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Review of *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* (2nd edition)

Edited by Shanti Bruce & Ben Rafoth, Boynton/Cook, 2009

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“English can be both amusing and treacherous,” notes Ben Rafoth, coeditor of *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*. Together with coeditor Shanti Bruce and dozens of other English, composition, and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and academics, this book presents the enjoyment and obstacles that tutors and tutees face. The 16 chapters cover a variety of ESL students: international, Generation 1.5, graduates of U.S. high schools, and professionals. In addition, this guide “also discusses differences in tutoring styles in various settings—for instance, with undergrads, peers, grad students, and instructors—as well as variations” also lays out differences in tutoring styles in various settings by undergrads, peers, grad students, and instructors, as well as variations in writing centers across the United States and at foreign universities.

Coeditors Bruce and Rafoth represent the breadth of experiences reflected by the writers in this guide. All of them are dedicated teachers,

helping ESL college students become better writers and helping tutors become better writers as well. Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox note in their article, “Reading an ESL Writer’s Text,” “Teachers often call the unexpected occurrences that happen in the classroom ‘teachable moments’—moments where significant learning could occur. It may be helpful to think of the unexpected in ESL writing with the same positive twist” (48). The contributors to this guide frequently remind readers that the errors ESL writers make are not negative or deficient ways of processing the English language. Tutors must give writers authority over their own work and be careful not to appropriate the writers’ voices.

This guide encourages tutors to focus on global issues with ESL writers. Writing centers should have policies clearly stating that tutors are not editing drones. Tutors can coach and suggest, but they must let the writers have ultimate authority over their own work. Another theme in this guide advises tutors to make time to understand the writers’ cultures and expectations. Notions of plagiarism, voice, and authority in American academic writing can be quite different from standards in the students’ home languages or countries. In “Looking at the Whole Text,” Jennifer E. Staben and Kathryn Dempsey Nordhaus state that through small talk and questioning, tutors can “act as informant to provide them with the background they [ESL writers] need to successfully negotiate these new writing contexts” (80). Moreover, coeditor Shanti Bruce finds that some ESL students’ beliefs about who makes a proper tutor may also be different from many of the tutors who are actually employed in American college writing centers right now. In her article “Listening to and Learning from ESL Writers,” she finds that some ESL students feel that a tutor should be a native speaker, have a lot of experience, and even be older than the tutee (221).

The biggest strengths of this guide are the pieces of practical advice for tutors. “Editing Line by Line” by Cynthia Linville has helpful tips for tutors. Many ESL writers want or expect tutors to fix their work line by line. But this must be balanced with having the writers take ownership of their papers, learning to fix the errors themselves, and discovering higher order issues. Linville suggests that tutors negotiate the desires of their

students with the need for them to recognize errors (120). Several articles include the transcripts from actual tutoring sessions or encourage role playing for tutors. Linville reports that “role playing outside of the session can help tutors navigate difficult situations,” and ultimately accomplish the objectives of the university, writing program, and the writing center (122). However, the advice in this guide is not solely for tutors; any staff and instructors involved with writing centers—English and ESL—will find a lot of helpful ideas here.

Consequently, it is probably the abundance of advice in *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* that may make it difficult for busy peer tutors to read and digest before or during their semester. If the tutors are involved in a class, seminar, or frequent tutor meetings, this guide would certainly be useful for discussions. If a writing center or ESL program has a number of tutors, each one (or a pair) could read a chapter and present the info to the group.

Writing centers are really in a golden age right now. They are well established in most colleges and universities, yet they are still ripe for growth, development, and technological expansion. Giving tutors explicit instruction and assistance is an essential service of writing centers and writing programs. *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* by Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth is an indispensable book for people involved in any aspect of English, ESL, or writing courses and programs.

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