

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in
one-to-one teaching of writing

Volume 14, Number 4

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....from the editor....

We all agree that it seems as if the semester has just started. But there is equal agreement, I'm sure, that a few weeks of vacation and holidays to celebrate are a welcome and well-earned break in a hectic semester. This month's newsletter includes some lighter reading for those leisure hours, along with articles that offer fresh insights and solutions for standard concerns.

The season of reminiscences and looking back is also upon us, and it has been suggested by Mildred Steele, one of our faithful members of long standing in this newsletter group, that we should have a series of articles on the history of writing labs. If you are interested in contributing to this history from your perspective, let me know. As usual, we need all the voices we can get when recalling the issues and events that trace the history of a national movement.

With the holidays upon us, I wish us all some peaceful leisure time, joyous holidays to celebrate, and a new year filled with health and happiness.

Muriel Harris, editor

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Posing Questions: The Student-Centered Tutorial Session

Tutoring, like writing, is a process. It is an activity that consists primarily of inquiry and discussion with an emphasis on encouraging students to discover and solve their own problems. An important element in this process is an effective questioning procedure. What questions should be asked to assist students along the road to self-discovery without too much tutorial intervention? How should goals be reached to those of the tutor? How, in short, can students be helped without compromising the integrity of their work? It is an interesting dilemma which can solve itself if effective questions are asked in the tutorial session.

Usually, students arrive at the writing center with either a rough draft which needs polishing or a finished paper which has been returned for revision. The typical session begins with students explaining

the details of their assignment and elaborating on their approach to the topic. The questioning begins immediately.

If the assignment is to write an essay introducing a person, the tutor may ask what characteristics of the person the writer wants to emphasize. If the assignment is to analyze a literary work, the tutor may inquire what aspect of the piece the student has selected and why. Both the purpose of the paper and the method the writer intends to employ are examined before the tutor even looks at the paper. The tone should be conversational. The purpose is twofold: first, to set the student at ease; and second, to begin to understand the level of comprehension and commitment the student brings to the assignment. Does the student care about the topic? Is there real enthusiasm to tap into or is the student merely going through the motions?

Next, students should be asked what specific problems they are having. What does the paper lack? Some students know exactly what their problem areas are: "I can't get started? "I'm saying the same things over and over." "I think my transitions are weak? "I have trouble with endings."

Others don't. They usually fall back on the old stand-by: "I just want you to check the grammar? These students require further attention at this point: "Do you have several points you want to make? What are they? Have you made them all?" "Do different Instructors ever mention similar problems with your work?"

Often, if students are extremely reticent, it may help to inquire what they like about the paper. All students like to talk about what they do well. In these cases, the areas the students omit can be addressed: "Do you have any real problems with building a logical argument?" "Would you call your style formal or informal, and how do your instructors react to that style?" Again, the aims are to encourage students to talk about their writing, and to make them think of their writing as a skill they can develop with practice.

After this introductory discussion, the tutor reads the paper, keeping the assignment and the student's assessment of aims and potential problems in mind. Then, focusing first

on the successful aspects of the writer's work, further discussion ensues. This discussion should deal, first of all, with improving the focus, organization, and development of the work..

A tutor may begin by considering the paper itself. Is it saying anything? Is it addressing the assignment? Is it well-focused? The questions to the students become more specific: "You are supposed to select one character in the novel; which character do you want to focus on?" "The assignment says you should use three incidents to bring your father to life; tell me about the incidents you have chosen?"

If the assignment is adequately ad-dressed, the tutor mentally moves on to the organization of the paper. Is there a logical progression? Is each concept or aspect covered fully? In this instance, the questions to the student will differ: "What's your organizational method here? Chronological? By aspect?" "You only have one sentence about the third cause of the Civil War; should you expand on that as you did on the others?" "Tell me more about your father. Why is he your hero?" "This example is well-stated, but does it advance your argument?"

(cont. on page 11)

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is eight to twelve double-spaced typed pages, three to four pages for reviews, and one to two pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose self-addressed envelopes with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g., Aug. 15 for the Oct. issue).

Please send all articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly donations to the editor.

Munchkin Madness: Creating a Real Discourse Community

With all the paperwork, time constraints, and students that tutors face day-to-day, it is easy to lose sight of an idea that's just too valuable- learning isn't learning unless it's meaningful. For example, in our writing center, we are frequently "assaulted" by students complaining about writing assignments they find meaningless: "I have no use for this! It's not gonna get me any where!" "What does this paper have to do with my career?" and "@#*!!!" We can also see more indirect "complaints" in students' frustration, lack of interest and motivation, or hostility toward their writing assignments. What these students need is a meaningful environment in which their writing can be tested and shared in an immediate, realistic context. And no one has a better chance to create meaningful learning contexts than tutors who work one-to-one or in small groups with students and each other.

We could argue here about changes that need to be made in writing assignments, but we are concentrating on what we, as tutors in writing centers, can do to create a realistic, interactive, and meaningful learning experience- in other words, create a discourse community.

Because of the flexible and adaptable structure of writing centers, we are uniquely equipped and have the freedom to try new ideas that may be too new to be seen as conventional or too playful to be seen as worthwhile. We have an obligation to meet the needs of our students, and the flexibility of tutorials allows us to adapt to the individual needs that are sometimes difficult to meet (or even find) in the complexity of a classroom. Because of our adaptability, a writing center can be several discourse communities. And because of our obligation and ability (in fact, our freedom) to make writing appropriate and realistic, we have a license to experiment, a license to create, a license to play.

One you get a license, you use it- don't you? This is how we used ours: An industrial engineering student from Saudi Arabia was having a particularly difficult time in his writing class- he saw no practical purpose to his

writing; he saw no connection between his writing assignments and his career as an industrial engineer. This resulted in a serious lack of motivation, a near shut-down in his desire to write, and an eventual regression in his writing skills. Since no conventional tutoring method proved successful, we created an entirely new environment- a discourse community in which his writing could become meaningful and realistic...his own enterprise".

To match the student's writing needs with his goal of becoming an industrial engineer, we gave him responsibility for a related enterprise- a styrofoam company. At first, he and his tutor were the only participants. The student was responsible for the operation of his enterprise, and his role required that he coordinate and report- in writing- on all aspects of the enterprise's engineering functions. His tutor ran the rest of the company and also represented outside influences such as suppliers, stockholders, unions and so on. The discourse community immediately expanded to include a business student and his tutor. The CHAB Styrofoam Company' was born.

CHAB Styrofoam Company was a manufacturing firm which produced everything from styrofoam cups to movie props. The only supplier of the essential raw material, "styro," was located in Sauk Rapids, Minnesota, where Munchkins used their expertise to harvest the styro and were compensated with free food and unlimited use of their boss's credit cards. Granted, this "Munchktn Madness" may seem silly (or, as we've said before, too much fun to be worthwhile), but keep in mind we do have a license. And if it wasn't fun, who would want to play? The playfulness of our enterprise was essential in opening the door to greater interaction and socialization within the discourse community and in providing a risk-free environment- mistakes could be made without consequences, writing was willingly shared, and questions were easily asked. The safe and inviting nature of the enterprise enabled our business to grow, which, in turn, encouraged even greater participation. With this growth, our enterprise brought more people and more ideas into the discourse community. Partici-

pants chose roles related to career interests:

- An industrial engineering student was the firm's engineer;
- A business major was the firm's president;
- Two art students competed for the enterprise's advertising needs;
- A prospective law student was en-listed as a legal representative;
- A graduate assistant offered his expertise in speech communication to organize a public relations department;
- An accounting student was the firm's accountant.

Marketing surveys, application letters, routine memos, and business reports were necessary to the enterprise's operation. But the real tasks were the participants' need to respond- in writing- to crises:

- The president threatened to resign;
- An English major proposed to write a novel of questionable taste set in the company;
- Munchkins threatened to strike due to haunted mines;
- Our writing center director attempted to unionize the Munchkins;
- A tutor's roommate rallied for a company-financed child care center.

In searching for solutions to crises, participants acquired the business and social skills and learned the language necessary to function in a business community.

Our enterprise, given more time, ⁴would have continued to grow beyond the writing center community. We envisioned our enter-prise expanding into the university community where professors and administrators across campus could lend their expertise to enterprise activities:

- A professor of management could be

asked to consult on deficiencies within the enterprise's organizational makeup;

- Industrial psychologists could be enlisted to speak on morale;
- A computer science professor could be engaged as a computer consultant;
- Professors could provide additional training;
- The administration could be approached to host a "convention" on campus.

And beyond the university community is the "real" business community. Local businesses may participate in the enterprise, and other writing centers or universities could be asked to join the "Munchkin Madness":

- A request could be made of a local bank about the procedure for opening a business checking account;
- A request could be made of the city council about zoning ordinances for building or expanding plant facilities;
- Requests for proposals could be sent to several office supply companies asking for prices on and availability of furnishings;
- *Another writing center enterprise could be asked to compete against the CHAB Styrofoam Company.

Expansion into the "real" business community was the ultimate goal of our enter-prise. And as interactive participants of a realistic and meaningful discourse community, our students brought diverse interests, skills, and experiences which allowed them to gain immeasurable amounts of knowledge within, outside, and beyond the enterprise. Inviting our students to play and to share their own needs and skills in the enterprise automatically insured that, as participants, they gained whatever it was they "played" for. All participation was voluntary, and although we initiated the enterprise, the needs and goals of the participants dictated the direction, purpose, and pace of our business. As the enterprise progressed, we tutors gradually reduced our

roles to the point where we remained only to interact as participants.

The interaction, participation, and diversity that naturally occurred in our enter-prise provided a foundation for a realistic context in which meaningful learning took place. All participants learned and practiced appropriate business writing, behavior, and skills:

• **Writing**

- audience
- purpose
- formatting
- vocabulary
- emphasis
- clarity
- conciseness
- types of writing
- information

• **Behavior**

- collaboration/interaction
- politics
- responsibilities
- thought/action
- reaction
- time constraints
- confidence

• **Skills**

- business communication - interview skills
- writing skills
- problem solving
- speaking skills
- telephone skills
- questioning techniques - time management

A primary obligation of writing centers is to create **m e a n i n g f u l** contexts for writing and learning. An enterprise provides a community in which meaningful learning- through role play, interaction, and experimentation- can occur. Because of our naturally diverse, interactive roles and skills, writing centers have the tools for creating any discourse community- any enterprise- to meet the needs of any student.

We'd like to persuade you to take our idea and use it to your own advantage and that of your students. We've provided a list of other possible enterprises ⁵ and outlined the general benefits any enterprise can offer. By starting

your own enterprise, you will experience the benefits and successes of interactive learning. The only burden resting on tutors is to initiate an appropriate enterprise; responsibility for the enterprise continuing rests with the participants- all willing contributors and learners. All you have to do is start it. Go ahead .. remember, you have a license.

Here's wishing you plenty of "Munchhkins" and all the "madness" you can handle.

Barb Gengler
and
Cindy Johaneck
St. Cloud State University St.
Cloud, MN

End Notes

'The idea of creating an appropriate enterprise came from Kathleen Cahill, a graduate assistant in our writing center. She helped us to assess the student's needs and to meet, through an enterprise, his needs and the needs of other students in our center. Ms. Cahill was also an active, valuable, and creative participant in our enterprise.

2 In *Joining The Literacy Club: Further Essays Into Education* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988), Frank Smith defines "enterprise" as collaborative learning in which there is no distinction between teacher and student, learning is relative and worthwhile, and participation is voluntary. Smith believes every enterprise should follow these four criteria:

- 1) no grades- enterprises are judged by their own worth and appropriateness
- 2) no restrictions- 'The world beyond the school walls should not be shut out' (71)
- 3) no coercion- no one is forced to participate, and "no one is excluded because of Insufficient talent or experiences" (72)
- 4) no status- teachers and students participate at the same level

We are using Smith's definition because we agree that an enterprise promotes natural learning: "Enterprises are group undertakings whose purpose is self-evident. No one who participates in an enterprise ever has to ask, 'Why am I doing this?' . . . Everything that is done with written language outside school can be done within its walls . . ." (70) because the

real world is everywhere you are.

3 The acronym "CHAB" uses the initials of the first four enterprise participants.

⁴We began our enterprise during Spring Quarter, and the end of the school year put our enterprise on hold.

5 Idea for possible enterprises:

- *publishing company
- *Phoney Boloney Staffers of America
- *Serve 'Em Up Fast Food Restaurant
- *Nities R Us
- *a local newspaper
- *a movie production company
- *To The Limit Credit Union
- *an airline
- *Kitty Kat Kuisine
- *a chemical company
- *a nursing home
- *Agra-City USA
- *a community symphony
- *a stuffed animal manufacturer
- *an art gallery

- *a department store

Enterprises suitable for individual projects:

- *customized t-shirts
- *beauty shop
- *small engine repair shop
- *auto mechanic

19th Annual Wyoming Conference on English

June 25-29, 1990
Laramie, Wyoming

**"Who's Teaching What to
Whom and Why?"**

For information contact Tilly Warnock, Department of English, University of Wyoming, P.O. Box 3353, Laramie, Wyoming 82071-3353. (307-766-6486).

National Project on Computers and College Writing

June 1-3, 1990
New York City

**"Computers and College
Writing: Curriculum and
Assessment for the 1990's"**

Contact: National Project on Computers and College Writing, CUNY - Office of Academic Computing, 555 West 57th Street/14th Floor, New York, NY 10019.

10th Annual Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference

April 12-14, 1990
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

**"Politics and Prose: Inviting the
Dialogue"**

Proposals on the theme are due February 1, 1990. For information, write or call Wilkie Leith, Director, The Writing Center, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 (703-323-3470).

Requiem for a Writing Center

Every effort had been made to make the Writing Center a warm and inviting place. There were small tables scattered about the room to encourage relaxed tete-a-tete. Ferns and ivy reduced the sterility of the former classroom, and carpet softened its echoes. It was a pleasant place to be.

In a distant corner of the room sat Hal Newman. Although reserved in manner, he could exhibit passion, particularly when talking about Mozart or metaphysical poetry. He had signed on as a tutor in the Writing Center because he wanted to help students write better. His own experience had revealed that most students' writing was deplorable, and he wanted to help preserve the language in which Donne and Shakespeare had written, a language rapidly being destroyed by the abuses of a largely illiterate population. Besides, working in the Writing Center would look good on his resume.

Hal had just sat through a thirty--minute tutorial in which he had tried to appear interested in Tammy's essay about Muffin, her pet poodle. Muffin had gotten lost when Tammy was twelve, and it seemed to be the most traumatic experience of her life. The entire essay was pure drivel. Actually, it wasn't pure drivel; it was incoherent and awkward drivel. How he had longed to tell her just how bad her writing was. He had rehearsed the entire speech in his head:

Tammy, you know what we're looking at here. (He would gesture disdainfully toward the paper.) This is bird cage liner, Tammy. No, I take it back. It's not safe for a bird. This, Tammy, is toxic waste. This paper doesn't need revision; it needs to be sealed in a stainless steel container and buried in a salt dome.

In reality, he had smiled politely and tried to be encouraging. He had listened to her drone on and on about Muffin's cute tricks:

She has this little ball, y'know. It's blue with, like, little gold flecks. We got it from the pet store the same day we got Muffin, and like, it's always been her

favorite ball to chase, or fetch, or what-ever. I mean, like we even tried other balls (giggle), but she just never, well, like, y'know, ever really went for them.

Hal had managed to preserve his sanity only by imagining that little blue ball stuffed tightly into Tammy's mouth.

This tutorial proved to be a turning point in Hal's career as a tutor. No more non-directive approaches, Rogerian strategies, student-friendly tutorials for him. He'd had enough of wimp tutoring. It was time to be confrontational. After all, if George Bush had been nice to Dan Rather, he might be selling oil leases in Houston instead of sitting in the White House.

He was determined to create his own style- "power" tutoring. There would be Rambo revision, Chuck Norris editing, and Clint Eastwood ultimatums (Write My Way, or Make My Day"). Deep Inside, Hal knew he had what it took to be a really successful tutor- the grammatical Right Stuff. He knew the Chicago Manual of Style, backwards and forwards. He could quote from the MLA Handbook chapter and verse. He knew the two most common uses of the present perfect tense. He knew the difference between a resumptive modifier and a summative modifier and could readily furnish examples of either. He knew the correct bibliographic citation for a previously published article reprinted under a different title in the second edition of an anthology. He knew that Harbrace in his heaven would look down on the papers he had copyedited, with every subject and every verb living in perfect harmony, and pronounce beneficently, "It is good."

Hal liked to think of his approach in managerial terms. He called it Tutoring by Objective (TBO). His idea of TBO was to get results, and to get them as quickly and efficiently as possible. Hal devised five rules for effective TBO:

1. Get down to business (don't chit-chat on company time)
2. The tutor is always in control (if students knew what to do with their

papers, they wouldn't be coming to you)

3. Stick to the basics (you can't teach students to think, but any moron can learn the comma rules)
4. Keep it simple (poets should be sensitive to language; students should fill in the blank)
5. Most people are average (don't expect too much, and you won't be disappointed)

The following period in Writing Center history is known simply as The Purge. Hal's TBO approach caught on in the department, and he was rapidly promoted to Writing Center Director. Soon the whole Writing Center was operating with machine-like efficiency. More students were being processed through the Writing Production Unit (the name change was also Hal's inspiration) than ever before.

But Hal still wasn't satisfied. Most students sat passively while their papers were being processed in the WPU, but you never knew when a Paper Originator (Hal's term) might involuntarily sneeze or even, if can you imagine it, ask a question?! In any case there was the wasted time it took to properly station the Paper Originator. Hal decided to do away with the "greet, seat, and retreat" ritual. He managed to scavenge a used conveyor belt from the cafeteria, and P.O.'s were instructed to place their papers on the conveyer through a hole in the wall of the WPU. The old doorway was sealed up, and tutors entered from the rear of the building.

Next, Hal turned his attention to the tutors. They had, at first, enjoyed the new "studentless" WPU. It was easier to be frank about the P.O.'s errors when you weren't actually face-to-face with one of them. And the tutors enjoyed the camaraderie that grew from sharing the stupid mistakes made by the illiterate P.O.'s. However, Hal discovered that production capacity could be increased by placing the Writing Inspectors (it was hard to think of them now as tutors) in self-contained work modules. The SCWM's ensured that W.I.'s could work free from distractions. Names for all errors had been standardized, and they were to be marked on machine-

readable scoring sheets with #2 pencils.

Still, the W.I.'s needed breaks and other costly amenities, and their reliability was always less than perfect. That's when Hal hit upon the final solution, the Hal 9200. The HAL 9200 was a completely automated Writing Production Unit which could process raw papers at the rate of 2160 words per second. It was the fulfillment of a dream for Hal. Words coming from an invisible source and processed to perfection without ever being touched by human hands. There was something about knowing that every word, every phrase, every sentence, every paragraph, every paper had been cleansed and purified that made Hal (or was it HAL?) hum with delight.

Of course, there were some few dissenters who thought something was amiss with the new system. They missed the old ferns and ivy and the conversations around little tables.

Some of them even claimed they detected an air of brimstone about the Writing Production Unit. But these were mostly anarchists and Bruffee-ites, extremists not to be taken seriously. All of those in authority were convinced that the HAL 9200 was the best thing that ever happened to student writing.

David Chapman Texas Tech
University Lubbock, Texas

New from NCTE

Sides, Charles H. Ed. *Technical and Business Communication: Bibliographic Essays for Teachers anti Corporate Trainers*. Urbana, Illinois: Net:, 1989. Price: \$25; NCTE; members \$20. (Available from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.)

This collection of seventeen essays covers a wide range of concerns and topics in technical writing, plus essays on the genres in technical communication such as annual reports, newsletters, instruction and style manuals, proposals, letters, reports, computer documentation, and so on. If your writing lab works with students writing papers in technical areas, this will be a useful addition to your resource library. The extensive bibliographies will be helpful in exploring each topic further.

Tutors' Column

Pardon My Footprints on Your Brain

As a tutor in the Writing Assistance Center at Weber State College, I've found that there is a special sort of thing we do. We leave our footprints on tutees' brains. Sometimes we do so with our boots; sometime the delicately hosed toes of our lady tutors do the dirty work. Nevertheless, if we have done our jobs well, our tutees leave our center a little different; some-how changed.

This peculiar phenomenon occurs to the best of us and that's how it should be. To leave indelible, never-to-be-forgotten prints on someone else's cortex requires experience, thoughtfulness, and care. And that's the best way to be a tutor,

This mode of tutoring requires a highly individualized technique. First, we must give the tutee our individual, undivided attention; no less will do. The tutee will not open up his overheated cerebrum to our probings if he feels the time will be wasted.

Second, we need to find out exactly what the tutee expects of us. Bringing pre-conceived notions of just what material we wish to tread before we ask the tutee will simply cause him to short-circuit and reject our help. Advice is easier to give than to receive, and many tutoring sessions can result in synapse suffocation if we do not address what the tutee thinks the problems are first. We can intro-duce our own mental musings later, after we have satisfied the student's needs.

Third, we must use positive reinforcement and reflective listening to discern where our tutee needs the most help. Repeating in paraphrases a student's question can reaffirm what is wanted and clarify the help we should give.

Fourth, we must offer up whatever nuggets of learning we can in a palatable

fashion. Many tutees consider us to be expert brain mechanics, but their adoration can quickly turn to excoriation if the God of Words has a devil of an ego. Tread lightly upon the Medulla Oblogata; the student is the first concern, so check your attitude at the door with your coat.

Granted, these are not nuts and bolts rules; they are interpersonal techniques, but we relate to people, not pagers. In short, we must crawl inside the mind of the tutee and live there a while. Only when we see the way the student's mind works can we be of any real assistance.

So, now that we have sufficiently picked the brain we're resting on, have given it the nourishment it needed in a way it could accept, we turn and find the footprints we've left behind. Hopefully, we've made an impression without doing any damage.

If we've done our job well, they'll never forget us.

Michael D. Christenson
Peer Tutor
Weber State College
Ogden, UT

A reader asks...

The O.S.U. Writing Lab is moving slowly and collaboratively towards the production of a video to be used for training purposes. If you have such a video and would be willing to let us view it, or if you have any pointers on the production process, we'd appreciate hearing from you. Contact Dan Sapp, Writing Assistant, Communication Skills Center, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331-6404.

Comment and response on sexist language

A) A reader comments...

I just read with interest the Tutor's Column article [by Isabel Spilman] in the June, 1989 issue of the Writing Lab Newsletter. However, I was shocked to find sexist language in it.... As a mother of three daughters and a teacher at a women's college. I've become very sensitive about sexist language.... I did think Isabel Spilman had a useful suggestion at the end of her article for alleviating the crunch in writing centers by initiating peer-response groups. I'll try that in the fall.

Jean Bauso Peace
College Raleigh,
NC

B) The tutor's writing center director responds...

Since Isabel had the misfortune to be under my tutelage when she wrote this article (and I was ever a sinner), I must assume the blame for her transgression. Whether that sin be (remember when we could not use the indicative "is" after "whether"?) mortal or venial, linguistic or political, I am (remember when we couldn't use contractions like "I'm"?) not sure. In fact, I'm not even sure why it's sexist to use "he" generically but not sexist to use "she" (which I'm seeing with increasing frequency) in the same sense. So you can see that Isabel, despite her now being an English teacher herself, has never had a chance, the poor sweet.

By way of atonement, I'm applying for a grant of some \$9 billion to perform a modern form of Bowdlerism on government records-specifically, to remove sexist language from all volumes of the Congressional Record between 1850 and 1950. The fact that this amount exceeds the President's request for the 'tear on drugs' reflects the relative importance of the two endeavors.

Let no man/woman speak to me of

other expedients (as the fellow modestly pro-posed) to avoid the uglification of English with nauseous neologisms like "he/she" and "him/ her." I simply will not countenance such propositions as the one that female writers ought to be permitted to use "she" generically and male writers "he" (or vice versa), or the even more ludicrous notion that we should yield to the wish of 97.84% of our students who want us to lighten up about the whole thing. No. I want all of my students to show the kind of concern that one did last year when he/she/ it (I'm big on talking chimpanzees, okay?) began an essay: "When Faulkner wrote his or her first novel...."

I think it is only right and fitting that the misguided academic restrictions of eighteenth-century prescriptive grammar be re-placed with the more enlightened twentieth-century restrictions of a political agenda- a truly :twat form of censorship, if you will. Thank goodness we're lucky enough to live in a country whose English teachers place other things above style!

Bill Pendleton, Pi. G. Randolph-
Macon College Ashland, VA

C) The tutor responds..

I'm glad somebody wrote in about the "he's" in my article because it gives me the chance to point out that I didn't use "he's." In fact, I never use "him," not even when I'm talking about my husband and two-year-old boy. I'm glad that another teacher liked my idea of group tutoring in writing centers, but I'm even happier that Dr. William Pendleton got what was coming to her! After I saw my article with two "he's" in it instead of "she's," I was furious! Then I knew why she had offered to post my manuscript for me. She had erased the esses in my ay! Please "plain this to all of the newsletter readers- that is, if she femails this letter like she promised to do. Thank you.

Isabel Spilman
Charlottesville, VA

Posing questions

(cont. from page 2)

Once these general areas are addressed, the effectiveness of the introduction and conclusion should be discussed. Many students can easily cut their opening paragraphs. It may help to point out that introductions are often close to freewriting; students' attempts to focus the paper and often this material can be trimmed.

It is important for the tutor to be diplomatic: "You have kind of a slow introduction; maybe you could get to the point sooner." "You seem to have two theses here. Which do you know more about?" "Have you reiterated these points in your concluding paragraphs?" It is always better, however, to have them discuss the goal, focus and organization before addressing the opening and closing. A major change is understood and embraced more readily after the students clarify for the tutor (and themselves) what they are saying. They can then focus in on the introduction and conclusion with a renewed sense of purpose.

As the session progresses and the discussion continues, the students present both written and spoken material, allowing the tutor to evaluate how much they really know and how best to assist them: "Did you try making an outline?" "You just gave me two examples to back up your statement; put them into your essay." "All that information is right here; you just have it out of sequence."

This procedure may seem lengthy. But, remember, not every student has the same problem. Some need only fine-tuning: "Cut the introduction and get to it." "Wrap up the ending quicker and you're all set." "You don't develop this concept as fully as the others." For these students, most of the questioning just isn't necessary. For others, there is only one serious problem to be addressed.

If there are several serious organizational flaws in one paper, the tutor should address the most serious and, explaining there are other problems, encourage the student to return on a regular basis with other work for further assistance.

Finally, the paper is reviewed for grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors. If there

are severe deficiencies, tutorial sessions dealing specifically with these issues may be necessary. In most cases, however, recurrent grammatical errors can be pointed out and students may be directed to grammar handbooks to work independently on solving these problems, further confirming to the students that the tutor is not prepared to do their work for them.

In conclusion, then, this approach ensures that the entire tutorial process is student-centered and student-oriented. The aim is to promote self-learning, not to have a tutor rewrite or edit students' work. By inquiry, discussion, and suggestion, by posing questions which lead the students into their own writing process, any tutorial session can encourage students to find their own solutions.

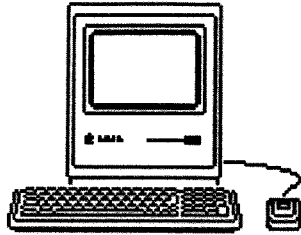
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A Sign of Maturity?

In 1981 when the number of high school writing labs was, at best, a single-digit figure and college-level labs were in the first major growth spurt, I concluded an article that appeared in the Writing Center Journal ("Growing Pains: The Coming of Age of Writing Centers" 2.1 [Fall/Winter 1982]: 1-9) by noting that writing labs will have come of age when one of the first questions students will ask in fresh-man composition is "Where's the writing lab?" It was, then, with great delight that I read the following notice in the newsletter of the Writing Center at Cedarburg High School (Cedarburg, Wisconsin):

Attention Seniors

Most colleges have a writing center. Seek it out and continue to receive one-to-one help with your college writing assignments.



Micro Style *by Evelyn Posey*

Using a Word Processor to Enhance Prewriting

In past "Micro Style" columns, I have shared my enthusiasm for including computers in the writing center, discussed computer hardware choices, and described some of the software that you might consider purchasing for your center. In the next few columns, I'll share some specific instructional techniques to demonstrate to your tutors and the students who come to the center- techniques that encourage them to use the computer in all parts of the writing process, not simply as a way to draft a printed page.

Since almost everyone who has purchased computers for their centers has also purchased word processing software, I'll share two strategies for using word processing software as a tool to enhance pre-writing. Of course, you can purchase software specifically written to help students generate ideas, and we may review some of these programs in future columns. For now, though, I would prefer to concentrate on techniques that are easy to work into an already existing instructional plan and that don't require you to make another software purchase.

In addition to being inexpensive and easy to use, these techniques are especially useful to your students because as they purchase computers for use outside of the writing center, most of them will rely only on word processing software rather than prewriting programs. Also, if you are like most of us, you are no longer content to introduce students to only one pre-writing strategy, but prefer to teach them numerous ways of generating ideas. It should, therefore, prove helpful to learn ways to use their word processing software as a pre-writing tool. In doing this, students use the versatility of the computer to compose as well as to draft a paper. With a little practice, most students readily give up generating ideas with

pen and paper, preferring to compose at the computer itself.

In our computer writing labs, we encourage students to use word processing as a pre-writing tool in several ways, including some that I introduce to my composition classes as well. One, developed by Stephen Marcus, is "invisible writing," a prewriting technique that helps students truly separate their creative thoughts from their critical feelings, and another is "cooperating audience," a technique that effectively demonstrates the importance of audience.

To introduce students to "invisible writing," have them boot their word processing program and then turn down the brightness knob on the monitor until they can no longer see the text as it is entered. Once they can't see what they are entering, they should begin to freewrite- you can give your favorite freewriting directions- concentrating on their thoughts, oblivious to the keyboard and screen. "Invisible writing" encourages students to generate ideas for a paper, while not allowing them to concern themselves with anything beyond their immediate thoughts. Because they can't see what they are entering into computer memory, they can't criticize their writing during this formative stage. Once they have exhausted their thoughts on a topic, they may turn up the brightness and read their freewriting in preparation for organizing a first draft.

I have found that "invisible writing" works well as a pre-writing technique, particularly if students have good keyboarding skills (so that they don't have to worry about whether their fingers are on the right keys) or if they are extremely critical of their own writing. Students who can't enter a paragraph of text

without backspacing to delete or without checking the spelling seem to benefit most from freeing themselves to concentrate on their thoughts. As with other pre-writing strategies, not all students will feel comfortable with "invisible writing," but some will take to it quickly and continue to use it for future writing assignments. After I introduce this technique, it isn't unusual to walk into the computer writing center and see students composing at what appear to be blank computer monitors.

Another pre-writing technique that I use is a form of computer writing that I call "cooperating audience." One student sits at the keyboard and begins to compose ideas for a paper. Two students sit at either side of the composer, and as the writer composes, read what is appearing on the screen to themselves. At any point in the process, one of the two readers may tap the writer on the shoulder to ask for clarification, an explanation, or a specific example- anything that will help the writer sense what his audience needs to understand the communication.

Because at this point in the process the writer is generating ideas for a paper, readers should limit their questions and comments to the content of the paper- how effectively the writer is organizing and developing his thoughts and how well they are communicating to his "cooperating audience." Comments on

sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics should wait until a later session.

This pre-writing technique helps the writer have a sense of audience and respond accordingly. Most seem to appreciate the immediate reaction to what appears on the screen. I have observed some writers, though, who become so engrossed in their composing that they are oblivious to shoulder tapping; the readers are forced to take more drastic measures to get the writer's attention. Of course, the readers should be cautioned to tap sparingly and to ask meaningful questions so as not to interfere with the writer's efforts to get thoughts recorded.

Because I enjoy the ease and relative low cost of using a word processing program to facilitate pre-writing, I often experiment with it as a means to enhance the writing process. Having mentioned several ways to use word processing other than to draft a paper, I hope that you will use your imagination to create other pre-writing techniques and that you will share them with me for future "Micro Style" columns.

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Teachers as Writing Center Tutors: Release from the Red Pen

In the October 1988 issue of *College Composition and Communication* Irene Lurkis Clark of the University of Southern California suggests that, for a variety of reasons, the writing center can be a valuable training ground for teachers of composition. Some reasons she cites are ones most of us who work in writing centers know well: we learn through firsthand observation how the writing process actually works- all stages of the process; we gain a new perspective on the significance of error; we see what kinds of assignments are most effective in stimulating thinking (347-3513).

For all these reasons, and for several more I'll discuss shortly, I think the writing center can also be a valuable retraining ground for classroom teachers, particularly for teachers in content areas other than English who are now being encouraged to use "writing across the curriculum" but haven't the slightest clue how to go about it.

Before I discuss my proposal for writing across the curriculum, though, I'd like to briefly describe our writing lab at the University of Montana and what has happened in it that led me to this conclusion regarding the lab as a

teacher training center. Our lab is in its fourth year of operation and is primarily a drop-in facility, although students can also schedule appointments. We see students from all disciplines, at all levels, and use of the lab has grown steadily. Last year we logged over 1000 student visits and numbers continue to increase. The lab is staffed by two graduate assistants and myself, with occasional help from volunteers and graduate assistants from another tutoring program on campus. Although I meet informally with each tutor several times a week, in my three years as lab director, I've never really had to teach these people how to tutor.

At first I thought I was just phenomenally lucky in the tutors I've been assigned. All of them have seemed to know naturally what Clark in her article says working in the lab can teach you. Their responses to papers have the priorities correct: they react to ideas before jumping on surface errors. They ask questions of writers before giving their own opinions. They wait and listen. Most importantly, these people have hardly ever tried to "take over" papers and make them theirs. They seem to understand intuitively the importance of text ownership, no matter how poorly conceived the text.

I finally decided, after puzzling awhile over my good luck, that this success might very well be attributed to the one thing these people have all had in common: they're all "creative writers." The University of Montana has a very strong creative writing program that attracts writers from all over the country, many of whom already hold advanced degrees. The majority of our teaching assistantships are given to MFA candidates who teach the freshman composition courses and also staff the writing lab. All MFA's are required to take demanding literature seminars as well as numerous workshops in fiction or poetry, so they are actively engaged in- and struggling with- their own writing processes on a daily basis.

Because of this active involvement, MFA's understand text ownership. They recognize what Donald Murray calls the "other self," the good judge of writing inside the student that is made stronger and more independent by a responsive teacher who listens to the student's own evaluations of her writing (69). In addition, since all MFA's must subject

their own writing to criticism in fiction or poetry workshops, they develop a fairly good sense of what is helpful and what isn't. Perhaps most importantly, creative writers take writing, any writing, very seriously and have a passionate commitment to the written word. With luck, some of this rubs off on the student enough to make him want to do that extra revision.

Maybe I'm making this sound rosier than it is. Certainly we've had a few personality conflicts, a few poets so absorbed in their own words that they've had to be reminded to consider the students'. But, on the whole, these committed writers have made excellent "natural" tutors.

But I think when we're talking about developing writing centers, particularly in high schools, and when we're talking about developing writing across the curriculum, we have to remember that many teachers in high schools, particularly those outside the English Department, do not write on a regular basis. Most of them see 125 students a day and simply don't have time. Further, many don't understand the process and tend to view the teaching of writing in ways they themselves were taught. As Clark puts it, "In almost everyone's experience with writing, there seems to lurk the specter of a red-pen-brandishing English teacher, and it is not uncommon for new instructors to emulate the teaching approaches by which they themselves were taught, even if they abhorred those approaches when they were students" (348).

I discovered just how true this is last year when, for the first time, I taught a course in writing across the curriculum. This is a course required of all secondary education majors in all disciplines at the University of Montana. It is restricted to seniors and is usually taken the quarter before student teaching—that is, the people in the course are very nearly certified teachers. On the that day of class, I handed out a xeroxed copy of a student essay and asked them to read it, write whatever they'd write on it if it came from one of their students, then grade it. The results were rather startling: comments had to do with surface errors rather than content. Grading was similarly harsh. And while I encountered some gifted writers and teachers in the course, I also encountered hostility toward writing, fear of writing, and insistence that the "cure" for all

bad writing is teaching grammar.

After teaching the course, I began to think that writing across the curriculum isn't working as well as it might not only because high school teachers don't have time to deal with writing assignments, but also because they don't understand the process or feel comfortable dealing with it.

And this brings me to my proposal. If I were trying to get a writing center going in a high school, I might rely to a certain extent on peer tutors, but I'd also insist that all teachers on the faculty eventually spend some time as tutors. I can hear the screams now from the science teacher who is also coaching track, chaperoning the dances, monitoring the lunch-room, and supervising the study hall. And I understand the dismay. High school teachers are, by and large, incredibly busy people. I do feel, though, that a lab structured in this manner would serve for professional development in a way that monitoring the lunchroom never can. Just some of the ways:

*Tutoring develops respect for the student. It's easy to lose it when all we see of students' thinking is hastily-written, error-riddled essays and assignments. In talking to them, we learn what they know and start looking for ways to help them say it.

*We learn about giving assignments when we talk to a student struggling with a confusing assignment from one of our colleagues.

*We learn about marginal comments on papers-which ones work and which ones confuse-when a student brings in a paper an-other teacher has returned with "awk." and "frag." and little strange parallel lines in the margins.

*We learn about sensitivity in evaluation and text ownership when we deal with the frustration of a student who thought she said everything she wanted to say and a teacher gave her a C- and told her she didn't say what she wanted to say at all!

*And we learn to start looking at students as individuals, as fellow travelers in the endless journey toward good writing, when we throw out the red pen- even for one hour a day-and break down that barrier imposed by evaluation. Students talk to teachers who

aren't grading them and often try to bluff the ones who are.

Clark says that teachers who have worked in the writing center tend to "incorporate individual conferences and group tutorials into their classroom teaching, approaches which are generally regarded as more effective than the old large-group lecture presentation" (349). She quotes William Smith of The University of Pittsburgh who says teachers trained in the writing center "want to use the conferencing model because they have developed confidence in their ability to use it" (81). Clark also says the questioning strategies developed in the lab carry over directly into classroom teaching and that writing lab work helps teachers write better assignments (350).

I'm teaching a freshman composition course this year for the first time in three years and I think this is true for me; my teaching has changed. Former lab TA's who've gone back to the classroom tell me the same thing. Maybe the best thing tutoring in a lab can do for a teacher- especially, perhaps, that science or math teacher who has always avoided writing or considered it painful- is foster a reassessment of the part writing can play in the teacher's own life, and promote a greater understanding of his or her own writing and teaching processes. All of us know there's no learning experience like teaching. And tutoring can take us one step further.

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If you are looking for software for the Macintosh that offers grammar instruction, you may want to preview NUTS & HYPERBOLTS, a five-program series. It reviews parts of speech and parts of sentences, to give the student a working vocabulary for the lessons on subject/ verb agreement, sentence fragments, comma splices, and pronoun reference. The instructional approach is the standard grammar handbook explanation and relies on a knowledge of terminology so that students must either know terms such as "antecedent" or "adverbial clause" or go through the reviews before launching into any lessons. Users are promised that "practice is integrated with the lessons, and students can move from lesson to practice to lesson at will." Well, those students who are adept at finding their way without a lot of guidance and who can surmount some frustrating program errors may be able to do so, but others will need to hunt among unlabeled disks with no clues as to what disk is

needed when. (Hint: the practices are not on the same disks with the accompanying lessons.) The author tries to lighten things with graphics described as humorous, though some users may find them distracting. More humorous are the programming errors that will cause you to switch disks endlessly until you simply turn off the computer and start over. The prose of the explanations is friendlier than some other programs you may have rejected.

If you are determined to have grammar explanations available on disks and have a Macintosh Plus, SE, SE 34, II, or flex ith One Meg of Ram and HyperCard 1.2.2 or later, you can investigate this series, priced at \$189.95, for the five disk set, by contacting Sterling Swift Software, P.O. Box 43325,, Austin, TX 78745-0009 (512-280-2431). Check to see whether there is an updated version which has eliminated the disconcerting programming errors.

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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