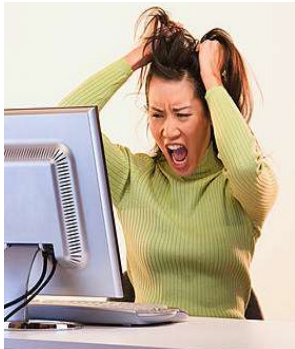


# Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum  
Southwestern Community College

Volume V  
Number 5



## Don't Let Frustration Prevent Student Success!

**Have a WAC Workshop for your class to support  
student learning and writing!**

In-class workshops are available on a variety of subjects related to college writing including research styles, paraphrasing/summarizing, and more.

You can also tailor a workshop with the WAC

Coordinator to support a specific assignment. Contact Jenn Hippensteel at ext. 4264 or [jb\\_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu](mailto:jb_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu) for more information.

National Day on Writing  
Monday, Oct. 21, 2013

Established by the National Council of Teachers of English, this celebration recognizes that we all write every day, no matter our choice of profession or place in life.

Use this day to emphasize and celebrate writing. I encourage you to have your students write in class on Monday, Oct. 21!

## What Does Your Field Value?

As each semester begins, our students find themselves navigating different classes, different instructors, and different expectations. They come to us as novices in our fields and in our classes, and it is up to us as instructors to show what professionals value in our particular disciplines.

It helps to consider first for yourself what your field values. Sometimes, these values seem so obvious to us that we aren't clearly aware of them. Much like a fish doesn't realize that he's in

water, we often don't recognize the standards that we work, think, and write by every day. It is useful, then, to clearly define what your field values. A value is something held in esteem; it is the worth or usefulness of something; a principle; a standard.

Each field has its own set of values or principles, and these values dictate the way professionals think and act within that field. For example, if a field places high value on current research over older research (such as

the medical field), it makes sense that professionals in that field would train themselves to think about, read, understand, and use current research.

These same values dictate the way professionals write within a field.

Good questions to ask yourself include, "What is valued in thinking in my field?" and "How is that mirrored in what is valued in the writing commonly done in my field?" and "How can I communicate these values to my students?" By

understanding what is valued, our students are more likely to be successful not only in their understanding of course/field concepts but also in their writing.

Because each field of study has its own unique set of values, it may be helpful to us to look at some of the differences between fields.

A good example is the type of thinking and writing valued in the field of Physics. Good thinking

*cont'd pg. 2*

**The value of an idea lies in the using of it.  
—Thomas Edison**

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## Values (cont'd)

leads to good writing, and in Physics this is most often seen in lab reports. SCC Physics instructor, Matt Cass, indicates that what is valued on a lab report includes an emphasis on “data that clearly supports or dismisses an original hypothesis; discussion of future research possibilities; analysis of error; and use of passive voice to emphasize the experiment over the experimenter.”

It is very possible that

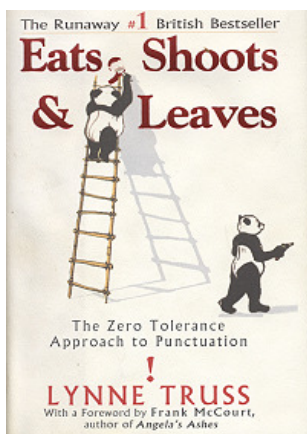
you may recognize significant differences in your field’s values and those listed above for Physics. For example, in some writing in the English/Literature field, the passive voice is considered weaker than the active voice. Consider what a student must do if he/she is taking both a Literature course and a Physics course. That student must first discover this difference in writing done in each field; that student must then be sure to

create writing that fits the values for whichever field he/she is writing for at the time.

These differences are what our students navigate every semester. It is no wonder that they struggle with writing when they are trying to figure out four or five different sets of values and expectations as each semester begins. Then, when they’ve finally gotten a handle on what their various instructors value in writing, the semester ends and our students find themselves

right back at square one.

To support student writing in our classes, we should make our fields’ values explicit in order to ease student transition into our classes, our thinking and writing assignments, and our disciplines. To make our values explicit to our students, we must first spend some time determining for ourselves what is valued in our field, in our assignments, and in student writing produced for our classes.



## Ten Years of *Eats Shoots & Leaves*

In 2003, Lynne Truss’ hilarious look at punctuation, *Eats Shoots & Leaves*, arrived on the shelves of American bookstores. In the decade since, there have been illustrated editions and children’s editions published, as well as books on specific punctuation marks.

I have found this book helpful in approaching troublesome punctuation (such as the comma) with students. It is funny and informative (a rare combination in discussions about punctuation), often giving the history of the particular punctuation mark in question as well as examples that make sense to students.

I’ll leave you with an example. In this passage, Truss is discussing the decrease in comma usage in today’s writing:

“...readers grow so accustomed to the dwindling

incidence of commas in public places that when signs go up saying “No dogs please”, only one person in a thousand bothers to point out that actually, as a statement, “no dogs please” is an indefensible generalization, since many dogs *do* please, as a matter of fact; they rather make a point of it” (Truss 81).

Truss, Lynne. *Eats Shoots & Leaves*. New York: Gotham Books, 2003.

