CHAPTER 19.

EMBRACING AI AS A "SECOND READER" IN WRITING CENTER CONSULTATIONS: EXPLORING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING AND REFLECTION

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The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLMs) has prompted writing centers to adapt their approaches to student consultations. While some view AI's influence on student writing with alarm (Marche), writing centers face specific challenges in addressing its integration, as Isabella Buck observes in the Digital Rhetoric Collective:

> We noticed a decline in visits to the writing center, especially for basic writing tasks. Additionally, students producing polished text using AI often struggle with deeper analysis and argumentation. How can we encourage them to discuss AI-generated texts and reflect on their writing process?

Buck's question mirrors our own research interests: How can writing with AI be used to *enhance* discussion and reflection in the writing center, rather than *replace* it? This paper, in part, seeks to answer that question. As graduate consultants (i.e., tutors) responsible for training both undergraduate and graduate consultants at a newly-established writing center in a Research 1 (R1) university, we view AI not as a threat to our work but as an opportunity to expand the inherently collaborative, technologically-mediated, and socially-mediated processes of writing and revising to include AI in ways that benefit both our consultants and student writers.

Our specific model for AI integration in the writing center is that of a "second reader," wherein our consultants leverage AI as a means of additional feedback on client writing. We believe that the combination of AI's speed, efficiency, and broad corpus of common student genres can generate more writer reflections and

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motivate additional revisions. We base this belief on the work of Ken Hyland and Fiona Hyland's work on second language learners' response to writing feedback, in that writing feedback only obtains meaning through the process of writing and rewriting for specific readers (2). Their term *socio-cognitive* reflects the necessity of the social component of feedback and revision for student writers (7). We see the output of these LLMs, such as ChatGPT, as possessing only the cognitive component, devoid of the necessary meaning-making contexts; in our words, they are only what we call "mechano-cognitive." Our answer to the question of why students would come to a writing center when an AI can provide feedback on their writing? To quote a certain founding document: *We the people.*

This paper outlines a model of AI integration in the writing center that reimagines writing in ways that celebrate the multiplicity of meaning-making, shares our model AI "second reader" protocols, and shares preliminary results from our Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved pilot study (IRBNet ID 2211585-1). We aim to leverage the strengths of AI and consultants to enhance the depth and breadth of feedback available to student writers. To do so, we explore the following research questions:

1. What are consultants' and clients' perceptions of the affordances and limitations of incorporating AI-generated feedback into writing center consultations?
2. How does the integration of AI as a "second reader" affect the roles and responsibilities of writing consultants?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of AI in writing center practices represents a paradigm shift in how we conceptualize writing support and the roles of writing center consultants. Stephen North's seminal work established a foundation for understanding writing centers as spaces focused on producing better writers, not just better writing (438). Yet, the advent of generative AI technologies, such as ChatGPT, Claude.ai, Gemini, etc., poses a challenge to this conception. How can we work on improving our student writers when they are increasingly engaging with systems that result in "cognitive offloading" of the writing process (Dawson 37)? Our model of the "second reader" attempts to honor North's call to create writing centers as a space focused on producing better writers by implementing AI in ways that generate more reflection and revision, rather than generating easy solutions.

To imagine the best method of AI integration into writing center practices, recent empirical studies on AI applications in writing instruction provide the basis of our model. Work from Robert Godwin-Jones (15-16) and Hanieh Shafiee Rad

et al. (5022-23) highlights the potential of AI tools used as feedback mechanisms to enhance student engagement and writing outcomes. A recent study by Lisa Sperber et al. introduced a model for integrating AI into the writing classroom, which they call "Peer and AI Review and Reflection" ("PAIRR"). This model asks students to prompt ChatGPT for writing feedback and then compare that feedback to peer review feedback on the same paper. The researchers concluded that combining AI and human feedback generated useful feedback and increased students' critical AI literacy. Students even found it preferable to peer-only or AI-only feedback. The PAIRR model thus functions as a framework for our present study design. Mark Warschauer et al. provide a more critical perspective, underscoring both the strengths of AI to provide reasonable and actionable feedback for students but also the complex ways in which AI tools potentially undermine student writing development (3-5), which is a tension that writing center consultants must navigate. For ChatGPT specifically, Jacob Steiss et al. found that clear prompting produced writing feedback that was only slightly behind the strength of instructor feedback (7). Similarly, Şahin Gökçearslan et al.'s systematic review of AI chatbots in education offers valuable insights into the benefits of implementation (ease of use, increased learner motivation) and challenges (limited interactions, plagiarism) but does not specifically address the unique context of writing centers (24-26).

While writing center scholarship on AI use has focused primarily on the policy, description, and *theoretical* implementation, scholarship on the actual implementation of AI into writing center processes has been minimal. Currently, many workshop presentations, papers, and digital policies reflect a readiness to begin adopting and adapting AI in limited capacities. Nathan Lindberg and Amanda Domingues' 2024 survey of writing center directors and tutors found that sentiments toward AI writing tools "appear to be shifting from negative to pragmatic" and that "the fear that AI writing tools will replace tutoring has generally not been justified" (2). This shift in sentiment from apprehension to pragmatism aligns with Matthew D. Bryan's historical account of writing center responses to writing software over the last fifty years. Namely, writing centers are at their best when they are "positioned as sites of inquiry" to new writing software, experimenting and raising questions that "may otherwise go overlooked" (24). Training materials for writing center consultants have been developed to help them respond appropriately to scenarios in which writers may relinquish agency to AI tools (Crull). Additionally, one experiment with AI in writing center contexts was written up for the University of Wisconsin–Madison's *Another Word* blog, with one tutor reporting a variety of usages (from brainstorming to sentence-level rephrasing) with varying effectiveness (Deans). Yet, to our knowledge, no published, IRB-approved study has tested the implementation of ChatGPT as a source of additional writing feedback in a writing center context.

Our study aims to address the current gap in the implementation of generative AI by using a multi-faceted approach from initial AI literacy training to implementation and reflection. This approach allows us to develop a more nuanced understanding of AI integration in writing center contexts, bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications.

METHODS

AI Protocols

In the initial stages of protocol development, we presented our preliminary prompts at a workshop during the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) Collaboration at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in 2024. This forum allowed us to test our prompts through mock sessions with experienced writing center professionals. Based on this feedback and our subsequent research, we refined and expanded our prompts to address the complexities of AI integration in writing center contexts. The prompts we settled on are as follows:

> I am a student in a university working on an assignment. Pretend you are a peer-tutor who will review my draft based on the assignment prompt and specific goals I provide and therefore will not make revisions. Instead, please provide clear, detailed, specific, and supportive readerly-feedback. The format for your feedback should be as follows:
>
> 1. A short reader-response to the draft as a whole.
> 2. Two to three areas that are strong in relation to my goals and assignment requirements.
> 3. Two to three specific aspects for revision and the reasoning about why each poses an issue.
>
> Here is the assignment prompt: [copy and paste assignment prompt]
>
> Here are my specific concerns: [write out areas of focus].
>
> Here is the draft: [copy and paste draft]

Gathering Data

To investigate AI integration in writing center sessions while maintaining ethical and professional standards, we conducted practice sessions exclusively with writing

center consultants acting as clients. This approach allowed us to test AI integration with participants who were already familiar with writing center practices and AI concerns in academic settings. Our study included three consultants: Rebecca (undergraduate), Mason (undergraduate), and Lydia (graduate), each bringing different levels of writing experience and disciplinary knowledge to the sessions.

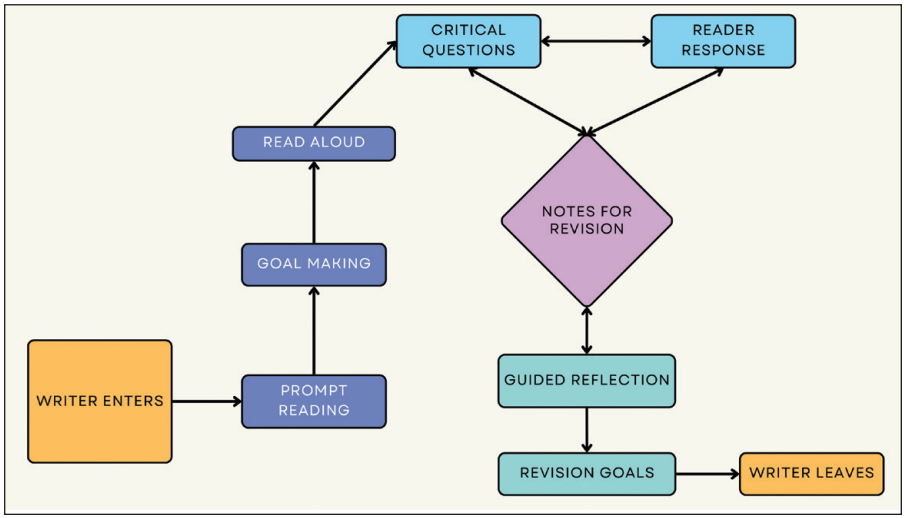

Figure 19.1. Traditional consulting session.

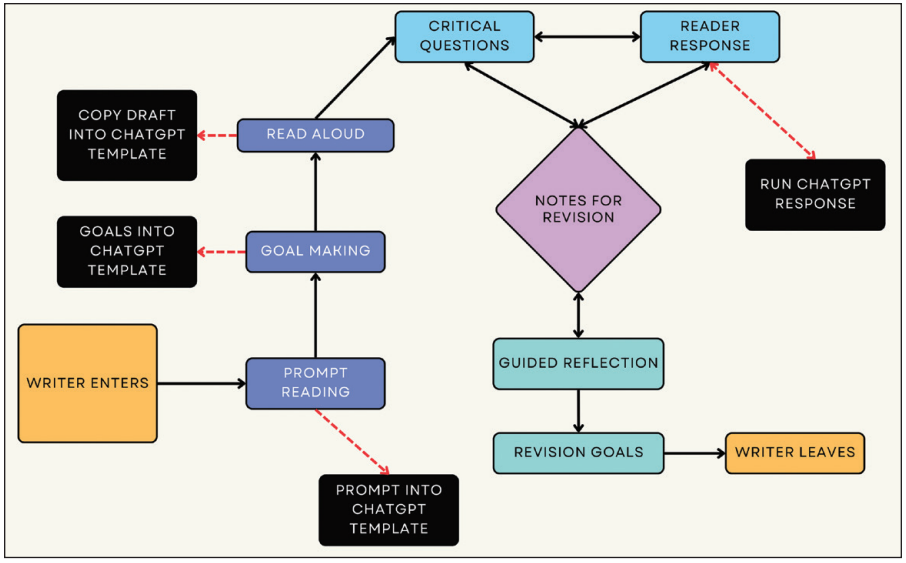

Figure 19.2. Consulting session with AI.

Each session followed a structured format incorporating AI as a "second reader" (see Figures 19.1 and 19.2). As documented in our session transcripts, consultants concluded each session with an intentional debrief, asking clients to reflect on their experience with the AI integration. Following each session, consultants also documented their own reflections on implementing AI tools into their practice, creating a comprehensive record of both immediate client feedback and consultant observations.

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FINDINGS

Our analysis of three writing center sessions reveals both expected and unexpected patterns in how AI integration functions across different writing stages and levels of expertise. These sessions—involving two undergraduate writers and one graduate student—demonstrate the complex interplay between AI feedback, consultant mediation, and writer development. While we initially conceived of AI as primarily a feedback tool, our findings suggest its value extends beyond simple response generation to create new opportunities for critical thinking and revision. The integration of AI feedback also revealed important considerations about how different writers engage with AI tools, leading to insights about both the benefits and limitations of AI in writing center contexts.

"Triangulation of Feedback": Aligning AI with Consultant Observations

The clearest example of the benefits of having an additional reader occurred with Rebecca's sociology paper. While ChatGPT suggested unique areas of revision that were fruitful (ChatGPT's feedback on revising transitions led to reflection, realization, and writing during the session), the most surprising positive impact of generative AI in the session came when the client and consultant had already agreed on the need for a revision. When ChatGPT's response suggested the same revision, the consultant summarized the feedback but was concerned the repetitive feedback would not be helpful:

> **Nick:** ... so then, yeah, pretty much what we said already about evidence.
>
> **Rebecca:** Oh. Uh huh. It's really similar actually but you know that's kind of cool. It says what we said so I know for sure like I need to put actual quotes in here and not just general stuff.

The client's appreciation of the feedback *because it was similar* and not in spite of the similarity reveals one potential benefit of the polyvocal feedback method. Generative AI's perspective as a second reader offered a helpful new perspective (in the case of transitions), but even when the perspective was similar, rather than dismissing it, the client appreciated the feedback as a form of validation. Despite having already acknowledged the need for evidence, now the writer "know[s] for sure" that they need to make a revision.

Further, the consultant's mediation of the feedback proved to be an effective strategy for maintaining writerly agency. As Nick read and summarized the feedback for Rebecca, she appreciated that "she didn't have to do much with [the ChatGPT interface]" and that having the consultant compare the feedback to previous thoughts felt natural rather than forced. This mediation allowed writers to engage critically with AI feedback rather than feeling overwhelmed by it, as evidenced by Rebecca's observation about her learning process:

> **Rebecca:** I like that it didn't tell me what to say; it just told me what was wrong. Otherwise, I might just copy it directly and not learn anything.

The consultant's integration of AI feedback with traditional pedagogical approaches—including asking probing questions, encouraging reflection, and guiding revision decisions—maintained the writing center's focus on developing writer agency while leveraging AI's analytical capabilities.

Preparatory Revision: Revising in Anticipation of—Not in Response to—Feedback

Perhaps our most surprising finding was the pedagogical value of preparing writing for AI review, particularly evident in Mason's session with an early-stage anthropology outline. The process of making writing "AI-ready" required explicit goal articulation, precise language use, and careful attention to argument structure—all key elements of writing center pedagogy. This process of what we term "preparatory revision"—revision done in anticipation of feedback rather than in response to it—often sparked meaningful improvements before any AI engagement:

> **Chloe:** So, we need to specify that you're working on an outline and write your goals. What do you want the AI to tell you about your outline?
>
> **Mason:** I mean, I guess I just want to know if it's good or not.
>
> **Chloe:** Yeah. So, maybe we want to get feedback on whether the argument is consistent in the outline?
>
> **Mason:** Yeah, that would be good.
>
> **Chloe:** What else are you thinking?
>
> **Mason:** I mean, maybe I would just want more feedback on how strong the argument is. Like, I want it to have more flavor and not just be a simple statement.

The process of preparing the draft for review with ChatGPT required the writer to be more specific and concrete about their goals than they had been during the initial conversation with the consultant. The preparation process frequently revealed gaps between discussed ideas and written content:

> **Chloe:** So, I notice that you use the phrase "argument/thesis" in the AI prompt, but your outline only says "argument." I wonder if you should also use the same phrase "argument/thesis" to make it easier for the AI to identify what you're talking about.

This attention to consistency led to another moment of revision when Chloe noted that the argument Mason described had not actually made it into the paper:

> **Mason:** Yeah, that's true. I guess we talked about it at the end, but I didn't actually write it.

This interaction exemplifies how preparing for AI review naturally incorporated traditional writing center practices: moving from general to specific concerns, improving terminology consistency, and bridging gaps between verbal discussion and written content. Ironically, this preparatory work proved more valuable than the AI feedback itself, as Mason reflected:

> **Mason:** I don't think it gave anything new. This is an incredibly rough draft of an outline, and we knew that going in. So, I kinda already knew that I needed to expand on my ideas and provide more evidence. If this was a full outline, and it was saying that I was still missing certain details, then maybe I would be like: Oh, yeah! I can add that. But it wasn't very helpful for this.

This finding suggests both AI's limitations (the writer's draft was an outline that was too early in the process to benefit from the type of feedback ChatGPT could provide) and that writing centers should consider reframing how we think about AI tools and consultations. While we initially conceived of AI as a "second reader" providing feedback, Mason's session demonstrates that the process of preparing for AI review can itself serve as a powerful tool for revision and reflection.

Writer Expertise and Disciplinary Knowledge: Graduate Student Perspectives

While our sessions with Rebecca and Mason highlighted undergraduate engagement with AI feedback, our session with Lydia, a fifth-year doctoral candidate in linguistics working on a postdoctoral fellowship application, revealed how writers of varying levels of experience may interact and benefit from generative AI-enhanced sessions in distinct ways. From the onset, Lydia expressed concerns about intellectual property and limited what she would share with AI.

> **Lydia:** If you wouldn't mind just doing the background. I just don't. I don't want it to have my research questions in there like I don't know just because it's like my ideas. I guess.
>
> **Nick:** Of course, I'll just take the background.

Unlike Rebecca's sociology paper or Mason's outline, Lydia's work represented novel scholarship she intended to publish. Her hesitation to share research questions with AI showcases the complexity of AI and intellectual property concerns that writing centers must consider when working with students—especially graduate students who are more likely to produce original knowledge rather than respond to a prescribed prompt.

Despite these initial reservations, the session revealed Lydia's sophisticated approach to evaluating AI feedback. When discussing the AI's suggestions about addressing limitations and broader implications, Lydia demonstrated careful consideration of which feedback elements would be most valuable:

> **Lydia:** But yeah, number three is kind of like, not helpful. Number one. Yes, that is helpful. I do wonder how much space I'll actually have for it, but I think that's a great point. That's something that I do need to take into more consideration. So yeah. I appreciate having the additional perspective.

As the session progressed, Lydia articulated an even more nuanced perspective about when and how AI feedback might be most beneficial:

> **Lydia:** Hmm. I think, because I consider you and me to be much more experts in this area than ChatGPT, I don't really care that much about it validating that. I guess the one thing like the first point, you know, because I'm not in education, I found that more useful because I'm not as sure about what I wrote. I actually almost wish we would have prompted it with like, oh, as an educational researcher, what's your take?

This strategic approach to AI feedback—valuing it more in areas outside her expertise while maintaining skepticism within her discipline—suggests the need for flexible, discipline-aware protocols in writing center AI integration. Lydia's ability to distinguish between feedback that confirmed existing plans versus feedback that provided new insights in less familiar areas demonstrates how graduate writers might most productively engage with AI tools.

DISCUSSION

By centering the perspectives and experiences of writing consultants, this research helps address the current gap in empirical literature on the practical implementation of AI in these contexts. The data reveals a nuanced picture of how AI can function as a "second reader" within the writing center setting, challenging simplistic fears of technological replacement while also highlighting important considerations for adapting these tools across diverse student populations and levels of expertise.

Generative AI is Effective as a "Second Reader" When Mediated through a Consultant

The concerns raised by participants about AI potentially rendering writing centers obsolete, as noted in the introduction (Marche), were not supported by this study. Our findings demonstrate that students effectively mediated between AI feedback and human feedback, which supports previous findings from Zhe Zhang and Hyland about highly engaged learners' abilities to actively participate with AWE feedback and also aligns with Ken Hyland and Fiona Hyland's established theories of socio-cognitive feedback. The results suggest that consultants play a crucial role in mediating AI feedback, preserving the collaborative, socially-situated nature of writing support and addressing fears expressed by some students (Lindberg and Domingues 2). By acting as intermediaries, consultants helped students critically engage with AI analysis while maintaining the social dimensions of writing support. These results echo Sperber et al.'s findings that combining human and AI writing feedback has benefits for developing critical AI literacy while retaining

writerly agency (11-12). The results also align with Warschauer et al.'s recommendation to thoughtfully integrate AI tools in ways that enhance, rather than replace, human guidance in writing development (5-6).

Adapting AI Integration across Levels of Expertise and Disciplines

The perspectives offered by the graduate student participant, Lydia, also underscore the importance of discipline-aware, flexible protocols for AI integration, as observed in recent surveys of writing center professionals (Byrd et al. 7, 8-9). Lydia's strategic approach to evaluating AI feedback based on her own expertise aligns with calls in writing center scholarship to adapt practices for diverse student populations (Warschauer et al. 1-6). This suggests that writing centers must consider how AI tools may function differently across levels of writer expertise and disciplinary contexts. As Steiss et al. found, the effectiveness of AI-generated feedback can vary based on the specificity of the prompt (10); Lydia's responses indicate that consultants may need to carefully calibrate AI prompts to leverage its strengths in areas outside the writer's core disciplinary knowledge.

CONCLUSION

As writing centers navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of artificial intelligence and its implications for supporting student writers, our study offers a promising model for thoughtful AI integration. By positioning AI as a "second reader" whose feedback is actively mediated by trained writing consultants, we can harness the analytical capabilities of these tools while maintaining the socially-situated, collaborative nature of writing center pedagogy.

Our findings suggest that AI's value in writing consultations extends beyond mere feedback generation. The process of preparing writing for AI review—what we term "preparatory revision"—can itself serve as a powerful catalyst for critical thinking and intentional writing choices. As students clarify their goals, tighten their language, and structure their arguments in anticipation of AI input, they engage in the very practices that writing centers have long sought to cultivate. Yet, our study also highlights the need for nuanced, context-aware approaches to AI integration. The concerns expressed by our graduate student participant about intellectual property and the limits of AI's disciplinary expertise underscore the importance of flexible protocols that can adapt to different levels of writer experience and specialized knowledge domains. Writing centers must develop strategies for leveraging AI's strengths while also acknowledging its limitations, particularly when working with advanced writers engaged in original research.

Ultimately, our findings challenge reductive narratives of technological replacement, instead pointing to the vital role that writing consultants can play in mediating AI tools to enhance, rather than undermine, student writing development. By embracing AI as an opportunity for inquiry and experimentation, writing centers can continue to fulfill their core mission of fostering reflective, autonomous writers equipped to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape. The integration of AI thus becomes not a threat to the writing center's relevance but rather an extension of its longstanding commitment to empowering students through collaborative, socially-embedded writing support.

As we look ahead, further research is needed to refine best practices for AI integration across diverse student populations and institutional contexts. This study offers a foundation for that work, demonstrating the potential for writing centers to proactively shape the development of AI tools in ways that align with our field's core values and pedagogical commitments. By engaging in this research, we position ourselves not as passive recipients of technological change but as active agents in crafting an approach to AI that celebrates the inherently human dimensions of writing and learning.

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