

The WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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With this issue the newsletter closes up shop for the summer, leaving me to confront a pile of other work on my desk. If you too are compiling an agenda of summer projects, consider adding to your list some or all of the following suggestions.

First, if you haven't yet written an article for the newsletter, let the rest of us hear from you. Members of our newsletter group say that reading about other writing labs is particularly useful in gaining a perspective on their own. That, in turn, suggests another project for you. Some readers write in to comment on articles, note which book reviews were useful, describe how the "Tutor's Corner" essays are used at tutor meetings, and generally offer the kind of feedback that helps me shape the newsletter into the kind of publication they want. If you haven't yet voiced your preferences, please do so.

And, finally, if you haven't sent in a yearly \$7.50 donation in recent memory, please do that also. We have no billing procedures and no invoices to send out. But in our on-going battle to stay afloat financially, we do have to reduce the mailing list periodically by eliminating those who haven't contributed for awhile. Please don't force us into loosing touch with you. So, send your articles, comments, reviews, announcements, and donations of \$7.50 (in checks made payable to Purdue University, but sent to me) to:

Muriel Harris, editor
Writing Lab Newsletter
Dept. of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

Have a pleasant, relaxing, and perhaps even productive summer (if those aren't mutually exclusive terms).

WORD PROCESSING AND MORE: THE JOYS AND CHORES OF A WRITING LAB COMPUTER

I am not at all surprised at the enthusiasm with which writing lab directors search for computer funding. Word processing, not to mention other computer capabilities, offers a lab numerous advantages. By facilitating revision, it can indirectly teach students better writing techniques, but it can also assist in direct instruction. Auxiliary scanning devices, which may be purchased for most word processing programs, mark spelling mistakes, alert writers to passive construction or wordiness, and analyze sentence length and sentence structure.

Even without purchasing additional software, you can often simulate some of these checking devices. If your word processing has a "search and replace" procedure, you can search for periods and replace them with, for instance, a series of asterisks. This visually separates sentences and helps the writer see possible repetitive sentence length and structure. Another handy use of the search/replace function is its ability to quickly remove all punctuation. Some students fail to see the use or importance of commas or periods; some even go so far as to argue that there is little use for them. If one of these disbelieving student's paper is on the computer, you can remove all her/his punctuation, or just the commas or just the periods, and ask the student to replace them in the appropriate spots. The sight of her/his own writing jammed together without any visual clues for pausing or stopping usually impresses on the student the usefulness of punctuation. When the student replaces the punctuation, s/he can also receive a meaningful lesson on how to punctuate because the words and the meaning they convey are the writer's own, not those of some impersonal exercise-book passage.

Word processing can also lessen some of the tedium of good writing. Many students

(and I) are intrigued by what these little machines do; a by-product of this fascination is often small improvements in the student's text. How many students do you know who look forward to checking their spelling? With a computer, the process becomes almost like a game. The search and replace mechanism can also take the writer on a quick safari through a 20-page jungle, hunting down, for instance, the erroneous "picturesque" and allowing him/her to change it to the correct "picaresque." With the computer, the writer finds all the errors and it's fun. Without the computer, even if he or she finds all the errors, it's tedious. Many times have I heard our clients say, "Wow, the computer can check that."

Another one of our most popular computer services is for the graduating senior. Twenty or thirty seniors this past year (three times this amount, I am sure, if we had more terminals) put their resumes and application letters on computer diskettes. Many, when they came to the lab, had already typed three or four drafts of their resumes and anticipated at their current rate three or four more. We not only helped them reduce drastically their production time but showed them how the computer could improve their resume's visual image through simple revisions. The computer offered them choices in seconds. "Do you want these items here?" (push three keys) "or here?" (push three more keys). Some of these resume customers have returned two or three times with new information to add; we call up their file, type three new lines, print, voila an update resume in five or ten minutes. The word processor also helps students avoid the form application letter. We show them how they can write a basic letter and then tailor it for various audiences or string together a series of standard paragraphs in different orders to address different prospective employers.

These students also benefited from our comments on their writing in both their resumes and application letters; they may have come to the lab for the ease of producing a document, but they left with knowledge of how to write better ones. Such was from the beginning my insidious plan; draw them in in larger-than-usual numbers because of the wonders of the machine (and wonders they are) but quietly teach them a bit (or a lot) about writing on the side.

Yes, every writing lab and center in the country should have word processing facilities. But because the arrival of boxes filled with computer equipment manuals is such a welcomed time for any writing lab, the problems involved in the actual use of the equipment--figuring the cost of operation, learning the software, preventing loss of information, training staff--are often not realized until after the boxes are unpacked and the computers are set up.

Figuring the additional cost of operation was the least of our worries. We realized that we would need to buy diskettes, computer paper, and printing ribbons but underestimated the correct amounts. Instead of two ribbons, we needed four, especially if we were to keep the print dark enough to satisfy some of the teachers of our clients (another relatively minor problem which I won't delve into). Diskettes filled up more rapidly than we had expected, so we needed 20 instead of 5. We discovered we couldn't afford to stock paper with tear-away, tractor-feed holes because it cost over a penny per page. We instead offered students 8 1/2 x 11-inch paper with tractor-feed holes included and suggested that they make photocopies of their essays before submitting them to their teachers.

A more serious difficulty was learning the software. We did not schedule enough time for tutors to master the word processing techniques. And using the software, not reading the manufacturer's manual, is the best, possibly the only, way to acquire a thorough understanding of it. In fact, some manuals might even impede your learning of the word processing procedures. We discovered that the instructions in the manufacturer's guides were most useful, or useful at all, only after a user logged many hours at the keyboard.

In short, unless you thoroughly train your lab personnel, you will probably have a series of mishaps which will prevent you from getting down to the desired business of improving student writing. Unfortunately, such training is more difficult than it seems especially if your lab is like ours, staffed with undergraduates with full schedules. You cannot suddenly devote half or more of regular staff meetings to computer training; other lab business continues as usual. And training demands more hours than we have staff meetings. I have already

explained that the manufacturer's manual is little help for computer neophytes and the writing of your own instructions is very time consuming. And besides, when tutors must laboriously consult written instructions, clients become impatient. Finally, many tutors have no particular feel for computer technology, some even experience mild or moderate Angst when sitting in front of a terminal.

What are some of the solutions to the above problems? Let me initially offer some that might be realistic for you even if they weren't for us.

1. Schedule your staff so that a computer-wise person is on duty at all times. You could maybe even hire someone who would not be a writing tutor but solely a computer tutor. Although the title has a nice ring to it, I would hesitate to take this step because it would make our establishment less a writing lab and more a computer lab. Anyhow, I believe that you can teach good writing tutors how to use the word processor.
2. Make sure that your lab begins its computer era with at least two terminals so that one will always be free for training.
3. Request additional money from the school so that you can pay tutors to come to training sessions.

For your standard low-budget operation some of the following suggestions should help you attract students to use the word processor, prevent loss of students' material and damage to your equipment, and train your staff (and at the same time save you money and justify to the administration money they spent on the computer equipment).

Attracting Students

- Have two or three word processing workshops for students and faculty. They will show the students and their teachers the advantages of the computer and will give you a chance to give some general instructions.
- Send out through campus mail brief notices which describe the benefits of word processing.

Preventing Loss of Material and Damage to Equipment

- Compose a checklist of safeguards which every client must read before using the word processor.
- Always keep one tutor available for computer consultation. That tutor should unobtrusively hover near the beginning user.

Staff Training

- Concentrate on training adjunct faculty or clerical staff, or any small group which will collectively cover all the hours the lab will be open. They can subsequently train those with whom they work. I would estimate that each tutor would need from 5 to 10 hours of practice on the word processor before s/he could with relative ease help a client type, revise and print a standard freshman composition essay, more experience, of course, for assisting someone in the composition of a business report, a resume, or any document with numerous divisions and various margins.
- Develop word processing exercises for tutors and check their work. Scramble the words, sentences, paragraphs of a paper; have them practice moving paragraphs, inserting words, deleting extraneous material and gaps in the text so that their revision conforms to a printed paper.
- Insist that inexperienced tutors (ones who cannot complete the exercises) use the word processor at least two hours per week.
- Have these tutors regularly sign up to use the computer so that no students will be occupying the terminal(s) when s/he should be training.
- have tutors type the lab's written handouts and exercises onto a disk. This will give them practice and help the lab cut costs. The advantage of having computer copies of forms and handouts is that you can make immediate revisions as you need to. You also have immediate access to printed copies of our forms and can use them while waiting for orders of handouts to return from the print shop. Furthermore, when you need to send an order to

the print shop, you always have a copy ready to go because with the word processor you can easily make revisions of handouts when you notice that a revision should be made. You don't have to delay your order until you can type a revised copy, and you do not have to succumb to the pressures of time and send in an unrevised form because no one has the hour or two it takes to type a revision. Finally, you do not have to continually pay someone for retyping.

--Pay a computer-wise tutor to work with less experienced tutors.

--Compile your own instructional manual. I mention this last because it will take you longest to do and it is tedious for many reasons. Any self-written guides must be very rudimentary because many clients and tutors fear that any experimenting or even extrapolating on instruction might cause the computer to yell at them or break on them. People who are in no way literalist in other circumstances, can become so in front of a terminal. People who would never consider halting in the middle of the road because the "walk" light has changed to "wait," might wait in the middle of a series of computer commands instead of hazarding the next step in defiance of a flashing "disk error" notice.

Nonetheless, I suppose that composing your own manual is an eventual necessity. As tedious as it is to produce and as slow as it is to use in day-to-day operations, it is the only way to systematically condense and refine the mass-produced manufacturer's guide. Below are a few suggestions which might help you compile your manual more quickly.

--Purchase a user's guide issued by a publishing firm that specializes in computer material (some do a good job of translating IBM, Apple (etc.) language into English) and use as a basis for your manual.

--Assign experienced tutors the job of writing instructions for various procedures.

--Have inexperienced tutors read and follow these instructions. This will teach them something about the procedures and will test the instructions for accuracy with a

less-than-knowledgeable audience.

I hope that some of these suggestions make your word-processing beginnings less bumpy than ours were. Our second year of word processing saw a decrease in mishaps and an increase in good writing. I am sure our third year will be even better.

Rick Marshall
Indiana Central Univ.
Indianapolis, Indiana

In Print, devoted to issues and innovations in the two year and community college, and supported by North Shore Community College, will publish its fifth annual number in April, 1988.

Lively, informative, jargon-free contributions of between one and two thousand words are sought. Poetry and fiction are welcome. Samples of the last issue will be sent on request. Write: Carl Carlsen, In Print editor, North Shore Community College, Beverly, MA 01915.

A READER COMMENTS

As Coordinator of writing/study skills tutoring at Hope College, a small midwestern liberal arts school, I have found the information in every issue of the newsletter to be of great value, both to myself and to my staff of peer tutors. The "Tutor's Corner," in particular, is required reading for my tutors. They will comment, argue, and agree with the writers' thoughts; I think the greater "connection" with other tutors has given the peer tutors here a sense of importance in looking at what they do.

Nancy Nordstrom
Hope College
Holland, Michigan

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Midwest College Learning Center Assn.
Annual Conference

Oct. 8-9, 1987

"Learning Center Professionals: Challenging
Students to Achieve"

The Hyatt Regency
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Call for proposals addressing the following issues: Successful diagnostic methods and devices; effective academic assistance; current learning theories and research; assessment and administration of the services of learning centers. For a copy of the proposal form, contact:

Sandra Burmeister
1987 Conference Chair
University of Wisconsin-Parkside
Box No. 2000
Kenosha, WI 53141
(414)553-2610

Deadline: June 10, 1987

DATA BASES IN THE WRITING CENTER:
THE PC AS ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD KEEPER

Have you ever wanted to know whether students from Mr. Jones's class use the center more or less than those from Dr. Smith's? Has Ms. Johnson ever called you, wanting to know the names of each of her students who have visited the center in the last nine days? Have you ever tried to discover which time blocks are busy and which are slow? And who uses your services most: basic writing, composition, or technical writing students?

All of this information can be at your fingertips with a well-planned data base, an electronic filing system designed to keep small pieces of information systematically arranged.

A data base allows you to create a file format which contains a series of columns. The columns, of course, are designated according to the information you want to chart. As the file is filled, information is stored in the columnar format. Most writing centers, for example, would want to keep similar information: students' names, tutors' names, instructors' names, course information, and time/date information. These topics, then, would become the column headings.

All of this, of course, can be recorded by hand using pencils and standard columnar pads. The data base, however, has distinct advantages over the manual system: since electronic text remains fluid, the data base allows for the information to be constantly rearranged, resorted, and printed using a variety of formats. Thus when you find yourself in need of information you never thought to catalog, you can quickly shuffle through the data base and arrange the information in whatever format you desire.

The questions I offered at the beginning of this section were neither hypothetical nor rhetorical. In the Davis and Elkins College Academic Resources Center we offer a variety of services to students and faculty across the campus. We function in a variety of roles: writing center, Apple computer facility, all-subject tutorial center, study area, headquarters for the Honors Program and the Writing Excellence Program, and coffee lounge. We also work closely with foundations courses in basic reading, writing, and math, assist the education department with computer literacy objectives, and proctor make-up tests. Therefore, it is not uncommon for the reading or nursing or chemistry professor requiring lab time to request print-outs of her students' visits. Advisors also occasionally want a record of their proteges' efforts. Additionally, we use the information each year to revise our scheduled hours, depending on data base information to identify slack hours which might be eliminated.

Our data base, therefore, includes the following columns: student last name, student first name, tutor name, professor name, course name and number, date, times in and out of the center, total time, and attendance description (required or walk-in). A sample printout of our information is included in Table One.

For our end-of-the-month report, we electronically rearrange this information in order to view the information we are interested in. We print a chronological hard copy, arranged by date, and a copy alphabetized by students' last names. We also rearrange and view other information on the screen, maintaining information on how many tutors were used, how many sessions each conducted, the number of different courses we were involved with, the number of professors whose students attended, and the percentage of students who were volunteer walk-ins.

All of this categorical information is easily manipulated using the Applesworks Data Base we have on hand. Each tutoring session is entered in the data base. Then with the touch of single, two-finger commands, we can rearrange the columns of information, making dates, names, tutors, or professors our left-hand, primary interest column. Then with another simple command we can arrange the information in the column either by alphabet or chronology, either forward or

reverse. Thus, we can change the above chronological list into a professor-important list quickly and easily, re-alphabetizing according to our new information goals. Within five seconds the on-screen information shown in figure one can be converted to the format shown in Table Two.

Another simple command or two, and we can produce hard-copy print-outs of only those sections of the data base that are important at the moment. Doctor Smith can learn which of her students used the center, but Mr. Jones's students retain their anonymity.

Record keeping shouldn't consume major parts of a center director's time; we have better things to do. Making our PCs more productive is one way of making us more productive.

Kevin Davis
Davis and Elkins College
Elkins, WV

Table 1.

File: Tables				
Report: Date				
Date	Last name	First name	Class	Tutor
Oct. 1	Fox	Mark	Engl. 101	Weaner
Oct. 4	Oberton	Janet	Engl. 102	Lilly
Oct. 5	Buckley	Mary Beth	Engl. 117	Harrison
Oct. 3	Scott	June	Engl. 101	Bozic
Oct. 1	Daube	Scott	Engl. 116	Yingling

Table 2.

File: Tables				
Report: Course				
Class	Tutor	Teacher	Last name	Date
Engl. 101	Weaner	Crowell	Fox	Oct. 1
Engl. 102	Lilly	Bloom	Oberton	Oct. 4
Engl. 117	Harrison	Davis	Buckley	Oct. 5
Engl. 101	Bozic	Goddin	Scott	Oct. 3
Engl. 116	Yingling	Goddin	Daube	Oct. 1

The Tutor's Corner

CONFESSIONS OF A TUTOR

As a tutor, I have two goals. First, I attempt to help the student solve his or her immediate problem. In doing so, I attempt to pursue a second goal--making the student, so far as possible, academically self-sufficient. Thus, I see the ultimate goal of the Learning Center not to perpetuate its use by making students dependent upon it and its staff, but to enable the student to employ with confidence his or her own intellectual capacities--in short, to wean the student from the tutor.

When a student first sits down with me, I am always a bit apprehensive, for I, as a tutor, am an authority figure conspicuously lacking in authority. If I misdirect a student, it is my responsibility, and that reflects detrimentally on the Learning Center. I can only suggest possibilities to the student. I can seldom give definite answers, therefore, to many student questions: "So I'll get an 'A' on this paper, right?" "Will he like this?" "Is this what she wants?" "How many/What kind of sources should I get?" "Is it long enough?" Definite answers come only with more mundane questions: "How should I punctuate this?" "Where in the MLA does it say . . .?" "How should I reorganize this paragraph?" Given these limitations, it is evident that the questions most important to the student--the former set--will go unanswered, and he or she may well feel that the Learning Center has been no help at all, and should be avoided in the future.

To compensate for this, it is necessary to do at least two things: give the student confidence in the Learning Center and its tutors, and give the student the means for confidence in his or her own intellectual potential, namely, self-sufficiency.

To meet the first goal, it is necessary to help the student resolve the immediate problem. Usually, this means going over the terms of the specific assignment, helping the student understand what is expected of him or her, exploring methodologies capable of solving the problem at hand, and, finally, intuiting if the problem, at this point, is solveable by the student. Much of the time it is.

However, I find that many students have a

marked lack of confidence in themselves. In a few, this underconfidence should be present. But by far, most students lacking in the confidence needed for academic initiative are indeed capable of performing that which is expected of them. They are simply so worried about being in error that thought itself is stifled. One student, for example, had to write an essay describing a process. He was quite familiar with his topic, but was so anxious about proceeding "incorrectly" that he could not recollect the steps involved in the process.

The solution is not to hold the student's hand, and spoonfeed easy answers--I have my own homework to do--but to give the student an assurance that his or her own thinking not only should be attempted, but should be seen as intellectually valid--at least potentially. That is, the student should be made to realize that he or she can arrive at the "right" procedure or answer on his or her own. Students must be made, in tutoring, to suggest their own solutions. However, they must also be taught to critique their own thinking. Ultimately this makes the students independent of the tutor. I suggest to the students I meet four guidelines for self-critiquing. These take the form of questions: "Is it relevant?" "Is it accurate?" "Is it complete?" "Is it clear?" And, when thought is transferred to paper, one must ask oneself as well, "Is it concise?"

By asking and answering these questions, the student is forced to consider the nature of the project, the qualitative and quantitative measures of the research involved, and logical/stylistic choices involved in communicating his or her findings. These, coincidentally, are the same considerations any tutor would pursue when helping a student. And it seems that the student is capable of posing these questions to him- or herself. This heightens the appreciation of a successful project, and forces the student to accept ultimate responsibility for his or her performance. To my thinking, this is true growth; this is why the Learning Center exists.

Paul McCallum
Peer Tutor
Morningside College
Sioux City, Iowa

 WRITING CENTER JOURNAL

The Writing Center Journal is an official publication of the National Writing Centers Association, which is an Affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English.

The primary purpose of The Writing Center Journal is to publish articles, announcements, and reviews that are of interest to writing center directors and tutors. We therefore invite manuscripts that explore issues or theories related to writing center administration or instruction. We are especially interested in theoretical articles and in reports of research related to or conducted in writing centers. In addition to directors and tutors who are associated with college and university writing centers, we encourage directors of high school writing centers to submit manuscripts.

Subscription to The Writing Center Journal is \$7.50 per year; single back issues are \$2.50. Checks should be made payable to The Writing Center Journal. Subscription requests and all related correspondence should be sent to Joyce Kinkead, Editor, The Writing Center Journal, Department of English, Utah State University, Logan UT 84322-3200.

Manuscripts and all correspondence regarding editorial matters should be sent to Jeanette Harris, Editor, The Writing Center Journal, Department of English, Texas Tech University Lubbock, TX 79409.

 CALL FOR PAPERS

Focuses is a forum which publishes articles linking composition theory and writing-center practice. The articles selected will be of special interest to directors of writing programs, writing-across-the-campus specialists, directors of writing centers, writing teachers, and teachers of writing on the computer.

For further information write or call William C. Wolff, editor, Focuses, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608, (704) 262-2321.

Subscriptions are \$10 a year for individuals and \$15 a year for institutions.

 INTERLOCK: A PROPOSAL FOR A
 "COSMOPOLITAN" WRITING LAB

Our selling point has been this: that writing is a function of thinking and learning. Students learn better when they write about what they learn, and they learn to think better in their discipline when their writing assignment requires them to think as a physicist, an historian, or a sociologist. In this project students do real world writing, relevant to their specialties, their learning, and their future. Such writing we believe can best be evaluated by another physicist, historian or sociologist--not an English teacher.¹ (Italics are mine.)

"Writing of all types develops precision of thought." (attributed to Francis Bacon)

"Citizens of the world" - cosmopolites--this is the goal that a liberal-arts education attempts to attain. And yet our writing centers and learning laboratories are programmed to help students in English, but not in other content areas. But what of the student--developmental or otherwise--who has a history paper due next week? What will happen to the philosophy major who can think but not write (not an uncommon phenomenon, unfortunately)? And who will help the business or technical student who needs help in drafting a one-page memo, an instruction sheet, a resume, or a product evaluation? Indeed, all three cases argue for the existence of a writing laboratory that transcends the parochial interests of any one department, a writing lab stocked with well-trained, articulate tutors who know the particular demands of a wide-ranging student clientele. Yet students like the ones cited above bespeak the need for academic or technical specialization not found in most labs today, but which should be.

Accordingly, I propose the concept of a "cosmopolitan" writing laboratory, one that will be run by tutors who are masters of a particular content area as well as of the principles of writing. The establishment of this laboratory is to be predicated on three principles: that different students from various content areas need specialized tutors in these areas, that finding and training these tutors will be challenging and will involve new ideas and techniques,

and that faculty need to be crucially integrated into any cosmopolitan writing-lab program. Adherence to these principles will guarantee a good foundation upon which to build a writing-across-the-curriculum program.

However, some people will object: What if proper tutors cannot be found? After all, the idea of a laboratory in which tutors have mastered not only writing skills but also the basics of a content area is still considered revolutionary. Mary C. Grattan and Susan P. Robbins confront this problem:

Facing a critical shortage of tutors one quarter, we appealed to faculty members in the Humanities/Social Sciences Division to donate one or two hours per week in the center. As a result of this request, we had several volunteers representing the fields of history, government, and community services, as well as English. Some of these volunteers entered the center with grave misgivings about their fluency in the jargon of English grammar, but we assured them that a sentence fragment could be described in many different ways and that their way might make more sense to the student than our way. As the quarter wore on, these content area faculty members realized how much they really did know about writing; after all, they had all written a thesis or dissertation and countless papers and essay tests when the students see their content area teachers in the center, they begin to view writing as an interest and a skill of all disciplines--not just English. And this is our real objective.² (Italics are mine.)

There are those who will raise another objection and say that there is no real reason for such a "cosmopolitan" laboratory: after all, writing papers for other content areas is the same as writing English papers. Grattan and Robbins do not concur:

Many content instructors believe a student should learn to write in English class and ever thereafter be able to write in any field or format. We have in our year's experience come to believe that his belief is based on a tragic misconception. We have worked with students who had very little trouble composing papers in English class, but experienced much difficulty in writing for history and sociology. (Italics are mine.) (7)

Indeed, anybody who is a history buff is aware of the need for an historical perspective and of the biases that appear when certain facts are left out (only natural in the selection of materials to be covered). And anyone who has ever studied any branch of philosophy is aware of the jargon that must be incorporated into papers of a philosophic bent, whether one deals with Thales, Democritus, Descartes, Hume, or Sartre. The technical writer has got to be keenly aware of audience, perhaps more so than would a writer in any other field. Terseness and precision in terminology are bound to be hallmarks of this writer's field. Thus, the writing lab must be able to deal effectively with all these writing demands and problems.

In conclusion, the cosmopolitan writing laboratory is an idea whose time has come. With the growing awareness of writing across the curriculum has emerged the concomitant need for a lab that will reach out and involve as many different content areas as possible. Were we truly Renaissance men and women and able to master the various content areas ourselves, we might feel that as English tutors and teachers we could have at our fingertips a working knowledge of whatever fields our students might be engaged in; in fact, we are fortunate to be conversant in just a small section of language arts. That being the case, it is up to us to try to involve as many faculty members as possible from other disciplines in our attempt to provide a background for writing-across-the-curriculum programs. We must let it be known that writing as a handmaiden of thinking is not the particular domain of the English tutor and teacher, that good writing ought not be confined to English classes but should be a cosmopolitan concern: in short, as John Sheffield wrote in the seventeenth century,

Of all those areas in which the wise excel, Nature's chief masterpiece is writing well.

Jay Yarmove
University of Cincinnati

¹Paul J. Ferlazzo, "Writing Across the Curriculum from the Point of View of a Department Chair," ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1982. ED 215 368.

²"The Writing Center after One Year: Some Myths and Recommendations," ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1979. ED 188 203.

THE WRITING LAB II. Gorilla Software, 6331
Fairmont Avenue, #375, El Cerrito, CA 94530.
Price: \$349.

As long as class lectures remain the dominant way of teaching English grammar in our schools, there will always be students who don't grasp concepts as fast as their classmates. When the instructor moves on to a new topic, these students become the clientele of writing centers. When this happens, the one-on-one teaching done by computers is particularly valuable. Students work at their own pace and are forced to answer all the questions themselves. In short, they cannot "disappear" as in a classroom situation. The Writing Lab, from Gorilla Software, uses this fact to present grammar for writers in an extremely effective manner without tying up lab personnel.

The Writing Lab package looks formidable. Disks cover topics beginning with phrases, sentences and run-ons and progress to three separate sentence combining disks to make up a complete grammar package. As a writing center resource, this package can present any basic grammar concept in the state-of-the-art interactive manner that makes computer-aided instruction so valuable. While it can't diagnose problems in a student's writing, it can present the knowledge necessary to correct problems once diagnosed and to prevent them from occurring again. But it's what's inside that makes the package truly impressive, and valuable to the college writing center.

The Writing Lab was tested on three students, a freshman composition student, an ESL graduate student, and an "average achieving" high school sophomore. The only instructor input necessary was to show how to insert a disk and point out the power switch. The package was easily used by all three students, and all operational details needed were presented by the module itself. While the package does come with a short, though adequate, manual that may be used by students at all levels, it isn't needed for anything other than start-up information and reference.

The clarity of the program makes it most effective. Even the high school student had no difficulty in following the lessons. Yet the information was dense enough that I will have to admit to learning a few things myself while testing the product. Should students encounter a topic that they find dif-

ficult to understand, they can go back and review previous screens. In addition, many of the topics are elaborated in detail screens that can be referenced whenever a student is unsatisfied by the initial presentation. For most students, however, the screens are unnecessary as the presentation is clear and complete.

After a module is completed, the system has a record-keeping program that will record each student's result for later use by the instructor. This feature is also of value to centers conducting empirical research. Data can be stored by name or designator numbers. The student, meanwhile, can go on to a series of printed lesson quizzes that further test mastery of the completed module. Also included in the package are printed worksheets for planning of individualized programs to meet student needs. A writing center counselor can lay out an entire study plan for a student after one meeting. The student can then do the simplest or most elaborate plan of study without further assistance, freeing up lab personnel for other duties.

On the technical side, when I first began testing The Writing Lab, I found a couple of minor flaws that were distracting. The people at Gorilla Software have since corrected all of the technical weak points, and The Writing Lab II has emerged as a most satisfactory program. Once in the program, the student is never hurried. The screens remain until the student acts to make a change. Occasionally, there are places where the movement is excessively slow. When the program responds to a student's answer, the response stays on the screen a bit long before giving the student an opportunity to move to the next screen. While two of our subjects commented on the problem, it did not seem to interfere with their attention span. One other minor annoyance concerns the program's audio. There is no way given in either the disks or the manual to shut off the sound effects that accompany the program. These could be annoying in a writing lab situation.

Most of the modules can be completed in less than one half hour. The longest any of our subjects took for a disk was 45 minutes. This is particularly useful in the college

remedial situation where students see the trip to the writing lab as inconvenient. Also helpful is the fact that most of the disks stand alone. It is only in the sentence combining section that more than one disk is necessary, and even there, the order is not critical.

Students can review materials after they have completed a package, or can stop in the middle, should time become a factor, and later return to the same spot. Should they decide to skip ahead, however, they need to go through an index. Headings in the index are sketchy, and this could hamper usefulness of this option.

Should instructors decide the program could be better suited to their students with a few changes, all screens are editable using Simpac's Super Sofcrates, also available from Gorilla. While the quality of the presentation is excellent and the sentences used come from "real" prose, this option will allow writing center directors to customize a package for business and technical writing or any type of specialty in writing across the curriculum. Instructions for editing are included in The Writing Lab's manual.

If there is a weakness, it lies in the program's response to answers in the sentence combining section. Should a student use a more obscure, but equally correct form of combined sentences, the program counts it wrong and then gives the more popular answer. Of course, building in all possible answers is nearly impossible, even if we knew what all the possibilities were. As such, this problem is most forgivable provided the instructor knows about it up front and can find a way to keep students from getting discouraged as a result.

While the entire package, consisting of 15 lessons and a record keeping-disk, is priced at \$349, individual lessons may be purchased for \$34.95 each. In addition, groups of lessons covering major topics can be purchased at varying prices. A sample demo disk is also available for \$7.50.

Gorilla Software's Barbara Pace assures me that anyone owning an old edition of The Writing Lab may send for an updated edition at a very nominal cost. The changes in the new version certainly justify the investment of less than \$10.

The Writing Lab is perfect for use in conjunction with freshman composition classes. This package can correct most grammar problems students will encounter and do so without tying up a lab instructor. The sentence combining segments can deliver all the benefits commonly associated with this form of pedagogy. On the junior high or high school level, the package can be used as the only grammar instruction in the areas it covers and will function effectively for writers. Most important, it does the job in a painless manner. Our three subjects found the experience quite tolerable, in spite of the fact that they had to give up a Saturday morning to the project. There's a lot to be said for that!

Michael W. Gos
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN

BOOK REVIEW

Muriel Harris, Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1986. \$13.00 (NCTE members \$10.00).

Do readers of Writing Lab Newsletter need to be convinced that one-to-one instruction works? Probably not. But if any doubters remain, Teaching One-to-One is a book to leave on their desks. In it, Muriel Harris makes an informed and impassioned case for supplementing (if not supplanting) traditional classroom work and written comments with face-to-face conversation. Drawing on her threefold credentials as teacher, tutor, and founding editor of Writing Lab Newsletter, Harris offers a wealth of insight and information that will stimulate converts and skeptics alike.

And as if her own credentials were not enough, Harris calls to the stand an impressive array of expert witnesses: Donald Murray, Donald Graves, and Roger Garrison among them. She also illustrates her points with student examples and transcribed excerpts from actual conference sessions, all of which make lively reading. Finally, because her argument is interdisciplinary, she enlists the aid of outside experts from psychology, anthropology, and linguistics. For these reasons, the bibliography and appendixes in Teaching One-to-One are especially valuable.

Teaching is a practical art, but Harris rightly begins with theory, putting the why ahead of the how-to. The book opens with "A Rationale for One-to-One Teaching" that sets forth the chief advantages of conference-based instruction over traditional teaching. Unlike marginal scribblings, the one-to-one teacher's spoken comments are immediate, intelligible, and individualized. In this "believing game" the teacher plays coach as well as umpire, offering advice and encouragement instead of cryptic annotation. Harris confesses that conferences are "exhausting, the level of concentration is high, and the intensity of the give-and-take can fry one's brain" (27). Nonetheless, she argues strenuously that compared to hours spent marking papers in absentia, conferences are efficient and satisfying work for teacher and student alike.

One-to-one instruction takes many forms, Harris shows in her second chapter, "Shapes and Purposes of the Conference." Approaches range from catch-as-catch-can meetings in a faculty office to tightly scheduled conferences held during each class. With tactful neutrality, Harris presents two radically different styles of conferring: the directive, text-centered approach of Roger Garrison and the non-directive, student-centered approach of Donald Murray. Whatever approach he or she takes, the one-to-one teacher necessarily plays multiple roles, serving as commentator, counselor, listener, and diagnostician.

Chapter Three discusses conference activities: "listening, questioning, observing, showing, and telling" (55). Harris offers valuable tips on each, and alerts teachers to common pitfalls: short time, shorter attention spans, manipulation, self-doubt. Drawing again on Garrison and Murray, she offers probing sample questions--and a sobering caveat from Donald Graves, who notes how seldom we wait fifteen seconds before answering our own queries.

"Diagnosis for Teaching One-to-One" is the fourth topic. For Harris, diagnosis is not labeling. It is the search for hidden patterns and causes. She urges teachers to begin conference-based teaching with a self-analysis of their own biases and expectations. Turning to the student, she describes a range of personality types and shows how cultural differences predetermine students' attitudes and behavior (87-94). When she examines the third variable, the

written product, Harris offers cogent advice on error analysis, dialect interference, and learning disabilities.

In the final chapter, "Strategies for Teaching One-to-One," Harris provides what readers of Writing Lab Newsletter have come to expect each month: a "grab bag" (105) of tried-and-tested techniques for one-to-one instruction. Again, the discussion moves from global to local issues. Except when a "quick and dirty" grammar lesson is called for, she suggests, one-to-one teachers do best to begin with overall rhetorical considerations--thesis, focus, and organization--before turning to surface errors.

Teaching One-to-One is easily the most comprehensive treatment of conference-based teaching published to date. It is also the least idiosyncratic, which is both a virtue and a vice. Faced with such mighty opposites as Garrison and Murray, whose methods are clearly antithetical, one longs to hear what Muriel Harris, an authority of equal stature, thinks for herself. In addition, several metaphors, perhaps terms of art, deserve scrutiny. The word "diagnosis," for example, lends scientific cachet to conference-based teaching, but it also suggests that the learner is ill. Valuable as a "grab bag" may be, it is no substitute for method. (Polanyi would disagree with me here.) Most troubling of all is the maternal metaphor "weaning" (34).

Harris's eclectic approach to one-to-one teaching is ultimately so forbearing that hard-core skeptics may be piqued rather than persuaded. "Do conferences really enhance writing ability?" insists the Spirit that Denies. With disarming candor, Harris reports that the evidence is incomplete (16-17). But if our Fearless Leader is so broad-minded as to embrace contradictions, she is also big enough to contain multitudes. In Teaching One-to-One Muriel Harris offers God's plenty of ideas and encouragement--the very stuff we've come to expect from her. For me (a believer, to be sure), that's more than enough.

William L. Stull
University of Hartford
West Hartford, CT

In Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference (NCTE, 1986), Muriel Harris clarifies the Meyers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator as she discusses differences in writing personalities. Her analysis is based on the work of George Jensen and John DiTiberio, who studied groups of writers and related their writing processes to the Meyers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator. This inventory "differentiates four bipolar dimensions, each of which represents opposing psychological processes":

1. Extraversion (to preserve Jung's spelling)-introversion (ways of focusing one's energies)
2. Sensing-intuition (ways of perceiving)
3. Thinking-feeling (ways of making evaluations and decisions)
4. Judging-perceiving (ways of approaching tasks in the outer world) (82)

Since I had taken the "test" several years ago, I found my results and used my yellow florescent marker to accent my individual qualities: introverted, sensing, thinking, and judging. I finally understood why I tutored in the manner that I did: Task Oriented. I remembered what Donald Graves called his "sense of uneasiness that too much time (was) passing while students (went) on at greater length than (was) needed to make a point," (56).¹ This uneasiness made me feel as if I were straying from the purpose of the session. I felt more comfortable when the student and I talked about actual problems with a paper. Little did I know that learning about the student in a conversational manner might be an important part of the tutoring experience.

As an introvert, I felt as if students needed some time alone to work on their papers. In the beginning of my assistantship, I assumed that all students wrote as I write: I sit and think about my topic, find a keyboard (computer or typewriter), and start putting my thoughts to words. Usually, I am more comfortable if I do this process by myself--something that is difficult with four sons, a husband, and a dog! However, after I listened to another tutor's flow of conversation with her students, I began to think that her manner might be better with students who need to experiment orally with sentences before writing them down.

I needed to be told that conversation wasn't "against the rules." In fact, Harris regards it as "part of the rules," saying that "at the beginning of a conference, getting acquainted or reestablishing contact takes priority as student and teacher settle in" (45). Harris' next suggestion is to talk with the student, perhaps diagnosing problems to establish goals for the conference. Then, the tutor should explain the tutoring process to the student. Harris warns that "with no explanation, no attempt to help her see that the instructor (has) decided that this approach would help her to get started, the student (has) no framework for understanding what (has) happened" (46). Finally, the conference progresses "through its instructional goal--practicing sentences, finding better details, suggesting revisions, and so on--and then ends with some closure that explains to the student what has been accomplished and what's left to do" (46).

The sensing part of my personality focused on mechanical problems in students' papers, blending easily with my propensity to view problems as black and white: there are no gray areas. Initially, my emphasis in a session was on mechanical correctness. Later, I felt as if it were almost useless to help students learn to "correct" their drafts. Some sentences would be altered so much in various revisions that the process was, at best, "busy work." Now, I work toward the intuitive model, helping students to see the whole of their papers before working on the individual parts. It would be beneficial to talk, initially, about the paper rather than addressing specific errors in the paper.

I am a thinking type. I have always needed clear-cut assignments to work comfortably. Since I know that this is true--and not because the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator and Muriel Harris tell me so--I feel that some valuable conference time could be spent discussing the student's assignment: not how to complete the assignment but what the assignment means. Harris quotes JoAnn Johnson's strategies for writing center conferences: "If a student is told to explain the assignment made by the teacher, read a section aloud, point to the places that are creating discomfort or experiment by writing an idea in different structural styles, then she will be dealing with her needs by elaborating, manipulating and developing strategies for the identification and solving of her writing problems, and that is the goal of a writing confer-

ence" (64).² The importance of speech in a writing conference is again affirmed.

Alas, I am a judging type. I find it harder to add material to papers than to edit material from them. For years, I read the following comments, scrawled in the margins of my papers: Not the clearest; Couldn't it be said better?; Explain further, more explicitly; Transition needed here; Connect your paragraphs to each other. Initially, transition words seemed so awkward. I didn't use them in conversation, so why should I use them in writing? But, many students are more comfortable speaking than writing. If tutors and students talk with each other, students' use of connectors in conversational speech might transfer to use of connectors in writing. Therefore, students might become better writers through conversation.

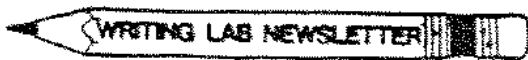
In conclusion, I suggest that as part of the tutor training program, the writing center director and tutors should discuss various personality types (not attitudes) that tutors may encounter in conferences. It seems important, also, for tutors to know their own personalities so that they might better understand different personality

types and help students with problems in their writing. Since the Meyers-Briggs assessment is both nonthreatening and short, perhaps tutors should take it as part of their initial training program. The assessment is easy to evaluate, so tutors could "score" their own papers, choosing whether or not to share their inventories with the rest of the group. On some occasions, tutors might find it helpful for tutees to complete the assessment, providing some additional insight into their writing. Additionally, tutors need to know that there isn't a "wrong" or "right" way to write: different strategies work well for different individuals.

Mary Kilmer
St. Cloud State University
St. Cloud, MN

¹Donald Graves, Writing: Teachers and Children at Work (Portsmouth, NJ: Ablex, 1985).

²JoAnn B. Johnson, "Re-evaluation of the Question as a Teaching Tool," Writing Lab Newsletter 10, no. 4 (1985): 1-4.



Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

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