

The 
Writers
 Brigade

AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE: KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION THROUGH A WRITERS WORKSHOP

**A GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUALS AND
ORGANIZATIONS**

**By Johana Schwartz
with Sarah Blackstone
and the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade**

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AAC-RERC

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PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This step-by-step guide describes how to set up a Writers Brigade to write and publish articles about research and development activities that are meant to have a positive impact on the lives of individuals with disabilities. It is based on the experiences of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade, which supports individuals who use augmentative communication technologies and other assistive devices, to prepare and publish articles about the research, development, education and dissemination going on within the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement (AAC-RERC).

Individuals who may be interested in this guide include principal investigators, project directors and program directors who are working on disability-related technology, education and/or healthcare issues and want to produce information about their findings, successes and outcomes in a way that takes dissemination well beyond traditional peer-reviewed journals and professional meeting presentations in order to share new ideas, information, materials and products more efficiently and extensively among all interested stakeholders.

Organizations that have a knowledge translation plan should find this guide particularly useful because it systematically explains how to include people with disabilities in the transfer and translation of research and product. The RERC network, the NIDRR funding portfolio and entities such as the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and other groups that carry out projects aimed at reducing the disabling impact of acute, chronic or degenerative conditions may find the Writers Brigade guide helpful.

WHY CONSIDER A WRITERS BRIGADE?

In just four years, the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade members published over 100 articles. Our voices are being heard. In my opinion, there is no one more qualified to write about product, organization or service than those who benefit from it. (AAC-RERC Writers Brigade member)

The most important reason to have a Writers Brigade is simply that it is the right thing to do. Any entity that aims to improve people's lives should strive to employ and empower the people whose lives they are trying to improve. A Writers Brigade can do both. It provides part-time employment for people with disabilities while helping them develop skills that are transferable to a broader marketplace. In addition, a Writers Brigade broadly publishes information about the ongoing research and development work of an organization, making these results more accessible to the people who most need to know.

A second, very practical reason for adopting a Writers Brigade approach is its favorable cost-benefit ratio. A Writers Brigade ensures a greater quantity and quality of information access for people with

disabilities, family members, policy makers, manufacturers and practitioners, and it can accomplish this at minimal cost to the organization. As one member said, “The total cost for the Writers Brigade program is minimal compared to the benefits accrued by the researchers, developers, the individuals who participate in the program, the organization and the funding agency. “(In the present case, the AAC-RERC and NIDRR).

Third, a Writers Brigade exemplifies a knowledge translation paradigm. It expands traditional top-down approaches of dissemination through professional journals and conference presentations to include two-way, ongoing interactions between individuals with disabilities and the research and development communities that endeavor to address their needs. A Writers Brigade also seeks to translate important findings so that intended beneficiaries can access and use them.

There are many additional reasons to have a Writers Brigade, which you can read about in this guide. Our hope is that you and others in your agency/organization will develop your own Writers Brigade, using and modifying the guide in ways that benefit your constituents. We wish you every success.

AAC-RERC Writers Brigade members: Johana Schwartz, Rebecca Barbush, Lauren Baxter, David Chapple, William Geluso, Joe Hemp-hill, Michael Joyce, Pamela Kennedy, Matthew Kim, Lateef McLeod, Tracy Rackensperger, Tom Younkerman

AAC-RERC Partners: Sarah Blackstone, David Beukelman, Diane Bryen, Kevin Caves, Frank DeRuyter, Jeff Higginbotham, Janice Light, David McNaughton, Howard Shane, Michael B. Williams

INTRODUCTION

Individuals with disabilities can take an active role in writing about the research, development and training activities undertaken by companies, organizations and projects that focus on them and are, in the end, meant to benefit them. The AAC-RERC Writers Brigade began in 2004 as one way to adhere to the principle of “Nothing About Us Without Us.” The mission of the AAC-RERC is to assist people who rely on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to achieve their goals by advancing and promoting AAC technologies and supporting the individuals who use, manufacture and recommend them. Thus, the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade is comprised of people who have difficulty speaking and who choose to use AAC and other assistive technologies to communicate.

I was the manager of the first AAC-RERC Writers Brigade (2004-2008). The Writers Brigade was part of the second funding cycle of the AAC-RERC, administered by Augmentative Communication, Inc. The Writers Brigade is a writer’s workshop, designed to increase employment skills, portfolios and opportunities of individuals who use AAC technologies, and a knowledge translation project that expands the awareness and impact of AAC-RERC research and development activities across multiple stakeholder groups.

The Writers Brigade supports individuals in technical writing. We approach potential members with this vocational training opportunity and invite them to submit an application. The virtual, telecommuting nature of our program makes it inclusive and accessible to many people. The members receive more individualized attention than they might in other educational programs. They undertake paid assignments to report on the activities of the AAC-RERC, working at their own pace and receiving customized feedback throughout their writing process. Once a writer arrives at a polished article, we submit it to a variety of professional and popular media for publication. As manager, I supervised eleven members from nine states as they gained their writers’ voices. The first Writers Brigade collectively contributed over 100 articles that expand the awareness and impact of the AAC-RERC projects and activities. The Writers Brigade has achieved a prominent voice that is well known and respected. I knew our program was a success when I saw articles by the Writers Brigade displayed in the waiting room of my speech-language pathologist’s office.

I worked to develop and cultivate a program that is easily transferable to other disability-related organizations, companies and government-funded agencies and projects. The strategies and procedures described in this guide are easy to modify to suit the needs and goals of your organization. I hope this guide can serve as a helping hand as you establish your Writers Brigade. This guide shares the lessons we have learned and the processes that have worked.

Good luck in your endeavors,

Johana Schwartz, B.A., Manager, AAC-RERC Writers Brigade, 2004-2008

I. STARTING A WRITERS BRIGADE PROGRAM

1. Identifying the leadership team and program staff.
2. Hiring the Writers Brigade program manager.
3. Recruiting applications from individuals with disabilities to join the Writers Brigade.
4. Reviewing and ranking applications.
5. Sending letter offering highly ranked applicants membership in the Writers Brigade.
6. Sending other applicants a letter thanking them for their interest.

The success of a Writers Brigade program depends on the quality of personnel in leadership positions—their enthusiasm about the organization, technical writing skills, understanding of the work of the organization and a belief that they will make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities. The program can be further enhanced by an advisory board and technical support personnel.

A first step is to hire the Writers Brigade program manager. Once the program manager is in place, she/he can begin recruiting individual members of the Writers Brigade. This section gives examples of recruitment approaches, a sample application form and letters that invite successful applicants to participate.

THE LEADERSHIP TEAM AND PROGRAM STAFF

The Writers Brigade program director is someone within an organization who understands and believes in the mission of the Writers Brigade. The director must have a close knowledge of the organization's mission, budget, structure, ongoing activities and desired outcomes, as well as an ability to work comfortably and effectively with individuals with disabilities. For the program to be sustainable, the director must allot time to support the program manager, negotiate with publishers, keep up with the organization's projects, maintain contact with the researchers/developers who are working on projects, review all articles before they go to publishers and be able to help identify the characteristics and needs of groups targeted for knowledge translation activities. The director also advocates for support within the organization. Although variable, the role of director can take five to ten hours a week.



The next step is to hire the Writers Brigade program manager and orient him or her to the goals and procedures of the organization and the Writers Brigade program. The program manager reports to the program director. The manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Writers Brigade, which includes recruiting new members, making writing assignments, editing drafts, building relationships with publishers and maintaining effective communication with the program director, the Writers Brigade members and the organization's leaders. The program manager mentors, coaches, tutors and requests feedback from members of the Writers Brigade to build their skills. The manager assigns and edits articles, placing them in publications that will increase the impact of the organization's mission. An effort is made to publish information that is readily accessible to all groups, especially people with disabilities and their supporters, manufacturers, policy-making groups, practitioners and educators.

In addition to the Program Manager and Program Director, the host organization provides a technical person to post information on the listserv, maintain the listserv and assist in updating information on the organization's website. The Writers Brigade may also appoint an advisory group with members who can give advice to the manager and director, help place articles in print and electronic publications, suggest new approaches to knowledge transfer, and offer other support as needed.

[See Example: Desirable Qualifications for a Writers Brigade Program Manager](#)
[See Example Job Description of a Writers Brigade Program Manager](#)

DESIRABLE QUALIFICATIONS FOR A WRITERS BRIGADE PROGRAM MANAGER

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Note: No program manager is expected to have all these skills when hired. However, she/he will need to develop them over time.

1. Skills with communication technologies. The Writer Brigade manager needs to be able to:

- ◆ Access a computer with a consistent Internet connection.
- ◆ Use Microsoft Word and its editing features.
- ◆ Access an email account.
- ◆ Write, send and read email messages with attached documents.
- ◆ Archive document files and email messages.
- ◆ Access technology support to resolve technology glitches so the program can run smoothly.
- ◆ Write in real-time online for up to fifteen hours per week.
- ◆ Communicate online with every member of the Writers Brigade, as well as the program director, other personnel in the organization and a variety of publishers.
- ◆ Make occasional business phone calls and participate in conference calls.
- ◆ Keep track of work flow, individual members' progress, online communications and articles published.

2. Writing and editing skills. The manager brings an appreciation for the conventions of the English language and a careful eye for editing to the job. It is preferable for the manager to have:

- ◆ Experience as a peer editor.
- ◆ Experience writing technical articles about disability technologies.
- ◆ An understanding of the revision process in writing.
- ◆ Experience writing business letters.
- ◆ An ability to recognize and correct errors in punctuation, word usage, tense, sentence structure and technical information.
- ◆ An ability to improve a draft for readability and organization.

3. Leadership and Management Skills. The manager is familiar with disability issues and the mission and structure of the organization. Ideally, the manager should have:

- ◆ Experience conducting business with publishers.
- ◆ An ability to provide tutorials, help clarify facts and conduct accuracy checks.
- ◆ Experience with program development.
- ◆ Experience and training in guiding others through the writing process.
- ◆ Ability to provide patient, positive and specific scaffolding support.
- ◆ Ability to teach employment-related skills, such as writing business letters, submitting an invoice, conducting an interview and meeting deadlines.
- ◆ Skills in writing progress memos to the program director.
- ◆ Ability to prepare formal reports about the program.
- ◆ Ability to prepare and give presentations about the Writers Brigade network at conferences and support other members to do so.

4. Ability to represent the organization's mission, goals and activities effectively and accurately. The manager should be able to:

- ◆ Read, understand and talk about related technical information and provide background information for specific articles.
- ◆ Become familiar with the organization's website and publications.
- ◆ Converse about personal and professional experiences and training in disability areas that reflect the mission of the organization.

5. Diplomacy skills and sensitivity to people with disabilities and related issues. The manager is able to:

- ◆ Engage, motivate and support writers of any age and ability.
- ◆ Negotiate with professionals on behalf of the members.
- ◆ Recognize and respond to requests for reasonable accommodations and disability access.
- ◆ Have experience and success supervising individuals in ways that take into account their unique needs.
- ◆ Scaffold supports for individuals with disabilities to build their skills.

JOB DESCRIPTION OF A WRITERS BRIGADE PROGRAM MANAGER

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

The Writers Brigade program manager is a part-time position. The job is conducted through telework. The program director is the manager's supervisor. Major responsibilities of the Writers Brigade manager are twofold:

(1) Mentor individuals with disabilities to write and publish articles about ongoing or completed research, development, training and other targeted activities within an organization.

(2) Extend and expand knowledge translation on behalf of the organization to targeted stakeholder groups in formats these groups prefer and can understand.

Job responsibilities of the manager include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- ◆ Maintaining continual Internet access during work hours. Note: Email messages with attached Microsoft Word documents are the main method of communication.
- ◆ Implementing all aspects of the Writers Brigade program in consultation with the program director.
- ◆ Being patient, positive and specific when editing and coaching members to write articles, with an eye to the mission of the organization.
- ◆ Guiding members through every step of the writing process using constructive criticism and encouraging multiple revisions to a draft until it is ready for submission to a publisher.
- ◆ Organizing and maintaining a searchable archive of all correspondence and articles for reference and as business records. Note: The manager can use a webmail program with a search tool to retrieve messages.
- ◆ Ensuring that each Writers Brigade member gains employment-related skills, such as writing business letters, submitting an invoice, conducting an interview and meeting deadlines.
- ◆ Regularly tracking and assessing each member's progress.
- ◆ Keeping the program director up-to-date.
- ◆ Participating in occasional conference calls with the director and research team leaders.
- ◆ Preparing and giving presentations about the Writers Brigade. Supporting other members to do so.
- ◆ Respecting and promoting the agenda of the organization. For example, "The Writers Brigade is a dissemination knowledge translation program designed to report on the research activities of the AAC-RERC (www.aac-rerc.com)."
- ◆ Monitoring assignments so the Writers Brigade adheres to the conditions of the grant (or other agreements) rather than any personal agendas of the members.

RECRUITING MEMBERS

After a brief orientation, the program manager and director begin to recruit an initial group of Writers Brigade members. Depending upon the skills of interested applicants and time constraints of the manager, a good size for the first group is four or five individuals. Each will make his/her way through the program, writing a short autobiographical statement and several technical articles. As one member finishes the program and becomes an alumnus, an additional member is recruited.

To recruit Writers Brigade members and increase awareness about the program, the program director may post recruitment announcements on relevant listservs and websites with a deadline for responding. The Writers Brigade staff may also ask leaders in the organization to nominate individuals. For example, the AAC-RERC program director asked all of the AAC-RERC partners to nominate individuals they knew who (a) relied on AAC technologies and strategies to communicate, (b) had sufficient writing skills to benefit from the Writers Brigade experience, (c) had an interest in participating and (d) had time to participate actively for about one year. Using both these strategies should result in a pool of applications from qualified individuals.



In response to all inquiries, the program manager distributes the Writers Brigade Announcement and Frequently Asked Questions Fact Sheet and emails a Writers Brigade Application Form to those who request one, inviting them to apply. The Application form includes instructions and a due date. Each applicant is asked to include a writing sample and at least one reference.

[See Example: Recruiting Announcement for the Writers Brigade.](#)

[See Example: Frequently Asked Questions about the Writers Brigade: A Fact Sheet.](#)

[See Example: The Writers Brigade Application Form](#)

RECRUITING ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THE WRITERS BRIGADE

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

PUBLISH YOUR WRITING!

BE A PART OF THE REHABILITATION ENGINEERING RESEARCH CENTER ON COMMUNICATION ENHANCEMENT (AAC-RERC)

You are invited to participate in an exciting program called the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. The Writers Brigade is for individuals who use augmentative communication and are interested in becoming published technical writers in the field of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). The program is managed and staffed by Augmentative Communication Inc. and is funded by the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research through the AAC-RERC.

As a member of the Writers Brigade, you will work as an insider, reporting the very latest research and developments in AAC technologies. The AAC-RERC Writers Brigade program manager will help you prepare interesting and informative articles that summarize current AAC-RERC research, development, training and dissemination activities. Throughout the process, you may also work closely with AAC-RERC staff and consultants. This is a great opportunity to improve your technical writing skills, build a portfolio of published articles, increase your employment options and expand your professional networks.

The Writers Brigade members work from home, corresponding online with the program manager and, as needed, with others who work for the AAC-RERC. We publish work in a variety of media, from journals and newsletters (like *Alternatively Speaking*, and *ASHA SID 12 Perspectives*) to newspapers, magazines and online media. There is no limit to where your byline may appear!

You will be paid a total of \$125 for articles you successfully publish: \$50 for a final draft, \$25 when the article is submitted for publication and \$50 when the article is published. The program manager works individually with members of the Writers Brigade to develop their technical writing skills so the article is accepted for publication.

If you are interested in learning more about the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade and/or wish to submit an application, please email the Writers Brigade Program manager at the following address: <email>.

For more information about the AAC-RERC and the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade, go to www.aac-rerc.com

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WRITERS BRIGADE: A FACT SHEET

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

1. What is the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade?

The AAC-RERC Writers Brigade program produces articles and other materials that explain the work of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement (AAC-RERC), while supporting the writing and publication of technical articles by individuals who rely on AAC. The AAC-RERC is a collaborative “virtual” research group dedicated to the development of effective AAC technologies. Funding is from the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research. The Writers Brigade program is a dissemination and training program within the AAC-RERC, directed by Sarah Blackstone of Augmentative Communication Inc. The activities of the Writers Brigade further the awareness, knowledge and interest of multiple AAC stakeholder groups by providing key information about current research and development activities and the work of the AAC-RERC.

2. What are the goals of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade?

- a. Increase the dissemination and use of information, materials, technologies and instructional strategies developed within the AAC-RERC so they reach relevant stakeholder groups.
- b. Increase the meaningful participation of individuals who use AAC in all aspects of AAC-RERC activities.
- c. Increase the technical writing skills of individuals who use AAC as they build a portfolio of published articles, increase their employment options and expand their social networks.

3. Who is involved in the Writers Brigade?

Four or five individuals who use AAC technologies participate in the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade at one time. The program manager mentors each individual, providing a range of supports to develop technical writing skills for various audiences. The program director oversees the program. Alumni of the Writers Brigade also remain involved.

4. What are the responsibilities of each Writers Brigade member?

- ◆ Writing, editing and re-writing assigned articles about various topics related to the research, development, training and dissemination underway within the organization.
- ◆ Learning how to write in the style of a variety of targeted publications.
- ◆ Participating in occasional discussions about the writing process with the program manager, other members and program staff.
- ◆ Providing feedback to the program manager regarding ways to improve the program and its outcomes.
- ◆ Providing the AAC-RERC with information about productivity, writing, publication and employment outcomes over time.

- ♦ Responding in a timely manner to writing assignments.

Each Writers Brigade member participates for approximately one year. After being actively involved, alumni often have opportunities to take on additional paid assignments.

5. What are the responsibilities of the program staff?

Program Manager. The program manager is responsible for coaching and supporting members to develop their skills in writing, revising and completing articles for publication. She/he supports individuals to write for different audiences and stakeholder groups and works collaboratively with a team to realize the goals of the Writers Brigade and the organization.

Program Director. The director of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade program has extensive experience with the writing and the publishing processes and is a partner in the AAC-RERC and a member of the AAC-RERC's management team. His/her responsibilities include interfacing with the AAC-RERC partners, overseeing the Writers Brigade program, supporting the program manager, handling payroll issues and expediting the publication of finished articles.

Program Staff. Other individuals may serve as consultants or advisors to support individual members or the program manager. Their responsibilities may include finding publishers for completed articles, increasing awareness about the program, providing technical assistance and editing.

6. Where is the Writers Brigade located?

The Writers Brigade is a virtual program. Staff and members telecommute from their home or work offices. All members and staff use the Internet to communicate and share work completed on their personal computers. The manager uses email to communicate with members on a regular basis. A listserv serves as a mechanism for group interaction from time to time on common issues and items of interest, as does the FaceBook Writers Brigade group. Members communicate with the manager via email. Articles are exchanged by attaching Microsoft Word documents to email messages.

7. Who can I contact?

The Writers Brigade manager is <Name and additional signature information>.

The Writers Brigade director is <Name and additional signature information>.

THE WRITERS BRIGADE APPLICATION FORM

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Thank you very much for your interest in the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. Please complete this short application form and return it by _____.

We are interested in your motivation for participating in the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. We also ask you to include a short writing sample. We will use the completed application and writing sample to make decisions about whom we invite to participate during <insert year>. As each current member completes the program, we recruit an additional member, so if you are not selected initially, please let us know if you wish to keep your application active.

Please email your application and writing sample to <manager's name/email,> the Writers Brigade program manager. Be sure to cc <director's name/email>, the Writers Brigade program director. Thank you!

Name:

Address:

Email:

Phone Number:

1. Please list your reason(s) for wanting to participate in the AAC-RERC Writer Brigade.

2. Please indicate whether you are currently

Yes No Employed part time (# hours/week_____)

Yes No Not currently employed

Yes No Currently in college

Yes No Have a high school diploma

Yes No Have college experience

Yes No Have a college degree

Yes No Have an advanced degree

3. Have you ever published anything? Yes No

If yes, please specify

4. What characteristics do you have that would benefit the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade?

5. What would you hope to learn from your experience with the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade?

6. Please provide the names and contact information of two references who are familiar with your writing so we may contact them on your behalf. You may also choose to include letters with your application.

7. Please include a sample of your writing and answer the following questions:

a. What was your purpose in writing this piece?

b. Who is the intended audience?

c. When was it written?

d. Has the writing sample ever been published? (NOTE: This is not a requirement!) YES_____ NO_____

If YES, please indicate the name of the publication and when it was published.

8. How are you sending your writing sample?

Note: We cannot consider your application complete until we have your Writing Sample. By Email? <add email information> By Fax? <add fax number> By post? <add address >

***PLEASE EMAIL YOUR APPLICATION TO <email address/attn: Director>.
Please cc the Manager @ <email address>***

THE DUE DATE IS <date>.

SELECTING AND ORIENTING WRITERS BRIGADE MEMBERS

The Writers Brigade staff reviews all completed applications, writing samples and reference names and then ranks applicants according to their qualifications and availability to participate in the program. The director and manager offer applicants a position in the Writers Brigade, in order of ranking until the desired number (4 or 5) is reached by sending applicants an Invitation to Participate Letter. The manager also sends a letter to unsuccessful candidates thanking them for applying and informing them that all current positions are filled. Highly ranked applicants who are not selected are asked if they wish to be considered for future openings.

Once an applicant has accepted a position, the Writers Brigade manager sends an email welcoming the member, with a copy to the program director. The email includes a Welcome Letter and a Request for Information from New Members. The Welcome Letter establishes contact between the new member and the program manager. It also offers a quick introduction to how the Writers Brigade works. The Request for Information form asks for contact information. The manager uses this information to update the roster, add members to the Writers Brigade listserv and to offer the member perks to join related organizations and subscribe to publications. It also enables the program director to set up payment authorizations for future invoices.



[See Example: Invitation to Participate Letter.](#)

[See Example: Welcome Letter.](#)

[See Example: Request for Information from New Members.](#)

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE LETTER

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

<Date>

Dear <Name of new member>:

Thank you for your application to the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. It is indeed my great pleasure to invite you to participate in the Writers Brigade for the next year. As you know, the Writers Brigade is for individuals who use augmentative communication technologies and who are interested in becoming published technical writers in the field of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). It is administered through <administering organization's name>. As a member of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade, you will work as an insider reporting the very latest developments in AAC technologies.

<Program manager's name>, the Writers Brigade program manager will help you prepare informative articles that summarize current AAC-RERC research and development activities. Throughout the process, you may also work with Writers Brigade staff, consultants and some of the AAC-RERC partners. You will work with the manager and, as needed, with others in the organization using email. The Writers Brigade is funded by the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research. I suggest you carefully review the content of the AAC-RERC's website at www.aac-rerc.com. Writers Brigade members publish work in a variety of media, from consumer journals and newsletters to newspapers, magazines and online media. We are finding that many publications are interested in articles written by Writers Brigade members. We encourage you to use your involvement in the Writers Brigade to expand your employment options, build your portfolio of published work, and strengthen your social and professional networks.

You will be paid \$50 for assigned articles you successfully complete. In addition, we will pay \$25 for articles submitted for publication and another \$50 extra when an article is published. The manager will mentor you as she supports you in the writing and publication process.

I sincerely hope you will accept this opportunity. Please respond by sending an email addressed to me at <director's email> with a copy to <manager>, the program manager at < email> indicating your acceptance of this offer. We will then send you some orientation materials. Because we would like to announce your participation in an upcoming AAC-RERC e-blast and on the AAC-RERC website, we hope to hear from you by <date>. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions. Again, congratulations! We are very much looking forward to working with you.

Best wishes,

<Director/additional signature information>

cc. <Manager/additional signature info>

WELCOME LETTER

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

<Date>

Dear <Name of new member>:

This is your official start in the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. So, welcome! You are undertaking the task of spreading the word about the field of AAC to a wider audience, who may view some of the information like a foreign language. Given this challenge, my goal as the program manager is to support you in your work. Because you are committed to making your best effort in the writing process, I believe you will find the Writers Brigade a rewarding experience in a supportive environment.

I am excited about the prospect of seeing your articles published, and together we will work to bring them to that point. I will provide customized and constructive feedback to help you polish and finish (It is not done after the first draft.) your article. In return, I expect you to respond promptly and thoughtfully to my suggestions. Together, we can develop your article into a manuscript that you take pride in submitting to publishers.

As a fellow writer, I find that the key to success is a respect for the writing process, with the realization that the sometimes-tedious business of rewriting is part of the job. I urge you not to become discouraged by this essential step. I would like to share with you the wisdom of Cynthia Gorney, Associate Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at UC Berkeley, who was asked to comment on the success of her students: "Everybody rewrote, re-reported, grappled with material, agonized, recovered, saw what to do next, and did it."

To facilitate the writing process, I will guide you in revising your articles by providing comments on your text using editing tools in Microsoft Word. I have broken this process into steps describing how I will collaborate individually with you.

The first step is the PreWrite. When I email you about a writing assignment, I will suggest that you read and highlight the main ideas in the accompanying materials, using the highlight feature or the underline feature in your word processing program. Next, we will develop an outline. Completing an outline will give us a chance to review the information you will be writing about. We will be able to address your questions and be sure you are clear about the meaning of technical information. Organizing information this way will streamline the process when you start writing.

The next step is drafting the article and making multiple revisions. I will explain this process in detail as part of your first assignment.

Your feedback is valuable to us. Therefore, another essential component of the process is the PostWrite. The PostWrite gives us the opportunity after each assignment to review how we do things, as well as how you are benefiting

from the experience. We may solicit your input about the Writers Brigade program at other times, as well. You are always welcome to share your ideas with us at any time. As we learn together, new procedures may emerge and others may evolve. I will present you with any changes as they occur.

At times, I will be sending information to all members and staff at once using the Writers Brigade listserv. However, I will primarily communicate with you on an individual basis as we work on drafts of your writing.

The first writing activity, which I will announce shortly, is designed, in part, for us to get acquainted with everyone in the Writers Brigade as well as the writing process.

It is designed to be a tutorial so you can become familiar with our writing process, as well as with the editing functions in Microsoft Word. This will give us a chance to work out any glitches before you begin writing articles.

Please fill in and return the attached request for information. By doing so, you will enable us to pay your invoices for work completed, as well as provide you with some “perks” (e.g., membership in USSAAC and subscriptions to AAC-RERC-related publications). I hope this orientation gives you a sense of what we will be doing. Maybe it has answered your questions, or maybe it has prompted new ones. Either way, email me at any time. While the procedures may seem abstract or theoretical now, once we start applying them, things will fall into place.

I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

<Manager’s name/additional signature info>

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION FROM NEW MEMBERS

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

We need the following information in order to process your invoices, as well as to ensure you gain access to other “benefits” offered to AAC-RERC Writers Brigade members. Be assured that this information is confidential. Please return this form to <name/email>.

1. Please provide your preferred mailing address, as well as your phone number, social security number, and fax number (if applicable).

Name and Address:

Phone #:

FAX#:

Social Security #:

2. What email address will you be using for this program so we can add your name to the Writers Brigade listserv? _____

3. Do you have regular Internet access throughout the week?

YES

NO

4. Do you keep to a regular schedule of time spent at your computer or online? Note: We do not expect you to commit to a schedule but any idea will help us. Likewise, we appreciate notice of any major changes to your schedule or availability, like vacations, illness or travel.

YES

NO

5. Are you currently a member of the United States Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (USSAAC)?

YES

NO

Would you like to become a member?

YES

NO

6. Do you currently subscribe to Augmentative Communication New/Alternatively Speaking/Speak Up?

YES

NO

Would you like to receive these or other publications? YES NO

II. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

1. Communicating through Email.
2. Communicating through the Listserv.
3. Communicating on FaceBook.
4. Weekly agendas.
5. Monthly reports.
6. Assignment logs.

The Writers Brigade program enables staff and members to live in different parts of the country and work in places and at times that are most convenient for them. As a result, multiple communication strategies are needed to help staff and members work effectively, both together and on their own. The director and the manager keep abreast of the organization's activities using a variety of communication mechanisms. The members primarily relied on email, a listserv and FaceBook.

The most frequently used strategy is email. Other communication mechanisms include the Writers Brigade listserv, FaceBook, weekly agendas, monthly reports, assignment logs and phone calls. As needed, the Writers Brigade program can adopt new communication strategies to further enhance the effectiveness of the program.

COMMUNICATING THROUGH EMAIL

Writers Brigade members use email to exchange drafts of articles, provide feedback and conduct administrative business, such as submitting invoices and sending memos. Email is essential to the program's success. It helps ensure that exchanges between the manager and members are private. This is especially important during instruction and when providing feedback, both positive and negative. Email also makes it easy to copy the director on all correspondence. On occasion, members use email to contact a researcher or publisher, when the manager asks them to do so.



Email is also used to distribute announcements about a project, event or opportunity. Because it is easy to save, organize and search, email enables staff and members to archive important program information for future reference. When a new member joins the Writers Brigade, the manager sends an email about email. For example:

Date:

Subject: Use of Email

Dear <new Writers Brigade member>

Most of our communication will take place over email. Given the “virtual” nature of the Writers Brigade program and given that you rely on AAC technologies and are familiar with computers, email is an efficient and effective way for us to communicate, although we may also use a listserv and other methods/modes, as needed.

You will use email to submit your assignments, as well as to receive feedback and important information from me and other Writers Brigade staff. You must be able to attach document files to an email and be able to archive all email messages for future reference.

You will want to copy (cc) the director, <director's name> at <director's email> on all correspondence. If you forget at first, I will give you a friendly reminder.

If you wish, we will help you share your email address with the other members. Please let me know if you run into any problems or have questions.

Sincerely,

<Manager's name and additional signature info>

COMMUNICATING THROUGH THE LISTSERV

The Writers Brigade listserv is an important communication mechanism for Writers Brigade staff, members and alumni. All Writers Brigade members and staff are subscribers to the Writers Brigade listserv, as are many Writers Brigade program alumni. Messages that go out to the group should be of interest to the group. Once a message is sent, it goes to everyone, there are no take backs. Writers are encouraged to reread their message before sending it and to sign it. While the Writers Brigade listserv is a friendly communication modality, members use a professional voice when preparing a message.



Sending email messages to the listserv informs the whole group at once. Recipients can see that the mail is coming from the Writers Brigade listserv. We use the listserv to orient members to the Writers Brigade Program, give introductions and provide materials to the group as a whole. Listserv communication is in addition to the one-on-one email exchanges between the manager and each Writers Brigade member.

The administrating organization hosts the listserv. The program manager, in collaboration with the program director, decides how to set it up. The manager is the listserv moderator and subscribes all Writers Brigade members, staff and alumni to the listserv. The manager is also responsible for communicating with the person who handles technical aspects of the listserv.

The manager promotes a professional tone and atmosphere on the listserv. The manager and director use the listserv to announce updates of interest, such as publicity about the Writers Brigade program; conferences; upcoming presentations by members of the Writers Brigade; writing opportunities and contests; helpful resources and tips; and group assignment deadlines.

Participants use the listserv to post their finished articles and ask or respond to questions. They are encouraged to check with the manager before posting to the listserv.

Another goal of the listserv is to promote networking and mentoring among alumni and current members. For example, alumni are encouraged to welcome new members who post their autobiographies and to say a few words about their personal experiences with the Writers Brigade. Active alumni sometime choose to re-post their updated bios. Some members and alumni announce their new publications and other successes on the listserv.

[See Example: Email to members about the Writers Brigade Listserv](#)

[See Example: Email to technical support person about the Writers Brigade Listserv.](#)

EMAIL TO MEMBERS ABOUT THE WRITERS BRIGADE LISTSERV

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC

To: Writers Brigade member

From: Writers Brigade manager

The Writers Brigade has a listserv. The address is <listserv address>. I will be using the listserv when I need to contact the group and may post announcements, introduce assignments, and distribute materials or references to assist you in your writing. These materials and reference guides may arrive as attachments or in the body of the email.

Although you are never required to post your contact information or anything you have written, you are always welcome to share with other members and staff via the listserv and use it as a tool to network with fellow writers. Messages that go out to the group should be of interest to the group.

To send a message that everyone on the list will see, you should address your email to <listserv address>. All mail from the Writers Brigade listserv goes out to everyone on the list and recipients will see that the mail is coming from the listserv. It is important to sign your posts so everyone will know who sent it. Once a message is sent, it goes to everyone—there are no take backs. So, reread your message before sending it. While the Writers Brigade listserv is a friendly communication modality, use your professional voice when preparing your message.

Remember, when submitting your drafts or questions specific to your work, address them directly to me at my own email address, < manager's email>, not to the listserv.

If you raise a question pertinent to the group, or if a point of writing comes up in our individual correspondence that I think everyone would benefit from, I might post my response on the listserv. However, I will preserve your anonymity when repeating it to the group.

I'd like to welcome you to the Writers Brigade listserv. Please let me know if you have any questions.

EMAIL TO TECHNICAL SUPPORT PERSON ABOUT THE WRITERS BRIGADE LISTSERV

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

To: <technical person at organization>

Re: New Writers Brigade listserv member

I am pleased to introduce to you the newest member of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade, <member's name>. Please subscribe her/him to the Writers Brigade listserv. Her/his email address is <email address>. Thank you for making this amendment to the roster and for keeping our listserv so diligently."

Sincerely,

<Writers Brigade manager>

THE FACEBOOK GROUP

Facebook is a social networking website that is very effective at building community and encouraging one-to-one communication. The Writers Brigade may consider implementing Facebook to:

1. Make the curriculum more accessible and more compatible with AAC technologies.
2. Make the Brigade more visible, increase publicity, and networking.
3. Reduce the isolation associated with long distance communication and telework.

The program manager is the administrator of this group. All active members and alumni receive invitations to join the Writers Brigade Facebook group. The group is classified as “Closed” to ensure publicity and privacy. [This is under “Customize” by “Access”.]

The manager has some control over the content of the group and can choose to delete/add members, posts, pictures, and/or almost any of the information that is available and may also choose to appoint another member or alumni as a volunteer administrator. “Recent News”, a field under “Group Info” could be a space to announce recent research or new topic ideas that might interest members of the Writers Brigade.

Writers Brigade members can build a close community. Via the group, members can ask for and receive advice directly from others. Facebook enables members to explore opinions, such as the use of the word “consumer.” Facebook also has an ability to post links so members can link to recent publications, videos, webcasts or articles others might find interesting.

Much communication will continue via email with the Manager. However, the group on Facebook encourages communication and fosters camaraderie among members.



[See Example: An invitation to join the Writers Brigade Facebook Group](#)

AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE WRITERS BRIGADE FACEBOOK GROUP (SENT OVER THE LISTSERV)

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Hello,

During the ISAAC conference in Montreal, Canada, the staff of the Writers Brigade met to discuss the future of the Writers Brigade. One of the suggestions that arose was to invite Writers Brigade members to join FaceBook and create a group to better enable discussions and foster social networking. The group has been created, now we invite you to join FaceBook. I encourage you all to take advantage of this opportunity to “speak” with one another more directly. I will send you an invitation to join the group. Please do.

This is the link for facebook:<http://www.facebook.com/index.php?>

This is the link for the group: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=xxxxxxxx>

Pictures are optional, FaceBook profiles and the Writers Brigade do not require them.

Hope to see you on FaceBook!

<Manager>

WEEKLY AGENDA

Weekly agendas help the Writers Brigade manager and program director establish priorities. The agenda notifies the director of scheduled office hours and when the manager plans to be available. In the weekly agenda, the manager outlines exactly what she/he needs from the director during the week.



The weekly agenda reports on the status of all Writers Brigade current members, even if no action is necessary or they are not currently active (*e.g.*, they are waiting for an article to be published).

The director responds to the weekly agenda. See example of the dialogue between the manager and director. The director's responses are in caps.

[See Example: Weekly Agenda](#)

SAMPLE WEEKLY AGENDA

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

This week I am working Mon-2-6; Wed 2-6; Thur 2-6; Fri 2-6

Here is what I plan to accomplish this week:

1. <Participant A> is done with the ACCESS article. She sent me her post-write already. I need to respond to one question she had. By the way, will you be compensating the writers for each step as they complete it (finish writing article, submit it for publication and get it published) or all at once? My preference would be to pay step- by- step because the reinforcement occurs repeatedly, whereas if you wait until the end of the process, the wait could be rather long. Also, breaking up the checks makes it easier to adjust SSI checks. So, <member A> is ready for her \$50 fee for writing the article. OKAY. I'LL EXPECT HER INVOICE, PREPARE THE CHECK AND SEND A LETTER CONGRATULATING HER.

I HAD SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR <member A's> ARTICLE BUT DIDN'T GET THEM TO YOU IN TIME. LET'S HAVE MEMBERS SUBMIT THEIR PIECE TO ME SO I CAN GIVE YOU ADDITIONAL EDITORIAL SUGGESTIONS. THEN, YOU CAN DECIDE TO INCORPORATE MY INPUT (OR NOT).

2. < Participant B>has sent me a second draft. I will review it this week. OKAY. I WILL STAND BY TO READ IT WHEN YOU THINK IT IS READY.

3. I gave < Participant C> until Friday for his second draft. If I receive it in time, I will be reviewing it this week. OKAY.

4. < Participant D>. I wrote her last week and asked her to send me what she had by today. I have nothing in my inbox from her and did not hear from her all last week either. She has talked a lot about her home computer being a problem and having to go into work to use the computer to complete these assignments. I don't know whether she is even getting online at home or how often she goes in to work, etc. Any suggestions? ASK HER WHAT HER BARRIERS ARE AND GET A BETTER SENSE OF HER REALITY. SHE'S CONSISTENTLY MISSING YOUR DEADLINES, RIGHT? CAN WE HELP?

5. My CSUN article. I am not discouraged by <Writers Brigade staff> comments. Her concerns with word choices regarding acronyms and people first language will not be a problem. I will revise accordingly.

I take it from your comments that you do not feel 3 versions of the article are called for. RIGHT

6. Brainstorm ideas for evaluation procedures. We should discuss how to improve the Post Write to prompt more critical responses. OKAY. SEND ME YOUR THOUGHTS. WE CAN SET UP A PHONE CALL IF NECESSARY.

MONTHLY REPORT

At the end of every month, the program manager prepares a monthly summary of accomplishments and next steps. This helps avoid potential problems and helps the director and manager evaluate the progress of individual writers and the program. These reports are archived. The director responds by commenting, making suggestions and answering questions directly on the report before returning it to the manager.

An Example: Monthly Report: Manager to Director



MONTHLY REPORT: MANAGER TO DIRECTOR

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

FEBRUARY MONTHLY SUMMARY

1. The listserv was set up and explained to the members. So far the staff is using it to make announcements and assignments.
2. I sent out an orientation letter explaining the purpose and the procedures to <new member>. I requested mailing addresses for payroll and subscriptions to AS and ACN.
3. I assembled a roster of contact information for all current members for your convenience. See attached.
4. I assigned the first exercise, the biography to <new member>. This assignment will help her become familiar with email and the editing features. I answered her questions pertaining to logistics, length of the first assignment, and deadlines.
5. I made comments on three drafts of a technical article from <member A>, and on one draft each from everyone else. I am satisfied with <A's> revisions for the purposes of this assignment. I am awaiting 2nd drafts from the others.
6. I wrote a first draft of my CSUN presentation and sent it to you for comments. I invited Writers Brigade members to attend or contribute quotes for our presentation.
7. I recruited one potential member, but have received no response from him.

PLAN FOR MARCH

1. Finish the biography assignment for new member. Answer questions and concerns that come up about the process. Invite her to post her biography on the listserv.
2. Finalize draft of technical article for <member A.> Discuss possible publishers with you.
3. Continue revisions of second assignment for members working on technical articles.
4. Finish CSUN presentation. Everyone will share their sections and collaborate. I will add my conclusion based on what the other members of the panel have said before that point.
5. Attend CSUN. Represent the Writers Brigade. Attend meetings and functions for that purpose. Deliver presentation.

ASSIGNMENT LOG

Another mechanism for tracking progress is the assignment log chart. It helps document the status of assignments, letters, submissions and payments. The manager submits the assignment log to the director along with the monthly summary. See sample Monthly Assignment Logs below. Note: Use landscape formatting.

ASSIGNMENT LOG: <MONTH>								
Name of participant	Assignment: # and title	Start date	Correspondence	Drafts received	Assignment complete	Target Publisher	Sent to publisher	Payments

ASSIGNMENT LOG: <MONTH>								
Name of participant	Assignment: # and title	Start date	Correspondence	Drafts received	Assignment complete	Target Publisher	Sent to Publisher	Payments
Julie	Telework Penn State	9/22	PreWrite: 9/29 Researcher: 9/30: 10/25	10/5; 10/18; 10/23	Draft accepted 10/30	Advance Magazine	Expected 11/5	\$50
Stacey	Auto-biography-Manager	9/20	PreWrite: 9/29	10/7; 10/15; 10/22	Yes 10/27	Listserv	Yes	\$50
Sam	USSAAC AAC-RE-RC Pages	10/09	PreWrite: 10/8 USSAAC editor: 10/20	10/25	No	USSAAC Speak Up		No
Jeremy	HS Training Duke U	9/1	Researcher 9/5; 9/15. Waiting for response		No	?		No
Danielle	Literacy Penn State	10/19	Researcher 10/22 PreWrite 10/25	10/30	No	ConnSene?		No

III. THE WRITERS BRIGADE PROGRAM



The Writers Brigade program involves a process that requires cooperation and effective communication among the Writers Brigade manager, director, staff, writers, researchers, and publishers. The manager maintains regular contact with all Writers Brigade members and the director. The director acts as a liaison with researchers and, on occasion, publishers and other groups. Researchers are asked to verify the accuracy of articles, provide unique insights about their work and “sound bytes” for an article.

The program’s goals are to support Writers Brigade members to write and publish articles that highlight the ongoing work and outcomes of the organization. The process involves multiple steps. It begins with an assignment and ends with the publication of an article. Writers are paid at three junctures during the process. Each Writers Brigade member goes through this process three or four times and most members publish at least three articles during their tenure in the Writers Brigade program. The process is illustrated above and described in the pages which follow.

MAKING ASSIGNMENTS

The manager makes writing assignments in consultation with the director, taking into consideration the writer's interests, background, skills and abilities. Often, writers benefit most when exploring topics of interest to them. Each assignment has a beginning, middle and end and each writer works with the manager to meet expectations. The writer is paid at three junctures as he/she successfully completes portions of the assignment.



To begin an assignment, the manager emails a description of the topic and includes a packet of information, which may include an introduction to the research, activity and goals of the project, possible audience, websites with pertinent information and so on.

The manager corresponds with the member to ensure he/she understands the assignment

and can access all of the materials. Sometimes the manager may guide the writers background reading by asking questions based on the five W's of journalism: Who, What, When, Where, and Why. For example, "Who will benefit from the research being conducted?" and "Describe what the assistive technology device will do".

PREWRITE

Soon after sending background information, the manager assigns a PreWrite. The purpose of the PreWrite is to orient a writer to the topic, background materials and their intended audience for the article. The PreWrite is a set of questions aimed at helping a writer consider how to approach an assignment.

The PreWrite also gives a writer the chance to ask questions about the project and seek clarification about expectations.

The manager helps the writer understand technical vocabulary and different kinds of approaches to the assignment. Below is an example of PreWrite questions emailed to a Writers Brigade member.



1. *What is your target publication? What are its expectations or main distinguishing features?*

2. *Who is your audience? Who reads the publication? What are their needs? Interests?*

3. *What do you want to communicate in your article?*

[Note: This is a free write. Write down your understanding of the important information; key words, notes.]

a. *What is your main idea and thesis for the article?*

b. *What evidence, background information, examples and quotations might you need to write the article?*

4. *What questions do you have and how will you find the answers?*

DRAFT, EDIT, REVISE ARTICLE

After the writer completes the PreWrite and the manager and director have helped to answer any questions, the manager instructs the member to begin drafting the article and makes suggestions based on the member's PreWrite. Writers are told they can expect to write and revise multiple drafts. During the first cycle of the Writers Brigade, for example, we averaged about five or six drafts for an article and two drafts for a cover letter and/or interview questions. The manager proposes a deadline for each draft and revision.

All drafts of articles are stored so they can be revisited. Sometimes it is helpful to review early drafts to reflect on a participant's progress. Also, a writer may find an early draft useful if a publisher returns the manuscript with suggestions.



In editing an article, the Writers Brigade manager uses the tracking features of Microsoft Word. During the first assignment, for example, the manager determines whether the edits and comments are visible to a writer when drafts are exchanged. The manager also may teach a writer to use editing features through a series of instructional emails.

[See Example: Editing Tools](#)

EDITING TOOLS

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

To < Member >:

From: Writers Brigade manager:

The editing tools we recommend are available in Microsoft Word. Since versions of Word differ and each person's computer and operating system are different, we will work together to make the editing and revision process easy and efficient. Our preferred option is to use the Comment and Word's Tracking features.

The Comments tool is located in Word's editing features in a drop down menu (e.g., under Review in Vista). When you open a document that has comments, you can activate this feature by clicking on Comment. You will then see brackets with initials and a number in the text. These correspond to comments I have made in the text. If you cannot see a comment, just double click on the bracketed number in the text. You can also add a comment by selecting "New Comment."

The Track Changes tool is also located in Word in the same drop down menu (e.g., under Review in VISTA). Using Track Changes, I am able to make changes that are clearly marked in a color so you can see them. When you submit a draft, I will edit your article and send you (1) a "dirty" copy, full of colored marks and changes, and (2) a "clean" copy. In the clean copy all changes are accepted (no longer visible). By having both copies, you will see all changes and comments and, if you agree with them, you can continue your work from the clean copy.

When you are preparing your drafts, please identify them as follows:

1. To save your draft, please select Save As. Then start with the letters WB (for Writers Brigade), plus a title, plus your initials and the number of the draft. For example, let's say that you were writing an article about accessing the Internet with AAC. You would submit your first draft saved as: WB+internet+AG.doc. NOTE: The first draft does not get a number.
2. After I edit the article, I will send it back and add my initials. WB+internet+AG+JS.doc
3. Each additional draft gets a number. For example: WB+internet+AG1.doc. It's a first revision so it's AG1.
4. Please save all files with a .doc extension.
5. Save a "dirty" copy to show all your changes. WB+internet+AG3.doc
6. Save a "clean" copy by copying the dirty copy and pasting it into a new document. This will show the document with changes accepted. WB+internet=AG3clean.doc
7. Email both documents to me.

Don't worry. This process may seem confusing, but once you become familiar with the editing tools, you'll find it makes things easier. Let me know if you run into any difficulties and we can solve them together.

FINAL DRAFT

The manager accepts final revisions and informs the writer that he/she has successfully completed the assignment. Depending upon the nature of the assignment, the manager and writer may ask others to review the final draft. For example, they may ask the researcher to make sure facts are accurate and quotations are acceptable.

The manager also forwards the final draft of the assignment to the director who checks the draft and may suggest further editorial changes. The manager and director begin to discuss publication options during these exchanges.

The manager directs the writer to submit an invoice to the director for \$50. The director prepares a check and sends a congratulatory letter to the writer for completing step one of the assignment.



SUBMIT FOR PUBLICATION

A major goal of a Writers Brigade is to publish articles about ongoing research, development, training activities and projects within a particular organization/entity. The manager, director and writer agree on publication options for the article. In prioritizing these options, they consider both print and electronic formats. They also discuss which publication is most likely to reach the desired audience. Other considerations include the Writers Brigade past experience with publishers, publication schedules, researcher/writer/ organizational preferences and so on. Sometimes articles are solicited from a publisher, or in the case of the first assignment, it is already known (a.k.a. the Writers Brigade listserv); otherwise the manager develops a list of potential publishers and prioritizes them.



Before submitting an article for publication, the manager will prepare a cover letter. The letter introduces the article and the writer and also provides information about the Writers Brigade, the organization and funding agency. The manager may include a copy of the writer's autobiography and his/her picture, as well. As Writers Brigade members become more familiar with the Writers Brigade process and more skillful at writing, the manager will involve the writer in the preparation of cover letters.

As soon as the article is submitted for publication, the manager instructs the writer to send the director an invoice for \$25. The director pays the invoice and includes a congratulatory note.

[See Example: Cover Letter to Publisher](#)

COVER LETTER TO PUBLISHER

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear Sherry,

We have corresponded in the past about the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade.

ADVANCE Magazine previously has published material by our writers.

The AAC-RERC Writers Brigade supports people with complex communication needs in writing and publishing technical articles describing the activities of the AAC-RERC. Sarah Blackstone is the director of the program and I am the program manager.

We previously placed an article about literacy and AAC in *ADVANCE*. We now have another article we would like to submit.

The article, written by Michael Joyce, MA, is entitled “Fresh copy: The Scoop on the AAC-RERC Pages “. Mr. Joyce directs the reader to a continuing resource in Augmentative Communication News (ACN) and in *Alternatively Speaking* (AS): the AAC-RERC Pages. As the article outlines, readers highly value these Pages as an informative and affirmative source that lends a voice to the AAC community. Mr. Joyce’s article goes behind the scenes of the production of the Pages in interviews with Sarah Blackstone and Michael B. Williams who are the editors of ACN and AS, respectively.

Mr. Joyce is well known in the field of AAC as a prolific writer. He has published a disability rights handbook, a collection of his poems, and technical articles. He holds two masters degrees from University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Thank you for your serious consideration. Dr. Blackstone and I are looking forward to hearing from you. We would like to consult with you as the publication process progresses. Please allow us to view the final version before it goes to print.

Regards,

Johana Schwartz, Manager, AAC-RERC Writers Brigade
<email>

ARTICLE ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION

The manager maintains contact with the publisher throughout the submission and acceptance process. When an article is accepted, the manager tracks publication timelines and supports the writer in responding to publisher requests for additional information or changes to the article. If an article is rejected, the manager asks for specific feedback and shares this with the writer and director. The next publisher on the prioritized list is then approached after modifying the cover letter and accompanying materials. The manager updates the writer and the director of all relevant information.

When changes to an article are requested, the manager assures the writer that such requests are typical of the publishing process. A publisher's job is to enhance articles in ways that make them more appealing to their particular readership. The manager always asks to see the article before it is published to avoid a situation wherein changes made to an article actually misrepresent the content or writer's point of view.

When the article is scheduled for publication, the manager sends the writer the PostWrite and invites her/him to invoice the director for \$50. Once again, the director sends a check and a congratulatory note.



POSTWRITE

Few writers have experience evaluating their own work; however, collecting and documenting feedback is an important component of the Writers Brigade program. After a writer completes an article and it is submitted for publication and accepted, the manager sends the writer the PostWrite part of the assignment. The goal of the PostWrite is to encourage a writer to take responsibility for and think critically about their work and to offer constructive criticism about the editing process, the Writers Brigade program and the manager.

When the member submits a PostWrite, the manager replies to affirm any feedback. The manager does not defend, but rather, addresses concerns and takes them into consideration. Finally, the manager uses the PostWrite to identify writing skills that a member wants to work on, and thinks about ways to work on these skills in the next assignment. The manager encourages each writer to give feedback so as to further develop the program. Over time, members often witness their feedback influencing the direction of the program.

Two examples of PostWrite formats follow. One is a PostWrite Questionnaire and the other is a PostWrite Paragraph. Typically, the manager may begin by introducing the questionnaire. The paragraph works better when members have more experience writing articles and reflecting on the process.

[See Example: PostWrite Questionnaire](#)

[See Example: PostWrite Paragraph](#)



POSTWRITE QUESTIONNAIRE

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Congratulations on completing your assignment and with panache. I have attached the final step in the writing process: the Post Write. Please respond to the questions in the attachment honestly with regards to the assignment. I will consider your opinions carefully. We value your thorough feedback. Your comments will help shape the Writers Brigade program, and will be useful for evaluation purposes.

Thank you for your constructive input. Please send this back to me by a week from today.

1. Please comment on components of this assignment. Please write Yes or No in the space provided, along with any comments you might wish to make.

Nature of the assignment

Did you find the assignment understandable?
Did the information you received lend itself to being summarized?
Was the meaning of any part unclear to you?
Did you feel you could make the information interesting to your target audience?

Pacing of assignment

Was there enough time to complete each step? If not, why not?

Clarity of task

Were the instructions I gave you clear? If not, why not?
Was there anything you were uncertain about? If yes, what was it?
Did you think the task was reasonable? If not, why not?

Supplemental Materials

Did the Background Information we provided in the PreWrite help you plan and organize your article? If not, why not?
Was there anything superfluous to the article in the Background Information? If yes, what was it?
Did you need additional information to write your article? If yes, what kind? Did you get it? How?

2. What about your final product represents improvement over your original draft and/or over things you've written previously? Please give some specific examples.

1.
2.
3.

3. What particular aspects of writing are you most interested in working on? Please rank/order the items. List the one you are most interested in working on FIRST and so on. Note: You do not have to rank all the items.

Aspects of Writing
1. Organization and transitions -How well your paragraphs and ideas flow.
2. Stating things more succinctly. Brevity- Avoiding wordiness.
3. Accuracy of technical information.
4. Stating things using simple language, with a reader-friendly voice.
5. Writing in ways that are more interesting.
6. Other aspects: Please specify
I am most interested in working on the following aspects of writing:

4. Which aspect of writing do you think I can help you with the most?

5. What did you find helpful about comments I made and/or our exchanges we had during the revision process? Please give an example of something I did that was

Very helpful to you
Moderately useful to you
Less helpful than some of the other changes suggested

6. The next three questions inquire about issues related to employment.

a. Has any of your writing been published since the last time you filled out this form? If so, please provide the bibliographic information: Last name, First initial. (Year). Article Title. Journal title, vol. Number, pages.
HERE IS A MODEL FOR THE FORMAT: Heyman, K. (1997). Talk radio, talk net. Yahoo!, 3, 62-83

b. Have you had any job offers since the last time you filled out this form? If yes, please describe.

c. Do you think about employment any differently than you did since the last time you filled out this form? If Yes, how?

7. Tell me anything else you want me to know about the writing process for this assignment.

The following are optional suggestions:

a. What happened that aided you or obstructed you in the physical process of writing, e.g., medical issues, scheduling time to work, technology upgrades, technology breakdowns, and relevant conversations/experiences/resources?

b. Did the information you are writing about enlighten you or prove useful? What did you learn from the article you summarized that is helpful to you?

c. Have the contents of this article come up in any conversations while you were working on it? How?

d. Who, if anyone, has expressed interest in publishing or distributing the article?

e. Describe any frustrations you encountered? For example, did you want to throw part of your work (or my comments) in the trash?

Please add any additional comments:

POSTWRITE PARAGRAPH

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Please respond to the following questions, giving specific details and examples. The questions are specific to the article and ask that you reflect on the writing and editing process. Please do NOT write directly on the form. Instead write a 200 word paragraph that describes your experience during the assignment, giving specific details and examples. Attached is a copy of the final version of your article so you can refer to it when giving feedback.

Note to Managers: You need to list questions and give a due date. There are examples of PostWrite Questions in the next section

IV. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT

The first Writers Brigade assignment challenges each new member to draft, edit and revise a short 300 word autobiography that focuses on their personal goals and experiences as a writer and on how they accomplish their goals using AAC and other technologies and supports. By preparing a short biography, new members become familiar with the Writers Brigades editing process and how carefully and critically the manager will edit their writing. They also learn the PreWrite, the PostWrite and invoicing components of all Writers Brigade assignments.

1. Receiving assignment and preparing the PreWrite.
2. Drafting, editing, revising 300 word Autobiography.
3. Posting completed Autobiography on Writers Brigade listserv.
4. Completing the PostWrite.
5. Submitting invoice for \$50.

This assignment gives the manager a chance to work with each member one-on-one to identify difficulties that may arise with technology compatibility, email attachments and formatting as they exchange multiple drafts and revisions to the autobiography.

Members are encouraged to publish their autobiography on the Writers Brigade

listserv, alongside the other Writers Brigade members, staff and alumni. Finally, they also learn how to submit an invoice for \$50 upon completion of the assignment.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT AND PREWRITE

The Autobiography assignment helps members transition from writing academic papers, essays, stories and poetry to mastering a technical writing genre, which is the focus of the Writers Brigade. The manager asks members to write 300 words about their goals and experiences as writers and how they accomplish their writing goals using various technologies and supports.

Because all Writers Brigade staff, as well as current members and alumni complete this assignment, new members are able to read the autobiographies of other writers before they prepare their own. They quickly learn that autobiographies differ in tone and voice as well as content.

To introduce the assignment, the manager emails the writer instructions and the PreWrite. The manager always includes a due date.

[See Example: Description of Autobiography Assignment](#)

[See Example: PreWrite for Autobiography](#)

[See Example: Staff Autobiography \(see also Appendix B\)](#)



DESCRIPTION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear <New member>,

Here it is - your first writing assignment!

As I mentioned, the staff would like to get to know you and we would like you to get to know us. Also, we want the first task to be relatively straightforward to give us all a chance to resolve any bugs that may crop up in using software or email during the writing and editing process.

First, review the attached biographies from our staff members. They represent a variety of approaches to writing personal profiles and statements. Consider the style each author uses. Also, review the sample PreWrite in the attachment and use it as a model for outlining your response to this assignment.

Your assignment is to complete Question 5 of the PreWrite and then write a 300 word autobiography from the point of view of your experiences and goals in writing and your use of AAC and other technologies to accomplish your goals.

For the purposes of this assignment, you may email your PreWrite notes to me with your first draft.

When writing an autobiography, it is hard to be selective because all our experiences may seem important and may make interesting reading. Thus, most biographies take a specific perspective, emphasizing one aspect of a life. The biography of an author might concentrate on his/her literary career and highlight events that inspired the author's work, omitting other details. For example, in my autobiography, which I share with you, I mention that I am disabled but did not describe how I became disabled, my childhood, my family circumstances, etc. I included only what was relevant to my interests and work as a writer. The challenge is to be selective and decide what you will include. Your readers will not know everything about you from this piece, but leaving the reader with unanswered questions can be a good thing!

I understand that you have other commitments. Please send me your PreWrite and autobiography in whatever stage of completion it is by <one week>. I will read it and make comments and suggestions. This will begin a series of exchanges during which I will edit your work and make suggestions and you will revise and redraft your autobiography. If you have difficulty receiving and/or opening multiple attachments, please let me know and I will be happy to send them to you individually.

Once I accept the final version of your autobiography, you will complete a PostWrite. I will instruct you about preparing and sending your invoice for \$50 when the time comes. Thanks! I look forward to reading your work.

<Manager> with a cc to Director

PREWRITE FOR AUTOBIOGRAPHY

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

To: <Member>

Re: PreWrite for your autobiography

The PreWrite is an initial step in the writing process. It requires that you spend time thinking about what you are going to write and how. It reminds you to take into consideration your intended audience, your purpose for the article, what kind of language you will use and what tone you want to convey.

The following PreWrite questions are designed to help you think through some of these issues in advance. The attached PreWrite has five questions. Because this is your first assignment, I have answered four of them to help orient you to the assignment. Thus, you are only expected to answer question #5. Please submit your answer along with a first draft of your autobiography by <date>.

I am looking forward to reading your draft and working with you on this assignment. Don't hesitate to email me if you have questions.

Also attached are examples of autobiographies written by other Writers Brigade members and staff. They may serve as models. They certainly provide evidence that everyone's autobiography has a unique voice, tone and story to tell. Have fun with this assignment.

PreWrite Questions

1. What is your target publication?

Answer. It is internal--the Writers Brigade listserv. Your short autobiography may help define and describe the Writers Brigade to others, as well as introduce you to potential publishers. Writers may wish to use their autobiography in a portfolio of their writing.

2. What are its expectations or main features that distinguish it?

Answer. 300 words about a writer's goals and experiences with writing. Writers Brigade members are encouraged to include information about how they accomplish their writing goals using various AAC technologies and supports.

3. Who is its audience-who reads it?

Answer. Writers Brigade staff, members and alumni, as well as potential publishers and employers.

4. What are their needs?

Answer. Your Writers Brigade colleagues, staff and alumni want to get a better sense of: Who is participating, the background of members, their goals and experiences related to writing, what has been influential in enabling people to write and perhaps a writer's employment and personal goals, particularly as they relate to writing.

5. What do you want to communicate to your target audience?

Please complete this question. You may include the main idea and thesis you want to express as well as some background information, examples and quotations. Here is an example of notes Johana Schwartz made for her PreWrite before she drafted her autobiography:

Communication obstacles led to my valuing effective communication. Motivated me to get college degree in English, to pursue career in writing and publishing.

Anecdote about English class where disability canon not on list. How this motivated me to promote disability and AAC canon.

My goal of publishing writing by people with disabilities. How the Writers Brigade helped me meet this goal of expanding genre, example of SLP, and my new capacity with the Writers Brigade.

STAFF AUTOBIOGRAPHY
AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE
(SEE ALSO APPENDIX B)

Johana Schwartz, Manager
AAC-RERC Writers Brigade 2003-2008

Living with cerebral palsy, I have always faced and overcome communication barriers. Relying on dysarthric speech, a Light Talker, a Liberator, and now a Pathfinder, figures prominently in my daily life. Over the years I have come to appreciate the value of effective communication. This led to my completing a bachelor's degree in English at Stanford University with an eye to entering the field of writing and publishing. I identified this market as an arena in which I could share my thoughts with a large audience.

In one of my English classes, my professor passed out a list of obscure canons of literature and observed that every population niche is represented by its own body of literature. I was appalled to realize that the disabled population, much less people who use AAC technologies, was not on this list. I decided at that moment that with my skills in writing and publishing, I would facilitate the development of a canon of literature by writers who use AAC. I am committed to helping people who use AAC find their writing voice and publish their experience.



During my term as a manager of the first AAC-RERC Writers Brigade, I supervised eleven writers gaining a voice through writing. The eleven members of the first Writers Brigade have collectively added over 100 articles to the canon of disability literature. After five years, the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade became well known and respected. I knew we made it when I saw articles by the Writers Brigade displayed in the waiting room of my Speech Language Pathologist.

I will see the further development of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade and the canon in my role as a consultant to the next manager. I will follow your progress with eagerness.

DRAFT, EDIT, REVISE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

When a new member submits his/her first draft, the sequence of editing, feedback and revision begins. The manager responds to the first draft by making suggestions and comments about the writer's choice of words, punctuation and grammar, as well as the content, tone and voice of the writer's work. For example, the manager may suggest that a writer shift his/her focus, add an example or provide more or less detail.

The manager does not rewrite the member's autobiography, but does challenge the writer to improve each draft until the autobiography is crisp, clear and engaging.

The manager approaches the editing job with technical editing skills and importantly, with a strong recognition that there is both a person and a paper involved. Writers who become members of the Writers Brigade program may have had limited experience being edited. Initially, they may not welcome critical comments and suggestions, no matter how positively they are presented. Some writers get defensive, while others may get discouraged. The job of the manager is to mentor and encourage, as well as

instruct each writer. Gradually, Writers Brigade members learn to accept and even appreciate criticism and suggestions because their writing improves and because, over time, they see several of their articles in print. As members gain new competencies, their confidence also increases. It is important for the member to understand that this assignment is just the beginning of a year-long process.

In responding to drafts of the autobiography, the manager provides both generic comments about the writer's work and gives specific feedback and suggestions, challenging the writer to make revisions.

See [Example: Providing Feedback on First Draft of Autobiography](#)



PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON FIRST DRAFT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Here is an example of how a Writers Brigade manager gets off to an encouraging start. This email was sent in response to a new member's first draft of the Autobiography assignment. The manager begins the email with generic comments and then provides specific feedback and suggestions.

Generic Comments

Nice going! I appreciate your prompt, yet thorough, response to the assignment. You have created a vivid portrait of yourself where your personality shines through. It was a pleasure to read. We are off to an excellent start.

Was the Pre-Write helpful in organizing your thoughts and writing? I have attached a copy of your first draft with comments included. You will see a lot of red ink. Don't let it discourage you. It does not mean I rewrote your autobiography. Rather, I have tried to point you in a more focused direction by suggesting what I would change and why. I hope you will consider my comments carefully and make your own decisions about what to change and how.

Specific Comments

I noticed that you have used some colloquial wording, like "cut it". In this context a casual voice is fine. However, in future assignments, you will want to experiment with more formal language. Do you have a thesaurus in your word processing program, maybe under Tools? When I am composing, I start by writing the first word that occurs to me, highlight it and select thesaurus, and then consider which alternatives are appropriate.

In your final paragraph, you have an opportunity to cycle back to your original statement you wanted to become a professional writer early on but the Department of Rehab nixed it. You might want to revise your final paragraph to bring this out. It would make a good closing statement.

Feel free to comment on how this process is working for you. I encourage you to ask questions, if you have any, about my edits and suggestions.

I look forward to seeing your changes to the first paragraph as requested in my comments on your draft. Please email me your next draft by <date>.

POSTING AUTOBIOGRAPHY ON WRITERS BRIGADE LISTSERV

After the manager accepts a finalized version of a member's autobiography, he/she invites the member to post it on the Writers Brigade listserv. The manager makes it clear that writers are not obligated to do so, but strongly encourages the member to share his/her work and introduce themselves to their colleagues, as well as Writers Brigade staff and alumni. The manager points out that posting their autobiography on the Writers Brigade listserv is a first step toward publishing their writing. See example below.



AN EXAMPLE FROM AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

To: <Member>

From: < Manager>

Date:

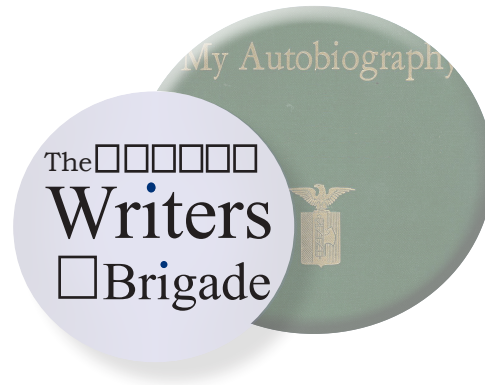
I encourage you to share your autobiography with your colleagues in the Writers Brigade by posting it to the Writers Brigade listserv. Although this step is optional, I expect that the Writers Brigade staff and your colleagues will be delighted to hear from you.

If you decide to share your final draft, please just copy the text of your autobiography into the body of an email and address it to <listserv address>.

I will send you the next step in this assignment (the PostWrite) in a separate email.

POSTWRITE FOR AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The manager sends the PostWrite for the autobiography assignment to the writer when their autobiography is complete. The PostWrite consists of a few pointed questions about the writer's experiences during the editing process. The PostWrite also asks members to identify any problems and suggest ways to improve the program. See example below.



POSTWRITE QUESTIONS

Please respond to the following questions using complete sentences.

1. Tell me anything I should know about the production of your autobiography.

I felt I improved my writing of the biography from the first draft to the last.

2. What do you think you did well in this assignment?

I think I conveyed well my abilities to write based on past experiences. I gave information I thought was relevant to the Writers Brigade staff.

3. What do you think you need to work on or any specific aspects you want me to address as we work together?

Even though I have written for a wide variety of individuals in the past, I hope being a part of the Writers Brigade will increase my ability to become a more versatile writer. In other words, I hope to improve my capability to "switch gears" from writing for academics to writing for the general population. I feel this will assist me with getting employment.

4. With reference to the revision process, what was helpful/not helpful about my comments?

I thought your comments were really helpful because you offered honest constructive criticism. I enjoyed the engaging discussions about the writing process and hope these will continue.

INVOICE FOR AUTOBIOGRAPHY

With the PostWrite, the manager sends the new member an email describing how to prepare and submit an invoice to the Writers Brigade director. The director sends the member a check, together with a congratulatory letter acknowledging the writer's accomplishment.

[See Example: Invoicing Email and Sample Invoice](#)

[See Example: Congratulatory Letter for Autobiographic Assignment](#)



INVOICING EMAIL AND SAMPLE INVOICE

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

To: <member>

From: <manager>

cc.: <director>

Date:

Congratulations. It is time to prepare your first invoice for \$50. You have successfully completed the Autobiography assignment. The invoice can be very simple. I am attaching an example in Microsoft Word, but you can feel free to use another format if you wish, just as long as you include the same basic information. Feel free to download the attached invoice to your desktop and make a clean copy every time you email an invoice to the director. Make sure you copy me.

The director will submit your invoice for payment. Your check will be sent to the address you provide on the invoice.

This process enables you to function as an “independent contractor.” You should get in the habit of invoicing people for your work. Please review the attached sample invoice and let me know if you have any questions.

SAMPLE INVOICE

Name

Mailing address

Phone

Date:

DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT DUE
------	-------------	------------

<date>	Completed Autobiography assignment	\$50.00
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CONGRATULATORY LETTER FOR AUTOBIOGRAPHIC ASSIGNMENT

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE



Augmentative Communication Inc.
1 Surf Way, #237
Monterey, CA 93940
831-649-3050; 831-646-5428 (fax)
www.augcominc.com

November 1, 2007

Dear _____,

Enclosed is a check for \$50 for completing your first assignment. Congratulations. Your autobiography was very well written, and we found it very interesting. Good luck on your next assignment.

Thank you for your impressive effort and for participating in the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Best regards,

Sarah W. Blackstone, Ph.D., Director, AAC-RERC Writers Brigade
President, Augmentative Communication Inc.

Enclosure (1)
cc. Johana Schwartz

V. TECHNICAL ARTICLES

Technical writing is a type of journalism and differs from other genres, such as essays, journal articles, short stories, biographies, opinion pieces and poetry. Technical articles aim to make information understandable to those who may (or may not) have much knowledge about a topic. Writers Brigade members learn to be sensitive about how they use language, who their target audience is, and how to make complicated technical information engaging and easy to understand.

1. Receiving technical article assignment.
2. Preparing PreWrite.
3. Drafting, editing and revising.
4. Editing Hints.
5. Interviewing researchers.
6. Finalizing article. Preparing Invoice #1.
7. Submitting for publication. Preparing Invoice #2.
8. Publishing article. Preparing Invoice #3.
9. Preparing PostWrite.

Writing technical articles requires skills that are acquired over time. Members write several technical articles during their tenure with the program. The manager works one-on-one with the members, guiding each through multiple assignments using the Writers Brigade draft, edit and revision process. The goal of the program is to publish all articles members write, thus expanding the impact of the organization's activities and the technical writing skills and

portfolios of all members. Writers are paid up to a total of \$125, in three installments, for each article published.

TECHNICAL ARTICLE ASSIGNMENT

Technical articles written by Writers Brigade members focus on making information about an organization's projects, programs and activities accessible to key stakeholder groups in a timely fashion by targeting specific audiences in an effort to raise awareness about certain issues affecting people with disabilities and increase the knowledge of individuals who may not read technical journals or attend AAC conferences.

Articles aim to make information that is difficult to explain, easy to understand, as well as to demonstrate how activities within an organization are positively affecting the lives of people with disabilities.

The manager makes all the technical writing assignments. The director often helps identify topics of importance and/or information that is ready for dissemination. All Writers Brigade members are assigned to write at least three technical articles on different topics during their tenure in the program.

To begin an assignment, the manager sends the member a description of the assignment and a packet of background information. Together the director and manager collect up-to-date and accurate information to assist the writer in developing his/her article. The information may include an abstract of the research/development proposal, the location (urls) of relevant information on websites and webcasts, related publications and PowerPoint presentations and project updates. If the material is lengthy, the manager may highlight important aspects for the writer.

Often, members need to develop a deeper understanding of research design and methodology and learn new concepts or vocabulary when they receive their assignment. The manager supports this process and encourages the writer to ask questions about research methods, technical terms and project goals, as well as strive to understand the results and outcomes of the particular activity or project they will write about. Learning to ask questions not only helps writers understand important information, but also helps them prepare articles that will make sense to others.

[See Example: Assigning Topics for a Technical Article](#)



ASSIGNING TOPICS FOR A TECHNICAL ARTICLE

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear <Member's name>

Your new assignment will build on your previous article about Michael Williams' webcast. Given your expertise with this specific webcast, and your interests in dissemination, we have decided that you should next cover the AAC-RERC webcast series. The AAC-RERC produces these videos, available online, to teach the public about the research they are doing. You are familiar with Michael's webcast, and the webcast featuring Colin.

I am sending you an article written by a Writers Brigade colleague about the concept of the webcast series. Please start by reading the attached draft to gain some background information. Your specific task will be to write an update to give publicity to the current set of webcasts. Try exploring the webcasts at the AAC-RERC yourself. Go to <http://www.aac-rerc.com> and click on webcasts from the menu on the left of the screen. Then, notice the name, subject, and partner associated with each of the webcasts. Click on some of the links to see how accessible they are to you. They are lengthy; you don't have to watch them in whole. We want you to get the idea, and experience them long enough to form an impression. What makes the webcasts educational or captivating, or revolutionary in your opinion? What features make the webcasts accessible to someone who uses AAC? To a student? A clinician?

Please try this lab practicum and let me know if you can download and watch the webcasts. Please check in with me before March 1st.

<Manager>

PREWRITE FOR TECHNICAL ARTICLES

Members prepare a PreWrite before they begin to draft their assigned technical article. The PreWrite includes questions about the article's content, supporting evidence and considers the target audience and possible publication venues. The manager invites the writer to review all background materials and encourages the writer to ask questions and seek information before preparing a PreWrite. A deadline is given.



As part of the PreWrite portion of an assignment, the manager may ask a writer to prepare an outline. An outline helps some writers organize their thoughts, identify important sections of an article and highlight key points.

[See Example: Technical Article PreWrite](#)

[See Example: Outline for a Technical Article](#)

TECHNICAL ARTICLE PREWRITE

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear < Member>

As you review the background information I sent, I would like you to generate a list of questions about things you don't understand, vocabulary you need defined, things you would like to know more about and/or things you would like to ask the investigators if you were to interview them. Please send me your questions by Monday.

Once I receive your list of questions, I will submit them to the principal investigator and get answers for you.

Then you will have what you need to do the PreWrite and begin your first draft. I will give you a due date for the PreWrite when I send you the researcher's responses to your questions.

The questions for the PreWrite follow:

1. What is your target publication?
2. What are its expectations or main distinguishing features?
3. Who is your audience? Who reads the publication?
4. What are their needs? Interests?
5. What do you want to communicate to them?
 - a. What is your main idea and thesis for the article?
 - b. What evidence, background information, examples and quotations might you need in writing the article?

OUTLINE FOR A TECHNICAL ARTICLE

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Note: The manager's comments are in red caps. They were sent to the author.

A Look at Telework: A Draft Outline

YOU CAPTURED A LOGICAL STRUCTURE TO THIS ARTICLE. I SUGGEST BEGINNING BY INTRODUCING THE LEAD RESEARCHER AND HOST UNIVERSITY. THEN YOU CAN PROCEED WITH YOUR DEFINITION OF TELEWORK AND THE REST OF YOUR OUTLINE.

I. Basic work duties that are performed from someplace other than a typical workplace with Internet or telecommunications is known as telework.

II. Participants in telework must meet certain criteria in the study. **YES. THESE DEFINE THE "WHO."**

- a. Have cerebral palsy.
- b. Don't have enough speech to meet their communication needs
- c. Use an AAC device
- d. Must have been employed 10 hours per week within the last 2 years
- e. Used telework during last employment experience

III. There are three phases of telework **IN THE STUDY.**

a. In phase 1 a focus group made up of AAC users is formed to gather the positive and negative areas of telework. This takes place over the Internet and is moderated by a telework advisor. **IT ALREADY HAPPENED. PLEASE WRITE IN PAST TENSE**

b. In phase 2, information additional to phase 1 is gathered from potential employers, AAC users actively seeking telework, co-workers and the support personnel including vocational rehabilitation counselors. Information is also gathered from these same sources on gaining employment via telework. **DESCRIBE IN PAST TENSE AND THEN GIVE RESULTS. YOU CAN FIND THESE IN NUMBER 4 BELOW AND OTHER ATTACHMENTS.**

c. In phase 3, instructional tools are developed to show potential employers the advantages in employing AAC users through telework. Phase 3 also focuses on how these tools affect the ways employers think and feel about telework. **THIS COULD BE YOUR CONCLUSION. IT FOLLOWS RESULTS FROM THE ONLINE FOCUS GROUP.**

4. Although there are advantages to telework, disadvantages remain.

a. Advantages include: working from home, having a flexible schedule, forming new relationships with fellow employees and the financial aspect.

b. Disadvantages include: technical difficulties or equipment problems, the declined face to face communication with co-workers, possibly being "overlooked" for promotions.

GOOD START. NOW YOU CAN MOVE ON. TIME TO BEGIN WRITING YOUR FIRST DRAFT OF THE ARTICLE. PLEASE SEND ME WHAT YOU HAVE BY <DATE>. YOU ARE WELL ON YOUR WAY.

DRAFT, EDIT, REVISE TECHNICAL ARTICLE

The Writers Brigade manager guides each member through the process of drafting and revising three technical articles. Typically, the writer and manager exchange multiple drafts of each article, regardless of the complexity of the material, the writer's skills and his/her comfort with the topic. By repeating this "draft and revise" process three times, writers gain experience, expertise and confidence. Most importantly, their writing improves. Alumni report that the Writers Brigade editing process became a valuable tool for them.

The manager sets deadlines for each draft. If a writer is unable to meet a deadline, he/she notifies the manager immediately. Conjointly, they set a new deadline. Reasons for missing deadlines have included medical issues, difficulty scheduling time to work, technology upgrades, technology breakdowns, relocation issues and difficulties with personal assistants.

The manager and writer use the editing tools that worked for them during the autobiography assignment, e.g., Microsoft Word editing tools. They label each draft and revision of the article, according to a structure that identifies the Writers Brigade, the article topic, the author and the number of the draft, the editor and the number of the revision. The label always ends with a "doc" extension.

1st draft of rb's article on telework: [WB+telework+rb.doc](#)

2nd draft of rb's article on telework. [WB+telework+rb1.doc](#)

JS edited version of 2nd draft of rb's article: [WB+telework+rb1+js1.doc](#)

2nd draft clean (revisions accepted). [WB+telework+rb1+js1clean.doc](#)

The manager explains the importance of multiple drafts, recognizing that some writers may not have been edited before or may feel defensive about suggestions or changes made to their article. The manager is encouraging and explains that editing is an important part of the writing process. Over time, all writers do adjust to the editing process and appreciate the results that good editing brings.



[See Example: Email to Writer about Editing Draft of Article](#)

[See Example: Editing Using Prompts](#)

[See Example: Editing: Making Revisions](#)

EMAIL TO WRITER ABOUT EDITING DRAFT OF ARTICLE

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear <Member>,

Thank you for revising so quickly and thoughtfully. I sense from this draft that you are dedicated to promoting disability awareness through writing. Joining the Writers Brigade was a good decision. The program will grant you the opportunity to spread the word to a variety of readers.

I appreciate your values of taking initiative and making changes. Both skills will help you in your revisions to improve your writing.

Your paragraphs worked well but complement each other better in a different order. I moved some paragraphs around for you. See how they read in the attachment labeled "clean copy 1b".

You raise some interesting ideas in this new draft. In the other attachment, I ask you to explain and expand on some sentences to make sure I understand them correctly and to learn more about your accomplishments.

When you revise, use the text in the clean copy document as your starting point. Copy it into a new blank document and revise as you wish.

You have responded to me with remarkable speed and very professionally. Do you think you could send me your next draft by <date>?

Thanks,

<Manager>

EDITING USING PROMPTS

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

In most assignments the editor approaches the editing process by giving prompts, as well as suggestions for revision. Prompts are particularly helpful for members who already have experience writing and editing. They challenge the member to improve without making the changes for them. An example of this approach follows. The first part is a draft of an article sent to the editor. The second part is the same article with the editor's comment interspersed throughout in red caps.

1. **DRAFT OF ARTICLE BEFORE EDITS.** From writer to editor.

Regular readers of SpeakUP might have noticed an ongoing column that showcases articles by participants of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. The column materializes outcomes of the Writers Brigade: increase authorship of those with complex communication needs, and keeping you informed about the latest research into AAC technologies. SpeakUP has brought you articles about the activities of the AAC-RERC during the first cycle of the Writers Brigade:

AAC and All That Jazz: Not Just Another Conference by Pamela Kennedy
Bubbly Ball by Johana Schwartz
The Full-Time Job of Getting a Full-Time Job by Tracy Rackensperger
The scoop on the AAC-RERC by Mick Joyce
Visual Scene Displays by Lauren Baxter
What's new at the AAC-RERC? by Tom Younkerman

There will be more of these great articles since the Writers Brigade has been funded for a second cycle during the third session of the AAC-RERC. The AAC-RERC Writers Brigade has some key changes and aspirations to announce. The AAC-RERC proudly presents Dr. David McNaughton as the new director of the Writers Brigade and Pamela Kennedy as the new program manager and editor of the Writers Brigade. The Writers Brigade will move its home base from Augmentative Communications Inc. to Pennsylvania State University. Pamela will continue to lead a cohort of four to five writers at a time as they prepare and publish technical articles.

The new term of the Writers Brigade also brings with it new endeavors. These new endeavors include: preparing and publishing different genres of articles, and a new manual or "survival guide" for organizations and the Writers Brigade. The guide is being developed by former program manager and current program consultant, Johana Schwartz, who is utilizing the help of former director and current program consultant, Sarah Blackstone. The guide will be an all access look at how the Writers Brigade developed, functions, and what could be improved. The guide is a function of the larger goal of the Writers Brigade to expand. It is meant for any organization that wishes to implement a program similar to the Writers Brigade and gives the means on how to set it up and run it.

In conclusion, we hope that the members of USSAAC will benefit from reading the upcoming articles in SpeakUP's Writers Brigade column.

2. **DRAFT WITH EDITOR'S COMMENTS.** USING PROMPTS (in red).

Overall, great representation of the facts. Now you need to tailor the outline it

reflects the values of the organization and speaks to the readership.

During my meeting with Sam Sennott, he told me that he'd like to see the magazine become the voice of people with CCN. This article is your chance to be the voice of the WB. You have been the expert on the program for the last five years. Tell your reader what you've seen in that time.

Regular Readers of SpeakUP might have noticed an ongoing column that showcases articles by participants of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade.

Two of USSAAC'S current goals are AAC awareness and widening the audience of the magazine. As a result, new memberships continue to increase each month. In order for the readers to understand the significance of this article, these questions need to be answered in your first paragraph:

What are the AAC-RERC and WB?
What is their purpose?
Who are you?
What is your relationship to the project?

The column materializes outcomes of the Writers Brigade: increase authorship of those with complex communication needs, and keeping you informed about the latest research into AAC technologies.

SpeakUP has brought you articles about the activities of the AAC-RERC during the first cycle of the Writers Brigade:

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What's new at the AAC-RERC? by Tom Younkerman

How has USSAAC played a role in the program besides the publications in SpeakUp? Round out the Writers Brigade and USSAAC a bit.

There will be more of these great articles since the Writers Brigade has been funded for a second cycle during the third session of the AAC-RERC. The AAC-RERC Writers Brigade has some key changes and aspirations to announce. The AAC-RERC proudly presents Dr. David McNaughton as the new director of the Writers Brigade and Pamela Kennedy as the new program manager and editor of the Writers Brigade. The Writers Brigade will move its home base from Augmentative Communications Inc. to Pennsylvania State University.

How were you and Sarah involved in this change? How are your successes connected to the expansion? What are the keys behind your successes?

Pamela will continue to lead a cohort of four to five writers at a time as they prepare and publish technical articles.

The new term of the Writers Brigade also brings with it new endeavors. These new endeavors include: preparing and publishing different genres of articles, and a new manual or "survival guide" for organizations and the Writers Brigade.

The guide is being developed by former program manager and current program consultant, Johana Schwartz, who is utilizing the help of former director and current program consultant, Sarah Blackstone. The guide will be an all access look at how the Writers Brigade developed, functions, and what could be improved. The guide is a function of the larger goal of the Writers Brigade to expand. It is meant for any organization that wishes to implement a program similar to the Writers Brigade and gives the means on how to set it up and run it.

In conclusion, we hope that the members of USSAAC will benefit from reading the upcoming articles in SpeakUP's Writers Brigade column.

Mention the guide in your conclusion to create a transition to tie things together. Otherwise, this seems to belong at the end of the previous paragraph.

Sam asked me to write one a very short piece after your article so it seems like we are passing the torch in the magazine.

EDITING MAKING REVISIONS

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Another approach to editing is for the editor to make direct changes on the draft using Microsoft tracking features. It is often helpful to model the kinds of changes that can make the article better. This may include correcting the writer's typos, spelling and grammar, rewording a sentence to make it more concise, reordering sentences and so on. Revising the draft never means the editor rewrites the article. At the same time, the editor may challenge the writer to come up with a better conclusion, a new title, or a better way of phrasing a sentence. The editor may highlight words that are misspelled (rather than correcting them) or ask the writer to rephrase a sentence (using the active voice). Editors will want to use the writer's "good" sentences even when they suggest moving the sentence around. The following is an example.

DRAFT OF ARTICLE WITH EDITS USING TRACK CHANGES. From editor to author.

The Writers Brigade (WB) is a project of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement (AAC-RERC). This ~~program~~ **writers' workshop** operates under a two-fold mission: enhancing employability for adults ~~who depend on assistive technology (AT) with complex communication needs (CCN)~~ and publicizing the ~~research and development~~ activities of the AAC-RERC. Members in the WB ~~will~~ gain professional experience in writing and publishing articles covering issues and new developments in the field of ~~AAC and~~ AT.

Michael B. Williams and Sarah Blackstone, both AAC-RERC partners working through Augmentative Communication, Inc., conceived of the WB in 2003. They ~~were motivated by the~~ **responded to research** findings of their colleagues, David McNaughton and Diane Bryen, who reported the extremely low employment rates for adults with ~~complex communication needs~~ **CCN**. Williams and Blackstone envisioned a project that would offer work experiences to individuals who rely on AAC while expanding the dissemination efforts of the AAC-RERC.

CLEAN DRAFT TO AUTHOR. PLEASE ADD TITLE

The Writers Brigade (WB) is a project of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement (AAC-RERC). This writers' workshop operates under a two-fold mission: enhancing employability for adults with complex communication needs (CCN) and publicizing the activities of the AAC-RERC. Members in the WB gain professional experience in writing and publishing articles covering issues and new developments in the field of AT.

Michael B. Williams and Sarah Blackstone, both AAC-RERC partners working through Augmentative Communication, Inc., conceived of the WB in 2003. They responded to research findings of their colleagues, David McNaughton and Diane Bryen, who reported extremely low employment rates for adults with CCN. Williams and Blackstone envisioned a project that would offer work experiences to individuals who rely on AAC while expanding the dissemination efforts of the AAC-RERC.

EDITING TIPS



Here are some tips for editing technical articles. The manager teaches members to be sensitive to acceptable and effective uses of language. Because the Writers Brigade represents people with disabilities, the tips emphasize the importance of using “people-first” terminology and language that respects differences and does not demean. The editing tips also highlight common grammatical mistakes observed in

technical articles, such as the overuse of passive voice, misuse of technical terms and the tendency to say in many words what a good writer can say in a few.

[See Example: People-First Vocabulary](#)

[See Example: Being Mindful of Language that Demeans](#)

[See Example: Use of “Training” versus “Education”](#)

[See Example: Use of Technical Terms](#)

[See Example: Active versus Passive Voice](#)

[See Example: Concise and Precise Writing](#)

PEOPLE-FIRST VOCABULARY

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

The AAC-RERC Writers Brigade teaches its members the importance of using people-first vocabulary in all its technical writing and in its day-to-day operation. Note that the list below prefers the words “people” and “individuals” rather than “consumer”.

The manager of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade collected a word bank of people-first options that members could draw from in preparing their articles.

- ◆ Individuals with complex communication needs (CCN) (Note: this is currently preferred by the International Society of Augmentative and Alternative Communication)
- ◆ People or individuals with speech disabilities who use augmentative communication devices/ strategies/ techniques
- ◆ People or individuals with communication disabilities who use AAC
- ◆ People or individuals who speak/write using AAC technologies
- ◆ People or individuals who communicate using assistive technology (AT) (Do not use AAC in this phrasing because it repeats the word “communicate”)
- ◆ People or individuals who use communication devices
- ◆ People or individuals who rely on AAC (The word 'rely' is accepted but not ideal, because it implies dependence and helplessness.)
- ◆ People or individuals who use speech generating devices (SGDs) or VOCAs (Voice Output Communication Aids)

The editor and writers should keep in mind that these constructs are social; therefore they can change over time and are influenced by geography and cultural inclination. Thus, not everyone will agree with current or preferred terminology. An example follows:

I remember the meeting where I first heard that we should be saying "relies on AAC" because the United Kingdom AAC crowd felt that "uses" and "user" reminded people of the illegitimacy of drug users and the dependency of social users. Sometimes it is important to speak the language of the crowd you are addressing and sometimes it is important to try to get them to expand their minds.

BEING MINDFUL OF LANGUAGE THAT DEMEANS

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

When revising, writers learn to consider the implications of each word in an article and whether it dignifies the population described. For example: the common verb “to want” may portray the subject of the sentence as juvenile, immature, and excessively demanding. Writers should use their thesaurus to find more assertive alternatives for “want” and “need”.

An editor with an activist agenda may also challenge terms such as “under-served population,” as shown below: [Editor’s response in caps and red].

Improving the Availability of AAC to the (Underserved). **DO YOU FEEL THAT THE TERM “UNDERSERVED” MIGHT NOT BE AFFIRMATIVE? WHEN YOU ARE TALKING DIRECTLY TO READERS, AVOID WORDS THAT MAKE THEM FEEL LIKE THEY ARE LESS OR THAT HIGHLIGHT THEIR CHALLENGE.**

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF “underserved” SOUNDS LIKE “undeserved.” ALWAYS USE NEGATIVE PREFIXES LIKE “UN-” AND “DIS-” WITH CAUTION.

As a result of the editor’s comments, the writer decided to revise and used “a more diverse population” instead:

Improving the Availability of AAC to a More Diverse Population The complexity of AAC technologies may make it difficult for individuals who have a cognitive and/or language disability to use them. This is due to the high degree of learning required to become a proficient communicator. The AAC-RERC will carry out several measures to address this issue.

USE OF "TRAINING" VERSUS "EDUCATION"

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

The Writers Brigade does not proclaim or say that they “train” their members in technical writing. The task of the Writers Brigade is to “educate”, “support” or “coach” members in technical writing. Below is an exchange between Writers Brigade staff that addresses the use of this terminology.

NIDRR uses "training" as one of the required activities within an RERC. Thus, we are "given" a training (adjective) component as part of our program. And...training (noun), dissemination, research and development are required AAC-RERC activities. However, it irks me to say we "train" people (verb). We educate/support perhaps, but training evokes a stimulus/response approach and that's not what true communication or education entails. Historically speaking, an individual with a label of cognitive disability who is "trainable" was not "educable." Some people with disabilities had to fight to stay out of "trainable" classrooms in order to get a proper education. Part of writing about disability issues is understanding the social and historical meanings of words. These meanings change faster than dictionaries or government programs. Part of the work of writing about government programs is to describe them accurately rather than to accept the program descriptions. A word that means an "interactive, experiential, teaching-learning process" would be useful. Always encourage writers to come up with alternatives for the word "training".

USE OF TECHNICAL TERMS

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

When editing an article, the manager will monitor usage of technical terms. Research partners often have preferences for wording. It is important to check out terminology with the researcher to ensure that the article reflects their preferences and the terminology the writer uses is accurate. For example, one researcher intervened, correcting the wording of technical terminology in an article:

I have made a small number of changes in the manuscript and used "mark changes" to track my edits. One small technical point - the webcasts are "streamed" not "downloaded" - streaming makes it faster and easier for people to watch, downloading is slower and ties up hard drive space on an individual's computer.

ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE VOICE

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

The Writers Brigade members use their published articles to portray people with disabilities as productive. They master and promote the active voice in all contexts. Please visit the following websites for material on the active voice <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/01/> and <http://wwwnew.towson.edu/ows/activepass.htm> [Both sites last accessed on 3/16/09]

The manager can share this list of active verbs commonly used to describe research development with the members and help writers adopt an active voice in their writing.

Analyze	Evaluate	Promote
Assess	Examine	Provide
Collaborate	Expand	Provide information
Collect data	Facilitate	Re-design
Compare	Generate	Research
Describe	Identify	Review
Design	Implement	Study
Determine	Investigate	Teach
Develop	Make available	Test
Draw on the resources of	Measure	Train
Establish	Observe	

CONCISE AND PRECISE WRITING

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Publications often prescribe space allotted for each article and expect submissions to adhere to a certain number of words. A challenge for most writers is to prioritize what to communicate and focus on and what to omit to meet the word count. Articles should convey information concisely, which is often more powerful than saying everything. It is also good to use examples. Well-chosen examples can illustrate your point without providing much background information or explanation.

Good writers are selective in their wording and try to use powerful words (usually verbs, not adjectives or adverbs) that are economical. Trimming is an essential and rewarding skill in writing and editing, because it allows you to say more, and say it more effectively. Below is an example of trimming prompted by the editor:

BEFORE: One reason life gives me pleasure is that I can communicate better than I ever thought I would be able to.

AFTER: One reason for my happiness is that I can communicate better than I ever thought I would.

INTERVIEWING RESEARCHERS

The manager and writer may decide to interview the researcher/principal investigator during a technical writing assignment. Interviews can provide background information and can give unique perspectives to an article. The director checks with the researcher to see if he/she is willing to participate in an interview.

Interviews are typically done through email. The manager initiates contact with the researcher and then supports the writer to draft a professional cover letter and develop good interview questions. The cover letter should:

- ♦ Introduce the writer as a member of the Writers Brigade
- ♦ Announce intent to target a particular audience
- ♦ Recruit the researcher's assistance by asking him/her to respond to a few interview questions
- ♦ Request quotations, sound bytes, clarification and updates
- ♦ Assure the researcher that the writer will keep in touch during the collaboration
- ♦ Express gratitude for his/her time
- ♦ Include contact information of the manager and director
- ♦ Include a formal salutation
- ♦ Suggest a "due date" for the researcher to respond. If the researcher does not, the manager or director can send a reminder.

Interview questions should be open-ended. They may ask for clarification or ask about a researcher's inspiration, purpose, expectations and hopes for certain outcomes. Interviews often yield a quotable quote.

Because researchers have limited time, the manager restricts the cover letter to one page and the interview questions to no more than five questions. The manager edits the member's interview questions and cover letter before asking the director to review the final version. [The director can often help by encouraging a timely response to interview questions and should be kept in the loop.] Then, the writer emails the cover letter and interview questions to the researcher.

After the interview is complete, the manager and writer can use the highlighting features in Microsoft Word to designate useful quotations. They can also compare notes and discuss where to put quotations. Some quotations work well as a concluding statement; others better serve as evidential support.

See Example: [Interviewing the Principal Investigator](#)
See Example: [Cover letter to Researcher with Interview Questions](#)



INTERVIEWING THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

To: <Member>

Re: Interviewing the principal investigator for your article

One common practice in journalism is to include quotations from sources you are writing about. In this case, that would be the researchers. Quotations can add a personal touch and act as a bridge between the reader and the research. They make an abstract topic like technology more intimate and approachable. I think this is a great opportunity for you to network with the principal investigator through an online conversation. If you were to have a conversation with the principal investor about this project, what would you talk about? I know you have already posed some technical questions about the research procedures. Review your draft (I have attached it for you) and formulate no more than five open-ended questions using the five “W”s. You might solicit their inspiration for the research, their motivation, their hopes for the outcome, how they envision it will help people with specific disabilities and what role it might play in society. Ask them to relate specific experiences with actual individuals who use AAC that they have worked with (try to develop anecdotes illustrate their research). You will also want to obtain specific statistics, if they have any, like what percent of Americans who use AAC struggle with literacy.

Please send me a draft of the questions you develop.

Thanks,

<Manager>

COVER LETTER TO RESEARCHER WITH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

AN EXAMPLE FROM AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear Dr. <Principal investigator>,

My name is <member>. You may remember me because I worked with one of your former students, Shawn, on his AAC mentoring project many years ago. Now, as a member of the Writers Brigade, I have an opportunity to write about one of your current projects entitled “Literacy Support Technologies for Individuals Who Use AAC”. I have read over your proposal and reviewed your recent Power Point presentation. The emphasis of the article is on project outcomes and is directed toward educators and parents.

To give me a better understanding of your project, I would appreciate if you would answer the following questions:

1. Can you explain what you mean by using a scaffolding teaching technique? Referencing slide number 11.
2. How will this computer-based program affect current techniques used to teach literacy to people who use AAC technologies?
3. What do you mean by “use of written language to support speech & language development?”
4. Can you clarify “decodes regular CVC words?” Reference slide number 28.
5. How will you provide access to word banks? Please explain what they are?

I would like to thank you for taking the time to helping me to get started. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

<Member>

FINALIZE ARTICLE – INVOICE #1

The manager decides when an article is ready for publication. Prior to making this decision, however, the manager may choose to consult with the director and/or researcher to ensure all information is accurate and the tone of the article is appropriate. It is a good idea for the director to review the article before it is accepted as final.

The manager tells the writer when his/her final draft is accepted, congratulates the writer and directs him/her to submit an invoice for \$50 to the director. Step one of the assignment is now complete. The director processes the invoice and sends the writer a check with a congratulatory letter.

During this phase, the manager and director may discuss and begin to prioritize publication options for the article. They consider advantages and disadvantages of print and electronic formats, taking into account the type of publication most likely to reach their targeted stakeholders in a timely fashion. They consider publication requirements, guidelines for submission and timelines for publication. Finally, they find out whether the researcher or organization might have a preference.

The goal is to make sure the article is published. The manager identifies and prioritizes the options in consultation with others who are involved.

See [Example: Invoice #1 for Technical Article \(Draft Complete\)](#)



INVOICE #1 FOR
TECHNICAL ARTICLE (DRAFT COMPLETE)
AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Name <Member's name>

Mailing address:

Phone:

Date: < >

DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT DUE
<date>	Completed Draft of Telework Article: Step 1 of Assignment	\$50.00

SUBMIT ARTICLE FOR PUBLICATION - INVOICE #2

The manager and director decide where to submit each article as it becomes ready for publication.

The publication process includes (1) identifying potential publications; (2) preparing a cover letter to the publication “pitching” the article; (3) submitting the article, letter and accompanying information to the publisher; (4) responding to a publisher’s decision (accept/reject) and making changes, as requested. If rejected, submitting the article to another publisher and (5) adding the citation to the writer’s bibliography when the article is published.

The manager checks out the requirements for submission, which are often posted on the publication’s website. Then, the manager prepares a cover letter, following the publisher’s guidelines. The cover letter introduces the article and the writer to the publisher. The manager may also include information about the Writers Brigade, the host organization and the funding source, as well as attach the writer’s autobiography and picture.

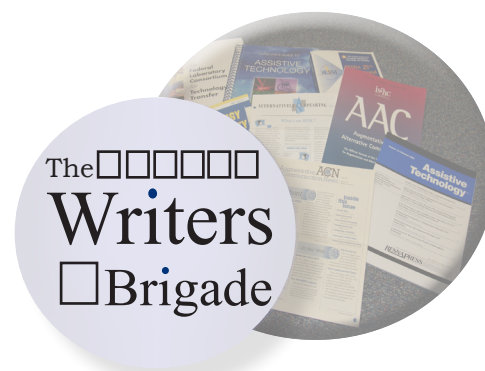
As members become more familiar with the writing and editing process, the manager will assign the writer more responsibility. Over time, writers learn to draft the cover letter and prepare other materials for submission.

When the letter, article and accompanying packet are submitted to the publisher, the manager instructs the writer to send an invoice for \$25 to the director. The director pays the invoice and includes a congratulatory note.

[See Example: Cover Letter to Publisher](#)

[See Example: Article Submitted to Publisher](#)

[See Example: Invoice #2 for Technical Article \(Submitted for publication\)](#)



COVER LETTER TO PUBLISHER

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear <Publisher>,

I am contacting you as the manager of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. The WB supports people who use AAC to generate articles covering the latest research and developments in the field of AAC. The goals are to spread the word about AAC technology research to a broader audience by publishing work written by people with disabilities, while simultaneously offering them work experience and support in writing technical articles.

I proudly present the most recent product of the Writers Brigade for publication in your <Name of Publication>. I have attached a manuscript entitled, “A Look at Telework” by Miss Lauren Baxter. In this article, Miss Baxter highlights a current investigation being conducted at the Pennsylvania State University. We hope that this article will enlighten your readers about the process of telework and the possibilities that come along with it.

Miss Lauren Baxter is a member of the Writers Brigade. She is a talented, aspiring writer, who is pursuing a degree in journalism. Since joining the Brigade, Miss Baxter has already published three technical articles. We sincerely hope to add another publication to her bibliography.

Thank you for your serious consideration of this manuscript. The Writers Brigade would like to support the <Name of Publication> in its publication process. Please contact me with questions, comments, or concerns about the article. We would like to preview the article again before it goes to print.

Thank you,

<Manager>

A Look at Telework

By Lauren Baxter, AAC-RERC Writer's Brigade

In 2003, AAC-RERC partner Dr. David McNaughton and his research team at Pennsylvania State University started the telework project to study the practicality of telework, as an employment opportunity for people with complex communication needs. Telework refers to duties that are performed outside a typical work place, usually via the Internet. Given the virtual nature of telework, McNaughton recognized the arrangement as feasible for people who use AAC to do their job. McNaughton explains "We are working on starting a pilot telework project with employers so we can track and support the process of telework from start to finish".

The telework project includes three phases. In the first phase, an Internet focus group formed to gather information on the positive and negative aspects of telework. Eight people who used telework during their last employment experience participated in the project. All rely on AAC because their speech is insufficient to meet their daily communication needs. During the six weeks of online discussions, the members shared the following advice about telework. A member of the focus group explained, "Include (the teleworker) in conference calls and chat rooms, don't limit work to e-mail." Another focus group recommendation was for employers to be flexible and accommodate the teleworker's needs. "It is important that the employer lets the worker be self-directed. Micro-managing works even less well when there is telecommunicating involved." And lastly, "A boss needs to be sure the employee is talked about in a professional manner even when the employee is not there." The focus group came to the consensus that employees should demonstrate their competence to potential and active employers in order to make a strong impression from a different location.

The members of the focus group revealed benefits of telework, along with the obstacles that the arrangement sometimes presents. The employees stated that they appreciate the flexibility of work hours, efficiency of working from home and financial opportunities. Reported challenges include staying on task, isolation from coworkers and being overlooked for promotions. Participants identified limitations in their assistive technology as a hindrance productivity as perceived by their employers. Investigators will also gather recommendations from employers about supporting teleworking. In the second phase, the research team will interview potential employers, co-workers and other support personnel, including vocational rehabilitation counselors. Then the team will use the feedback to create instructional tools to facilitate opportunities for teleworkers who use AAC. Once these guidelines become publicized, McNaughton will evaluate how they impact businesses and the employees who contribute through telework.

Telework, as seen in the example of the Internet focus group, has already proven to expand employment opportunities for people who use AAC. The resources developed by the project will become widely available and may further enhance telework as a viable choice. People using AAC may prominently join the workforce because telework enables them to contribute productively in a most comfortable setting.

INVOICE #2
FOR TECHNICAL ARTICLE (SUBMITTED TO PUBLISHER)
AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Name

Mailing address	Date:
Phone	

DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT DUE
<date>	Telework Article submitted to publisher: Step 2 of Assignment	\$25.00

PUBLICATION OF THE TECHNICAL ARTICLE - INVOICE #3

The manager works with the publisher and writer after the article is accepted so the process is carried out efficiently and professionally and the writer is able to respond to the publisher's requests.

To ensure the integrity of the article, the manager asks to approve the final version before it "goes to press."

When the article is ready for publication, the manager invites the writer to submit the final invoice (\$50) and to complete the PostWrite. The director processes the invoice and sends a check and congratulatory note to the writer. An example of the invoice follows:



INVOICE #3 FOR TECHNICAL ARTICLE (PUBLISHED)

Name

Mailing address	Date:
Phone	

DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT DUE
<date>	Telework Article published by Advance Magazine: Step 3 of Assignment	\$50.00

POSTWRITE FOR TECHNICAL ARTICLES

After the article is 'in line' for publication, the manager sends the writer a PostWrite with instructions. The PostWrite challenges the writer to reflect on the editing process and his/her personal experiences writing, revising and publishing the article. The manager also encourages the writer to consider what he/she may have learned or wish to learn during the next assignment.

The PostWrite also gathers feedback about the manager's role in supporting the writer and the Writers Brigade program in general. This information is archived and used to improve the program and to plan the writer's next assignment.

See [Example: PostWrite for Technical Article](#)



POSTWRITE FOR TECHNICAL ARTICLE

EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

1. Please comment on these components of this assignment. Your feedback will help us develop the program further. Please write Yes or No in the space provided along with your comments, as appropriate. The member's responses are in CAPS.

Nature of the assignment

Did you find the assigned article readable? YES
Did it lend itself to being summarized? YES
Was the meaning of any part unclear to you? NO
Did you feel you could make the information interesting to your target audience? YES

Pacing of assignment

Was there enough time to complete each step? If not, why not? YES, I WAS ABLE TO TAKE THE TIME TO RE- WRITE PARTS OF MY ARTICLE.

Clarity of task

Were the instructions I gave you clear? If not, why not? YES, YOU ALWAYS GIVE VERY CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS.
Was there anything you were uncertain about? If yes, what was it? NO
Did you think the task was reasonable? If not, why not? YES

Supplemental Materials

Did the Background Information you were provided in the Pre-Write help you plan and organize your article? If not, why not? YES
Was there anything superfluous to the article in the Background Information? If yes, what was it? NO
Did you need additional information to write your article? If yes, what kind? Did you get it and how? NO

2. What about your final product represents improvement over your original draft and/or over things you've written previously? Please give some specific examples.

1. I FEEL THE ORGANIZATION OF THE INFORMATION IN MY ARTICLE WAS BETTER.
2. MY ARTICLE SEEMS CLEARER AND INCLUDES MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SUBJECT.
3. IT SOUNDS STRANGE, BUT I FEEL SIMPLE AREAS LIKE PUNCTUATION WAS IMPROVED.

3. What particular aspects of your writing are you most interested in working on?

Aspects of Writing

1. Organization and transitions -How well your paragraphs and ideas flow.
2. Stating things more succinctly. Brevity– Avoiding wordiness.
3. Accuracy of technical information.
4. Stating things using simple language, with a reader-friendly voice.
5. Writing in ways that are more interesting.
6. Other aspects: Please specify

RANKING: Please rank order the items by writing their numbers below. List the one you are most interested in working on FIRST and so on. Note: You do not have to rank all the items. 2,4,3,5,1

4. Of the aspects of writing that you ranked, which areas do you think I might be most helpful to you?

2. STATING THINGS MORE SUCCINCTLY.

5. What did you find helpful about any comments I made and/or our exchanges during the revision process? Please give an example of something I did that was

Very helpful to you. CUTTING DOWN ON THE WORDINESS. BRINGING MY ARTICLE MORE TO THE POINT.

Moderately useful to you. WORDS TO SOUND MORE INTERESTING.

Less helpful than some of the other changes suggested. PUNCTUATION AND GRAMMAR.

6. The next three questions inquire about issues related to employment.

Has any of your writing been published since the last time you filled out this form? If so, please provide the bibliographic information: Last name, First initial. (Year). Article Title. Journal title, vol. Number, pages
HERE IS A MODEL FOR THE FORMAT: Heyman, K. (1997). Talk radio, talk net. Yahoo!, 3, 62-83

Have you had any job offers since the last time you filled out this form? NO

Do you think about employment any differently than you did since the last time you filled out this form? If Yes, how? NO

7. Tell me anything else you want me to know about the writing process for this assignment. The following are optional suggestions of how you might respond to this question:

- a. What happened that aided you or obstructed you in the physical process of writing? Examples may include medical issues, scheduling time to work, technology upgrades, technology breakdowns, and relevant conversations/experiences/resources.
- b. Did the information you are writing about enlighten you or prove useful? What did you learn from the article you summarized that is helpful to you?
- c. How have the contents of this article come up in conversation while you were working on it?
- d. Who, if anyone, expressed interest in publishing or distributing the article?
- e. Describe any frustrations you encountered? For example, did you want to throw part of your work (or my comments) in the trash?

YOUR COMMENTS BELOW:

BETWEEN MY DYNAVOS COMPLETELY BEING DOWN AND MY BODY
BREAKING DOWN, I WAS DEFINITELY HELD UP.
THE INFORMATION WAS EXTREMELY ENLIGHTENING AND I GOT A LOT OF
USEFUL INFORMATION FROM IT.
THIS WAS BY FAR THE MOST EXCITING SUBJECT FOR ME.
THERE WERE SEVERAL TIMES DURING MY WRITING OF THE ARTICLE THAT
THIS SUBJECT CAME UP BECAUSE OF MY EXCITEMENT.

VI. ACQUIRED PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

The Writers Brigade offers employment to individuals with disabilities in a completely accessible and competitive work environment. While expectations are high, the manager and

director make reasonable accommodations by being flexible, open and understanding and by setting clear expectations and deadlines. For example, some members can produce a page of writing in one week, while others may require more or less time.

1. Preparing invoices.
2. Preparing business letters.
3. Maintaining a bibliography.
4. Preparing a resume.
5. Public speaking.
6. Networking.

The Writers Brigade helps support the acquisition of not only technical writing skills, but also employment skills, such as preparing invoices, writing business letters, maintaining a bibliography and a resume and developing public speaking skills. The manager provides direction and scaffolding supports for members to assist them with the development of these important skills.

Because the Writers Brigade is dedicated to seeing its members achieve success both during and after their participation in the program, it strongly supports networking, which can lead to employment and other opportunities. The manager may assign members to interview

researchers, write covers letters to publishers and attend conferences, as well as encourage their involvement in the Writers Brigade Facebook group and listserv.

INVOICES

Writers Brigade members report that the compensation they earn distinguishes the program from other writing workshops. As a result, they feel their work is valued. They are perceived as professional writers.

The manager sends an email to each new member explaining the invoicing procedure and providing a sample invoice template. The manager instructs each member when to bill for work completed and how to submit an invoice. Members send their invoices by email to the director with a copy to the manager who documents the transaction in the monthly report. The director forwards the invoice to the organization's accounting department and prepares a congratulatory letter. The director makes sure all payments are sent and received.

[See Example: Invoicing Procedure](#)

[See Example: Invoice Template](#)



INVOICING PROCEDURE

EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

To: <Member>
From: <Manager>
cc.: <Director>

Date:

You will be preparing invoices as you complete assignments so we can pay you. Your invoice can be very simple. I am attaching an example in Microsoft Word, but you can feel free to use another format if you wish, just as long as you include the same basic information. Feel free to download the attached invoice to your desktop and make a clean copy every time you prepare an invoice.

The pay schedule for your autobiography is \$50. You will bill the Writers Brigade after it is accepted.

The pay schedule for technical articles is as follows:

\$50 for writing and revising each article to completion

\$25 for submitting the article for publication

\$50 when the article is accepted for publication

In addition, there may be other types of assignments, from time-to-time, with a different pay scale. We will inform you as these opportunities become available.

After you prepare an invoice, email it to the director at <director's email> with a copy to me. The director will submit it for payment and send you a check to the address you provide on the invoice.

This process enables you to function as an "independent contractor." You should get in the habit of invoicing people for your work. Please review the attached sample invoice and let me know if you have any questions.

INVOICE TEMPLATE
EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC

INVOICE

Name

<u>Address</u> <u>Phone</u> <u>Email</u>	DATE:
--	-------

DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
<Date>	Description of Work Completed (e.g., nature of assignment, name of article, submitted to <publisher>, etc.)	Total Due

BUSINESS LETTERS



Members of the Writers Brigade are expected to write formal business letters. The purposes of these letters are typically to (1) request an interview or information about a particular topic from a project director, researcher or developer or (2) introduce an article to a publisher. The manager often drafts the first letter for the writer so as to provide a model of professionalism.

As writers gain more experience,

however, the manager asks them to draft their own letter and then provides suggestions for improvement.

Business letters use a special format. A typical business letter will have the return address of the letter writer, the date, the name and address of the recipient and a formal salutation and closing. The body of the letter will be concise and to the point. Also, enclosures will be noted.

[See Example: Guidelines for Writing a Business Letter](#)

[See Example: Cover Letter to a Publisher](#)

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A BUSINESS LETTER

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

1. Return address of the letter writer.

1 Surf Way
Monterey, CA 93940

2. The date of the letter. Begin with the month; use a comma

January 31, 2009

3. Complete name, title, and address of the recipient.

Use "Mr." for a male recipient. If you do not know how a female recipient prefers to be addressed, it is best to use "Ms."

Ms. Jane Doe, Publisher
AT Journal
1234 Magazine Avenue
College City, CA 12345

4. Salutation with a colon. Dear Ms. Doe:

5. Body of the letter. Keep an initial business letter short. Most people do not have time to read long letters! In a one-page letter, you will usually only need three or four paragraphs, single spaced. Use a double space between paragraphs.

6. Closing. The most common closing is "Sincerely." Follow this with a comma. Skip four single lines after the closing and type your name. Sign your name in the space above your name.

7. Enclosure. If you are enclosing additional information with your letter such as a resume or an article, skip two single lines after your typed name and type "Enclosure" or "Enclosures." If you use the plural, you have the option of stating the number of enclosures in parentheses.

Enclosures (2)

COVER LETTER TO A PUBLISHER
AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Manager's contact information

January 31, 2009

Ms. Jane Doe, Publisher
AT Journal
1234 Magazine Avenue
College City, CA 12345

Dear Ms. Doe,

I am contacting you on behalf of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. The Writers Brigade supports people who use AAC to produce and publish articles describing the latest research and development in the field of AAC. The authors spread the word about the activities of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement, while simultaneously developing networking and vocational experience. I'm enclosing a brief description. Please view the following link for a more detailed description of our work: www.aac-rerc.com

I would like to know what your submission guidelines are, the kinds of articles you accept and their length. I would like to include the AT Journal as a potential destination for placing articles by Writers Brigade members.

I hope we can look forward to a fruitful collaboration. Thanks for your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Manager's signature

<Manager>, Manager, AAC-RERC Writers Brigade

Enclosure

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Writers Brigade increases the number of publications associated with the organization's activities, as well as the knowledge, skills and publication records of each member. The manager actively tracks all members' publications and bylines and maintains a working bibliography in APA format for each participant and for the Writers Brigade as a collective.



Members are expected to retain and update their own working bibliographies. As an article is published, the manager emails the member the new citation using an APA format. At regular intervals, the manager also sends the members and alumni their working bibliographies and asks them to reconcile the Writers Brigade version with their own personal version. This gives them a chance to add new citations.

The collective working bibliography is a critical way to track progress, document success and measure outcomes of the Writers Brigade program over time. The Writers Brigade bibliography is made available on the organization's website and distributed at presentations as well as shared with others, including the funding agency.

Because many Writers Brigade members continue to publish after they finish the Writers Brigade program, alumni are asked to update their bibliographies at least yearly. See Appendix A for the January 2009 version of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade collective bibliography.

[See Example: Instructions for Maintaining your Bibliography](#)

[See Example: Guidelines for American Psychological Association Style Guide \(APA\) formatting](#)

[See Example: Request to Update Bibliography](#)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAINTAINING YOUR BIBLIOGRAPHY

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Hi Bibliographers,

We have reached a stage in the Writers Brigade program where many of your articles are appearing in a variety of publications. You can take pride in seeing your by-line in print. You are realizing your potential as writers, which was our hope for the Writers Brigade.

As you accumulate publications of your writings, it is important for you to keep a record of your work in the form of a working bibliography. You will want to use this record for your resume or curriculum vitae. I recommend starting a running document. Every time you publish or speak to a group, add the new listing in chronological order. Authors are listed alphabetically. Multiple listings by the same author (i.e., you) are listed in chronological order.

We urge you to be inclusive in tracking what you publish, as well as where your writing appears. When you complete a Writers Brigade assignment, we will request an update from you on any work you have published, both through the Writers Brigade and on your own. Keeping a list of articles in print or online, public speaking presentations you make, personal websites you maintain, opinion columns, letters to the editor, listserv postings, anything at all, will make it easier for you to remember, document and report this information.

The Writers Brigade staff needs to assemble this information at least yearly to submit to the funding agency, NIDRR, who will note your progress.

I would like to direct you to the American Psychological Association (APA) style of referencing which applies to the technical writing we are doing. I encourage you to become familiar with the APA style and to try to implement it when you compile your bibliographies. I have attached some guidelines and examples of APA citations relevant to where your work has appeared so far. At the top of the attachment, you will find two websites from which I drew the information. Both websites are valuable resources that you will want to bookmark, especially if your work is published in a context that I have not included on the attachment.

For now, please review the examples in the attachment and start working on your comprehensive bibliography. Use this as an opportunity to dialogue with me or other staff, if you have questions. Then, next time you complete a post-write form, you should start documenting your publications using the APA format.

Congratulations on your publications so far. Here's to many more!

<Manager>

GUIDELINES FOR AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION STYLE GUIDE (APA) FORMATTING

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Resources:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> and
<http://www.wooster.edu/psychology/apa-crib.html#Examples>

[Both sites last accessed on March 16, 2009.]

Authors' names are inverted (last name first). If you are using more than one reference by the same author (or the same group of authors listed in the same order) published in the same year, organize them in the reference list alphabetically by the title of the article or chapter. Then assign letter suffixes to the year.

All lines **after** the first line of each entry in your reference list should be indented one-half inch from the left margin. This is called hanging indentation.

When referring to any work that is NOT a journal, such as a book, article, or Web page, capitalize only the first letter of the first word of a title and subtitle, the first word after a colon or a dash in the title, and proper nouns. Do not capitalize the first letter of the second word in a hyphenated compound word.

- ♦ Capitalize all major words in journal titles.
- ♦ Italicize titles of longer works such as books and journals.
- ♦ Do not italicize, underline, or put quotes around the titles of shorter works such as journal articles or essays in edited collections.

I. Print Periodicals

a. An article in a periodical (e.g., a journal, newspaper, or magazine)

Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (Year). Title of article. Title of periodical, volume number, pages.

b. Magazine article, one author

Henry, W. A., III. (1990, April 9). Making the grade in today's schools. *Time*, 135, 28-31.

c. Journal article, one author

Harlow, H. F. (1983). Fundamentals for preparing psychology journal articles. *Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology*, 55, 893-896.

NOTE: For a magazine or newspaper article, you need to include specific publication dates (month and day, if applicable) as well as the year. For a journal article, you do not need to include the month or day of publication.

NOTE: You need list only the volume number if the periodical uses continuous pagination throughout a particular volume. If each issue

begins with page 1, then you should list the issue number as well: Title of Periodical, Volume number (Issue number), pages. Note that the issue number is not italicized. If the journal does not use volume numbers, use the month, season, or other designation within the year to designate the specific journal article.

II. Internet Publications

a. Article in an Internet Periodical

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Date of publication). Title of article. Title of journal, volume number (issue number if available). Retrieved month day, year from <http://Web address>.

b. An online journal article

Kenneth, I. A. (2000). A Buddhist response to the nature of human rights. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 8(4). Retrieved month day, year from <http://www.cac.psu.edu/jbe/twocont.html>

c. Nonperiodical Internet Document (e.g., a Web page or report)

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Date of publication). Title of article. Retrieved month date, year from <http://Web address>.

NOTE: When an Internet document is more than one Web page, provide a URL that links to the home page or entry page for the document. Also, if there isn't a date available for the document use (n.d.) for no date.

d. Message posted to an online newsgroup, forum or discussion group

Frook, B. D. (1999, July 23). New inventions in the cyberworld of toylandia [Msg 25]. Message posted to <http://groups.earthlink.com/forum/messages/00025.html>

III. Conference Presentations

a. Conference paper (unpublished):

Shrout, P. E. (Chair), Hunter, J. E., Harris, R. J., Wilkinson, L., Strouss, M. E., Applebaum, M. I., et al. (1996, August). Significance tests: Should they be banned from APA journals? Symposium conducted at the 104th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada.

REQUEST TO UPDATE BIBLIOGRAPHY

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear Contributors,

I hope you take great pride in seeing your byline in the recent issue of *Augmentative Communication News* (ACN). The article entitled, "Comments on school experiences across four decades" looks fabulous, a result of your perseverance. Your dedication to the writing and revising process brings rewards. Appearing in a distinguished publication like ACN is a grand accomplishment.

I expect that you will want to share this article with others. Include it in your portfolio to present to perspective employers and document in your working bibliography. I enclose the citation for this article in the APA format. Please use it to update your bibliography. You may also wish to include it on your resume.

Blackstone, S., Baxter L., Chapple D., Geluso B., Merchen M., & Schwartz, J. (2005). Comments on school experiences across four decades. *Augmentative Communication News*, 17(3), 5-6.

Again, congratulations on your published article. Here's to many more.

<Manager>

RESUME

Perspective employers nearly always require applicants to submit a resume. Writers Brigade members learn how to maintain an up-to-date resume, which they are encouraged to use when applying for a job or when they submit an article or other type of writing for publication.

The manager keeps a working resume for each member of the Writers Brigade. Each resume documents the member's position, dates of service and responsibilities with the Brigade. Like a working bibliography, the resumes of members help document the outcomes of the Writers Brigade program. The numbers of publications and jobs held by members before, during and after the Writers Brigade are important factors in determining the value of the program over time.

Many formats are acceptable for a resume. A general rule, however, is to tailor the resume to the employment opportunity, keep it short (on one page) and make it reflect the individual's goals and relevant skills.

See [Example: Resume Instructions for Writers Brigade Members](#)



RESUME INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITERS BRIGADE MEMBERS

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear <Member>

Do you have a resume ready to send out? Does it include your name, address, employment history, education, current employment, volunteer work, awards and so on? If not, the attached guidelines for developing a resume will help get you started. You can also 'google' resume format and see lots of examples. www.google.com

During your tenure with the Writers Brigade, I will help you develop and maintain your resume. You will use it to introduce yourself to prospective publishers and employers. The most common resume format is called "chronological." You simply list your education and experience in reverse chronological order - most recent items first. The goal is to showcase your background and qualifications. For example, here's how you can list your job with the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade.

Your Name

2007- to present. Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on
Communication Enhancement (Duke University/Augmentative
Communication Inc)

AAC-RERC Writers Brigade member. Writing articles; submitting articles for publication; interacting with publishers, researchers and project staff; giving presentations at conferences.

Please send me a draft copy of your resume and include your present position on the Writers Brigade. We will update it from time to time, along with your bibliography.

Sincerely,

<Manager>

PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Writers Brigade sends representatives to national and international conferences to present information about the Writers Brigade and promote the organization and its activities. One advantage of public speaking is the immediate networking potential inherent in face-to-face contact. At conferences, members also will circulate through the vendor exhibits, meet delegates, research partners and other presenters. Such contacts can result in job offers and additional writing opportunities, as well as new friends and colleagues. These networking opportunities help writers further pursue their careers in a technical field.

For example in March 2007, Johana Schwartz, Tom Younkerman, Matt Kim and Lateef McLeod exercised their writing and public speaking skills at the Fourth Annual Bubbly Ball, "The Writers Brigade Takes On The World", co-hosted by United States Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (USSAAC) and Microsoft. USSAAC had selected the Writers Brigade to receive honors for its work in advancing the field of AAC. Each member who represented the Brigade was asked to give a short, entertaining speech. One of them described his experience at the conference as follows, "I enjoyed the camaraderie and working together as a group. I just liked being around others, who I could communicate with on my level." Another outcome was that Matthew Kim was invited to give a paper at ASHA's Special Interest Division 12 (ASHA SID-12) annual conference on the topic of "AAC in Academic Settings." Over 100 speech-language pathologists attended his speech.

Registration fees and travel expenses are covered by the organization and the manager and director help the member with traveling logistics. In addition, the Writers Brigade may compensate the member for composing and delivering the speech. The manager and director may also help the member write a speech, prepare a power point presentation and practice pacing a presentation. Members learn about differences between oral and written skills and how to participate on a panel and engage a live audience. The manager also includes a lesson on public speaking etiquette.

At the conference, Writers Brigade members and staff can meet to rehearse a presentation. They may decide who will introduce the Writers Brigade members and moderate a question period. The manager asks all members who participate in a presentation to complete a PostWrite. This helps staff document the experience, identify problems incurred by members and ultimately, improves the program over time.

[See Example: Public Speaking Etiquette](#)



PUBLIC SPEAKING ETIQUETTE

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

These guidelines were developed specifically for people who use AAC technologies. The goal is to assist them in preparing and presenting a speech.

- ◆ The speech should be delivered in sections on a device--not all at once.
- ◆ Use punctuation to help pace your speech. Commas are great for adding pauses, even if it is not grammatically correct.
- ◆ Give extra commas before a quotation or change of voice.
- ◆ Be aware of how acronyms are pronounced. For example: RERC should be written R E R C. USSAAC and ASHA should be written as USAK and ASHA.
- ◆ Do not bog down the speech by writing out all of the acronyms. A power point slide and/or handouts can explain them.
- ◆ Be concise and to the point.
- ◆ During the speech, look like you are actively typing on the device and remember to look at the audience.
- ◆ Make eye contact and gestures as the device speaks. Even though you are not personally speaking, it still helps the audience follow your presentation.
- ◆ Questions from the audience can be taken individually by the member after the presentation or the speaker can invite questions during the presentation. In any case, be clear about your preference.
- ◆ Handouts should include contact information and the working bibliography of the Writers Brigade.

NETWORKING



While members telecommute to work, networking opportunities abound through new technology, such as the eBlasts, Facebook and iGoogle, as well as conferences and publications. New members are first introduced to the staff of the Writers Brigade and the sponsoring organization, like the AAC-RERC. Then when members post their autobiographies on the listserv, they meet their colleagues and Writers Brigade alumni. They encounter a group

of peers and role models, who have succeeded as authors with complex communication needs. The inspiring role models encourage these fledgling writers by greeting them, answering questions, and demonstrating potential by sharing what they have learned and published.

Members also network with research partners and staff of the RERC as they prepare technical articles. The Writers Brigade prompts members to interview partners about their activities, to share their comments about the research and to exchange expertise. This is how they learn about technology that might benefit them. As one member said, "The WB not only helped me fulfill my dreams of working in the AAC industry; the connections I developed by working with the AAC-RERC assisted in moving road blocks so I could obtain my first speech generating device."

Networking within and beyond the Brigade can lead to personal improvements. When members research the AAC-RERC projects, they learn about the technology that can help them in self-expression. For example, Johana Schwartz said, "For people who rely on AAC, it is constructive to work with those who know about the technology. The RERC joined my team to help ensure that I received advanced technology and that it was functioning efficiently so that I could meet my work quota."

The Writers Brigade promotes networking beyond the organization. When members submit an article, they make a case for it to an editor of a publication. They become involved in the publication process, dialoguing with the team. These interactions have led to more projects and publications. Publishers may commission additional technical articles from a member whose writing they have published before or ask alumni to write brief updates or new articles regarding a previous technical article.

A Writers Brigade member enters a team that responds professionally and encouragingly. Researchers and the organization take pride in journalists who give publicity to their work and return the favor with work incentives. Members and alumni can count on finding a network of colleagues that supports their progress and vocational aspirations.

VII. PROGRAM EVALUATION

In order to evaluate the program and identify ways to improve it, the manager collects feedback from Writers

Brigade members and alumni at regular intervals. After each assignment, members fill out a PostWrite to document their opinions and experiences with the writing process. In addition, when a Writers Brigade member 'graduates' from the program, he/she completes an Exit Survey. Members reflect on their personal progress and accomplishments as technical writers. The survey also invites members to make suggestions for improving the program.

1. Completing the program.

2. Participating in the Writers Brigade exit survey.

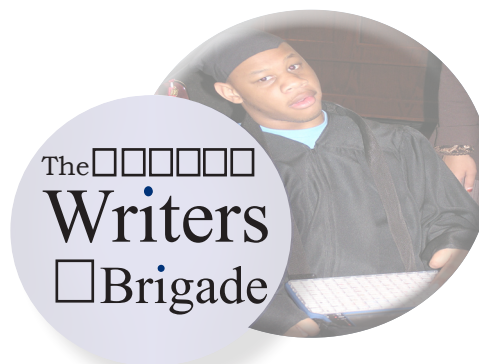
3. Participating in the Writers Brigade annual survey.

In addition, members and alumni complete an Annual Survey, which identifies changes in their employment status and goals, as well as their new publications. This survey invites members and alumni to share their thoughts about the Writers Brigade program and its impact on their lives.

The Exit Survey and Annual Survey are voluntary paid assignments. The manager distributes these assignments over the listserv to encourage participation. These surveys often yield 'quotable quotes' for use in presentations and reports.

COMPLETING THE PROGRAM: BECOMING AN ALUMNUS

When a member is ready to graduate, the manager emails the member a letter with the Exit Survey. The subject line of the email says, “A job well done” or something similar. The letter communicates praise and congratulations, addressing the member’s accomplishments and acknowledging any obstacles the member may have overcome. The manager also uses the letter to reminisce briefly and encourage the member in her/his future endeavors. For example, “You had a chance to work with the fine and professional individuals of the Writers Brigade. You know what kind of excellent work you can produce. Don’t be satisfied with anything less. When you approach employment or other projects remember you now know what you can accomplish. You have achieved a lot from being a part of the WB, but now you can do more. The WB can be just your start. Good luck in whatever direction you choose.”



The manager asks the member to complete the Exit Survey and return it with an invoice for \$50. The director follows up with another congratulatory email and orders the Writers Brigade plaque to commemorate the member’s successful completion of the program.

It is in the best interest of the program to keep members active as alumni. Thus the manager and director continue to support all members after they graduate by offering to assist them in preparing and submitting articles and pursuing employment opportunities. Alumni may also be called upon to present on behalf of the Writers Brigade at conferences and to collaborate on articles about the Writers Brigade or other topics. Members and alumni have sometimes worked with partners to expand an original technical article for a scientific journal. Extended involvement encourages an increased commitment to the field of technical writing and to the continued success of Writers Brigade members and the program.

[An Example: The Writers Brigade Plaque](#)

[An Example: Letter to Members Who Complete the Writers Brigade Program](#)

THE WRITERS BRIGADE PLAQUE
AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE



LETTER TO MEMBERS WHO COMPLETE THE WRITERS BRIGADE PROGRAM

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear <Member>,

Let me say that it has been a pleasure working with you and watching you develop your skills as a writer. You have tackled a variety of writing challenges and made significant accomplishments. You have done exceptionally well in our program. You now rank among professionals as a published writer.

Once you complete the Exit Survey, the Writers Brigade will promote your status to alumni. We plan to keep you involved in the program by offering you some writing opportunities. We will let you know when these assignments arise.

In any case, I will continue to support you in your endeavors. In return, I ask that you continue to contribute to our program. I encourage you to list the director and myself as references, whenever you apply for new employment opportunities. We are always available and happy to write letters of recommendation on your behalf. Please keep us in mind and feel free to contact us.

It is our hope that the Writers Brigade has greatly prepared you for your next career moves. You will want to list your involvement in the WB as work experience on your resume or curriculum vitae. Here is a sample entry. Note the formatting I used. It is universal for a resume.

2004-2005. Technical Writer, AAC-RERC Writers Brigade, Telecommute.
Wrote and published articles for the purpose of disseminating the activities of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement. Interpreted technical information for diverse publications targeting a variety of audiences.

Please keep in touch with us and tell us about any writing or work you are doing. Periodically, we will also request formal updates and input from you. We will always appreciate your prompt reply to these paid assignments.

Over the course of the AAC-RERC funding cycle, several new members will join and graduate from the Writers Brigade. Because you have done such a good job, we hope that we might rely on you, from time to time, to lend support to future members. While you are under no obligation to us, we hope to have you work as a mentor with new members, contribute to our Facebook group, and actively use the listserv to update us or give your input.

Congratulations on completing this important program and on all your publications. I am confident that you will enjoy continued success. Thank you for your hard work. Please return your Exit Survey and final invoice to me with a copy to the director.

Sincerely, <Manager>, on behalf of the AAC-RERC
(cc) to the director

EXIT SURVEY

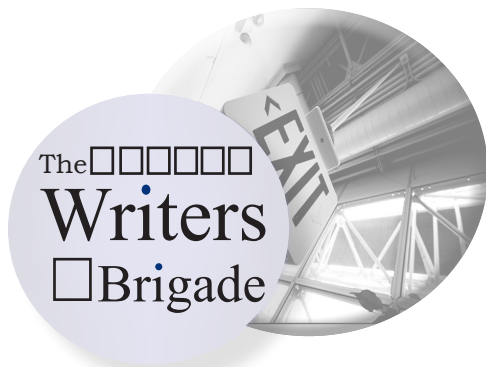
The purpose of the Exit Survey is to capture the opinions and reflections of Writers Brigade members as they complete the program.

While a PostWrite helps members document their experiences with a particular assignment, the Exit Survey asks members to reflect on the gestalt of their involvement with the Writers Brigade. They consider ways in

which the Writers Brigade program has helped them develop technical writing skills, what other benefits they have accrued and how the Writers Brigade has influenced their current and future plans. In addition, each member is asked to consider how to improve the Writers Brigade program and to nominate others they feel might be interested in participating.

The manager instructs the member to complete the Exit Survey and return it along with an invoice for \$50.

See Example: [Exit survey](#)



EXIT SURVEY
AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Dear <Member>

You have now completed your term in the Writers Brigade and are getting ready to move on. We ask that you fill out this Exit Survey as a component of your Writers Brigade program experience. The goal of the survey is to help you reflect on your experiences and help us to evaluate the program. We will use the information to improve the Writers Brigade.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at <Manager's email>. After you complete the survey you may send an invoice to the Writers Brigade for \$50. The director will mail you a check. Thank you for all your work.

Writers Brigade Exit Survey

Your name:

Amount of time you participated in the Writers Brigade:

of publications you had during that period:

of publications you had during year prior to joining the Writers Brigade:

PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

***Strongly agree (SA); Agree (A); Agree somewhat (AS); Disagree (D);
Strongly disagree (SD)***

I. The Writers Brigade Program helped me to	SA	A	AS	D	SD
Write and revise assigned articles about various AAC topics related to research, development, training and dissemination.					
Write in different styles for targeted publications.					
Participate in occasional discussions about the writing process with program staff.					
Provide feedback regarding how staff worked to support the development of technical writing skills and supporting my participation in the Writers Brigade.					
Respond in a timely manner to writing assignments.					
Other, please specify:					

***Strongly agree (SA); Agree (A); Agree somewhat (AS); Disagree (D);
Strongly disagree (SD)***

II. The primary benefits of the Writers Brigade are:	SA	A	AS	D	SD
Working with a skilled editor on specific assignments.					
Learning specific ways to improve my punctuation.					
Learning how to use words more effectively.					
Organizing my thoughts.					
Developing a plan to complete an article.					
Stating things more succinctly.					
Making sure information is accurate.					
Using simple language, with a reader-friendly voice.					
Writing in ways that are more interesting.					
Getting what I write published and expanding my resume.					
Providing new opportunities for employment.					
Using editing software to support the writing process.					
Learning professional skills like composing a business letter and mastering the APA format.					
Networking with some of the partners in the AAC-RERC.					
Other benefits, please specify:					

***Strongly agree (SA); Agree (A); Agree somewhat (AS); Disagree (D);
Strongly disagree (SD)***

III. Please comment about your assignments	SA	A	AS	D	SD
The assignments were interesting.					
The assignments were clear.					
The time I had to complete assignments was appropriate.					
The materials I was given helped me to complete assignments.					
I learned a lot by completing the assignments.					

Other comments about your assignments.					
--	--	--	--	--	--

IV. Please write one to two short paragraphs about your experiences in the Writers Brigade. Please include information about the extent to which it has had an impact on (1) your writing skills; (2) your work habits; (3) your employment opportunities.

V. Please write a short paragraph about whether (or not) you would recommend the Writers Brigade to other individuals who rely on AAC and why.

VI. What are your immediate plans for the future? Do you think your experience with the Writers Brigade will have any impact on these plans?

VII. What two to five things about the Writers Brigade experience would you recommend we change?

VIII. The Writers Brigade exists to mentor individuals who rely on AAC to write about research and development activities and other AAC-related issues. Do you think other groups or organizations like United Cerebral Palsy, the ALS Society, or publications like New Mobility, Advance Magazine should use a Writers Brigade approach as part of their dissemination efforts to transfer knowledge to multiple stakeholder groups? **YES NO Why?**

IX. How would you rate the skills of the Writers Brigade program manager? [1=minimal skills to 5=highly skilled] _____. What did the Manager do that was particularly helpful?

X. If you have any further comments, please share them below.

XI. Is there anyone you would like to nominate to participate in the Writers Brigade? If so, please indicate WHO it is and WHY you feel the person would be a good candidate.

XII. Indicate whether you will permit/not permit yourself to be quoted in presentations and articles about the Writers Brigade. **CIRCLE ONE.**

You may quote me.

You may NOT quote me.

ANNUAL SURVEY

The Annual Survey is emailed to all Writers Brigade members and alumni each year. The purpose of the survey is to track the careers of people who have participated in the program. Questions relate to the member's Writers Brigade experiences and their accomplishments as alumni. Specific questions address their skills, the editing process, their publications and their employment status. This survey limits responses to a certain number of words. Those who participate are invited to submit an invoice for \$25 along with their responses to the survey.

See [Example below](#).

ANNUAL WRITERS BRIGADE SURVEY

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

1. When did you join the Writers Brigade? (3-5 words)

2. What motivated you to enroll? (3 sentences)

3. What have you accomplished as a member of the Writers Brigade? What have you accomplished since you have graduated? (30-40 words)

4. What skills did you improve? What did you learn? (40-50 words)

5. What do you think about the writing process; i.e., revising multiple drafts? And about corresponding with an editor? How have you used this process in other contexts? (50 words)

6. How has the Writers Brigade prepared you for your long-term career goals? Have you begun to think about employment any differently? (40-50 words)

7. Who would you recommend to apply to join the Writers Brigade? (4 words)

8. Please comment about your experience as a member of the Writers Brigade. (This is an open-ended question.) (75 or more words. Please make it a well-rounded paragraph)

VIII. OUTCOMES

This chapter reports on the outputs and outcomes of the Flagship AAC-RERC Writers Brigade program through 2008. Outcomes are discussed in relation to three key Writers Brigade program goals: (1) increasing the technical writing skills of people with disabilities, (2) disseminating timely, up-to-date information about ongoing research and development activities to key stakeholder groups and (3) improving the employment prospects of Writers Brigade members. The information reported is both quantitative and qualitative, individual and group-oriented. It is also sprinkled with personal reflections that capture, in real terms, some of the experiences and opinions of those who participated in the program.

1. The Flagship Brigadiers

2. Technical writing skills

3. Publications

5. Employment

4. Making improvements

The AAC-RERC Writers Brigade continues, funded for five more years by the National Institutes of Disability and Rehabilitation Research, under the leadership of Pamela Kennedy, manager (2008-2013), and David McNaughton,

director, at Pennsylvania State University. Stay tuned for reports of future outcomes and impacts of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade.

THE FLAGSHIP BRIGADIERS

A total of 15 individuals who use AAC technologies participated in the Writers Brigade from 2003 to 2008. At any one time, the cadre of active Writers Brigade members ranged from two to five writers and the manager. As one person left or completed the program and became an alumnus, another was recruited as a member. The manager led the group for five years; and during that time, eleven members successfully finished the program.



Three members who began the program did not complete it. Reasons varied; however, all withdrew before completing their first technical article. The manager negotiated leave-takings amicably. Explanations for withdrawal included equipment difficulties, a living arrangement that made competitive work difficult, a lack of personal supports, poor health and limited writing skills. Several found the program more challenging than they had expected. One reported the program required far more writing and revising than she thought possible given the ergonomics of her current AAC technologies, Internet interface and computer. Another said that her caregivers did not value or respect her work schedule and she was having difficulty accessing a quiet place to work. Finally, expenses may have been a factor. Access to a computer, the Internet, and a phone line are not provided by the program, but cost money.

The manager and the eleven members who completed the program included five women and seven men, ranging in age from their early 20s to 60s. All but two individuals have a diagnosis of cerebral palsy; other diagnoses include Friedreich's Ataxia and an acquired quadriplegia. All had an associated dysarthria and/or dysphonia and members reported using a range of AAC devices (e.g., DynaWrite, Mercury, Pathfinder, LightWriter, Message Mate) to speak, as well as computers, word processing software and other types of technologies to write. They also mentioned using Co-Writer, Speaking Dynamically Pro, Text Aloud and Nextup Talker on a table PC and the IntelliKeys Classic Keyboard. One member had a high school diploma; all others had some college experience: three had begun attending college, four had a bachelor's degree and four had a master's degree.

Most members had never written a technical article prior to joining the Writers Brigade. Three members had previously been involved with an AAC-RERC research project and one had co-written a journal article with a research team. Five members had written in other genres, publishing poetry, essays or fiction pieces. When asked how the Writers Brigade was different, one member said:

One thing that really needs to be driven home to other organizations is the fact that you actually pay individuals. There are many opportunities for people who use AAC to volunteer their services, but far too rarely are such people valued and recognized for their contributions via the social norm of being paid.

The manager, Johana Schwartz, a recent graduate of Stanford University who majored in English Literature, had prior experience mentoring classmates in a writer's workshop. Her leadership skills, coupled with her keen sensitivity as a mentor and her ability to write and edit the work of others, underlie the successful outcomes of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade program as reported in this chapter. She wrote,

Like many of the members, I was approached with the perfect part time job at the right time when many of my newly graduated peers were struggling to find work. I gained multiple benefits from this job, both personally and professionally. I had to learn how to manage an office, other writers, and my time wisely. I had to be able to expect the unexpected and plan for the worst case scenario.

A leadership position challenged me and caused me to develop my own skills further. I had to take on the responsibility of both editing manuscripts and helping to support the growth of each member. I was required to teach them skills while cultivating their drafts to "perfection" and to build their confidence while, at the same time, criticizing their work. I worked as the liaison between new participants, the research partners and the director. I represented the AAC-RERC, Writers Brigade and its members to these important professionals.

At all times I modeled what I was expecting from the members. This included good writing and a high level of professionalism. I had to learn how to deal with some disgruntled comments after someone had received my feedback, as well as how to introduce and explain the scientific research process. I communicated with a supervisor on a daily basis, summarized my weekly and monthly progress, and had to learn how to analyze data, such as the surveys, which included written feedback from members.

The Outcomes described in this chapter focus on the technical writing skills, publication records and employment status of members and are based on information from our PostWrites, Exit Interviews and Yearly Surveys.

TECHNICAL WRITING SKILLS

The Writers Brigade helped me gain objectivity. I think I've learned that even though your text may be grammatically correct, it can always be improved upon. Rephrasing is key.

Writers Brigade members graduated from the program as journalists for the canon of disability literature. All honed or developed their technical writing skills and submitted articles for publication. They reported their writing improved in important ways. One person told the manager, *"You showed me how to say what I wanted in fewer words. You suggested better word choices to express myself. Best of all, you didn't try to change what I wanted to say."*

Postwrite evaluations revealed that members understood that technical writing required them to convey more information in less space. They also reported that they learned to avoid punctuation, spelling, and grammatical errors and to take responsibility for self-editing and proof reading. After an assignment, one member wrote, *"I feel the organization of the information in my article was better. My article seems clearer and includes more information about the subject. It sounds strange, but I also feel simple areas like punctuation were improved."*

Having an editor is like having a colleague. The editor is there as safety net, helping writers avoid errors and confusion through prompts and revisions. When writing a technical article, members found they needed to collect and manage a lot of information. At first, prioritizing and organizing facts and quotations was overwhelming. However, each member showed marked improvement after just a few rounds of revision. As one member reported, *"The assignment to write an announcement for the training manual presented me with a special challenge since I had never written an announcement before. My inexperience made me apprehensive about this assignment. But with the examples that Johana provided, combined with her patient guidance, I believe I produced a respectable document."*

Throughout the program, writers were exposed to different genres and learned to take into account the expectations of editors as well as different target audiences. As a result, several indicated they had developed more flexibility, better human relations skills and knowledge about how things worked in the field of AAC and in the publishing world.



I improved my technical writing skills greatly. I learned about the publication and editing process. I have improved my human relations skills through correspondence with the editor. In addition,

I learned more about the researcher's role in AAC product development. The Writers Brigade taught me to study and be conscious of what an editor wants. Before sending a piece, I make sure it is in the best shape possible. Even a letter to the op-ed piece needs to contain the correct amount of words, be double spaced and have all the components the newspaper requires.

The manager held all members accountable for their writing. If information was unclear or incomplete, the manager challenged writers to elaborate. She also taught them to read or listen to their own writing out loud and then to correct it. As a result, writers learned to proofread, see their errors and improve the clarity of their writing. This was evident not only in their assignments, but also in their responses to surveys over time. They used more complex sentencing and expressed their ideas and thoughts more clearly and eloquently.

When comparing drafts of articles written by members at the beginning and end of their Writers Brigade experience, the manager noted that grammar, spelling, organization and interest-related factors had improved. One member stated that *"the Writers Brigade impressed on me that I need to make sure that every piece I send out must be the best I can produce. I even check all my e-mails now for spelling and grammar mistakes. People reading my writings see what kind of a person I am."*

Because all alumni developed important technical writing skills, AAC-RERC researchers and the Writers Brigade staff continue to call upon them to take on new projects or follow-up on a previous article they may have written. For example, alumni have worked with research partners to produce a short sidebars and web announcements. In addition, several members have been recruited at conferences by AAC manufacturers or editors of other AAC/AT publications to write consumer reviews of technology, as well as about disability-related issues and opinion pieces. One member writes regularly for *ATNetwork: Assistive Technology Tools for Living* at www.atnet.org. *SpeakUp* (USSAAC's newsletter) at www.ussaac.org now saves a column for the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade and the *ConnSENSE Bulletin* (an online assistive technology newsletter) at www.connsensebulletin.com often contacts the manager to solicit an article for an upcoming issue. In short, alumni continue to broaden and apply their skills as technical writers.

Alumni also report that their Writers Brigade experience resulted in them having more confidence in and comfort with their writing skills. For example, one member noted that, *"the Writers Brigade has opened many opportunities for me. It helped me to expand my ability to write technical articles. It also gave me the confidence to approach editors and new publications. The Writers Brigade has been and continues to be important influence in my writing career."*

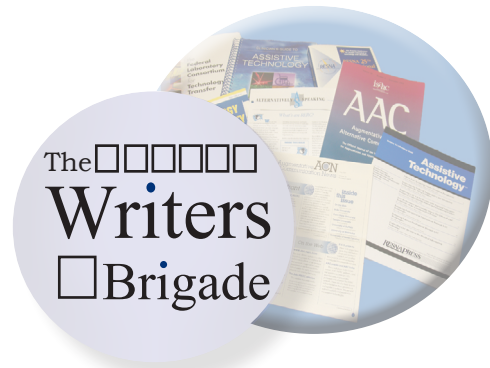
With greater confidence and skills there may also come an ability and readiness to "voice" one's concerns. Several members are now more willing

to speak out and step forward, even describing themselves as activists and self-advocates. For example, *“The Writers Brigade not only helped me fulfill my dreams of working in the AAC industry, the connections I developed by working with the AAC-RERC assisted in removing road blocks so I could obtain my first speech generating device.”*

Alumni report they like being the first to explore breakthroughs in new AAC technologies and strategies and to receive the honor of reporting about them. In addition, alumni have a reliable network of role models and colleagues. Because they have developed technical writing skills and have published their work, they also have a foundation of employable skills, which in some cases has ignited their careers.

PUBLICATIONS

Publications are important for people with complex communication needs, who are used to communicating with their assistive technology, but not always used to being “heard”. Being published online and in print transcends physical obstacles, like limited mobility and dysarthric speech.



As shown in Table I, considerable variability exists among members with regard to their publication records before, during and after the Writers Brigade. These data reflect differences in their ages, experiences and personal goals. For example, some members identify themselves as poets or writers, while others write for other purposes, *e.g.*, a job requirement, to express their ideas and opinions, as an assignment, *etc.* Six of the participants had published their work prior to joining the Writers Brigade, but, only two had published technical articles. As shown in the Table, before they joined the Writers Brigade, members had a total of 26 publications (Note: Only 4 were technical articles). During their tenure with the Brigade, they accrued 108 citations as a collective. As alumni, most have continued to publish, for a total of 47 citations.

Table I. Citations of the Members Before, During and After their Participation in the Writers Brigade: Technical Articles and Other Genres						
Members* anonymous	Citations Prior to the WB	Citations During the WB	Citations After the WB		Technical articles	Other genres
3	1	2	0		2	1
5	0	5	0		4	1
6	0	5	3		4	4
12	4	6	4		10	4
10	2	13	8		6	17
7	1	3	3		3	4
1	0	3	3		3	3
8	13	6	0		1	18
4	0	7	3		3	7
2	5	25	21		25	26
11	0	26	0		12	14
9	0	7	2		7	2
ALL	26	108	47		80	101
Total	181				181	

These twelve individuals have published a total of 80 technical articles and 101 publications in other genres (e.g., poetry, short stories, essays, op-ed pieces, autobiography, scripts), demonstrating a significant increase in the writing and publication records of all participants. They have written articles about AAC-RERC projects underway or recently completed by researchers and engineers at Pennsylvania State University, the University of Nebraska, Temple University, the University of Buffalo-New York, Augmentative Communication Inc., Boston Children's Hospital and Duke University. Topics have included accounts of research and development activities in the areas of literacy, telework and employment, as well as the use of AAC technologies with young children, children with autism, adults with aphasia and adults with traumatic brain injury. They have also written about the AAC-RERC webcast series and about research and development projects related to the usability of AAC technologies. Other topics have focused on issues related to accessing AAC and mainstream technologies, vocabulary sets and webcrawling.

Between 2004 and 2008 the bylines of Writers Brigade members appeared in ten different print and online newsletters, as well as in magazines and journals, within and outside the area of AAC.¹ These publications reach a large, broad-based constituency of individuals with an interest in AAC. For example *Advance Magazine* is distributed to thousands of speech-language pathologists. The *ConnSense Bulletin* goes out to hundreds of individuals and organizations interested in assistive technology. The *AAC-RERC E-newsletter* goes to many universities and individuals, including the entire RERC network. In addition, *Augmentative Communication News* and *Alternatively Speaking* have an international readership of consumers, manufacturers, researchers, policy makers and practitioners with pages devoted to AAC-RERC activities in each issue. Finally, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's Special Interest Division 12's *Perspectives in AAC*, which is distributed to over 1000 members, devoted an entire issue to AAC-RERC projects with each article written by a member of the Writers Brigade.

One high point of my tenure as manager of the Brigade occurred in 2005. After much preparation, we placed writings by all of our original participants in the SID 12 newsletter, Perspectives on Augmentative and Alternative Communication. ASHA featured the technical articles by the Writers Brigade. After the issue came out, speech language pathologists were able to take a quiz about the material for continuing education credits, based on what Writers Brigade members had written.

These data show that Writers Brigade members significantly increased the quantity of information available about AAC-RERC activities between 2004 and 2008. In addition, they expanded and extended the transfer of information to include previously overlooked audiences and stakeholder

¹ AAC-RERC E-Newsletter; ADVANCE; Alternatively Speaking; Augmentative Communication News; Perspectives on Augmentative and Alternative Communication; PRC Newsletter; SpeakUP; The Assistive Technology Journal; The ConnSENSE Bulletin.

groups. The Writers Brigade developed articles that are eminently readable and therefore more accessible to people both within and outside the specialized area of AAC.

As alumni, all but two members of the Brigade continue to publish their work. Only one person is not currently pursuing an interest in writing. Six have continued to write and publish technical articles. For example, four have served as guest editors for *Alternatively Speaking* and/or written key articles for *Augmentative Communication News*. One member has written a script for a webcast about AAC in Emergency Situations and is the key presenter. [See www.aac-lerc.com.] Two members have published books of poetry, and others publish their poetry online. Several submitted short stories to the International Society of Augmentative and Alternative Communication's 25th Anniversary project. Another member produces a monthly newsletter for her university. One member writes regular op-ed pieces for the *Fresno Bee* and the *Los Angeles Times*. A majority of alumni have been asked to write additional articles for AAC-RERC partners and publications.

In addition to writing, several members of the Writers Brigade have traveled to regional, national and international conferences to present information about the Writers Brigade, the AAC-RERC and their various activities.

Publication outcomes clearly demonstrate that Writers Brigade alumni turned their knowledge about technical writing into a successful publication record. In so doing, they have exponentially increased and expanded the knowledge translation activities within the AAC-RERC by targeting and reaching stakeholder groups that directly benefit from knowing about the work underway within the AAC-RERC to improve AAC technologies. For a complete list of their publications through 2008, go to Appendix B.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Participating in the Writers Brigade has given me to the experience and confidence to seek employment opportunities so I can work from home. I also plan to do some freelance writing, which I can hopefully market.

Since I was already employed, I am not sure that being in the Writers Brigade has changed the way that I approach employment, but I think it has given me more options to earn extra income. I now believe that if I put my mind to it I can write about my thoughts and experiences and get published.



The employment statistics for people who use AAC technologies, while fairly limited, are very discouraging. Reasons for high unemployment rates involve significant barriers that include problems accessing personal supports on the job, transportation and equipment access, as well as equipment set up and maintenance, and finally, health and endurance issues. In addition, many employers hesitate to hire people with complex communication needs (CCN), citing reasons that reflect their lack of information about how to make accommodations and/or an unwillingness to create opportunities for people with severe disabilities. Another barrier is that many individuals with CCN have not had on-the-job training, employment experiences as teenagers or the educational background that is required to compete in today's job market.

The Writers Brigade project used a telework model of employment, which enabled the AAC-RERC to address many of the barriers people who use AAC technologies face. The Writers Brigade manager and members worked at times when it was convenient for them, using their own personal support networks and equipment. The AAC-RERC staff was able to adjust and adapt workloads to accommodate the individuals who participated. Because the manager was personally aware of barriers members might face, she could not only advocate for them but also suggest solutions to problems they encountered.

The Writers Brigade is a mentoring project, so writers were not paid a salary. Rather, they were considered "independent contractors" and paid by the "piece."

At the time they entered the Writers Brigade program, eight members reported they were not employed. Some said they had been employed at times in the past. One member was employed full time as a special education teacher. Three members were working part time as a (1) remote trouble shooter/beta-tester for an AAC manufacturer, (2) computer programmer at a university, and a (3) consultant/research assistant on an

AAC-RERC grant.

During their tenure as Writers Brigade members, all members were employed part time and paid for completion of each assignment. The manager earned a monthly salary over the five years of the program as a part-time employee. Several members continued to work for other companies and/or organizations.

When members were most recently surveyed (late 2008), six individuals reported being unemployed. Of these, only one, however, is currently looking for a job. Five participants are working part time and one alumnus is working full time. This information is shown in Table II.

Table II. Employment Status of Writers Brigade Participants: Pre and Post Program					
Pre Writers Brigade: N=12			Post Writers Brigade: Alumni N=12		
Unemployed	Work FT	Work PT	Unemployed	Work FT	Work PT
8	1	3	6	1	5

In considering changes in the employment status of the group, the numbers suggest only a minor improvement overall. However, when analyzing changes from an individual's perspective, we note that while seven participants experienced no change in their employment status, five have, as shown in Table III. Only one member who remains unemployed is looking for work. Five members who are currently unemployed are not looking for work either because they consider themselves semi-retired because of age or because of their health status. In other words, only one person who is unemployed and able to work is currently looking for work.

Table III. Change in Employment Status from 2004-2008 for Alumni of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade				
	Unemployed/ looking for work	Unemployed/ not looking for work	Employed Part Time	Employed Full time
No change	1	4	2	
Unemployed/ working PT			3	
Unemployed/ working FT				
Working PT/Working FT				1
Working FT/Working PT				
Working FT/Not employed		1		

One person who had been working part time is now employed full time. She describes her job as follows:

My official title at the Institute on Human Development and Disability at UGA is Outreach Coordinator. Duties include overseeing the development and implementation of community education and outreach activities about the Institute's numerous programs and activities to people with disabilities, family members, paraprofessionals, policymakers, and the general public, attending meetings and conferences, and preparing articles for media publication. I also hold a position requiring me to conduct research, outreach, and public service. Beginning in 2009, I'll be conducting a study on recent high school graduates who use AAC and their perceptions of family involvement related to academic success. I continue to produce our internal newsletter, Cascade, every month. Articles are composed by staff, edited by me, and then published.

The member who entered the Writers Brigade with a full time job is no longer working. He holds several advanced degrees and is now on disability, recovering very slowly from surgery. He plans to return to work.

Five members are now employed part time. Two continue to work in the same jobs they held before their participation in the Writers Brigade. The others have found work in the AAC community. Two continue to work within the AAC-RERC and one works for an AAC manufacturer as a consultant.

In short, while the statistics in Table II may appear relatively stable, Table III shows that peoples' lives have changed. Several participants report making careers that built upon their work in the Brigade. For example, the former manager is now a consultant to the Writers Brigade and in that role has written this Guide. Another is now the manager of the second AAC-RERC's Writers Brigade, ensuring her employment for the next five years. She reports that the Writers Brigade has allowed her to work because she acquired new equipment via her connections through the Writers Brigade and was able to travel to a conference where she found a publisher for her book, became a public speaker, and ultimately was elected, along with another alumni of the Writers Brigade, to be a co-Vice President in the United States Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (USSAAC). The alumnus who is currently employed full time used her contacts with the AAC-RERC to secure her current job.

Employment Disincentives

It is important to acknowledge that people with disabilities face disincentives when they try to work. For example, the manager of the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade experienced multiple frustrations because she received a monthly salary, and as a result, risked losing the benefits she needed to work, the support she needed for personal care assistance, healthcare and housing needs. Issues related to her living situation and the onsite support she needed to work, as well as to equipment problems

arose multiple times during her tenure as manager. In addition, she had to learn to negotiate the intersection between employment-related issues and government entitlement programs, particularly the Social Security Administration. She persisted through these difficulties. Always the advocate, she understood that *“What I am doing is very important to breaking a stereotype and hopefully paving the way for others.”* Because she valued her job, she faced losing benefits that enabled her to live safely and semi-independently and to work, as she describes below.

I experienced problems working from my home, especially since I have moved a lot. Finding a good workplace with minimum interruptions is exceedingly important for high-quality and critical writing. For people who live in group, foster, or nursing homes, finding a good workplace with minimum interruptions is exceedingly important for high-quality and critical writing.

One of the most trying aspects to being the Writers Brigade manager was justifying my income and keeping my benefits. Even though I was making an amount under the cutoff, it was tedious to report my income. I always felt I was in danger of losing my SSI or SSDI benefits, even though I clearly need them. I spent time every month reporting my income and copying my receipts, only to learn that my submissions were unopened and undocumented for an entire year. Ultimately, I managed to sort out the chaos. Overall, communication with Social Security was not easy, but with the skills that I had developed during college and expanded upon as the manager of the Writers Brigade, I persevered.

As the manager, I also received assistance and advice from the RERC and Vocational Rehabilitation Services to get the equipment that I needed to do my job. Furthermore, I benefited from having this equipment outside of my job.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE PROGRAM



Over time, the Writers Brigade program has evolved and improved. It will continue to do so as it embarks on its second five year funding cycle. When we asked alumni how to improve the program, two themes emerged. They recommended that the Writers Brigade program (1) find ways to increase interactions among members, the manager, alumni and staff and (2) consider ways to expand the program and to make editing tools more accessible and explicit.

1. Increasing interactions. Alumni pointed out that early on, the Writers Brigade relied on its listserv and email. Neither was ideally suited to facilitate interactions between and among participants. Today new technologies, such as Facebook, Instant messaging and web-based project planners make it easier for the Writers Brigade to take advantage of networking and co-planning opportunities. Suggestions included:

- ◆ Have a conference meeting when members first join.
- ◆ Encourage members to use a message board.
- ◆ Create a blog or YouTube video featuring AAC so the Writers Brigade can reach people with complex communication needs outside the industry.
- ◆ Subscribe to a web based project planner to help members get more organized, celebrate milestones, feel like a team, communicate, track progress and leave messages for each other without chasing our tails and so many emails. Examples: [Project management, collaboration, and task software: Basecamp](#), [ProjExec® Online](#), [WebEx WebOffice](#), [GoPlan](#) and [activeCollab](#).
- ◆ Consider having a monthly meeting via Instant Messenger or Yahoo so members can share their ideas and frustrations.
- ◆ Consider having the manager publish an online newsletter that would go out to the RERC listserv and introduce new members as well as announce new publications. The newsletter might also distribute writings by members.
- ◆ Ask alumni to greet new members on Facebook and the listserv and give encouragement.
- ◆ Ask alumni to consider becoming mentors. The program could assign new members to an alumnus so that they can have more individualized help.
- ◆ Engage alumni to lead discussions on the listserv and Facebook. Invited them

to share their experiences with regards to employment, networking, publishing independently or with the Brigade, and writing.

2. Expanding the program and making editing tools more accessible and explicit.

Some alumni suggested having more assignments, as well as more varied and flexible assignments, including topics that took on disability-related issues outside of the AAC-RERC. One person mentioned more pay for assignments. Other suggestions included:

- ♦ Develop a writing style manual for new members to explain the dos and don'ts of writing in the AAC industry. For example, tips such as: Don't refer the AAC community as consumers; Use people first language; Make transitions, leads, conclusions like this and so on.
- ♦ Provide more instruction about how to use editing software.
- ♦ Utilize resources such as the Writing Center at the host university.
- ♦ Accredite the Writers Brigade program to make it more official and enhance the prestige of the participants and their articles.
- ♦ Approach other media outlets and audiences. For example, disseminating activities of the RERC to college students.
- ♦ Recruit more diverse applicants so the Brigade can serve people of many different cultural and educational backgrounds and disabilities.

APPENDICES

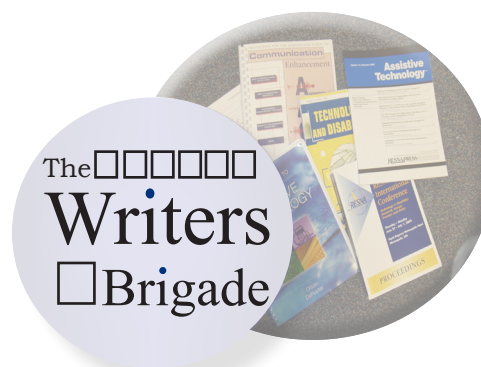
Appendix A.
Bibliographies for the
AAC-RERC Writers
Brigade through 2008

Appendix B.
Sample Autobiographies
from the AAC-RERC
Writers Brigade

APPENDIX A

BIBLIOGRAPHIES FOR AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE THROUGH 2008

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APPENDIX B

SAMPLE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES FROM THE AAC-RERC WRITERS BRIGADE

Michael B. Williams

AAC-RERC Partner, Writers Brigade Advisor, ACI Staff

Michael B. Williams has been in the forefront of the disability rights movement for more than thirty years. Born in Chicago, Illinois in the late 1930's, he moved to California with his parents when he was ten. Williams attended special schools for people with disabilities up to the tenth grade, whereupon he became the first severely disabled person to attend Pasadena's John Muir High School.

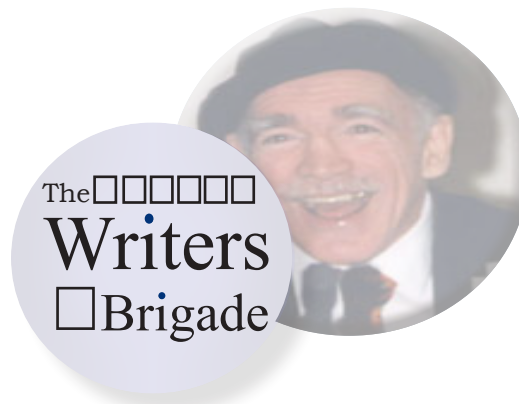
He then attended Pasadena City College and Occidental College, earning an A. B. degree in English in 1961. Some twenty years later, Williams returned to school, earning a Masters of Library and Information Studies from the University of California, Berkeley.

In 1969, Williams moved to Berkeley, California where he became heavily involved with the disability rights movement and the pioneering Center for Independent Living. Here he discovered his passion for writing about disability issues; numerous articles on disability written by him have been circulated around the world.

As a young boy, Williams sat on his grandfather's lap to type on a manual Royal typewriter. In the 1970's he became one of the first to own a personal computer (a Processor Tech Sol with a 5" North Star disc drive and 16k of memory). Amazed at what his computer could do for him, Williams put his typewriter away and became an enthusiastic advocate for the use of computer technology by people with disabilities. This interest in computers lead him into the exciting world of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Williams has experimented with a variety of speech generating technologies and continues to greet each new development in this field with the excitement of a kid on Christmas.

Williams has always been fond of a good story, especially a funny one – *Aesops Fables* as told by his grandfather, Dr. Seuss' "*To Think that It Happened on Mulberry Street*", the comedy of Jack Benny and Fred Allen on radio, Steve Allen and Jack Paar on television, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and whatever is in the current New Yorker all have given him pleasure over the years.

Political activism has always been part of Williams' life. His early affiliations were as a wire report re-writer at KPFK in Los Angeles and as



an active member of the ACLU and Young Democrats, writing for both organizations' newsletters. Later, Williams sat on the boards of UCPA, CIL, Hear Our voices and the Area IV Developmental Disabilities Board. He has been president of CIL and USSAAC and a vice president of ISAAC. Williams has been known to demonstrate for civil rights and disability rights, most famously as one of the activists who took over the San Francisco Federal Building for a month during the 504 demonstrations.

Currently, Williams is editor of *Alternatively Speaking*, a highly respected newsletter for augmented communicators and their families, and a research partner in the Rehabilitation Engineering and Research Center on Speech Enhancement.

Pam Kennedy
Writers Brigade Member 2007-2008
Writers Brigade Manager 2008-2013

Writing, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), assistive technology (AT) and research are my passions! This led me to the Writers Brigade and the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement (AAC-RERC). As someone who relies on AT, I see a need to design technology in ways that address each individual's unique social, psychological, physical and communication needs.

As a sophomore in high school, I took the advice of a teacher and enrolled in a journalism class. Suddenly, research and writing became a map to worlds I never knew existed. I excelled academically; as a member of the school newspaper and yearbook staff, I gained recognition in my community. At state competitions, some of my articles won awards. During my senior year, I was the editor of the yearbook.

After graduation, the school administration hired me to co-edit the district's disability newsletter, Family and Educator Enhancement Team. Later, after I was using an assistance dog from Great Plains Assistance Dogs Foundation, Inc., I periodically wrote articles for their newsletter, Foundation Chronicles. After completing disability-related advocacy courses with Partners in Policymaking, I functioned as an advocate, serving as a speaker, editor and writer for various projects.

I define my life by pursuing my passions, learning new skills and making a difference in others' lives by becoming an advocate. I may have cerebral palsy and dysarthria. however, I am a multi-modal communicator who began using a speech generating device (SGD) when I was 22 years old. As a result, I can now attend college classes, give



presentations regarding my experience as an alternative communicator, have a social life and participate in small talk. In doing so, I have discovered invaluable treasures: friendship, love, happiness, laughter, increased self-esteem, confidence, adventure and (of course), writing, augmentative and alternative communication, assistive technology and research. As a result, my life is filled with passion!

Sarah Blackstone

2003-2008 Writers Brigade Director

and Partner in the AAC-RERC.

Founder and President of ACI

My sixtieth birthday recently came and went leaving behind a delicious book (compiled by my husband Harvey) full of words of wisdom and humor about the “third thirty” from family members, friends and colleagues. Writing, and of course its inimitable partner reading, are powerful communication avenues. I see writing as an enormously worthwhile and valuable human endeavor.

Early on, I wrote only because, or if, I had to. It wasn’t any fun and English teachers often engendered fear and trepidation through their self-appointed roles as Grammar Czars. Even my “Dear Diary” efforts didn’t provide me with a single hint that adventure, learning, satisfaction and discovery could flow from “writing.” Today, I write and/or edit much of the time. My first major publication was an edited book, *Augmentative Communication: An Introduction*, published by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in 1985. I’ve written and published *Augmentative Communication News* since 1988 and many chapters, articles and reports as well.

Gradually, over time, I have come to understand, appreciate and even accept my own writing process. I have also learned that all serious writers have a unique way of approaching the writing process. What is never different, however, is that we all write A LOT and, if we are lucky, we have good editors! My favorite book about writing is *Bird by Bird* by Anne LaMott. It is an honest tale about how truly hard and painful writing can be. LaMott acknowledges that it can take courage and persistence to write.

The type of writing I do is called technical writing. I don’t write stories, poetry or plays although I love reading them. Mostly I write about augmentative and alternative communication. Technical writers play an essential role in any field because they help others (both inside and outside the field) understand what is going on. Being involved in the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade has given me a unique opportunity to work with people who take writing seriously and are willing to work hard to help others become more familiar with important AAC research and technology developments.



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