



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Vol. II, No. 7 (March, 1978)

In response to numerous requests for our complete mailing list, Helen Naugle has kindly offered to send a copy to anyone interested in obtaining one (see p. 5). Her offer to perform this time-consuming task is greatly appreciated!

Also in this issue is the first of what we look forward to including as a continuing feature in the newsletter: "Great Moments in Writing Lab History." The artist and creator is Bill Demaree, a lab staff member in Purdue's Writing Lab. Bill, an avid fan of Gilbert and Sullivan (hence the pen-name "Schwenck"), is a man of incredibly varied talents. He was part of the original group who structured our lab several years ago; has effectively tutored hundreds of students since then; is the artist-in-residence for all the graphics on our lab's instructional handouts, announcements, and self-instructional modules; has directed a major drama production for Purdue's theater; has served as the Editorial Assistant for the CEA journals; is presently writing his doctoral dissertation in drama; and has published an article in Dramatics.

Bill's contribution to our newsletter reminds us all of what we already know, that writing lab people are an unusually talented, capable lot. Yet, despite having published nine issues of our newsletter since its inception last April, we still have yet to hear from most of our members. Please share your work with the rest of us by sending in your articles, letters, descriptions of your lab, and other information or ideas that you'd care to share with our other readers (plus names of new members and/or donations of \$2, with checks made payable to me, to help defray our rapidly rising mailing and duplicating costs) to:

Prof. Muriel Harris, Editor
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Special Interest Session on Writing Labs at the 4 C's

Rudolph Almasy (West Virginia University), who is coordinating the Special Interest Session for Writing Lab Directors at the next 4 C's meeting in Denver, reports that the first part of the session will include the following discussion topics: A) Setting Up a Writing Lab--Various Models, Various Problems; B) Developing Courses Through the Writing Lab; C) The Writing Lab as a Supplement to Freshman English; D) Moving the Writing Lab Beyond Freshman English: What are the Possibilities? E) The Writing Lab Component Within General Remedial Services; F) Instructional Materials in the Writing Lab; G) Accountability in the Writing Lab; H) Finding and Training Tutors for the Writing Lab; I) Writing Lab Possibilities at the Community College; and J) Writing Lab Possibilities at the Small College/University. These sessions should prove to be highly useful; and since almost all of those who will act as discussion leaders are WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER members, it will be a pleasant opportunity to meet the faces behind the names that have appeared in the newsletter.

The second part of the Special Interest Session will focus on solving individual problems for people who seek help.



THE COMP-LAB PROJECT
at York College of
The City University of New York

Aided by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, three

members of the English Department at York College, Mary Epes, Carolyn Kirkpatrick, and Michael Southwell, have developed a laboratory-centered basic writing course, the COMP-LAB Project, where reduced classroom hours are systematically coordinated with a flexible schedule of autotutorial work in a writing laboratory.

The population of the COMP-LAB Project consists of students in English 100, the lowest-level remedial course in York's Freshman English sequence, into which 40% of entering freshmen are placed. These students are largely from minority groups and have high school averages below 80%; their writing characteristically displays heavy dialect interference on the word and sentence level, syntactic confusion, inability to organize ideas on paper, and general ignorance of manuscript form.

In the laboratory, under the supervision of tutors and trained student aides, students work on discrete grammatical problems. The laboratory method is autotutorial; students are provided with modules, packages of audiovisual and self-correcting written exercises developed by the Project Associates. Each module focuses on a separate problem. In using these materials, students move from pattern practice through sentence exercises, proofreading, and controlled composition, to grammatically-focussed writing assignments. Each of these techniques, suitable for an autotutorial system, and compatible with each other, permits the isolation of a particular writing problem, so that students are not forced into the near-impossible task of trying to get everything right at the same time. Each technique, precisely by isolating problems, enables students to work on exercises which have an easily determined right or wrong answer. Each is conducive to repetitive drill for the mastery of forms and the correction of errors. Finally, each technique fits easily into an incremental system, where students, having mastered one problem, go on to a more difficult one.

In the classroom, students work on syntactic and rhetorical aspects of written English, such as involved sentence structure and paragraph development, which cannot be taught by even the most sophisticated autotutorial methods. Free writing is used heavily to develop students' abilities to write extended passages.

The effectiveness of this program is due not only to the strength of its isolated compo-

nents, but even more to their sequencing and coordination.

As most instructors are aware, traditional grammar exercises have little or no impact on students' own writing. In the COMP-LAB modules, on the other hand, as students move through any given module, they are guided, step by step, from theoretical knowledge of a grammatical principle to the habitual use of that principle in their own writing. They begin by listening on tapes to a clear, brief, non-technical explanation of the principle involved, reinforced by practice in selecting the correct response when several options are possible (traditional fill-in-the-blanks exercises); they move on to recognizing and correcting given misapplications or non-applications of the principle (proofreading exercises) to discovering and correcting confusion with previous learning (various types of cumulative contrastive exercises); to using the principle to reshape given structures in individual sentences or passages of continuous prose (controlled composition); and finally to applying the principle in the composing process itself (grammatically-focussed writing assignments).

Coordination is as essential to the classroom component of the course as sequencing is to the lab. In each successive paper, students are held responsible only for those grammatical structures and other writing principles which they have already had a chance to learn, either in the classroom or the lab. Students must correct and explain errors only in these areas; they must also do appropriate additional exercises when significant backsliding or confusion of new learning with old is observed in their papers.

Consistent, careful coordination between lab and classroom makes students aware of and responsible for their own progress, resulting in strong, positive attitudes towards the course. At all points in the term, they know exactly what they have learned, what they need to learn, and that the chance to learn it is instantly available: the lab, a friendly, quiet place, staffed by knowledgeable, helpful, non-threatening tutors, is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every school day. Thus the course provides both the opportunity and the motivation for students to get the quantity as well as the kind of practice necessary to establish the habit of editing for common errors which do, in fact, characterize their

writing, rather than those which most grammar handbooks emphasize.

Mary Epes
York College-CUNY

(Mary Epes and her colleagues will be giving a panel presentation at the 4 C's in Denver.-- Editor's note).

The Writing Lab: An Anecdote

Considering the great fury of emphasis on the writing lab situation and the concomittant problem with the remedial Johnny who cannot read or write, most of the pedagogical solutions to the problem have been in the area of systematic programs which can effectively deal with the remedial English student. One has only to glance at the many titles of articles, notes, and queries which are now being published in the various writing lab newsletters to witness the systematic approach which the writing lab is taking. The scholarly approach has been, and apparently continues to be, the manifestation of an outward, visible form which impoverished English students will be able to use to remediate their composition woes. Of course, such an outward structure is a crucial necessity, but I am afraid that a deep-seated, invisible need of our writing lab students is being flagrantly ignored because of our systematic planning. A brief anecdote of an actual experience at the writing lab at Oklahoma State University will clarify this statement.

After spending many hours of organization, approach, and programming for the upcoming influx of freshman students experiencing difficulty in their English classes, we, at the writing lab, attempted to apply what we felt to be a very positive and efficient method of handling remedial writing problems. Most of the hesitant students were inevitably corralled into our program, and many received very positive benefits from the lab's instruction, eventually returning to their classes with some of the basics of effective writing. However, a few, as usual, dribbled through our program in a very lackluster fashion. One of these students, a young woman who often exhibited intense signs of confusion and disappointment in her failure to write effectively, proclaimed one day in the lab: "All I really need is someone to talk to." The lab was immediately transformed into a foreboding tranquility. Here was a student who needed to communicate

with us because we ironically failed to communicate with her. We, as trained individuals in the field of English, were momentarily abashed because of our inability to handle the situation. The young woman was on the verge of tears; she had not effectively responded to our program, and somewhere in the foggy distance I heard Cool Hand Luke shouting, in the last scene, "What we have here is a failure to communicate!" The young woman continued to seethe, and I attempted to sit patiently near her, listening to what she needed to say, hoping that somehow this woman's hysteria would abate, and we could coax her back on the road to solving her writing problems.

A seemingly insignificant story. But somewhere in all of our planning and organizing, the lab had failed to humanely come to grips with the real issues of remedial English students: communicating by being sensitive, not only to the rigorous demands of effective composition, but to human beings who are often very confused and unsure of their ability to work, to achieve, and to succeed in an academic subject. This confusion is one of the primal characteristics of any remedial English student. I am far from being an advocate of suckling students as if they were babes, but somehow, through all of our programming, the lab had detached itself from the student as human being with needs that are often unrelated to the immediate demands of the classroom, but needs that often have an overpowering influence on a student's performance in a classroom situation. The programming is important; it is a necessity; but if the lab loses sight of the human element--the need to respond sensitively to the mentally crippled student--all of us in the field of English will be guilty because of our inability to communicate effectively. This communication is seldom found on a graph, diagram, or a series of statistics, and it is seldom if ever taught to the soon-to-be English teacher in the classroom. If the writing lab is to succeed, we need to relearn the cornerstone of all effective communication: a sensitive insight into who our audience is--remedial English students whose problems are often as human as they are academic. Only then can we say to our profession and to ourselves: "What we have here is the ability to communicate!"

James Hill
Oklahoma State University



We have been using a TICCIT computer system here at BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY for 2½ years, and we work very closely with the writing lab. In case you don't know about the TICCIT computer system, let me give you some background. TICCIT, which is an acronym for Time shared, Interactive, Computer-Controlled Information Television was developed from 1970-1975 on an NSF grant. The Mitre Corporation developed the hardware and software, while English and Math courses were written by members of the Brigham Young University community. The TICCIT system is comprised of two Nova minicomputers, six disc drives and anywhere from 32 - 128 computer terminals. These terminals are modified Sony TV sets. TICCIT is a unique computer assisted instruction system in that an instructional model is "built into" the design. Students have an option of choosing their own learning strategy as they move through the Rules, Examples, Practice problems and Helps. TICCIT uses seven colors, graphics, videotapes, and this exciting idea of learner control to make instruction more appealing to students. If you want more information on TICCIT, contact

HAZELTINE CORPORATION
 EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS GROUP
 7680 Old Springhouse Road
 McLean, Virginia 22101

The English course on TICCIT was written especially for TICCIT and it is impossible for us to distribute portions of the course or to transfer this course to another computer system. However, this course is included with the purchase of a TICCIT system from Hazeltine

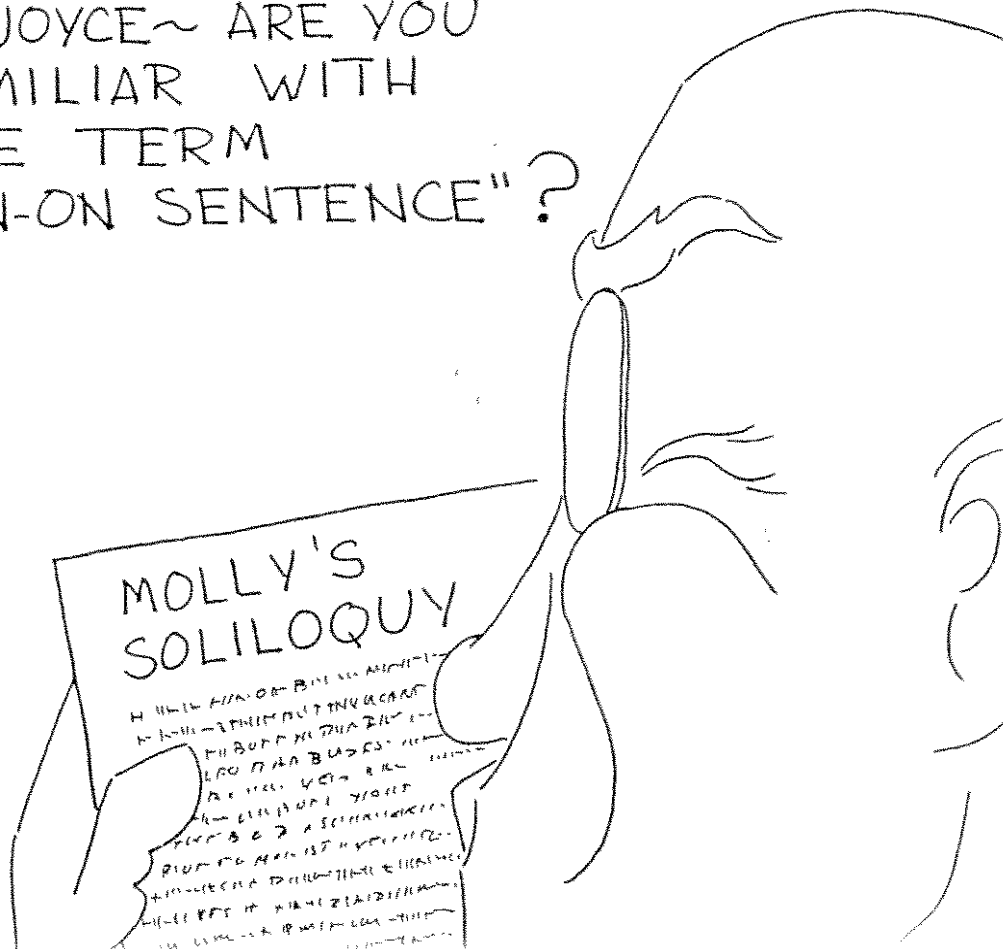
This English course is also used at Phoenix Community College and at Northern Virginia Community College. These colleges use TICCIT as the main instruction. Here at BYU, we use the computer as adjunctive instruction to class lectures and as main instruction for some remedial groups. Students with spelling, grammar or composition problems are often referred to us by the writing lab. We can keep track of the student's progress and we can relay that information to the lab instructor by means of a computer printout.

If you have further questions or are interested in a description of the English course or TICCIT, Please write to me c/o Computer Teaching Center, 3406 HELL, BYU, Provo, Utah 84601.

Gaylene Rosaschi
 Brigham Young University

GREAT MOMENTS
 IN WRITING LAB
 HISTORY, #1

MR. JOYCE~ ARE YOU
 FAMILIAR WITH
 THE TERM
 "RUN-ON SENTENCE"?



by Edward

The Editor's Mailbag...

I shall be happy to supply the complete mailing list of the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER to those people who write requesting it.

Helen Naugle
Department of English
Georgia Inst. of Tech.
Atlanta, Georgia 30332

I have enjoyed receiving the newsletter and discovering some of the techniques and methods others are using in writing labs. While it may not be your intent, perhaps the newsletter could eventually be expanded to include short articles and perhaps an occasional longer one.

R. Stanley Dicks
Wheeling College

(Professor Dick's letter with this most worthwhile suggestion also included, as an excellent example of the kind of article the newsletter should contain, a description of eight ways to remove the "remedial" stigma of labs. His article will appear in the April issue.--

Editor's note)

Here at JCCC we have developed some plans for a Writing Center and have surveyed the Communications faculty for in-put. Excitement is high, but sometimes I wonder if the faculty isn't expecting too much from the Center. After all, can we turn 'D' students into 'A' students?

Meanwhile, we'll struggle on. We will open the Center this summer on a trial basis, with full operation beginning in the fall. Between now and then I have two crucial decisions to make: should we have coffee and will rock music help the students to think. More on these later.

Larry Rochelle
Johnson County Community College

For those who are interested in some general evaluative observations on program evaluation (not limited to writing labs), I would suggest that a reading of Richard Heydinger's article, "Evaluation of Personalized Instruction," Journal of Personalized Instruction (September, 1977) might be helpful.

Michael F. O'Hear
Indiana-Purdue at Fort Wayne

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER-Mailing List - Supplement #9
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