Proofreading and Punctuation

By Sara Lambert

"We don't proofread here": Re-visioning the writing center to better meet student needs

- Joan Hawthorne
  - Director of the University of North Dakota Writing Center
  - Reflecting on experience of attending Midwest Writing Centers Association conference
    - Presentations: "unspoken understanding… that tutoring is about improving the writer, not the writing" (1)
    - One-on-one conversations: "'Of course the paper is important'" (1)
  - Confronting the traditional idea of what writing centers do created by lore readings like North and Brooks
- "We don't proofread here"
  - Hawthorne wanted to address the issue with the conversation that tutors often had with students when they came in
  - Shifted from "'we don't proofread here'" to "'we'd be happy to take a look at your paper with you'" (2)
  - Students use the language of proofreading to ask for help because "they lacked the vocabulary and/or experience to know what they really needed" (2)
  - Draws on Nancy Grimm: "consider who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by standard tutoring practices" (3)
- Traditional Tutoring (4) versus Directive Tutoring (5)

Tutor Techniques / Strategies at Your Disposal

Active Listening:
- validate via "I hear you saying"
- paraphrase to double-check understanding and show attentiveness
- question to encourage more thinking, greater comprehensiveness:
  - *-OPEN* questions for rapport building, generating more background information
  - *-CLOSED* questions for gathering specific information
- "I statements" to demonstrate reader reaction, need for more information
- body language to show interest, friendliness, approval

Genuine Reader Reaction:
- "I statements" regarding your expectations, understanding, reactions
- requests for more information ("Why did you say this?")
- requests for clarity ("What do you mean here?")
- questions to probe purpose, generate depth ("So what?")
- questions to generate new perspectives, develop new connections among ideas ("How are these ideas related?")
- questions to generate follow-through ("What next?" or "What would that mean?")

Silence and Wait Time:
- the pause that forces the student to think something through for him/herself
- if more wait time feels counter-productive, rephrase the question and still leave the move up to the student
- give the student more than a few seconds of think time by stepping away from the table
- provide the student with still more think time by giving a small writing or listing task and coming back to look at it in 2-5 minutes

Directive Tutoring: What Can It Look Like?

- Providing (requested or not) a correction
- Providing a word or a sample sentence
- Directly answering a question about the student's writing
- Providing a variety of sample options that might work
- Modeling the writerly habit of brainstorming options and thinking them through to determine how each might shape the paper
- Showing the connection between precise language and meaning by offering sample wordings and demonstrating how meaning shifts
- Engaging in a back-and-forth discussion with the student where both of you generate ideas, meaning, ideas for organization
- For further discussion:
  ✔How do you know when directive tutoring is appropriate?

  ✔Helping students through even very minor editorial issues can be extremely slow and inefficient (and can feel patronizing) if directiveness is strictly avoided.

  ✔The questions we ask and the agenda-setting we do can steer students in a particular direction. Is it non-directive simply because it's in the form of a question?

  ✔Writing center conferences are negotiated events between the student and the consultant. There is no "right answer" or "best conference" to use as a guide. If students leave the conference (a) with a slightly better paper, (b) as a slightly better writer, and (c) feeling comfortable with the center and likely to return so you can continue the work that was begun, you've had a "good enough" conference.

Chapter 9: Punctuation from Practical Tutor

- Punctuation
    - Punctuation is "a way to make meaning" not just a complicated system of rules (180)
    - The writer that fails to punctuate correctly is "having trouble expressing relationships among ideas properly" (177)
    - Punctuation helps the reader "predict meaning by telling them when to expect an idea to continue and when to assume that it has been completed" (177-8)
- Strategies to Help Writers with Punctuation
    - Approach punctuation errors as a way to "help a writer explore alternate ways of relating ideas, not as an occasion for fixing up 'mechanical' errors" (180)
    - Oral reading
        - Read something several different ways and ask writer how they intended it to be read
        - Does not work for everyone because some writers cannot distinguish speech rhythms
- Asking Questions (181) & (193)

For eliminating fragments:
1. "Who's doing what?" or "who is what?"
2. "Can this idea stand by itself?"
   (This often works better if you cover up the preceding and following sentences.)

For eliminating run-ons and for punctuating compound sentences:
3. "How many ideas (actions) are there?" and "Which ones can stand by themselves?"

For adding commas around nonessential embedded phrases, nonrestrictive and introductory subordinate clauses:
4. "If you take away this idea, will the sentence still make sense?"

FOR POSSESSIVES:
Who is the owner?
Write the name of the owner; then add 's
example: keys belong to the boy = *boy*'s keys

FOR CONTRACTIONS:
What letter is missing?
Place the apostrophe where the letter should be.
example: did not = didn't

Discussion Questions

1. What place do you see proofreading having in the writing center?
2. For those who have had their first shifts, how have you dealt with punctuation and proofreading? For those who haven't, what challenges do you anticipate? Which strategies seem most helpful?
3. How does asynchronous tutoring change the way we help students with punctuation rules and other aspects of proofreading? Which strategies carry over easily and which require adjustments?