Small-Screen Thinking:
Why CLAS writing tutorial sessions do not involve laptops

While using laptops or devices undoubtedly makes certain aspects of the writing process easier—rearranging passages, altering format, fine tuning edits—it can get in the way of what CLAS writing tutoring is all about: the revision process. Effective revision requires taking a step back and looking at our work as a whole to make better decisions about individual elements, which is a lot harder to do when quick, easy edits and limitless distractions are available at our electronic fingertips.

The Editing Trap: Substituting Writing for Thinking

Computers seem to tempt people to substitute writing for thinking. When they write with a word processor, instead of rethinking their drafts for purpose, audience, content, strategy, and effectiveness, most untrained writers just keep editing the words they first wrote down. We have seen works go through as many as six drafts without one important improvement in the thought.

Drawn in by the word processor's ability to facilitate small changes, such writers neglect the larger steps in writing. They compose when they need to be planning, edit when they need to be revising, and format when they need to be restructuring. Thesis development, flow of logic, and major structural issues never get addressed, and the quality of the work suffers as a result.

Small Screens

When a writer uses a screen that shows, at most, 24 lines at a time, an overview perspective is almost impossible. Without a clear sense of direction, prose wanders, partially expressed ideas recur, and points get muddled.

Distraction

Uninterrupted focus is key to deeper thinking and processing. While we cannot ever eliminate all distractions, we can certainly mitigate the most prolific sources of modern day focus issues: our devices.

Our laptops, phones, and tablets keep us constantly connected to the world around us, but the constant influx of information and notifications can hinder critical and creative thinking space.

So, let’s turn off and tune in...because hard copies make for easy improvements.