

Writing Centers in the Information Age

Frank Orenstein

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Before we begin:

1. How has technology affected your voice as a writer? Do you know?
2. How many sessions have you had this semester that involved zero technology?

Computers and Writing: Casting a Broader Net with Theory and Research

1. “In most cases, we have been content to “see” and “understand” computers in terms of machines we already know”
 - a. Computers and word-processing programs like Microsoft word have affects on our work beyond the purely physical.
 - b. Even today we tend to take technology and its affects on our writing for granted.
2. One of the most fundamental places technology can cause change is the classroom, or the Writing Center, by changing various aspects of the environment.
 - a. Thoughts?
 - b. Common aspects of writing affected by the use of a computer, or other form of technology, span from initial planning, writing a draft, editing and revision, and more.
 - c. Some individuals feel that one of the biggest ways that computers affect writing is the speed at which they allow it to be done.
 - d. Regarding this, some professors encourage handwriting the first draft of an assignment before even touching a keyboard.

3. Though this article is somewhat older, and references writing as a “solitary dorm-room activity”, Selfe and Whalstrom still recognize how technology in writing greatly enhances the collaborative capabilities of writers.
 - a. To take this a step further, examine Google Docs.
 - b. Thoughts?
4. Computers may even effect how teachers and professors grade work.
 - a. Thoughts or ideas?
5. **The Elephant in the Room:**
 - a. Programs like Word or Google Docs that “aid” the user in their writing via a spell or grammar check have significant influence on how texts are written.
 - i. Furthermore, they are not perfect, nor are they always designed for individual feedback from writers
 - ii. This leads to questions like: “How much of a writer’s work remains unaffected?” or “Does this affect how students learn?”
6. **Tech and Rhetoric:**
 - a. How as this affected Writing Centers?
 - i. Given the possible implications explored by this older article, how much do you think computers have affected the tutoring sessions of the Writing Center?
 - b. Ethics?
 - i. The ethical dilemma of directive or non-directive tutoring reaches a whole other level when we consider the fact that the computer’s “voice” may have an impact on everything we write or teach.

Using Computers to Expand the Role of Writing Centers

1. Example sessions:

- a. In a Writing Center without an internet connection, students and tutors may be frustrated in their goals for a session by a lack of information or some other critical aspect that requires outside research. Students may leave without achieving what they desired, and tutors may be left feeling as though the session failed.
 - b. A session in a Writing Center that possesses computers and an internet connection, or at least allows students to use their own, will be less affected by this issue. A lack of information or overly broad topic can be refined, narrowed, or illuminated. This enhances the effectiveness of the session, and the progress made by the student.
2. The definition of “information literacy is described as "the ability to access, retrieve, evaluate, and integrate information from a variety of electronically generated resources"
 - a. Is this still the case? If not, how has newer forms of Media changed it?
3. Creation of “email tutoring”, among other new technologies, replaced the older “grammar hotline”
 - a. Despite the novelty of these methods, they suffered from a lack of interest due to a lack of real-time, one-on-one interaction.
 - i. Thoughts?
4. The creation of MOOs and, later on, similar programs such as Google Docs allowed writers to collaborate on single projects in real time.
 - a. We don’t often use this method in the Writing Center here at Trinity, but could it be useful?
 - b. Opinions?
5. Online resources nonetheless act as incredible versatile and speedy methods for information dissemination for both students and faculty.
 - a. This in turn can boost learning and comprehension, or contribute to further research.