

Supporting Success in Writing: Rethinking Resources with Empathy

Chiara Ojeda and Robert Schachel

“I propose that the function of the university is to cultivate the life of the mind and to make the advantages of that cultivation available to both individuals and to society. What does this mean for introductory courses? . . . Introductory courses should teach students how to talk about and how to analyze the processes, aims, and value of their own educations.”

--Marshall Gregory, “Introductory Courses, Student Ethos, and Living the Life of the Mind.”

—Approximately 22% of Valencia Students fail ENC 1101 the first time they take it. Among those who take it a second time, approximately 46% fail it again.

—Therefore, it is crucial that we acknowledge the human experience of the composition course for the beginning writer. We accomplish this through Empathetic Pedagogy. The goal becomes to educate the student, not to teach the subject. As a result, vulnerability, approachability, and humanity become the core. Building on these values with the student as the goal, confidence and skill sets begin to grow.

“The teacher’s job is to support students’ efforts to acquire the confidence they need to take risks. . . . The real aim of teaching is helping students acquire such capacities of mind and heart as will assist them in living lives that are autonomous, personally enriched, socially responsible, intellectually perspicuous, and morally defensible.” --Marshall Gregory, “Do We Teach Disciplines, or Do We Teach Students”

—Hence, the way we support students’ writing is to begin from the student’s perspective. What does writing mean to them? What are their experiences with writing? Often, looking back on one’s own starting work is useful reminder.

—The issue is to offer formative feedback in as close to real time as possible and in ways that allow students to self- correct with guidance. Students gain agency, feel in charge of their own writing, and realize that their choices are their own rather those of the professor. As a result, they find a written voice.

HOW DO WE SUPPORT THIS JOURNEY?

- **Physical (Face to Face) Support on Campus:** Office Hours; Library; Communications (Writing) Center, Supplemental Learning.
- **Digital Resources Support Off Campus:** The Valencia Library Website; Videos from the East Communications Center; Academic Refreshers.
- **Other Non-Campus Resources:** Thesaurus.com/Dictionary.com; The Hemingway App; OWL at Purdue and OWL at Excelsior; Grammarly*

1. Physical (Face to Face) Support on Campus:

A. Professor Office Hours

Try to have students come by at least once during the semester. Conferences are an excellent way to build rapport. Make sure they know where your office is, and always make them feel welcome.

Don't just focus on their writing—ask how they feel about their writing. Acknowledge the human experience involved in committing their words to paper. Let them know the anxiety is part of the process, and they will survive it. Talk up their strengths, correct their mistakes, encourage their risks. It is okay to stumble through the words; that is why one revises.

Progress Discussions—Where are you so far? Where do you feel stuck? What is working for you? What gives you the most trouble? What do you like/not like about the assignment? It is often not about finding the answers, but being provoked with the right questions.

B. Library (<http://valenciacollege.edu/library/>)

Help the students develop a relationship/partnership with a Librarian. Use their names when possible. Take them to the library. Remind them that Librarians are the people Professors go to when they need help.

Have active research days—let the students explore the databases and libguides with the Librarian right there. Do not forget to encourage the physical bookshelves as a resource as well.

C. Writing/Communications Center

East: <https://valenciacollege.edu/east/academicsuccess/writing/>

West: <http://valenciacollege.edu/learning-support/communications/>

Osceola: <https://valenciacollege.edu/osceola/writing-center/>

Again, mention people by name. Take students there, introduce them to the process. It is different on each campus, but the goals are the same. Remember that it can be intimidating the first time they go. Prepare them, spend time in class letting them know what to expect.

East: New consultation process, viewing parties, professor information folder.

West: Online appointment system, one-on-one tutors, and a communications lab with floating tutors.

D. Supplemental Learning:

A mentor-based learning support model using a student who has succeeded in the course to guide and to support voluntary small group study sessions. Requires recruiting and supporting your embedded tutor alongside their supervisor in Learning Support. Different models work differently by campus, but the core result is direct, frequent, regular face to face support both in the classroom and out.

Leaders often model not only course content, they are an excellent resource for generating a real-time formative feedback loop between professor, leader, and student. The mentor/mentee model is unique to the class and professor, but supportive of the course as a whole. Students can get support from students who have been in their situation (being a Valencia student at one time is a requirement).

2. Digital Resources Support Off Campus:

A. Valencia Library Website:

LibGuides (<http://libguides.valenciacollege.edu/>) offer a space where professors can garner several resources, links, videos, support services for their particular courses. For 1102, *The Valencia Reader* (http://libguides.valenciacollege.edu/valencia_reader), offers an open source Literature Book to save students money on texts. One can search them by type, subject, or owner, and you can contact your librarian to create your own.

MLA documentation pages (<http://valenciacollege.edu/library/mla-apa-chicago-guides/mlacitation.cfm>) allow for excellent models that students can follow. However, students often think they have to log into ATLAS to access this (like they do for databases). Be sure to provide direct links in your online support (Blackboard, Frontdoor, Canvas) so students can go directly there. It also helps if students have direct links to Electronic Sources (<http://valenciacollege.edu/library/mla-apa-chicago-guides/mla-documentation-electronic.cfm>) and Printed Sources (<http://valenciacollege.edu/library/mla-apa-chicago-guides/mla-documentation-print.cfm>). This helps them get to where they need to be quickly and without confusion.

Plagiarism Tutorials (<http://valenciacollege.edu/library/tutorials/plagiarism.cfm>) as well as other tutorials on the site help students refresh or self-teach skills.

B. Videos from the East Writing Center

(<https://valenciacollege.edu/east/academicsuccess/writing/printableworksheets.cfm>)

Videos can be developed for specific topics—you can speak with your writing center crew if you would like to create one. They have viewing parties in the East center with mini-tutorial sessions after (group study emphasis on a topic).

C. Academic Refreshers

(<http://valenciacollege.edu/east/academicsuccess/writing/documents/CommCenterDirectionsforRefresherRegistrationBlackboardCURRENT.pdf>)

Academic online refresher courses can be used as a way to review concepts in class, and it equips students with resources they can refer to later.

List of Exercises

(<http://valenciacollege.edu/east/academicsuccess/writing/documents/RefresherListofExercises.pdf>)

3. **Other Non-Campus Resources:**

A. The Hemingway App – (<http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>)

Especially useful for students who have trouble with overusing or recognizing the passive voice. It offers real time recognition of Passive Voice, overly complex sentences, heavy use of adverbs, and embellished language. It points out flaws, but does not correct them.

B. Thesaurus.com / Dictionary.com – (<http://www.thesaurus.com>)

Almost so obvious it gets overlooked, this is an invaluable resource for development of student writing vocabulary. It helps with varying transitions, reading comprehension, vocabulary expansion, and language play (which builds confidence). Recommend students keep this tab open on their browser as they compose, and encourage them to use it instead of MS Word synonym feature. It also ranks usefulness of synonyms to try to avoid awkward usage.

C. OWL (Online Writing Labs)

At Purdue: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

At Excelsior: <http://owl.excelsior.edu/>

The OWLs are open source writing handbooks that cover a wide variety of topics and examples in writing. They offer additional practice, and one can use them during office hours or in class to assist the student or supplement a lesson with examples.

D. SmartThinking tutoring is available via Atlas, and they will assist students with editing problems and specific issues. However, there is a turnaround time and students should be aware of that.

<https://valenciacollege.edu/osceola/learningcenter/OnlineTutoring.cfm>

E. Grammarly* – this resource is slightly controversial. Some professors seem to think it helps students, some see it as a replacement for actual learning. Perhaps one way to think of it is the way many of us thought of spellcheck—it helps streamline the process, but does not replace the knowledge.

You will be able to find a copy of our presentation and handout on my Faculty Frontdoor under Course Materials, Writing Conference Presentation (all the way at the bottom).

<http://frontdoor.valenciacollege.edu/?rschachel>

Or, you can just Google my last name. It should be the first hit that comes up.