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Beyond Tickets and Comma Splices: Using Writing Center Coaching Techniques to Support Online Learners

Lisa McNeal

College of Coastal Georgia, lmcneal@ccga.edu

Jennifer P. Gray

College of Coastal Georgia, jgray@ccga.edu

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Abstract

Many college students struggle with technical difficulties when enrolled in an online or hybrid class. Sometimes students do not even have a choice about online options, such as in the COVID-19 era, when the shift to remote instruction has happened and could happen at any time. Students need support for success in the online environment, yet many support models focus on the immediate problem rather than deeper root causes for the problem or misunderstanding. Traditional support models may use a ticket-based system that strives to quickly resolve the issue at hand. While the ticket-based system has some merit, there is a need for additional support via a technology coaching approach, which was influenced by writing center philosophies. This type of approach can focus on teaching students proper netiquette, appropriate techniques, and basic computer skills, which will enable them to succeed not just in a single online course but also in an online program or an eventual work environment. The article concludes with a discussion of collaboration and the importance of slow thinking, a concept inspired by the Slow Food movement which actively encourages problem solving and reflection.

Keywords

online learners, writing center, help desk, Slow Food

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Beyond Tickets and Comma Splices: Using Writing Center Coaching Techniques to Support Online Learners

Consider the university technology help desk. Often staffed by well-meaning, entry-level workers, help desk employees face arduous tasks every day: answering a phone or email from a worried student, stressed staff member, frazzled faculty, or angry parent, and trying to resolve their technical problem while simultaneously providing excellent customer service. Often underappreciated, the help desk employees are the foundation of a technology services department, providing important assistance, doing detective work to get details from the student or faculty, unearth the root of their problem, and, if necessary, route the ticket to another department. For example, a student calls and says they can't log on the portal. However, they don't need to log on to the portal, nor will they be able to because they graduated two years ago. What they really need is an electronic transcript, so they can apply to graduate school. Their call needs to be transferred to the registrar who can assist them in requesting an electronic transcript. Many times help desk employees answer the same questions, over and over, trying to put out the fire as quickly as possible. How do I reset my password? Why can't I log onto the learning management system (LMS)? Why can't I print? Why won't the video my professor posted play on my laptop?

With the rapid move to remote instruction at most institutions in spring 2020 due to COVID-19, the help desk employees grew busier than ever. For example, at our institution, help desk tickets related to online classes went from 177 in fall 2019 to 261 in spring 2020. With the shift to remote instruction on March 16, 2020, to the end of the semester, faculty and students were dependent on the LMS. Faculty and students were instructed on the proper help channels to use to get support, which included submitting help desk tickets. Often the help desk was the hub that routed the important tickets to the appropriate department: technology services, registrar, library, eLearning, advising, etc. This global pandemic has highlighted the need for not only technical support for online learners but the need to shift to a coaching model. Flower Darby, a leading scholar in the field of online teaching, describes the pivotal role played by help desk employees as they interact with online students. Darby (2018) writes:

For example, many new online students struggle to even find the log-in page for the Learning Management System (LMS). If they find the site, they might not know their user ID and password. If they find and call the help desk number, they may be greeted by an overworked, stressed out employee who might not provide patient and friendly support. All of this effort is required just to get in the door of an online program. Even after they successfully log in to the LMS, newer students may not know how to

get into the virtual classroom. It is not necessarily self-evident that students should click the link or title with an often-abbreviated class name and confusing session code. (p. xvii)

More likely than not, this student will contact the help desk again, desperate for assistance with their online course. So, in the COVID-19 era, when the shift to online learning could happen at any time, how do we better prepare help desk employees, student workers, and anyone providing support to online learners? For two faculty, the answer is the clear: transform the traditional help desk support model into a coaching session.

Help Desk Purpose and Function

In *Creating A Customer-Focused Help Desk: How to Win and Keep Your Customers*, Hiles and Gunn (2016) describe the help desk as a strategic, diagnostic tool. They propose that the help desk is the “stethoscope on the heart of the organization, identifying the slightest sign of sickness, prescribing treatment to keep the patient –the whole organization –healthy” (p. 1). The authors explain that the help desk’s role is the “first point of contact in your organization for customers experiencing problems and your entire organization’s efficiency may be judged by the professionalism and effectiveness of its response” (p. 1).

Hiles and Gunn (2016) continue by describing the help desk in medical terms. They write: “The users therefore are dependent upon effective and rapid response from IT to permit them to meet these objectives” (p. 2). The authors note that “customers” may need “instant first aid” in areas such as equipment failure, operational queries, resolution of problems, network failures, and moves of equipment (p. 2). Yumashev (2020) reiterates the fix-it mindset of the help desk. He writes that a help desk is “an organizational unit/process, that resolves issues using the ‘break/fix’ concept, usually with the aid of internal IT help desk software. This is often called ‘incident management’ or ‘problem management’. If something goes down - let's go fix it.” In other words, an IT ticketing system is “tactical,” not “strategic” or visionary (Yumashev, 2020).

Similarly, the help desk at a college or university focuses on customer support and quickly resolving problems. However, rather than clients or customers, the help desk users are students, faculty, staff, and, occasionally, the parent of a student. Easom (2017), who supports online students and faculty at the Pima Medical Institute, describes the frazzled students who contact the help desk. Easom (2017) writes, “They simply fire off the distress signal and wait to be rescued” (p. 9). With the traditional help desk model, the help desk employees are

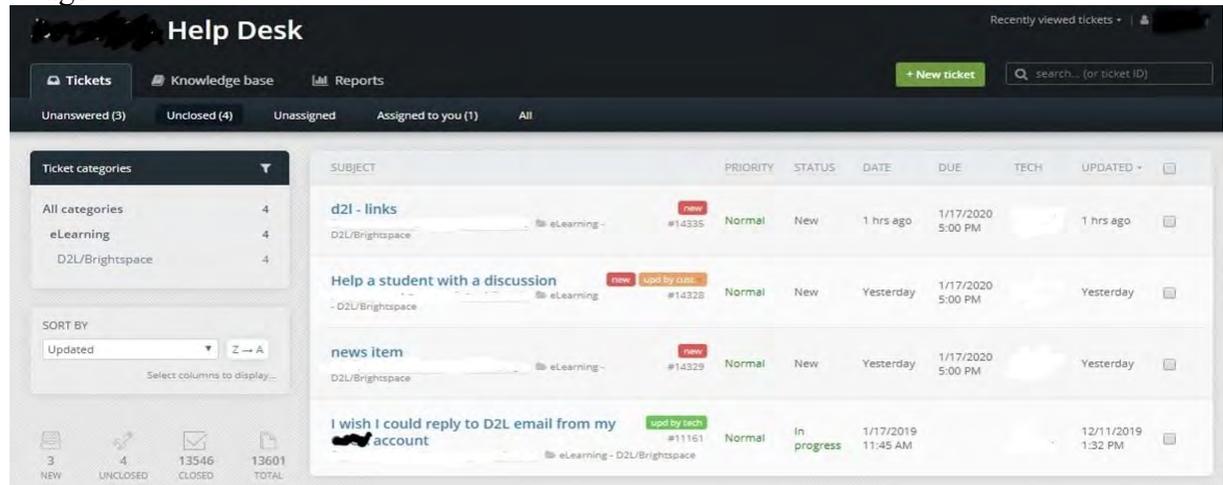
the active ones, charged with repairing the problem, and the students or other callers are in a passive role, relying on someone else's expertise. McVicker (2009) describes the help desk employees in heroic terms and writes, "They heal viruses. They exterminate bugs. They even clean Windows. These quintessential Mr. and Ms. fix-its can tackle anything, as long as you give them a few hours, a short list of symptoms—and your computer" (p. 1).

Going deeper, let us examine the help desk at our institution, the College of Coastal Georgia. According to the college's website, the mission of information technology services is, "to provide high quality, reliable and responsive information and instructional technology support services to the College of Coastal Georgia community that are consistent with the strategic planning process of the College. This will be accomplished through the delivery of efficient, enhanced, and collaborative support and services" (Technology Services, 2020.).

This mission is aligned with the typical functions of a help desk: responding to customers' needs and providing efficient, reliable service. To respond to customers' needs and track their calls, most help desk centers use a help desk ticketing system. Simply put a help desk ticketing system is "a customer service tool that helps companies manage their service and support cases. The system or app creates a "ticket" which documents customer requests and interactions over time, making it easier for customer service reps to resolve complicated issues" (Fontanella, n.d.).

At our institution, we use a product called JitBit as our help desk ticketing system. Students, faculty, and staff can submit tickets online or call the main help desk number to initiate a ticket. The help desk employee who answers the phone will then create the ticket and assign it to the appropriate category, such as Email, Cyber Security, Desktop/Laptop, or eLearning, which includes D2L, the College's learning management system. Tickets are time stamped and can be assigned a priority level, such as low, medium, or high. Tickets are color coded by priority. Low priority tickets are coded green, medium priority are marked in yellow, and high priority tickets are stamped bright red. See image 1.1 for a screenshot of our College's help desk ticketing system.

Image 1.1



While they may seem different at first, help desk systems and writing centers on campus share many commonalities. Let us move into a quick history of writing centers on campus.

Concept of Coaching

At the Writing Center on our campus, we use the term “coach” to describe each writing tutor and “coaching” to describe the action of tutoring writing. We prefer “coach/coaching” over “tutor/tutoring.” Coaching is more reflective of the activity performed in sessions, and the term can be more inviting to students. When thinking of a tutor, students often think of a deficit or a problem they have that needs fixing. Many students will not attend a writing center session because they think they don’t have a problem or deficit, or they don’t want to imagine that they need help. Writing centers have fought against this deficit-based idea that they are a fix-it shop that exists to serve weak writers, as this mindset can limit the interaction with students. This mindset can also impact students’ confidence levels, as they may assume they are bad writers or they have a weak or unhealthy paper because they have to have a tutor. This deficit label comes from a long history of writing centers being cast as clinics or repair shops that exist to clear up the problems in the student’s written product. Writing centers began their existence in the early 1900s as partners to first-year writing (FYW) classes in college, and students who were not doing well in the FYW classes were sent to the writing center to labor on their repairs. At the time, most of the centers were called writing labs, and they were viewed as “a center for remediation” for students who were not meeting the standards for the FYW classes (Kelly, 1980, p. 5). Other descriptions of early versions of writing centers were more treatment-based. For example, at the University of North Carolina, FYW instructors may

have placed “CC” next to the grade, which stood for “Composition Condition”; this condition required testing conducted at the writing lab, which was called the “Composition Condition Laboratory” (Boquet, 1999, p. 468). Here, the student has the crisis of the “condition” and the writing center provides the healing treatment.

While we may be tempted to discount this type of deficit mindset as just historical residue, Boquet (1999) reminds us that it is common to still see a modern-day “CC” on papers, as professors tell students to go to the Writing Center to have their bad papers fixed. A few years ago I worked with a student who was particularly demoralized. I looked at his paper and saw the professor’s comment, “Run, don’t walk, to the Writing Center,” scrawled in red ink like blood at the bottom. Murphy (1989) highlights how students come to the writing center “hurt” by the feedback from faculty or other past negative experiences in writing classes (p. 14). Here, the writing center is cast in the role of providing the healing treatment for the unacceptable written injury. Therefore, to counteract those deficit-based ideas and broaden our work, we label ourselves as coaches.

When thinking of a tutor as a coach, students may have a different mindset, as even the best athletes still have coaches. In athletics, the coach works to provide an outside perspective for the athlete, and the coach has an external view not possible for the athlete. The coach is essential to the work of the athlete. In the Writing Center, we present our work in a similar way: we provide feedback and an outside perspective on the student’s performance on the page.

In addition to addressing the historical stigma of tutoring, coaching approaches writing instruction in a different manner. Instead of simply pointing out what is wrong or working as an editor, the coach reviews the student’s writing to emphasize what is working in the paper and how that positive action can be replicated and built off of elsewhere in the draft and in future writings. For example, the coach is not an editor who holds a red pen and takes over the paper to silently provide corrections, marking comma splices left and right. That type of approach makes the student passive, as if she is only there to have someone else fix a problem. The student isn’t a learner here; someone else does the work for the student. With coaching, the coach would teach that same writer about any patterns of error noticed, why these errors can be problematic, and help writers find these errors on their own. The coach no longer simply corrects a comma splice; instead, the coach explains what a comma splice is, why it can be problematic for the assignment, and encourages the writer to find the error on her own. In this case, the work of the coach is to help students become stronger writers instead of passive receivers of corrections or treatment.

Stephen North, a famous writing center scholar, explains this mindset as helping the writer and not just the paper. He states, “our job is to produce better writers, not better writing...we look beyond or through that particular project, that particular text, and see it as an occasion for addressing our primary concern” (p. 438). The primary concern for North is the writer. Ultimately we do not want the student to improve only on one paper; we want the student to grow as a writer. We use the paper to talk not only about the comma splice in paragraph three but about the larger issues of writing skills and writerly development. If we only focus on the one paper, the student will be back again with the same issues for the next paper. Instead, we want to teach students about writing. We want students to be able to problem-solve, make changes to the work on their own, and develop in skill as a writer.

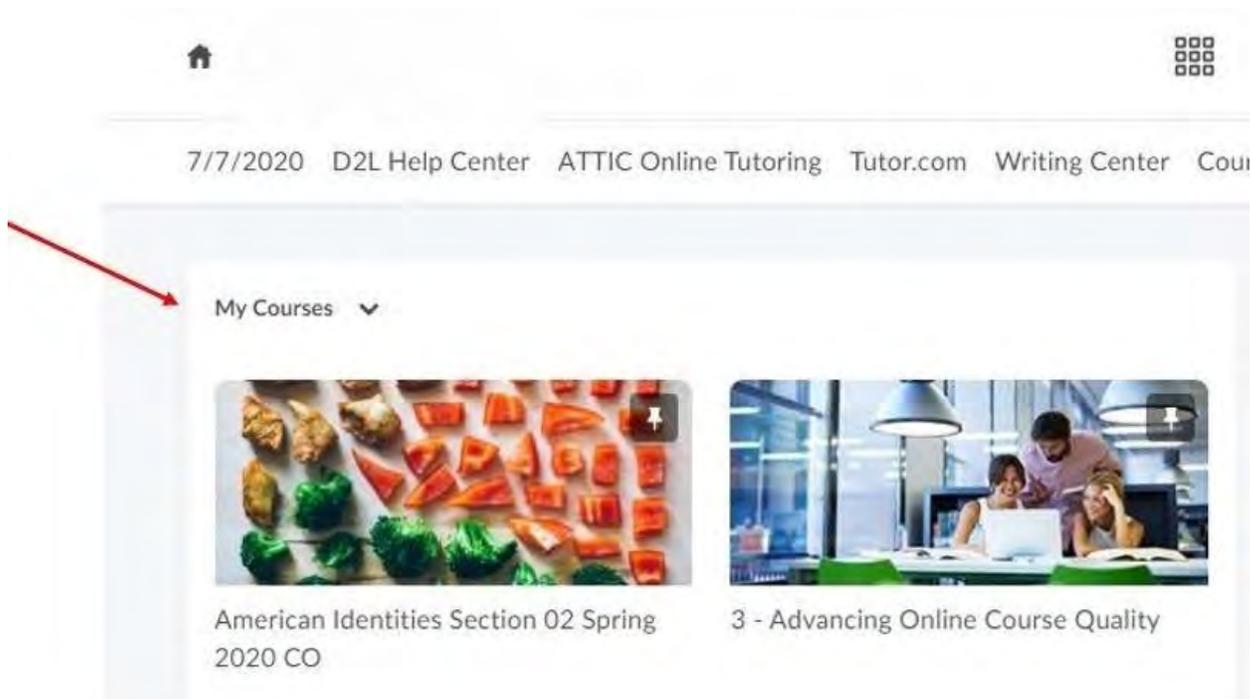
This approach is not only limited to writing centers. Much like the writing center hopes to develop and help the writer grow, the help desk staff at an institution can use the same approach to develop technologically savvy students who can achieve success through applying the coaching approach to help desk ticket responses. We can use our responses back to students to solve the problem and teach them how to avoid the problem in the future.

Let us take a look at what a typical help desk ticket response might look like and then compare that typical response with a coaching-based response. Our first sample involves a common help desk request: a student cannot find their online course. The student’s name, email address, and any identifiable information have been removed.

To Whom It May Concern,
My HIST 4000 Class that starts on Monday is still not showing up on my D2L. If someone could fix this before then I would greatly appreciate it.
Very Respectfully,
Ima Student

In a typical help desk response, our process might look like this:

- Student opens up the help desk system to submit a ticket
- Student fills out the help desk ticket to ask for help in “fixing” the problem, such as a request to help pin a class to make the class visible on their LMS homepage
- Help desk staff receives the ticket
- Help desk staff impersonates the student and pins the requested class
- Help desk staff takes a screenshot to show the student the now-pinned class



- Help desk staff writes a brief email and tells the student the class is pinned and attaches the screenshot:

Hello Ima,

I got your message. Your summer class is there, however, it was at the bottom of the course list in D2L. I went ahead and “unpinned” your spring classes so your summer History class would move to the top. See the attached screenshot. Have a good afternoon.

Sincerely,

Cameron

- Help desk staff closes the ticket
- Student and help desk staff receive an auto-notification that the ticket has been closed

In this example, the student reports a problem via the help desk ticket and the problem gets fixed. There is little to no explanation included, as the request just fixes a problem. There is no teaching or discussion shared; instead, the fire is put out. In this case, the student may or may not have the same problem during the next semester when classes still need to be pinned. The help desk may receive the same request from the same student in the next term.

However, a coaching-based help desk session might follow this process:

- Student submits a ticket for help

- Help desk staff reads the ticket carefully and thinks slowly about how to respond
- Help desk staff crafts an email that guides the student and coaches them on how to fix the problem for themselves
- Help desk email starts with a friendly greeting in the email
- The email's stance provides reassurance
- The email provides step-by-step directions on how to search for and pin the class
- The email explains how to pin and unpin classes
- The email discusses a strategy to pin classes at the start of each term without needing a help desk ticket
- The email ends with a kind send-off message

Dear Ima,

Hello! I got your message. I have good news for you. Your summer class is there and I'm going to teach you how to pin it. Here are the steps for finding and pinning your class.

Steps

1. Logon D2L.

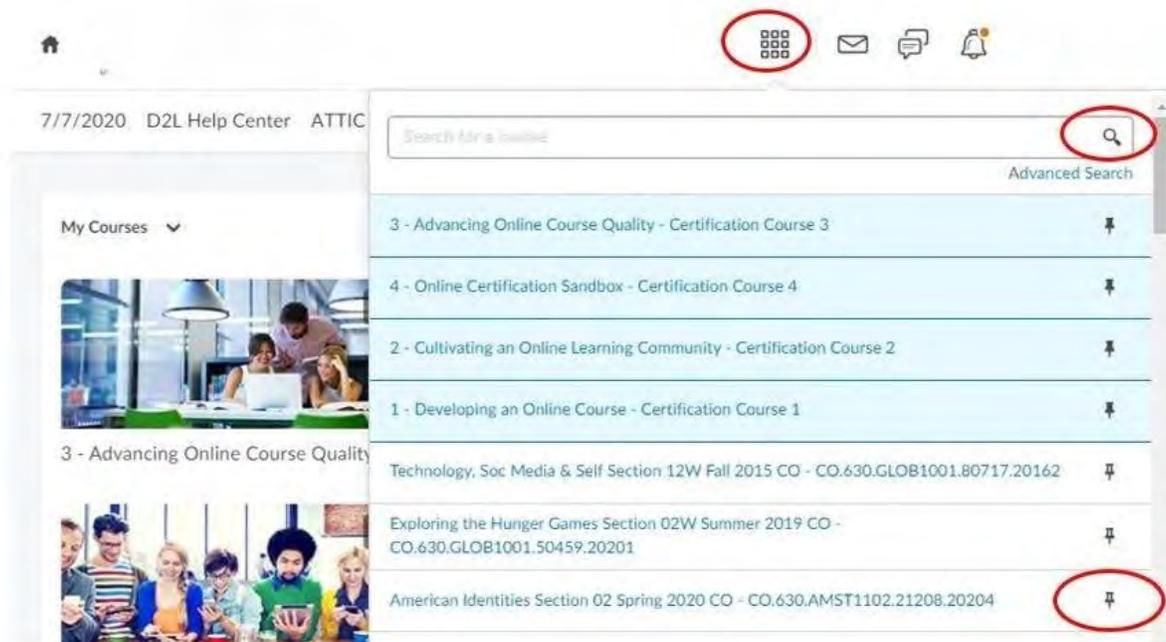
2. Click on the Course Selector or waffle icon.

3. Type the course name and then click on the magnifying glass icon.

4. Select the pin icon next to the course you wish to pin. See the screenshot below for a visual representation of these steps.

Remember, you can use the course selector or waffle icon to search for and pin classes. It's a good habit to do this at the beginning of every term. As always, feel free to contact us for support with your online classes. We're here to guide you and point you in the right direction.

Have a good afternoon. Sincerely, Cameron



As you can see, the second email is longer, and the help desk staff member must put more time into writing it. While pinning the class would be quicker, this option only fixes the problem at hand: the student can't find her summer course. Chances are the student will encounter this same issue again next semester. Taking the time to teach the student the steps is an investment. Hopefully, the student will remember what they have learned and be able to solve the problem on their own next semester. Ultimately, this approach can result in a decreased workload for help desks, as there is a good chance that the student will not ask the same question again in the following semester. She has learned how to pin the class, so there is a potential she will remember again in a few months. The help desk response in this case provides teaching as well as a repair.

Of course, this type of a response requires a longer and more detailed response. One way to handle this type of workload is to create a template for the repair (i.e., how to pin a class) while still providing personalized greetings and closing for students.

For example, during an email-based writing center coaching session, we could start out by writing a greeting to the student and then saying back our understanding of the context of the assignment. We look at the student's paper and get a sense of the student's ability. We then provide feedback and instruction about the writing situation. If a student demonstrates a common problem, such as

a comma splice, the writing coach will need to teach the student about the error. The instruction here doesn't change: a comma splice is a comma splice no matter how it appears in a piece of writing. The template in this case is the rule, a placeholder for the student's work, and the choices students have to work around the problem:

A comma splice happens when writers use only a comma to join two complete thoughts. The comma is not strong enough for this task. Here is an example of this problem in your draft: [INSERT STUDENT SAMPLE].

To handle this problem, we have some options:

- 1. We can use a semicolon in place of the comma (i.e., I went to the writing center today; the discussions about my writing were helpful.)*
- 2. We can use a comma + a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, so, for, nor, yet) at the junction of the two complete thoughts (i.e., I went to the writing center today, and the discussions about my writing were helpful.)*
- 3. We can use a period in place of the comma (i.e., I went to the writing center today. The discussions about my writing were helpful.)*

In this case, we bracket the template by using personalized material before and after the template. This action creates a personalized email that both teaches the students and provides individualized repair to the problem.

Here, Dr. Gray shares an example of what this type of email would look like using the comma splice rule template (in italics in the email) from above:

Dear Sam,

Thank you for sharing your draft for your personal narrative assignment in your composition course. I see that you have included the opening two paragraphs, and I can clearly understand that you will be focusing on the importance of your contest-winning essay experience from 11th grade. It is great that your focus is so clear for readers, as this attention makes readers have an easier time following your message.

However, I noticed the same sentence-level error throughout these two paragraphs, and I wanted to take some time to talk to you about this problem, which is called a comma splice. This error *happens when writers use only a comma to join two complete thoughts. The comma is not strong enough for this task. Here is an example of this problem in your draft: [The essay contest was scary at first, I avoided the essay prompt for a few days.]*. To handle this problem, we have some options:

1. *We can use a semicolon in place of the comma (i.e., I went to the writing center today; the discussions about my writing were helpful.)*
2. *We can use a comma + a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, so, for, nor, yet) at the junction of the two complete thoughts (i.e., I went to the writing center today, and the discussions about my writing were helpful.)*
3. *We can use a period in place of the comma (i.e., I went to the writing center today. The discussions about my writing were helpful.)*

Sam, you will need to select one of the options above to use to repair your comma splice sample included. Then, you will need to work to address the other comma splices I noticed in the two paragraphs. I counted eight other examples of this error, so go ahead and review your two paragraphs and see if you can find them. If you have trouble, let's meet again and continue to work on that issue.

Good luck on your draft, and I enjoyed reading about your contest! This experience certainly impacted your life's path.

Dr. Gray

In this case, the student knows Dr. Gray understands the main point of the essay and that she actually read the essay. She complimented him on the clarity of his main idea and explained why he should continue to strive for a strong focus. She identified and explained the comma splice rule, showed samples, and encouraged Sam to find the other eight examples of this error in the two paragraphs. Dr. Gray ended with an open offer for more assistance if needed. This personalized conclusion works to show the student that his message was heard.

Now, contrast that personalized email with a fix-it response that only identifies the problem and solution:

Sam,

You have nine comma splices in your two-paragraph draft. Fix this problem with a semicolon or period in place of the comma. You can also use a comma + a coordinating conjunction at the junction of the two complete thoughts. Here is a link if you need more information:

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/comma-splice/>

Dr. Gray

Using the personalized aspects in the response for both writing center sessions and help desk sessions can improve the interactions for all users. However, this approach may not be natural for all users, so professional development can be helpful.

Next Steps: Professional Development

In the previous section, we wrote about how transforming the help desk model into a coaching session could benefit online learners. Professional development is needed to successfully adopt this framework for supporting online learners. We recommend providing professional development for anyone who plays a help desk role, recognizing this role could be filled by staff, faculty, or students. Let us look at how this training could unfold from beginning to end.

Drawing from her background as an instructional designer, Dr. McNeal recommends using the ADDIE model to develop the technology coaching professional development. The ADDIE is model grounded in instructional systems design. Seels and Richey (1994) define instructional systems design as “an organized procedure that includes the steps of analyzing, designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating instruction” (p. 31). Abbreviated as ADDIE, this five-phase model is often used by instructional designers and training developers (ADDIE Model, n.d.). The ADDIE model can be used as a guide to develop dynamic, flexible, and learner-centered training; therefore, this model is ideal for our novel approach to technology coaching. We will examine each phase of this model and explain how readers could apply the concept of technology coaching at their institution. See the Appendices for additional examples and templates for professional development activities.

Step One: Analysis

Analysis, the first phase of ADDIE, is the “process of defining what is to be learned” (McGriff, 2000). During this foundational phase, the people who are designing the professional development need to ask these questions: Who are the learners? What do they need to be able to do? Additionally, they should ask these questions:

1. What is the problem?
2. What is the source of the problem?
3. What are possible solutions?

After answering these questions, the designers should write the instructional objectives and a list of tasks to be instructed.

Here is how the analysis process might look for our instructional problem. First, we define the problem: online learners constantly contact the help desk for support with the same, routine problems, such as how to reset a password or pin a course to the home page of the LMS. Rather than learning how to solve their technical issues, the learners grow overly dependent on help desk employees to fix their technical issues. This approach is not sustainable, and it doesn't lead to learners who are agentic and self-aware problem-solvers. Additionally, help desk

employees may get burned out from answering the same questions over and over. Then we brainstorm the sources of the problem. While these sources could vary by institution, we came up with two sources:

1. Help desk employees are trained using the traditional help desk model, which is focused on fixing the problems quickly rather than instruction and coaching.
2. Students are taught to contact the help desk, and they expect the help desk employees to fix their problems.

We propose several solutions. First off, offer professional development for help desk employees and teach them how to use the coaching model. Second, use existing methods of communication and/or orientation activities to change the students' perception of the help desk as a fix-it shop.

Step Two: Design

Now it is time to work on fleshing out the instruction and deciding the major objectives for the professional development. During the design phase, we start planning the strategy for developing the instruction. We need to think about how we are going to achieve the instructional objectives. Here are some of the things we might do when designing the instruction:

1. Write a description of the learners
2. Writing learning objectives
3. Decide how the instruction will be delivered
4. Decide the sequence of the instruction

In other words, during this step, we are planning or designing the instruction. Our design for a technology coaching professional development session might look like this:

Learners: For example, we have three full-time help desk employees and four part-time student workers. Most help desk employees are staff members, with less than five years of experience. All full-time employees have bachelor's degrees. The student workers have at least one year of experience.

Learning Objectives: After participating in this professional development session, the participants will be able to:

1. Describe what happens during a typical coaching session
2. Describe what happens during a typical help desk call/ticket
3. Explain the differences between a coaching session and a help desk fix-it session
4. Explain the benefits of adopting a technology coaching approach
5. Explain the limitations of a technology coaching approach

6. Participate in a role-playing activity to practice technology coaching

Delivery: This session will be delivered online using a synchronous video conferencing platform, such as Blackboard Collaborate.

Outline:

1. Introductions
2. Explain the characteristics typical coaching session
3. Explain what happens during a typical help desk call/ticket
4. List the differences between a coaching session and a help desk fix-it session
5. List the benefits of adopting a technology coaching approach
6. List the limitations of a technology coaching approach
7. Lead participants in in a role-playing activity to practice technology coaching
8. Ask if the participants have questions

See Appendix 2 for scenarios that could be used for roleplaying during the professional development session.

Step Three: Development

Now it's time to move from planning to developing. During this phase, which builds upon the previous analysis and design phases, we create the actual instructional materials. During this phase, we develop all the materials and media that will be used in the instruction, and any supporting documentation. For example, we may create a PowerPoint presentation, handouts, documentation, discussion prompts, or role-playing scenarios. We should also allow time to try out these materials with a colleague or someone with help desk experience to listen to their feedback and revise the instructional materials as needed.

See Appendix 3 for a handout that could be distributed during the professional development session.

Step Four: Implementation

According to McGriff (2000), the Implementation phase refers to the actual delivery of the instruction, whether it's classroom-based or online. In other words, this is when we lead the instruction we designed. This phase should promote the learners' understanding of the materials and ensure they can transfer the knowledge from the professional development session to the work setting. During this phase, we market or advertise this professional development session. Advertising could be as simple as emailing the help desk supervisor and the

employee; we could advertise more broadly by checking with other departments responsible for professional development, such as Human Resources and the Center for Teaching and Learning. Employees in those departments may have suggestions for advertising the professional development. After all, we spent a lot of time designing this professional development session. We want people to show up!

Step Five: Evaluation

Evaluation is the fifth phase of the ADDIE model. Simply put, evaluation involves asking these types of questions: Was the training effective? Were the learners able to do what you want them to do? Were the instructional materials appropriate? (Gagne, Wager, Golas, & Keller, 2005). Importantly, was the solution, the technology coaching workshop, successful? There are many ways to approach evaluation. However, in this situation, we recommend a simple approach. First off, after the workshop concludes, take a few minutes to reflect on the experience by asking questions, such as What went right? What went wrong? What would I do differently if I offered this workshop again? Then send an email to all the workshop participants, thanking them for attending, reinforcing the key concepts, providing links to handouts and the workshop recording, and asking them to complete a short survey. Model the spirit of the technology coaching session by sending each participating a personalized email. Next, examine the instructional materials that were used, such as the agenda, case studies, handouts, etc. Revise and improve them if needed, and post online or on the college's intranet. Finally, a few weeks after the workshop, schedule a meeting with the help desk employees to note what changes they have noticed since attending the workshop and applying the technology coaching techniques. See Appendix 4 for examples of a thank-you email and survey.

Readers are more than welcome to use any of the examples provided here and within the Appendices. Hopefully their professional development workshops will be a success!

Conclusion: Spirit of Discovery and Reflection at a Slow Pace

One of the goals of our collaborative work was to proactively respond to situations in a way that builds thinkers and problem solvers. Ideally, we need to avoid being reactive only, as reactivity can limit our forward progress and abilities to predict needs and situations. Sometimes there is no way around an immediate fix. Sometimes we do have fires to extinguish in our area. Sometimes a pandemic happens, and we have to respond and convert hundreds of courses to an

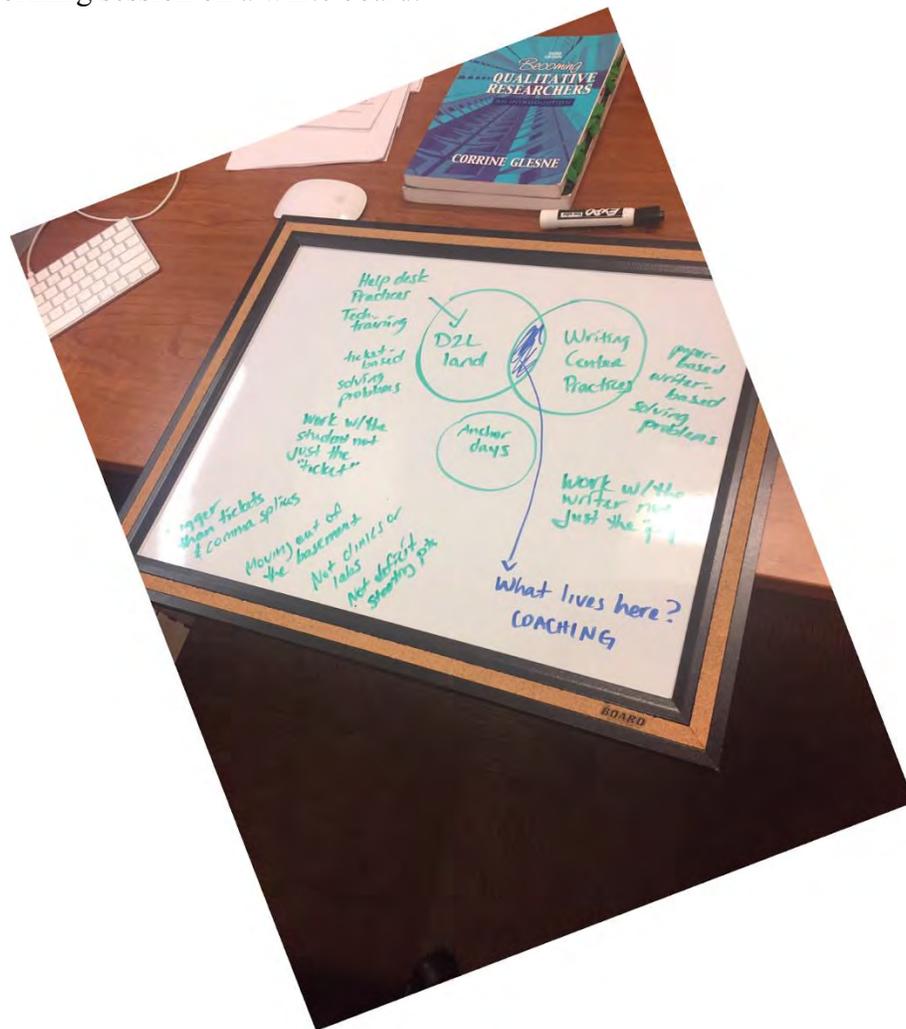
online format in days, weeks, or even overnight. We certainly must respond to a critical task as soon as possible, but it is also important to understand why the task is happening and act in ways to prevent the same problem in the future. The why is the important part here. Fires should not be the norm, and we cannot respond as if everything is in flames because that approach doesn't promote growth. We ultimately will never escape the unhealthy fire situation if we don't teach and coach our way out of it. There is often time to do some teaching, so users can better understand the systems and stop being so passive and automatic in their interactions. After all, isn't this what we are called to do as educators? Focusing on the why in addition to the fix can broaden the help desk users' experiences and teach them to be a stronger member of the institutional community.

In conclusion, we wanted to take a moment to tell the story of our collaboration. How exactly did two people in such different fields find commonality, and why is this type of unity helpful in higher education? The answer is the Slow Food movement. We both subscribe to the philosophy created by the Slow Food movement, which started in the 1980s (Slow Food USA, 2018). The Slow Food movement's (2018) governing manifesto highlights the importance of the movement, as they remind us that "[w]e are enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: Fast Life, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods." The Slow Food movement applies outside of food service as the movement reminds us of the dangers of "Fast Life." Fast food and fast life encourages speed, uniformity, isolation, and lack of creativity because it stifles collaboration, conversation, reflection, and discovery. Fast life pushes out a standardized product (i.e., a hamburger) that most eat in solitude without appreciation. Honore (2004) describes the impact of fast life as a form of "time sickness" and emphasizes that our entire "world is time-sick" as pressure mounts "go faster" and get more done (p. 3). Berg and Seeber (2017) use the Slow Food movement in their text, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* to highlight the dangers of fast life within higher education. They equate the standardized food product to the standardized customer in higher education: the student. They encourage us to take time "for reflection and dialogue" in order to discover partnerships in unexpected places (pp. ix-x).

Overall, we resist these fast life concepts in our higher education workplace and believe in following the Slow Food movement by taking a slower and more reflective and collaborative approach to our workplace. We are not churning out a standardized product; instead, we are using the Slow Food movement's principles to celebrate the discoveries within our workplace and different departments. One key element of the Slow Food movement (2018) is

existing within a “shared and interdisciplinary spirit.” At first glance, we have tasks and job descriptions that seem far apart. After all, what sorts of commonalities does an eLearning director with an instructional design background have with a Writing Center director on the surface? However, by taking a slow approach that focuses on listening, reflection, thinking, and discovery, we found commonalities between our workplace responsibilities and a way to share and merge the unique elements of each discipline.

To illustrate this collaboration, we are including a photo of our very first brainstorming session on a white board:



This image highlights how we applied the principles of slow thinking and coaching. We identified important elements within each discipline (D2L land [Dr. McNeal] and Writing Center practices [Dr. Gray]), and then we found the

commonality in the center: “What Lives Here? Coaching.” When there is time to slow down and be creative, this type of interaction and creativity can happen. It all began with a question: What do we have in common? What lives here? We encourage readers to slow down, look around, and find the hidden collaborator who perhaps is working right down the hall.

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Appendix 1: Learning Outcomes and Workshop Agenda

Learning Objectives

After participating in this professional development sessions, the participants will be able to:

1. Describe what happens during a typical coaching session
2. Describe what happens during a typical help desk call/ticket
3. Explain the differences between a coaching session and a help desk fix-it session
4. Explain the benefits of adopting a technology coaching approach
5. Explain the limitations of a technology coaching approach
6. Participate in a role-playing activity to practice technology coaching

Agenda:

1. Introductions
2. Explain the characteristics typical coaching session
3. Explain what happens during a typical help desk call/ticket
4. List the differences between a coaching session and a help desk fix-it session
5. List the benefits of adopting a technology coaching approach
6. List the limitations of a technology coaching approach
7. Lead participants in in a role-playing activity to practice technology coaching
8. Ask if the participants have questions

Appendix 2: Possible Scenarios to Use during a Workshop

Respondus isn't working!

I have tried to install this browser multiple ways, and I am always prompted that Chromebook is not managed by a licensed institution, even though it belongs to my school. I also tried the app but when I go to select my institution, this college does not show up. How can I fix this?

Suzy Student

The dropbox isn't working!!!!!! HELP ME

Dear eLearning,

I am 9211111111 and presently I don't have opportunity to upload my Chapter 1 Accounting Homework on D2L. Can you all help me please?

PowerPoint problems

Good afternoon,

I am having (what I assume to be) a PowerPoint format problem in my online art class. The text is cut off to the left on the original document screen in D2L, (I have included snippet pictures) and when I open it in actual PowerPoint, the background has changed to black and the teachers lecture notes are completely gone. I have changed the background to white and there is still no text. I have tried using a different computer and the problem is the same. I have zoomed out on the screen and that has no effect.

I'm not sure what else to do.

Thank you,

Alex Musée

Appendix 3: Workshop Handout

Using Writing Center Coaching Techniques to Support Online Learners

At educational institutions throughout the United States, college students regularly contact help desk for assistance with face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses. In the COVID-19 era, when the shift to online learning could happen at any time, how do we better prepare help desk employees, student workers, and anyone providing support to online learners? In this professional development session, you will learn how to better support online learners using writing center coaching techniques.

Learning Objectives:

After participating in this professional development sessions, you will be able to:

1. Describe what happens during a typical coaching session
2. Describe what happens during a typical help desk call/ticket
3. Explain the differences between a coaching session and a help desk fix-it session
4. Explain the benefits of adopting a technology coaching approach
5. Explain the limitations of a technology coaching approach
6. Participate in a role-playing activity to practice technology coaching

Notes:

Thank you for attending today's professional development session. Feel free to contact us if you have questions.

Dr. Lisa McNeal: lmcneal@ccga.edu

Dr. Jennifer Gray: jgray@ccga.edu

Appendix 4: Thank-you Email and Survey

Thank-you Email

Dear [insert first name here],

Thank you for attending today's professional development session about technology coaching. I hope this workshop sparked your interest, and you apply what you learned the next time the phone rings or a help desk ticket pops up in your email. Remember, crafting a coaching email may take more time, but it will pay off in the long run because you will be teaching people how to solve their problems rather than just putting out their fires.

I placed all the workshop materials, including the agenda, handout, and recording of the workshop on this web site: [add web site address here]. As a reminder, feel free to contact me if you have questions about technology coaching. Finally, please complete this short survey [insert link here] and give me feedback about the workshop.

Have a great afternoon!

Sincerely, Dr. McNeal

Email: INSERT Phone: XXXXXXXXXXXX

Survey

1. Name:
2. Department:
3. What did you like best about this workshop?
4. What other features of the workshop did you find to be effective or helpful?
5. What aspects of the workshop could be improved?
6. The workshop leader was engaging.
 - a. Strongly Disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree
7. The workshop format was appropriate.
 - a. Strongly Disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree
8. The workshop content increased my knowledge.
 - a. Strongly Disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral

- d. Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree
9. The workshop met my expectations.
- a. Strongly Disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree
10. Use the space below to provide additional feedback about this professional development workshop.