Not a Grammar Dungeon

Some harried students confidently walk through the door, papers in hand and eyes on their watches, expecting to look up from their busy schedules and find a giant, red, "Easy Button" beautifully centered on a hallowed, editorial desk. Other students teeter in the doorway for three minutes before tentatively, yet officially, entering the room. Their eyes sweep their surroundings the way one would analyze a dentist’s office—transfixed solely on visible instruments of torture. It does not take long to spot the six, red, hefty Webster's dictionaries neatly stacked on the bookshelf or for the misinterpreting student to barrel out the door. You, however, must enter this particular door differently; you must not enter as a pending victim, but as a new friend prepared to discover a second home.

Dallas Baptist University’s Writing Center is not a paper daycare, nor is it a grammar dungeon inhabited by crooked-nosed English instructors who screech with pain at the sound of dropping “g’s” and dangling participles. No, it is a haven of reflection. Hidden in the basement of the Collins building, tucked in a cozy right corner, is an ordinary classroom door that opens to reveal an exceptional staff of warmhearted tutors ready to lend you their attention, knowledge, and skill. Like Sprint PCS’s family plan trial family, the writing center tutors are free trial readers who give you in-depth feedback in a warm, secure, conferencing atmosphere.
Room 001, to many of the students and tutors, is a “home away from home,” says Ka Riley, director of the writing center. This “dungeon” has no windows and only one door, but the writing center’s soft background murmur of reader and writer, the frequent “Billie, does this look right?”, and the occasional chit chat and giggles kindles the room no bigger than the dine-in section at Wendy’s.

Life sprouts in basement room 001 despite the lack of sun. The warm hues of royal blue and milk-chocolate brown walls are nicely complemented by vibrant green potted plants which sport tiny American flags that slightly wave to the hum of the air conditioner—it is a patriotic and welcoming atmosphere. Prettily arranged potted flowers adorn smooth table tops. Clusters of new, wooden, number two pencils are located only a fingertip away from anywhere you sit; smelling and feeling heavenly, they serve as the perfect incentive to sharpen the revered writing tool and begin composing. The bookshelves in the writing center are not stiff, rigid, and unbreathable, but open and inviting; the books are slanted and unevenly spaced and as comfortable for rummaging through as the compact disc selection sprawled all over the back seat of your best friend’s car. This is not to say that the room is untidy, because it’s not; neither is it decorated like a museum where you must only look and never touch. No, you are welcome to move around, spin in your comfy chair, finger the yellow flowers, sharpen your pencil, and tap your heels. It is not a depressed environment, but a cheerful one. You are meant to learn and revise in a relaxed, but fully animated, surrounding.

It is hard to miss the love for writing that this room represents and would love to share with each of its visitors. Bookends in the image of American eagles, gray dogs, Calvary crosses, and Noah’s ark are scattered around the room, sure to catch an avid
reader’s eye. For the gaming enthusiast, he is certain to stop and admire a framed picture of a Balderscrabble game that proudly boasts nonsense words such as “Nage”, “Chowqrk”, “Apexi”, “Dipouta”, and “Vue”; words with forgotten, made-up meanings that sound sweet to a linguist’s ears and represent the wonder and flexibility of the English language. With so many small and interesting English symbols and emblems, it is hard to walk away from the room without a new curiosity and appreciation for language.

The door to room 001, then, is not a door you can barge through with the sole expectation of dropping off your paper for an editor to dust off. You must enter with the expectation that the writing center will help teach you how to become a better writer by opening your eyes to a reader’s opinion of your work through a session of reflection and correction, a collaboration in learning between writer and reader. Neither is the door to room 001 to be entered timidly. You must enter expecting to be enlightened and uplifted as a writer and student. Enter DBU’s Writing Center with the frame of mind that this is as open an atmosphere as home, for that is how you will be greeted and advised. Take a peppermint out of the pumpkin jar on Tiffany’s desk, relax, and put yourself in a reflective writing mood, for you have found, in the middle of a busy university, a home away from home—the perfect climate to develop and flourish your creative compositions.