

MSU Writing Center Language Statement

- We challenge the notion of standard English as the only correct expressive form, rather we recognize and value a number of Englishes.
- We meet writers wherever they are in their writing and work with them, as they discover how best to use their writing voice.
- We address writers' concerns surrounding style, grammar, and other writing-related policies and support them in advocating for their language practices.
- We respect writers' agency to express themselves in ways most comfortable to them, including their choice of Englishes, languages, pronouns, stories, and perspectives.

Our Challenge

Academic spaces often prescribe specific grammar rules and writing structures, enforcing standard English as the only legitimate language. In so doing, the academy silences othered voices and diminishes diversity within our campus.

Since Standard English is the norm in academic writing, we often serve writers concerned with "fixing" their grammar. Committed to working with writers to develop multiple literacies, promoting diverse understandings of writing, and supporting multidisciplinary methods of thinking, this language statement serves as a valuable addition to our writing center.

It is a choice to accept the standardized linguistic culture at the expense of writers who use variations of English or other languages. Instead, we take a position honoring the decades of advocacy done by others for greater language inclusivity*. Thus, we affirm and support writers' choices of languages, pronouns, English(es), stories, and perspectives.

Intentions and Desired Impact

In creating, publishing, and implementing this statement, we hope to:

- Inform students, faculty, and staff at MSU, so that together, we may create a space where writers may use their authentic voices; and
- Encourage the larger academic community to adopt similar statements and language-inclusive practices.

Five Linguistic Facts of Life (Standard English Fairytale)

1. All spoken language changes over time
2. All spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms
3. Grammatically and communicative effectiveness are distinct and independent issues.
4. Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally fundamentally different creatures
5. Variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level.

Do you think that our current language statement reflects these ideas? Are there any points that you think are missing?

What would these principles look like when being executed? How do we use them to inform our practice, and to avoid this following idea, shared by Greenfield? Alternatively- how does the way we tell our stories connect to us and our ideas of language and speaking?

“Many educators who reject the idea of the superiority of “Standard English” instead celebrate what they *interpret* to be the antiracist alternative: respect students’ home languages while teaching “Standard English” in the classroom or writing center, not as a superior language but as a ticket for survival and success in American society.” (Greenfield 10).

Let's consider some scenarios down below!

1. Jordan Carter is a Black-identified undergraduate student in his 3rd year of his undergraduate degree in political science from Detroit. During his session with you- your first-time meeting and working with him, although he has used the Writing Center a couple of times- he shares with the following feedback his professor gave him on one of his recent papers: *“Avoid colloquialisms in your writing, as this is simply unprofessional”* and *“don’t let the sexist language of the older scholars that we are reading in class or that of your own culture lull you into thinking you can write this way. The point is not primarily about equality or the like. Using sexist language is stylistically immature. It’s at least s much of an eyesore as bad grammar or misspelled words.”* Afterward, he asks if you would read over his 8-page paper, which is due in a few days during your 1-hour appointment.
2. Darrell Smith is an undergraduate student with a double major in theatre and creative writing, who is in the process of writing his first screenplay, which is based on his life as a disabled student navigating a large predominately white college in the Midwest. He shared his 1st draft of his screenplay with a faculty member, who volunteered to review for him. However, he schedules his appointment with you after looking over the copious, but unconstructive, comments he received. You skim over some of the suggestions to get a better idea of what Darrell is referencing, which included notes such as: *“Your main character is static and un compelling. As a reader, I find it difficult to relate”* and *“The dialogue in this scene isn’t realistic. Nobody talks boring like that.”*