

## The Writing Center in the Teaching of Professional Genres

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### Abstract

This article describes an innovative collaborative experience between the Writing Center, a teacher, and the Special Collections Library at Tecnológico de Monterrey. As part of the 70th anniversary of the Cervantes Library, students studying Communication, Journalism, and Hispanic Literature participated in writing informative texts for a commemorative book. The experience included exploring various discursive genres; the instructional design was based on an adaptation of Pintrich's (2000) self-regulation model and used peer review as a learning strategy. Participants faced challenges such as the perception of self-efficacy in writing and adapting to the absence of direct theoretical references, which were overcome through tutorial support and interaction with specialists from the Library. The results showed improvements in the students' communication skills, who developed their authorial voice and generated content that met professional standards. In addition, the Library decided to continue with this dynamic due to its positive impact on the dissemination of the heritage collection. For its part, the Writing Center consolidated its role as a space for training and academic dialogue. This experience demonstrates the value of experiential learning and interdisciplinary collaboration in the teaching of professional writing.

*Palabras clave:* writing center, discursive genres, transformative learning, professional writing, writing across the curriculum

### **The writing center in teaching professional genres**

One of the main functions of university writing centers is to support students in their learning of various academic writing genres (Molina-Natera, 2016). The Writing Center at Tecnológico de Monterrey (CE) took advantage of its participation in an intensive writing course in the Spring semester of 2024, which is part of the Journalism, Communication, and Hispanic Literature programs, to fulfill this task. The educational goal of this course, called Professional Writing, is for students in the aforementioned academic programs to be able to express ideas, arguments, and emotions with linguistic accuracy, taking contextual elements into account. In addition, they must demonstrate their ability to interpret the conceptual, virtual, and physical environment in their proposals for representation.

The Tec21 Model, Tecnológico de Monterrey's teaching model, provides for several types of training units: training blocks, 5 or 10-week courses that require between 60 and 120 hours per semester; 15-week subjects, which require 120 hours; and intensive courses or Tec Weeks, which take place in two fixed periods throughout the semester during which students devote their time solely to that learning experience. The Professional Writing course is a Tech Week and, by design, students devote 40 hours of work to it, 20 of which are spent interacting face-to-face with classmates and teachers, and the rest is independent work. It should be noted that, in many courses or training units, in addition to the teaching team, there is the collaboration of a training partner who raises specific needs that must be resolved by the students.

Teacher and student participation in an intensive experience of this nature faces numerous challenges: time management, design of work materials, commitment, attention, and interest on the part of students, among others. Given these particularities of the model, the Writing Center collaborated with the teacher who taught the course to design a learning experience that met three requirements: that learning be situated, that spaces for autonomous learning be included, and that students have the ongoing guidance of an accompanying tutor. This paper shares the solution implemented and the results obtained, as well as the value of experiential learning and interdisciplinary collaboration in the teaching of professional writing.

The design of this practice was based on several assumptions: first, that students of Communication, Journalism, and Hispanic Literature require formal training in discursive genres such as reviews, popular articles, interviews, and chronicles; second, that students face specific challenges in adapting their language to these discursive forms; third, that many of the participants are convinced that pursuing degrees related to written production automatically gives them the skills necessary to write

professionally; and fourth, that the writing center can implement innovative strategies to guide their learning and facilitate peer assessment dynamics, thus enriching the training process.

To cover situated learning, the teacher invited the Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra Special Collections Library at Tecnológico de Monterrey, which celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2024, as a training partner. This institution provided documentary materials and promoted interaction between its staff and the students taking the course with the aim of compiling a commemorative book consisting of informative texts highlighting the material wealth of this institution. To this end, the most iconic works from its reserved collections were selected to be worked on with the students and assigned according to each student's professional interests. In addition, it was decided to dedicate space in the volume to interviews with staff in order to learn a little more about the tasks of preservation and dissemination of the collections it safeguards.

Writing informative texts requires balancing the communicative interaction between the writer and the reader. It was necessary to find a balance between references familiar to the Tec community, such as the Cervantes Library, and new references, such as the concept of special collections and the characteristics of some of its most valuable works. The accompanying tutor was aware of the difficulties involved in the process of adapting and adjusting the language of expository texts, which have been described extensively by Tineo Tiquillahuanca (2023). To resolve these difficulties, she drew on her experience working in the library, which allowed the students to consult restricted-access works and talk to archive specialists and staff who curate the special collections and are responsible for the care, study, and exhibition of particular collections.

The shared teaching experience allowed students to learn not only the characteristics of the assigned discursive genre but also to practice their research strategies in order to adapt the information from the source. In other words, the exercise proposed to the course participants included documentary research strategies, professional writing strategies, and peer evaluation practices to generate relevant manuscripts for inclusion in an anniversary volume.

In order to support self-regulated and transformative learning, a modified model by Pintrich (2000) was applied, which includes processes of planning, self-observation, control, and reflection to promote textualization, revision, and content validity (Guzmán Yparraguirre, 2020). To achieve this, the roles of the agents involved were established: the library staff acted as training partners, or experts and advisors in the use of documentary materials; the Writing Center, through the accompanying tutor,

performed the functions of writing guide and, subsequently, editorial coordinator of the work. In turn, the teacher conducted the daily work sessions and supervised the completion of the planned phases.

As expected, in addition to distributing the hours of interaction with teachers and experts in different activities related to writing and documentary research, students developed activities such as note-taking, research, resolving doubts, observing the characteristics of professional writing, written production, peer review, and editing. To reinforce this process, a logbook was used as a space and process for reflection on the lessons learned each day of work. This support between the participating areas (teachers, library, and CE) allowed students to reflect during their creative process and intervene in the work of their peers without this being part of the evaluation process.

The learning experience depended on the teacher's observations and the writing guide. Throughout the implementation process, they identified that students had a problem with their perception of self-efficacy in writing. In other words, at the university, the writing process generally begins with the analysis of sources from which ideas are extracted, developed, and integrated into various discursive genres. However, on this occasion, the students began by reviewing the documentary sources selected by the library staff and then began their documentary research process to understand the importance or significance of the selected works. From this perspective, the fact that the participants felt deprived of theoretical support (Bernardo Jiménez y Alcántara Mora, 2024) posed difficulties regarding their ability to carry out the task.

For this reason, the experience included spaces for autonomous learning and ongoing guidance to enhance the communicative performance of those seeking a career in literature, communication, and journalism; these spaces include the planning processes described by Pintrich (2000). This dynamic involved a different kind of collaboration for the Writing Center, since, on this occasion, it provided comprehensive support to the teacher: it shared the characteristics of the genres to be developed, made recommendations on professional writing, resolved doubts related to grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, and organized peer evaluation sessions in specific spaces for that purpose. In summary, the implementation of the course brought together, on the one hand, the experiential learning of the Tec21 Model in partnership with the Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra Special Collections Library and, on the other, the presence of the institutional Writing Center.

In addition, during the textualization process, participants supported each other in the construction and revision of texts, meaning that through peer work, participants were able to observe themselves. Villarreal et al. (2024) emphasize that in order to progress from the beginner to the expert

level, it is necessary to know and integrate the elements of the textual genre and to have a methodology that organizes the discursive progression that allows for the development of a sense of commitment to the assigned tasks. In organizing the time devoted to the activity, peer review practices were carried out, which became the focus of the work developed by providing control during the closing of the experience, before presenting the manuscript to the training partner, the Miguel de Cervantes Special Collections Library, to proceed with its editorial production.

In conclusion, the results were positive: the students expressed satisfaction with what they had learned; the Library decided to keep the project active because the productions met its dissemination needs, and the Writing Center consolidated its profile as a space for dialogue and improvement of written communication. This educational experience helped students to enhance their written expression of ideas, arguments, and emotions with linguistic correctness, considering contextual elements and the creation of a text close to professional standards (Leal Isida and Carrizales Guerra, 2024a); this text is available to the general public through the link included in Leal Isida and Carrizales Guerra (2024b). In addition, the joint work between various actors confirms the idea that dialogue allows for the negotiation of meanings and possibilities (Díaz Domínguez and Catalá Llinás, 2015) to achieve the greatest possible impact on learning.

In summary, the experience described above allowed students to improve their ability to express ideas, arguments, and emotions with linguistic accuracy, taking contextual elements into account. In addition, they demonstrated their ability to interpret the conceptual, virtual, and physical environment in their texts, which followed the guidelines established by the training partner. We are confident that the experience can be replicated in the future, as the Special Collections Library is very interested in having students of Hispanic Literature, Communication, and Journalism contribute to the dissemination of its reserved collections.

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