

JG: Hello, and welcome to the first episode of season two of the Writing Across Cottey project. So whereas in season one, we were speaking with Cottey faculty across the disciplines to talk about how writing worked in their academic areas, in season two here, we're going to take a slightly different approach, and we are going to talk to some other individuals on our Cottey campus. We're going to mainly talk with some of our staff and administrators, and the interviews are going to be more about writing in the workplace and how these individuals use their writing skills and what kind of writing is done in their particular line of work here. But again, the whole purpose of this project is to illustrate how writing is kind of done across the board, across campus, not just in the English department, not just in the writing classes, but something that is done across all classes and in all areas of the campus community. So for our premiere, debut episode of season two, we have our library coordinator, Courtney Trautweiler, with us, and we are very fortunate to have her with us today. Thank you for being here, Ms. Trautweiler.

CT: Oh, it's a pleasure. Thank you for inviting me. I'm looking forward to the experience.

JG: Very good. Well, I'm just going to jump in right here with the first question, and it is a very broad question. What kind of writing is done in your position?

CT: Well, I mean, to be honest, we do across the spectrum levels of writing. There's academic writing, there's business writing, there's casual writing. We really have to be able to move seamlessly between those different types of writing. So for example, with the business or the administrative aspect of it, there's a lot of emails that happen, social media, there's marketing, there's reports, there's analytical and quarterly reports and annual reports. And really that just runs the gamut of business and administrative writing. There's also instructional writing, so instructions on how users can access the library materials, library guides, etc. We also have things like policy documents and tutorials that we write. We also have examples of advocacy and outreach writing, so things that create a picture of the value of the library to our stakeholders. So a lot of business writing in that regard, and then there's also academic writing. So as a library director, I could then write articles and publish about the library field, about particular areas within the world of librarianship, and publish those to academic and peer reviewed journals. I can then also present at conferences as well. And I also need to have a really solid understanding of academic writing for instructional purposes. When I'm working with students, I need to understand the writing that they need to be able to produce so that when I'm guiding them through research, the research process and looking for materials to support their assignments and projects and research papers and capstones, etc., I need to know the product that they're trying to create so that I can then help them fill that out with reasonable and accurate resources to be included. So all of the things we do, all of the writing.

JG: Yeah, that is a very wide variety of genres that you're asked to write in, and I think a lot of people don't really realize that about the library all that stuff that goes on behind the scenes. So yeah, it's interesting to hear the director tell us what exactly goes on behind the scenes and how the sausage is made, so to speak. Okay, so why do you think it's important to be able to write well in your position?

CT: Well, I think the main, simplest answer is clarity of communication. I want to be able to write well so that whatever it is that I'm communicating or asking a staff member to communicate, I want it to be clear and concise. I want to be able to have a clear picture of who the audience is and what the purpose of the writing is and make sure that the reader or the listener is getting the clear picture of what I want to communicate. So I believe that that is really the important part of it, yeah, is accuracy and communication.

JG: Yeah, and I think you kind of anticipated my next question, but are there any other specific writing skills that you would say are particularly important for writing in your position?

CT: I think you need to be able to be well organized. I think that you should be able to identify the particular audience that you're wanting to speak to or communicate to, maybe the rhetorical situation, understanding how you're going to communicate this and why it's important to communicate this so that the email or the report or the social media post or whatever it happens to be is very concise and to the point and not, you know, too open ended. You want it to be very direct and clear.

JG: I'm very happy to hear you talk about the importance of audience and rhetorical situation because, of course, these are topics that we really emphasize in our first year writing classes, FWS and Writing 102, and it's a theme that came through, I think, in every single one of the season one episodes when we were talking with faculty across the disciplines. They would reiterate that importance of knowing your rhetorical situation, knowing your audience, and the best way to tailor your message to them. And so it's really, I think, important for everyone to see that that extends to the professional side of things as well. You know, when you're sending an email to somebody in a professional context, the same ideas apply to that. You still need to have that keen sense of audience and rhetorical awareness. So there's a very clear reason we teach these things.

CT: If I'm going to send an email to Dr. Niles, the president of the college, it's going to have a different style and significance and obvious audience than me just sending an email to a student or a staff member or a casual, informative email. So there has to be an understanding of when formality is important and when it's not.

JG: So we talk in my field of writing studies about the idea of transfer and the question of what skills that you learn in one context would be able to transfer to another context. And I think there's a lot of controversy about that, a lot of debate over what transfers and what doesn't. But one thing that I am a firm believer that transfers is that sense of rhetorical awareness. So you, at the very least, get used to analyzing the rhetorical situation in front of you and adapting to that. You know, I tell my students, I can't teach you how to write every single genre that you're ever possibly going to encounter, especially those that are in other disciplines, like lab reports. I'm not an expert on that. But what I can teach you, what we can teach you, is the rhetorical tools for you to do that yourself, for you to take inventory of the rhetorical situation and figure out the best way to approach that particular piece of writing.

CT: And developing that ability to think critically in that situation and think, "What have I learned in other situations that is going to benefit me in this situation?" And critical thinking is a huge part of the world of libraries and research, etc. So it kind of moves along a spectrum. And if you know that you need to communicate a particular idea or thought, or you're reporting some information, you're relying on previous experience to kind of shape how that communication is going to come to fruition.

JG: So alright, so my next question is, what has been the most important thing that you've learned about writing in your position?

CT: Oh, interesting. Okay, you're going to have to give me a second here.

JG: Sure, yeah. Something that you've learned through the course of being in your position.

CT: The most important thing that I've learned in writing is that it is a constant part of my career and my position, and I can always improve it. So what I know now I've learned from my past experience, and I'm always open to continuing to fine tune that and learn from, for example, my peers, you know, writing

faculty, from students, from other librarians, from other library directors, from my staff, how to even improve the level of communication that I can achieve through writing. So I'm always looking for that extra edge. I'm always looking for that one little level up, that little xp boost in video game terms. That's really what I've learned, that I will never not have writing as a part of my career. And I enjoy it. I enjoy really being able to create that great email or that great report, the narrative, the evaluation, you know, in a collection development sense, for the library that really just gets down to brass tacks. And it's clear and concise. I mean, I really do enjoy having that skill and constantly improving it.

JG: That was a great answer. Thank you. Sometimes people ask me if I like writing. I don't always say yes. Actually, sometimes I really don't like writing. But I do like having written, if that makes sense. So what you're talking about, that rewarding feeling of having finished something, and especially if it's successful, you really get that sense that this was something that you worked hard on, and you've seen the fruits of your labor, right? And I do also like what you say about always learning and always looking to improve. And that is another thing that came up in just about all, if not all, of the season one interviews with the faculty. They all consistently said they're still improving. They're still practicing. And writing is one of those things that I would say you never truly master. You've never gotten to the point where you are the perfect writer. And even very, very experienced writers, even famous authors, will tell you that there is always something more to learn, something new to learn, something to improve upon. And so I would really like people in general, but you know, especially my students, to understand that writing is something that is hard for pretty much everyone. You know, it gets easier, but it's never easy.

CT: I second that. Writing is hard, yes,

JG: Yes, it is. This is all very difficult, challenging stuff. But the other thing is, I want you to understand that it is a good thing, arguably, that it's not master-able. It should be a motivating factor that it is something that you can constantly see progress on. I had a former professor who, whenever one of his students said, "I'm not good at this," he would say, "Yet. You're not good at that yet." And you know, I hear a lot of people say, "Oh, I'm just not good at writing. I'm just not a natural born writer." And I want to say, "You really don't have to be, okay? You can get better." Now, are you going to get to that point where it's easy every time? No, I don't think so, because no one can. It's always going to be hard, but you can get better with practice.

CT: Practice, practice, practice, and sitting down and doing the work and the rough draft, and then the second draft, and then having somebody else maybe look at it, and then giving you some feedback, especially if you've spent a lot of time with something and you can't see it anymore because you've spent a lot of time working on a particular thing. And being able to have someone give you some constructive feedback from a different direction can really open up a blocked door, in case you are stuck.

JG: Feedback is another thing that's consistently come up in these interviews. So go to the writing center! Get some feedback. Yes, even highly experienced people, even very experienced writers, benefit from getting that feedback. It is hard. It's hard to get feedback on our writing. Sometimes it's hard to take that criticism well, but it's part of improving.

CT: I agree, and I think one of the things about writing in the library that is a driving factor for me is that it is so important that I am able to communicate clearly with the library patrons. So I want to be able to share what we have, show you how to use it, and ultimately, it's also a teaching opportunity. So as a librarian, I'm also teaching patrons through communication, and then there's the professional contributions of articles, etc. But we have so much that is done via writing, and the importance of that communication, that it seems like sometimes that's all that we do is write. And when you asked me to come on the interview, I had to stop and think for a minute because so many parts of that are on

autopilot. There's so much writing that happens in the aspect of being the librarian and library director, I was like, I need to be able to articulate what these types of writings are and why they're important, because you're already doing it. But if someone asks you why it's important, or what is it that you do, being able to identify those pieces was an excellent activity for me to go through mentally to think about that. Because I hadn't, so I appreciate that, or at least I hadn't in a while.

JG: Well, I have one more question, and that is, what writing related advice would you have for someone who might be seeking to enter your position or a similar one? Someone who wants to get into library work? What would be your advice to them?

CT: What would be the writing advice?

JG: Yes.

CT: Okay, so the writing advice that I would give them would be to practice, practice, practice, and definitely familiarize yourself with the different types of writing that would be present in in the library administrative field. You know, for example, that all of the genres of business writing, emails, social media, report writing. Understand how those different genres work together and also understanding the different aspects of academic writing, so familiarizing yourself with those things so that when you land that position that you've always wanted—you know, not everybody wants to be a librarian, but it's pretty cool. I would say that knowing what you're getting into and then practicing, and then also having someone like a mentor or another professional in the field that can give you some feedback or some direction on how to improve. Maybe even taking some writing courses, some online writing courses, just to brush up and practice. And to not be afraid of it. They're all skills that you can grow and improve and with repeated performance of living in your email inbox all day and needing to create instruction for library guides or library instruction for library patrons. You really get a lot of practice. There's not ever a lull, so don't be afraid to try. Have someone that you can bounce ideas off. Take some classes. If you need to, watch plenty of YouTube or Khan Academy. Get some extra eyes on your work and just sit down and actually do the work. That's my advice.

JG: I think that's all really good advice, especially your point about not being afraid to try. I think that goes for any field. A lot of people doubt themselves or second guess themselves, and you have to remember that no one starts out an expert. Everyone was once in that position, but having a mentor, having a practice, seeking that feedback, is how those people eventually got to where they are. And they're not super human or anything. They just put in the hours. So right, you got to start somewhere.

CT: You're going to have those emails where you're sitting there and you start typing and they're like, delete, delete, delete, delete, you're going to rewrite it a little bit. Delete, delete, delete. I mean, there will be those instances where you have to sit with that. Maybe you need to pause and come back, try it again later. So there will be those times when you have maybe the confusion about the rhetorical situation or the audience, or maybe you're trying to be too formal when it's not necessary to be that formal, or you're not being formal enough when you should be more formal. So yeah, I do like that. I really enjoy writing, so it's an important part of my career.

JG: I like that idea of letting something sit for a while, maybe, you know, taking a break from it. I think in psychology, they call that incubation. One of the psychology professors can correct me if I'm wrong, but it's actually been shown to work. It actually often does. If you're stumped on something, you take a break from it and do something else, and you come back to it, and you might have that eureka moment, and you figure out where you want to go with it.

CT: I agree. And I think what continues to happen when you pause, even though it's not actively in the front of your brain, I think your brain is still working on it in the background. So it's moved to the background, and you're doing other things, but your brain is still processing that.

JG: I do that all the time. The key is, though, you can't put it off to the last minute because then you don't have time to let it incubate! So that's another piece of advice I have, is if you're going to do that, well, you kind of have to, you know, get a little bit of an early start on it.

CT: Procrastination can certainly be a problem, so avoiding that whenever you can is very important. So, I mean, I'm human. I've procrastinated before. We all have been there.

JG: We all have. But don't make it a habit.

CT: Best to avoid it. Certainly best to avoid it.

JG: All right. Well, I found this incredibly enlightening. I think that this is really the perfect way to kick off this second season of our show here, and we're going to continue to talk with staff administrators across the Cottey campus about the kind of writing that's done in their workplace and the advice that they would have for people maybe looking to enter that workplace. So thanks again to our library director, Ms. Trautweiler, for joining us today. I hope you had as good of a time as I did.

CT: I had a wonderful time. I really appreciate the invitation, and I look forward to having the library support the students and the faculty and all of their future writing endeavors. This is a fantastic experience. Thank you.

JG: Good. You're welcome. Thank you. And we will have this episode and a written transcription of it posted on the Writing Center website shortly, and I'll be sending out an email when that happens. But until then, please stay tuned for another episode in the spring semester. Don't forget to come visit our tutors in the Writing Center to get some of that feedback that Ms. Trautweiler was talking about today, and we will see you next time. Bye bye.

CT: All right. Thank you, Dr. Green.