



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Member of the NWCA:NCTE Assembly
Information Exchange Agreement

Vol. VIII, No. 6 (February, 1984)

Since writing lab people have frequently expressed an avid interest in having a directory with detailed information about writing labs throughout the country, I'm undertaking such a project for the National Writing Centers Association. Enclosed is a questionnaire for those labs that wish to be listed in this directory. I've tried to include questions which will provide the kinds of answers many of you have said you need on various occasions and for various reasons. The only frequently asked question I know of that has been omitted here, that of the size of the lab's budget, has not been included because I suspect that some of us may be hesitant to provide such figures publicly. If you are willing to offer budget figures, you might want to indicate that in the questionnaire. If I have omitted other questions that you think should have been included, feel free to provide your answers in the "additional comments" section at the end.

The directory will be a photocopied compilation of your completed questionnaires. Since your form will be copied exactly as is, please type it and make the print as readable as you can. Also, in an attempt to cram in a long list of questions for you to respond to, I have undoubtedly been more than a bit cryptic. To help you figure out the kinds of information being asked for, I have included a sample of a completed questionnaire.

Please fill out only one questionnaire per lab and, if humanly possible, return the form to me as soon as you can. Preliminary results of the question of regional writing lab associations will be reported at the CCCC Special Interest Session for Writing Labs at the end of March, in New York. However, to ensure as

complete a directory as possible, I'll wait until June 15th to compile and print the final version. All forms to be included must be received before that date.

The price of purchasing the directory will depend on costs for printing and duplicating and will be announced in a future issue of the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER, along with ordering information. If you need more blank copies of the questionnaire, please send me a stamped, self-addressed envelope. And if you can think of ways that the directory can be particularly useful to you, let me know.

As usual, keep sending your articles, announcements, reviews, questions, names of new members, and \$5/year donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University, but sent to me) to:

Muriel Harris, editor
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
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West Lafayette, IN 47907



RECRUITING AND SELECTING PEER TUTORS

Since recruiting, selecting, and training peer tutors is an important part of my job as director of the Southeastern Massachusetts University Writing/Reading Center, I read with interest Peter A. Lyons' "Selecting Tutors: a Two-Step Process," (WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER, 7, No. 8, April 1983) and Suzanne Comins' "To the 'Manner' Born: A Rebuttal" (WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER, 8, No. 3, November 1983). In a way I envy them, for it appears that they must have dozens of applicants who are wonderful writers, with outgoing, pleasant personal-

ities, and so eager to tutor that they don't mind going through a rigorous interview and extensive paperwork to get the job.

Unfortunately, at our Center, we have such a small tutoring budget that we do not pay new tutors. Therefore, each semester we conduct a major recruiting campaign through which we try to make our program attractive to a pool of qualified tutors. Although there is much I agree with both in Peter Lyons' and Suzanne Comins' tutor selection practices, I'm sure that if we followed their methods, very few of our applicants would become tutors.

Since many other writing labs must be in positions similar to ours, I would like to share some of our successful tutor recruiting and selection practices. Our selection process is based on the following premises. 1) Selection begins with careful and extensive recruiting. 2) Self-selection, as Ms. Comins suggests, is a key part of the process, as long as the application procedure does not become so difficult that too few are left in the applicant pool at the end. For example, asking for two recommendations from faculty could be a bit much. 3) As Ms. Comins emphasizes in her article, tutors are trained, not born. In fact, I prefer inexperienced tutors whom we train to those who are already set in their ways. 4) It's difficult to assess the effectiveness of tutors till they begin tutoring. 5) The recruiting and selecting process should reflect the atmosphere of the Center as a workplace.

It is, of course, no small task to recruit peer tutors to staff a writing center when there is no program money to pay them for their work. Attracting qualified and competent students to tutor--as volunteers, for academic credits, or on work-study assignments--requires planning, persistence, and a variety of strategies. At our center we have developed a plan that enables us to indentify an adequate number of qualified tutors for each semester. We begin recruiting around midterm for next semester's tutors, using the following seven-step process.

First, we put ads in the school newspaper and on the school radio station. We put free ads in as many sections of the newspaper as possible--classifieds, meeting notices, news briefs. The idea is to saturate. We also try to get someone to

write an article about our center, our need for tutors, or anything that draws attention to our program in a positive light. Since we always have tutors who also work on the newspaper, it is fairly easy to get such a piece written.

Second, we put up lots of posters. We get our tutors to make them if they have free time, since they are creative and can think of eye-appealing layouts and catchy slogans that attract other students.

Third, we ask our current tutors to speak in any of their classes that might be good sources for new tutors, particularly writing, literature, and selected humanities courses. They can talk about what it's like to work at the Center, and they can identify what appeals to other students. To help our tutors recruit, we have written a brochure about the tutoring experience to give out to interested students.

Fourth, we ask faculty to give us names of students they recommend as tutors. We send these students personal letters telling them that Professor X recommended them to be a tutor. Students are always delighted when instructors think they are qualified to tutor. We also enclose our brochure about tutoring, as we do for all other tutor recruiting mailings.

Fifth, we write to students who have received A's in specific courses, ones in which they have to do much writing. Students who get A's in freshman composition and in introduction to literature classes have potential as tutors. We also write to students getting A's in other courses, such as Business and Technical Writing, Advanced Composition, and humanities courses requiring writing. Our letters congratulate them for having received an A in the particular subject, a recognition of their achievements that is particularly effective in large, impersonal schools. The names of these students can usually be obtained from the Registrar.

Sixth, we send letters to all students who are on the Dean's List, inviting them to be tutors. The names of these students are also usually available from the Registrar.

Finally, we ask our present tutors to recommend other students as tutors. We write personal letters to these students, telling them that they have been recommended

by one of the present tutors.

This seven-part plan is effective because steps three through seven are targeted at students with good writing skills, making it almost unnecessary to develop a selection procedure. Although some students could receive as many as four letters inviting them to tutor, sometimes this saturation effect is necessary to get a student to make the decision to become a tutor. Completing all seven steps does take time, but it is worth the effort because it produces an excellent pool of tutors with varied backgrounds.

We do, of course, have an application process for prospective tutors, but ours seems to be less intimidating and time consuming than either Mr. Lyons' or Ms. Comins' extensive interviewing procedure. In my eight years as director of our center, I have met very few applicants who are really convinced they would make good tutors. Generally, we have to encourage them, to build their confidence, to help them realize that they do have the necessary skills. We also work with a time constraint because no matter how early we recruit, many of our applicants do not identify themselves till the first week of the semester during which they wish to tutor.

Once a prospective tutor appears at the Writing/Reading Center, we give him or her a brief application to fill out. It asks a few basic questions, such as major, year of graduation, grade point average, name of one faculty reference, reason for wanting to tutor, and prior experience. This application takes about five minutes to complete. Although we do require that our tutors be sophomores, have a 3.0 grade point average, and B in their freshman composition courses, most of the time we check neither references nor grades. We have yet to meet an applicant who becomes a tutor by lying about grades or by giving a false reference. We check the information given by students only if we have major doubts about them. Besides having found routine checks unnecessary, we don't have the time to do them. I don't know whether our tutors know that we usually don't verify the information they give us, but I suspect they do. And I think it suggests that we trust them.

Each applicant also has a brief interview, usually done on the spot. However, we never call it an interview and

always make sure that it is a dialogue that reflects the atmosphere of our center: our program has much structure, but it is unobtrusive.

We begin each interview with the same set of questions. We are really less interested in the applicants' answers than in their thinking about the question. We ask whether they are dependable, how they feel about writing, how they study, how they feel about students who need tutoring, and how they feel about training. We explain briefly what we do at the Center, make very clear to them what we expect of our tutors--especially if they are volunteering, and ask if they have any questions. If we were to require our applicants to role play by commenting on a student paper as Mr. Lyons suggests, ask them how to construct a conclusion, ask them about their strengths and weaknesses as writers and in their personalities, or what they would do if a tutee of the opposite sex developed a crush on them as Ms. Comins suggests, we would never see many of them again. Most of our applicants are nice people, who have a hunch they would like to try tutoring, but they are not exceptionally articulate the first time we meet them. During the interview, we also ask them to bring a writing sample, but unless we have a doubt about the applicant, we don't require it prior to accepting him or her as a tutor. We use these samples mostly to get an idea of each tutor's ability and the kind of training he or she needs. Those students who don't have adequate writing samples usually don't come back.

In most instances, we accept applicants as tutors on the spot. If we have any doubts, we suggest that they think over whether they really want to tutor, and generally the ones who don't have the right qualifications don't come back.

Since most application procedures create essentially artificial situations, we prefer to take the risk of letting students who meet our minimum qualifications work at the Center for one semester to see how they really perform. I agree with Ms. Comins that the tutor's personality is important, but I find it difficult to define what the right personality is. For example, will a quiet person be a poor tutor and an outgoing person a good tutor? We try to avoid developing a picture of a "tutor type," for we have room for many types that complement each other and that can be matched to the

individual personalities of our students. Occasionally, we do get someone who is not suited for the job, but more often we are pleasantly surprised by how well our new tutors handle their responsibilities. Those who do not work out usually know that they are not measuring up to the standards we expect, and they decide not to return. On the other hand, by having a simple application procedure and by being inclusive rather than exclusive in our selection of tutors, we have found that many dedicated, hard working, and academically sound students have joined our staff.

Susan Glassman
Southeastern Massachusetts
University



We have the same fragment, but it makes sense when connected to the sentence before it. In our Writing Lab we offer the following advice to students:

READ THE PAPER BACKWARDS. Start at the end of the paper or at the end of each paragraph (rough draft preferably). Read from end mark to end mark, one single sentence at a time. If the sentence does not make sense by itself, it is a fragment. By simply reversing the reading order of the sentences, the writer can detect and correct fragment errors before the teacher does.

Kathy Martin
Perry Meridian High School
Indianapolis, Indiana



GOOD NEWS FROM ALABAMA!
IMPROVED PREPARATION AND INNOVATION

A QUICK CHECK AND CURE FOR FRAGMENTS

After ascertaining that a student can recognize and identify complete sentences versus fragments through regular drills, the lab instructor can use the "quick check and cure" method described here. Emphasize that this method is a revision technique to be applied to the first or rough draft. When followed consistently, it is effective in reducing fragments in students' writing. The "cure" isolates sentences and fragments as in a drill, thus eliminating the "carry over coherence" of merely reading through the paragraph or essay.

The "quick check and cure" method:

Most of us can tell if a SINGLE sentence is a fragment or a complete thought.

EXAMPLE: Which is very interesting to her.

Obviously, the preceding example is a fragment: we do not know what WHICH refers to. The trouble comes when a fragment is mixed with other sentences in a paragraph and sounds right when we read through the paragraph.

EXAMPLE: Mary enjoys tracing her family tree. Which is very interesting to her.

Two items concerning the Learning Lab at Lurleen B. Wallace State Junior College, Andalusia, Alabama, may be of interest to other lab directors. First, we have fewer developmental students on the lowest level than ever before. Second, all developmental English, as well as reading and math, students are now scheduled for two regular sessions per week in the lab.

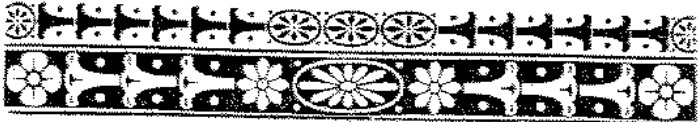
In the past the English Department has offered two levels of developmental English: an 099 course for those with more severe deficiencies and English 100 for those with fewer problems. This year for the first time only six students out of approximately 250 entering freshmen qualified for 099, too few to justify a class, and they were integrated into the English 100 courses.

In an attempt to prepare and retain all developmental students, a new program was initiated this fall in which students in developmental courses spend two periods a week in the Learning Lab in addition to five hours in class. The students have been surprisingly receptive to this innovation which allows lab personnel to individualize their instruction. Individualization in English labs is accomplished by administering the Test of Adult Basic Education and prescribing materials to correct deficiencies it reveals, by working closely with the students' classroom teachers to pinpoint weaknesses, and by teaching students to write

and edit paragraphs on the word processor.

The more intense individualized instruction, coupled with the improved preparation, is making a difference in the students' performance in the classroom according to the English teachers. Whether the lab sessions will serve to retain those who might otherwise become discouraged and drop out remains to be seen.

Marilyn Centner
Lurleen B. Wallace
State Junior College



MATERIALS EXCHANGE TABLE AT 1984 CCCC

Tom Waldrep, University of South Carolina, will organize a materials display and exchange table this year at the Special Session on Writing Labs at CCCC to be held in New York, March 29-31. In the past, this table has been an invaluable addition to the Writing Centers Special Interest Group, enabling participants from all over the United States to share ideas and materials. These materials have included everything from bookmarks and brochures, letting students know a writing center is available, to descriptions of services provided, guides for tutoring, and actual materials used within the writing labs. Any materials you would like to share with other colleagues would be welcomed. As chair of the session, Jan Ugan of Utah State University, is arranging the program so there will be time between the business meeting and workshops for everyone to have an opportunity to participate in the exchange.

Should you decide to participate in the materials exchange table, the procedure is as follows:

1. Donors of display materials are to fill out the accompanying form, listing and describing materials. This form should be sent to me as soon as possible so that I can plan for adequate space.
2. Donors are to bring the materials with them to New York and turn them in to me fifteen minutes before the session begins. (I will be on duty at the table during this period, during our fifteen-minute inter-

mission, and approximately fifteen minutes following the conclusion of the session.)

3. Materials are to be in manila folders, identified by school and individual, and marked "Display Only; Do Not Remove." A legal pad (with school, individual identification, and the cost of return postage) should be included in the folder for names and addresses of those requesting copies.
4. While the exchange will be handled primarily by mail, you may prefer to bring 50-100 copies of your handout to eliminate the expense and delay of mailing.
5. Donors will be responsible for picking up their folders during the fifteen minutes following the session.

Those of you who would like to participate in the materials exchange but who will not be able to attend the convention may send your materials straight to New York at the following address any time after the first of March:

Tom Waldrep
Conference on College Composition
and Communication
Sheraton Center Hotel
52nd Street and Seventh Avenue
New York, New York 10019

Because of rising costs in mailing, should you wish to have materials returned to you, please include postage to cover mailing costs.

On the same subject of rising costs, we realize that with budget cutbacks and travel limitations not everyone who would like to will be able to attend CCCC's and participate in the materials exchange. If you are in this position and have particular information in mind you would like sent to you, let me know before the convention. I will then check the information available and add your name to the list provided if what you want is part of the exchange.

If you have any materials at all you think others would also find useful, please plan to share them by participating in the materials exchange table. Any questions or

suggestions you might have please direct to Tom Waldrep, Director of Freshman English, English Department, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina 29208.

Date _____

TO: Tom Waldrep
Director, Freshman English
English Department
University of South Carolina
Columbia, South Carolina 29208

FROM: (name) _____
(school) _____
(address) _____

Materials for Exchange Table:

(List and briefly describe type, size, content, etc.)

- _____ I will bring copyrighted materials that can be ordered.
- _____ I will bring 50-100 copies of my handouts to New York.
- _____ I will bring a sample of a handout to New York.
- _____ I will be able to send copies to those requesting them.
- _____ I am mailing to you copies (or a sample) to be placed on the Materials Exchange Table.



WORD PROCESSING THEME COMMENTS
IN THE WRITING LAB

As colleges and universities strive to provide realistic educations for their students, writing laboratories are likely locales for English departments to house newly-purchased computers. This is the situation we are finding ourselves in at Cameron University. And as we read the professional literature, we are beginning to realize that the software which we develop will either help to ensure an enduring fac-

ulty endeavor at the lab computer terminals or help to relegate the computers to the status of some lab cassette programs, items to be grudgingly used only occasionally. I believe that one way for labs to encourage a continuing faculty use of the computers and the lab is to develop programs for the word processing of comments on theme cover sheets.

In the May, 1983 issue of TRS-80 Newsletter, in an article entitled "A Grading Technique Using Scripsit," Dr. Timothy Little of Michigan State University describes a program he developed for the word processing of theme annotations. A central argument of the article is that since we teachers repeat ourselves frequently in commenting upon student writing and since word processing programs move stored messages at high speeds, we should word process oft-repeated theme comments.

Last summer, after the logic of Little's argument had tugged at me for several weeks, I sat down at my TRS-80 color computer, put together a few simple programs, and came up with a 6-menu 13K special, designed to call students' attention to common usage errors, among other things, and to give the students assignments based upon their error patterns. I use a Radio Shack Quick Printer II, which types on a 2 1/2 inch tape; with minor modifications the program will no doubt run with other small printers which interface with the color computer.

My theme grading routine proceeds as follows: As I read and comment upon a student's paper, I place check marks on a cover sheet which includes a list of usage and other items grouped according to menu number in the program. By each item is another number coded to what I will eventually type onto the computer keyboard; also, beside each item on both sides is a short line on which I can place a check mark and tally marks; the check marks are a signal to type the number to activate the printer. Before going to the keyboard, I grade all of the themes. I place the cover sheets in one pile and the themes in another; each group is arranged in the order of grading. I have an area on the cover sheet to write the personalized comments which are an indispensable element of theme grading. After the printer runs a set of statements, I tear off the tape, staple it to the cover sheet, and begin typing the numbers which will activate the printed comments for the next student.

I am making the program available to our Writing Laboratory; as a former Coordinator of the Writing Lab and now Director of Freshman Composition, I know how professionally rewarding it is for all of us when a new phase of the lab operation flourishes within the composition program.

For the reader who wants to design a similar system, the following lines represent the skeletal outline of the program's main commands. The lines deal with one main menu item and another item, subject-verb agreement, from the usage submenu:

```
40 print "4-usage"  
55 input "choose menu"; M  
60 on M gosub 100, 200, 300, 400, 500,  
600
```

Pressing 4 takes the instructor to the submenu, the first line of which is below:

```
400 print "1-s-v agr"  
425 input "choice"; D  
426 if D=1 then print #-2,cap$ "subject-  
verb agr problems"  
427 if D=11 then print #-2,cap$ "read  
RMP 369-373, do ex. 6a, 373"  
429 if D=111 then print #-2,cap$ "read  
CF 156-157, do ex. 6.2 157"  
482 if D=15 then goto 499  
499 cls  
500 print "1-go to lab" (followed by  
other menu items in the writing  
lab menu)
```

The screened items like line 400 indicating menu numbers provide an instructor looking at a student cover sheet with the same number at the keyboard. Upon pressing 1, line 426 calls for a print line bringing attention to subject-verb agreement problems. The instructor may follow up by pressing 11, in which case line 427 calls for a printed statement asking the student to do the first subject-verb agreement exercise in the program, one appearing on page 373 of our Composition I text, Rhetoric Made Plain. Similarly, if the instructor presses 111, line 429 calls up a subject-verb agreement assignment in the Basic English course text, Composition Five. Line 482 gives the program user the first line of the next menu; the "go to the writing lab" line is from the Writing Lab menu; it can activate a lengthy statement which asks a student to work in the lab on a spelling program since the lab's program is superior to the spelling sections in our texts.

Presently, the program includes eighty-five lines that I can call up for the rapid printing of comments that up to now I have repeatedly made to students, semester after semester. I can easily add lines. Although I write comments on each student's paper and cover sheet, I estimate that the word processing program is going to save me about ten hours per composition course per term. And as more faculty members become aware of the time savings for such programs, I anticipate that our Writing Lab's computers and printers are going to be used regularly.

Leigh Howard Holmes
Cameron University



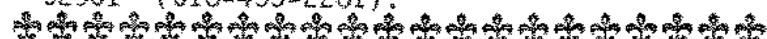
DO YOU AND YOUR TUTORS NEED HELP IN UNDERSTANDING WRITER'S BLOCK?

Mike Rose's Writer's Block: The Cognitive Dimension, recently published by Southern Illinois University Press (152 pages, \$8.50) is described as "the first scholarly study to approach this universal source of frustration as a measurable problem that can be analyzed and remedied. Using principles of cognitive psychology to explain his discovery, Rose notes that the problem often is rooted in such cognitive difficulties as rigid or inappropriate composing rules and planning strategies.

"Through questionnaires, interviews, essays, and videotapes of students in the act of writing, Rose concludes that blockers spend more time pondering, only to submit essays that are shorter than and inferior to those of nonblockers. Blockers also voiced more rigid composing rules, made more misleading assumptions concerning composition, and more negatively evaluated their work.

"Compared to nonblockers, blockers used fewer functional strategies of composition, and they frequently edited their work prematurely. Rose identifies these symptoms and problems; more important, he develops programs and strategies for eliminating writer's block."

This highly informative book, which belongs on the tutors' bookshelf in every writing lab and learning center, can be ordered from Southern Illinois University Press, P.O. Box 3697, Carbondale, IL 62901 (618-453-2281).



Margaret, a native of the United States, and Sue, an ESL student from Taiwan, basic writing students at George Mason University's Composition Tutorial Center (CTC) in Fairfax, Virginia, were afraid of written words--at least their own. Because writing was painful for them, they avoided writing whenever they could. Margaret was convinced she could never measure up to her English teachers' expectations. Nearly paralyzed by her fear of writing, she wrote less and less and only when it was absolutely necessary. No matter how much she was told to write for an assignment, she could only write a page, or at most, a page and a half. A top "A" student in elementary grades, her work in English slipped to "D's" in high school and a "No Credit" in her first attempt to complete a freshman English class at GMU.

As a second grader, Sue had won a prize for excellent writing in her native Chinese. But when she moved to the United States a year later, she became afraid to write or speak. Although her initial fears decreased as the years went by, she came to feel she "couldn't write anything correct." She remembers one teacher in junior high school who marked up her papers and put her own words in place of Sue's the way she wanted them rather than the way Sue intended. By the time she arrived at GMU, Sue felt that no matter how hard she worked at her writing, she would still only get "C's."

Mina Shaughnessy in Errors and Expectations¹ says BWs' confusion over correct form--as insisted upon by teachers--paralyzes their writing. The fear of making mistakes builds a barrier that keeps the BW "not only from writing something in formal English but from having something to write."

Frustrated and angry over their seeming inability to improve their writing, Margaret and Sue came to the CTC on recommendations by their teachers. For the first time in a long while, both Margaret and Sue received immediate and positive feedback on their writing in an atmosphere of acceptance and trust. As a result, their attitudes toward writing changed--they believed they could write better--which, in turn, led them to do better writing.

Over and over again, I saw BW students like Margaret and Sue at GMU develop successful writing skills in the CTC. The Center was designed to help students identified as having trouble with their writing--those who obtained a 35 or lower score on the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE) and whose written essays were judged by members of the English Department to be deficient in writing skills. Students were required to attend two fifty-minute sessions a week for one semester. In an intensive two-week seminar before school started, and in weekly meetings that continued throughout the semester, Dr. Marie Nelson of the English Department trained six of us graduate students to serve as tutors in the CTC. The goal was to establish a sound writing program based on developmental principles--the CTC was not to be perceived as an editing service. During that first year, I saw our tutorial procedures bring about positive changes in most of our students' attitudes toward their writing.

John was a typical CTC student with a TSWE score of 30. His essay exhibited a limited vocabulary and difficulties with sentence structure. On our first meeting, in order to become better acquainted and to develop a safe environment for John, we talked about ourselves, our families, the university, majors, and so on. I told him that even though I was his tutor, I would not have all the answers to his writing problems, but that we'd work together to correct them.

During this meeting, I gave John a writing attitude questionnaire to be filled out as honestly as possible. Using this as a basis, we discussed John's feelings about writing in general and about his own writing in particular. Afterwards, John and I, student and teacher, did a freewrite--we wrote freely--on whatever topic came to mind. If John couldn't think of anything to write, I'd tell him to start with "I can't think of anything to write," repeating it over and over again until something clicked and his writing took off. Once beyond the indecision about what to write, the students' words would usually come rapidly because they were writing about something important to them--and not what I said they had to write.

The second time we met I asked John to make an authority list, a list of things about which he knew. I explained that writers write best when they write about what they know. Most of our students, including John, protested that they didn't know much about anything. But when I told them they surely knew about themselves, their families, hobbies, cars, boyfriends, girlfriends, sports, and so on, they invariably grinned and began their lists. Next, they were to choose one topic from this list and begin writing. They were to write as if they were telling one other reader (me, if they chose) whatever it was that they knew. They were not to worry, I told them, about correctness, punctuation, spelling, or anything else, because we wouldn't be going over these freewrites for errors at all until they had written two or three that they wanted to revise and put in final form.

In 15-20 minutes, because John knew about the subject he chose and was free of writing anxiety, he had a page of writing before him. When asked to read aloud to the small group he was a part of, he unconsciously corrected many of his vocabulary errors; he recognized other sentence structures as faulty and stopped to correct them, then continued on with his reading. We tutors saw that personal editing begins the moment students read their writing aloud. When John finished, we gave him our honest reactions to his writing. I might tell him, "I liked your opening sentence," and another might say, "Your words were very descriptive," and so on. Even though no putdowns were allowed by anybody in a CTC group, that didn't preclude listeners from pointing out to a writer that they didn't understand what the person was trying to say or do--or even that the piece of writing was boring. Being honest with each other was important in developing trust between the individuals in a group.

After three or four freewriting sessions, I asked John if he would like to revise or work further on one of his previous freewrites. Revision, I told him, was not just correcting his spelling or verb tenses, but a new way of seeing one's writing. I gave John a copy of Kirby's Revision Checklist². After going over this point by point, we worked through a freewrite revision together.

If John was involved in writing assignments for his English class, he could bring these to our tutorial sessions for revision.

In his group, four or five students might be working on as many different papers. Since lack of time was often a problem, pairing several students together to help each other allowed me the chance to assist another student alone for ten minutes or so. In that way, each of the students got the help he needed.

About mid-semester, we tutors had the students freewrite on what they felt were their major problems in writing. Although they had been correcting their writing errors for some time, this freewrite made the students think about specific difficulties. After reading and talking about these problems, the students decided which one they wanted to improve or eliminate. Some wrote that organizing their thoughts was their worst problem, while others cited poor spelling, use of articles, or verb tenses. Once they identified a writing problem and understood what they could do to reduce its occurrence, we often had the students keep a record of the number of times they made that mistake in their revision papers. They could then set a goal of trying to lower the number of these mistakes in each subsequent revision.

We in GMU's CTC have learned that writing does not have to be painful for everyone. When BWs are temporarily free from worry about making mistakes, as they initially are in the CTC, their writing, with practice, develops the fluency it had when they were younger. Once fluent, they can learn to correct their own mistakes--and knowing that they can do this gives them further confidence. Their attitudes change from thinking that they can't write to delight in discovering they can do good writing after all. Although good writing may always be hard for them--as it is for most writers--a blank sheet of paper will no longer frighten them--or give them pain.

Kay Hutchison Benton

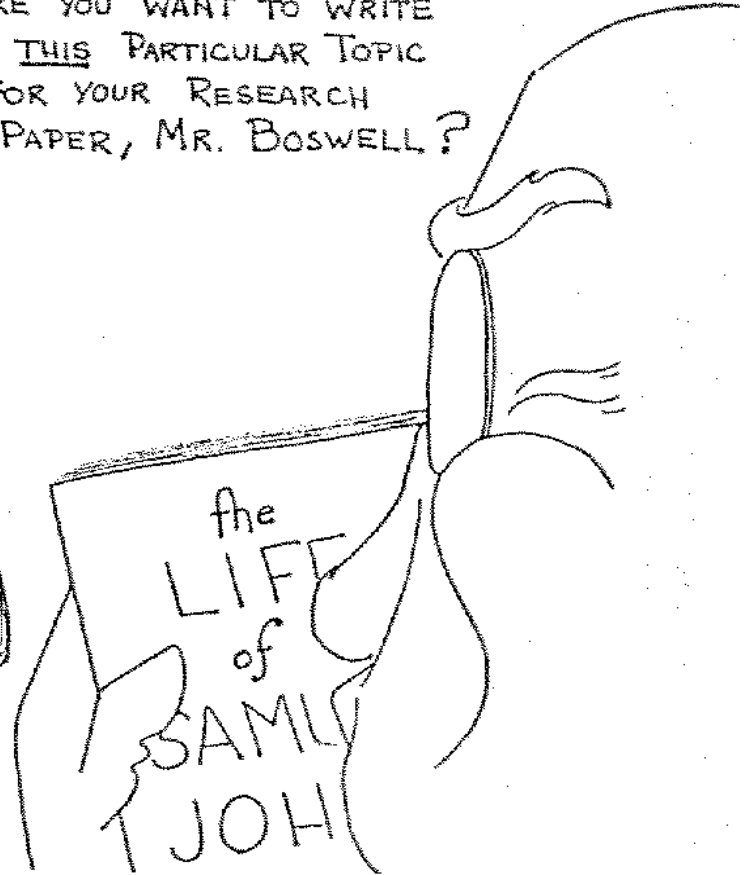
Notes

¹Mina Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 5,11.

²Dan Kirby and Tom Liner, Inside Out (Boyton/Cook, 1981).



BUT YOUR JOURNAL IS FULL OF SUCH
INTERESTING STUFF — ARE YOU
SURE YOU WANT TO WRITE
ON THIS PARTICULAR TOPIC
FOR YOUR RESEARCH
PAPER, MR. BOSWELL?



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
Muriel Harris, editor
Dept. of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, Ind. 47907

