

Such decisions should be made by the writer based on his or her own developing criteria. Since the tutor is clearly just a helper, a coach, and not the grader, the writer is forced back on her own. But when teachers, who are also the graders, offer such comments, students are likely to do whatever is suggested—because they're smart and know it is to their advantage to give the grader what she wants. Tutors, on the other hand, offer suggestions that have to be weighed but can be ignored. More real choice-making goes on here. The advantage of the tutor's feedback, then, is that it is non-evaluative and can stand—or fall by the wayside. And tutor feedback, since tutors are trained to do this as their job, is likely to be more skilled than peer feedback in classroom response groups. Peers in a classroom often feel the force of peer pressure to offer each other only positive comments, or they are likely to see this as not worth investing too much energy, the "yah-it's-OK-I-guess" syndrome.

The writing center, then, is a place for your students to get feedback on developing drafts of their writing. If your students

haven't done this before, you'll have to explain that going there with a final draft an hour before it has to be handed in is not the way to do this. That may seem obvious to you, especially if you tend to share working drafts of your own writing with colleagues, but for students who are in the early stages of learning how to make use of reader feedback, that is not readily apparent. More commonly, they will assume that you are recommending that someone look over the paper to proofread for typos and spelling errors before you see it. Tutors spend far too much of their time (and the student's) trying to explain to bewildered writers that a writing center is not a proofreading service.

Tutors answer questions

Another service tutors provide for your students is being available to answer questions that all writers should and do have. But no teacher can be on constant call to answer those questions. And some questions, especially the more real ones, are those that

The Writing Lab Newsletter: A History of Collaboration

Kim Ballard and Rick Anderson
Purdue University Writing Lab

For over eleven years *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, published by Professor Muriel Harris at Purdue University's Writing Lab, has continued to offer a means for exchanging ideas and "hands-on" information about every phase of running a writing lab. Topics for exchange have ranged from the recruitment of tutors and the development of tutorial theory to administrative concerns and public relations. Now, as when it began, the need for *The Writing Lab Newsletter* is grounded in the collaborative nature of writing lab tutoring. The *Newsletter* allows readers to talk things over with hundreds of other dedicated writing teachers as easily as students in a lab can discuss their writing with a skilled tutor.

This open exchange of information reflects what has been Harris's basic philosophy of one-to-one tutoring since she and three graduate students began Purdue's Writing Lab in 1976. For Harris the *Newsletter's* history starts with that early collaborative effort. Harris had taught composition and basic writing at Purdue on a part-time basis for several years when she and three graduate teaching assistants, Linda Calendrillo, Bill Demaree, and Nell Gillis, started the Lab. The four shared a partitioned half of a former classroom, one *Harbrace Handbook*, one dictionary, and a drawer full of homemade handouts designed to help students relive their tutorial conversations after they left the Lab.

Harris and the new Lab staff also shared the belief that the classroom environment by itself was not suffi-

cient for helping writers develop their skills. Because students have individualized writing needs and questions, Harris explains, "We all wanted to do something different. To do something better." Consequently, they began to put into action the ideas that Harris eventually developed into the tutorial approach which she has presented at many conferences and in her two

books, *Teaching One to One: The Writing Conference* and *Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs*.

An important aspect of Harris's approach, published in *English Journal* in December 1980, is that during a single conference tutors may play the roles of coach, counselor, and commentator. She also believes that tutors must listen more than talk and that the goal of the tutorial is to help students come to their own understanding of what they are doing through feedback on what they have written.

When Harris and her staff began to implement and evaluate those ideas in 1976, they found themselves

(Continued on p. 7)



Muriel Harris

students will go to the writing center because you mentioned it in class or recommended it on their papers. Some will, but most won't—for a variety of reasons. They may think of the center as the place where only the real washouts go, or they may not be sufficiently motivated to get there. They prefer to stall, put it off, and at best, slide in during the last week of the semester. You'll need to present the center in a more positive way as a place for all writers, and you can dangle carrots such as extra credit or no credit until a revision has been worked on in a tutorial. Some instructors simply require going to the center, but that can send students in with the wrong attitude. Some advance publicity, such as having a tutor visit the class or conduct a mock tutorial in class, can help. Testimonials from students who have used the lab also change attitudes. Another unreal expectation is that your students will cure all their writing ills or some major problem in a visit or two. If the student has been writing all those fragments for years before arriving in your class, it isn't likely that one or two tutorials will suffice.

There are other myths about writing centers too, myths that keep teachers from using the center as well—that writers who use the lab are hapless cast-offs abandoned by their teachers, that tutorial collaboration means having the tutor write the paper for the student, or that writing centers are nothing more than dispensers of band-aid help, mending fragments and curing comma splices. One way to dispel such myths is to begin using the center. This set of directions should start you off, but you'll find that you'll create your own user's manual as you proceed.

Resources about Writing Centers

If you wish to learn more about writing centers, the following materials will help:

- SLATE Starter Sheet on Writing Centers, available from National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

- Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs*. Ed. Muriel Harris. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1982.

- Writing Center Journal*. Edited by Jeanette Harris, Dept. of English, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409 and Joyce Kinkead, Dept. of English, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322-3200. (Published twice a year, includes articles on theoretical and research issues and book reviews, \$7.50/year)

- Writing Lab Newsletter*. Edited by Muriel Harris, Dept. of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907. (Published monthly, Sept. to June, includes shorter articles on practical, immediately useful matters, announcements, and reviews of books and materials, \$7.50/year)

Subscribing to *Composition Chronicle*

If you're reading someone else's copy of *Composition Chronicle* and would like to have a subscription of your own, send a check or purchase order for \$25.00 to Viceroy Publications, 3217 Bronson Hill Road, Livonia, NY 14487. Special rates on request for students, photocopying rights, and multiple copies.

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facing unique situations and problems. They looked to each other for support and also pestered colleagues and Purdue's library staff for journals which addressed their needs. Harris, whose doctorate in Renaissance literature had given her a thorough background in classical rhetorical theory, says that she located *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, and a few other journals which concentrated on composition theory, but she found little material which specifically addressed the needs of new writing lab personnel. Meanwhile, she and her staff developed strategies and approaches in their new pedagogy and discussed their desires to collaborate with other lab directors and tutors.

That collaboration occurred in a dramatic form during an unexpectedly well-attended session at the 1977 Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in St. Louis. That year Harris, Mary Croft, Janice Neuleib, and Joyce Stewart presented one of the earliest panel discussions on writing lab theory and administration; their audience was so large that many had to listen from the hallway. The collaboration which inspired the *Newsletter* took place during that spirited session when the participants recognized that their vigorous exchange of ideas could help them in the development of their own writing lab programs and that they needed a means of continuing their useful exchange. The enthusiasm of their discoveries ran the Writing Lab session head-on into the next presentation. Harris remembers that as participants for the next presentation tried to push their way into the room, she suggested that a newsletter would be the best way to continue their collaboration. She also realized that they needed each other's addresses and passed around a sheet of paper that eventually became *The Writing Lab Newsletter's* first mailing list. That 1977 list has grown from its 50 initial readers to over 1200 today.

These same needs for mutual support through the exchange of ideas gave birth to the *Newsletter* and explain its continuing success. In his April 1984 *College English* review, "Journals in Composition Studies," Robert Connors makes this point and emphasizes the vital role Harris has played in the *Newsletter's* growth and appeal. He characterizes the newsletter as "classic and admirably useful" and suggests that of all the journals he examines in his article the *Newsletter* is "the most personalized and informal." Connors notes that it is "strongly imbued with the character of its editor, Muriel Harris," and concludes that "it is the only writing journal that makes its readers feel like friends."

A likely reason that the *Newsletter* sounds like "friends discussing things over coffee" is that until recently it was produced in Harris's kitchen. Harris smiles when she remembers her family's role in that "kitchen table affair." Often she edited submissions, did paste-ups, kept financial records, completed correspondence, and cooked dinner at the same time. The masters for the *Newsletter's* earliest issues were held together by scotch tape and highlighted with hand-drawn borders. Harris's daughter, Rebecca, fresh from her journalism classes at Indiana University, initiated the *Newsletter's* first technical innovations when she showed her mother that rubber cement and border tape produced a more attractive paste-up. When the Dean of Academic Services at Purdue University funded a Macintosh desk-

top publishing system for the *Newsletter*, Harris and her husband, Sam, sometimes worked together until two or three o'clock in the morning learning how to use it. This latest collaboration is responsible for the professional new look the *Newsletter* assumed in January 1988.

Besides these changes in the *Newsletter's* publication, Harris is proud of other significant developments in the *Newsletter's* content, readership, and professional acceptance. The variety of its contributors and articles is one of the most useful aspects of the *Newsletter*. In each issue space is shared by lab directors, other administrators, graduate assistants, and peer tutors who write about their experiences and insights. Authors share their research results, philosophies, and innovations. Harris's willingness to publish the best thinking about writing lab work at every level reinvigorates the idea that educators and students are colleagues.

Another development Harris likes to discuss concerns the expanding nature of the *Newsletter's* audience. There are subscribers in all fifty states and Canada, and the *Newsletter* is used in writing programs and writing labs in Bermuda, Denmark, Hong Kong and Japan. A recent reader survey indicates that it has become a "pass around publication." As many as 20 to 30 readers commonly share a single copy of an issue which is passed from lab directors to department chairs to deans. Copies of many of the articles are also used as materials in tutor training and writing instruction classes. The readership, originally from colleges and universities, now also includes primary, intermediate and secondary educators, who work with students at every grade from K-12. Harris believes that this newest addition to the *Newsletter's* audience is important evidence of the growing acceptance of tutorial writing instruction at all levels.

In fact, writing lab pedagogy has been recognized by an increasing number of educators and administrators as a uniquely effective and successful way to teach writing both in composition classes and in courses across the curriculum. Consequently, tenure review committees have acknowledged the significance of the research and scholarship in the *Newsletter*. Harris admits this recognition has added even more hours to her workload, since every aspect of the *Newsletter*—except preliminary typing, final printing, and mailing—is done entirely during her spare time after regular teaching, tutoring, and administrative work. More and more of the 30 to 40 letters she writes each week are addressed to tenure and promotion committees reviewing candidates who have published in the *Newsletter*.

In the future Harris believes that the *Newsletter* will continue to play an important part in the creation of new writing labs and the training of new tutors. She plans to begin a series of columns from contributing editors highlighting various labs, special programs, and tutors. She also hopes that the *Newsletter* will continue to be a favorite place for writing lab people to exchange ideas, recall personal experiences, announce conferences, request paper proposals, and advertise jobs.

Given the *Newsletter's* highly personable nature, it is also likely to remain a favorite place to share the lighter moments of writing lab tutoring which reveal so much about teaching writing one-to-one.

First issue of cross-disciplinary journal for composition appears

A new journal, plans for which were described in the March issue of *CC*, has made its debut. The journal is *Issues in Writing*, and the fall issue—its first—was published in November. *Issues in Writing* is sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, with major funding from the English Department and additional support from the Division of Business and Economics.

If this cooperation between English and business seems unique, it nevertheless reflects the aim of the journal to cross disciplinary lines and talk about writing in many disciplines. The journal also is designed to appeal to both academic and nonacademic audiences.

As might be expected, the first issue showed little luck in attracting nonacademic writers or in publishing material that would appeal to people outside academe. Most of the articles are aimed at classroom teachers. However, the journal had better luck in cutting across discipline boundaries. Of the five articles in the journal, one is about writing in the economics class and another about writing in an introductory painting course.

In addition to articles, *Issues in Writing* is supposed to include book reviews and one interview in each issue "with an authority who bridges diverse writing communities." There were no reviews in the first issue, but there was an extended interview with Frank N. Smith, editor of *Technical Communication* and Corporate Manager of Technical Information at McDonnell Douglas Corporation.

Smith had several interesting things to say about the training of technical writers. He advocated broad training in general rhetorical skills such as audience analysis rather than narrow training to write specific technical documents. And he said that technical writers should be masters of their craft in order to get respect from their technically-oriented colleagues; above all, they should be experts on grammar (a subject that most English teachers don't learn until they must teach it, usually in junior high).

Issues in Writing is edited by James D. Stokes, David G. Holborn, Roberta Stokes, and Richard Behm—all of Stevens Point. The journal is to be published twice a year, in the fall and spring.

To subscribe costs \$8 for one year, \$14 for two years—same price to both institutions and individuals. Send name, address, and payment to *Issues in Writing*, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Stevens Point, WI 54481. Be sure to say whether you want to start with the fall issue already published or wait until the spring issue.

Contents of the first issue

"The Preparation and Performance of Technical Writers: A Conversation with Dr. Frank R. Smith"

"Writing about Economics: A Tool to Strengthen Student Understanding," by Dennis J. Palmini

"Using Writing to Develop Visual Artists: A Pedagogical Model"