The WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

This month's issue of the newsletter has a particularly rich mix of notices which offer opportunities for members of our newsletter group to gather together. You'll find invitations to submit proposals for a regional writing center conference, for a conference for and about writing tutors, and for a developmental education conference. You'll also find an announcement for an NCTE regional conference and for the Special Interest Session for writing lab directors at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Clearly, many of us will be crossing paths with each other this spring and next fall.

In the intervals between those conferences--and for the rest of us not attending them--the newsletter (I hope) continues to be a monthly forum for us to meet and exchange views, suggestions, and advice. Thus, in this issue you'll also find help in setting up a workshop on cliches; notes on software you may want to consider; reviews of books to use as resources; an article by a peer tutor; an examination of the role of the writing tutor; and a discussion of conference techniques.

If the newsletter is to be a useful forum, we should keep checking on whether the newsletter meets your needs. Are there any topics not yet addressed? Do you want some answers to questions or problems you have? Need suggestions from others? Let us hear from you!

And, of course, keep sending your articles, announcements, reviews, names of new members, and those always-appreciated yearly donations of $7.50 (in checks made payable to Purdue University and sent to me):

Muriel Harris, editor
Writing Lab Newsletter
Department of English
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DODGING THE PUNDIT: THE PREVENTION OF PEDAGOGY IN THE WRITING CENTER

Regardless of the rewarding nature of its operations, the tutorial writing center on the college campus faces a variety of daily challenges. One challenge of particular significance may be termed "tutor role confusion," or the tendency of peer writing coaches to turn into petty pedagogues. In order to explore this issue, let us briefly focus on a composite tutor who works in a typically ambitious writing center facility, keeping in mind that generic definitions are difficult if not impossible to affix to such facilities, due to their complexity and to the specialized needs they are expected to meet for their own institutions.

Nevertheless, while it may be impossible to describe the typical writing center, it is not impossible to describe the typical tutor working in one. First, each member of the writing center staff currently under discussion is drawn from the college's student body at large and is trained specifically as a writing tutor. Second, each tutor at this facility interacts on a one-on-one basis with up to thirty student writers a week. And third, the tutor, whether an English major, an engineering undergraduate, or a retired librarian, is expected to assist another student toward the improvement of his or her writing. Given such circumstances (and especially if the tutor has experienced a marked degree of success), it is not only possible, but probable, that a perceptive peer coach can turn into a pedant. The quandary at issue might best be stated in these terms: How can a writing center's tutors be trained, both initially and on a recurring basis, in order to prevent a tendency toward pedantry? In other words, how can a tutor, who must deal efficiently and decisively with dozens of writers a week, avoid the inclination to "teach" in its pejorative sense?

These questions force us to closely eval-

uate the fundamental role of the writing tutor. Since the writing center's function is to facilitate the improvement of student composition through a careful process of listening and questioning, then tutors in writing centers are charged with the responsibility of collaborating with their fellow students so that those students will discover for themselves certain truths about their writing. Tutors must require that students do their own work; they must never present themselves as "experts." In spite of such clear directives, however, tutors often become role-confused: they turn into pedagogues instead of peers, thereby violating the basic tenets of good tutoring. Clearly, a dilemma such as this demands attention because the writing center is a place where students often think critically about their writing for the first time, using a tutor as a listener, a questioner, and a guide. That kind of theoretical philosophy is plainly at odds with the tutor who has grown into a pundit.

Why the good tutor becomes a bad teacher is a complex issue whose component parts lie within four broadly labelled areas: one, the tutor's lack of self-confidence; two, the tutor's inability to create a rapport with the tutee; three, the tutor's misplaced writing priorities (i.e., what are the "serious" and "not-so-serious" issues in a student's paper?); and four, the tutor's weakness in or unfamiliarity with the inquiry method of tutoring. While discussing these four areas, we can also address the question of how a writing/tutoring facility might confront and ameliorate in an ongoing fashion the problem of tutor-turned-teacher role confusion.

Initially, writing center tutors are trained before they actively counsel other students. It is during this training period and at specified intervals throughout the tutor's employment at the writing center that the crucial issue of personal self-confidence should be dealt with. During a tutor's beginning preparation, role-playing specific situations which he or she is likely to encounter when assisting students is significantly beneficial. While role-playing, the tutor can take on both the roles of coach and student to gain perspective from each character's point of view. If treated with care, a role-playing session interspersed throughout a quarter or semester will function as "preventative

medicine" and can strengthen a tutor's self-confidence by allowing him or her to act out possible troublesome situations before they actually occur. In addition, role-playing enables a tutor to practice new terms and untried ways of phrasing comments with a fellow tutor under safe and controlled conditions. Further, tutors will contribute to their own self-assurance and sense of worth as writing coaches by remembering to utilize several techniques of good tutoring. First, they will employ "wait time," remaining quiet for a sufficient interval after asking an open-ended question of their tutee; accurate use of such wait time helps eradicate the insecure tutor's tendency to fill a void with his or her own voice, creating the illusion that something is being accomplished. Second, tutors will allow students to dominate the session, thereby letting them discover truths about their writing in an independent fashion. And third, tutors will develop an awareness of their own body language and gain expertise in such fundamental personal dynamics as establishing eye contact and maintaining appropriate personal space.

Although building a tutor's self-confidence through well-timed, periodic role-playing is an important process in the overall scheme of addressing and preventing writing center pedantry, it is insufficient in and of itself. Equally important is the ongoing development in the tutor of a sense of rapport with the student who needs assistance. In order to prevent the proclivity toward becoming an "expert," this empathy must be tapped and developed during a tutor's initial training and at regular intervals throughout his or her employment. One method of cultivating a tutor's empathic capabilities is to require him or her to write for a group of peers, who will assess the tutor's writing much the same as tutors assess other students' writing every day in the center. Since tutors need to gain, and endlessly regain, their perspectives as struggling fellow writers and peers, this kind of evaluation process is humbling.

As an example of how humbling such assessment can be, let us look at Jean, a peer tutor in a busy writing center, who is going through the process of peer evaluation herself. Jean has recently fallen prey to some pedantic tutor behavior and has lost some of her natural empathy. Two of her fellow tutors are bringing that point home to her during a regularly scheduled workshop

for writing center tutors. Jean has just given her paper to the two tutors who are "helping" her:

Jean: Well, what do you think of my paper?

Peer Tutor #1: Hmmm . . . you could sure do a lot more with this introduction, I think. Let's see how we could reword this awkward sentence here. (Seizes Jean's paper, scribbles on it, erases something.)

Jean: What are you doing? What are you changing there? I thought that stuff was pretty good! (Attempts to see her paper, which Peer Tutor #1 is busily redrafting.)

Peer Tutor #2: (Scrutinizing paper along with Peer Tutor #1) Oh yeah, yeah, I see what you're doing there. Much better.

Jean: Hey, come on, you guys! Give me my paper back!

(Session dissolves, with subsequent group discussion of proper empathic tutoring behavior.)

This type of peer assessment, like role-playing, should be regularly employed during the course of a quarter or semester. Tutors may bring to a tutoring session their own genuine strengths and weaknesses, but they must abandon their teachers' hats at the door.

An empathic and confident tutor, though less likely to fall into the trap of becoming the "pro," may still lack an awareness of what considerations should demand high-priority attention in a student's paper. The tutor may seize upon faulty grammar or weak sentence structure as a means of "getting something concrete done" in the session, neglecting in the process the needs of the student writer. As a result, the tutoring session shifts into lopsidedness: the tutor lectures and the tutee becomes passive. No dialogue occurs, and no real work is accomplished. The student may indeed learn the proper use of a semicolon, but his or her writing, as the consequence of such an ill-managed meeting, benefits little. Furthermore, the student writer may never return to the writing center. After all, information about the correct use of the semicolon can be found in any grammar handbook. Why go to a tutoring

facility to find out what one can discover on one's own? Tutors, therefore, must be continually reminded of the function of a writing center--to facilitate the improvement of student writing through a carefully conducted process of listening and questioning. In addition, tutors must be trained to deal with issues of fundamental importance, neglecting until subsequent sessions less urgent concerns. Comparatively minor aspects of a student's work, such as punctuation misuse, improper mechanical structure, or spelling errors, must never be dealt with in the session at the expense of the far more essential components of student writing: focus, voice, and organization.

At this point, the writing center tutor, regardless of preparation or self-confidence, may still fall prey to occasional pedantry if he or she is not given clear instruction in the last major area under discussion, which is the theory and practice underlying the inquiry method of peer tutoring. In essence, if the tutor does not know what to say and how to say it, the tutoring session will be unbalanced, a tutor-centered process wherein the tutee assumes a passive role and the net profit for both participants is negligible. During a tutor's training, this questioning method of tutoring should be introduced, and at regular intervals throughout the quarter or semester, workshops or role-playing meetings should be scheduled to reacquaint the writing center tutors in the major areas of the inquiry method. These four areas may be briefly stated as follows:

1) When employing a questioning method of tutoring, the tutor's questions shall be open-ended, i.e., those involving more than a yes or no answer;

2) While engaging in a dialogue with the student, the tutor will refrain from setting himself or herself up as the "expert" and will, if necessary, employ a handbook or a fellow tutor for clarification;

3) The tutor will listen far more than he or she talks, and will continually draw the student writer closer to certain truths about his or her writing through a process of active listening and questioning;

4) The tutor will not pronounce evaluations upon a student's writing.

Statements such as "This is good" or "I don't like this" have little place in a tutoring session. Rather, the tutor should strive to discover what the student likes or dislikes and why.

As tutors grow more comfortable in their helping roles, they will modify the inquiry method to closely fit their own personal styles. However, the proper use of this method will not allow the tutor to become role-confused; he or she will be constrained to remain curious and attentive. The tutor will struggle along with the student and will be unable to evaluate either the student or the writing, except in the form of a questioning dialogue. Used genuinely, the inquiry method can serve as an efficient process by which to draw student writers ever closer to the discovery of truths about their writing.

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It is evident that writing centers, as they continue to flourish on college campuses, in high schools, and at two-year institutions, perform a necessary, if not indispensible, function. Tutors are at the very heart of these facilities, and, as such, they deserve exemplary initial training as well as a recurring program of workshops and role-playing sessions throughout the course of their employment. To train a tutor and then allow him or her to assist students with their writing, while simultaneously providing a faulty or nonexistent process of re-education, is virtually to insure the growth of pedantry in the writing center.

Shelley Miller
Montana State University

UPDATE ON SOFTWARE PREVIEW POLICY

In his review of the software program Writer's Helper (Writing Lab Newsletter 11.7 [1987]: 11-13), Mark Simpson noted that the company's policy requires prepayment in order to preview the software package. Jim Leaven, Marketing Manager for Writer's Helper, has informed us that their new policy now requires only that an instructor send them a letter on school stationery. Anyone doing so will receive the package for a 30-day preview.

JOB OPENING

Tenure Track position in Rhetoric and Composition. Assistant Professor Level; current salary range is $19,348-31,842 (1987-1988 salary under negotiation). **Responsibilities:** teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in composition and rhetoric; willing to stand for election to director of composition for three-year renewable term. **Qualifications:** Ph.D. in English with specialization in Composition/Rhetoric and demonstrated excellence in composition teaching required. Experience/Expertise in one or more of the following areas desirable: writing-program administration, writing assessment, secondary school teaching, writing research. Women and minorities are encouraged to apply. Send letter of application, resume, transcripts, at least three recent letters of recommendation, and postcard for acknowledgment by April 14th to Judith Kilborn, Chair of Search Committee, Department of English, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN 56301.

CALL FOR PAPERS

1987 Midwest Writing Centers
Association Conference

"Writing Labs: Experience and Experiments"

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis
October 23-24, 1987

Submit your proposal by sending a 150-word abstract for a 20-minute individual presentation or a 50-minute workshop or panel discussion to the address below by May 1, 1987. Please include your name, title, institution, address, and phone number.

Following are possible conference topics relating to writing center administration, practice, or theory: transcending the remedial image; grant writing: methods and grant sources; screening, testing, and placement; writing lab modules: development and use; process vs. product in the writing center; effects of composition research on lab practice.

To receive more information or to submit a proposal, contact

John H. Knight
English Department
Fort Hays State University
Hays, KS 67601
(913) 628-5384

NCTE Northwest Regional Conference

"Greater Expectations: English for Everyone"

Vancouver, B.C.

May 1, 2, 3, 1987

Major literary and educational speakers from Canada, the U.S.A., the U.K., and Australia will be present, as well as local Northwest contributors. For further information, contact

Geoff Madoc-Jones
Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, B.C., CANADA
V5A 1S6
(291-4432 or 291-3395)

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Fourth Annual Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

November 7-8, 1987
Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana

"The Writing/Tutoring Process"

This conference invites peer tutors, professional tutors, and faculty to join together in discussions, workshops, and presentations to share ideas and common concerns about tutoring writing.

We invite 250-word proposals for 75-minute whole panels and workshops or for 20-minute single presentations. Suggestions are also invited for topics for informal discussions and conversations that you would be willing to lead. While proposals on all aspects of tutoring writing will be considered, we particularly invite proposals exploring the conference theme, how the writing and tutoring processes intersect and interact. Peer tutors are particularly encouraged to send in their own proposals or to join in faculty proposals.

Proposal deadline: Postmarked by June 15. Send proposals to Phyllis Lassner. For information about the conference, contact Muriel Harris.

Conference schedule: Nov. 6, evening

registration and informal reception; Nov. 7, 8 a.m.-11 p.m., meals, conference sessions, informal evening reception; Nov. 8, 8 a.m.-1 p.m., breakfast and conference sessions. Registration fee (includes four meals and snacks): $25 per student; $50 per faculty member. Options for inexpensive housing for students will be available, in addition to suggestions for hotel accommodations.

For conference registration, contact Conference Division Registration, Stewart Center, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907.

Conference Co-Chairs:

Muriel Harris
Dept. of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907
(317-494-3723)

(and)

Phyllis Lassner
English Composition Board
1025 Angell, LSA
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
(313-747-4531)

NWCA TO EXAMINE WRITING CENTER ETHICS AT 4C'S

"Ethics and the Writing Center" will be the focus of the National Writing Center Association's Special Interest Group session at the forthcoming Atlanta Conference on College Composition and Communication. The group will meet on Thursday, March 19, from 5:30-6:30 in the Peachtree Way Room of the Westin Peachtree Plaza. Karen Hodges, of the University of Arkansas, will discuss faculty perspectives on writing center ethics. Student perspectives will be presented by Stan Patten and several peer tutors from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In addition, a materials exchange for writing center personnel has been arranged by Bob Child of Purdue University. A wine-and-cheese reception will immediately follow the informal presentations. All are invited to participate; we hope you can attend.

THE ROGUE AND THE TUTOR: A TALE

There once was a Knight Director from the Place of Writing who reigned over a set of goodly tutors, and their names were Calladore, Madeleine, Isadore, and Colette. They were tutors of the noblest sort, giving out good advice and true to all who would hear it. As Merlin was for magic, so were these tutors for heuristics. Faster than you could say, "Dramatistic Pentad," they would call forth ideas of great pith and moment from the simplest of their petitioners. And their powers of prophecy were well known throughout the realm; both for visions and revisions they were unsurpassed. Yet they did not disdain the common labor of a tutor, and would gladly take upon themselves the burden of a baffled basic writer or a budding bibliographer. And in the Conflict Grammatic, they had shown their valor repeatedly, standing bravely before Frags and Awks and Puncs. And even when they had looked, face-to-face, upon the Idiom Idiotic, they had neither grinned nor chagrinned.

But, lo, one day a cloud passed over this brave and merry band. A fair seeming young man approached the Knight Director. He wore the guise of a student, and his colors were McCrimmon Blue and Harbrace Tan.

"Sir, you have wronged me," quoth he.
"Not I," answered this one, "for I never knew thee."
"Are you the master of Isadore?"
"Aye," quoth I.
"Then you have wronged me. For she hath proved a traitor most foul. I came to her heavy with fragments, and these she did promise to mend, and that right speedily. But when I presented my parchment to my mistress, the Lady Flint, she hath discerned in me fragment upon fragment, and she hath let the full weight of my error fall upon me, and now I am undone." And here he wept and cried, "Mercy." But a little later he said, "And when I laid forth my plaint before the Lady Flint, and told her that I had been to the Place of Writing, even then she laid curses upon your head, and said that I was never to seek succour from you again." And so he left me.

Now all this was in the month of December. And my heart melted within me because I wondered if Isadore had denied the Tutor's Creed and had dwelt among us as a wolf among sheep. But, lo, when I searched the Archives, I discovered that the fair seeming young man had visited the Place of Writing in **SEPTEMBER**, and had been there for six minutes and no more. And moreover, I learned, that, of fragments, not a word had been spoken by Isadore; for, as we all know, sense must precede syntax. Then I began to wonder if the fair seeming young man might verily be a rogue.

And so I approached the Lady Flint, only to learn that she was, in truth, Our Lady of Mercy, Friend of the Frosh, Last Refuge of the Refuse. And she, with sweetness, protested that she had ever spoken with the fair seeming young man about this matter: to wit, how he had fared in the Place of Writing. And, although others would have named him Most Foul Miscreant and Errant Knave; she would have him only to be a foolish youth who had yet to learn the ways of wisdom. And so we parted.

And now I stand before you with a tale that is no less true for being a tale. And I would have you take a lesson from my homily, ye knights all: Though all the World should prove False, to your Tutors be True.

David W. Chapman
Texas Tech University

NEWSROOM: SOFTWARE FOR YOUR NEWSLETTER

For writing labs that produce their own newsletters and have an Apple II series, IBM PC, or Commodore computer, there's a software program, Newsroom, to help you design, create, and print out a newsletter with a banner, headlines, two columns of print, and graphics. The easy-to-learn program has over 600 pieces of clip art graphics and 5 different fonts of type to choose from. One minor complication is that while the original price of Newsroom may seem reasonable ($49.95 for the Apple or Commodore program; $59.95 for the IBM PC version), you may be irked when you open the package to find that you'll have to pay an additional $12 for a back up disk. For further information, contact Springboard Software, Inc., 7808 Creekridge Circle, Minneapolis, MN 55435 (612-944-3915).

The Tutor's Corner

As a tutor for the Writing Skills Center at St. Cloud State University (SCSU), I have observed that many students do not make the effort to revise their papers. For them, generating ideas and developing papers are painful. For many beginning writers, writing is analogous to cleaning a cluttered room. Every sentence must be stripped, re-finished, and polished to perfection. Rewriting and retyping are forbidden words and actions: they are time-consuming, inconvenient, and tedious. Other beginning writers have never been taught how to use revision techniques, or they do not have the motivation to rewrite their work.

Through my tutoring experiences thus far, I have discovered that many beginning writers have perfectionistic attitudes. If a first draft is not perfect (flawless), they feel they have failed. They disregard the proverb "Rome was not built in a day," and they forget that any creative endeavor takes time, energy, and persistance to develop and mature into a masterpiece. As tutors, we need to help students over these hurdles by showing them that revision requires patience. We can also encourage students to apply revision strategies by introducing stimulating, challenging, learning environments.

The word processor is the latest innovation for teaching and motivating students to rethink and revise their texts. Word processors make writing fun; they enable students to tinker with language, spend more time experimenting with words, phrases, and ideas. They make effective writing happen as students not only revise more but consciously acknowledge the writing process.

As tutors, we must remember to focus on the positive revisionary characteristics word processors make available. The principle of addition is the most positive characteristic word processors offer as they make adding text easy. The composing process is moved forward instead of backward (deleting), so students gain control over their writing. Negative acts of revision (deleting, replacing) are forced into the background, but they are not ignored. Creating written text is hard work; adding text, instead of retracting ideas, is psychologically easier for writers to cope with and use when they are writing and revising. By using the process of addition, beginning writers, then, view revising with a positive attitude; they take the responsibility for deciding what their revision alternatives are as they control their available choices.

Word processors help students to motivate themselves, slow down, and tackle revision tasks one at a time instead of being over-whelmed by trying to rework several problems simultaneously, especially during final editing. As computers are non-threatening and fun to operate, they alleviate tension writers may experience and allow them to experiment; hence, revision becomes a logical step in the act of committing words to paper.

Tutors can guide students in reducing their errors as well as show students the necessity for revising while working on word processors. Word processors cannot replace tutors or teachers. They can, however, motivate students to satisfy writing tasks such as exploring ideas, rewriting phrases, discovering their writing styles, and inventing final, effective, polished texts.

As the SCSU Writing Skills Center continues to expand and provide more resources to aid writers, a word processor will be brought into our facility. Our WSC staff will encourage students to take word processor composition courses which are already available. By using the word processor in the WSC, students can be guided by tutors in a step-by-step process in which they coordinate students' mechanical operation of the word processor with their writing skills. Our hope is that beginning as well as advanced writers will become intrigued with operating word processors and spending time reworking and fine-tuning their work.

Deborah A. Schmidt
St. Cloud State University
St. Cloud, MN

REVITALIZING CLICHES: A WORKSHOP STRATEGY

Many students sent to the writing lab come with papers marked from start to finish with comments such as "illogical," "grammar error," and "cliche," most of which the students take as proof of their inability to be logical, correct, and original. Our first task as tutors is usually to assure the students that their minds are normal and fully sufficient for learning good writing. Then we proceed to explain the nature of logic and grammar, which is sometimes illogical but at least follows some convention. One of our greatest challenges, however, comes in dealing with cliches. Most handbooks give the trite definition of cliches as "once fresh sayings grown ineffective by overuse." But these handbooks leave untouched the fact that cliches are relative to time, culture, and region.[1] What may be a cliche to the teacher may be completely new to the student. Furthermore, these handbooks usually state (or at least imply) that cliches are bad and should be avoided by all good writers.

As given by most English teachers and handbooks, the standard advice concerning cliches can be boiled down to one simple injunction: avoid overly familiar phrases and sayings. Unfortunately, such advice denies the basic nature of cliches and overlooks the wealth of language lying dormant in them. The following workshop is designed to present a positive alternative for helping students work with cliches. The objective of the workshop is to help students begin writing with the language they know best, and then proceed to use this familiar language as a resource for developing original writing.

Begin the workshop by quizzing students about what they already know about cliches. Supply a working definition, if necessary. Ask them to give examples from daily conversation or television. Talk with them briefly about the value of cliches (such as "Hello, how are you?") in conveying a sense of acceptance and adding a sense of the familiar to communication. Then present them with clever modifications of cliches as used in the advertising world, in newspaper headlines, or in other major forms of writing, such as popular articles or books. If possible, use local examples and present these modified cliches in living color. Slides may be useful when drawing examples from billboards. Here are a few recent examples:

"Let Hormel give you a helping ham."
"Merry Crispness" (a Christmas advertisement for a deep fat frier)
"You can bank on First Federal"
"There's no place like Rome"

After making the students aware of how cliches provide resources for the advertising and publishing world, acquaint them with ways they can recognize cliches and then use them as resources for developing their own writing. To aid cliche recognition, introduce the students to Eric Partridge's A Dictionary of Cliches, 5th ed., Barron's A Diction of American Idioms, and the interviews with Mr. Arbuthnot in Frank Sullivan's A Pearl in Every Oyster. Short examples from these books can be handed out as resources for student writing during the workshop. Don't let the students get bogged down with the fine distinctions between cliches, idioms, and familiar sayings; linguists are still struggling over these distinctions and the boundaries between these classifications are often shifting. For this presentation, just concentrate on taking stale, unoriginal phrasing and transforming it into something new and interesting.

Then present the students with the following techniques for modifying cliches. Since modifying cliches involves re-contextualizing them, the following illustrations present both the cliches and the contexts in which they have been modified.

1. Extending--Take a common saying and expand it. This technique builds action or detail.

Cliche: blind as a bat

Extended Cliche: When Tom removed his thick glasses, he was as blind as a bat in an electrical storm.

Cliche: sober as a judge

Extended Cliche: When Jill, the new sales clerk, was called in for questioning about shop lifting, she was as sober as a judge awaiting trial for bribery.

Note how the expanded versions are more vivid than the old ones, and can contain an element of surprise--a key ingredient of humor.

2. Partially Converting--Use most of a cliche and change a part of it. This modification creates surprise through unexpected replacement of a term or phrase.

Cliche: the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak

Partially Converted Cliche: When two year old Jeffry tried to snap his fingers for the Christmas musical, he found his little fingers couldn't reach the base of his thumb. In truth, the spirit was willing, but the flesh wasn't big enough yet.

Cliche: solid as a rock

Partially Converted Cliche: The stock broker assured me that my investment in Marvel Quilts would be as solid as a cast iron headboard. Unfortunately, the market for quilts cracked, and my investment fell with the down quilts.

These partially converted cliches are memorable for their new use of old sayings and for their touch of humor.

3. Fully Converting--Use the pattern of the cliche to express a new analogy or perspective.

Cliche: "The love of money is the root of all evils."--I Timothy 6:10

Fully Converted Cliche: As Pooh Bear discovered after raiding the bee hive, the love of honey is the root of all tummy aches.

Cliche: "A rose by any other name is as sweet."--Shakespeare

Fully Converted Cliche: Though Andy Bobson missed receiving the Athlete of the Year Award, his unexpected Citizenship Award taught him that a prize by any other name is even more rewarding.

Fully converted cliches retain the rhythm and basic analogy pattern of the cliche, but present a new idea.

4. Inverting--Begin with the familiar phrase and turn its meaning upside down. This modification works best to illustrate irony or paradox.

Cliche: born with a silver spoon in his mouth

Inverted Cliche: Mr. Jones had a promising voice for opera. Unfortunately, he was born with a silver spoon stuck in his throat and never learned to open his mouth without talking about money.

Cliche: "I left my heart in San Francisco"

Inverted Cliche: "People don't leave their hearts in San Francisco; they send them there long before they see its towers and bridges and hills. And we like that just fine." Jon Carroll, "San Francisco," TWA Ambassador, December 1986, p. 33.

Note how this method achieves its effectiveness by defeating the reader's expectations and emphasizing an unexpected fact or event.

5. Punning--Play on the meanings or sounds of words in a saying.

Cliche: "He marches to the beat of a different drummer."--Thoreau

Pun on Cliche: As the weary congregation listened to old Mr. Jones rant his way through another choir anthem, the children agreed that he definitely bleats to the tune of another hummer.

Cliche: having a sound man behind you

Pun on Cliche: As the moderator introduced the female singer, he also lauded her husband's assistance on her sound equipment by quipping, "Isn't it nice to have a good, sound man behind you?"

The challenge in playing with puns is to make meaningful ones. Do caution the students against corniness.

6. Combining--Use two (or more) cliches in combination to add a new twist or expand details. This method is fairly difficult and sometimes involves mixing metaphors, so use it with caution.

Cliches: -being grounded
-up in the air

Combined Cliches: In commenting on her airline company that had recently been grounded due to financial problems and faced an uncertain future, one executive responded, "I think it's funny that an airline that's been grounded can be so much

up in the air."

Cliches: -cool as a cucumber
-in a pickle

Combined Cliches: Though the financial magnate remained as cool as a cucumber, his nonchalance only got him into a bigger pickle with the bankruptcy court judge.

Notice how these combined cliches revitalize language chiefly by reminding the reader about the concrete meanings of the cliches. This is the safest way to cue students about combining cliches.

After introducing the students to these six methods of modifying cliches, have them practice modifying cliches taken from samples of student writing. For each example, be sure to give enough context to guide the students in understanding how to create modifications that enhance meaning while revitalizing the language.

Once the students have begun to catch on to these methods, cue these budding writers about using even modified cliches sparingly. Titles, openings, and closings are usually the best places for using clever turns of language. As a closing to the workshop, you may want to give the students a handout summarizing the concepts introduced in the workshop.[2]

Learning to do something original with familiar phrases takes training, time, and not a little talent. The problem that most young writers have is that they simply stop revising too soon, either out of ignorance of new possibilities or out of fatigue or discouragement. With the aid of this workshop, these neophite writers will at least be given a glimpse of how to move one step closer to creating interesting, purposeful prose by treating cliches as the resources they are. Letting students know that the common language they use has the potential for expressing uncommonly intriguing ideas may be the best news they will hear all semester.

Daven M. Kari
University of Louisville

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[1]For insights on the nature of cliches, I am greatly indebted to Dr. Virgil Lokke, Mr. Jim Weston, and Dr. Kathleen Yancey of Purdue University.

[2]Should you want a copy of a handout to leave with the students, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Writing Lab at Purdue University (West Lafayette, IN 47907) and ask for the one entitled "Revitalizing Cliches." This handout covers the same concepts, but combines partial conversation and complete conversion of cliches into one category.

Jeanette Harris, a member of our newsletter group and past president of the National Writing Centers Association, has co-authored a book with Christine Hult entitled A Writer's Introduction to Word Processing (Wadsworth Publishing Co.). The text includes definitions and explanations of word processing functions; discussions of how to use word processing at each stage of the writing process; emphasis on revising, editing, and proofreading with a word processor; discussions of commercial word processing software and auxiliary programs; and activities and exercises to reinforce computer skills. In all, this is a highly useful text for a computer lab and a valuable addition to a writing lab library's resource materials.

CALL FOR PAPERS: DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

Proposals sought for New York Metropolitan Association for Developmental Education fall conference on October 23, 1987.

The following types of manuscripts are welcome: papers reporting on current issues in developmental education, teaching methodologies, innovative programs, retention, counseling and tutoring, evaluation and assessment, curriculum.

Please forward 3 copies of a one-page abstract and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Ann E. Damiano, Mount Saint Mary College, Newburgh, New York 12550. Deadline for all submissions: June 15, 1987.

Writing and rewriting are a constant search for what it is one is saying.

John Updike

THE MAGIC OF CONFERENCES

When I began my work in the Writing Workshop at Montclair State College, I was not alone. I had already been introduced to Janet Emig, Donald Graves, Donald Murray, and Erika Lindemann, among others, and they remained with me throughout the semester to guide me, challenge me, and encourage me as I conferenced with remedial writers. For example, it was Donald Graves who advised an approach to Mary's problem.

Mary came with her psychology paper. "Can you help me with my writing?" she asked.

"Maybe," I replied. "What seems to be the problem?"

"Spelling," she answered wearily. "I just can't spell. Everytime I hand in a paper, it comes back covered with red marks. Even in psychology. That guy thinks he's an English teacher or something. He even takes points off for stuff like spelling!" Mary shook her head in disgust.

I read through Mary's paper quickly. On the first page alone I noticed eleven spelling errors. Mary and I talked for a minute or two about the content of the paper. Then I focused on the spelling problem. "I want you to correct this paper yourself," I said. Mary's eyes widened and she shook her head. "Everytime you find a word which is misspelled," I continued, "circle it. Then let me see what you've done."

Mary went to work immediately and returned within five minutes. On her first try, Mary had correctly identified all but two of the words which were misspelled. "Good job," I said. "Do you own a dictionary?"

"Yes. It's at the dorm."

"Well, when you get back there, look up all the circled words and correct them. If you can't find a word, ask a friend. Then double-check."

Mary thanked me and left. I, in turn, thanked Donald Graves whose book mentioned a similar approach taken by a first grade teacher in helping a student with spelling (130).

I found working with students during the pre-writing phase of the composing process to be the most exciting. It was delightful to witness the "aha!" that came when students discovered their own solutions to writing problems. A conversation with Henry illustrates this discovery process.

Henry dragged into my office and slumped into a chair. "I'm so depressed," he mumbled.

"About your writing?"

"Yeah," he said. "I have to write a definition of a taxi."

"Why a taxi?"

"That's what my composition group decided. The teacher split us into groups to choose the topic. I wanted 'clown.'"

"Did you ask the group?"

"Yes, but I didn't want to push it. They would have blamed me if they got stuck."

"Oh, I see. So now you can blame them instead."

Henry smiled. "Yeah, I guess. But I hate taxis. I had to take one once, and it was dirty and cost a lot and took forever to pick me up."

"You sound really angry."

"Well, yeah. I really hate taxis! I could write a whole paper about that."

"Why don't you?"

"Hey, I could do that, couldn't I? I could define taxis by telling why I hate them." Henry took out paper and wrote until time for his next class.

This conference with Henry was typical of conferences with many students who claimed "writing blocks." As Donald Graves writes:

> Children don't know what they know. Most learners don't. When we speak, or when someone elicits information from us, it is as informative to the speaker as it is to the listener (138).

Most students seem able to talk themselves out of their dilemma with only minimal guidance. Graves comments further that "the

secret to the short, effective conference is the child's talk" (138). Student talk seems to be the best block-buster.

Several students who visited the Workshop had already progressed through the pre-writing stage. They had written introductions, done research or developed their arguments. However, especially in the writing of critical papers or essays, many students had written themselves into a corner. Todd was such a student.

He had selected two short stories and three poems of Alice Walker's as support for his thesis that Walker's writing emphasizes hopefulness in the midst of social disintegration. His seventeen handwritten pages contained a catchy and concise introduction, which I complimented. The rest, however, was not analysis, but a retelling of one short story. As Todd and I reviewed the various methods of analyzing literature, he began to see the new direction his writing would take. To my surprise he was not discouraged by the prospect of discarding over a dozen pages; rather, he seemed relieved. Helping students like Todd was a challenge. The conferences were always unpredictable. I would ask a question; the student would respond. According to Graves, it is this unpredictability that makes the conference stimulating (119).

Thomas A. Carnicelli suggests several techniques to use during such a conference. He stresses the need for the tutor to read the entire student paper. The skillful tutor then offers encouragement, and through questioning, leads the student into new areas of thinking and writing. Carnicelli also emphasizes the student's preference for specific suggestions from the tutor on how to improve the writing (111-117).

Other students who visited the Workshop during the writing process had organizational problems. Such students sensed that they were repeating themselves, but were unable to locate the root of the problem. With these students, constructing a basic outline helped reveal the repetitions and provided solutions to reorganization. The students were able to look for internal logic and cause/effect relationships within the paper. Lindemann suggests that:

Outlining can also serve revision because, when students outline a draft, they may discover digressions,

inconsistencies, or other organizational problems to work on in subsequent drafts (78).

By far the greatest number of students came to the Workshop at the rewriting or revision stage of their writing. Problems with syntax, punctuation, vocabulary, spelling and proofreading accounted for most of the errors in these student papers. Most students who came with revision problems were not only aware of the extent of their writing problems, but often could recognize specific mistakes. What they lacked was the experience to correct the errors. And what they got was a short lesson dealing with a specific problem which they had encountered in the writing of that paper. Dealing with the problem within the context of the student paper may be the best way both to teach and to reinforce the lesson (Graves, 146). For the student who is already sensitive about writing problems, the privacy of the conference is also important (Carnicelli, 102).

Syntax problems were especially common. Students are unsure of when to stop writing, so add commas and periods randomly. The results are either sentence fragments or comma splices. Either way, the sentences make little sense until the punctuation is removed and the sentences reformed. Lindemann says that "decombining and recombining sentences can help students untangle, tighten, and rewrite sentences too complex for a reader to follow easily" (144).

Both sentence problems and vocabulary difficulties seem to take root in the false assumption that College English is a unique language in which only twenty-word sentences and ten-letter words have value. I have shown students sentences from textbooks and novels to prove that readable sentences can be short. I encourage students to simplify whenever possible. These mistakes, however, do show the struggle for improvement. They are what Emig classifies as "developmental errors" (146).

Mike, having written an essay about mountain climbing, declared that he felt "concorial" when he climbed down.

"Concorial?" I asked. "What is that like?"

"It's like really proud. I conquered the mountain."

Mike decided to substitute the word "proud" for "concorial," although I encouraged him to feel "concorial" about his search for the perfect word.

Students whose final drafts were loaded with typing errors needed practice proofreading. When reading the sentence aloud, a student was likely to read correctly over the error, never seeing the mistake. I tried putting an "x" next to the line with an error and asking the student to locate the problem. It became a game. "I can find six errors in the second paragraph. Can you?" With practice most could find their own mistakes.

Conferences incorporate into the teaching of writing the educational philosophy of individualization. As Emig says, "one writes best as one learns best, at one's own pace" (128). Some students mastered a particular problem in one session, others returned for many weeks before feeling confident about constructing sentences, organizing ideas or using words successfully. All the students, however, seemed to value their writing more as they came to understand the process.

Writing conferences require the teacher to stand aside and let the student do the work. The teacher may provide direction, guidance and encouragement, but ultimately the responsibility rests with the student writer. It is easier to circle mistakes with colored pen than to guide the student to find the errors. However, unlike marking red comments on a paper, the writing conference is fun and often works like a charm.

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ALPHA ARRANGEMENT: NEW WAVE OF HANDBOOKS?

Just as the alphabetical arrangement of the thesaurus moved it from the horse-and-buggy byways to the fast-food interstates, perhaps the alpha-arranged handbook will effect a similar transformation for handbooks. Two cases in point: William Herman's Portable English Handbook: An Index to Grammar, Usage, and the Research Paper, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1986), 444 pages, and Alice Maclin's Reference Guide to English: A Handbook of English as a Second Language, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1987) 486 pages. A casual glance at the Tables of Contents of both resources reveals their similar approach to organization. Herman's book is superficially the more traditional of the two with his first and third sections which treat basic grammar and the research paper done in typical handbook fashion. However, his second section, "An Index to Usage and the Principles of Effective Writing," like the entire content of Maclin's text, is arranged alphabetically. Both books also offer conventional indexes for ready reference to materials not easily found through the alpha approach to the text. Additionally, both offer answer keys in the backs of the books. As one might expect of an ESL resource, Maclin's text makes frequent helpful detours through all possible ramifications of tense, counts and non-counts, and the like. Her illuminating explanations about "confusing choices" alone are worth the price of the book. Hopefully, students already familiar with the use of the dictionary will more readily adapt to using alpha-arranged handbooks such as these than the more traditional versions. In brief, these two books deserve places on the reference shelves of all writing labs!

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MLA BOOKS ON WRITING PROGRAMS

New Methods in College Writing Programs: Theories in Practice. Eds. Paul Connolly and Theresa Vilardi (New York: MLA, 165 pages). Clothbound, $30; paperbound, $16.50.

This collection of twenty-eight essays surveys numerous college writing programs at institutions throughout the country, focusing on the variety of changes taking place in the way writing is taught and learned. Highlighted are successful innovative writing programs which have been renovated within the last five years. In their essays contributors provide a discussion of the history of writing programs, general designs, theoretical assumptions that inform the teaching method(s), staff development, strengths and problems, and distinctive features of the programs. Included is information on peer tutoring, writing centers, writing intensive courses, and evaluation of writing in these programs. This is a valuable resource for the comparative study of writing programs.

Composition and the Academy: A Study of Writing Program Administration. By Carol Hartzog (New York: MLA, 184 pages). Clothbound, $30; paperbound, $16.50.

This examination of various writing programs and how they are being administered draws on a study of writing program administration at forty-one post-secondary institutions. The study discusses the political struggles, issues, and tactics involved in the administration of these programs and also describes the fit between the programs and their institutions. The author's aim is to examine strategies rather than to develop modules that can be followed. Anyone involved in designing, managing, or teaching in campuswide writing programs will find this book useful. Included also is a selected bibliography on composition and writing program administration.