

Annual Report: Psychology Writing Center

Patti Loesche, Director

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The Psychology Writing Center has been open since 1991 and is the oldest and largest UW resource outside of the classroom to support scientific writing. The writing center is staffed by a faculty director (Patti Loesche) and tutors who are graduate students in Psychology.

Writing Center Contributions to Undergraduate Writing in Psychology in 2011-2012

Hours of tutoring scheduled per week. The writing center is centrally located for Psychology undergraduates in Guthrie Annex 4, along with the Psychology Undergraduate Study Center and TA offices. We are open 20 hours a week (10 hr/wk in summer) for 30-minute appointments. Students may either schedule appointments online or drop in if the tutor is available.

Student population served. Undergraduates enrolled in psychology courses (premajors, majors, and mixed majors).

Courses served, students seen, and appointments held. We have kept records on student use since 1996. Compared to the 16-year averages for 1996-2012, we served fewer courses in 2011-2012 but saw more students and held about the same number of appointments.

	<u>Au 2011 - Sp 2012</u>	<u>Au 1996 - Sp 2012 (16-year average)</u>
Courses served	44	64
Students seen	421	349
Appointments held	652	665

- Student use of the writing center this year remained very high, even though we served fewer courses than average. Thus, student use seems to be limited by the number of appointments that we can provide. We do not expect this situation to change.
- About 20% of the students we served in 2011-2012 wrote most comfortably in a language other than English, and they used about 30% of the total appointments.
- Students who use the writing center tend to return (about 1.5 appointments per student).
- The reported figures on student use (numbers of students and appointments) underestimate actual student demand, because we limit students to scheduling two appointments per week and consequently turn many away.

Nature of tutoring session. Most papers are course assignments, usually evidence-based critiques and synthesis on issues in psychology; many require formal scientific writing (article summaries, literature reviews, lab reports). We also help with undergraduate honors theses, research proposals, research papers for publication, and conference posters.

Graduate-level tutors help students to critically evaluate their own writing, with emphasis on framing a theoretical argument and supporting it with objective evidence. In a typical 30-minute session:

1. The tutor logs the student into the database (course number, how often the student has come in, and the language in which the student writes most comfortably).
2. The student identifies the purpose of the paper and the instructor's expectations.
3. The tutor asks the student to explain which parts of the assignment she feels the most and least confident about, and this sets the course for the session.
4. The tutor guides the student with directed questions and with suggestions (e.g., on organization, clarity, documenting evidence). We rarely edit or proofread, and only as a final step on an otherwise complete paper. We do, however, assist with grammar and vocabulary for students who do not write fluently in English, if the student has met the paper's major goals.
5. At the end of the session, the tutor summarizes the points discussed and helps the student to identify next steps.
6. The tutor documents in our database the type of writing assistance given.

The Psychology Writing Center supports the department's goals for student learning by:

1. *Working one-on-one with students.* We are able to help individual students beyond what instructors often are able to accomplish in the classroom. In addition to help with specific papers, tutoring helps students to understand the differences between writing in psychology and other disciplines. These discipline-specific expectations, although implicit in many course assignments, are not always directly explained.
2. *Supporting writing in the Psychology curriculum through:*
 - *Workshops and lectures* for undergraduate classes, with particular collaboration on lectures and assignments in Psychology 209 (Fundamentals of Research in Psychology), required for the Psychology major and the only course in the department to formally introduce students to scientific writing.
 - *Handouts on writing* that are widely used to support and explain writing in Psychology courses at UW and elsewhere.
 - *Consulting with faculty* and TAs on assignment design and clarity and maintain an archive of writing assignments.
 - *Discussion and evaluation of course assignments* in Psych 535 (Teaching in Psychology), where graduate students learn to prepare for teaching careers.
3. *Conducting ongoing assessment of writing needs of students who use the writing center* (now in its third year). We are evaluating how individual writing needs vary across writing assignments in the curriculum, including between major and nonmajor courses, and between students who do and do not write fluently in English.

Plan for the Psychology Writing Center for 2012-2013

We will continue to support writing in the Psychology undergraduate curriculum in 2012-2013, as described above and as we have done since 1991. The writing center staff will continue to:

1. Provide tutoring one-on-one for students in undergraduate psychology courses
2. Document and evaluate writing center use; i.e.:
 - Courses served, individual students served, and appointments provided
 - The types of writing needs of students who use the writing center
 - Student satisfaction surveys
3. Evaluate patterns of writing needs among courses, across course levels, and among students who do and do not write most comfortably in English
4. Give lectures and workshops on writing in psychology courses
5. Provide small-group sessions for students working on course papers, especially for students in large-lecture courses (e.g., 202, 209, 306, 357)
6. Consult with course instructors on the design and evaluation of writing assignments
7. Expand our archive of writing assignments and explore ways to make this more easily accessible to instructors, especially graduate students and new faculty
8. Maintain and update the Psychology Writing Center website
(<http://www.psych.uw.edu/psych.php#p=335>)
9. Maintain and expand our library of online writing guides to support writing not just in psychology, but also in other disciplines in the natural sciences