

# TEACHING WITH WRITING

THE OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY WRITING INTENSIVE CURRICULUM (WIC)

VOLUME 17 ISSUE 1

FALL 2007

## Upcoming WIC Events Winter 2008

**Wednesday, Jan. 9:**  
**Orientation for using the  
Writer's Personal Profile**  
3-5 p.m., Waldo 121

**Wednesday, Jan. 30:**  
**Best Practices Seminar:  
What Works? Writing,  
Thinking, and Learning**  
12-1 p.m., Waldo 121

**Wednesday, Feb. 13:**  
**Best Practices Seminar:  
What Works? Improving  
Student Writing**  
12-1 p.m., Waldo 121

**Wednesday, March 5:**  
**Orientation for using the  
Writer's Personal Profile**  
3-5 p.m., Waldo 121

## In This Issue

**The Writer's Personal  
Profile (p. 1)**

**Visual Fluency (p. 2)**

**WIC Culture of Writing  
Awards (p. 4)**

**Valley Library's Course-  
Specific Websites (p. 4)**

## Writing tool assists instructors

Writer's Personal Profile guides instructors and students at the start of WIC courses

Travis Margoni  
WIC GTA

**W**IC instructor Cassie Minot has an advantage over many other WIC instructors. She knows her students' writing histories, expectations, and many of their strengths and weaknesses at the start of each term, thanks to the Writer's Personal Profile (WPP).

Instructors often begin a term with little understanding of their students' writing experiences and expectations. The WPP is a tool developed specifically for the OSU WIC program and similar writing across the curriculum programs to both guide students and help instructors tailor a course to student needs. The WPP is a relatively short sur-

vey, comprised of both multiple choice and short-answer questions, and should take students roughly 20 minutes to complete. It can be taken on hard copy or on Blackboard.

Minot, an Instructor of Nutrition and Exercise Science, is currently using the WPP for a second term. She used both a hard copy and the electronic version on Blackboard for her Exercise Science 415 course, Motor Control and Movement Dysfunction, and Minot is using the WPP again this term for Exercise Science 381, Analysis of Critical Issues in Exercise and Sport Science.

Minot said the WPP has allowed her to see differences in her students this term. While the particular group in EXS 415



Photo by Jeanna Towns

**Cassie Minot has used the  
WPP in her WIC courses.**

last spring had little experience with revising and submitting multiple drafts, about 75 percent of the EXS 381 students

*Continued on page 4*

## Pre/Views: Writer's Personal Profile



Vicki Tolar Burton  
WIC Director

**I**n OSU Writing Intensive courses, the Writer's Personal Profile is turning writing assessment inside out. With this tool, assessment happens not just at the end of a course but also at the beginning. Even more important, assessment of stu-

dent writing is done by the students, not by the teacher. I see the WPP as an exciting tool designed to improve student success and commitment in writing intensive courses.

Please consider this an invitation to use the WPP in your next WIC course.

The WPP is a 29-item self-assessment survey that asks students to take stock of their current writing strengths and problems, consider themselves as writers in a profession, and set personal writing goals for their WIC classes.

The WPP is a research-based tool developed by Tracy Ann Robinson as part of her graduate

thesis in English and refined in collaboration with the OSU WIC program and the Technology Across the Curriculum (TAC) program. The survey helps connect students to course goals and improve self-efficacy from the start. Using the WPP, a teacher gains answers to questions like these:

- What are the writing strengths of the students entering your WIC class?
- What are their writing problems?
- To what careers do they aspire?
- Is their understanding of workplace writing in your disci-

*Continued on page 3*

## About Teaching with Writing

### Editor

Vicki Tolar Burton

### Assistant Editor

Travis Margoni

### Design Editor

Jeanna Towns

*Teaching with Writing* is the newsletter of the Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum Program. As part of the Baccalaureate Core, all OSU students are required to take an upper-division writing intensive course in their major.

The content of WIC courses ranges from Bioengineering Design to the History of Photography. While subject matter differs by department, all WIC courses share certain commonalities defined by the Faculty Senate:

- Informal ungraded or minimally graded writing is used as a mode of learning the content material.
- Students are introduced to conventions and practices of writing in their discipline and use of borrowed information.
- Students complete at least 5,000 words of writing, of which at least 2,000 words are polished, formal assignments that have been revised.
- Students are guided through the whole process, receive feedback on drafts, and have opportunities to revise.

For complete information on WIC guidelines, visit the WIC website at:

<<<http://wic.oregonstate.edu>>>

# Building visually fluent texts: awareness is key

Travis Margoni  
WIC GTA

Every instructor reads them: tiny fonts on student papers, the 5,000-word rough draft in bold, entire documents italicized. Not only do the assignments fail to meet the instructor's requirements, they're slow, difficult reads.

Keven Malkewitz, Assistant Professor of Marketing, insists that visual fluency can be improved in many forms of text, from student papers, to websites, to labels on wine bottles. Malkewitz delivered a presentation on visual fluency at a WIC Lunch Seminar on Oct. 19 after receiving a WIC grant in 2005 to conduct and report research on fluency as it applies across the curriculum.

Malkewitz defines visual fluency as "the ease, speed, and accuracy with which information can be processed." It is a combination of both perceptual and conceptual fluency, where perceptual consists of color and contrast, shape and size, and low-level automatic processing. This leads to conceptual fluency and the learning that follows.

For example, the white border around a stop sign helps the white letters to stand out against the red background; the perceptual elements combine for a conceptual fluency; most drivers recognize a stop sign and its significance without fixing their eyes on it for more than a moment. The label on a bottle of wine like Yellow Tail Shiraz is more complex, with graphic designers and marketing directors teaming to appeal to a precise but large consumer audience. Malkewitz said the bottle's simple typeface (sans serifs), use of open space around the text (often referred to as white space), and the repetition of design elements make the label perceptually fluent. The company's name and the use of a wallaby on the label contribute to its conceptual fluency. Shoppers know that it is an Australian wine.

People working and studying in the university community make decisions that affect visual fluency on a daily basis. When using texts that involve multiple colors and



Photo by Jeanna Towns

**Keven Malkewitz prepares a presentation on visual fluency at a WIC Lunch Seminar.**

shades, Malkewitz suggests a minimum 3:1 contrast, paying special attention to the background color. White text on a black background (or black on white) makes for a contrast ratio of 23:1, while red text against a bright green background creates a contrast of 2.9:1 and is much less visually fluent.

Many instructors—particularly WIC instructors—are subjected to thousands of student-composed words each term. While most courses call for papers to be written in the standard Times New Roman, 12-point font, students' first drafts may be far from visually fluent. And what, exactly, makes Times New Roman so easy to read? Malkewitz says it's not just the technical elements, but the fact that we are accustomed to seeing the font. The ascender and descender distances are moderate, as well as serifs, making the text easy to process quickly. "It's a great font, very legible," he said. "It's good in a variety of settings. It can be letters, books, on the screen—although not as good

on the screen.”

Malkewitz identified four easy-to-read fonts in his presentation: Times New Roman and Georgia, which are fonts with serifs, and Verdana and Arial, which are sans serif fonts.

For instructors and students, Malkewitz preaches one main point: “Awareness. Just be aware that this thing called visual fluency exists and it impacts what people take away from writing,” he said. “Design with the audience in mind. Is it a poster presentation at a conference? Is it a PowerPoint presentation? That awareness would include the intended use of the artifact where that might be.”

Malkewitz, who earned a Ph. D. from the University of Oregon in 2000 in marketing with a consumer behavior emphasis, said his awareness started at a very early age—6 years old. After attending a football game, he and his father went into a sporting goods store in search of just the right football tee.

“I remember walking out thinking, wow, this is fascinating, how people make these kinds of decisions,” he said. Malkewitz has worked on product development for Adidas and several other companies. “I have always been interested in how things look and how that influences behavior. Intuitively, we’re very visual beings.”

## Pre/Views, continued

*Continued from page 1*

pline accurate?

- What are their personal writing goals for the course?

Using Blackboard functions, teachers can both aggregate the results for each question to give a snapshot of the whole class and look at individual student results.

If having this information about your students at start of term would help you fine-tune your course to meet student needs, consider attending an orientation seminar: that introduces the Writer’s Personal Profile during Winter term.

To use the tool during Winter term, plan to attend the Wednesday, January 9, seminar, 3-5 p.m. To use the tool during Spring 2008, Summer 2008, or Fall 2008, attend the Wednesday, March 5, 3-5 p.m. seminar. If you need an alternate date for orientation, you can request other dates via e-mail.

The process for using the WPP is:

1. Register for and attend an orientation for using the Writer’s Personal Profile.
2. Notify the WIC director that you would like to administer the WPP as a Blackboard test document or on hard copy.
3. Assign students to complete the WPP during week 1 or 2 of the term.
4. Ask students to print out a copy of their completed survey and make a copy for you.
5. Optional: Have students create a one-page summary of their results on a form we have designed.
6. Aggregate survey results and discuss them with the class.
7. Use the WPP results to address spe-

cific learning needs of your class.

8. Have students re-examine their WPP at end of term to self-assess for improvement and for accomplishment of individual goals. You might also use it at mid-term to assess progress.

All WIC instructors are invited to join the Writer’s Personal Profile pilot project now.

E-mail [vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu).

### Preferred Fonts

Georgia

Times New Roman

Verdana

Arial

*Learn how to use the Writer’s Personal Profile in your WIC class by attending an instructor’s orientation to the WPP.*

Dates: Wednesday, Jan. 9,  
or Wednesday, March 5, 3-5 p.m.  
Register by e-mail to  
[vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu)

## Attention Instructors: WIC Culture of Writing Awards coming spring term

Please remember to save outstanding student papers and nominate them for the WIC Culture of Writing Award in your discipline.

Presented by the students’ departments and OSU’s Writing Intensive Curriculum Program, the awards recognize the top undergraduate paper written in the respective departments during the academic year. Nominated work does not need to have been created for a WIC course.

## Writer's Profile, cont.

*Continued from page 1*

this term are familiar with the revision process. Minot said the WPP design is ideal, and “makes [students] think about their issues with writing.”

Minot also used an exit survey, asking students to reflect upon their Writer's Personal Profiles at the end of the term. “I think that made it twice as effective.”

While some WIC instructors may have reservations about committing time to the WPP, fitting it into a lengthy syllabus, Minot said the time trade-off is “worth it for both (students and instructors). You want them to be reflective. The responsibility isn't just on me—it's on them.”

She said she looked through the hard copies of the survey, recorded trends, and noted students who may have difficulties in her WIC courses. Minot made the WPP worth 15 points and used class time in the first week.

“Sometimes when you demand it in class, it shows how important it is,” Minot said.

The WPP was developed by Tracy Ann Robinson in her 2006 thesis, “A Study of Writing-Intensive Student Self-Assessment and Goal-Setting at Start of Term.” Robinson is currently the Corporate Relations and Communication Curriculum Coordinator for the School of Mechanical, Industrial, and Manufacturing Engineering. Robinson's thesis explains that the WPP aims to serve four major functions:

- Help incoming WIC students gain a more complete understanding of what, exactly, a WIC course is and what they can expect to gain from the course; and help outgoing students more fully recognize what they have given to and gained by their participation in the course.

- Help instructors get to

know their incoming students as writers, thereby facilitating instructors' efforts to identify reasonable and relevant writing expectations and goals for their WIC course and, if necessary, to fine-tune their instructional plans in order to teach more specifically to these expectations and goals.

- Include students in the outcomes-setting process for their WIC course and encourage them to consider the elements of personal motivation, engagement, and personal responsibility for their learning experiences, thereby enhancing their gains as WIC course participants.

- Enhance the perceived value of these upper-division courses by increasing their visible role in effecting college students' successful transition into the professional workplace.

Robinson said that instructors should have little trouble using the WPP on Blackboard. “[Instructors] have to know how to use the test functions, but this was the first time I worked with that part of Blackboard,” she said. “It was pretty easy.”

Although it was conceived as a written, in-class exercise, Robinson said she sees many advantages to using the electronic version. She has assisted instructor John Parmigiani in the two-term senior design course, ME 418/419 and IE 497/498.

“Being able to copy and paste made it easier for the professor as well as for me,” she said. “I think [students] took time for more lengthy responses online.”

Robinson said it has been rewarding to see her project utilized in the classroom.

“It's good to see that students are using it and taking it seriously,” she said. Robinson looks forward to having more instructors use the WPP in the future.

### Valley Library Customizes Course-Specific Websites

OSU librarians will create customized websites to support your course assignments. Students can access these pages from the Library homepage or your Blackboard page.

The pages can include links to databases and journals, tutorials, pictures, video clips, chat, RSS feeds, online style manuals, and more—whatever will help your students. You can see examples of current course pages on the Library's “Get Help with a Class” page:

[http://ica.library.oregonstate.edu/Course\\_Assignment\\_Pages](http://ica.library.oregonstate.edu/Course_Assignment_Pages)

If you are interested, contact the librarian for your department:

<http://osulibrary.oregonstate.edu/staff/collegelibs.html>

*Loretta Rielly*  
Valley Library

### Mathematics journal publishes Culture of Writing Award article

Congratulations to Sharon Sternadel, winner of the 2006 WIC Culture of Writing Award in Mathematics. Her article “Circles in a One-Way Street Taxicab Model” has recently been accepted for publication in the Pi Mu Epsilon Journal.

### Undergraduate Lang publishes article on supplements

Adam Lang, a senior in the Department of Nutrition and Exercise Sciences, has had his article, “Effects of Creatine, Amino Acid, and Protein Supplementation on Performance,” published in the August, 2007 issue of the Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.

The paper was written as a requirement for a Writing Intensive Curriculum course taught by Brad Cardinal, EXSS 381, Critical Issues and Analysis in Exercise and Sport Science. Upon graduating, Adam is interested in pursuing a career in the strength and conditioning field.



Writing Intensive Curriculum Program  
Waldo Hall 125  
Corvallis, OR 97331-6404  
<http://wic.oregonstate.edu/>  
phone: 541.737.2930  
fax: 541.737.4173