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On The Local Level: Rethinking Grammar and The Role of Editing in Writing Centers

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ON THE LOCAL LEVEL: RETHINKING GRAMMAR AND THE ROLE OF EDITING IN

WRITING CENTERS

by

JENNIFER CARTER

Under the Direction of Michael Harker, PhD

ABSTRACT

The discussion regarding how to address requests for help with grammar and sentence-level concerns has been an ongoing conversation throughout writing center literature. The general consensus among administrators and tutor-scholars within in the field is to move away from a product-oriented focus towards one that is more process-oriented, preferring to prioritize writers over their writing. In response to this literature, and in an attempt to move away from the "repair center" stigma, writing centers often incorporate policies on their websites that negate editing and proofreading services. This thesis explores the messages that these policies send to students and offers a compromise in regards to how writing centers should approach requests for help with sentence-level concerns, suggesting three different grammar-based sessions. This compromise would provide students with the grammar knowledge they may be missing in order to become better writers and stronger editors.

INDEX WORDS: Writing center, Grammar, Editing, Discourse analysis, Policies, Websites

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JENNIFER CARTER

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated in memory of my father from whom I received my stubbornness and perseverance. His pride in me is what has kept, and continues to keep, me motivated throughout all of these years.

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I have received so much support from my friends and family throughout this process. and I am so completely grateful to the people in my life who played a role in this achievement.

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1   INTRODUCTION

As a tutor at the Writing Studio at Georgia State University, I am required to follow the center's policies of making sure that I do not do the work for the student and of providing my students with a more conversational, non-directive[1] approach during my sessions. GSU's center mirrors the consensus throughout writing center studies and wishes to create a conversational space among writers. Our goal is to serve as a place that helps students during any stage of the writing process—rather than serving as a repair station. The connotation of the center as a repair station works against and destroys the image of the writing center that scholars and administrators in the field have spent decades trying to create and takes away from the collective goal of creating better writers, not better papers. In other words, like most centers, GSU's writing center refrains from offering students editing services. Yet, this service is exactly what most students are looking for when they come into our center; they need someone to read through their papers and to edit for sentence-level concerns, either because they do not know how to edit on their own or they realize they may lack the grammatical knowledge to find these mistakes independently[2]. Generally, these students show more concern for improving their papers on a local level and less concern for enhancing earlier stages in their writing processes.

This observation that a large percentage, if not the majority, of students who are signing up for appointments with our tutors want help with grammar was one of the first observations that I made when I first started working at the center. Sometimes this need is explicit. On the client form, the student will indicate that he or she wants help exclusively with grammar. Other

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[1] In short, non-directive strategies enable students to come to conclusions about improving their writing on their own. Tutors who engage in directive strategies typically provide students with these conclusions or even solutions for improving their papers.

[2] For this thesis, editing will imply copyediting specifically, which is an action that involves reading through a text looking for local errors in grammar, mechanics, and syntax. Editing in this sense requires knowledge of grammar rules. Since the knowledge is needed to guide the action, editing and grammar are used interchangeably in our literature and from our students as a way to focus on sentence-level concerns.

times, students will come in asking for help with revision, though it soon becomes clear that by revise, they mean edit, and by edit, they mean checking for grammar mistakes. As a self-proclaimed grammarian, I recognize the importance of knowing and adhering to most grammar rules, so I welcome working with these students when they make their way into the center. I even advocate for an emphasis on grammar in writing centers because, in the attempt to move away from the repair center stigma and to be more conversational in our sessions, centers end up denying students a service that they are specifically coming to the center looking for. And, while I understand the different reasons that our field has for wishing to focus on larger concerns than grammar, I believe denying editing ends up doing our students a disservice and ends up denying our students from getting from our centers what they need that they may not be able to get elsewhere.

This ubiquitous focus on grammar that I noticed and welcomed from students led me to ask the following question: Why are students so focused and concerned with being grammatically correct? The simple answer: they learn to be. One of the problems with this learned behavior is that they are being taught that grammar is important, but they are not gathering enough grammatical knowledge or reinforcement during secondary education or higher education to uphold these standards. Due to time restrictions and the need to focus on more global writing concerns, composition teachers are often unable or completely reluctant to provide adequate grammar instructions in their classrooms, which leaves writing centers the only viable places on campus where students can get the help they are looking for and need. This push for grammar instruction and help with sentence-level mechanics illustrates how highly valued correct grammar is or believed to be and indicates that students are not always looking for another set of eyes to proofread their papers. The students who come into a writing center for this

particular reason recognize and often admit that they are not the best at grammar, and they look for the tutors to fill in the missing pieces during a quick thirty-minute or hour-long appointment. This knowledge that they seek out in the writing center represents a gap created from or left unaddressed by instructors.

Although these students are not being taught a proper usage of Standardized American English grammar well enough throughout their education, they are expected to have this knowledge. Grammar and mechanics are listed on rubrics for writing (regardless of which discipline or class the student is studying), requiring students to be held accountable for information that they may not know or may have been taught incorrectly (Williams). Failure to possess this knowledge could cause them to lose points on their assignments, negatively impacting their grades and performance. Associating proper English with grades often frightens students who want to do well, which is when we see these students coming into our writing centers.

The need for correctness stems from a radical viewpoint. Scholars as early as the mid-19th-Century, if not earlier, have published articles indicating that using incorrect grammar is an evil act (Lindblom; Crowley; Connors). This connection between morality and proper English has plowed its way into social–not just academic–thoughts and has been gathering steam ever since. The trend (rather, need) for adherence to Standard American English, proper English, and correct grammar is so far ingrained in composition and writing studies that cries of literacy crises emerge when students leave college and enter the "real" world without this knowledge. As a result, the demand for correct grammar is not going to go away. As Mike Rose addresses, the common misconception outside our field (and too often within it) is that "good writing is correct writing" (345).

While correct writing does not indicate good writing, and good writing does not necessarily have to adhere to proper grammar rules, I do believe that it is important that students understand how messages are often dependent upon the structure of a sentence and on different mechanics. This emphasis on using grammar in a way to effectively communicate messages, an act that gives the writer better control of and agency in their language, stems from Martha Kolln's and Loretta Gray's idea of rhetorical grammar. In my time as a tutor, I have had multiple sessions where I explain to students, for example, the difference between using "which," as indicative of a non-restrictive clause, and "that," for restrictive clauses. My objective in this explanation is not to pass down knowledge about an obscure grammar rule that they are not familiar with; rather, I explain to them the different messages they send based on the clause they are using and how one comma—because it is really more about the comma than it is "which" versus "that"—can change the meaning of a sentence entirely. In the same breath, however, I explain to them that most of the time, the including or removing of this comma will not matter much in the scheme of things. I explain that using an extra comma, or breaking another grammar/usage rule, may not always result in any significant confusion from the reader, only a slight pause (Shaughnessy), but I caution them that the time when it does happen could result in them sending incorrect messages. Avoiding these situations is the primary reason that I advocate for them to learn the grammar rule because sometimes not adhering to these rules could be the reason they are not seen as an effective communicator. And if our purpose in writing centers is to help our students become better, more effective writers and communicators, then including services that address help with sentence-level concerns, rather than denying them, is a must.

My goal in this thesis is to examine the different conversations within our field that addresses grammar's inclusion in writing centers. In the first chapter, I review the major

arguments from writing center scholarship regarding how we should consider and approach requests for help with grammar. I discuss how the conversations that happen in our literature influence our practices within the centers and how we communicate these practices to our students on our websites. In my second chapter, I discuss my findings from a discourse analysis that I performed that explored what messages we are sending to our students when we talk about our policies on grammar. In the third chapter, I posit that what is happening in our literature and our websites is not mirroring the practices that are happening during our sessions, and I argue that instead of trying to reflect our literature, our websites should more closely reflect our actual sessions. To do this, though, we need to reconsider different approaches for working with grammar so that tutors are not editing student work, but are still helping students with what they need.

2   EDITING'S PLACE IN THE WRITING PROCESS AND THE FOCUS ON GRAMMAR IN OUR WRITING CENTERS

In this chapter, I will provide a brief history of writing centers' emergence during the current-traditional composition paradigm and the field's attempt to move with composition studies to more process-focused paradigms. Next, I will show how this alignment with composition studies has resulted in a decline in positioning centers as places where students can receive help with sentence-level concerns, such as grammar. I will then illustrate how the discussion of whether or not centers should focus on these concerns—and how—has been an ongoing discussion throughout the decades, which becomes more problematic when considering how the needs of one student do not align with the needs of another. Finally, I will argue that these conversations are important because within our own centers, specifically on our websites, we—writing center administrators and tutors—use language that mirrors this debate; yet, we still have not reached any resolutions within the field.

Articles published in *The Writing Lab Newsletter, Writing Center Journal,* and the books housed in our centers and used as training guides and resources profoundly influence the way we consider and reconsider the policies that we enact in our centers and sessions. In this review of writing center literature, I will focus on a small, but substantial, fraction of a much larger and ongoing conversation that has been taking place since the 1930's regarding the inclusion of grammar in writing centers. It is important to know what is being said in our scholarship, because these texts are directed to administrators and tutors who run and work at these centers, and who then broadcast these messages to our students on our websites to communicate what services we offer, and, frequently, what services we do not. The students who visit our centers and websites do not have the same investment in or understanding of this scholarship, nor do

they necessarily care about the conversations and debates that are happening within our field. These students do, however, care about coming to our centers to receive help on their papers, and many of these students want help with grammar.

2.1 Understanding Who Our Students Are by What They Need

To understand why the discussion of grammar is a continuous and important conversation within writing center studies and why our field is concerned with being more process-focused, we first need to understand who our students are and the reasons they are coming into our centers. Our students—either within our own colleges or universities or collectively as a field—consist of both native English speakers and English Language Learners, students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia and those without. They are first-year composition students and graduate students. They are the students who want help with grammar, and they are coming into our centers because they need us to help them with it. Therefore, the move to process-oriented centers, where sessions focus on developmental issues rather than local level concerns, is problematic in that it assumes that all students have the same needs or require the same type of help with their writing. By making this assumption, centers are not taking into account that not all students need help with organization or expressing their ideas, and these scholars ignore that some students may only need help with sentence-level concerns. In fact, the conversations within composition and writing center studies that discuss students who come into our centers looking for help with grammar quickly categorize these students as basic writers.

In Mina P. Shaughnessy's iconic discussion of the basic writing student in her introduction to *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing,* she defines the basic writing student as one who "is aware that he leaves a trail of errors behind him when he writes. He can usually think of little else while he is writing. But he doesn't know what to do

about it" (391). As Shaughnessy argues, "[Basic Writing] students write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes" (390). This discussion of basic writing students is important to writing center studies, because it indicates how students, whether defined as basic writers or not, are often aware that they are making grammatical and usage mistakes. These students in turn approach writing centers for help in finding and fixing these errors as an attempt to reach out for help addressing what they know they need help with. They recognize that they lack the knowledge to accurately address all errors in their papers and view writing centers as places where someone can assist them in resolving this gap in knowledge and help them with their needs.

David Bartholomae adds to the basic writing conversation in his article "The Study of Error" by discussing the problem with the term "Basic Writing." He argues that there is no real way of determining what basic writing means or the difference between a "basic writer" and a successful writer. What is more problematic, he believes, is that there are pedagogies based on teaching basic writing, but they are not "built on the results of any systematic inquiry into what basic writers do when they write" (253). In response to this lack of clarity, he provides his understanding of a basic writer, arguing that it is seen in a variety of ways, especially through overly complex syntax. In his later article "Inventing the University," Bartholomae provides a definition of a basic writer that sums up the view of the field: "the key distinguishing feature of a basic writer is the presence of sentence-level error," ("Inventing" 624). According to this logic, even if a student produces writing that clearly articulates her ideas and is developed and organized, the hint of sentence-level errors would categorize her as a basic writer. This understanding of this type of writer, on who makes "basic" sentence-level mistakes, indicates

that not all students who come to our centers want or need to work on organization or their thesis. These students can fully develop their ideas but may lack the knowledge to accurately communicate them.

Combining Shaughnessy's and Bartholomae's definitions of basic writers leads us to a clearer understanding of who our students are and why many of them come into our centers looking for help, not with their ideas, but with sentence-level concerns. Through their explanations, a basic writer is generally a beginning writer, one prone to making sentence-level mistakes. While Bartholomae indicates that the presence of these mistakes is enough to label a student a basic writer, it can be assumed that these errors do not include typos or drafting errors, as even experienced writers are guilty of those. Shaughnessy's explanation of a basic writer defines these writers as those who know they are making mistakes. By these two definitions, then, all of the students who come into our centers are or have been considered basic writers at some point; yet, our centers still want to focus on global and developmental concerns despite recognizing who are students are and what they need. In the following section, I will explain why we are so reluctant to provide sentence-level services that would be more beneficial to all of our students.

2.2   Writing Centers' Move Away from Current-Traditional Rhetoric

When writing centers first appeared in the 1930s, current-traditional rhetoric dominated composition studies textbooks (Murphy and Sherwood 2). As Robert J. Connors explains in "Current-Traditional Rhetoric: Thirty Years of Writing with a Purpose," current-traditional rhetoric consisted of "an interest in the final essay as a discretely produced piece of writing, done to order, error-free. The strong prescriptive emphasis on good grammar and correct usage . . . has always been and continues to be a mainstay of C-T rhetoric" (210). This focus on the paper as a

product resulted in "a repudiation of teaching the composing process" in the writing classroom in favor of grammar instructions (Young qtd, in Berlin and Inkster 1). Since "writing centers emerged at a time when current-traditional rhetoric was the dominant paradigm, they often tended to take on the role of providing this kind of remedial help to students," mirroring the type of instructions and focuses that occurred within these classrooms (Murphy and Sherwood 3). Centers became supplemental places, then, where students could receive extra help with grammar and polishing their paper to adhere to current-traditional practices. In the 1970s, when these composition classes shifted to more process-oriented approaches, the writing center remained trapped with the stigma of being the place that students went to for remedial help.

To understand how this composition paradigm shift in classrooms contributed to and resulted in writing centers' static position within the current-traditional paradigm, it is important to first understand how editing fits into the writing process. Jenny Edbauer Rice's and Janet Emig's discussions of revision and editing are crucial to understanding how editing and proofreading fit into the writing process, which leads to an understanding of how centers were relegated with dealing with this part of the writing process while classrooms focused on other process-oriented instructions. In her discussion of Peter Elbow's ideology in her article "Rhetoric's Mechanics: Retooling the Equipment of Writing Production," Rice sheds light on a potential reason for centers being stuck with addressing product-oriented concerns: "Elbow's notion of freewriting, for example, is largely based on the premise that focusing on mechanics will block the uninhibited thoughts that might otherwise flow from heart to hand. Whereas grammar and mechanics were once seen as the starting point of sound thinking, they were eventually repositioned as writing's *final touch*" (Rice 371). In freewriting exercises, the emphasis of the writing process is placed specifically on invention. The author's content

becomes the main focus of writing, and grammar becomes the technical aspect fixed at the end of the writing process to enhance clarity. With invention prioritized in the classrooms, students turn to writing centers to help them polish their papers and assist them in areas that are not being addressed within the classroom.

Additionally, Emig also addresses how the emphasis on invention leads to revision being a final step in the writing process, one that only happens once the author finishing writing the text. In her article "The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders," she discusses the views from other scholars, particularly those in Rhetoric and Composition, who consider revision in this manner. Emig notes, "In the process of writing, revision seems to occupy the same place that verification holds in scientific and mathematical research," in other words, checking for correctness after the process is completed—or editing (237). These discussions of invention-based pedagogies and activities and revision as end-process, then, indicate how classes began putting more time and emphasis into the earlier stages of the writing process, such as invention, rather than the later ones, such as revision and editing. When editing is separated or ignored as an important part of the writing process, students do not learn to take agency in editing. Not only do students rarely know how to edit their own papers, but they also lack the grammatical knowledge needed to edit on their own. With students spending more time in the classroom working on ideas rather than rote grammar rules or editing, centers become places where students come to receive help with editing. Through this understanding that centers are places to receive help with what is not taught in composition classrooms, centers are unable to move beyond the current-traditional ideology that the composition classroom was able to.

In 1984, Stephen North penned his response to centers serving as a place for editing and remedial help in his article, "The Idea of a Writing Center," which became one of the most

popular, and arguably most important, articles in writing center studies, an article that is frequently cited and republished. In this article, North expresses his idealistic vision of writing centers moving past current-traditional rhetoric and aligning with composition studies. From North's perspective, tutors in these centers would focus less on the paper as a final product and more on the writing process as a whole. This new approach

> "represents the marriage of what are arguably the two most powerful contemporary perspectives on teaching writing: first, that writing is most usefully viewed as a process; and second, that writing curricula need to be student-centered. This new writing center, then, defines its province not in terms of some curriculum, but in terms of the writers it serves." (North "Ideas" 49-50)

The enactment of this idea would create centers that would simultaneously be process-driven and would focus on the needs of the students—needs, he assumed, that focused less on sentence-level concerns and more on creation and brainstorming. North bases his perception of what students need on what tutors believe students need help with as recognized within their sessions, though he does not take into account that some students may primarily need help with grammar.

Ten years after releasing his vision for a new center, North published a follow-up to his article, standing behind his disdain for writing centers serving as places for editing and proofreading. He says, "I do not believe it is finally a good thing for a writing center to be seen as taking upon its shoulders the whole institution's (real or imagined) sins of illiteracy, either: to serve as conscience, savior, or sacrificial victim" ("Revisiting" 68). It can be deduced that North is not necessarily against current-traditional practices—his classifications of errors as sins and evidence of illiteracy attest to his view on correctness—only that he does not feel as though writing centers are the places where these issues should be addressed. His strong stance against

writing centers as "repair centers" ("Revisiting" 44) that fix these students' sins has remained an influential viewpoint in writing center studies. His articles were and are still important to the field, because they serve as revolutionary texts that spoke out against the focus on grammar and editing, creating the field's collective intent of "creating better writers not better writing" ("Ideas" 438). While North essentially started this movement of centers to identify less with the current-traditional paradigm, the field has yet to agree on exactly how to address sentence-level and grammar concerns that still arise in our centers.

2.3   Scholarship about Grammar: A Great Debate Within Writing Centers

Writing centers' attempt to be seen as more than just places for students to go for sentence-level concerns left a gap regarding where students would go to receive help with grammar. Would centers still address questions with grammar and usage, or would they solely focus on more process-oriented topics? This question of grammar's place in the writing center has been an ongoing conversation throughout writing center literature, both before and after North discussed his frustrations of shouldering these "sins of illiteracy." In fact, *The Writing Lab Newsletter* alone has published, at least once a year since 1991, articles or "Tutor's Columns" that continue the conversation about working with grammar in our centers. These articles from *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, as well as articles from *Writing Center Journal* and books published in the field, collectively offer a debate about grammar. While many centers seemed to adopt North's "better writers, not writing" tenant, discussions that usually prelude any articles about grammar in the center, many scholars in the field have argued in favor for grammar inclusion. The articles that I focus on in this section of the literature review are ones that provide an overview of the major cases for and against working with grammar and that reflects a general understanding of what this grammar debate looks like.

North's resistance in 1994 against writing centers being seen as repair centers is likely in direct response to articles such as Gail Lewis Tubbs' "A Case for Teaching Grammar to Writers," which was published in *The Writing Lab Newsletter* in 1991. In this article, Tubbs likens language and grammar to any other "convenience we enjoy," such as cars or computers. As an example, she explains her unfamiliarity with the ins and outs of her car's engine, which prompts her reliance on a mechanic's expertise "to be able to take it apart and put it back together in better than original shape." His abilities to fix her engine indicate the likelihood that he "feels more in control of his car than" she does (3). Tubbs' example is meant to express the importance of having expertise over language, indicating that the more knowledge a student has of grammar and language, the more in control they will be of their ideas. Although published in *Writing Lab Newsletter,* Tubbs' piece does not specifically argue that students should receive this help in writing centers. With composition classes shifting away from instruction that would help empower students with knowledge of their language, writing centers are naturally expected to fill this void. North's disregard for the repair center analogy, however, focuses on the service aspect of the center. Undoubtedly, he believes that centers are being seen as nothing more than "fix it shops" and not places where students train to become metaphorical mechanics of their papers (North, "Revisiting," 435).

Like Tubbs, Glover and Stay realize the importance of understanding the connection between grammar and language, and they take this position one step further and discuss the possibilities and opportunities that come from including this focus in writing centers. In their article, Glover and Stay argue that "composition process theorist[s] . . . ignore a more fundamental issue: the link between *understanding* grammar and writing proficiency" (130). The authors also acknowledge that the classroom is not the best place for students to make these

connections or to learn grammar. Traditional classrooms have too many students and too little time to properly teach each student "grammar as a way of thinking" (131). Instead, Glover and Stay believe that "Writing centers offer the best place to teach such a grammar of discovery because they allow learning to occur contextually . . . and because one-on-one instruction can mitigate the political obstacles of the classroom" (132). Through these tutorials, students would learn grammar as it applies to them and their individual needs over a course of time that would be more realistic and practical than in a classroom. As a result, students would gradually become better writers and would be able to address local concerns on their own without relying on writing centers to point out mistakes for them.

While scholars such as Glover and Stay are optimistic about the inclusion of grammar in writing centers, scholars such as Michael A. Pemberton disagree with these approaches, arguing that tutorials are still not enough time to address a grammar in a way that will adequately help students with both sentence-level issues and more developmental ones in their papers. In "Writing Center Ethics: Grammar redeux, redeux, redeux," he explains that within these half-hour or hour-long conferences, it is unlikely for tutors to help students free their papers of all errors and to do so in a way so that they are not making the same mistakes in future papers. Even several sessions would not be enough time to help students in a way that will "miraculously make up for all the grammar instruction that didn't seem to 'take' in the first twelve-or-so years of the student's public school education" (6). Rather than focusing on issues such as comma splices, he argues that faculty members usually agree that they would favor help with the thesis. In his article, Pemberton does not argue against centers working with grammar. Writing centers offer more time to address grammar concerns than composition classes, but they still do not offer enough time to adequately address everything in a single paper. Instead, Pemberton is realistic

about what can be accomplished and what should be prioritized, believing in most cases that other matters deserve more attention than grammar does.

Pemberton's discussion regarding the problem of prioritizing grammar over more important matters in the paper represents the conversation that Beth Rapp Young addresses in her article. She explains that "Another argument is that proofreading supports an unrealistic view of writing-as-product, not process. Proofreading does this by ignoring the global revision needs of a paper in favor of error checking, especially when the writer still needs to work on ideas and organization" (112). This explanation illustrates one problem that writing centers tutors and administrators have with proofreading and editing papers during sessions in that it promotes the idea of product versus process approaches in centers. Furthermore, this misconception leads to students coming into the center right before their papers are due and expecting help with these final touches. These situations leave no time for students to work on developmental concerns, but instead prioritizes a focus on grammar. According to Young, "Some would argue that proofreading is against the purpose of writing centers because writing centers are supposed to work towards better writer, not better papers" (112). Not only does the need for a polished product overwrite and overlook the attention an individual needs to become better writers, but also this product-driven approach to composition fosters the misconceptions that correct writing is indicative of good writing.

Throughout the literature, the conversations about grammar's inclusion in writing centers address this controversial topic in regards to making sure the tutorials are student-centered, focusing on the needs of the students. Those in favor for addressing grammar argue that expertise or understanding of the way language works will put the students in more control of their writing. However, those who argue against working on grammar believe that the time spent on

grammar could be spent on more important areas in the student's writing that would help the student to become a better writer. In the meantime, students are coming into our centers asking for and expecting help with this stage in their writing process. As Young expresses, "The fact is students enter most writing centers expecting to receive help on all aspects of their writing, including final editing" (111). As much as brainstorming, drafting, and revising are considered important parts of the writing process, so too should editing be considered. This consideration is especially true if centers want their services to accommodate the needs of all students and to truly help them become better writers—even if doing so means helping them fully understand all stages of the writing process and providing them with grammar knowledge that they may lack.

In the next chapter, I will address the results of the discourse analysis that I performed on sixty-three writing center websites in the southeastern region regarding the messages that our centers send about our services and whether or not these services align with the needs of our students. By looking at the language that centers use on their websites to explain policies and services, we can understand what ideas from our scholarship are included in our practices and what these messages mean to our students. Additionally, these messages reveal a gap in the literature regarding how our policies may contribute to students' confusion about editing's place in the writing process. Furthermore, I will argue that these policies reinforce student misconceptions that editing is not the role of a writer and therefore not something they are expected to know how to do.

3   WRITING CENTER WEBSITES AND MESSAGES REGARDING EDITING

SERVICES

In February 2016, I presented at a roundtable discussion at the Southeastern Writing

Center Association (SWCA) conference with fellow GSU tutors. Our panel, "Grappling with

Grammar: Achieving Inclusivity through Grammatical Discourse in the Writing Center," was

well attended with 25 active participants. During our introductions, we addressed the difficulties

of trying to move away from the repair center stigma while at the same time having students

visiting our centers wanting help with grammar. The audience affirmed our concerns and

understood that what we hope to achieve within the field does not always match the needs of the

students who come into our centers. Additionally, audience members and panelists collectively

discussed how our aversion to grammar ends up hurting English Language Learners (ELL) and

students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia. The writing tutors and administrations in that

room came together to discuss different ways that we could effectively include grammar in our

writing centers rather than removing it.

While representing only a small percentage of the voices of our field, the conversations at

my panel indicate how prominent the need for grammar help is in our centers and how, despite

the messages we wish to deliver and the policies we try to enforce, grammar is not losing its

place in our centers anytime soon. My panel at SWCA was one of two panels at the conference

that explicitly, as noted in our titles, discussed ways to include grammar in our centers. Another

panelist briefly addressed the topic in his presentation about working with students with dyslexia.

In our literature, the latest editions of both *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* and *The St.*

Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors, guides that are popular training and resource materials

for new and veteran tutors, include discussions on how to approach grammar in the writing

center (see: Murphy and Sherwood, Brooks, Thonus, Myers). In 2009, Christina Murphy, Joe Law, and Steve Sherwood published *Writing Centers: An Annotated Bibliography*, which contains over thirty citations for articles published within the past 30 years that address grammar. The publishing and republishing of these kinds of articles, and the conversations that we are engaging in during conferences, illustrate the ongoing conversation that our field is having on this subject, and these conversations are a direct response to the practices and situations that we are experiencing in our writing centers. Furthermore, these conversations and the frequency in which they are happening disclose a truth we cannot avoid: our students want help with grammar—they always have; they always will.

Typically, when students come into the writing center and ask for help with grammar, it is unclear what kind of help they actually need or want, and this is usually where problems with addressing grammar begin. Students usually do not have realistic expectations about the kind of help they can receive and how much of it will directly inform the papers they bring to the sessions. Sometimes, this means that they request help in a way that insinuates that they want to have their papers proofread and edited for them, but this request is likely due to their limited understanding of what kind of help they are able to receive, and our websites are not helping students understand that difference. Although tutors are unwilling and unable to do the work for the student, they are usually willing to help the student with proofreading and editing techniques or with gaining grammar knowledge. However, without a clear language to explain what we do offer, tutors, as my colleagues and I have experienced, can easily feel pressured to help students with their immediate needs (the paper at hand), which pushes the sessions to resemble the type of repair-center environment that we try so hard to remove ourselves from.

As part of my research, I conducted a discourse analysis of writing center websites to reveal representational trends that reflect the ideological canon regarding grammar's inclusion in the center, particularly in the way we talk about editing and proofreading services. Through this analysis, I aimed to determine what messages we are sending students, whether or not these messages clearly communicate the services we offer, what those services look like, or even what to expect when a student wants help with grammar. Are these messages effective? The results of this analysis illustrate whether or not the goals discussed online, particularly in mission statements, align with the reasons students are coming to our centers. In other words, what messages do we convey about the purpose of a writing center and how do those messages reflect students' intentions for coming to the center?

My first task in this research was to determine the best way to narrow the scope of writing center websites into a manageable sample size. Since I am a member of the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) and have attended several SWCA conferences, focusing on the schools affiliated with SWCA allowed me the opportunity to match the collective rhetoric of these schools' websites with the conversations that I participated in at these conferences. This information allowed me to assess whether or not the language used online matches experiences and practices discussed during panels in a way that would inform my conclusions.

I used the Institutional Members database on the Southeastern Writing Center Association website to access a running list of institutions that hold memberships with the association. It is important to note, however, that the online list is not current, as the database is not regularly updated to encompass all changes, and is thus not inclusive of all universities and colleges in this region; the website did not include many of the institutions represented at the 2016 conference. I chose to stick with only those on this database, however, because doing so

provided me with 50+ institutions to examine—a sample size that was both manageable and offered a varied selection—and links to the respective websites. To maintain focus on first-year composition students, I omitted any preparatory or high schools. Additionally, I was unable to access some of the websites on the list, as some linked straight to the online scheduler, Write Chat Online. In situations like these, or when some of the links were broken, I searched for the writing center website through the college's main page. If I was still unable to access the information I wished to analyze, I removed the college from my data collection. This process left me with a total of sixty-three writing centers from nine states in the southeastern region.

While analyzing the sites, I combed through the schools' "About" pages, frequently asked questions, mission statements, policies, and any other links and pages that would likely discuss that school's stance on local level concerns such as editing, proofreading, or helping with grammar. Throughout this process, I initially noticed some trends in the type of language schools were (or were not) using could be tied into their viewpoints on the place of editing or grammar in its writing center. I coded the data I collected from websites using the following four categories:

1) Denies editing and proofreading services, using phrases explicit and similar to "do not edit or proofread";

2) Offers alternative ways of addressing local level concerns, as in "However, we can assist with proofreading and editing strategies that help you learn to recognize and correct grammatical errors independently";

(3) Insists that tutors help with any stage or part of the writing process; and

4) Uses language claiming that a goal of the center is to help students become better writers.

Table 3.1 represents the results of this coding based on percentages.

Table 3.1: Type of Language Used to Discuss Services

Language Used to Discuss Services	Percentage
Denies Editing/ Proofreading	52.38
Offers Alt. Language to Address Local Concerns	53.97
Help Students Become Better Writers	34.92
Helps with Any Stage of Writing Process	60.32

My primary concern when looking at the data I collected from different schools was with the language used to address the different services offered, especially those messages when pertaining to the denial of editing and/or proofreading. These rhetorical trends determine whether or not the respective center wishes to reinforce the ideological canon of the writing center, such as by prioritizing more developmental concerns over those of local, sentence-level ones. Schools position their centers against the perception of being viewed largely as repair centers when they use rhetoric to deny editing and proofreading services. Furthermore, the combination of language used when talking about editing services and the writing process sends different messages to students about sentence-level concerns, such as grammar and mechanics and their importance in the writing process and the practice to become better writers. Table 3.2 shows different language combinations in conjunction with denying local level services that lead to these messages.

Table 3.2: Language Combinations

Language Combinations	Percentage of Schools
Denies Editing, Helps with Writing Process and Offers Alt. Language	33.33
Denies Editing, Helps with Writing Process, but Offers No Alt. Language	3.17
Denies Editing, but Helps Students Become Better Writers	22.22

3.1 Messages Conveyed

While denying editing services does not necessarily mean that tutors will not help with sentence-level concerns such as grammar, not addressing what kind of help students can expect to receive can send messages that are unclear to students. What is further problematic is that tutors and students may not share a concrete understanding of what editing and proofreading mean. In some situations, students may misunderstand "we do not offer editing services" as meaning the same thing as not helping with grammar in general. For instance, in "'We Don't Proofread Here': Re-visioning the Writing Center to Better Meet Student Needs," Joan Hawthrone argues that when students encounter that language structure they become "focused on the first and negative message: 'No'" (2). Without clear definitions or practices set into place, denying editing does more than deny a service, more than removes editing from the writing process. Ultimately, this language could deny students an understanding of the kind of help that the center does offer and could thus restrict these students from coming to the center for help and preventing them from receiving the type of instruction and attention they need to succeed both short-term (particular paper) and long-term (by becoming stronger agents of their writing).

The results of this study show that most schools are using clear language to discuss the services that the centers do or do not offer. It does, however, indicate that some of our websites do not, which calls for us to consider what messages we are sending our students. The different rhetorical trends in the messages conveyed throughout these websites, as numbered in Table 3.2, helps us understand the different viewpoints that the southeastern region has regarding dealing with local level concerns in the center. Based on the different combinations of language that a center uses, the denial of editing and proofreading services could result in several interpretations of how grammar fits into the center. Additionally, centers are sending messages (intentionally or

not) about editing's relationship with the writing process and whether or not sessions that work on editing, proofreading, or learning grammar will help the students become better writers. In the following sections, I will analyze the text of a few websites to determine what messages these centers are sending their students.

3.1.1   Messages about the Writing Process

When schools do not use language explaining that the tutors do not edit papers for the students, students do not receive clear justifications for the writing center not offering editing and proofreading. Unlike those tutors and administrators who are familiar with Stephen North's repair center ideology, these students do not have the same understanding of writing center history and the field's desire to focus on more developmental concerns. They may not understand the problems of having editing and proofreading errors corrected for them and the benefits of learning why something is incorrect and the process of how to fix it. By explicitly denying editing, centers ultimately deny students of a service that they need and that they are already coming into the center looking for.

Although there are only a few schools in the region that say they do not offer editing services without clearly indicating whether or not they will still help students with their sentence-level concerns, the message this language sends is still worth considering. For instance, the home page of a school in Alabama explains that "The Center is neither a proofreading nor editing service, but rather a space in which writers are welcomed to brainstorm, discuss ideas, learn, and receive feedback on their work." The language that this school uses attempts to reinforce aspects of writing that adhere to more developmental concerns and that would lead to more conversational lessons. Although the center ensures that students are able "to collaborate with

trained peer and professional tutors to learn effective writing skills for class and lifetime use," it is implied that these writing skills would not include grammar.

Another unclear message develops when centers insist that they help with all stages of the writing process. For instance, one school in Georgia is very clear about what to expect from the writing center staff, informing students that the center is "not a drop-off editing service" and that students should not expect to "walk out with a perfect paper," especially from a thirty-minute session. The staff is, however, "here to assist you in focusing your writing, assist you with revisions, give constructive feedback, and tutor you in proper ways of completing your assignment." Like the example from Alabama, the message is clear that this center does not elect into proofreading or editing services; however, the center does not offer alternative language for working with local level concerns. Instead, it "offers consultation and guidance at all stages of the writing process," which, depending on a student's understanding of the writing process, could send mixed messages about that center's willingness to help the student with editing and proofreading techniques, or even with grammar more broadly.

When centers use language explaining that they help with any stage of the writing process but are unclear about how they approach sentence-level concerns or editing practices, then students are not receiving clear messages from the center about editing's place in the writing process. Alternatively, when centers use language indicating they help students become better writers, they send the message that editing and proofreading are not *important* steps in the writing process. The message that editing and proofreading are not important steps in the writing process is more clearly sent when centers use this language in conjunction with the notion that they help at all stages of the writing process. By separating editing from the writing process in this manner, students are less likely to recognize and understand that editing is something that

they are capable of and expected to be able to do on their own. Without centers using this alternative language about working with students to develop their own approaches for editing, students will not see the writing center as a place to receive the help that they may need as a part of their writing process, a need that they would not be able to receive directed help with elsewhere.

3.1.2   *Messages about Agency and Better Writers*

Alternatively, when centers deny editing and proofreading services but use alternative language to discuss editing and proofreading, they encourage the idea that editing is a part of the writing process and promote the development of students' sense of agency in their work, returning the responsibility of editing back to the students. With these messages, students would then be able to not only recognize editing's role in the writing process, but they will also be able to understand that editing is *their* role when writing. Instead of believing they can send their papers to the writing center to have a tutor edit them, which is a current misunderstanding of how writing centers work, the students will learn to view the centers as places where they can still receive help with grammar.

One school in Alabama uses language on their website that I believe sufficiently explains their viewpoints on editing services without characterizing editing as an unimportant stage in the writing process. On their "About" page, they indicate that they provide many different approaches for tutoring, including both directive and non-directive methods. Since their focus is to "engage clients in conversation . . . **Consultants do not edit, proofread, or write text for their peers**" (emphasis theirs). This message so far does two things that reflect the writing center's ideological canon. First, it prioritizes sessions that are more conversational, though it

does indicate the understanding that sometimes sessions have to turn over to directive measures[3]. Secondly, the center denies editing and proofreading services. By adding the phrase "or write text for their peers" in conjunction with this denial, students are led to recognize that tutors do not edit or proofread because, like writing the text, those jobs belong to the students.

However, instead of denying the services and leaving the message as it stands, they also insist that sessions include "productive, educational ways to discuss grammar, editing skills, and proofreading." The combination of these messages pushes the sense of agency onto students who come into the center wishing to discuss these areas. Rather than sending an unclear message of whether or not students can receive help with these concerns, the center tells them what to expect for sessions addressing these concerns. Additionally, as explained in their FAQ section, sessions for students who want specific help with editing and grammar will be conducted at the tutor's discretion: "Each writing consultant will handle it in his or her own way and tailor their feedback to your situation." In these situations, the website explains that tutors may help students with "increasing [their] own skills at editing" or address "more 'global' aspects of [their] text . . . before [moving] on to editing and proofreading." With the emphasis and diction leading students to keep agency of their work, this center clearly sends messages that editing is an important part—and still the student's part—of the writing process and that learning these skills will help these students become better writers.

Even if we do dismiss editing and proofreading services, but use alternative language to instill a sense of agency within our students, our websites do not always offer clear expectations about what a student should expect to accomplish in one session. While we can, either on our websites or in person, recommend students to not wait until the last minute to come in to discuss

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[3] Whether tutorials should take on directive or non-directive approaches is also a largely discussed and debated issue in writing center scholarship; editing services is only one small part of this conversation.

their papers, our students may not fully understand how much of that recommendation deals with making sure that enough time is put aside for working on the paper. As experienced tutors and writers, we are familiar with how much time is needed to help students with editing skills or gaining grammar knowledge, not only throughout the course of one session but over an extended amount of time; but this familiarity may be something that our students are still learning.

When considering the language we are putting on our websites, we need to evaluate whether or not we are sending out clear messages about what we do and do not do during tutoring sessions. It is not enough to simply deny editing services without indicating whether or not the tutors will be willing and able to work with local concerns. When centers claim that they help at any stage of the writing process, they should assure that they are clear about where editing falls in this writing process and that they address this viewpoint to the students in a way that is understood. Furthermore, centers need to evaluate what is actually happening in their centers to make sure that their idea(l)s about the purpose of a writing center align with students' needs and the type of sessions that may be taking place.

As is often the case with sessions at Georgia State University, the idea(l)s of a writing center may not always make their way into our sessions for various reasons. Additionally, students are not always receiving clear and consistent messages about what kind of help they can expect in our center. The research that I conducted for this discourse analysis addresses these ongoing problems that happen at GSU and undoubtedly at other institutions as well. I propose we use this analysis and the trends revealed in a way that moves us forward and past the "fix-it" mentality. In the next chapter, I offer ways that we can refrain from editing student's work for them, but still help them with local level concerns, and ways to effectively send these messages and expectations to our students.

4   RE-CONSIDERING GRAMMAR'S PLACE IN WRITING CENTERS

A writing center's website serves as a medium to inform students about the types of services that the center offers, and essentially this platform works as a means to discuss the center's view of grammar's place in the center and how the tutors will address requests for working with local level concerns. The messages that we send online, however, do not always reach all of the students who come into the center, and it is not uncommon for students to come to a session wishing to work on their grammar. As a result, tutors, in an attempt to adhere to their writing center policy, are often placed in a difficult situation of not being able to provide students with what they need. As Young explains, "Tutors risk disappointing students when they explain that they cannot comb through a paper for errors, mark and correct each one, and hand the paper back with a stamp of approval" (111). Tutors, then, have to consider the best way to compromise with both the student and the policy—not editing papers for the students—in a way that still helps the students but allows them to keep (or gain) agency in their work. Helping students with grammar and editing is something that tutors are already doing, which indicates that the students' need for sentence-level help sends a greater message than the messages that we hope our websites send—despite how much we try to deliver messages that editing has no place in the center.

As scholars in field of Writing Centers, we should reexamine the messages we send on our websites about editing and working with grammar. Rather than attempting to have our websites reinforce the desire to move away from a repair-center image, we must shift our language to embrace the role of editing in the center in a way that more closely mirrors what some of us are already doing in our sessions. At the same time, however, we need to implement different practices that would make working with grammar a less directive, "fix it" approach and

instead help students become better agents of their writing by helping them with their grammar. More specifically, we need to teach them rhetorical grammar. Instead of dismissing grammar outright or offering vague ways of addressing it, we need better approaches—in this chapter, I offer three—and these approaches should be indicated clearly on our websites so that students can indicate which type of session they want to participate in.

4.1   (Re)Defining and (Re)Approaching Grammar-Based Sessions

At GSU, we advocate to both tutors and students that we aim to engage in "conversations on writing" as a means to move away from directive or editing-based sessions. During training and staff meetings, we discuss different ways to address grammar concerns, which includes techniques such as having the student read the text aloud and calling attention to error patterns within the first few paragraphs. These techniques seem favorable among the tutors, but in practice, most of us find ourselves overwhelmed with addressing all the errors in the paper. Thirty minutes (for undergraduates) is not always enough time to go over an entire paper, especially if the student comes to the center with little knowledge of or practice with English grammar. Additionally, one session may not be enough time to go over one issue, such as missing or incorrect articles, if the student is not familiar with the convention to begin with. The frustration of repeatedly attempting and failing to explain the grammar rule in a way that the student can take with them and apply to the rest of their paper and the pressure of helping the students get what they need out of the session result in our tutors defaulting into editing. This defaulting leads to the satisfaction of knowing that the student got what they were looking for as well as the hope that they at least learned something that they could apply to their next paper.

With these types of sessions happening frequently at GSU, we are working together to develop ways to communicate realistic expectations of sessions to our students, such as moving

away from a text-based online session where default editing had been an issue. This one change has been helpful in working towards clarifying a misunderstanding of the type of sessions we offer. It also indicates that if we are direct with students about what to expect in our sessions, then they will be receptive to the message and respond accordingly (we have fewer people signing up for online sessions now). In order to make sure that our students are clearly understanding the messages that we are sending about the types of services that we offer in our centers, we as tutors and writing center administrators, should be using the same language to define terms such as grammar, editing, and proofreading that our students are using. Our websites should reflect this language as well. A goal we should move towards achieving is assuring that we are communicating effectively and clearly, both online and in person, the types of services we *do* offer, especially in relationship to grammar.

This defining, or redefining, of grammar, proofreading, and editing should also come in conjunction with including different approaches for grammar-based sessions that focus on the particular needs of students. Implementing specific types of grammar sessions would promote in students a meta-awareness of rhetorical grammar in what Martha Kolln and Loretta Gray refer to in their textbook *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*. These approaches, then, would help students understand the different choices and reasons they have for using particular mechanics and grammar in their writing. As Kolln and Gray say, "Writers who recognize the choices available to them will be well-equipped for controlling the effects of their words" (xii). Students would initially work on strengthening their understanding of grammar with the tutors acting as facilitators for this knowledge. Through these different sessions, they would progressively learn the reasons why they are using grammar and mechanics a particular way and also different ways to more effectively communicate. Through this progression to

understanding rhetorical grammar, this "conscious grammar understanding" students will then become stronger agents of their writing in a way "that will support not only their academic career but their lifelong literacy as well" (Kolln and Gray xiii). For the students who come in wanting help with grammar, this support would equate to students receiving immediate assistance on strengthening the papers that they are currently working on and would provide students with techniques and knowledge that they can apply to future papers.

Based on my experiences as a tutor, I have categorized three different types of help with grammar that students who I have worked with have asked for when visiting the center: grammar lessons, error analysis, and proofreading. Sometimes, students come into the center wishing to fill a gap in their knowledge; they recognize that they are having trouble with particular grammar or mechanical rules and want help understanding how to follow the rule correctly. Students who come in asking specifically for editing, tend to realize that they have errors in their writing, but are not sure of which rules they are breaking. Alternatively, some students come in with clear knowledge of grammar rules, and their writing contains few errors, some of which are only typos. These students are the ones searching for proofreading sessions. Rather than tutors trying to determine which particular student they are working with, something that would only be clear by reading and, essentially, editing the paper, a center could have these three different types of sessions as options that students can choose from when setting up an appointment. Centers that opt into these types of approaches would clearly communicate what the student should expect to accomplish in each type of session so that when students sign up for an appointment they could indicate what they want to focus on without (m)any misunderstandings.

APPROACH 1: GRAMMAR LESSONS

The first proposed approach would be to provide sessions that offer grammar lessons broadly, where students could come into the center looking for help with specific grammar rules. For instance, I often work with students who indicate on their appointment forms that they want help with grammar. When they get to the session and I ask them what they want help with, they tend to be more specific than they are in their forms. Rather than say that they simply need help with grammar, they will explain that they need help with certain grammar rules, providing the following types of sentences: "I need help with my verb tenses," "my professor says that I need to work on passive voice," or "I'm really bad at run-on sentences." So, in instances when students are told that they are using commas incorrectly, they could sign up for or indicate (depending on how the session promotes these types of sessions) that they want a lesson on commas, and the session would focus on the different ways that one can use a comma. In this sense, tutors would take on more of the role of a grammar instructor or consultant, helping students to understand the grammar rules.

While crossing the line from tutoring to teaching could be seen as problematic, I argue that in these situations we should question what our roles as tutors are. According to North, "we are not here to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum. We are here to talk to writers" ("Ideas" 440). Providing grammar lessons can still be conversational. Tutors and students could discuss the grammar rules and the different messages that not adhering to the rule sends, such as how the message may change without a comma. Additionally, the student and tutor could practice the grammar rule in a mini-workshop and negotiate the answers. Sometimes, however, these sessions may end up as conversational as the tutor would like, but even if they are not, students should be able to receive

that kind of one-sided conversation in their sessions if they need help understanding grammar rules.

APPROACH 2: EXTENDED ERROR ANALYSIS

The second type of grammar-based session is extended error analysis, which would ideally take place over a series of sessions. In these sessions, students would bring in samples of their work and collaborate with the tutor to see the types of errors they are making. This kind of session would more closely resemble the ways that centers currently try to gear their sessions— helping students find the errors in their writing and ways to consider editing techniques. The students who opt for this type of session would come in understanding that one session would not be enough time to talk about an entire paper, and this understanding could be reinforced in the way that the centers promote these types of sessions. Since one paper could take several sessions, this type of session would ideally push students to work on their papers independently between sessions to incorporate knowledge learned. These sessions would also focus on helping the student make meaning of the grammar rules and not necessarily give them the corrections.

This kind of session would pull into the writing center a potential method that David Bartholomae suggests in "The Study of Error" for composition instructors to incorporate into their pedagogy. Instead of with a teacher, the writer would work with a tutor to "discover the grammar of *that* coherence, of the 'idiosyncratic dialect' that belongs to a particular writer at a particular moment in the history of his attempts to imagine and reproduce the standard idiom of academic discourse" ("Error" 255). In this sense, the tutor would help the student chart and analyze his or her own writing. As Bartholomae says, "By charting and analyzing a writer's errors, we can begin in our instruction with what a writer *does* rather than what he fails to do" so that by "[s]tudying their own writing . . . students [put themselves] in a position to see

themselves as language users, rather than as victims of a language that uses them" ("Error" 258). These sessions would then help students gain power over the words that they choose and enhance their voice to defend the grammatical choices that they make, thus providing them with an understanding of rhetorical grammar and agency.

APPROACH 3: PROOFREADING

The last kind of grammar-focused session would be one that deals solely with proofreading. Unlike the error analysis, the tutor and student would not converse about the errors in the paper, on any scale be it globally or locally. Rather, the tutor would be there to serve as another set of eyes on the paper, checking for typos or overlooked errors. The tutor would not be required to correct the errors; in fact, they should be encouraged not to do this. Their only requirement or expectation would be to highlight the typos for the student who may not be able to see the mistakes on their own. A proofreading session, however, must happen only when the student is ready to submit the paper, because, as Young explains, "Once the writer changes the ideas and sentences, proofreading must begin all over again" (111). Students should be clearly informed that proofreading should only happen after the student engages in error analysis sessions and not instead of them. If during the session, however, the tutor does find repetitive errors that are indicative of error patterns, missing knowledge, or unfamiliarity with a grammar rule, then the tutor should suggest that the student schedule an appointment for extended error analysis.

The language used on the websites to dismiss proofreading as a service indicates that proofreading takes agency away from the student and that instead we should be teaching students how to proofread and edit their own papers. While working towards students learning to proofread independently should be a distant goal, "Part of the argument for writing centers is that

an outside reader can notice things the writer cannot because he or she is too familiar with the paper" (Young 112). Students are bound to come to writing centers for proofreading because they recognize the ethos that tutors have as experienced writers, since writing tutors are typically those who hold a degree in English or are working towards one. This experience makes tutors more reliable when looking for overlooked mistakes than their peers who may have less experience with writing.

The dichotomy of writer and editor reinforces the separation between writing and editing and the truth that a writer is too familiar with her work to be able to find all of the overlooked errors or mistakes. As indicated in an experience he had with one of his students, Bartholomae concluded that "students will often, or in predictable instances, substitute correct forms for the incorrect forms on the page, even though they are generally unaware that such a substitution was made" ("Error" 261). This example came from a time when he asked his student to read his paper out loud, an approach that is both a common practice in writing centers and encouraged as a proofreading technique. While reading out loud does help a writer catch some of her mistakes, it is not foolproof, and the writer could verbally correct a mistake instead of visually catching it. This inability to find one's own errors also reaffirms students' understanding of how proofreading and editing works outside of academia. As Young explains, "in the workplace and other so-called real-world settings, writers often turn to someone else for help with proofreading, because outside readers are more effective proofreaders" (115). Professional and experienced writers seek help from others to catch typos and overlooked errors, and student writers also need this kind of assistance when wishing to submit a paper that is polished.

Having these three different types of sessions with a clear purpose will help remove the pressure of trying to broadly handle a "grammar" session in a way that leads to directive and

editing approaches. By providing students with a clear understanding of what to expect in each

of these sessions, they will be able to opt into sessions that best fit their needs. The sessions,

then, will be more focused, working clearly on one or two issues instead of trying to address

several issues at once and still help the student produce a grammatically correct paper. A tutor

who works with these types of sessions will also be able to spend time enhancing their

understanding of grammar rules as they appear, rather than feeling as though they have to be able

to explain any rule as it comes up in the paper. This specific focus on one rule at a time will be

especially helpful for those tutors who do not have a strong background in grammar.

4.2   Implementing Grammar-Based Sessions into Centers

Since grammatical or mechanical correctness is only part of a much larger and more

complex writing process, it would be unlikely and unfair to expect all tutors to come to the center

with the same level of grammar expertise. While some tutors are bound to consider themselves

grammarians, other may be less comfortable with working within the different grammar-based

session approaches. For instance, although some tutors may be able to recognize errors when

they come across them, they may not know the rule or a way to explain the rule to the students

(see: Hartwell, Hillocks). In these instances, the tutors in each center should come together as a

community to find a common ground (of grammar expertise) and to figure out which techniques

would work best for both the tutors and the students.

In these situations, tutors would become learners, either learning from their fellow tutors,

or co-learning with their students, situations that are not uncommon in Georgia State's center

already. One of the most common examples of these types of interactions at GSU occur when

working with APA citations. Most of the tutors who are new to the center generally only have a

strong understanding of MLA formatting; yet, many of our students come into the center looking

for help with APA formatting. Sometimes, if the tutor feels comfortable doing so, he or she will ask another tutor who may have more experience with APA for help. Alternatively, the tutor may turn to other resources that are available to him or her, such as a quick reference guide, a handbook that discusses different styles, or even the Internet. With the student present, the two are able to go over the information provided and make meaning together.

The same scenario could apply to different grammar approaches. When a student comes in asking about a particular grammar rule, or when a grammar checker flags a particular error, and the tutor is unfamiliar with the rule, the tutor and the student can research and make sense of the rule together. For instance, a common grammar concern that brings students into the center involves moving language from passive voice to active voice. In situations when the assigned tutor either has no experience working with passive voice, or when they are unable to offer different ways to find and correct passive voice, then the tutor can proceed in the same two ways as they would when looking for help with citations. They can ask an available tutor for advice, potentially leading to a co-tutoring session, or they can look up different tips online with their student. Young explains that "Beginning tutors sometimes worry that consulting a handbook hurts their credibility, but actually, demonstrating that you know how to use writerly resources enhance your credibility at the same time that it helps you resist being framed as the authority" (114). Not only would accessing information this way help both of those involved with the session better understand the particular grammar rule, but researching the rule with the student will also indirectly (or directly depending on the tutor's preference) teach him or her how to research for the kind of answers and help they are looking for.

One technique that a center could incorporate into sessions to help tutors conduct grammar lessons or extended error analysis sessions is by implementing or providing grammar

checker and revision assistant software, such as Grammarly or Turnitin. I realize how unpopular my suggestion may be with colleges; however, the use of grammar checkers is an approach that could be implemented in center practice to help students and tutors gain a better understanding of grammar rules and to help students become more accountable for their use grammar, language, and mechanics. In their article, "My New Teaching Partner? Using the Grammar Checker in Writing Instruction," Reva Potter and Dorothy Fuller describe the built in grammar checkers in word processors as "a technology tool so common that we forget it exists" (Potter and Fuller 40). While built in grammar checkers can cause fixing mistakes to become an automatic response—where the student sees the squiggly green or red lines, right clicks them, and moves on—paired with instruction, and not just suggestions for fixes, they could prove useful for students who are unaware of what suggestions such as "passive voice, consider reversing" mean.

Potter recalls a practice she used in her seventh-grade classroom where the students assessed the mistakes they made based on the mistakes the grammar-checking software called attention to. They made a list of their common mistakes and discussed the grammar issues in class (Potter and Fuller 37). This same practice could hold value during writing center sessions. Oftentimes, students who bring electronic copies of their paper to the center may still have suggestions from Word's grammar checker that have gone unaddressed. Instead of simply fixing the errors as the tutor runs across them in the paper, the tutors could use the suggestions of the grammar checker to provide the students with mini lessons to help them understand the errors that they are most commonly making throughout their writing. If the student brought in a hard copy of their assignment, then the tutors could still conduct the lesson with a grammar checker, by having the student type the incorrect sentence and discussing what happens to the sentence in terms of the different suggestions offered.

Many scholars rightfully question how much students should rely on these software to aid them in their attempts to edit their papers, as in the case with any proofreading or editing technique, these types of software are not foolproof. Young warns, "Use grammar checkers with caution, though, because they identify many 'errors' that aren't errors at all (like passive voice) and they fail to catch errors that really are (like agreement)" (113). The formulas that the software uses as an attempt to calculate the syntax of sentences are objective and do not account for every possible sentence arrangement. However, regardless of how often incorrect grammar checkers are in some of their suggestions, the errors they make or miss are significantly fewer than the ones that they properly fix. In Van Horn, Royal's article, "Scholarly Tools: Grammarian, Endnote, and Others," he suggests that "the real value in using grammar-checking software is that it helps you learn your shortcomings. If you learn the mistakes you tend to make, you will become more sensitive to them and will start to watch out for them" (550). This access of providing a quick and simple assessment of what mistakes are made in a paper is an essential resource for students who want to work on editing their papers and to become accountable for their writing.

Despite how available the software is for students, tutors should not rely on the software to do all the work for them, nor should the software be seen as a replacement for visiting the center for all of a student's grammar needs. As Potter says, "Teachers [and tutors] need to be aware of the limited feedback the grammar checker provides to their students" (36). While programs like Grammarly may provide tooltips that explain what a direct or indirect object is, the use of the software should only be supplement when editing a paper or during the session. Students would probably benefit more from the lesson if the tutor ran the paper through Grammarly and simultaneously discussed the solution to the issues detected while the student

read the software's suggestions on the screen. As Potter and Fuller suggest, "Employing the grammar checker as a partner in the classroom [and in this case, writing centers] may highlight instructional gaps that teachers [and tutors] can fill" (40). This approach, then, becomes both collaborative and conversational; it also provides some students with techniques to approach their own writing critically in a way that they were probably unfamiliar.

Another technique to conduct these kinds of sessions stems from a practice that seems to be common among writing centers: composing and allocating common resources, such as handbooks and handouts. Many centers already provide these resources to students either in their centers (as we do at Georgia State) or on their websites. As another co-learning approach, centers could host workshops for both students and tutors. Like the grammar and software checkers, having these resources available would help provide both tutors and students with knowledge of different grammar rules.

It is important to realize, however, that these software and resources should be used as supplements during sessions rather than a substitute for the kind of help provided. Rather than referring a student to Grammarly or providing him or her with a handout at the end of the session, these resources should be incorporated into the session with both tutor and student engaging in discussion. The idea is to work together with the students to learn the grammar rules, regardless of how advanced the tutor's knowledge is. Conducting sessions this way would help keep going the spirit of "conversations on writing," as expressed at Georgia State. Some tutors may believe that their purpose is to have conversations with students about their ideas and not to serve as a grammar instructor. Additionally, there will undoubtedly be some backlash, especially from tutors who are uncomfortable or unwilling to work with grammar. In situations like these, it may be best to delegate grammar related sessions to those who are willing and able to take on

these sessions so that our students are able receive the help that they are looking for when they come to our centers.

5   CONCLUSION

While grammar is only a small part of writing, those of us in the field of writing center studies need to insert grammar into the goal of making students better writers. The general consensus is that focusing on grammar works on creating better papers, and some scholars believe that in doing so we are offering a disservice to our students by not focusing on who they are as writers. According to North,

> in a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction. In axiom form it goes like this: Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing. Any given project—a class assignment, a law school application letter, an encyclopedia entry, a dissertation proposal—is for the writer the prime, often the exclusive concern. That particular text, its success or failure, is what brings them to talk to us in the first place. In the center, though, we look beyond or through that particular project, that particular text, and see it as an occasion for addressing *our* primary concern, the process by which it is produced. ("Idea" 438)

This argument favors the importance of global issues of papers, such as organization. Yet, global issues and thinking about better writing in terms of the development of ideas only recognize some of the stages in the writing process. A writer does not express his or her full potential if they do not take into account the importance of the editing and proofreading stages of the writing process. Recognizing these stages, however, gives students agency with their writing, and by prompting critical thinking skills through the purpose of rhetorical grammar, students will inevitably become better writers.

Due to the time limitations in the classroom, grammar is not and cannot be covered in as much depth as students may need, if it gets covered at all. As a result, writing centers have

become a common place on college campuses where students can receive structured support and instruction on improving their grammar and mechanics. This knowledge does not have to be limited to the paper, in a product-driven approach; rather, the grammar-based sessions that I offered in chapter 3 should focus on addressing grammar in a way that helps the students retain the rules for future writing projects. Several of these approaches will help move sessions away from the tutor editing the student's paper; however, there will be times when proofreading will be asked for. In these instances, tutors should be willing to proofread the papers with their students. Some scholars and tutors may argue that not everyone is equally familiar with grammar and mechanical rules, which may prove to be difficult or inefficient. However, this situation could be equated to tutors addressing citations and formatting in styles that they are not familiar with. At first the tutors may need to consult resources and learn with their students, but over time they would gain a stronger knowledge of grammar that would also benefit them. In this process, then, both students and tutors will become stronger agents of their writing.

Enacting specific grammar-focused sessions in our centers provides our field with a compromise to the debate about grammar that we have had for decades. In these sessions, students will be able to learn how to gain control over their language. They will be able to receive one-on-one help with learning grammar and with editing techniques in ways that assist them with their specific needs that classroom instruction is unable to provide them with. Additionally, with these types of sessions extending over the course of several tutorials, tutors will not be burdened with trying to address every issue or concern in the course of one session. In doing so, students will learn to and be expected to leave plenty of time between when their papers are due and when they come into the center for help on their papers.

Whether or not writing centers choose to include these types of sessions as a way to specifically address grammar concerns, centers need to make sure that the language on their website clearly explains what types of sessions are offered and the choices students have when electing into tutorials. Even when attempting to send the message that the center will help students with editing techniques, including this language after initially denying editing services can still send problematic messages to our students. When revising our websites, we should make an effort to remove language discussing what we do not offer and replace it with language that says what we do.

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