

VOX CALUMUS

Issue No. III

Newsletter of the Gavilan College Writing Center

Fall 2005

Crack the code: Learn to write the college way

Linda Bernabe

Writing Assistant

I remember sitting in my first college English classroom here at Gavilan, just three years after emigrating from El Salvador not yet feeling confident speaking English much less writing it.

My teacher went on and on, talking about main ideas, thesis statements, organization, transitions, and proper citation. Little sense all these components made back then. I felt I was given several pieces of a puzzle without really knowing how to put them together. Right then, I realized that learning to write at college was basically learning a different language within the English language itself.

I had to learn what it was expected

This is “another way to keep the masses oppressed and silent since most people don’t know how to communicate their ideas using academic writing.”

from me as a writer, using the language I now call academic writing, which for me is using a more sophisticated and formal writing voice than I usually do.

When first introduced to this type of writing, I felt overwhelmed and limited. I wrote in fear, constantly asking myself, “Am I writing what they want me to write? How do they want me to write? Am I doing it correctly?”

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Victor Hernandez (left) enjoys a moment of relaxation in the Writing Center.

An excerpt from his story “xxxx” starts below.

Victor’s victory

A writer takes off

Urusla Perez

Writing Assistant

It’s a warm Wednesday afternoon in the Writing Center and Victor Hernandez, an English 438 student, sits in front of the computer screen typing away.

Victor is not your average college student, a high school dropout at fourteen, “I just thought I couldn’t learn and I was not a good reader,” said Hernandez. Victor is not shy to admit that dropping out of school was one of the biggest mistakes of his life. Now 24 years later he is back in school eager to improve his writing and reading skills.

It is only when coming back to school he found out that he suffers from a learning disability that affects his memory. So he’s learning new skills regarding his disability. “God gave me the second chance and told me that I could go back,” said Hernandez.

This is his third semester attending Gavilan. He believes that his writing has significantly improved since September. Kimberly Smith, the Writing Center

Coordinator, said “What I notice is that he is infinity taking more risks as a writer, and less worried about the small things. Second he cares more about his writing,” said Smith.

Jesse Sandow, a Writing Center assistant, “He has dramatically improved and very persistent and really motivated with his writing.

“School has given me more confidence in life in general,” said Hernandez. For example, his improvement has given him more confidence when applying for a job.

Hernandez stresses the need to be a life long learner, “Education is always going to be part of life.” Sometimes in his own writing he experiences inadequacy because he’s not a good speller. But Hernandez experiences this surge of power that pushes him to keep working on his writing. He spends his lab hours sitting in front of the computer and typing away thought after thought that flows through his head.

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Sofia Moreno (above), a featured reader at the event who works in Gavilan’s reprographics department, shares her writing with the crowd.



Andrew Olvera (above), a writer and student, readies himself for the event’s open-mic portion.

OPEN HOUSE CELEBRATION

The Writing Center opened its doors in October, welcoming readers and writers from across the campus. It was all to celebrate the center’s new computers, new website and the forthcoming publication of three former Writing Assistants in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* of Purdue University.

Gavilan’s Jane Harmon, Fabio Gonzalez and Nancy Asay, of Barnes & Noble, spoke to the crowd about the role of writing in their own lives and the lives of their communities.

Fran Lozano and Sofia Moreno read a selection of their prose and poetry, which was followed by an open-mic involving more than a dozen faculty and student writers.



Joeline Boulware (left) and Rachelle Escamilla, former Writing Assistants, were noted for the forthcoming publication of their research project about the connection between drawing and writing in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* of Purdue University.

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Hernandez has the following tips for writers: One just sit down and write it. Two imagine a story before you write. Three use spell checker. Four don’t worry about the spelling. “Normally I would use some thoughts because of my spelling but I will misspell the word and continue to write,” said Hernandez.

After he’s done with the piece he uses spell check. Hernandez said, “You just want to keep going even though you are not the greatest speller or writer in the world.”

Hernandez encourages young people not go down the same path he did. Stay in school and achieve your dreams, he said.

Writing tip

Heat up; drink in; write down

Erin Jacksich

Writing Assistant

There is something about drinking a hot beverage and writing that go together. It is a very appealing combination. The task of writing seems far less daunting if I have a cup of freshly brewed coffee in my hand, sweetened just the way I like it.

Whenever I am beginning to write, I always feel an overwhelming sense of anxiety. The hot drink seems to have a magical effect on my mind, which eases the intimidation and stress I feel towards the writing I must do.

Maybe it’s because I get the chance to stop, take a drink and reflect for a second. It could possibly just be the caffeine in the coffee that is giving me

motivation. But whether you drink coffee, tea or hot chocolate, the effect is always the same.

I love to sit down and write with my warm mug on cold, rainy fall days. It



seems to warm me up inside.

Another perfect time is in the hottest part of summer, when you can get up in the early morning hours—the only part of the day that seems to be cool. Later, when it’s blistering hot outside, you can remember later how refreshing the morning was as you sat with your coffee and put thoughts to paper.

Whatever the reason you are writing whether for school or personal enjoyment, I highly recommend you try this writing ritual; have a hot drink as you begin to write. You may find yourself more focused, and this may show through in your writing.

