dence in their writing — experienced significant attitudinal changes as they became adept at using the computer. Because the word processor made revision easy, students began to consider writing as a process and to realize that changes could be made. Since a reader would not have to see an unsatisfactory effort, WANDAH liberated these basic writers. In addition, WANDAH socialized the class and stimulated peer editing as students began to look at each other's papers. Another instructor found that her developmental students wrote more and for longer periods of time.

Because administrators required an evaluation of WANDAH based on some kind of test, developers have devised a limited test for a class of five students. As students type, the special version of WANDAH they use records every key stroke, providing statistical output about the writing process, and the screen is video-taped. Afterwards, students are interviewed by their instructor and their comments are recorded as they look at the videotape and try to recall the writing process — to explain what they were doing or thinking about as they worked. Results are not yet available, however.

Finally, in response to a question about research which proves that the computer helps students write better, Cohen addressed the problem of accountability. If institutions allocate funds for computers, administrators expect statistical proof both that writing has been improved and that the funds were well spent. Administrators, therefore, tend to want a unit of measurement of writing quality, what Cohen called the written, so that it can be said, for example, that the writing of students who used WANDAH has improved five writers over the writing of students who have not. Although average sentence length, grammatical errors per page, misspellings, etc. can be counted, none of these is the written itself. To build a statistical model resulting in something resembling a worry about editing, this engenders a more relaxed, natural style, according to Humphreys. In addition, students can compare different versions of their papers with split-screen viewing capability. They can also call up a precis of their papers by programming the computer to condense all of the topic sentences in their papers. Students can also experiment with the structure of their papers by switching paragraphs easily, and this helps them to see the development of what they have written. Humphreys noted that besides allowing students to make major revisions more easily in their writing, computers, by emphasizing the visual nature of writing, give students one more dimension to work with in trying to understand, and edit, their own writing. For instance, computers can show students the length of each of their sentences by printing them separately. Students can flip the printed copy sideways to see graphically how many of their sentences are very short and how many are unusually long. All of these functions drew students toward a concept of writing as discovery, allowing them to experiment and create with ease.

Humphreys made several comments about what the computer can do for student writers. First, computers have the power to change the writing process by separating its stages more easily and therefore allowing students to focus their attention on specific aspects. For example, during the drafting stage, they can pay more attention to the content of their papers without having to worry about editing. This engenders a more relaxed, natural style, according to Humphreys. In addition, students can compare different versions of their papers with split-screen viewing capability. They can also call up a precis of their papers by programming the computer to condense all of the topic sentences in their papers. Students can also experiment with the structure of their papers by switching paragraphs easily, and this helps them to see the development of what they have written. Humphreys noted that besides allowing students to make major revisions more easily in their writing, computers, by emphasizing the visual nature of writing, give students one more dimension to work with in trying to understand, and edit, their own writing. For instance, computers can show students the length of each of their sentences by printing them separately. Students can flip the printed copy sideways to see graphically how many of their sentences are very short and how many are unusually long. All of these functions drew students toward a concept of writing as discovery, allowing them to experiment and create with ease.

Computers, Humphreys indicated, can also aid writing teachers by helping them to create lists of problem areas that plague particular students and explanations of what needs to be done to correct the problems. Computers can also be programmed to stop at each mark of punctuation, so that students must slow down in reading their writing and think about their use of punctuation. Finally, many computer checks exist to help students correct problems with spelling, style, mechanics, and typing. These are particularly helpful because the computer is programmed to pose a question students must answer (e.g.
“You have a comma here. Is that what you wanted?”

Humphreys stated that networked computers make the writing process public. They encourage students to talk about their writing, to share their work, to ask questions, and to ask for help. Thus, the audience for students’ writing becomes real and accessible. Moreover, the use of computers in the writing class makes collaborative writing possible. Humphreys described one writing project that his students work on an entire term: They are all asked to write a journal entry on the same topic. After printing out their entries, students put their journals together and combine efforts to produce one piece of writing. Whether they realize it or not, they learn the art of negotiation, ways to defend their ideas, and how to take criticism. Humphreys concluded that such collaborative work highlights the communicative purpose of writing, for in order to produce an effective piece of writing, students must deal with one another, negotiate differences, and support their beliefs. Moreover, the use of the computer in the writing classroom also allows the teacher to compose in public, that is, actually to demonstrate the stages of the writing process, from brainstorming through editing.

The session concluded with members of the audience experimenting on the computers and software that Humphreys had on display.

Self-Assessing Strategies continued

2. They characteristically took control of the writing process at points where the text was out of their control, consciously focusing on one skill in order to insure success at other levels. For example:

(a) They ignored surface features and concentrated on audience, permitting more elaboration of details.

(b) When they lost their sense of audience, they simply attributed characteristics to it and moved ahead.

(c) When they lost momentum, they revised surface features for a brief period, and this gave them the confidence they needed to regain forward impetus.

(d) While waiting for invention to proceed at points where they were blocked, both writers simply transcribed notes they had taken beforehand.

Sirc also reported on another study, which he had conducted using the same technique, of a student composing a strongly felt letter to a relative about a family situation. Sirc pointed out that as teachers we often regard writing as a purely cognitive activity, and don’t acknowledge or emphasize the affective and psychological dimensions that powerfully influence a writer’s handling of the task. Factors that emerged during Sirc’s interviews with the author were that the topic of this letter was the writer’s entire life, including past events, family relationships, future plans, opinions, and emotions, and that the letter incorporated a complex sense of audience.

Both Sirc and Anson concluded that student writers have the ability to examine and to evaluate their writing processes and products, and that teachers need to help them develop their ability to make projective comments on their drafts and evaluate their drafts and revisions.