

# The WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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Information Exchange Agreement

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(November 1985)

What are some of the major concerns of writing lab directors? As this month's newsletter articles indicate, using peer tutors in two-year colleges and tutoring ESL students (subjects of articles in last month's newsletter) are topics that continue to engage our interest, along with the concern for reaching out across the campus and into the community, topics of two more articles in this month's issue. Other subjects often raised as questions include the following:

- Why do some teachers resist sending students in need of tutorial work to the lab, and how can we overcome this resistance?
- What are some techniques for avoiding the kind of proofreading some students want us to do when they come to the lab with a paper that is about to be handed in?
- What makes tutorial (or individualized) instruction so much more effective than large group instruction?
- What do we do when a student comes with a paper that is graded too harshly or that has insulting comments--or that has wrong "corrections" in the margins?

Since we still seem to have more questions than answers, your responses are needed. And if you have a question that you need answers to, send that in also, along with your announcements, reviews, articles on other topics, names of new members, and \$5 yearly donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University) to:

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

## THE WRITING CENTER: A CENTER FOR WRITING-ACROSS-THE-CURRICULUM ACTIVITIES

As a tutor at the Brown University Writing Center last year, I was involved in implementing an outreach program to facilitate writing across the curriculum. This program, which could be adopted at any college, has grown out of a new system to indicate the university-wide commitment to writing, a commitment that increasing numbers of colleges will be compelled to make if their graduating seniors are to be competent in writing. As part of this system, there now appears a place on the Brown University grade cards where the instructor can check whether the student has writing problems. As a result, even those professors who, perhaps because of the subject matter of their courses, are loathe to "grade down" for such problems can now register concern; by extension, students are thereby becoming increasingly aware that writing is a matter of concern in all classes, rather than merely in composition and/or English classes.

The director of composition receives a computer print-out indicating those students who have received checks, the classes in which they have received the checks, and the professors who have noted these writing deficiencies. We have discovered, in examining the print-outs, that students in particular classes--generally, large survey courses where the instructors have little time for extensive comments on papers--are receiving a high number of these checks. Such clustering does not necessarily indicate that only students with writing problems tend to take these classes; rather, it may indicate a sensitivity to writing problems on the part of particular instructors, as well as a frustration with a system which allows them little time to respond to these problems. Our initial response was, of course, to distinguish those students with serious writing problems as indicated by the number of checks received and/or the frequency with which they are received, and then to shunt these students into composi-

tion classes after a conference with a writing instructor. Our second response was to create an outreach program by means of which a tutor from the writing center, often in conjunction with an individual with special knowledge of the relevant field, addresses any survey class that has previously generated a large number of checks, if the instructor so requests. The session (or sessions) may take place either during a regularly scheduled class meeting, at a required evening meeting, or at an optional evening meeting, depending upon the instructor's wishes. The benefits to the students, the faculty, the tutors, and the writing center--in short, to the whole university community--are enormous.

First, students in a variety of disciplines are exposed to basic information about writing. Issues such as pre-writing, organization, tone, audience, revision, and editing are often addressed. Such sessions may also provide students with pragmatic information about the kind of writing--whether short essays, long research papers, reviews, summaries, essay exams, or lab reports--that will be required in the course. Then, too, analysis of the demands of a particular assignment--often a large research paper--may be provided. Many students who would never consider taking a composition course are willing to listen carefully to the information provided at these sessions, since the relevance of composition to a course in which they are interested is demonstrated.

Second, instructors who feel that they have neither the time nor the expertise to deal with writing problems, yet who feel a sincere concern about the decline of the quality of student writing, now have the opportunity to act constructively. By requesting a session, providing information about the writing requirement in their classes, and, perhaps most importantly, indicating a concern with writing, they can demonstrate to their students a commitment to this issue, no matter what the "content" of their courses.

Third, the writing center is performing an important service to the university community as a whole, and thereby garners its respect and gratitude--important responses, to be sure, in this time of fiscal reduction. The center also demonstrates a commitment to the concept of writing across the curriculum; at those universities where tutors are culled almost exclusively from among English graduate and undergraduate students, the tutors particularly need the

opportunity to enlarge their focus, to gain a larger perspective about writing requirements, for they will be better able to serve the students from various disciplines who arrive at the center requesting help.

Fourth, not only does the center become more involved with the rest of the university community, but the rest of the community also becomes involved with the center. The tutor presenting the session is paired, if possible, with individuals who have special knowledge of the field--a graduate student with expertise in that discipline, an instructor, or even an advanced undergraduate who has taken courses in that area and is familiar with the instructor's requirements; the paired specialist thus becomes more familiar, if only by osmosis, with the techniques of diagnosing and treating writing problems. Not only is one more individual made sensitive to writing, but also one more tutor may be recruited to work in the writing center; as individuals from other disciplines work with writing center personnel, they may even become interested enough to join the center. Such tutors would be particularly valuable because their presence might help to convince students that the center is pertinent to the needs of all students.

Fifth, the "captive audience" at the session learns about composition and the writing center in a very tangible way. As such, the most useful kind of publicity is generated for the center; students who have learned something during the session and who want to learn more make their way voluntarily to the center with some frequency.

Having delineated the benefits of such a program, I will now briefly describe the implementation of one set of sessions recently presented at Brown. The Psychology Department has generated a comparatively large number of checks signalling writing deficiencies. Particularly in the freshman survey courses--large lecture classes with very high enrollments--many students received such checks. With this information in hand, Professor Tori Haring-Smith--the director of the writing fellows program at Brown University--approached those professors teaching the introductory psychology survey and suggested the possibility of offering a session on composition to the classes. Two of the three professors--all of whom were senior faculty members--evinced interest in the program and agreed to the proposed session. Approximately one month after this initial meeting, Professor Haring-Smith and I (a

writing center tutor with experience in presenting special sessions to targeted populations in the Brown University community) met with these psychology professors. We outlined for them the basic issues that we hoped to address in such a session and then asked for their suggestions. Each professor, of course, had a pet peeve or an area of special concern that we agreed to address. At this point, we arranged a time for the sessions. Since the professors were most concerned about the quality of final research papers, we decided to offer the session after the students would have received their topics and, presumably, begun their research, yet before they would have started the actual writing. Since the research papers assigned by the professors were so different, and since the classes were so large, we decided to present three sessions--two directed toward the students of the professor assigning the most complicated research paper, and one directed toward the students of the professor assigning a somewhat more "standard" research paper. We also decided that attendance at the sessions would be voluntary, though all would be held in the psychology laboratory during regular lab hours.

Having completed this preliminary work, we then contacted two advanced undergraduates who had successfully completed the freshman psychology course in past years and whose writing in psychology assignments had been singled out by these professors as particularly admirable. Both students were eager to join the program.

During a period of approximately two weeks, the four of us met several times, as

well as meeting with the psychology professors again. We also met with the teaching assistants who would be grading many of the papers. The professors provided us with samples of good and bad writing in research papers and lab reports; in addition, we studied the sections on the natural and the social sciences in Writing in the Arts and Sciences by Elaine Maimon et al. Finally, we analyzed the assignments that were to be provided to the students. This analysis was particularly interesting and valuable in the case of one assignment, which proved to be a far more complicated task than the professor had either realized or intended. We pointed out the complexities--the assignment required the students to manipulate persona, tone, and audience in a discontinuous fashion--and we also indicated the kinds of problems that would result from such an assignment. Our detailed (and tactful) critique helped the professor to revise and refine his assignment before providing it to the students.

A week before the sessions, Professor Haring-Smith, the undergraduate "specialists," and I met to plan our presentation. Professor Haring-Smith and I concentrated on developing those portions of the sessions that would serve as a kind of frame: the presentation of information about composition that would be generally applicable to any writing assignment. The undergraduates concentrated on specifying those issues that are peculiarly important to writing in psychology and on finding examples that would be appropriate to this discipline. They also provided much practical information about the most efficient way to research a topic in psychology. The four of us were

The New York College Learning Skills Association is hosting its Ninth Annual Symposium on Developmental/Remedial Education

Co-sponsor: Rochester Institute of Technology

Date: April 13, 14, 15, 1986

Place: Grossinger's Resort Hotel  
Liberty, New York

Proposal Deadline: November 15, 1985

For information and registration, contact:

Marcia Birken  
Chair, Ninth Annual Symposium  
Learning Development Center  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
1 Lomb Memorial Drive  
Rochester, NY 14623

#### 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.

thus able to achieve a balance between the general and the specific, the abstract and the concrete, the ideal and the practical.

The sessions--run as relatively informal panel discussions--were generally well attended. Questions from the students were encouraged, and we referred a number of the more technical questions to the professors and teaching assistants, who were in attendance. Our close collaboration with them in the preliminary meetings paid dividends here, as we were able to present a kind of united front before the students. The relationship between composition and psychology--form and content--was thus made concrete by our interaction.

The response to these sessions was positive on the part of students, teaching assistants, and professors alike. At the suggestion of the professors, plans are now under way to incorporate yet more detailed sessions into the freshman psychology survey at several points during the semester; we hope that these sessions will be funded in part by the Psychology Department instead of by the writing center alone as was the case for the original sessions. The professors and teaching assistants feel that their students benefited from the sessions and that they are now better able to comment effectively on student writing in psychology. Professor Haring-Smith and I agree that we now better understand the particular demands made of students writing in the natural and social sciences and that we will be able to address their concerns more usefully in our own freshman composition courses. This collaboration between composition specialists and psychology specialists has thus benefited not only the students, but the teachers as well, as the best of educational enterprises do.

Kim Moreland  
Auburn University

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A READER RESPONDS . . . .

PEER TUTORS AS A PART OF THE  
COLLABORATIVE CLOSE COMMUNITY NETWORK:  
A RESPONSE TO BETTY NEUMANN'S QUESTIONS

I would like to respond to Betty Neumann's questions about peer tutoring in two-year colleges (WLN, June 1985) in the order she posed them:

1. Should two-year colleges have peer tutors?

Yes! In fact, at two-year colleges the opportunity to have bona fide collaborating PEER tutors rather than school teachers disguised as upper-class students is a positive factor. Further, it seems inappropriate at any educational institution to deny students access to collaborative learning, a tool which has been working beautifully since Adam and Eve collaborated on fruit tasting.

2. How do two-year colleges identify qualified peer tutors?

Three qualities should be kept in mind. First, the peer tutor should be good at writing and must be familiar with the systems of writing instruction used by the institution. Normally, the "A" students from freshman English are ready to tutor as soon as they complete their first semester if they meet the second and third criteria. Second, peer tutors must have a collaborative attitude. That is, they must sense that the written product is usually better if the writer treats writing as a purpose-centered process and willingly involves tentative members of the reading audience in the development of the written product. Related to the collaborative attitude (and still part of the second criterion) is the need for peer tutors to consider themselves equal-not-superior. Like good deconstructionist critics, they should stare into the great abyss of possibility admitting that their interpretation of the nature of good writing may not be any better than that of the tutee. Tutor and tutee must, in their environment of human ambivalence, form a close community as writer and reader for the purpose of creating a mutually acceptable expression of ideas. Third, tutors, whether they are 18 or 48, should exhibit maturity. Pared down to basics, this means that they must show up for work and that they must behave themselves.

3. What standards must they meet?

See 2 (above).

4. How should they be compensated?

Government-provided work/study funds should be used whenever possible, institutional funds in other cases. If your college is like mine, you'll have to arm-wrestle the physical plant for work/study students.

## 5. Should they be given college credit?

I see a real value to college credit for peer tutoring, especially for those tutors who intend to teach professionally. There is, however, a law against giving federal work/study money for credit-bearing work. Perhaps you can offer students a choice between the two. We do, and we find that most tutors are there for the bucks.

## 6. How should they be trained?

Your freshman English program and other writing intensive courses across the curriculum are the best training grounds, especially if your institution has a well-guided pragmatic/process oriented program for developing students' writing skills. But on-the-job training is always the necessary final step: the center director tutors the tutors; the tutors watch the director tutoring; the tutors tutor tutees; the collaborative close community (director, tutors, tutees, cooperating professors) evaluates the process and the results and suggests improvement.

## 7. In what areas should they tutor?

Communication skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening. And in all of these, the stress should be upon communication as a means of learning.

## 8. How can instructors who are skeptical about peer tutors be persuaded to support them?

The proof will be in the products: reduced basic skills teaching for instructors, better communication skills on the part of students. Initially, though, a major advantage can be gained by forming

another collaborative close community--a community of teachers who cooperate in selecting peer tutors. If skeptics help to select peer tutors from among the best students, skepticism declines.

Notice that the idea of collaborative close community is central to all of the above. Educators are terrible hermits. We need to learn from our students who have been collaborating with their more advanced peers for centuries. By establishing collaborative close communities officially, we can replace exercises in counter-productive cheating with productive learning experiences.

Jeff Glauner  
Park College

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OUTREACH: THE WRITING CENTER, THE  
CAMPUS, AND THE COMMUNITY

Consider the effect a pebble has when dropped into a pool of water. Surrounding the stone's point of entry are ever-enlarging concentric circles. These circles represent the audiences of the writing center. The center's first responsibility is to the campus, including the students, departmental colleagues (assuming the writing center is in the province of the English department), center personnel, other faculty, and the administration, and finally then to audiences outside the campus. (Pat Bates includes in her public relations circle the category of "colleagues outside the institution."<sup>1</sup>)

Although writing centers have circles of audiences, it might be argued that writing

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TEACHERS . . . SHARE YOUR IDEAS!

The NCTE Committee on Professional Writing Networks for Teachers and Supervisors is ready to help you. If you would be interested in sharing your ideas, but feel you would like some help in writing your thoughts, the Committee will give you suggestions and support. Send your half completed, or fully completed manuscript to Dr. Rosemary Winkeljohann, Millersville University of Pennsylvania, Department of Education, Millersville, Pennsylvania 17551. Your manuscript will then be sent to a committee member who will return it to you with suggestions.

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WRITING LAB REPORTS REQUESTED

The University of Texas is considering revising its writing lab and would appreciate receiving a copy of your most recent annual report in order to gain an overview of various programs. Please send to:

Lester Faigley  
Dept. of English  
University of Texas  
Austin, Texas 78712

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centers have progressed, or evolved, in a straight line. Certainly these centers evolved in different forms. As Muriel Harris points out, there are two dominant models for this structure: writing labs, which are product-oriented, relying heavily on materials, and writing centers, which are process-oriented, relying on tutorial instruction.<sup>2</sup> Why this concern for the origins and future of writing centers? Obviously, once a center is established, its survival is not guaranteed. In fact, as a learning resource for students, that center may be outstanding; however, we know that outstanding centers may also fall under the ax. Take for instance, the perils of Phyllis Sherwood's lab at Raymond Walters College, chronicled in the September, 1982 issue of the Writing Lab Newsletter. In short, even a lab with national exposure cannot be assured of its continuance. Consider the number of centers which are defunct or have undergone more subtle changes: changing the director's role from full-time to part-time, demoting that position to a paraprofessional, or decreasing funding or hours of operation. How do we prevent the possible demise of writing centers then? We must make our writing centers (the process-dominant model) an integral part not only of the campus but also of the community. I want to argue, then, that writing centers are not developing linearly but rather cyclically, or in a spiral.

But the primary reason why writing centers do and should develop in a spiral--that is how they become an integral part of the campus--should not be linked just to survival. Certainly, we should not be naive about the future of our writing centers; we should ask, "What can I do to insure the center's future?" But I think it highly likely, given the typical personality of the writing center director, that these outreach programs will be an inherent part of the program. As Jeanette Harris notes, "We are obviously fighters, or we wouldn't be associated with writing centers in the first place."<sup>3</sup> Not only are we administrators fighters, but the typical director is competent, humane, and caring; using those qualities, then, the director strives to reach as many students as possible to improve their writing skills, which demands a flexible, diverse program. Being associated with a writing center influences a person to develop or increase these "nurturing" attitudes. The CCCO report on Learning Skills Centers found that "Instructors re-

leased from a judgmental role and encouraged in an advocacy role were free to make discoveries about learning and teaching and develop different attitudes toward students who were 'failing.' They became sensitized to the crucial role that self-confidence and self-esteem play in verbal behavior, and they discovered that, often, what showed up as writing difficulties can be difficulties in other skills. . . ."<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is the nature of the beast to be a person who can wear many hats, perhaps even as many hats as Dr. Seuss' Bartholomew Cubbins, as Jan Ugan pointed out at a CCCO presentation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, a writing center directed by such a person will be a center of writing for the English department, the campus, and the community.

The personality of the writing center must be quite clear to the center's staff and also to the department, for tutors and faculty alike may be tempted to take the easy road of defining a writing center as a skills lab. Certainly that kind of lab has its advantages, but it is not the kind of lab which will function like the pebble dropped in the water. Let's explore, then, those first circles created by dropping our pebble. At the heart of a center is its staff. We think that by working as a tutor, a student grows intellectually, socially, and emotionally. In short, students who tutor are acquiring an education. What do they learn? They learn about materials (and their development), objectives, learning styles, procedures, and people. We also think they learn more about themselves as people and as writers. One way, then, of generating credit for the writing center (a concern of survivalists) is to offer a class in tutoring. Another possibility is to link tutoring in the writing center to another class, such as an undergraduate course in diagnosing basic writing problems, a graduate course on rhetoric and basic writing, or even to an outside department's course such as secondary education's English methods course. The advantages are twofold: the students get "hands-on" experience and the writing center gets free tutoring. Likewise, graduate assistants might have the same kind of assignment as part of their duties to see another learning mode.

For the English Department, the advantages of a writing center are transparent: composition, creative writing, literary criticism and technical writing. Of what use can the writing center be to other

departments? First, students from academic disciplines outside English should be able to find help in the writing center with report and scientific writing, research papers, social science writing, theses and dissertations, letters of application and resumes, plus study sessions for the LSAT, GRE, and MCAT. Writing center personnel can work directly with specific departments to set up programs for their students. Furthermore, the writing center and the library can work together to develop research modules for students to use in conjunction with a course on research writing or in lieu of such a course (another credit-bearing course for the writing center).

The writing center can be a force for literacy on campus, conducting workshops geared to specific disciplines, visiting classes to guest lecture on improving writing skills, consulting with departments on evaluation and conferencing, developing materials such as editing guides and style sheets, reading student papers, and conducting surveys. In short, the writing center functions as a resource center for all faculty, even to offering editing advice to faculty about their writing, such as grant proposals. Perhaps the main drawback to a beginning writing-across-the-curriculum program is the faculty's hesitation to see themselves as teachers of writing, or many times even as writers. It is their duty, however, to provide students opportunities for writing; then the writing center can offer in-service workshops on tips for writing assignments. After all, students who write about the content learn that content better; the writing, however, doesn't have to be "super-correct," an attitude which portrays--mistakenly and subtly--writing as grammar.

In the circle beyond faculty is the administration, those people who can sound the death knell for a writing center--or provide support. In order for that support to be given, the writing center must demonstrate its value. A good relationship depends on the director voicing concerns and giving information to the administration while also listening to their suggestions. It is important that accurate statistics on budget and use of the center reach the administration, just as it is important for the center to be a good public relations tool for the university. Research done in the writing center, plus participation in professional meetings, publication, and

writing center conferences on campus, provide good copy for the institution. Thus, activities such as media publicity, open houses, tournaments (Spelling Bees, Scrabble), creative writing contests, and students' published writing keep the center in the limelight. Other programs can also be of interest to another group in this circle-- the secretarial and clerical staff. Certainly workshops in effective writing skills would also be helpful to them, a fact evidenced by the number of calls received from them on the writing center hotline.

In the outer circle are two groups: teachers outside the campus and the community. Often, the relationships between university and public schools and even "town and gown" have been shaky. Take for instance the metaphors we use: ivory tower and trenches. The writing center, perhaps better than any other service or department on campus, can help to build a skylift between the tower and trenches. For the teachers outside the campus we "share" consultants who come to campus for workshops and convocations; we also offer a summer workshop with outside consultants for teachers, dovetailing with regional conferences such as the Rocky Mountain Writing Center Conference so that participants may hear a sampling of papers and workshops from people in writing across the country. Our most successful program, however, has been a series of visitations by high school students to the campus writing center. These students bring their essays with them, and working in the writing center with faculty and tutors, they participate in (often for the first time unfortunately) a one-to-one conference. We also manage during an introduction to the writing center to "push" our writing program and suggest that they keep our university in mind for their college career. We succeed at removing some of the fear and mystery of college by making it concrete through these sessions. After the tutoring sessions are complete, we give them an example of a writing assignment from freshman composition, which becomes the next writing task for their high school writing class. For future exchanges, we plan on visiting the high school, guest lecturing, providing an assignment, and then having the students visit the campus. The students like the feedback from college teachers, and the high school teachers are grateful for the support since our teachers usually reinforce those concepts which the high school teacher has been presenting. Moreover, our

English education majors have the opportunity to work with high school students, and this activity also introduces them to high school teachers, an activity they will probably use in their own classes in the future.

Finally, there is the community at large. With this group, the writing center has two functions: publicizing writing and teaching writing. The first can be done through radio/TV interviews, speeches, newspaper articles, and displays. Although the director targets specific groups of the community--senior citizens, literary groups, day-care centers (infant literacy), secretaries, businessmen, technical writers, and government workers--it is highly likely that these groups will approach the writing center for consulting or conferences once the writing center's publicity is spread. These groups want information on writers, creative writing, effective report writing, or editing. The writing center, then, serves as a hub for providing speakers for them. Indeed, if the director takes on all these projects, that person would probably be found at a desk, frazzled and burned out.

This is simply an idea bank for writing center directors; satisfactory results of these projects will depend on many variables--time, energy, funding, locale, and cooperation. When I began, I argued against a linear progression by writing centers. I

believe that looking at spiralling audiences provides a heuristic for directors to plan and evaluate. As directors of writing centers, let us see our futures as they should be--a spiral reaching upward.

Joyce Kinkead  
Utah State University

<sup>1</sup>Patricia Teel Bates, "The Public-Relations Circle," in Tutoring Writing, ed. Muriel Harris (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1982), p. 208.

<sup>2</sup>Muriel Harris, "Process and Product: Dominant Models for Writing Centers," in Improving Writing Skills, New Directors for College Learning Assistance, No. 3, ed. Thom Hawkins and Phyllis Brooks, March (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Jeanette Harris, "Redefining the Role of the Writing Center," Writing Lab Newsletter, 7, No. 3 (1982), 1.

<sup>4</sup>Learning Skills Centers: A CCCC Report (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1976), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>Jan Ugan, "The Writing Lab: Serving the Non-Traditional Student," CCCC, San Francisco, 19 March 1982.

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INSTITUTE

The 1986 Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators will hold its summer session from June 28 through July 25 on the campus of Appalachian State University in Boone, NC.

The 1986 Kellogg Institute will train faculty, counselors and administrators from remedial, developmental, and learning assistance programs in the most current techniques for promoting learning improvement. The Institute program consists of a summer session followed by a fall term practicum project on the home campuses of participants. The 1986 summer program will focus on the use of learning styles and their implications for instruction, the process of developing evaluation activities, the use of academic intervention and counseling techniques, the management of programs and classes, and the use of

computers for management, data collection, and instructional purposes.

Institute fees are \$625 plus \$300 for room and board. A graduate credit fee for the fall semester practicum will also be charged. Up to eight (8) hours of graduate credit may also be obtained for participation in the summer program. Leaders' Scholarships, which include \$500 fee waivers, are available.

Applications for the Institute may be obtained by contacting Ms. Elaine Bingham, Assistant Director of the Center for Developmental Education, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608. Additional information about the Institute and guidelines for the scholarship program may be obtained by contacting the Institute Director, Dr. Hunter R. Boylan, through the Center for Developmental Education (704) 262-3057. Early application is encouraged to insure a space in the Institute. The application deadline is April 1, 1986.



# The Tutor's Corner

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Now that I have been an English tutor at Harrisburg Area Community College for one full year, I realize how profoundly my attitudes toward tutoring have changed. When I began, I was under the assumption that I would only be "helping" other students. The wide range of people who have come for tutoring have caused me to see something else. Besides helping others improve their writing skills, I have learned to set my own style and ideas aside so that I can help each student attain his own goal, whether it be finishing an essay for publication or constructing simple sentences.

Of course, my primary responsibility as a tutor is to help other students. With most students, this often takes the form of proofreading. Unfortunately, many on campus, including professors, see tutoring as only a "last-minute polish." Several students have come to me with final drafts of papers which were due the following day. While the grammar in these papers might be perfect, they often have no content or organization whatsoever. I have read comparison papers which were assigned as cause-effect. In other cases, while the individual paragraphs were well organized, their order throughout the paper was incoherent. At this point, there is little I can do to help, except encourage the student to come for help sooner on the next paper so that I can help him get a clear idea of what he wanted to say.

Other students go to the opposite extreme. These are the students who expect me to write their papers for them. I have been lucky in that I have not had many students of this type. When I did work with one, though, I made it clear that it was his paper, not mine, and that he was going to do the work, not me.

However, the great majority of students who come for tutoring fall between these two extremes. Many have an idea of what they want to say, but they just can't seem to get started. I usually ask these students a lot of questions, such as:

1. What is the most important idea?

2. What examples can you use?
3. How can you organize these ideas more clearly?
4. Do your examples refer to the thesis?

By answering these questions, students discover that they really do have a good idea of what they are doing. Most people have good, clear ideas in their head; they merely have trouble putting these ideas on paper. I often tell students to read a troublesome passage out loud. By doing this, they can usually spot what is awkward about it and correct it. Using these techniques, students usually think that I have done a lot of work for them, when actually I have done nothing except make them think. Once a student gains confidence in his ability, there is no limit to what he can achieve.

I believe beginning students are not the only ones who need their confidence boosted. Several days ago, I began by helping a graduate student refine a thesis, and ended it by explaining to another student the difference between nouns and verbs. This contrast has taught me to focus my thinking in order to get to the root of a problem. It has also helped me to communicate with people from vastly different cultural and educational backgrounds, and to be patient with students who don't understand something the first time. Now, when doing my own writing, I ask myself the same questions that I ask of the students I tutor.

Thus, tutoring carries with it a great deal of responsibility. Some students actually look up to and confide in their tutors. Several students have come to me for career advice while others have asked for help with their personal problems. Once in a while, a student will just simply need someone to talk to. While all of these are important, my greatest responsibility to students is to instill in them that willingness to learn. Correcting grammar is unimportant; if I can foster a desire to go on, to improve, I have accomplished my task.

Jesse Zimmerman  
Harrisburg Area Community  
College

## CALL FOR PAPERS

The Writing Centers Association: East Central announces its Eighth Annual conference, to be held on May 16-17, 1986, at Northern Kentucky University, seven miles southeast of Cincinnati, Ohio. The theme of the conference is "Words Reaching Out To Worlds." Papers, presentations, panels and ideas for workshops should fit into half or full hour time blocks (including time for questions and discussion). Topics may include, but need not be limited to, traditional concerns of writing centers. (No general program descriptions, however.) We encourage proposals that focus on any issue related to the teaching, learning, or practice of writing. We also encourage proposals that focus on issues that may concern writing centers in the future or have not yet received sufficient attention, such as the following:

- writing centers and secondary schools
- writing centers and teacher training
- writing centers and institutional politics
- writing centers and the non-academic world
- writing centers and advanced students
- writing centers and the psychology of authorship
- writing centers and reading centers
- writing centers and student retention
- writing centers and feminist values
- writing centers and "students' right to their own language"

Persons interested in participating should submit a 200-word substantive proposal (plus three copies) by January 15, 1986.

In addition, writing centers and labs are invited to display their materials and services. Materials Exchange Tables will be made available. If you desire to participate in the Materials Exchange, send to us by April 1, 1986, a brief description of your materials and an indication of the amount of space needed for display.

Please send all proposals, requests for display space, and inquiries to:

Paul Ellis  
 Writing Center--230 BP  
 Northern Kentucky University  
 Highland Heights, KY 41076

## MY AUNT, MY SCHOOL TO COME, LOVES. A TUTORING PROGRAM FOR THE ADVANCED ESL STUDENT

I found tutoring Pramod J. a rewarding experience, not only because he was bright, pleasant and highly motivated--all of which help, as any tutor will admit--but also because he had a fairly good grasp of formal English already. With Pramod it was not a matter so much of nuts-and-bolts tutoring as delving into the finer aspects of idiomatic structure, reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary.

Pramod was a graduate student from Thailand who came to the Writing Center because of failure to obtain the passing score of 84 on the Michigan Test, a requirement for all ESL students in order to achieve regular-student status at Youngstown State University. With the right approach and intensive tutoring sessions twice a week, I was confident that within the quarter Pramod could be helped to read faster and better (one of his handicaps on the test having been his inability to get through the timed reading-comprehension paragraph fast enough), as well as write with greater ease and control in the short-essay mode.

ESL students are particularly challenging to me because of my own multilingual background. The fact that my "other languages" are Indian (Asian) proves an advantage when it comes to understanding some of the more common errors in English committed by foreign students. I can relate very well, for example, to syntactical errors that might throw some of my colleagues into a tailspin. Why on earth, they wonder, would a student come up with a sentence such as "my aunt, my school to come, loves" instead of plain old "my aunt loves to come to my school." Well, I know it's probably because in many Asian languages sentences are structured Subject-Object-Predicate rather than the S-P-O customary in English. Once the student is made aware of this pattern, what appears to be a very basic problem clears up rather rapidly.

I also understand spelling errors that might appear totally whimsical to others. There are a few common reasons for them: the student might be using British spellings; his own alphabet might be a great deal more phonetic than English is, so that he just

has not oriented himself to the relative chaos of English spelling systems; or his language may use certain sounds interchangeably--d and t, for instance, or p and b, or r and l.

Finally I know from experience that the most subtle and difficult aspect of a new language is idiomatic structure and usage. How do you convince a student, for example, that "jumping out of one's skin" is not a major medical calamity?

Here is one of Pramod's early writings, and as you can see, while he writes--even well--he does display some of these classic symptoms of the ESL student.

I am a grauate student in Mechanical Engineering major. I have been studying at Youngstown State University since Fall 1982. I will graduate next Spring and want to study PhD program in Mechanical Engineering.

I finished my Bachelor's Degree in Thailand in 1980. Before I came to YSU, I attended English course at Oklahoma State university, Oklahoma, for two months. When I started studing at YSU in Winter 1981, I took two English courses. I got PR grade in one course, so I took it again last Fall and past it. My problem is I couldn't get 84 on Michigan test which is the requirement for foreign students. I have to take Michigan test again at the end of this quarter and I hope I will pass.

After I finish my Master's degree, I will go back to my country during summer and will come to United States next Fall to study in PhD. program. When I finish I would like to go back to my country and teash Engineering student in the university I graduated.

Assuming that the fourth word is an editing error, the very first sentence strikes us as idiomatically wrong, even while grammatically correct--"I am a grauate student in Mechanical Engineering major." In the third sentence of paragraph 2, "studing" instead of "studying" may not be just an editing mistake--perhaps Pramod is unsure of the rule for changing tense on

words ending with y. Again, "past" instead of "passed" suggests tense-form problems, as well as the idea, perhaps, of the interchangeable d and t. "Teash" for "teach" might be an honest-to-goodness spelling error, but again, that entire last sentence suggests idiomatic problems. Notice too, that throughout the paper, capitalization is erratic, articles are missing, and twice "student" has been used as a plural without the s. On the other hand, his organization, paragraphing, grammar and punctuation are good.

When Pramod first came in we had a long chat about what it was he hoped to accomplish through tutoring. I think it is essential for a tutor to ascertain what the student wants; that cuts down on the chances of either the tutor or the course of study taking off on a tangent that is meaningless to the student. Indeed, forthright communication throughout our tutoring sessions added greatly to their quality and made them immensely enjoyable for both of us. Like most students who come in for tutoring, Pramod was taking time out of a hectic schedule for these sessions, and I wanted to be sure we agreed on priorities. His overriding concern was passing the "Michigan" at the end of the quarter; he saw his primary deficiencies as those of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and idiomatically correct writing.

A good book to use with Pramod was Language and Life in the U.S.A. by Gladys G. Doby and Janet Ross (2nd ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1968). The book contains a series of essays about various aspects of American life and culture--"American Social Relations," "The Role of Women in American Life," "Covered Wagon Days," and so on--which are both educational and interesting. I had Pramod read an essay twice, once straight through for the general theme, the second time carefully for detail, marking in his notebook the words or expressions he did not understand.

Next we did the "word-study," a list of words italicized in the text and defined in a column above the essay. This constitutes the vocabulary study for the chapter. We would note how the definitions fit into the context of the text; Pramod would then use these words in sentences of his own. In order to familiarize him with the dictionary and thesaurus, I made him look up words and expressions he was not sure about and find

closely related substitutes, so that he appreciated contexts and shades of meaning.

After this we proceeded to the reading comprehension, sentence structure, and grammar exercises at the end of the essay, and Pramod answered these questions orally in order to feel more at ease in speaking the language. These exercises are excellent in their test of general understanding, recall of detail, interpretation of idioms and ideas, and comprehension of grammatical structures.

Finally we did the writing exercise. Picking one of the optional topics provided, Pramod would write a short paper at home on matters related to the text--contrasting Thai customs to American ones, for example, or describing his experiences in America. This he read out loud to me at our next session (a way for him to catch errors he had missed on paper), after which it was jointly edited and revised. Working together this way on his writing--both the short pieces written "in class" and the longer ones at home--proved most helpful to Pramod, for we discussed all changes as we rewrote sentences for clarity, found appropriate idiomatic expressions, and corrected grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.

While this intensive work with Language and Life (a book that I would recommend highly to anyone in Pramod's situation) took care of his reading and writing needs, Essential Idioms in English by Robert J. Dixon (revised ed., Regents Publishing Co., 1971) helped him with that tricky aspect of language--idioms. Basically a listing of

idioms using common words ("looking out," "look into," "look over") and arranged from easiest to most difficult, this book also has exercises designed to help the student understand and use everyday idiomatic expressions correctly. Pramod did a few of these each time at the end of our session--they are fun and relaxing to do.

Pramod and I also reviewed prewriting and revision techniques, such as brainstorming, freewriting and Richard Lanham's "lard factor" revision method (Revising Process, New York: Scribners, 1979), so useful to all students.

Another thing I would have liked to have done for Pramod was to get a group of ESL students organized, so that he would have had a peer group to interact with verbally, since so much of language is picked up literally "by ear." In a group such as this, all the participants can profit greatly from workshops, peer evaluation of writing, and the like.

All in all, while this might seem to have been a packed schedule, both Pramod and I enjoyed intensive work on a variety of projects, rather than a slower pace or getting bogged down in any one activity. From week to week I could see his fluency--and more importantly his confidence, growing--and this in itself was rewarding. I am happy, besides, to report that Pramod passed his "Michigan" at the end of the quarter with an 89, a marked improvement over the 78 he had made prior to our tutoring sessions.

Lalita Prabhu  
Youngstown State  
University

### WORD PROCESSING EVALUATIONS AVAILABLE

Microcomputers and Word Processing Programs: An Evaluation and Critique, by Brian Gallagher of La Guardia Community College, is one of the Research Monograph Series published by the City University of New York Office of Academic Affairs' Instructional Resource Center.

The 191-page monograph provides:

- an introduction to the uses of word processing in the writing classroom
- a critical survey of twenty word processing programs for the academic writer

- an analysis of the philosophical and social implications of the new technology
- a complete bibliography

Copies are available from the Instructional Resource Center for \$5 each. Checks should be made payable to the CUNY Research Foundation and mailed to Box BG, Instructional Resource Center, The City University of New York, 535 East 80 Street, New York, NY 10021.

CALL FOR PAPERS

SOUTHEASTERN WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATION

"Beyond Basic Writing: What more can writing centers do?" is the theme for our 6th annual conference. It will be held April 17-19, 1986 in Mobile, Alabama. Presentations of 15-20 minutes (8-10 double-spaced, typed pages) should address one of the following topics: the tutoring of ESL and learning disabled students, competency testing, the writing center as the core of a writing across the curriculum program, the use of computers in the composing process, and ways to establish community outreach programs.

Double-spaced, typed manuscripts should be sent by February 1, 1986 to Renee Harper, Writing Lab; Bookstore Basement, University of South Alabama; Mobile, Alabama 36688.

Good photocopies are acceptable. Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you wish to have your manuscript returned.

As a graduating senior majoring in accounting and a Writing Center tutor, I would like to share with you a recent interview experience. I was interviewing for an accounting position in the Controller's Department of a major corporation and was pleased to learn of the interest that this company places on writing skills. Many of the people in this organization commented on the fact that I worked as a Writing Center tutor, and they expressed the concern that so many of the students they interview lack good writing skills. One interviewer had a unique way of summing up the problem: "Accountants know how to write in accounting, but they don't know how to write in English." I am happy to say that I received an offer of employment from the company and will begin work there this summer. I am looking forward to beginning work and applying to real life situations the accounting and writing skills I have developed throughout my college career.

John Piepenbrink  
Valparaiso University  
Writing Center Tutor

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

8th NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE LEARNING ASSISTANCE CENTERS --May 15-17, 1986--

sponsored by THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL ACADEMIC SERVICES Long Island University-Brooklyn Campus Brooklyn, NY 11201

Proposals should be practical in nature, about 200 - 250 words in length, and include topics such as: Computer Assisted Instruction, Program Evaluation, Critical Thinking Skills, Basic Skills, English as a Second Language, Cognitive Skills, and Materials Development. Workshops should be planned for 75 minute sessions. Please submit all proposals by January 15, 1986.

Elaine A. Caputo  
Conference Chairperson  
Special Academic Services  
Long Island University  
Brooklyn, NY 11201  
(718)403-1020

Guidelines for Proposals: 1. submit three copies, 2. include your title, department, office and home telephone numbers, 3. list equipment needs, and 4. attach a brief biography or resume.

WANTED: IDEAS OR CURRICULUM MATERIALS FOR CIVIC WRITING.

I am writing a handbook on civic writing and wish to compile a resource list of composition assignments or curriculum materials for this kind of writing. Civic writing can include speeches, letters to the editor, petitions, resolutions, and letters to legislators, other officials, business people, or community leaders on civic or political concerns. I would very much appreciate hearing from anyone who has developed composition assignments or curriculum materials for this kind of writing in science, social studies, or English classes. Please write Dr. Sandra Stotsky, Larsen Hall, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA 02138, or call 617-734-5118. All ideas or materials will be credited to their creators or schools.



## A READER COMMENTS . . . .

I just want to say that the Writing Lab Newsletter has been very informative and beneficial to me and my career. I feel quite relieved that there are others experiencing some of the same problems that I am experiencing. It is also gratifying to hear the success stories as well. I am rather biased in my opinion of writing centers. I am beginning to see them as indispensable. I have learned a lot about teaching, thinking, writing, and psychology as a professional tutor and tutorial coordinator. I have the chance to work with the brightest to the should I say "most persistent." I think that a tutoring session allows a student to speak with another student and many skills can be developed thereby. Simply, it is refreshing to know that there are colleagues across the country with similar views.

James Boswell, Jr.  
Harrisburg Community  
College  
Harrisburg, PA

ELEVENTH ANNUAL RHETORIC SEMINAR ON  
CURRENT THEORIES OF TEACHING COMPOSITION

Purdue University June 2-13, 1986

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