WELCOME BACK! After what I hope was a relaxing, pleasant summer for all, we've returned to our writing labs to meet new challenges, look for better solutions to old problems, and continue offering that necessary one-to-one help to writers. And the newsletter will, I hope, offer everyone another year's worth of useful articles to assist in this vital work. For example, next month's newsletter will focus on working with students learning English as a second language, and later issues will have articles on writing-across-the-curriculum, the writing lab and proficiency exams, the use of questions in tutorials, a survey of faculty attitudes toward the writing lab, tutor training, tutorial approaches to helping students writing responses to literature, microcomputers in the lab, group tutorials, the writing lab's image, the role of the writing lab in teacher preparation, and more.

In addition to discussions of these topics, we'd like to continue the Tutor's Corner as a column for peer tutors to share their experiences with each other. However, there are only a few articles by peer tutors waiting to appear in future issues. So, if you feel that the Tutor's Corner is useful reading, coax your peer tutors into putting their ideas on paper.

For the more observant among us this issue of the newsletter may look a bit different. The changes are part of an on-going search for a more readable format. If you have better suggestions, please let me know. And, of course, please keep sending in your articles, announcements, book reviews, questions and responses, names of new members, and your yearly $5 donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University, but sent to me) to:

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

SMALL REALLY IS BEAUTIFUL--THE SUCCESS OF A WRITING CENTER

The Southern Technical Institute's Writing Lab was born three years ago in order to meet the needs of the Southeast's fastest growing technical school. With an enrollment of approximately 3400 students, Southern Tech produces the largest number of engineering technology graduates in the nation. Responsive to the demands of employers for graduates who possess communication proficiency as well as technological skill, Southern Tech offers one of the finest writing programs for engineering technologists. In keeping with the philosophy of the college, the Writing Lab is designed as a support system for the introductory composition courses which stress the basic skills.

This paper describes the success of the Southern Tech Writing Lab, offers suggestions to those who would like to begin a lab on a limited budget, identifies characteristics of a successful operation, and outlines some useful ideas for public relations.

Originally, the lab was staffed by two part-time instructors available to answer questions or correct practice essays for any student who might wander into the room. Lab referral forms existed, but only a few teachers used them. Although the lab hours were limited and the numbers served were small, satisfied students quickly spread the word that the tutelage received harvested positive rewards, frequently in the form of higher composition grades. The lab's primary mission of helping students improve writing skills was succeeding. The positive responses from teachers who verified student improvement and students who experienced marked success prompted the college to maintain the lab's funding for the second year. In a period of fiscal tightfistedness, the lab had won a victory. In light of the first two years, the lab has been deemed successful on the basis of cost effectiveness, operational efficiency, student and

faculty evaluations, and numbers of students served.

At the end of the Lab's second year of operation, a position opened for a director who would oversee the operation of the lab and teach two classes as well. I was appointed and given a two thousand dollar budget for salaries and materials.

Contrary to what one might think, this small budget can be viewed as a challenge, not an obstacle. To anyone interested in implementing a new program on a similarly limited budget, allow me to offer some suggestions.

1. Be a scrooge. Designer, name-brand materials and tutor tapes do not take the place of an instructor. The efficiency and success of the writing center rests with the professionals who work there. Salaries should take first priority, followed by basic supplies and a few auto-instructional texts.

2. Staff the lab with experienced professionals who can, during hours when student traffic is light, dedicate time to developing lab materials.

3. Avoid professional printers who will print and collate teacher-made materials for a few that will devour a budget.

4. Harvest and squirrel. Encourage colleagues to share in the lab's development by donating materials. Most will welcome the opportunity to rid shelves and files of dusty texts and yellowed worksheets. Books can be used as references, given to appreciative students, or loaned.

5. Use imagination to create materials. Do not discard seemingly useless donated texts. Valuable exercises can be torn out and mounted on stiff paper. Answer keys can be written on the reverse, and one self-correcting "lesson" has been made!

6. Solicit the physical plant or other departments to salvage a few files and a bookcase or two.

7. Contact book companies. Begin with those from which your department has recently made purchases. Complimentary copies can help next year's planning (when the budget is bigger) and can, in the meantime, serve students.

As well as being cost-effective, a successful lab will operate efficiently. Just as a business might lose customers if its employees showed a lack of courtesy to those who sought its services, so might a writing center lose students if the correct atmosphere is not set. Prior to opening, step-by-step lab procedures should be reviewed with staff members, to include methods of greeting and working with students. In addition, materials must be continually updated and organized, and a system of attendance and progress reporting must be established. Finally, the successful lab should recognize the importance of a strong public relations program.

Public relations is no more than marketing a product, in this case, the writing center. In the case of Southern Tech's Writing Lab, once we defined our target market (our students), our product (our services), our packaging (our classroom), and our price (free to any student attending the college), we set about our promotion.

Let me outline a few ways of launching a public relations program.

1. At the beginning of each quarter, the director should visit all introductory composition courses in order to pass out written information concerning lab services, including function, location, and hours of operation.

2. Publish announcements in the school newspaper and faculty newsletter about the services offered.

3. Send an information sheet explaining the lab services to all department heads. Include objectives of the writing center.

4. Sponsor clinics, workshops, seminars, and lectures related to the writing process. For example, Southern Tech students have demanded three repeat performances of a lecture entitled "History Made Easier: How to Write a Better History Essay." Each program was well attended and was enthusiastically received by students and faculty.

5. Advertise each function sponsored by the lab. Use newspaper announcements and the college radio station; put up eye-catching posters around campus. Put announcements for special functions in the mailboxes of faculty who might be most interested in attending. Ask them to announce each event

to their classes. And, most importantly, put memos in their boxes the day before the function to remind them.

6. Maintain contact with instructors whose students use the lab. Our students sign a general log book and a special sheet indicating their instructor. Teachers receive a copy of student attendance on a weekly basis.

7. Maintain communication with all instructors. Ask for suggestions on how the lab services may be improved. Most importantly, listen, weigh, and consider all suggestions offered.

8. Remember to say two small words that are of great importance to your operation: thank you. These words apply to the students who attend the lab and its programs as well as to the faculty who support what the lab is doing. Without their support, a vital service might be lost.

Two years after the Writing Lab's inception, we are using an extensive, refined lab referral system; we have increased the hours of operation to include both day and night students; and we have added one staff member.

In spite of the small staff, the limited budget, and the use of one meager classroom, the Southern Technical Institute Writing Lab is a success. Now, even with many teachers using the lab referral system, almost half the students attend on their own initiative. Last quarter, for example, the Lab served almost one thousand students out of the 3400 enrolled.

Southern Tech is proud of its accomplishment. And, while it is hoped that the Writing Lab will continue to grow and expand its services, its present limitations need not hamper its success. After all, small really is beautiful.

Noreen J. Ewing
Appalachian State
University

WRITING PROFICIENCY EXAMINATIONS: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON WRITING LABS

Within the last few years many colleges and universities have become concerned about a perceptible and widely publicized decline in the writing ability of their students. In response some schools have made an effort to promote more writing in all academic disciplines through "writing across the curriculum" programs. Others have mandated college-wide writing standards and instituted writing proficiency programs. Such programs, which consist of required upper-division writing courses and/or upper-level writing proficiency examinations, imply that growth in writing ability should continue over a student's entire academic career.

All of these responses emphasize writing as a primary learning tool incorporating those cognitive skills essential for anyone to control and manipulate facts and ideas. This places a new emphasis on writing ability as a significant intellectual achievement moving far beyond "basic skills." And with this new emphasis the writing center/

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The New Jersey Association of Developmental Educators (NJADE) will hold its annual Fall Conference on October 25 at the Landmark Inn, Mapleshade, New Jersey. This year's conference theme is "Developmental Education and Retention."

For additional information, please contact

Dorothy Minkoff, NJADE Conference Chair
Trenton State College
Center for Personal and Academic
 Development
Hillwood Lakes CN 550
Trenton, NJ 08625

TEACHER-RESEARCHER GRANTS PROGRAM

The Research Foundation of the National Council of Teachers of English invites K-12 classroom teachers to submit proposals for small grants (up to $1,000) for classroom-based research on the teaching of English and language arts. These grants are intended to support research questions teachers raise about classroom issues. They are not intended to support travel to professional meetings, to fund the purchase of permanent equipment or commercial teaching materials, to provide extended released time, or to underwrite research done as part of a graduate program. Address requests for information and for application guidelines to Teacher Researcher, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.

lab enters a new phase.

Training in basic skills is often seen as the sole raison d'etre for writing centers now functioning on college campuses. But students preparing for upper-level proficiency examinations and struggling to employ the appropriate format, vocabulary, and syntax to convey meaning in their respective disciplines will demand and require more than the sets of skill training exercises that can sometimes satisfy the freshman writers who often make up the bulk of the writing lab's clientele.

Working under a grant from Fitchburg State College I recently began a study of the writing requirements of over four hundred colleges in the United States with undergraduate enrollment of 3000 or more students. From this group I culled a list of those colleges that require students to pass a writing proficiency examination as a graduation requirement. To these schools, seventy-six in all, I sent a questionnaire designed to determine both the form and nature of such examinations and the formal preparation and follow up procedures that are offered to students taking the examinations. One thing revealed by the survey was that the new writing proficiency requirement was creating renewed interest in the writing lab as an important campus resource.

Seventy-two percent (72%) of the schools surveyed (55) returned the questionnaires. The following data is based on that total number of responses unless otherwise specified. Sixty-two percent (62%) of the colleges reported that the writing proficiency requirement was quite recent and had been in effect for six years or less.

Forty-three percent (43%) of the colleges require an upper-division proficiency examination, --one that tests the student's writing ability at the junior level and assumes that students will have attained more than minimum competency in writing during their first two years in college. Seventeen percent (17%) of this group allow students the option of taking an upper-level writing course in lieu of the exam. Such courses are usually offered within the student's major department. They are often designated "writing emphasis" courses and are designed specifically to give students additional training and experience in formal written expression of the kind necessary for research, synthesis, and analysis of data in the student's major field.

Of those schools requiring an examination, 62% ask students to complete a composition course or course sequence before attempting the examination. Forty percent (40%) do not allow students to attempt the exam until the end of their sophomore year. And while 69% stipulate only that a student must pass the writing proficiency requirement before graduation, another 24% insist that students must pass the requirement either before enrolling in upper-division courses or before attaining junior status.

The examinations fall into three broad categories: 62% are essay only; 31% are essay plus objective test; 2% are standardized-machine scored. The remaining 5% are unspecified. That some of the tests require the writer to do more than construct a passable five-paragraph essay is evident from the fact that nearly 36% of the colleges make source materials for the essay available to students well in advance of the test. The same percentage of schools (36%) reported that they offer some sort of preparation for the examination outside of regularly scheduled composition classes. Such preparation is offered either through workshops or through informal seminars.

Ninety percent (90%) of the schools with a writing proficiency requirement report that they have a writing lab. Approximately 20% of the schools require that students who fail the writing proficiency examination attend a writing lab or workshop. But only one college reports that it gives credit for the workshop program. In that case students may fulfill their proficiency requirement solely through that program. Most of the schools that require follow up work in a writing lab (75%) give an essay examination. But in no instance is the writing lab staff responsible for designing, administering or grading the writing examination.

The percentage of students who pass such examinations on their first attempt is fairly high. Half of the colleges responding reported that over 70% of their students pass on their first attempt. Another 40% reported that 60-65 percent of their students pass on the first try. Only two schools reported that fewer than 30% of their students pass immediately, and in one of those instances students are encouraged to attempt the examination early in their

academic careers in order to have their writing problems diagnosed and to allow sufficient time for them to improve their performance as writers. Repeated failure is a problem for relatively few students. Thirty percent (30%) of the colleges reported that fewer than 10% of their students had to repeat the examination more than once. Only 10% noted that more than one third of their students had to take the examination more than twice.

The evaluation criteria used for writing examinations can affect both the degree of expertise necessary for a student to pass the test and also the basic structure of the test. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the schools use a holistic scoring technique, while 7% use some type of analytic scale (i.e., Diederich's) and another 11% use either machine scoring (on objective tests) or a mixture of analytic and primary trait scoring in addition to a holistic score. No matter what the grading procedure, 56% of the schools stated that they establish specific evaluative criteria for each examination.

However the high percentage of schools reporting that they base their decision on a holistic scoring procedure suggests that the test's emphasis is placed primarily on larger considerations of content and structure. The writer's ability to organize material into a coherent and cohesive pattern with a clear focus and with adequate development of major points would be the main issue. The writer's adherence to specific rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation would be secondary.

The proposal for a new writing proficiency requirement at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) exemplifies the rationale that underlies many of the recently established writing requirements and the role of the writing lab. The report by a faculty Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) that recommended such a requirement emphasizes the "the success of the requirement depends heavily on the acceptance of a broadly-shared curriculum-wide responsibility to emphasize the importance of writing in all subject areas and to provide opportunities for students to write."

What is significant about the M.I.T. proposal is the role it sees a Writing Resource Center playing in the process. The Writing Center should not merely help poorly pre-

pared students meet minimum competency standards. It does not envision the Writing Center as performing a function that is completely separate and distinct from that of the rest of the faculty. Instead it stresses that one function of the Center would be to "help faculty in the various disciplines deal more effectively with the writing problems of their students." In addition it sees the Center as a resource available to the entire university community pointing out that ideally "other employees could also use the facility."

In two states (California and Georgia) a writing proficiency requirement has been mandated for the entire state college system by state regents or board of trustees. In Georgia the State Regents not only mandated the requirement but also prepare and administer the examination. While all six of the state colleges in Georgia that were surveyed do have writing labs, the writing requirement is not presented explicity as part of a general faculty effort to encourage students to work to increase their writing skill throughout their academic careers.

In California the Board of Trustees simply state that "all students entering the CSUC ... be required to demonstrate their proficiency with regard to writing skills as a requirement for graduation," that "such demonstration of proficiency must come after a student has earned 56 semester units" and that "a lower division course ... cannot be used to fulfill the requirement." Each school is free to devise its own means of implementing that policy.

Several colleges in the California state system implement the Trustee Policy for a Writing Skills Graduation Requirement through a campus-wide program of upper-level writing-emphasis courses offered independently by all major departments. The schools establish specific criteria for such courses and, as is noted in one representative college catalog, "Students may be referred to the Learning Center for additional help, but the basic responsibility for instruction in composition rests with the instructor of the class."

Some colleges give the writing lab the dual responsibility both of providing basic skill training and of determining whether students have attained a level of writing proficiency adequate for graduation. One example is Louisiana State University (Baton

Rouge) which lists "Proficiency in English" as a degree requirement. It states that students "whose grade in English 1002 is lower than "B" and who fail a subsequent proficiency test "will have two semesters (beginning the next semester they are enrolled after the test is given) to demonstrate English proficiency in the English Writing Laboratory. <u>Students who fail to demonstrate proficiency in English by the end of their second semester in the laboratory will be dropped from the college</u>" (their italics).

What can we learn from this data? It has several implications for those of us who feel that the writing center/lab should do more than simply provide basic skill training for poorly prepared freshman students. Rather the lab can serve as a resource for the entire academic community. The new emphasis on writing proficiency views writing as an important and valuable intellectual tool that the student should learn to employ with ever-increasing skill during his entire academic career. And the writing center/lab can support this view in several ways.

First, if possible, the lab should sponsor or run writing-across-the-curriculum seminars for faculty in all disciplines in order to encourage the college community as a whole to share the responsibility for students' writing performance. Second, through faculty training workshops it should offer guidelines to faculty in all departments to help to identify students whose academic difficulties are directly related to their writing deficiencies. Third, lab directors should be aware of the research in the relationship between cognitive development and writing ability. The lab should make available those diagnostic materials and composition exercises whose value this research supports. Fourth, the lab should attempt to provide materials and workshops on those writing problems that confront writers at all levels of ability. These include, for example, overcoming writer's block, employing discovery techniques and invention heuristics, making appropriate stylistic and rhetorical choices, designing resumes, and mastering the forms and techniques of research reports. Ideally the work of the writing center/lab should be seen as contributing to the well-being of the university as a whole.

Nancy Yee
Fitchburg State College

HIRE JUNIOR COLLEGE STUDENTS AS TUTORS? WHY NOT? (IDEAS FOR HIRING AND FUNDING TUTORS AT THE JUNIOR COLLEGE)

How do you hire tutors at a junior college? This question was asked frequently at the Fifth Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference held in Atlanta in April. The same question was raised in the June, 1985 issue of the <u>Writing Lab Newsletter</u> by Betty B. Neumann from Jefferson State College. At the Learning Support Center of St. Petersburg Junior College, Clearwater Campus, we have a variety of ways in which to hire and pay tutors:

1. We hire some students who walk into the LSC and ask for a job. They are interviewed by our Coordinator who finds out what English courses they have completed and what grades they received in those courses. She verifies the information given by the potential tutors through permanent records on the college computer and talks to the students' previous English instructors for both character checks and first-hand reports on the students' performance in the classroom. If the students' backgrounds are good, we hire and train them as new tutors.

2. We hire tutors by faculty recommendations. Each semester, we ask English faculty members to be on the lookout for "A" students in Composition I or II whom they think would make good tutors. If these students maintain an "A" average throughout the course, at the end of the semester, instructors send the potential tutors to the Writing Lab Coordinator. These students go through the same screening process as walk-in candidates.

   We try to hire tutors from our own campus population because they have been taught by our faculty; therefore, tutors know what the faculty expect of their students.

3. Occasionally, honor fraternity members want to tutor to fulfill a service project. These students volunteer their time and go through the same screening process as our paid tutors.

4. Another source of expert tutoring comes from retired English teachers who like to work with students on a volunteer basis. They set their own schedules and work as many hours as they desire.

5. As an additional source, some colleges include a 2-3 credit course in their curriculum called Peer Classroom/ Laboratory Tutoring.

There are three major sources of funds for paying our tutors:

1. The Learning Support Center budget (the Writing Lab is part of this) allows a limited amount of money for paying really good students who do not qualify for other forms of payment. This budget allows us to employ former tutors who graduate and transfer to a nearby university if they are still interested in working for us. (All tutors are paid minimum wage.)

2. Financial Aid (funded by the federal government) provides us with funds to hire needy students who qualify as tutors. They can work up to a maximum of fifteen hours per week. If we keep in close contact with the Financial Aid officers, they can be on the look-out for students who would possibly make good tutors and refer them to our Writing Lab.

3. The Work Study Program (also funded by the federal government) provides employment for many students who want to work on campus. This gives us another financial source for hiring tutors, but in this case, they do not have to qualify as needy students. (If you are not aware of this program, call your Financial Aid office.)

Here are some additional ideas for seeking monetary help:

4. Ask your English Department to transfer excess funds set aside for materials to an account to provide salaries for tutors. They may want to do without some materials in order to help your Writing Lab.

5. On our campus we have a special program called Project Success funded by the Staff and Program Development Committee which receives its monies from state appropriations. This program is designed to help retain disadvantaged students who attend SPJC. The Writing Lab receives some financial help from Project Success for paying tutors.

   Helpful hint - If your school has a special program for disadvantaged students, then the Director of the Writing Lab should practice some assertiveness and inform this special group that hiring tutors with funds from the project would definitely help disadvantaged students.

6. A final source to attack is the friendly dean or provost on campus. Administrators may be very interested in helping to fund student tutors. There is no better way to use college money then to pay good students to help their peers.

   Have faith in good students at your college who have completed Composition I, Composition II or both. They make great tutors because the material from their English classes is fresh in their minds, and they enjoy helping struggling students.

   Please write to our campus if you have any questions or want further information about hiring or funding tutors at the junior college level.

Nadine Held
St. Petersburg Junior
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Clearwater Campus
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Reading/Writing Lab
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Congratulations to a member of our newsletter group, Colby Kullman, at the University of Mississippi, on the publication of his collection of essays, Theatre Companies of the World and a new journal he will edit, Studies in American Drama, 1945-present.

NEW ENGLAND WRITING CENTERS
ASSOCIATION JOINS NATIONAL NETWORK

On April 20, 1985, over fifty tutors and administrators from the six New England states arrived at the University of Hartford for the first meeting of NEWCA, the New England Writing Centers Association. With the founding of NEWCA, the National Writing Centers Association network extends from coast to coast and border to border.

Helped by a planning grant from the University of Hartford, conference co-directors Sherry Horton and William Stull began organizing NEWCA in the fall of 1984. To discover whether there was sufficient interest in the project, they wrote to some two hundred writing centers in New England colleges. The response was enthusiastic, and in December a steering committee convened to plan the spring conference.

To encourage open discussion and mutual aid, the committee chose as the conference theme "Where We Are Now." Before the meeting the committee asked registrants to send in printed materials describing their centers and tutoring methods, and these informal "proceedings" were duplicated for the conference. Instead of hearing a few formal presentations, conferees joined in small group discussions led by steering committee members. A pre-registration poll determined five high-interest topics, and each participant attended two sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon:

1. Tutor Training and Tutoring ESL Students

2. Who Do They Think We Are?: Raising Faculty Awareness and Promoting Writing Across the Curriculum

3. Tutoring Students with Special Needs

4. Computers and the Writing Center

5. Motivating Students to Use the Writing Center

Between twelve and twenty men and women attended each session. After introducing themselves and describing their writing centers, they discussed strategies, hopes, and concerns.

Professor Harvey Kail, Director of the Writing Center at the University of Maine, Orono, and a delegate to the National Writing Centers Association, provided midday remarks on the work of the National Association and the role of NEWCA both in and beyond New England. "Call it Yankee stubbornness," Kail observed, "but New England is the last holdout in the movement. With the founding of NEWCA, the National Writing Centers Association becomes truly national."

During a business meeting, the membership approved a constitution, set annual dues at $5.00 ($1.00 going to support the National Association), and elected a steering committee for 1985-87. The committee includes Henry A. Barton (American International College, MA), Kathleen Shine Cain (Merrimack College, MA), Anne Greene, Sherry Horton, Mary McGann, Nancy Nyhan (Framingham State College, MA), Angela Renaud, Michael Rossi (Merrimack College, MA), Joyce Seligman, and Bonnie Sunstein (Rivier College, NH). The NEWCA officers for 1985-35 are Mary McGann (Chair), Joyce Seligman (Vice Chair), Michael Rossi (Recorder), Nancy Nyhan (Treasurer), Bonnie Sunstein (NWCA rep.), and Anne Greene (alternate rep.).

At the day's end, conferees evaluated the meeting and commented on NEWCA's future. "We're off!" wrote one. "That's what counts. Sufficient energy was generated to get the regional association going. Congratulations and thanks."

As conference co-directors, we second those remarks and thank all who helped transform NEWCA from bright idea to brighter reality. We also extend best wishes to the steering committee, who will soon begin planning the 1986 conference. We will be happy to answer anyone seeking membership or further information, and for $2.00 we will send out the conference "proceedings," a fat packet of program descriptions and useful handouts. Write to either of us at the Learning Skills Center, University of Hartford, West Hartford, CT 06117.

Sherry Horton
William L. Stull
University of Hartford

The Tutor's Corner

SPEAKING OF WRITING

"How do I start this damn paper?" This question, or one of any number of variations on the same theme, seems to begin at least as many tutorials as not. If for no reason other than frequency of appearance, it may be one of the most important questions a tutor is required to answer.

"Well," a tutor might respond, "you get started by writing down a thesis sentence." Or perhaps he could offer this advice: "You begin by making an outline." These answers are, I think, somewhat akin to defining a horse as a rather horsey type of animal. If a tutee does not know how to start writing, how on earth can he or she be expected to adequately follow tutorial advice regarding such esoteric things as "outlines" and "thesis sentences"?

In response to this very difficult situation, tutors have frequently emphasized prewriting strategies, i.e., activities designed to get pen or pencil moving, and, hopefully, ideas flowing. Three of the more popular techniques are freewriting, brainstorming, and clustering. Ironically though, all of these techniques require a tutee to do precisely what he says he cannot do; they require him to write.

In his book, A Guide To The Whole Writing Process, Jack Blum states the basic assumption which underlies most prewriting activities very succinctly:

Whenever you're stuck on a topic and can think of nothing to write, take a piece of paper and just start writing. You'll be amazed at how easily the ideas will flow.(64)

But this technique does not, I fear, significantly reduce a tutee's fear of or confusion regarding the writing process. All we may have managed to do here is frustrate him:

Q. "How do I get started?"
A. "Well, you get started by "freewriting."
Q. "How do I do that?"
A. "Well . . .you, uh . . .you write."
Q. "Isn't this where I came in?"

I realize that I've oversimplified the frustration involved here but not, I trust, unconscionably so. Even though we tutors know precisely what it is we wish to accomplish (or hope we do), frequently the tutee does not share our insight. The suggestion that he begin, or learn, the writing process by simply writing seems, at best, to be a circular kind of instruction and, at worst, a self-defeating waste of effort.

Now I do not deny the importance or validity of prewriting activities per se. Very often they are extremely useful techniques for transferring ideas out of a writer's mind and onto paper, and should be enthusiastically practiced whenever appropriate. It does seem, however, that many analyses and descriptions of prewriting fail to pay sufficient attention to a most essential component of the entire process--the need to converse. In this regard, Thom Hawkins makes the following germane observation regarding peer tutors at the University of California, Berkeley:

They feel that they are providing a vital link in the writing process, a link between writer and audience which is often missing when students write only for teachers. Tutors explain that the missing link is the opportunity to use oral language in discursive intellectual discourse.(64)

I suspect that Hawkins' observation might be supported by any tutor who has tried to help solve his tutee's writer's block by asking the tutee to sit back, relax, and talk a little bit about the assigned topic. Frequently, the tutee is able to talk quite freely about the subject in question-- perhaps not always in an orderly, grammatically correct fashion, but the ideas begin to flow just the same.

In his book, The Writing Room, Harvey S. Wiener refers to an "internal conversation" as a means by which writers advance their thoughts, both before and during the actual writing process:

Experienced writers advance at least partially by means of some internal conversation . . . .about their intended thought, about what reveals itself in ink, and about how intention modifies and

is modified by the written statement. But that is a conversation beginning writers have rarely practiced. Good instruction, therefore, insists on doing out loud . . .what a good writer does quietly at home by himself.(21)

Amen, brother! It seems to me that just as a rough draft must precede the development of a finished draft, so too must external conversation or dialog introduce an inexperienced writer to this internal conversation so necessary to good writing. Accordingly, it seems quite possible that the most valuable tutorials may be those sessions during which the tutee spends more time talking than writing.

There is a second and, I think, equally valid reason for more talking and less writing during tutorials. Blum says it nicely:

Beginning writers often need to discover the worth of their own writing voices. (vii)

This "worth" is, of course, an intensely personal item. We all protect our own self-images jealously, but perhaps never so much as when we feel threatened in some fashion. Accordingly, beginning tutees, who already have some problems and/or insecurities (why else would they be tutees?), may perhaps be more sensitive about their writing skills than are other students.

With this in mind, it might be of benefit to discuss some of these difficulties with a tutee rather than forcing him or her to "perform" during the tutorial in front of a patient but expectant tutor. For unless the tutee has had sufficient time to think or talk through the assigned topic prior to the tutorial, the activity during the session will not be as creative or freewheeling as it ought to be. It simply can't be. Time constraints and the presence of an authority figure within arm's-length work inexorably

toward a stifling of the same creative processes which the tutor hopes to encourage.

Unquestionably, there is a very special value to "talking through" ideas prior to writing them down. Kenneth Bruffee has witnessed the effects of this process at the Brooklyn College Writing Center and makes the following observation:

Many of the students who walked through the doors of the Writing Center . . .did not really seem to know the subjects they studied when they were asked to write about them. Yet given the opportunity to talk with sympathetic peers, these same students seemed to discover knowledge they did not know they had. (Hawkins 67)

Bruffee's observation lies at the very heart of effective prewriting, for prewriting is, ultimately, nothing less than a full development of Wiener's "internal conversation." A tutor can, I believe, provide no greater service to beginning or insecure tutees than to introduce them to the essential process of self-dialog. A proper foundation for effective and meaningful writing depends on it.

Mick Noppen
DePaul University

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WRITING LAB DIRECTORY AVAILABLE

The Writing Lab Directory is a compilation of two-page questionnaires completed by writing lab directors. The questionnaire answers describe each lab's instructional staff, student population, types of instruction and materials, special programs, use of computers, and facilities.

Copies are obtainable for $13.50 each, including postage. Prepaid orders only. Please make all checks payable to Purdue University and send them to Muriel Harris, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907.

MERRIMACK COLLEGE WRITING CENTER

The Merrimack College Writing Center operates out of the top floor of the college's library. Merrimack is a small (1900) liberal arts college located 30 miles north of Boston.

Less than two years old, the Writing Center grew out of (and now incorporates) the English Department's Tutoring Program. Staffed by 8 peer tutors, one coordinator, one associate coordinator, and several faculty tutors, the Center is open about 20 hours a week and serves students on a walk-in or referral basis. We tutored 516 students in 1983-1984. After a semester's hiatus, we are tutoring about half that number this spring. Many of our tutees have been freshmen enrolled in the required Rhetoric I & II courses; yet, we have been successful in attracting students of all levels and disciplines, particularly engineering students. With the addition this semester of three Macintoshes, and assorted writing tutorial software, even more varied students are beginning to see the Center's value.

Peer tutors are trained throughout the school year in sessions led by the Center's coordinators. Peer criticism (descriptive, evaluative, substantive) is stressed. All students who have maintained a 3.0 average in writing related courses are eligible to be tutors, but many tutors are referred by writing faculty. It looks as if we will have good success in keeping tutors until they graduate. Tutors are paid through work-study money and sometimes through student payroll, a budget line funded with grant money.

An understanding of the nature of writing and the value of the dialogue determines our teaching style in the Writing Center. We believe writing is a process that includes all the stages of writing that one uses to define, to develop, to clarify, and to refine. Thus, the purpose of the Writing Center is to assist as many students as possible by engaging them in discussions of these areas so that ultimately they will take the responsibility for becoming better writers. All areas of the writing process are our domain, but we do not do proof-reading.

The Writing Center directs its services in these ways:

1. To students we offer instruction on a one-to-one basis, addressing the personal needs of each student writer who comes to the Center.

2. To faculty we communicate innovations and changes in writing, and are willing to give short presentations in their classrooms. For each student a professor refers to the Center, we send a written report of the visit to the professor.

3. For tutors the Center offers activities separate from their tutoring. We meet regularly--either individually or in small groups--for discussions on writing and their work. We also have a "Brown Bag" seminar series, led by members of the writing faculty, covering such areas as tutoring the learning disabled and tutoring students for whom English is a second language. Finally, we prepare a letter of recommendation for each of our tutors that details his or her work in the Center and that is intended to be helpful in his or her future academic and professional life.

We are pleased with the direction our Writing Center is taking. But we continue to work hard in order to renew student interest in writing, improve our tutor training, accelerate our outreach to the college community, and make the computer a more integral part of the Center. We would be pleased to get any new ideas and to answer inquiries about our Center. Also, our staff has generated a 100+ source bibliography on collaboration in composition that we'd be most happy to share. Address correspondence to: Professor Albert DeCiccio (Associate Coordinator) or Dr. Michael Rossi (Coordinator), Writing Center, Merrimack College, North Andover, MA 01845.

Albert DeCiccio
Merrimack College

HANDBOOK AVAILABLE
ON
TECHNICAL WRITING

Madelon Cheek, an instructor in the Purdue University Writing Lab, has written Technical Writing Resources, a handbook for engineering and technology faculty who require technical writing in their courses. The contents of the handbook include 1) an Introduction; 2) Instructional Assistance (offers suggestions on how to structure and evaluate effective writing assignments; 3) Writing Lab assistance (explains the Lab's tutorial instruction, self-instructional materials, and workshops; and 4) Computer Aided Assistance (gives information on word processing, text editing, and a detailed discussion of Writer's Workbench). The appendices include a brief presentation of technical writing style, report formats, and report illustrations.

The handbook costs $3.00 and contains 35 pages in an 8" x 8 1/2" format. Please use the form included here to order your copies.

Send _____ copies of Technical Writing Resources, @ $3 each, to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

Phone: _____

All orders must be pre-paid and checks made payable to Purdue University.

Mail to: P. Jessie, Writing Lab
English Dept.
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

EDITING FOR STYLE A LA JOSEPH WILLIAMS

About a year ago, I was forced to go through virtually every exercise in Joseph Williams' book, Style, for a Grammar and Rhetoric class. Williams' book attempts to transform foggy, turgid style into clear, concise English. He presents scores of sentences like the following, ripe for a linguistic Nutrisystem treatment, aimed at making them lean.

> Upon court appearance by the defendant, courtroom legal service will be effected by the presiding justice with the request for time requirement waiver so that the case hearing can begin (24).

Many of his examples are worse than this, and I found the work of streamlining them time-consuming and irritating. But, just as any behaviorist knows, the repetition of the process firmly implanted a number of the Williams dictates in my brain, dictates which I feel have improved my writing and given me a tool for editing in the Writing Lab.

When students come in and say, "I just don't like the way it sounds," I can frequently pull out one of Williams' rules and apply it. Their faces will brighten and they will say, "That sounds much better!" While doing this, I try to name what editing we have done, making it sound like what it is--a mechanical tinkering with a "correct" but clunky sentence in order to make it run smoother. The rest of this article will identify and illustrate five of Williams' prescriptions which I have found most useful in the Lab.

"WHO'S DOING WHAT?"

Williams' thesis might be this: "It's good to write clearly, and anyone can" (2). One of his first rules for writing clearly is to name the subject, or answer the question, "Who's Doing What?" A student recently penned this gem in a paper on fair housing laws:

> Unfortunately, attitudes were already formed as far as "Myths and Prejudices," causing strong opinions to be formed.

Who was forming the opinions and the attitudes? Granted, on sensitive subjects such as racial discrimination, the passive voice may indeed have its uses since a writer may not want to accuse openly. Still, the sentence could be helped simply by inserting the doer of the action, or "agent," as

Williams prefers.

>   Home-owners had already formed atti-
>   tudes based on "Myths and Preju-
>   dices" causing them to strongly op-
>   pose the concept of an interracial
>   neighborhood.

Similarly, we sometimes find in college
committee reports statements like this:

>   There is persistent concern about
>   high turnover rates in faculty-
>   level positions.

Of course, whenever editor/teachers see the
flaccid "There is," they want to eliminate
it. But the substantive question is, "Who
is doing it? Who is concerned?"

>   The dean is concerned about the high
>   rate of faculty turnover.

"CAN THIS NOUN BE VERBALIZED?"

A second Williams' dictum involves re-
vising nominalizations. He supports the
"strong verb" platform, suggesting that
bulky nouns be transformed into action words
whenever possible. A student wrote this
sentence in a paper on Betty Smith's A Tree
Grows in Brooklyn:

>   The plot is the most important de-
>   monstrator of the theme of the
>   struggle to advance to a higher
>   position.

First, an editor could fault this sen-
tence for over-nominalization and suggest
"demonstrator" be turned into a verb. In
addition, the editor might return to our
first point and suggest that the subjects of
the actions be named.

>   In the plot, Smith demonstrates the
>   theme of immigrants struggling to
>   advance to a higher position.

"WHERE'S THE FAT?"

"Wordiness" bothers Williams and bothers
most college teachers. Observation tells me
that some high school teachers coerce their
students into wordiness by putting margina-
lia on papers such as, "Employ your thesau-
rus." But wordiness may be the sign of stu-
dents "socializing" themselves into a new
subject, as Williams described it at a

Writing Coference at Indiana State Univer-
sity in April, 1984. Thus, wordiness may
not be as great a crime as we have supposed.
But some forms of wordiness are simply un-
necessary and easily pointed out in the Lab.
Staff may say to the student-writer, "Are
there any words here you could cross out?"
Those quickest to go, Williams suggests,
would be redundant pairs, redundant modi-
fiers, and meaningless modifiers.

Cutting the fat from this sentence is
easy.

>   For all intents and purposes, the
>   committee is willing and able to
>   attempt to take on the difficult
>   task of ridding the official col-
>   lege governmental structure of cer-
>   tain of its various needless indivi-
>   dual substructures.

>   The committee will try to rid the
>   college government of needless sub-
>   structures.

"WOULD A MODIFIER HELP?"

The fourth of Williams' prescriptions I
want to discuss encourages use of modifiers,
both "free" and what he calls "resumptive"
(85-88). "Free" modifiers--adjectives and
participles--can be substituted in student
writing in place of the monotonous and, who,
and which clauses.

>   High school English teachers who are
>   often overworked and who have six
>   daily classes should nevertheless
>   assign more papers and they should
>   grade them more positively which
>   will give students more practice and
>   that will improve their feelings to-
>   ward writing.

>   High school English teachers,
>   overworked with six daily classes,
>   should nevertheless assign
>   more papers and grade them positive-
>   ly, thus giving students more prac-
>   tice and improving students' feel-
>   ings toward writing.

Resumptive modifiers occur when you re-
peat a key word. Repetition of words has
been represented as a sin to students, so
this is not a sentence pattern they would
think of employing. Yet the pattern is re-
freshing, and a number of times I have sug-
gested it, much to the students' pleasure.

One student wrote:

> Rembrandt excelled in these portraits. They used new lighting techniques, had more depth, and used techniques to create a liveliness in his painting.

I suggested this alternative pattern, incorporating both the resumptive modifier, free modifiers, and prepositional phrases.

> Rembrandt excelled in these portraits, portraits with new lighting and depth, portraits using new techniques to create a liveliness in his painting.

"CAN YOU BE SPECIFIC?"

Finally, I encourage students to incorporate examples in their writing. A student came to the Lab with her letter of application to the Education department, a letter which struck her as lackluster. One sentence read, "I want to pursue the Elementary Education major because I found my summer work with children rewarding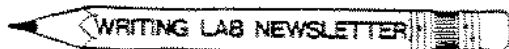." After she explained the nature of her summer work in conversation, I prompted her to revise the sentence to the following:

> I want to pursue the Elementary Education major because I found my summer work with Girl Scout campers, Bible School kindergartners, and Red Cross beginning swimmers very rewarding.

For me, these five editing principles stand out as particularly useful. Too often teachers feel they have done their job by writing "Vague" or "Awk" in the margin. The one-on-one conference and the Writing Lab situation, however, allow us to offer students more: clear explanations of editing techniques that can make student writing more appealing to both teachers and to the student/writers themselves.

Judy Stoffel
St. Mary-of-the-Woods
College

Williams, Joseph M. Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity & Grace. Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman, 1981.