop the session—we can ask them for help. Alternatively, we might write down the error and the writer's email address and follow up later. Or, and this might be more risky, we can offer what we *think* we know—that this part of the writing doesn't seem right to us and here's what we'd do instead—but we have to explain to the writer that we're drawing on our intuitive knowledge of the language rather than our explicit understanding of specific grammar rules. It might be that we have to admit that we just don't know, encourage the writer to ask his professor, and move on to something we can help the writer with.

If There Is No Writing, Help the Writer Get Started

To help a multilingual writer start from ground zero on a piece of writing, any of the strategies for generating ideas and writing that we discuss in Chapters 3 and 4 can be useful. You might need to highlight the cultural expectations of the assignment and help the writer work on any related reading and associated special vocabulary. Most of all, you'll want to draw on your conversational, motivational, and scaffolding skills, taking an interest in the writer's ideas, perhaps with a pen in hand so you can take notes, draw a map, or in other ways help him plan out what he'd like to say, and encouraging the writer to start on this writing during the session himself.

Wrap Up

As with all sessions, you'll want to keep your eye on the clock so that you and the writer don't feel rushed at the end, set aside the last ten minutes or so to give the writer time to address any final concerns and make a plan for what she'll address on her own. You'll also want to invite the writer to use your program again.

Reflect

During and after sessions, reflection can be especially useful when working with writers across language and cultural differences. As Severino and Deifell suggest,

writers and tutors can reflect by using "meta-discourse" to describe why a language choice is the correct one. In addition, some scholars recommend that multilingual writers keep a log to keep track of these choices and reflections (Cogie, Strain, and Lorinkas 18–19, 25–28). Even if the writer is disinclined to keep such a log, simply talking about what he learned about and accomplished in the session can promote such reflection. Tutors, too, should reflect on these sessions, to consolidate their learning for themselves and for other tutors in their programs.

For Writing

1. What do you know about the way that you learn? What are your own learning differences? Are you a strong visual learner? (Do you map things out? Are you good with directions?) Are you a strong auditory learner? (Do you learn well in situations in which you hear something explained?) Are you a tactile or kinesthetic learner? (Do you learn well in situations where you move around and/or physically manipulate items to illustrate a concept?)
2. Write a brief narrative that illustrates a way in which you learn well or in which you have difficulty learning well.
3. Write a brief essay that describes as a learning environment the space in which you tutor. How, for example, does this space engage the senses? What kind of learning and learners does the configuration of space enable, encourage, discourage, and prohibit? Envision and describe the learning styles of the writer who might benefit the most from your program. Now describe a writer whose learning styles would not match well. Are there ways to adapt the program to better meet the needs of both, and if so should the program change? Why or why not?

TUTORING ACROSS PHYSICAL AND LEARNING DIFFERENCES

How you work with writers across differences in physical and learning abilities might also depend on your own identity or background. If you have a disability yourself or know people with such differences, you will likely be well aware that disabilities make up an even bigger identity category than that of language and culture, since they include a range of both physical and cognitive impairments.

If you don't have experience with or knowledge of physical and learning disabilities and differences, the International Writing Centers Association's Statement on Disabilities might help. For one thing, it provides a sense of how wide-ranging this identity category is. Following the United Nations and World Health Assembly's definition, this statement holds that **disability** is "Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." At least fifteen percent

of the population is disabled “and people with disabilities are considered ‘the population’s largest minority.’” Therefore, disability “is a universal human experience and not a concern to a minority of humanity: every human being can suffer from a decrement in health and, thereby, experience some disability” (1).

The universality of physical and learning disabilities means that writers, tutors, directors, and other members of writing tutoring programs work with them every day. In addition, Babcock and Thonus point out that the accommodations stipulated by the Americans with Disabilities Act extend “to all educational contexts, including the writing center” (93). Along with being entitled to use writing tutoring programs, students with disabilities might even prefer them to the disabilities offices on their campuses, according to writing center scholar Julie Neff Lippman (Clark et al. 238). As a result, Hitt urges those of us in writing tutoring programs to be prepared to work with “*all* students” as part of our commitment to treat writers “individually and, thus, as *different* from one another in terms of what they bring to the center and how they learn and compose” (383, this book). In her award-winning article on tutoring deaf writers, Babcock holds that “tutors must respect students’ abilities and realize that all students are different: some process information differently due to preference, and some, such as deaf students and students with LDs, process information differently due to differences in hard wiring” (“Interpreted” 112).

Fortunately, because writing tutors and writing tutoring programs have long recognized that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to tutoring and writing, respecting writers as individuals and tailoring our work to fit their needs is a large part of what we do in any case. This following pages will provide you with additional flexible strategies to include in your multimodal tutoring toolkit that should be especially helpful in working with writers across differences in learning and physical abilities. Generally speaking, these flexible approaches can include those listed in Table 5.3 (next page).

Below, we describe in more detail additional strategies that researchers have identified as helping work across physical and learning differences. We start with discussions of dyslexia and deafness, two disabilities that might affect the writer’s text and language. Then we move to disabilities that might cause behavioral differences, including attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and others that result in pragmatic impairment, which can include difficulty in understanding how others are feeling or their mental states, sarcasm, irony, and jokes, as well as ambiguity and indirectness (Perkins qtd. in Babcock “When” 286, this book). We should point out that, in contrast to the relatively large amount of research and tutor-education materials on multilingual writers, there is significantly less information about tutoring writing across learning and physical differences. Below, we survey some of the research and advice currently available. We also encourage you and the other members of your program to contact the disabilities office on your campus to find out about local resources and to pursue your own research on these important topics.

Table 5.3 General Strategies for Working Across Differences in Learning and Physical Abilities.

- *Use familiar tutoring strategies*, such as getting acquainted; asking the writer what she wants to work on; analyzing the assignment or context for the writing, reading the writing (if there is any), and helping the writer get started if not; negotiating priorities, wrapping up, and reflecting.
- *Draw on strategies for working across language and cultural differences*. You might need to be more direct than feels natural or comfortable to you. You might find that reading aloud (by you or the writer) is not an effective strategy. You might need to give the writer more time to answer questions.
- *Ask the writer what works for him*. As Gillespie and Lerner suggest, the writer himself can be “your best resource in the tutorial.” Along with asking the writer directly about strategies that help him succeed at various tasks, “even nonwritten ones,” be sure to listen and observe the writer to find out what works. “You will need to be flexible, patient, and creative in your sessions” (170).
- *Be flexible about writing process strategies*. Gillespie and Lerner explain that for some writers with learning disabilities, brainstorming strategies such as freewriting might not be useful. They recommend instead using questions to help writers “develop their ideas. Some will need you to write down key terms or take notes as you ask them questions about the subject matter. Some may need you to help them organize their ideas into an outline” (170).
- *Support visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles*. Hitt suggests using strategies that play to the writer’s strengths and abilities: “If a student prefers drawing, tutors can adapt, asking the student to sketch an outline of their main ideas. Similarly, talking through a text could be more beneficial than reading it word for word” (387, this book).
- *Be prepared to not know about the writer’s disability*. The writer’s cognitive or physical difference might not be apparent or relevant to your work. Moreover, the writer might not want to tell you or know about it fully himself. Kiedaisch and Dinitz’s opening questions that we include above can invite disclosure, but you should not ask, since doing so likely violates the writer’s right to privacy.

Dyslexia

In a study for which she interviewed dyslexic students at her institution, undergraduate tutor-researcher Jennifer Wewers defines dyslexia as a broad category with “a diversity of characteristics” (230). As a “language-based processing disorder,” it can include difficulties with reading (decoding words, seeing “letter-sound correspondences,” and “processing the context”), “listening/comprehension difficulties,” spelling, and writing processes (234, 230–31). As she is careful to point out, “dyslexia is not the result of subnormal intelligence” (230).

Wewers suggests that many of the strategies that tutors would use with any writer, such as offering their perspectives as readers and “encouraging multi-drafting and revising,” are useful for writers with dyslexia. She cautions, however, against viewing “dyslexic writers as ‘just like’ non-dyslexic writers” since this might give the impression that tutors are “delegitimizing or trivializing [their] unique problems” (232). Tutoring strategies that might be less effective for these writers include reading aloud, hedging, and even asking questions, since a dyslexic writer who has “trouble with short-term memory retention may be

unable to answer the questions a tutor poses, or may need more time to arrive at an answer" (233).

Wewers urges tutors to "be flexible and creative" in their approaches, including varying "channels of communication." For instance, rather than simply repeating a question that a writer can't answer, she recommends rephrasing it in different ways "until one of them finally 'clicks'" (233–34). Tutors might also need to help dyslexic writers with reading, since one of the writers she interviewed described her struggles with paraphrasing and synthesizing material. Wewers suggests "asking guiding questions about the material and then writing down what the student says in response, following the tutee's train of thought in written form" (235). Another writer Wewers interviewed talked about her difficulties with organization and with writing that "wanders" in ways she cannot pinpoint herself (235). This writer recommended that tutors "be very specific when they are identifying aspects of a paper that are unclear or disorganized, taking care to explain exactly why they are confused" (236). Wewers suggests making a reverse outline for the writer and looking over an example of the kind of writing the writer is working on, talking over its "rhetorical moves," and highlighting the choices made by the writer of the example. "Stressing choices in this way might be helpful for the dyslexic student who has often felt that his or her choice has been taken away. With choice, tutees may feel a greater sense of control over their writing" (236).

Wewers points out too that dyslexic students might need help with grammar and spelling. Gillespie and Lerner, describing the writing of learning-disabled writers in general, explain that "The written page might not look the same to the LD writer as it does to you." This writer might not see errors in spelling or grammar. As a result, you'll need to help the writer find and correct the errors (170–71). Lippman suggests taking this process one step further. Rather than helping the writer make corrections on a hard copy, which might result in additional mistakes as the writer types in corrections later on, the tutor might work with the writer on an electronic copy, typing in the corrections as the writer says them out loud and "repeating [the writer's] words to make sure the sentences say exactly what [the writer] wants them to say"—because the writer might be able to "hear the wrong word even when he can't see it." She recommends also pointing out when a "sentence is perfect" and not treating the changes as a "big deal" (Clark et al. 240).

Deafness

Working successfully across hearing differences requires hearing tutors to reflect on several assumptions they might hold and adjust their tutoring strategies accordingly. Babcock explains that deaf people, as distinguished from the hard-of-hearing, make up "a cultural and linguistic minority who live in a society where the majority (hearing people) use speech and sound for

tasks for which deaf people commonly use vision" ("Interpreted" 96). As she goes on to say,

Deafness is a unique situation in which many commonplace ideas become problematical, such as the way we think of an author *speaking* through a text. . . . Commonly, writing and reading are described in analogies of hearing and speaking, and common tutoring practices depend on aural and oral processing of language. Deaf people, in contrast, process language through the eyes and hands, not the ears and mouth. ("Interpreted" 98)

In her longer study of tutoring deaf and hearing students, *Tell Me How It Reads*, Babcock reminds us that deaf writers cannot, of course, hear their mistakes, making reading aloud an ineffectual strategy (180). Likewise, appealing to "what sounds right" in terms of grammatical correctness is equally ineffective ("Interpreted" 115).

Instead, deaf people need to find their errors by seeing them on the page, which requires familiarity "with the conventions of print in English" (*Tell Me* 180) and particular grammar rules ("Interpreted" 115). As a result, and because it might well be "the only fully accessible, direct avenue to English for deaf people," reading is especially crucial (*Tell Me* 184). Yet because American Sign Language, the language that deaf people in the United States primarily communicate with, is distinct from written English, deaf people often have difficulties with reading. As a result, Babcock recommends that tutors "pay special attention to reading comprehension, paraphrasing, and summarizing" (*Tell Me* 180).

In addition, hearing tutors should consider how these writers take in information and what impact it will have on their own tutoring strategies. Because hearing people can process both "aural and visual message at the same time," hearing tutors might mistakenly try to communicate with deaf writers at the same time that these writers are reading over their writing. Instead, because deaf writers can process "only one visual message at a time, either the interpreter's signs or the words on the paper," Babcock reminds us that when the writer is "looking down at the text," we need to get the writer's attention first in order to communicate with her. She recommends "waving your hand in the student's field of vision" (*Tell Me* 182).

Babcock recommends two other strategies that build on deaf culture and language. First, although she acknowledges that "all writers . . . need to be pushed to find their own answers wherever possible," because deaf culture values directness, she recommends that tutors employ "direct communication" and "straight talk" when they find that leading questions and other indirect, hedging techniques aren't working (*Tell Me* 181; "Interpreted" 104). Second, although it can be useful for deaf people to produce text by writing it out, on paper or on a computer, they might find it easier to brainstorm in American Sign Language "while the interpreter interprets and the tutor takes notes," since this would avoid the additional step of translating their thoughts into written English (*Tell Me* 183).

Probably most important, since “all deaf students are different, and they know their own communication needs,” Babcock suggests encouraging deaf writers to indicate which communication method is best for them. These might include making use of visual ways of communicating, including putting the text between the tutor and writer, writing on paper or online, and modeling corrections (“Interpreted” 113, 105, 115; *Tell Me* 182).

Pragmatic Impairments

In an article included in Section IV, Babcock discusses another broad category of disability, pragmatic impairment, which “is associated with diagnoses as varied as Asperger’s syndrome, autism, learning disability, traumatic brain injury, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders” (269, this book). People with pragmatic impairment might have trouble understanding why someone is asking a particular question or making a particular statement as well as using other cues such as “facial expression, pauses, [and] intonation” (272, this book). They might also use words unusually or incorrectly. Again, being direct and explicit, this time about what you want the writer to do, can “assist those tutees who do not perceive the speaker’s meaning behind an utterance” (e.g., “I am asking these questions to help you come up with ideas about what to put in the paper”) (272, this book).

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Undergraduate tutor-researcher Emily Ryan characterizes ADHD “as a developmental delay in self-control” with symptoms that include “impulsivity, distractibility, or excess energy” (291, Hallowell and Ratley qtd. in Ryan 290). Her article provides a largely first-person account, in part because very few students were willing to share their experiences with her, the result, she suspects, of the stigma they felt (297). Along with being sensitive to this possible “fear of being judged,” Ryan suggests that tutors might need to help writers with ADHD with time management and keeping track of writing-related materials (such as the assignment) as well as organizing ideas and seeing “the big picture” (295). In addition, Gillespie and Lerner suggest that these writers sometimes need a quiet place to work (171).

We have moved quickly through a variety of physical and learning differences that can affect tutoring sessions. We should emphasize that, in addition to those we discuss here, there are many other kinds of disability and difference that can have an impact on writing tutoring sessions and that the descriptions we provide are meant as a starting place for discussion rather than a set of definitive answers. We encourage you to work with the tutors and writers in your program to broaden this conversation, by pursuing the scholarship we mention here, by talking with the staff of your campus’s disabilities office, and by researching other kinds of difference that we have not named that may affect tutors’ and writers’ choices.

For Writing

1. Review an assignment sheet from one of your classes. Does it describe the expectations of academic writing to be completed in this assignment? If so, compare these elements described with your own understanding of academic writing. Where are these concepts the same? Different? Are there any expectations in the assignment that are implicit or missing? How do you know these expectations exist? How might the lack of this information change a writer’s approach to the assignment?
2. There is a tradition of teachers saying, “Only if you truly know a topic can you write about it.” Do you think this statement is true? Generally? Always? Hypothesize or write about an instance in which this was not the case.
3. Are there parts of your identity that you have left out of your own academic writing? If so, why did you make this decision? How might including these elements of your identity affect your academic writing for better and for worse?

U.S. ACADEMIC WRITING

Here, we return to a topic we touch on in our discussion of language and culture differences, U.S. academic writing. Initially, this topic might seem to have little to do with identity, and its implications for tutors might be just as unclear. For one thing, academic writing is text and not a characteristic of human beings such as those we’ve discussed so far in this chapter. Yet many in the writing center field, including tutor-researchers, see significant connections between academic writing and identity, in part because, when successful, this writing implies an alignment of the author’s identity with expectations for community membership in U.S. colleges and universities. This is a controversial topic: you might find yourself on one side or the other, or somewhere in between. However, because it raises concerns that you might well face as a tutor, we provide information, theories, and an additional set of strategies to draw on. Moreover, as with all scholarly controversies, this topic might well present you with the kind of gap that must be filled with your own insights as a tutor and researcher.

U.S. Academic Writing, Identity, and Tutors

Academic writing in the United States can be said to “have” an identity insofar as it reflects many of the values of its home culture, with its general emphasis on efficiency and directness. Probably more important, academic writing in the United States intersects with the identities of the student and faculty writers who try to succeed at it. Such identity characteristics as language and cultural backgrounds and physical and learning differences, as well as others we do not cover here, can impede writers’ individual successes with this writing.

In turn, tutors are connected to this tie between academic writing and writer identity because a large part of the work we do is to help writers achieve such success. Indeed, as we discuss in Chapter 2, this is the reason writing tutoring programs were founded in the first place, even if this is not the only reason they exist now. As undergraduate researcher Brooke Baker holds in an article included in Section IV, “It is vitally important for new writers to understand the structural and linguistic expectations of this academic discourse they are choosing to learn” (276, this book). Following Kenneth Bruffee’s lead, she sees the tutor’s role as one of helping writers to enter this “conversation”: “Our academic literacy is one of the most important things tutors can share with our tutees. We have learned to speak the language(s) of the academy despite our divergent backgrounds, and . . . we have the ability, via peerhood, to impact the language choices of our writers” (280, this book).

Bruffee’s emphasis on helping writers enter the “conversation” points up yet another way that academic writing in the United States is—or can be felt to be—linked to identity. Because for many people writing seems both to express and influence who we are, succeeding at academic writing can feel as if it comes at a cost to one’s identity and how it is represented through language. Virginia Pryor, for example, an undergraduate whose discussion of academic writing appears in the tutor education textbook *Working with Student Writers*, puts the situation this way: “a large portion of student writers are faced with a constant tension between the sense of being coerced into using specific language, grammar, and style and their own compulsion to assimilate into the system by following its rules—appropriating and incorporating these standards into their own writing” (336). As a case in point, Maria E. Barajas-Román, an undergraduate researcher whose essay appears in the same collection, describes herself as “a first generation Mexican-American” and “the first in my family in over seven generations to earn a college degree.” Yet as she reviewed her college writing, she found that her feelings were complicated: “Though the content in the papers is academically sound, looking back, I can read between the lines and see my intense struggle for validation. Each sentence is a shovelfull of acquiescence burying what I knew to be true about life and learning” (306). And Jonathan Doucette, a tutor-researcher whose article appears in Section IV, finds that he too had “excluded” himself from a paper he wrote as a first-year student: “writing without taking into account my own sexual identity reproduced ‘appropriate,’ distanced, masculine, heterosexual discourse that constrained my identity as a student writer and beyond” (346, this book). Even transferring to a new college where he was able to study the very issues of gender and sexuality that he had struggled with previously created other divisions, leading him to give up “one way of relating to the world (heteronormative) for another (queer), yet each set of discourse separated me from communities I wanted to be a part of” (347, this book).

Tutor Ambivalence About U.S. Academic Writing

This process of translating one’s identity by way of academic writing has led some tutors to feel ambivalent about their roles in it. Doucette and another undergraduate tutor-researcher, Jeff Reger, whose article also appears Section IV, both express concern for “the writing center’s pedagogical imperative,” as articulated by Stephen North, to “change the writer” (Reger 498, this book; Doucette 351, this book). Under this imperative, Doucette holds, the writing center can be seen “as a space in which unqualified, inexperienced writers are transformed into appropriate academics” (351, this book). Tutors, in turn, holds Reger, “can inadvertently urge students to acculturate themselves into academic discourse—permanently altering the way students think and write” (498, this book). Reger extends this critique to Bruffee as well, calling into question the seeming neutrality of the re-acculturation and change of consciousness resulting from his peer tutoring model. As writing center scholar and theorist Nancy Maloney Grimm describes,

For Bruffee, the goal of peer tutoring was to encourage students to think more like “us” (the academic community, a place not known for its racial diversity). Bruffee was interested in the “social justification of belief” rather than the negotiation of differing beliefs. His definition of community was “a group of people who accept, and whose work is guided by, the same paradigms and the same code of values and assumptions”. . . . There was no discussion of what to do when paradigms, values, and assumptions conflicted. (“Retheorizing” 93)

Exemplifying this ambivalence, undergraduate tutor-researcher Mara Brecht reflects on her work with Kathy, an adult writer from a less privileged background than her own whom she tutored in a community literacy program. In the article included in Section IV, she ultimately wonders, “Did my suggestions help Kathy to write more easily and confidently about what she thought, or did my suggestions simply alter her text so it was more compatible with dominant writing styles, such as my own?” (299, this book).

Of course, you might not feel such ambivalence about succeeding at academic writing yourself, as a writer or a tutor, and you might work with writers who don’t either. But because this is a concern that many in the field—including other tutors—have raised, we offer information, theories, and an additional set of strategies to draw on in case you or the writers you work with do experience such ambivalence.

Standards, Nonstandard, and a “Third Option”

One such piece of information has to do with the nature of “standard” English and standards for writing in college. As we discuss in Chapter 2, the pervasive belief in higher education used to be that there was only one way to write correctly. Whether because they learned to write in another culture, they approach writing in a particular way due to a disability, or their educational background in

the United States didn't include sustained focus on such standards, people who did not follow this norm were seen as nonstandard, or "bad," writers, and perhaps not intelligent enough for college. Although this belief still has its supporters, scholars and researchers have come to see that such standards are not stable or "natural." Like authorship, they have a history that has changed over time: Shakespeare, for instance, was considered nonstandard during his day and after. And, as we have seen with citation and writing practices, these standards are far from universal. As Harry Denny puts it, academic discourse is "arbitrary, fluid, and subject to constant change. As any linguistic historian of English will confirm, the language is elastic and evolving, so for anyone to posit any common use of it as static is foolish" (*Facing* 73).

This revised view of academic discourse as arbitrary, fluid, and changing has a number of significant implications. Most important, as Denny goes on to argue, this history demonstrates that it is "wrong and unethical . . . to teach any group of students, especially those who speak and write from marginalized positions, that in order to be successful they must surrender whatever Englishes they possess for some transitory 'standard'" (*Facing* 73). As Reger and Doucette put it, the choice between acculturating to or rejecting academic discourse is a "false dilemma." For them, there is another way, a "third option," that of "negotiat[ing] multiple, even contradictory, subject positions while rooted in dominant discourse" and "bridging the gap between 'home' or 'private' language and 'academic' language in ways that render the student legible to a larger academic community" (Bawarshi and Pelkowski qtd. in Reger 501, this book; Doucette 353, this book).

Writing Tutoring Programs as "Contact Zones"

This third option for a negotiated discourse in turn has implications for tutors and writing tutoring programs. As Doucette writes, "Perhaps the writing center . . . should not reject entirely the traditional codes of the academy—for the material negative effects for a student who takes such a risk would be many, not least a failing grade—nor should the center completely acquiesce to such codes either. A complex hybrid of the two approaches may be called for" (353, this book). Many of the tutor-researchers whose work we've included in Section IV promote this idea of the writing tutoring program as hybrid, calling it a "third space" (Mozafari, this book) in which tutor and writer alike enact a "critical consciousness" (Baker 279, this book; Reger 500, this book). But most often, following Grimm's lead in her groundbreaking book *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times* (57), these tutor-researchers draw on critical theorist Mary Louise Pratt's famous framework for discussing the difficulties that sometimes arise with cross-cultural interactions, the "contact zone." Reger, Brecht, and Baker all see writing tutoring programs as contact zones, places where "disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 34).

Tutoring writing, in other words, is not necessarily a smooth and comfortable process. As Brecht says, "Pratt highlights the idea that there is no place of neutrality or safety, even in the educational sphere. . . . The game of education is not actually a fair one" (302, this book). As a contact zone, according to Baker, the writing tutoring program can become "a place in which student and tutor could meet and clash; a space in which to try on language and form without the fear of failure" (275, this book).

In addition, these researchers demonstrate what can happen in the writing tutoring program as contact zone and offer specific strategies (Table 5.4). Identities are everywhere in our sessions and our programs, ourselves, the writing we produce, the writers we help, and the relationships we form with them. As Nancy Maloney Grimm points out, yet another of the benefits of tutoring is learning how to build such relationships across the differences that result when we do not share identities. "Whether your future workplace is a hospital operating room, an airplane control tower, or an international information systems network, your job success will depend on your ability to develop positive working relationships with people from historically, culturally, linguistically, and economically different backgrounds" ("New" 19).

Table 5.4 Tutoring Strategies for the Contact Zone.

- **Explain academic writing.** Baker describes aiming to "demystify" academic discourse for the writers she worked with in a small-group setting. Along with "playing with language, arguing about meaning, and trying on language from the outside," the group "defin[ed] good writing," explored trying "to fake this new dialect," struggled, and even "rais[e]d the specter of language changing the way we think and who we are" (281, this book).
- **Analyze academic writing in terms of conventions, not absolute rules.** Reger recommends teaching writers "how to analyze writing conventions themselves so that they have the ability to understand any discourse." Specifically, he suggests explaining "that academic discourse is not necessarily the best or the ideal, but what is expected in the context of the American university." He urges tutors to steer clear of "absolute 'wrong' or 'right' judgments" by "identify[ing] errors always as what is expected by professors in academic discourse," and, consequently, "allowing ambivalence about acculturation rather than unquestioning acceptance" (501, 506, this book).
- **Identify the tensions in academic writing.** Denny argues that we should not admonish writers to "stop writing like you speak" (as if the voice in either context is neutral and absent of deeply political referents). "Instead, we should help writers 'process and name the dynamics and tensions,' 'understand what their professors' expectations are,' and, in a manner that resembles Mozafari's work with Kim, find 'ways of leveraging personal experience in occasions where professors might not otherwise allow it'" (*Facing* 77, 131, 54).
- **Identify the tensions in our own programs.** In "Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression in the Writing Center," Mandy Suhr-Sytsma and Shan-Estelle Brown provide a fruitful means of taking the discussion further, in the context of your own program. They provide strategies for dealing with "systematic inequalities and discrimination based on sites of differences such as race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexuality, and/or (dis)ability" (509, this book).

For Inquiry

1. After reviewing Chapter 11, pages 261–63, design and implement a case study of writers who use your program and who represent a specific identity group. The purpose of this case study is to suggest possible resources, outreach activities, or program revisions that might better serve this group.
2. Conduct historical research into the changes over time of both your institution's student demographics and the kinds of writing education that have been available on your campus. What do these trajectories suggest about changes in your institution's concept of "student" and/or "writing"? Compare this history to the changes taking place in writing center studies and writing studies as seen in such works as Neal Lerner's *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory*, Elizabeth H. Boquet's "Our Little Secret," and/or James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*. Does the evidence from your institution support and/or refute these narratives?
3. Look through your institution's latest admissions pamphlet and/or prospective student webpage(s). Drawing upon identity theories such as those described in this chapter and in Chapters 2 and 9, describe the identity of students represented in these materials. How do they represent gender, race and/or class? What kinds of activities are they performing? Are they engaged in academic activities? Social? Athletic? Are they in a public forum? A private space? What stories do these pictures tell? What do these images suggest about the student identity of your institution? Compare this information with that documented by your institution's demographic data. What differences do you see? Why would your institution want to represent its students in this fashion?
4. First locate a campus group whose community is focused on an identity category—for example, the international student society or the organization for nontraditionally aged students. Next, conduct a research review in both writing center studies and writing studies to investigate literacy research pertaining to this group. Finally, investigate this group's use of your program's services and its representation among your tutoring staff. For instance, ask for an appointment with this group to interview them about their relationship to your program. (You can find information about interviews in Chapters 10 and 11.) Write a recommendation report to be shared with your program.

CHAPTER 6



Tutoring Writing In and Across The Disciplines

For Discussion

1. Working with your peers, create a collective list of all of the writing assignments you will need to complete for your classes this semester. As you look over this list, discuss the writing skills that will be needed for any—or all—of these assignments. What writing skills are common to many of these assignments? What, if any, writing skills would be limited to only a few?
2. Working with your peers, finish this sentence in as many ways as possible: "All good academic writing _____"

INTRODUCTION

By this point in your career as a student, you've probably read or composed many different kinds of writing for a variety of courses and extracurricular contexts. As a result, you're likely aware that the kinds of writing required for these contexts can be diverse but that they also have features in common. And you've probably had to figure out how to deal with these differences and similarities both as a reader and a writer, including how to make your writing meet readers' varying expectations. For writing in your major, about which you might well have expertise, you might have internalized these expectations so well that you don't remember how you learned them—or a time when you didn't know them. These kinds of writing bring us to the key concept for this chapter, **genre**.

Even with all you know already about different kinds of writing in college, the prospect of working with someone on writing for a course or other context with which you have no experience can be intimidating. The good news is that you're not alone. There are many accounts of tutors feeling daunted by having to