

# THE WRITING CENTER

## FALL 2003 BULLETIN

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### DIRECTOR

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## Tutoring

One-on-one sessions available Monday-Friday for UM students desiring better writing strategies and feedback. Refer your students early and often.

## Online Help

Web-based advice, lessons, exercises, style guides, and handouts for students and faculty. Go to our website [www.umt.edu/writingcenter](http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter) and recommend it to students.

## Workshops

Presentations on writing skills or UM writing requirements at the request of faculty or staff. To request a workshop, call x2470. Workshops are scheduled on a first come, first served basis.

### **UNC 295 Critical Writing II**

New for fall, Critical Writing II is a two-credit course that gives students more options in meeting UM writing proficiency requirements. If your w-course is overflowing, consider

recommending Critical Writing II to non-majors. Students will learn how to write thesis statements, develop supporting arguments, craft logical paragraphs, and choose appropriate language. Writing exercises will require close reading and analysis. The course also serves as preparation for the UDWPA. Students may register for W 9:10-11 or F 12:10-2 sections. Spring sections will be announced in the 2004 class schedule.

## Writing Assistant Program

The Writing Assistant Program pairs a student writing assistant (WA) with faculty in courses with a significant writing requirement. The WA writes comments on drafts of student papers before they are turned in for a grade. Their comments guide students toward better development, organization, mechanics, and diction. This extra revision cycle provides students with informed feedback that usually leads to better final drafts. The WA is trained and supervised by The Writing Center and may address course-specific criteria. Fifteen WAs will be available in fall semester. To request a WA for your course, call the director at 243-2470 before September 12, 2003.

## Writing Rubrics Help Students, Faculty

Students often complain that they don't know what an instructor is looking for when grading papers; faculty lament that students just don't know how to write anymore. Research on the teaching of writing suggests that mounting frustration over students' writing skills is a symptom of a failure to communicate. Experts recommend that faculty tell students plainly what constitutes good writing *before* the papers come in. An efficient way to do this is by providing students with a **writing rubric** for each assignment or course.

What is a writing rubric? In a nutshell, it is a set of explicit criteria that tells the student writer what constitutes a successful performance. Rubrics are built on the **traits** or qualities that faculty want to elicit when they assign a paper. Some traits, like *organization*, *clarity*, and *focus*, underlie many writing rubrics, across different types of writing. Faculty create a rubric by identifying the traits that are important in their field and drafting performance criteria that students can use to assess their own writing. Such rubrics are usually used in grading papers and appear in the course syllabus.

Many believe that any writing rubric, thoughtfully designed and applied, better serves students than a sprinkling of comments such as "poor organization", "wordy", or "Brilliant!" on student papers. What is meant by "poor", "wordy", or "brilliant"? The burden of definition, writing experts say, rests squarely on those evaluating the writing. But the time needed to create a good rubric is time well spent by faculty: grading is faster, more consistent, and easier to explain to students.

### Rubrics (cont.)

Four years ago a writing rubric was developed at UM for use in the Upper Division Writing Proficiency Assessment. While the rubric itself was revised last year, the traits it features remain the same: *development*, *organization*, *voice*, and *mechanics*. The traits are translated into seven criteria, stated for five points along a performance continuum for scoring purposes. The rubric values traits that are

relevant to most types of writing in general education courses.

A student's essay must meet these minimum criteria (score-point 3) to pass:

1. Responds appropriately, with a sufficient understanding of the text and question.
2. Has a single thesis that is supported by some evidence or details.
3. Develops ideas logically.
4. Has a purposeful organization.
5. Displays adequate word choice and sentence structure.
6. Has an appropriate, consistent voice.
7. Most grammar and mechanics are correct.

Criteria 1-3 spell out what is meant by development; criteria 3-4 speak to organization; criteria 5-6 address voice and associated issues; criterion 7 judges conventions. (See all score points at [www.umt.edu/provost/writingassessmentunder](http://www.umt.edu/provost/writingassessmentunder) "Exam Evaluative Criteria".) Teaching students to understand this rubric takes time, but in the process students learn how to talk about and judge their writing.

Rubrics fail if they are vague, too narrow, or too long. There are many good rubrics around that can be adapted by UM faculty. Sample rubrics developed at ETS (makers of the GRE and SAT), ACT, and at other universities can be found on The Writing Center website. For more information on writing rubrics or to schedule a workshop on rubrics in your department, call 243-2470.