

JG: Hello, and welcome back to Writing Across Cottey. This is Season 2, Episode 3 of our series, and of course, in Season 2, we are talking to staff and administrators across Cottey about the kind of writing that they do in their position. And so we're very excited to have Ms. Kim Severance, our Director of Career Services, for this episode, and this is someone I've been wanting to talk to for a while now because as you can imagine, I think written and oral communication really factor quite a lot into the work done in that area. So Ms. Severance, thank you for joining us for this episode.

KS: Thank you for having me.

JG: And I'm just going to launch right into the first question, which is a very broad question so take it in whatever direction you want. What kind of writing is done in your position?

KS: Well, I think you probably already know that writing is across the board in all of our positions, but I see writing used every day in my position. It can be in emails, it can be in reports or proposals, it can be—a lot of mine is in employer relations because that's what I do a lot of the time is secure internships for students, so I do a lot with communications with employers or potential employers. Presentations, speeches, sometimes it's just marketing materials, creating flyers or creating newsletters, brochures. I'm going to go—I'm just going to zip through them all and then we can come back. How about that?

JG: That sounds good.

KS: Sometimes I create guides. Right now I'm developing some instructional materials hopefully that I can get out to students that would be like an internship guide. Sometimes they're things that are already in place, updating instructional things like tip sheets—internship tip sheets—or résumé checklists. Let's see if there's anything else I was thinking of that I need to list for you. Grant applications even. Sometimes it's something personal that might be, like, to attend a workshop, or sometimes it might be for funding. And then there's a lot of reviewing and editing. Students come to me for résumé reviews, cover letter reviews. Sometimes it's grant school essays, LinkedIn in profiles, all that kind of thing. So there's a lot of editing that goes on or just suggestive writing, writing for their—or suggestions for their writing, not suggestive writing. And then recommendation letters. So there's a pretty wide range of writing that goes on within my every day, every week, every month—it doesn't happen every day, but yes. Every day sees writing in my field.

JG: Yeah. So those students who have taken First-Year Writing Seminar and Writing 102, the word that should be coming to mind right now is "genre." G-E-N-R-E, right?

KS: Yes.

JG: You write in a lot of different genres of writing. And they all take their own set of conventions and expectations that you have to think about.

KS: Exactly.

JG: So why do you think it is important to be able to write well in your position?

KS: Well you certainly don't want to—you want to be clear, you want to be concise. You don't want to take up extra time or be misunderstood. You want to be—when you're dealing with potential employers, you don't want to take up their time or—you want to be professional. You've got to put on a good face. You want to make good contacts. If your first impression is not a good one, they don't want that connection to you or to your school or to your students. So first impressions are vital. So if I

don't make a good impression, it probably isn't going to make any difference for our students because they're not going to make that connection. So I've got to make a good impression so my students can make a good impression.

JG: And I think a lot of people's early impressions are formed based on your perceived communication skills.

KS: Right.

JG: You know, the first thing out of your mouth. The first thing that you write to them.

KS: Yeah. And it—sometimes, long-word choices are not the best. Sometimes it's just a matter of your grammar or your punctuation or your spelling. You don't have to have huge word choices, vocabulary. It's the simple things. Did you check your punctuation? Did you check your spelling? Did you check that you spelled their name wrong? Check the little things.

JG: Yeah, that's a big damage to your credibility if you misspell somebody's name and you're talking to them.

KS: Yes, exactly right.

JG: Well, I feel like you've kind of anticipated my next question, but it's what specific writing skills would you say are important for writing in your position?

KS: You need to be—this is going to sound like maybe an oxymoron. You need to be detailed but you need to be succinct. You don't want to overdo it, but you don't want to underdo it. Sometimes today, you have a limited time with your audience, but you need to get as much to them in as little time as they're going to give you. So get as much in as you can in as little space as you can.

JG: That is something that we've been talking about a lot in my Professional Writing class this semester, the tension between being concise but also being comprehensive. You know, you have to tell the audience everything that they need, but you have to deliver it in the most concise, tight package possible.

KS: Right. We don't want to go on and on and on. We could, but it's not an essay. We're not giving a doctoral speech.

JG: And to go back to a point you made earlier, sometimes a smaller word is preferable to a bigger word.

KS: Exactly. We don't want to have to go look it up to figure out what we're talking about. So keep it simple, Sam.

JG: Now, Ms. Severance, what is the most important thing that you have learned about writing in your position?

KS: Write to your audience. Know your audience. And sometimes your audience is varied, so I would like to think that you're—you know, sometimes we're told to write to the simplest of our audience, but we can't always write to the simplest of our audience. So we need to kind of keep it to the medium of our audience. We're not going to go to the top, we're not going to go to the bottom. We want to keep

it to the medium where we're focused on catching everybody there. Jon, I don't know. Writing is hard to catch everybody's attention because everybody has a different timespan, everybody has a different style. Everybody's going to critique it differently. So everything that we've said so far works for everybody differently. Find what works for you, simplify it, and make it work. But just know your audience.

JG: I sometimes joke that I can't teach you how to write because—you know, I can teach you some strategies, but ultimately, you have to see for yourself. And that concept of audience is something that's come up in literally every single interview that I've done for this series because it looks different for every audience, right? You can't just do the same thing every time. You have got to tailor things to the person or people in front of you.

KS: It's hard. It's one of those strange—it's a hard skill. You're writing, but it's a soft skill learning how to use it, if that makes sense.

JG: And it takes a lot of practice to get comfortable with that, to recognize the importance of thinking about audience.

KS: Exactly.

JG: So, last question. What writing-related advice would you have for someone that may be seeking to enter your position or a similar one?

KS: Check, check, and double-check. Triple check. Never publish something without putting eyes on it at least three times. Don't hit enter. In a school like Cottey, a lot of us are in a one-person office, and we don't have somebody to double-check our work, so you either find another colleague in another office that will check your work for you or you get to where you check your work three or four times before you hit enter. But you make sure that you edit your work before you send it. We're—when we go from student to professional, we're so used to doing assignments that we might submit eight, ten, twelve assignments a week that are rough draft assignments and we don't have to edit them. But all of a sudden, we're doing professional work that we're submitting and people are judging us on, and it counts. Everything that we now put out counts. So now, there's no second chance. This isn't just a first draft. This is the draft. This is the final. So put a second set of eyes on it, find someone you trust, or look it over two or three times. Let it sit overnight. Come back to it with fresh eyes the next day. Emails are really important for that, Jon. If you are crafting an email, especially if you have a little bit of anxiety over that email or energy in that email or maybe you have some—it's a reactionary email, never hit send before you've had some time to think twice about that email. Let it sit overnight, come back to it, read it again, and edit it.

JG: Yep, that's very good advice. I was just talking to a faculty member—and I won't say who—just the other day who said that they like to sort of compose their gut reaction email but then not send it, sit on it for a day, and then come back and write the actual email that they end up sending. I think there can be something very cathartic about that.

KS: Yes. Sometimes you just write it, delete it, start it again.

JG: And you know, something that we also talked about in the Professional Writing class at the beginning of the semester is a key difference between the academic writing that you're doing in college and professional writing that you do in the workplace is—you know, when you're writing for school, your instructors kind of perceive that as a learning opportunity, and it's OK to make mistakes because

you're learning, you're growing. People aren't going to give you that benefit of the doubt in the working world. You know, that first impression is everything, and if you're not already at the level they expect you to be, they're not necessarily going to have the patience to help you get to that level.

KS: Right. You might have a good mentor or an understanding boss or colleague who will come in and help you and guide you, but depending on who your audience was, if it goes out to a high-price, high-paying employer, that makes all the difference. If they're paying the bill and you just made a huge impression on them, and not a good one, the boss can't be as lenient on you. So yeah, you've always got to make that double-check. The flexibility within the workplace differs on what kind of a workplace you're in.

JG: But sometimes they're not going to be as forgiving of mistakes as other times.

KS: Very true.

JG: Well, I think that that is a very salient point to end on. I thought that this was very enlightening. You know, a lot of the same topics that we've covered in others of these episodes came up, but then a lot of new things as well. So I hope our viewers also felt that they learned something from this. And this episode will probably go up on our website around December, probably around the end of the fall semester, so that is a very good time to remind everyone to please come take advantage of the Cottey Writing Center in the Kolderie Center, Monday-Thursday, 6-9 PM. We have eight very, very strong writing tutors that would be happy to work with you no matter what stage of your project you're on. So now is the time. Now is the time to come in. You don't need to make an appointment; you just come right on in and ask to speak with a writing tutor. So we will wrap this episode up, and stay tuned for the next episode, which will come out sometime in the spring semester. Ms. Severance, thank you once again for a very enlightening interview.

KS: Thanks for asking me, Jon.

JG: All right. Everyone have a good day.

KS: All right.