



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

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...from the editor....

The lead article this month is intended to provide us with resources and information about working with journalism students in the writing lab. It is also intended as a stimulus to our colleagues in other departments, for we need to hear from them as well- especially as writing labs expand into increased responsibilities for writing-across-the-curriculum efforts.

If you'd like to coax a similar article from faculty members in other departments, try sending them a copy of this one, on journalism students in the writing lab, as a model for what they might offer us.

And if your mailing label indicates that your subscription is about to expire, you might want to send your business office a reminder that prepayment is needed for the newsletter because- lacking both personnel and funds- we do not send invoices. Let's not lose touch!

-Muriel Harris, editor

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Equipping Your Writing Center to Assist Journalistic Writers

Writing centers increasingly assist students with an array of genres. Besides tutoring composition and literature students, they aid those in biology, nursing, engineering, philosophy, and countless other areas in producing the discourse of their fields. But one group may still receive little attention: journalism students. At many schools, composition and journalistic writing instruction are separated. Journalism students assume writing centers handle only essay and grammatical instruction. Further, tutors may not be familiar with journalistic goals and genres.

As a former writing center tutor and current professor of journalism, I am convinced that writing centers can benefit journalism students, especially if writing centers are aware of journalism students' special needs. In addition, writing centers can assist students who have little journalistic training but who produce news-

letters, brochures, and news releases for campus organizations. But to help both groups, writing center directors first need awareness of journalistic goals. This essay describes these students' needs and offers ways to meet them. I begin by detailing similarities and differences in research papers and news stories, suggesting ways in which tutorial assistance for these two genres should be similar and yet distinct. I then describe services well-informed, nonjournalist tutors can offer as well as more extensive services possible if journalistically trained tutors are on staff.

Research Papers and News Stories

The distinctive needs of journalism students derive from the nature of news reporting, so it is useful to consider ways in which research papers and news stories are similar and distinct. From a Kinneavian perspective, both may be viewed as forms of "reference" discourse (Kinneavy; Chap. 3). All reference discourse genres purport to represent some aspect of reality; however, the research paper's and the news story's purposes for offering representations of reality are different. The research paper supports a claim. That is, a research paper is an effective text only to the extent that it offers a thesis and supplies support for it.

In contrast, news stories represent reality to create awareness of the latest events. As such, they have less of an obligation to offer thorough evidence for each claim but more of a mandate to be novel, interesting, and accessible. Being sensitive to the related but differing goals of these two types of reference or informative discourse allows journalistic tutors to view the challenges faced by beginning journalists as similar to and yet distinct from those faced by research paper authors. Specifically, both genres require skill in research, organization, accuracy, and style, but the types of challenges posed by each will differ.

- Research challenges. Because research papers must supply evidence for claims, the author must locate prestigious print sources- scholarly articles, respected news magazines- in the library. In contrast, since news stories must present the latest information likely to interest a mass audience, news reporters depend heavily on oral sources. Young journalists need help in planning story coverage, that is, in

thinking about, e.g., the upcoming city council meeting, key issues, and why these issues are important to local people. They also need help with identifying sources to interview.

- *Organization challenges. The organization of the research paper is determined by its need to support its thesis. Nearly all novice writers struggle to discover their thesis and the lines of argument supporting it. Somewhat similarly, young journalists struggle to find the "lead" for their stories-the most important or surprising information. Because news stories are designed to attract attention, they follow an organizational pattern known as the inverted pyramid. In it, main information is presented first, followed by elaboration and further detail, arranged in most-to-least-important order. Paragraphs are brief, often one sentence, to enhance "skimmability "

- *Accuracy and completeness challenges. Research paper authors must have names, dates, and citations correct. News story authors must also be careful with facts, especially names: if James B. Carol was convicted of child molesting and a student reporter writes that it was James B. Carol, prominent local attorney, the

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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.

student may be sued for libel. Further, just as research papers can inadvertently present one-sided, one-source accounts of events, so can poor news stories. Novice journalists often need another reader's eyes to see if their stories are sufficiently thorough and balanced,

***Stylistic challenges.** Research paper authors struggle to incorporate the arguments of others into a language of their own. Novice news reporters work at this as well, in addition to making their language simple yet attention-getting. Further, since news stories need to be written for "skimmability" and impact, novice journalists need sessions on conciseness.

In sum, novice journalists need special help, but the challenges they face are somewhat similar to those of research paper authors. So, tutors who are well informed about community issues and good with helping students with re-search papers also should be useful to journal-ism students.

Tutoring by Thoughtful News Readers

Well-informed, nonjournalist tutors can assist journalism students with aspects of reportorial strategy, interviewing, organization, accuracy, completeness, and style.

***Reportorial strategy.** Even good writers struggle over what information to collect about an event. I recently assigned students to cover columnist Ellen Goodman when she spoke at Purdue. In class, we discussed her columns and information from Current Biography. Still some students had few questions to guide their note-taking at her lecture. Such students would be helped by tutors' questions reminding them of their readers' curiosity about Goodman. Campus newspaper readers might want to know if the lecture was interesting or funny, and whether Goodman resembles her newspaper photos. They might be curious about the turnout, wondering whether more females than males were in the audience.

***Interviewing.** Novice journalists need help with identifying expert sources and with generating lines of questioning for interviews. Writing center tutors could suggest possible contacts for a story on

the local landfill controversy or experts on Middle East affairs. Tutors also could role-play interviewees so that novice journalists may practice their interviewing skills. Good tips on interviewing are available in Biagi; Killenberg and Anderson; and Stewart and Cash.

***Organization.** Nearly all reporters struggle to find the leads for their stories; tutors could minimize this struggle in several ways. First, involving young re-porters in "what's new?" conversations can help them pull away from a mass of notes and seize upon a lead. Like this:

"So, what happened at the meeting?"

"A hundred things; I've got twenty pages of notes from people upset about the proposed park."

"Hmm.. So is that what you'll write about?"

"Well, the park issue was the big controversy, but actually the decision to buy insurance on the landfill may wind up costing people real money."

"Maybe that's what you should say."

Benefitting from this conversation, the reporter writes the following lead: "Ten citizens spoke against the proposed park at the West Lafayette City Council meeting Monday, while an ordinance to spend \$40,000 annually on landfill insurance passed without comment." Excellent advice on this coaching technique is presented in Clark's book and pamphlet.

Next, novice reporters must organize the rest of their story. Presumably, they are guided by the principle "most to least important," but in practice this rule is quite vague. For specific aid, tutors and tutees can analyze several news stories on a similar topic and identify typical information patterns. (The writing center should have stacks of local and campus newspapers ready for such work.) Analyses will reveal that news stories often present the "big idea" in paragraph one, a more detailed version of the same idea in paragraph two, and a quote supporting this idea in paragraph three. Another

technique is to ask students to reorganize scrambled stories or fact lists, putting them in inverted pyramid order. Introductory journalism texts and workbooks are filled with scrambled stories and fact sheets. Popular ones are Brooks et al.; Fedler; and Mencher.

***Accuracy and completeness.** Tutors can assist journalism students by asking questions about accuracy. Just noting that a name is spelled two ways in the same story is embarrassing but useful. To facilitate fact-checking, writing centers should contain (a) local and campus telephone books, (b) the local city directory, which lists all residents, whether they have telephones or not, (c) a directory of city and county officials (often available from the League of Women Voters), (d) local maps, (e) a current almanac, (f) an encyclopedia, and (g) Webster's New World Dictionary, which the U. S. press has adopted as its guide to spellings.

Story completeness is another issue nonjournalist tutors can address. Recently at our university a water pipe broke and flooded the computer center. The local newspaper covered this event but gave only the briefest description of how it occurred. Many campus community members wanted more than just the traditional "5 w's" (what happened? to whom? when? where? why or how?). Their questions: Are my computer files damaged? How long will it be before I can resume normal use of computer center services? Reporters could have addressed these questions if thoughtful editors had spotted these informational holes. Knowledgeable tutors can act as editors should.

***Style.** Tutors are often experts on reducing wordiness. Be somewhat cautious, though, about having tutors without journalistic training offer help beyond reducing wordiness. Journalists must abide by Associated Press style which mandates procedures for abbreviation, capitalization, punctuation, and numeral use. Some of these rules differ from those found in composition handbooks (e.g., journalists put book titles in quotation marks and omit the comma before "and" for items in a series). Further, rather

than varying their attributional verbs, journalists purposely repeat words such as "said," instead of substituting "claims" or "feels." These terms imply a more overt authorial point-of-view than journalistic conventions allow. A tutor who unknowingly edited a journalism student's story could cause more harm than good in this domain. Writing centers may want to solve this potential problem by acquiring tutors with expertise in journalism. These and other more elaborate ways of offering special help to journalism students are discussed next.

Tutoring by Experts and Other, More Extensive Help

Offering journalism experts as tutors.

Individuals with expertise in journalistic writing may be interested in working as tutors. The college newspaper adviser can recommend potential candidates who write well and work effectively with other students. Tutors may even be available among professionals in your community: university news service editors as well as local newspaper, television, and radio news reporters all command news writing skills.

Topics for handouts on journalistic writing.

Writing centers employing those with journalistic training can develop files of hand-outs on difficult aspects of journalism. Here are several good topics:

***First interviews.** Many students are unnerved by the prospect of interviewing busy campus and community leaders. A handout on first interviews can alleviate some fears. It should cover asking permission for the interview, identifying oneself as a reporter, deciding - whether to use a tape recorder, understanding types of interview questions, sequencing questions, and asking permission to telephone if necessary following the interview. On interviewing see Biagi; Killenberg and Anderson; and Stewart and Cash, as well as the relevant chapters on interviewing in Brooks et al.; Fedler, and Mencher.

***Notetaking.** Besides overcoming the logistical problems of taking notes while standing up, being in a hurry, or talking on the phone, novice journalists have difficulty producing accurate, clear notes

during interviews and organizing them for quick retrieval when writing. Biagi de-scribes clever solutions to these problems.

***Leads.** Sometimes even top reporters cannot find the right lead; novice reporters struggle even more. A good handout on lead writing would illustrate overly long leads (often those containing all five w's in paragraph one), overly short ones (those written in headlines rather than full sentences), leads that fail to emphasize surprising aspects of a story, and leads that are clear but wordy. (The Associated Press strives for 18- to 20-word first paragraphs.) On lead writing, see the appropriate chapters in Fedler; Mencher; and MacDougall and Reid.

***Feature stories.** Features are viewed as "soft" news because they are less timely and less event-oriented than "hard" news stories. Features focus on issues, topics, personalities, trends, or human-interest anecdotes and strive to facilitate understanding or amuse rather than enhance event awareness. The challenge to writing good features and magazine articles lies first with finding good topics. Consequently, a handout on feature writing should discuss ways of generating topics for features (e.g., see Rowan), and explain the major types of features such as profiles, trend stories, coping with daily life, how-to's, and amusing anecdotes. A second challenge in feature writing lies in selecting an effective organizational pattern since features can use many types of organization. Good sources on features are Rivers and Work; and Ruehlmann.

•Extra curricular journalistic writing: newsletters, brochures, news releases. As an adviser to student organizations, I have seen students who "hate writing" eagerly volunteer to serve as newsletter editors. A good handout on newsletters would help these novice editors by focusing on newsletter goals. Newsletters may (a) inform members of services and upcoming events, (b) announce an organization's accomplishments and create enthusiasm for its goals, or (c) analyze events in depth. Means for attaining these goals include interpretive articles, calendars,

news briefs, reviews, and employee recognition columns. On newsletters see the two books by Parker; as well as Bivins; Lattimore and Terry; and Newsom and Carrell.

Similarly, a good handout on brochures would remind writers that brochures inform an already targeted audience. Copy should chiefly inform about services or upcoming events rather than entertain. Brochures are covered in the sources listed for newsletters.

News releases are written as news stories by public relations officers and mass mailed to the news media. They are viewed as bids for free advertising by reporters and often pitched in the circular file. Items most likely to be published are those containing genuine news of mass interest or compelling human drama. A hospital's purchase of state-of-the-art equipment is less likely to warrant publication than the story of a local individual whose life was saved by the equipment's use. On news releases see the relevant chapters in Brooks et al.; Fedler; and Newsom and Carrell.

Materials for your journalism resource center.

A good journalism resource center would help students and faculty examine and produce outstanding, in-depth news coverage. The resource center also might help instructors experiment with new approaches to journalism pedagogy. Here are some materials the center could offer students and instructors:

•Excellent examples of journalistic writing r
See Fry; also Scanlan; and Murray. Subscribe to Columbia Journalism Review, The Qu and Washington Journalism Review.

***Books on public chairs and in-depth reporting:** See Hage; Hamilton; Izard; Kessler and Duncan; MacDougall and Reid; Mencher; Ullmann and Honeyman; and Ward and Hansen.

***Guides to Associated Press style:** Get the definitive source, French et al., and a good instructional guide to AP style such as Prejean and Danielson.

***Reviews of journalistic and composition software:** Write Professor Gale Wiley, director of the Clearinghouse for Computer-based Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Department of Journalism. University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712.

***Journalism pedagogy:** Subscribe to Journalism Educate.

Conclusion

Writing centers are meccas for writers of all sorts. If your institution already has extensive facilities for journalistic writing instruction, there is no need to duplicate them in the writing center. But the odds are good that many students- aspiring journalists and newly elected newsletter editors- would greatly appreciate writing center assistance. And so would their teachers and readers.

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Closed Mouth, Open Ears: Listening in the Tutorial

Although writing center research indicates that the listening role is a vital one, many tutors spend more time talking to their students than listening to them. Tutors often underestimate the importance of listening in the collaborative learning situation of the tutorial and thus under-utilize the listening role. For their students' sake, many tutors should practice closing their mouths and opening their ears.

Tutors who talk more than they should do so for two main reasons: 1) they feel their purpose is to teach; to them, teaching means presenting information to a captive audience—the student; or 2) like other people in helping positions, tutors want to solve problems for their students and, therefore, feel they should be giving advice. However, many students learn least through information presented orally and best through doing (Rogers 162). The tutor's goal should be to work collaboratively with students, not to lecture at them.

The sympathetic, "helper" tutor needs to realize that students need someone to listen to them far more than they need advice about how to solve their writing problems. Listening helps students learn because it encourages students to take some of the responsibility for solving their own problems; thus they learn by doing. Sometimes the results of listening are almost magical: often all a tutor has to do is listen, and the student works through the problem for herself (Burley-Allen 1). Tutors need to realize that rather than "doing nothing" when they are listening, listening is a valuable service they perform.

Listening in the writing center is somewhat different than listening in a counseling situation. First of all, tutors deal less with personal issues than do counselors although tutors do, at times, need to listen to personal problems. Besides listening to students talk about their feelings, however, they listen to students' ideas for a paper- and they also need to listen to the words that students have written on their papers.

When a student comes to the center,

especially for the first time, the tutor needs to make him feel comfortable by creating a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere. Casual comments, perhaps about something happening on campus, and friendly questions, for example, about what classes the student is taking, help students feel that the tutor is interested in them, especially when the tutor listens carefully to what students say in response.

Sometimes students are upset when they come to the writing center and need to talk about their anger over a grade or their frustration about their writing before they can begin working. Often they feel stupid because they have been asked by a teacher to work in the center. The tutor must try to understand the student's feelings and listen without making judgments. This kind of empathic listening does not mean that the tutor attempts to solve the student's psychological problems, but only that he cares about the whole student, not just about the writing problems. Being listened to in this way is therapeutic; it increases students' self-esteem and gives them confidence in their ability to solve their own problems (Taylor 1). As a sympathetic ear, the tutor helps students develop positive attitudes toward themselves and toward writing (Arkin 5).

However, not all students are able to talk about their feelings immediately. Tutors should pay attention not only to what a student says but also to tone of voice, eye contact, and posture. If a student's words say one thing but non-verbal language says another, a tutor may want to encourage her to talk about the problem. An alert tutor who listens to feelings revealed non-verbally can respond appropriately to these feelings even if the student does not express them in words. Some students will want to wait until they know a tutor well before stating negative feelings. The trust necessary for that kind of sharing often grows from genuine, non-judgmental listening- from keeping ears, eyes, mind, and heart open- and the mouth closed.

Another way to make students aware that tutors care is for the tutor and student to collaborate on setting up goals for tutorial sessions. Even if the teacher has asked the student to work on certain things, the tutor needs to make sure the student agrees with the teacher's assessment of the problem. The tutor also should find out if the student has any

other writing concerns or problems and reassure him that those concerns will be addressed. The only way to do this is to ask and listen carefully to the answer. Listening to the student talk about her writing difficulties conveys the message that the work in the writing center is a team effort and demonstrates respect for the student's needs. Listening to the student while actively working on a problem also shows the student that tutoring is a collaborative effort. When tutors close their mouths and listen, they encourage the kind of talk that helps students learn. Although some-times tutors need to present a concept or convey information to a student, for example when explaining grammar rules, they must remember to find ways for the student to use the concept presented. For example, a tutor can ask a student to complete a punctuation exercise and then explain the rule for each comma used. Verbalizing punctuation rules helps students learn them and also tells the listening tutor which rules need more practice.

Another way tutors use listening as a collaborative learning tool is when students talk about ideas for papers. Oral pre-writing with an actively listening tutor is effective for many students. When students are encouraged to talk about their ideas, those ideas often begin to come more easily and completely. Pre-writing talk helps students organize and develop ideas because the tutorial is a safe situation for experimenting. Many students need to talk through their ideas before they can successfully write them down.

Another use of the listening role occurs when the tutor acts as audience for the student's paper. By reacting as a reader, a tutor can help the student discover what works and what doesn't. Peter Elbow suggests telling the writer everything that happened as the tutor listened to his paper (87). This kind of reaction gives students an idea of audience and reader needs. Another possible reaction is to play dumb-- expressing confusion about sections of a paper in order to demonstrate to the student that the language or organization needs to be clearer. For example, if a student has a problem with dangling modifiers in which the subject is missing, a tutor can say something "I'm really confused here. This sentence makes it sound like the stoplight is crossing the street. Is that what you mean?"

Paraphrasing or summarizing the paper

(cont. on page 14)

Tutors' Column

Ours Is to Wonder Why

One of the duties of writing tutors in the Student Learning Center at the University of California-Berkeley is keeping a journal of tutoring experiences. The following journal entry was written after a particularly productive session with one of my tutees. I have appended a discussion of what I see as the

or implications of this session.

Today Blair decided that the matter most requiring our attention was the upcoming in-class midterm exam. She said that the topic involved selections from the class reader and that her instructor had suggested that the students concentrate on one of three essays. Blair had made her choice and had begun to outline her thoughts about the essay. From this basis, we embarked on a forty-five minute question-and-answer session, sharpening Blair's focus on the major points of the article. Every time she brought up a new aspect of it, I asked questions and challenged her statements, narrowing the terms of her description, until she suddenly lit up and quickly scrawled some new insight. A particularly difficult moment came in differentiating between the first and second points of the essay. Through this constant clarification and distillation of ideas, I think Blair made an important step toward questioning her own writing; questioning, I believe, is something that she will be able to take away from our tutoring experience and use throughout her academic writing career.

The essay was a discussion of the language of advertising, and the author first stated that ad language needs to be "edited and purposeful"; next he claimed that ad language has to be "rich and arresting." We covered the reasons behind the first statement: ads have a limited time/space and have a definite purpose (to glowingly describe a product in that short time/space) and are therefore constrained to

short, punchy messages. On to the second point....

M'self: "So, what's the second point?"

Blair: "That ads need to be 'rich and arresting' to be effective."

M'self "Okay, what does that mean?"

Blair: "Well, they only have a limited time to sell something, so they have to grab your attention and make an impact."

M'self "All right. How is that different from what you said about 'edited and purposeful'?"

Blair. "Ummmm....uhhhh....well....they sort of mean the same thing, I guess-.I don't know."

M'self: "So O'Neill says the same thing twice."

Blair: "Sort of."

M'self "Paid by the word, was he?"

Blair: "No....there must be something different."

M'self: "What makes something 'rich and arresting'? What does 'rich and arresting' mean that 'edited and purposeful' doesn't?"

Blair: "Well, it's not about time."

M'self: "No, I guess not." (It was time for a new approach.) "Let's assume that the advertiser has me right where he wants me. I'm going to sit here and read this entire ad. Time and space

are no longer problems. What will 'rich and arresting' language do for the advertiser in this case?"

"It will make you buy," Blair ventured, apparently wondering whether I was really so dense as to not realize this point on my own.

M'self: AH -HA!"

Blair "WHAT?!?!? You scared me!" M'self: "There! You just said it!"

Blair: "What!?! All I said was that 'rich and arresting' would make you want to buy the product!"

M'self: "So isn't that the point of this section?"

Blair: "Uh, of course. I just said it was. 'Rich and arresting language persuades people to buy the product,' Let me write it down before we go on to the third point."

Ruthless clarification led to Blair seeing the difference between two points, and to her-better understanding of an essay which I have never read. Later in the session, during the discussion of one of the other points in the essay, Blair informed me that the "simple" language of ads was a bad . Although I could certainly understand why she would take exception to the mindless language of ads, that sort of intuitive agreement will not suffice for academic writing. She needed to be better able to defend her assertion. Before I could say a word, nay, before my lips could form a sound, she blurted out "WHY!" I leapt nearly out of my chair. "Why did you do that?" I meekly queried. "I wanted to say it before you did," she smugly answered, "And I did." Part of tutoring is to make yourself obsolete; I think today I saw an important step toward my own antiquation.

In the weeks since that session, Blair has continued to progress. I met with Maureen. Blair's instructor, after that midterm was graded; she indicated that Blair's major problem seemed to be a sort of incoherence in her writing. Her papers lacked an underlying

order; there seemed to be no cogent, logical argument. Blair and I have attacked that problem, and the questioning continues to clarify her work. Now when Blair brings in a rough draft of a paper, she anticipates the questions that I will ask, and the challenges I might make. Most importantly, she clears up her basic logical errors before she ever gets to me. An exercise which really seemed to bring home the importance of self-questioning was the creation of a persuasive speech a couple of weeks ago. By imagining a hostile audience, Blair was able to project a challenging voice against her own work. Her speech was convincing because, as she later explained to me, she kept in mind what a hostile audience would be thinking after she made each point. And aren't all academic audiences hostile?

Tutoring involves asking many, many questions. Some of them are aimed at grammatical difficulties or sentence construction problems, some at more global organizational troubles. The most important questions we can ask, however, are those questions which the students can learn to ask of themselves. We can give advice, we can challenge statements, we can cheer success; but if we don't give our students the tools to survive the years of writing which face them (without someone beside them to advise, challenge, and cheer), can we say that we've really done anything at all?

Asking the questions that inspire self-questioning may seem like the perfect solution to every tutoring problem; how, then, does one do it? Here's the really challenging part of the whole idea; I don't think that there exists a single plan of action which will lead to it. Mostly, it seems to be a natural result of the interaction between tutor and tutee. When Blair belted out "WHY!" I was really unaware that the monosyllabic query was such a large part of my tutoring vocabulary; apparently I had asked it enough that Blair realized the question's importance to academic writing. If she could rob her audience of the opportunity to ask "why?", her logic would be a great deal more sound. That is precisely what she has gone on to do. Having finished a rough draft of another assignment she prepared to read it to me. She prefaced her oration with "I think it's pretty good. After everything I wrote I asked 'why?' I don't think there are any questions now."

I could go for the storybook ending here, but tutoring isn't like that. Of course there were questions left to be asked. But they were new, more complex questions; we left behind the simple "why?" in favor of questions about transitions, and rhetorical values, and even style. One question will never solve all writing difficulties. But if the student asks the question of herself, she is well on the way to developing writing strategies which she can rely on after the tutorials have ended.

Matthew J. Livesey
Peer Tutor
University of California-
Berkeley

(This essay will also appear in Martha Maxwell's When Tutor Meets Student: Experiences in Collaborative Learning. Kensington, MD: MM Assoc., 1990.)

ECWCA NEWS

The East Central Writing Centers Association announces the establishment of ECWCA NEWS, an annual newsletter which members will receive each spring. The NEWS is not a publication that will solicit or publish articles. Rather, its purpose is to inform members of news of the organization: information on the annual conference, proceedings of the ECWCA board, openings on the board, professional news on members (e.g. members' publications, promotions, changes of jobs; tutors getting jobs or being accepted to graduate schools: job announcements), center news, and the like. If you have any news that you would like to share with the membership, please send it by Dec. 1 to Peter Carino, Dept. of English, Indiana St. University, Terre Haute, IN 47809.

Calendar for Writing Center Associations (WCAs)

Oct. 5-6: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Minnesota.

Contact: Judith Kilborn, English Dept., St. Cloud State U., St. Cloud, MN 56301.

Oct. 11-13: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Contact: William O. Shakespeare, Reading-Writing Center, 1010A JKHB, Brigham Young U., Provo, Utah 84602.

Oct. 13: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in LaGrande, Oregon.

Contact: Mark Shadle, Writing Center, Eastern Oregon State College, LaGrande, Oregon 97850.

Oct. 26-28: Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference, in University Park, PA

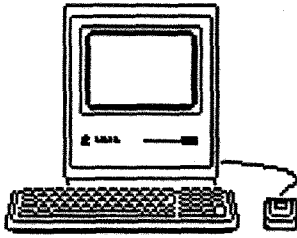
Contact: Ron Maxwell, English Dept., The Penn State U., University Park, PA 16802.

Feb. 15: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in New York

Contact: David Fletcher, Lehman College, B38 Carman, 250 Bedford Park Blvd. West, Bronx, NY 10468.

April 1, 1991: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Highland Heights, KY

Contact: Paul Ellis, Writing Center, No. Kentucky U., Highland Heights, KY 41076.



Micro Style *by Evelyn Posey*

Prewriting Options: Moving Beyond the Word Processor

Those of us with computers in our writing centers often acknowledge that they are simply a tool and that any real improvement in students' writing attitudes or abilities is the result of their willingness to work at writing and the instructor's or tutor's ability to guide them through effective writing processes. In a previous *Micro Style* column, I suggested several ways that students can use a word processor as a simple prewriting tool, but as writing teachers, we are always looking for better ways to motivate students. Those of us attracted to computers can't resist moving beyond word processing to commercially available prewriting programs that might further encourage our students. At the very least, these programs reinforce the idea that there is more than one way to generate ideas for a paper, and, at best, they provide students with additional, often unique, motivation to write.

Of the many programs that we at the University of Texas at El Paso have previewed, the following software seems to be the best match for our theory of the ideal computer-supported writing curriculum- one that introduces computers as a tool to support a writing community, encouraging students to prewrite as part of a comprehensive, recursive process that also includes drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

In our Academic Development Center computer writing lab, we use *Writer's Helper*, Stage II (Conduit) and a prewriting program, *ACAPAK*, written by one of our instructors specifically for our developmental writers. In both of these programs, students are guided through prewriting activities that help them

select a topic, generate ideas, and organize these thoughts. In *Writer's Helper*, Stage II for instance, they choose from a selection of menu options such as brainstorm, question, or list to help them find a topic. Once they have chosen a topic, they select menu options that help them analyze their audience, compare their ideas, and make connections among these ideas. To organize their thoughts, they select from such options as setting goals, outlining, or debating both sides of the issue. (*Writer's Helper* also includes revision activities- but that's a topic for a future column.)

ACAPAK, our locally written prewriting program, provides students with specific prompts that help them generate ideas for the assignments given in our developmental writing classes. They may select menu options that provide definitions of key essay terms, such as thesis, paragraph, and supporting details. Moreover, they may select a model essay for each writing assignment.

In our Liberal Arts Computer Lab where we work with more advanced writers, we use *Mindwriter* (Daedalus). *Mindwriter*, which has a vocabulary level better suited to juniors, seniors, and graduate students, provides heuristics that help students generate ideas for both informative and persuasive papers. They select an invention heuristic such as Aristotle's Topoi or Burke's Pentad and then respond to a series of questions or prompts to formulate ideas. Once they have completed the prompts, they save their work, retrieve it with a word processor, and begin drafting.

We have also recently previewed and are

now planning to add SEEN (Conduit) to our Liberal Arts Computer Lab. This critical reading tutorial takes students step by step through a literary or artistic analysis. They select from such menu options as plot or character analysis and, following the prompts, critically analyze literary or artistic works. SEEN also includes an on-line bulletin board for students to post their responses where other students in the class can review and respond to them.

Whether you preview some of these programs or select others that better match your center's needs, I would encourage you to consider the following guidelines that we use when selecting instructional software. Select programs that:

***are written by educators who themselves teach composition.**

You know, then, that the instructional methods are sound, authored by people who know composition research and who teach in computer-supported writing labs themselves.

***work with commonly used word processing software.**

Students should not have to abandon their favorite word processor to use one that comes with the prewriting program. Writers usually prefer, instead, to generate ideas in a prewriting program and retrieve those ideas in their favorite word processor to begin drafting.

***offer choices.**

Students should be able to select one or more ways to begin writing, reinforcing the concept that each writer has a unique process and that there are many ways to select, generate, and organize ideas for a topic. Instructors, too, should be able to modify the software so that the prompts fit their particular writing center or classroom situation.

***are inexpensive.**

Most writing center directors can't afford thousands of dollars for a single software purchase. The software programs that we have selected are each less than \$500 for a lab of thirty net-worked computers and are even less expensive for a few individual computers.

***motivate students to write, write, write, with clear-on screen instructions and easily accessed menus.**

Although it is not easy to find software that meets these criteria, we believe that pre-writing software works best when it is flexible, is applicable to many writing situations, and promotes critical inquiry and writing processes rather than prescriptive practice. We have found that such carefully selected prewriting software improves students' attitudes because they willingly use the computer to improve their writing abilities.

References

ACAPAK. [computer program.] El Paso, TX: Academic Development Center.

MINDWRITER. [computer program.] Austin, TX: The Daedalus Group. Inc.

SEEN. [computer program.] Iowa City, IA
CONDUIT.

WRITER'S HELPER, STAGE II [computer program.] Iowa City, IA: CONDUIT.

A while? or Awhile?

Gramatically, *awhile* is an adverb, and *a while* combines an article and a noun.

You can write that "He worked *awhile*" or that "He worked for *a while*." But you should not write that "He worked for *awhile*" or that "He worked *a while*." In general, *a while* is preceded by *for*.

-from *The Glossary of Misused Words & Phrases (communication briefings, 140 S. Broadway, Pitman NJ 08071).*

Closed Mouth

(cont. from page 8)

is another way for students to discover if they were successful in conveying the intended meaning (Taylor 2). When paraphrasing or summarizing, the tutor tells the student, in his own words, what the paper says. Tutors can also tell students exactly what caused a particular reaction.

These responses- reacting, paraphrasing, playing dumb, and giving reasons for a reaction- are all forms of feedback which tell the student that the tutor is listening. Listening requires more than closing one's mouth; it is not an easy, passive process and is of little value unless demonstrated. Feedback provides students the assurance that they are being heard and helps them determine the effectiveness of their words- both written and oral.

Besides helping students realize how effective their papers are, summary comments are also useful when listening directly to students-when they are expressing feelings or exploring ideas. Summarizing what a student has said demonstrates that the tutor is listening and helps the student assess the effectiveness of his message. For example, when listening to a student explore ideas for a paper, a tutor might say "I hear you saying that first you are going to write about the reasons for your decision to change your major, and then you are going to write about the effects of that decision." If the summary is correct, the student can agree; if not or if the student decides that is not what she wants to say, she can revise the message,

Reaction comments, too, can be used when listening to students as well as to papers. For example, if the tutor is confused about what a student is intending to write about, she might say, "I am confused about what you are saying you want to focus on in this paper." Reaction comments also tell the student if they are communicating effectively or not.

Reflection comments are more often used when students are talking about feelings than when they are exploring ideas for papers. Reflection mirrors or restates what a student has said or seems to be feeling. For example, when a student expresses discouragement about an assignment, a tutor might say, "You are finding it hard to get started on this paper."

Reflecting a student's feelings is a very effective way for the tutor to demonstrate listening and encourage the student to continue talking.

However, sometimes a tutor wants to provide feedback and encourage the student to continue without the longer interruption in the flow of talk necessary with summary, reaction, or reflection comments, for example, when a student is exploring an idea for a paper. Other verbal responses, such as "Mmhuh" at appropriate times, also demonstrate listening and encourage students to continue talking, as do "leading" responses such as "Tell me more" and "Go on" (Taylor 3). Leading responses get the student started and place the responsibility on her for keeping the conference going (Taylor 2).

Another way to demonstrate listening and encourage communication is with questions that demonstrate listening by expanding and developing what the student has said. For example, if a student is explaining why she put a comma in a certain place, the tutor can say something like "That's right. You now seem to feel sure about commas after introductory clauses. Now can you tell me why you used a comma before this 'and'?" If the student is exploring ideas for a paper on drug abuse, the tutor might say, "You have lots of good personal experiences to put in this paper. What other kinds of evidence might also be effective to make your point?"

Although sometimes tutors will plan questions ahead of time or as a session proceeds, they also need to be flexible and adjust questions according to the student's answers. "Canned questions"-those that are too general or have little connection with what the student has been saying- quickly demonstrate that the tutor is not really listening. In addition, tutors find that open-ended questions, requiring more than a "yes" or "no," are useful because the student must do more thinking and communicating. Meyer and Smith point out that the question "Are you sure?" should be avoided as it sounds condescending (36).

Silence is also a good way to get students to play a more active role in the tutorial (Arkin and Sholer 96). Often tutors are tempted to open their mouths when silence becomes uncomfortable; however, silence is an ally to communication. Meyer and Smith emphasize that pacing questions slowly is important as is modulating the tone of voice so

that questions do not sound "inquisitional or hostile" (32). Increasing the time allowed for students to answer questions has been found to increase the number and length of responses (Rowe 87).

Tutors also demonstrate listening through non-verbal behaviors that demonstrate listening such as looking directly at the student, leaning slightly forward, nodding, and smiling (Burley-Allen 115). Leaning back, falling to make eye contact, doodling, drumming with the fingers, fiddling with objects on the desk, and crossing the arms are signals to the student that the tutor's attention is else-where (Argyle 60). If the tutor is genuinely listening, non-verbal listening behaviors usually come naturally. However, tutors may have developed habits, such as doodling, that convey a different message to students. Usually the message from non-verbal behaviors is picked up unconsciously, but such behaviors do influence communication (Argyle 62).

Most tutors sincerely want to help, and when they learn about the importance of listening in collaborative learning, they are willing to, more often, close their mouths and open their ears. Listening, however, is not easy, it requires intense concentration, which is not always simple to achieve in the busy, distracting atmosphere of a writing center. Tutors owe it to their students to screen out distractions and interruptions as much as possible. When interruptions do occur, tutors can help students by remembering- jotting them down if necessary- the last few words the student said. When the interruption ceases, the tutor can then say, for example, something like "You were telling me about your feeling that this paragraph is a little choppy." This response shows that the tutor has been listening, feels the student's words are important enough to remember, and pulls the student back to the task at hand.

Distractions can also come from within: when tutors are tired, harried, or worried, they must make special efforts to listen. Paying particular attention to their own non-verbal behavior at such times is a big help. Making a special effort to look directly at the student, nod, smile, and so on, helps focus attention on what the student is saying.

Experienced tutors usually keep their ears open more than their mouths. They have

learned that listening- not just in spurts or just to the words- is an integral part of an effective tutorial. And most experienced tutors have learned feedback techniques that encourage students to communicate. Listening is one powerful way to do what all good helpers must do eventually-become obsolete (Harris 28),

Karen Morris
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Cloud, MN

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**National Conference on Peer
Tutoring in Writing**

October 26-28, 1990

The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA

"Peer Tutoring: Collaboration and Change"

Keynote speaker: Kenneth Bruffee

Registration Fees: Students \$28; Faculty/Staff
\$60; Address inquiries to Ron Maxwell, Dept. of
English, Penn State University, University
Park, PA 16802

Call for Proposals

**CUNY Writing Centers Assn.
3rd Annual Tutoring Conference**

Feb. 15, 1991

Lehman College
Bronx, NY

"Uncommon Sense in the Writing Center"

Keynote speaker: John Mayher

Proposals are invited for 60 minute sessions:
workshops, roundtable and panel discussions,
and demonstrations, or 15-minute individual
presentations. Tutor presentations and audi-
ence participation are stressed. Send a one-
page description and a 2-3 line summary to
David Fletcher, Lehman College, B38 Carman,
250 Bedford Park Boulevard West, Bronx, NY
10468. Deadline: Dec. 4, 1990.

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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