What would you include if asked to write a job listing for a writing lab director? For some people this is not a theoretical question but a pressing necessity. There's a job opening at their college, they are on the recruitment committee, and they have three or--if they are lucky--four days to write a job announcement for a writing lab director (perhaps for a lab not yet started). I recently fielded a phone call from someone in this situation, and he was perplexed. "What kind of person are we looking for?" "What qualifications are necessary?" "Is experience more important than academic studies in rhetoric?" His questions kept coming without a pause. Since such questions are so intriguing, you are hereby invited to consider how you'd answer them if you were to write a job listing for a writing lab director. There are no constraints on making your imaginary announcement either totally serious or the result of some wishful day-dreaming--or pent-up frustration.

I look forward to hearing from you. And, of course, please keep sending your articles, reviews, announcements, queries, names of new members, and those always appreciated yearly donations of $7.50 (in checks made payable to Purdue University, but sent to me) to:

Muriel Harris, editor
Writing Lab Newsletter
Dept. of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

From *The Spectator* of Fairleigh
Dickinson University:
TEACHER COMPETANCY IS
A MATTER OF OPINION
And sometimes a matter of fact.

From The Chronicle of Higher Education
(March 4, 1987)

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN THE BUDGET IS ZERO?

What do you do when the budget is zero? Perhaps you have never faced that situation. But we have. A few years ago at Gonzaga University, our students reflected the statements in A Nation at Risk (p.8), issued in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education:

Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.

The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) demonstrate a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980. Average verbal scores fell over 50 points and average mathematics scores dropped nearly 40 points.

College Board achievement tests also reveal consistent declines in recent years in such subjects as physics and English.

At the same time, the English Department implemented a three year grant assisting professors in diverse disciplines to develop writing components for their courses. Writing was the center of our concern because it was at the center of our curriculum, and because most professors demanded carefully crafted papers. But many students needed help--especially entering freshmen who had not been exposed to the rigor of clear thinking or fine writing. The entire educational process suffered as professors struggled to maintain classes on a university level and some students struggled to learn pre-college skills.

The budget, however, was zero. But undaunted and with Gonzaga's century-old history of "people helping people," we have built an effective program.

Seven years ago, the Writing Lab, as

such, did not exist. But several days a week in a cubby hole in the English Department, generous English majors helped students who stopped by. This year, however, in a small room across the hall, probably a thousand tutorial sessions will be held as writers discuss their papers with available tutors.

Low keyed but effective, and built on personal interaction, the Writing Lab has become a refuge and a center for improving writing. Poorer students, especially, seek the understanding and encouragement found there; juniors, seniors, and graduate students, however, form a substantial part of the clientele.

So how does this simple service accomplish so much? Mostly with intense commitment and cooperation. Because writing is integral to our curriculum, students must develop competence. And as you know, this demand for proficiency is more easily stated in the Core Curriculum than attained in the classroom. So freshmen seek help with composition papers, and upperclass students and graduates want term papers critiqued and short essays discussed. And the Writing Lab is the place!

What are the factors in our success? I would like briefly to touch on several: tutors, schedules, focus, and spin-offs.

First, the tutors. They include English majors, upperclass students, education majors, law students, work study recipients, and volunteers. English faculty and advisors encourage good writers to work in the Lab, work study students interview for positions, energetic students volunteer, and sometimes we beat the bushes! English majors may earn one credit one semester with an independent practicum. And all tutors must meet two criteria: 1) have an expertise in writing and know the basics and 2) have an empathetic understanding and acceptance of students seeking help. Personal concern of the tutors often clears the way for effective learning and seems to be the potent factor in our successful story.

Training sessions held regularly each semester review the basic skills and the procedures for analyzing writing. Usually the Director of Lower Division English assists in giving these mini-training sessions held every few weeks. Problems

encountered by the tutors also become the agenda for these classes. And "casual" training occurs when tutors themselves share techniques and strategies for the day-to-day tutors. The overhead in dollars is zero, but the cost in time, concern, and commitment is high.

Next, the Writing Lab Schedule must be built around tutors' class schedules, and this arrangement poses a problem every semester. However, juggling tutor schedules enables the Lab to be open 35 to 40 hours a week, daily from nine until five. Students drop in at all hours and usually on their own initiative. Appointments may be made at any time.

Tutorial assistance centers on four main areas: STRUCTURE, including introductions, paragraphing, and conclusions; CONTENT, including insufficient data, illogical thinking, and wordiness; SENTENCES, including fragments, run-ons, and variety; and MECHANICS, including punctuation, capitalization, and other mechanical devices. Students are directed to focus on main problems in their writing and to choose the agenda for their conference. Some need only a reader to assist with logical development or transitions. Some seek assistance with mechanical item while others want to vary sentences, eliminate wordiness, or follow suggestions given by a professor.

The Writing Lab does not offer a proofreading service and we strive to maintain this stance--otherwise tutors end up putting in commas just before the final deadline arrives! Nor is the Lab a remedial room based on pre-tests, post-tests, and incremental components. Rather, it is a place where writers can share their work, ask questions, re-write, and receive needed assistance. Perhaps experts would call the whole process peer tutoring or collaborative learning. Each semester the bond between tutors and students grows while the poor writers gain confidence and skill and the average writers develop proficiency.

Because the Writing Lab is a happy place where people volunteer to work and where students volunteer to go, the spin-offs are many. Student-clients receive the most. Helped by other writers who care, they gain a sense of their worth and freedom to talk about their writing problems. Tutors have a sense of achievement, grow in human rela-

tions, and often see their own writing improve. Student teachers gain a practical knowledge of strategies in the one-to-one teaching. Professors see the Lab as an extension of their classroom and welcome assistance in the tedious conferencing that often consumes a disproportionate number of precious office hours.

Again, with little equipment, small staff, and minimal space, the Writing Lab seems to succeed through the individualized instruction and personal concern given there. Writing is seen as a cooperative venture, when a tutor listens and offers positive reinforcement. And most of all, students with a weak background in writing and nowhere to turn find a warm reception as well as assistance in their struggle to write.

Last spring, a member of the accrediting team from NCATE discovered our Writing Lab and returned three times during the week, bringing other members of the team to watch the one-to-one conferences, to interview the tutors, and to discuss our procedures. The visitors were amazed at the rapport among students and tutors and the excellent work being done--and wondered why we had not advertized our phenomenal success.

So from a cubby hole to an organized Lab, we continue to support our commitment to fine writing. Recently the English Department, with the approval of the Dean of Arts and Sciences, decided to broaden the scope of the Writing Lab. Next semester we will install word processors and establish a program for self-editing. Other departments in the university will be involved in this endeavor. But we hope never to lose the effective program we now have--especially the individual assistance given to individual students--"people helping people."

Phyllis M. Taufen
Gonzaga University
Spokane, Washington

"QUICK FIX" VS. "INSTRUCTION"

As Muriel Harris noted in the February 1987 issue of the Writing Lab Newsletter, grammar hotlines "dole out 'quick fix' answers, not instruction." These words are not only true but disheartening to those of us who provide the hotline service.

The Academic Support Center of Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, has been a member of the national grammar hotline for three years. During this time we have averaged seven calls per day per staff person. Overall, the experience has been enjoyable and positive. However, many negatives also exist when this service is available.

On the positive side, Cedar Crest College has received nationwide publicity from the hotline through various forms of the media-- radio interviews, television news coverage, and newspaper syndication with national press syndicates. The majority of the callers are pleased to have a "quick fix" and indicate their satisfaction verbally as well as in written form through correspondence sent to the College president.

However, Muriel Harris' remark, "we are reinforcing that image of a band-aid clinic," is true in some circumstances. Unfortunately, some callers do not want explanations or rationale. They only want answers. Moreover, they want answers immediately and not always to simple questions or even to grammar questions. Patrons want Latin and French translations, answers to Trivial Pursuits questions, and names of Karate hardware to cite just a few of the requests.

The common questions--the difference between "who and whom," "affect and effect," "lie and lay"--are guaranteed, daily inquiries. Some callers never want an explanation and let our staff know immediately. Others call two or three times a day while some save their questions and then request seven or more answers during one conversation.

Naturally, a number of people think our full-time employment is answering grammar/ etiquette/weather/punctuation/spelling/ translation questions, and they never realize we are working with students at the same time we are answering a hotline question. However, a positive aspect of this situation is that the student in the office at the time of the phone call hears the explanation; sometimes students answer the question when they hear me repeat it. In this way, both caller and student participate and learn, I hope. In addition, many callers ask us for the names of reference

works we consult so they, too, may purchase copies.

As educators, we realize assessment is difficult. To measure the educational impact on our clients is impossible. Therefore, as all educators do, we try to answer questions correctly and professionally. We hope our clients are receptive to our "instruction," understand the explanations, and are not victims of the "quick fix."

Karen W. Coleman
Cedar Crest College
Allentown, Pennsylvania

PROPOSAL FOR CCCC 1988

The National Writing Centers Association is now in the process of developing a proposal for next year's CCCC. Instead of the usual format, we envision a round table type discussion which will be based on a student paper, selected because it raises a variety of problemmatic issues, and distributed to everyone. The issues generated by the paper will then be addressed by three panel members, followed by general discussion by everyone. The issues for discussion will be as follows:

    the pedagogical perspective
    the ethical perspective
    the perspective of relevant composition
      research

We expect that the discussion will be heated and that the session will be lively.

Anyone interested in participating in this session either as a panelist, a respondent, or as coordinator of the materials table should contact:

Irene Clark, Writing Center Director
Freshman Writing Program HSS Annex 201
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0062

TRAINING MANUAL AVAILABLE

HARVARD UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER TRAINING MANUAL, by Chad Allen and Greg Lichtenberg, is a fifty-page manual, written by two undergraduate Writing Center staff members. The manual covers the basic infor-

mation any new staff member will need in meeting students and conducting conferences. To order, please send a check for $6.00 made payable to Harvard University. Mail your order to:

Linda Simon
Director, The Writing Center
Harvard University
12 Quincy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Sorenson, Sharon. The Student's Guide to Writing Better Compositions (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1986), 201 pp., $7.95 (paper).

Sorenson, Sharon. Everyday Grammar and Usage: Simplified and Self-Taught (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1985), 124 pp., $4.95 (paper).

Sharon Sorenson, a long-standing member of our newsletter group and founder and director of the Writing Lab at Central High School (Evansville, Indiana) has written two books that belong on the resource shelf of every writing lab, particularly those in high schools. The Student's Guide to Writing Better Compositions was written for all high school and junior- or technical-college students who want to write better essays in any subject. It's an invaluable guide which explains in clear, jargon-free prose, how to vary sentences for interest and emphasis, how to develop paragraphs by eight different methods, how to formulate an effective thesis for a three- to five-paragraph paper, and how to outline and draft a well-organized essay. There are useful checklists, realistic examples with analyses in the margins, and a wealth of exercises throughout the book. Since the answers follow each exercise on the same page, students can easily check their answers and get quick feedback. Everyday Grammar and Usage is designed as a self-study book and covers the major parts of speech, parts of the sentence, matters of usage, and punctuation. Simple, clear explanations and plenty of examples help students move easily through this valuable review. The only problem with these books is that, like any truly useful resource, they will tend to disappear off the shelf. Be sure to order spares. (Write to Prentice Hall Press, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 200 Old Tappan Road, Old Tappan, NJ 07675 or call 1-800-223-2336.)

The Tutor's Corner

FOR NEXT YEAR

Toward the end of last semester, the director of our Writing Center asked us tutors what we had learned about working in the Writing Center and what we could write down to help next year's tutors. I wanted to respond because my tutoring has totally changed since my first summer as a tutor two years ago.

First, I would engrave on the wall in front of my face: we are here to teach and not to correct. Some of us this semester are still proofreading and copyediting, but I find myself more and more reluctant to do this. I just worked with someone who has a severe spelling problem, and I found myself trying to give him hints about how to deal with it. I pointed out that he had a problem with adding endings. What a distance from two years ago when I virtually edited three dissertations by foreign students--for free! (Mechanical engineering no less!)

Second, I would make sure before I start tutoring that the student knows I will not write. I've always liked the advice of a fellow tutor that you should give the pencil to the student. I've never been able to do it, but I think the theory is sound.

Next, I would make sure that I listen. What does the student want? What is the student worried about? I think I probably wouldn't have gotten into as many fights with students if I'd listened more carefully and realized that they needed to let off steam or that they were worried about something besides what I was talking about.

I have tried to do what our director suggested: "have each student write something in front of you," but too often rely on having them tell me. It's quite different to write it down. When they write and get stuck, then I get them to talk and afterwards write more. I would try to do more of that.

Last, I would try to make sure I give them at least two suggestions (so they can choose) about how to approach their writing at home. When I analyze and let them leave, I think we both feel that they can't do any-thing at home by themselves. I feel like I've cut them adrift without a life pre-server. But if I say, "Try this or this or this," they seem to go out with more confidence.

I think that this change in my tutoring--from re-writing to interpreting, asking and suggesting--has benefited the students and me. Students, if they are not totally astonished and infuriated after finding out that I expect them to think and write, usually feel much more powerful; they can revise their own papers, not just offer them up as limp sacrifices to tutors or professors. I too feel much more powerful; I am no longer at the mercy of three masters: the students, their professors, and my own perfectionism. I can save my perfectionism for my own papers, and as for the students and the demands of their professors, I can always fall back on that most blessed of all tutors' questions: What are you trying to say?

Virginia Sickbert
Peer Tutor
SUNY--Stony Brook

COMPUTER PROGRAMS AVAILABLE

Two programs, STYLED and STYLLIST, analyze texts and report several patterns: long words, punctuation, structure words, forms of TO BE, and nominalization. STYLED uses screen graphics; STYLLIST reports to a disk file which one may window when editing.

STYLED and STYLLIST help writers edit for strong verbs and clear agency. The manual not only documents how to use the programs but also tells what's at stake in the analysis.

The programs and the manual come on a disk for IBMs and compatibles. They require MS-DOS version 2.1 or higher. Download from any of several electronic bulletin boards; or send $5 to cover cost of disk and air mail from Louie Crew, Director of the Writing Program, Chinese University, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong. Do not sell, but freely copy and give the disk to anyone who wants it.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE WRITING CENTER:
DO WE NEED IT?

Traditionally in writing centers, we have relied on what we do best and what we know works: one-to-one tutoring. Recently, however, a number of technological innovations--audio tapes, video tapes, and computers--have found their way into the writing center. Can any of these new technologies really improve upon or complement an approach that emphasizes individualized instruction? I ask this question not only out of my general interest in writing lab instruction, but also because I have recently been involved in an assessment of the writing center at Indiana University. For twenty-five years, this writing center has operated on a one-to-one tutorial basis, and the instructional tools available to the staff have consisted, for the most part, of traditional materials such as rhetorics, handbooks, and locally-prepared handouts, but none of the newer materials based on audio, video, or computer technology. The practical question that arose out of the assessment, therefore, was whether our writing center should acquire any of the more recently introduced materials based on new technological innovations.

To find out which technological innovations are really useful in a writing lab setting, I decided to consult directors of writing centers who had tried these instructional tools. By conducting telephone interviews, I was able to talk with writing center directors about a range of concerns, one of which was their use of and feelings about some of the aids to writing center instruction. Although only twelve institutions were contacted, they include community colleges and universities from various geographical locations. The directors I spoke to were: Joan Kotker (Bellevue Community College), Marian Arkin (Laguardia Community College), Rick Straub (Ohio State University), Muriel Harris (Purdue University), Jeanette Harris (Texas Tech University), Thom Hawkins (University of California at Berkeley), Judy Collas (University of California at Los Angeles), Don Cruikshank (University of Illinois at Urbana), Deborah Keller-Cohen (University of Michigan), Krys Kornilowics (University of Minnesota), Bradley Hughes (University of Wisconsin at Madison), and Joyce Kinkead (Utah State University). By informing me about their experiences with audio tapes, videos, and computers, these directors have given me some insights into the recent introduction of technology to the writing center.

Even though the ready availability of self-instructional audio tapes promises to solve the problems of centers, such as our own, which find themselves unable to accommodate all the students who seek one-to-one tutorial instruction, nearly all of the directors I spoke with who have used audio tapes expressed some reservations about them. Six of the twelve schools (Bellevue, Laguardia, Purdue, U.C. Berkeley, U.C.L.A., Wisconsin, and Utah) have centers in which audio tapes are available. Most of the directors at these schools, however, spoke about using the tapes "sparingly." Those who use audio tapes tend to employ them primarily with ESL students who need practice in English usage and grammar. But other lab directors are reluctant to endorse even this limited use of audio tapes, believing that all of the tapes are "pretty dismal" or "not pedagogically sound." The centers that have audio tapes, then, tend either to use them in only a few special cases, such as with ESL students, or not to use them at all. Interestingly, Muriel Harris (Purdue) pointed out that it is difficult to judge how many students actually benefit from audio tapes because "there's not much interaction with students using taped instruction."

Writing centers have not been using video tapes as long as they have been using audio tapes, but nevertheless the centers with video equipment reported more positive results. Although video tapes are apparently not being used widely for instruction, they might, I think, have some potential value in helping students understand their writing processes. For example, if we video-taped students while they were composing, we could give them the opportunity to watch and analyze themselves as writers. But video equipment is more often used to help train tutors than to provide instruction in writing. Wisconsin uses video tapes as part of its training program for new teaching assistants, and four of the seven centers that have peer tutoring programs (Laguardia, Purdue, U.C. Berkeley,

and U.C.L.A.) include video taping as a component of their training of peer tutors. Typically, in undergraduate tutoring programs, experienced tutors tape a tutoring session, using the film to discuss tutoring techniques with new peer tutors. At the U.C. Berkeley lab, tutoring sessions and workshops are taped and then analyzed by tutees as well as tutors. The assumption, apparently, is that tutees can help their peers be better tutors and that, by discussing a video-taped tutoring session, tutors and tutees can learn to work together more successfully. Concerning this training Thom Hawkins explained that it has become "next in importance to personal contact for training" at Berkeley. Although only four of the directors I spoke with use video, all of them agreed that it can help in the training of peer tutors.

Undoubtedly, the most strongly endorsed and widely used new machine in writing centers is the computer. Ten of the twelve directors interviewed indicated that their students have access to computers either in separate computer labs or in their own writing centers. The writing centers at Bellevue, Purdue, U.C. Berkeley, U.C.L.A., Wisconsin, and Utah have all acquired their own computers, and some of these labs are experimenting with software designed to enable students to work independently on particular aspects of writing (grammar, punctuation, vagueness, or usage, for example). Other labs are using software designed to help students work on generating ideas for papers. The Purdue writing lab has been experimenting with a number of the linguistic, heuristic, and text-editing programs, sharing their results via the software reviews published in The Writing Lab Newsletter, a practice which is helpful to those of us contemplating the purchase of software packages.

The most popular use of the computers, though, is word processing. All of the centers with access to computers use word processing software. Those centers with their own computers often set up "open hours" during which a tutor/computer consultant is on duty. While these centers are surely providing a service to their schools, they don't deny that open hours also work as "bait" to lure in students who might not otherwise consider visiting the lab. Some centers also use word processing as part of writing center courses. Bradley Hughes uses the University of Wisconsin's

fifteen interlocked IBM computers and video network in teaching some of the thirty short classes offered by the Wisconsin lab. What interested me the most about the Wisconsin writing center, however, was Hughes' emphasis on integrating word processing into the one-to-one tutorial process. By having tutees work on computers before, during, and after regularly scheduled tutoring sessions, Hughes has developed several methods for extending conference time. All of these methods focus on the student's actual writing, and ideally, after several sessions, control of the computer is gradually transferred from the tutor to the student. (For a complete description of his methods of incorporating computers into the tutorial process, see: Bradley Hughes, "Extending the Dialogue: Microcomputers in the Writing Lab," paper presented to the Midwest Writing Center Association, St. Louis, October 1985.) Computers, it seems, have quickly become standard equipment at most writing centers.

To sum up, writing labs seem to use audio tapes, which are designed for self instruction, either sparingly or not at all. Video analysis, which I think has some potential to be incorporated into the tutorial process, is now being used to train undergraduate students to conduct one-to-one sessions with their peers. The computer, which is by far the most widely used and enthusiastically endorsed new technology, obviously opens up new opportunities for writing centers, but the computer's primary function, at least in the writing centers I contacted, is word processing, a function that is being integrated into one-to-one tutorials. Do we need technology in the writing center? My answer, one that seems to be reflected by the practices and opinions of the directors I interviewed, ironically, is that we need most those "high tech" instructional tools that complement what we have traditionally emphasized--individualized instruction.

Pat Slattery
Indiana University

NETWORKING COMPUTERS AT THE
LEARNING CENTER

When we received a New Jersey "Computers in Curricula" grant at our Learning Center on the Madison campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University, we planned to network fifteen IBM PCs using an IBM AT and XT and an IBM Local Area Network. When we wrote the grant, we were excited about the possibilities of sharing disks, directories, and printers on a network, but we weren't sure what unforeseen difficulties were in store for us with a network. We received some dire warnings concerning the state of the art in LAN, including predictions of expensive repair bills and difficulties in operating a complex system in a university setting.

After a semester's operation, we can report that we have had no massive equipment failure. Actually, the majority of the expense with a network is tied up in network program cards, which are no riskier than any other cards, such as cards for graphics or printers. An individual network program card may be defective (and hopefully stop working before the warranty expires), but there is little likelihood that the complete network will go down. Of course, disk drives can go bad, or keyboards can lose functions, but these failures can happen with or without a network.

The warnings against the complexities of a network in a Learning Center environment are more pertinent to our experience. With fifteen or more student operators and writing specialists responsible for running the network at different times, keeping the Learning Center computer room open over seventy hours a week resulted in occasional chaos. Conscientious operators, who were striving to master the intracacies of the network and the word processors, were overburdened with petty difficulties, and students became overly anxious that papers might be devoured by that monster called "the network." However, we learned from our mistakes and started the new school year with a set of procedural policies that we hope will guarantee a successful year for students, operators, and writing specialists at the Learning Center.

When we first set up the network, we decided to offer a choice of word processors. We kept an old favorite from previous years of stand-alone computers at the Learning Center and added the word processor being used by instructors in the Freshman Writing Workshop. The "old favorite" was copy protected; the other word processor was not.

The copy-protected word processor required that a "key" diskette be placed in the A-drive of each machine, a scheme that defeated our dream of a computer environment free from floppy disks. Worse than that, however, the copy-protected word processor would freeze the entire network if the number of files being shared exceeded a predetermined limit.

We quickly learned, with the help of an IBM network consultant, how to fine tune the network to prevent the freeze-up, but not before several students' papers were lost on a busy night in the computer room just before final week, and not before several student operators endured the intense pressure of fifteen panic-stricken students faced with the loss of valuable papers. This unfortunate episode, which continued through an extremely busy week, undermined many students' budding faith in computers as helpful tools in writing.

Our remedy for this situation has been to retire the copy-protected word processor this year. The unprotected word processor runs without the "key" diskette at each machine, and it runs without glitches on the network. As more software is made specifically for a network environment, difficulties such as we experienced will disappear. However, if we have occasion to buy software again, we will insist upon a demonstration, on our own network, of any software we are considering.

The best guide through the pitfalls of networking and networked software is a good network consultant. A computer sales representative is not particularly the expert you need, although he or she may be a source of information. Hopefully, the company who sells you the network will supply the network consultant. If possible, talk to the consultant before you buy the system. We dealt with several consultants within the company we bought from before we found one who not only is an expert with our

particular network, but also is willing to come to our computer room to help get rid of glitches, is happy to give advice over the telephone, and is creative in adapting software to our particular network environment.

Networks are new, and small problems will develop that can only be solved on an individual basis. Our consultant said that he tried running workshops on general network knowledge, but he discovered that each customer's problems are so unique that general workshops have little value.

In the first semester that our computer room was in operation, we were plagued by the "word of mouth" syndrome. Network manuals, and even the manuals for word processors, are lengthy and difficult to use as a quick reference source. While we were evolving our operating rules for the Learning Center computer room, it was difficult to write our own operations manual. Therefore, student operators and writing specialists were often reduced to explaining the simplest procedure (such as the End of File message that must be sent to a network printer before it will begin printing) many, many times rather than having a written source for students to refer to.

This year we have copies of manuals we have produced ourselves at strategic points in the computer room. One manual is a tutorial for a newcomer to the computer room. It takes new students from putting their computer on the network to printing a hard copy of their completed paper. Another manual is a quick reference source for the network and the word processor. Yet another manual has been developed specifically for student operators. Our policies and procedures are set in print this year and cannot be changed so easily as when they were first being evolved.

Another important policy decision we made for this year is limiting our guarantee for technical expertise to word processing only. Our grant was written for computers to be used in the Learning Center's model for writing, helping students to write more freely and with greater enthusiasm for editing, and we are eager to keep the computer room centered around the writing process. However, we found that our computer room attracted many basic programming students and students working on Lotus or other programs they brought into the computer room with them. This is fine for

stand-alone computers, but on a network each new software application is bound to have one or two quirks with printing or saving that must be worked out before the application will run. Student operators cannot be expected to handle idiosyncrasies of this sort. This year we have curtailed outside software applications, and we made clear from the beginning that, while basic programmers will not be turned away during open time, they cannot expect student operators or writing specialists to solve their technical difficulties or help them with their programs. Our computer room is dedicated to teaching writing on word processors.

Other factors are at work this year to make our students more knowledgeable concerning word processing. Several writing classes are being taught on word processors, using the same word processor that we have in the Learning Center. Freshmen in basic skills writing classes are required to come to the Learning Center for writing labs that are being taught on the computers. The Learning Center offers weekly seminars on the basics of word processing.

As students become more knowledgeable with word processing and as student operators become more proficient in running the network, writing specialists and writing peer tutors have more time to concentrate on the writing process rather than on word processing, and that's where we want the emphasis to be. The network offers exciting possibilities, not only in sharing peripherals, but in peer collaboration in small-group lab settings as well. We took one semester to harness our network, and now we are ready to see how effectively we can make it work.

Sharon Sweeney
Fairleigh Dickinson
University-Madison

Review

Rose, Mike, ed. When a Writer Can't Write. New York: Guilford, 1985, 272 pp., $30 (hardcover), $15 (paper).

The contributers to the anthology, When a Writer Can't Write, edited by Mike Rose, raise important questions shared by most of

us who teach writing in classrooms or tutor in labs. Why, they ask, do some people write fluently while others become stymied when they compose? What, in fact, is writer's block? What cognitive, affective, and social-contextual variables contribute to blocking? And what causes general apprehension towards writing for many people? The authors try to answer these questions, and many of their insights are especially valuable for writing lab tutors, whose tutees are often those students troubled by some form of writer's block, whether it be fear of composing, confusion over what to say, difficulties with planning or revising, or some other psychological impediment which prohibits them from thinking coherently.

One word of caution about the book first. Most of the findings and conclusions drawn in the essays are based on qualitative-descriptive studies. The majority of the researchers conducted case studies to identify variables which affect blocking and to describe writing process behaviors of people who have difficulty composing. Almost all the investigations involved small populations, often just one or two subjects. So the warning here is for readers not to generalize beyond the writers in these studies. In fact, what the researchers impress upon us is the idiosyncratic nature of writer's block. For us tutors in the lab, this only confirms what we know already to be true-- that each writer's strengths and weaknesses are his or her own and must be accepted and treated as such. The researchers should be commended for acknowledging this and for being careful themselves not to make invalid generalizations from their results about all writers.

In his article, "Blocking and the Young Writer," Donald Graves deals with primary-grade students, but we can still learn from what he has to say about the nature of writer's block and possibly ask ourselves what implications it has for tutoring. Graves says, "Children grow as writers because they solve problems in composing"(17). Writer's block actually develops out of children's growth as writers. Moreover, he says, blocking occurs in stages: Young students initially are confused about the use of conventions and mechanical problems; over time, they move beyond these blockages to ones involving higher-level cognitive functions such as topic selection, audience and revision. Graves stresses the point that writing blocks are

nothing to worry about. As if he were a pediatrician consoling parents about the development of their child, he tells us that blocking is a natural part of growth. Yet, despite its inevitability, parents and teachers are extremely important in providing a supportive, nurturing environment for students as they experience these transitional periods. We need to help them in these times of imbalance, when their intentions and performance do not match up. As tutors, one of our greatest concerns is how to be better facilitators of growth. We, as Graves suggests, must help our students build the confidence needed to move beyond their difficulties and reassure them that these problems are only a natural part of growing as a writer.

Mike Rose tells us that writer's block results from several factors. Cognitive style, the individual differences in the way people think, is one influence. Another, which is just as important as and inseparable from cognitive processes, is the writer's attitudes and feelings about things like assignments, topics, and teaching methods. Lastly, Rose emphasizes that we cannot overlook all the social-contextual variables--familial, institutional, and cultural--which come to bear, in varying degrees, on writers every time they compose.

Focusing on one of these social contexts, that of the academic institution, David Bartholemae argues that we as a community of educators esteem certain kinds of discourse which many students are not yet aware of or comfortable with. We fault students, for instance, for not knowing the conventions of literary, historical, sociological, or biological texts, instead of giving them time to practice using the language in these fields. As writing center tutors, we need to be aware of this disparity between students' language and that of the academic discipline in which they are writing, and perhaps we can assist students in meeting the language expectations of particular discourse communities.

Examining the correlations between cognitive and emotional processes, Larson Reed performed case studies of high school students writing long term papers. He found in his preliminary observations that students who could internally regulate their cognitive and emotional processes enjoyed writing more, could maintain their attention level while writing the paper, and wrote more

successful papers than students who were "overaroused" or "underaroused." These two categories of writers suffered from different types of writer's block. Over-aroused writers tended to be nervous and agitated, and disliked what they produced. These students began the assignment with high expectations for what they hoped to accomplish but found they could not meet their goals. They ended up being distracted throughout the writing process, and their papers were often fragmented and filled with repetitions because they were afraid to say new things.

Underaroused writers, on the other hand, became apathetic and disinterested in their writing. These students' abilities exceeded the demands of the task. They became bored with their topics after they had completed the initial research and notetaking, and writing the paper became merely a mechanical procedure; they just wanted to get it over with.

As tutors we constantly meet students who resemble these in Reed's study. Possibly we are in a better position to detect how a student is reacting to an assignment--feelings and behaviors a classroom teacher may not notice until it's too late. We can give students feedback, which Reed says is very important in maintaining a positive attitude. We might also help students choose topics that do meet their ability levels, so they don't end up either frustrated or bored.

Case studies were also the method used by Stan Jones to investigate those whom he calls "monitor overusers and underusers," people with composing problems writing in a non-native language. He relies on "monitor theory," Stephen Krashen's distinction between language acquisition (an unconscious process) and language learning (a conscious process) to distinguish two types of writers. Jones found that his one subject, Lianna, who learned rules of grammar and who relied on them to carefully monitor the writing she produced, spent an excessive amount of time stopping before thought units. She also took much time checking her sentences after writing them. Both pauses inhibited a steady flow of thought. Catrina, another subject, however, acquired a second language by using it, not by memorizing its rules. She wrote more fluently, not stopping often to rethink what she had said. What is interesting is that Jones

discovered no qualitative differences in the writing of the two women. Furthermore, it seemed that knowing grammar rules actually had a detrimental effect on a second-language user causing a special type of writer's block.

Finally, Muriel Harris demonstrates how protocol analysis (the analysis of thinking-aloud reports given by students as they write) is a useful tool for diagnosing writing process problems in the writing center. As Harris points out, each writer's problems are idiosyncratic, and sometimes the teaching of general writing strategies in classrooms does not satisfy the needs of every student in those classes. For example, Harris relates the protocol of one student, Beth, who used outlines only to check if she had forgotten to include something in her papers. She hadn't, however, thought of using outlines to help her organize her ideas. Her essays, as a result, were often incoherent. Harris discovered through the analysis of Beth's protocol, moreover, that Beth lacked strategies for effectively re-reading her essays looking for structure of ideas.

Although there is much debate over the use of protocol analysis as an investigative method, Harris shows us how it can be used successfully and meaningfully to detect individual writer's problems. She admits that it cannot reveal everything going on inside of a student's head, but it is one way of identifying stumbling blocks in writing processes. It is important to note that protocols do not lead to labeling of students. It is a way, in fact, to avoid making assumptions about what help students need when they come to the writing center.

Other writers included in the book range from John Daly and Cynthia Selfe discussing writing apprehension to Donald Murray defending one form of writer's block as an "essential delay" experienced by many good writers when they juggle many ideas and concepts at once.

If there is anything commonly expressed by the writers in the anthology, it is that writing is not easy. They are all sensitive to the complexities of writing and the cognitive-emotional demands placed on people when they brave this complicated process.

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SHOULD WRITING LAB CONFERENCES
BE REQUIRED FOR COMPOSITION STUDENTS?

Of the many comments we're likely to hear in a writing center, perhaps the most vexing come from juniors or seniors who say, "If only we'd known about this place before . . ." Such comments imply that all our publicity activities--all those flyers, newspaper ads, and presentations--have gone for naught.

Here at Oregon State, we engage in all of those publicity activities, well aware that part of our problem is our physical loca- tion, as well as the historical orientation of our campus. The lab is housed in a building with virtually no classrooms, and therefore almost no walk-through traffic. In addition, O.S.U. is a land-grant institu- tion with an historically agricultural and scientific orientation and, as yet, no writing-across-the-curriculum program. Thus, students who use the Writing Lab are those who have made a conscious and informed decision to do so, based on their prior knowledge of the Lab's existence.

In an effort to reach students early in their college careers, we approached English Department writing faculty in order to esta- blish a more formal relationship with WR 121 (Composition) students. WR 121 is the sole university-wide graduation requirement; hence, reaching these students would put us in contact with the widest possible range of majors. We hoped that this early contact with the Writing Lab might well result in continued use by these students.

Quite apart from addressing any Writing Lab visibility problems, some schedule of repeated Writing Lab usage would also, we felt, be a useful pedagogical strategy. We hoped that students required to receive response to work-in-progress would start writing earlier. We felt that the inter- change with a trained and experienced student-writer might result in a more directed and efficient revision process. We believed such visits would add another layer of concern for good writing, reinforcing the instructor's own. And finally, we hoped such visits might also act to further acquaint student writers with the conven- tions and expectations of the college writing discourse community.

As a result of our memo to English Department faculty, we established a formal relationship with two composition sections taught by the same instructor during the spring quarter, 1986. It was agreed that as a part of the general course requirements, students in these sections would be required to make weekly appointments in the Writing Lab. Lab staff would keep track of these student visits, and the lab notes would be part of the materials considered by the instructor in awarding final grades. We also decided to survey these students in order to determine their feelings about the usefulness of their lab conferences. The survey was distributed during the eighth week of the quarter; at that point, students should have made six or seven lab visits. Survey questions and results are presented below.

Total Enrolled in the 2 sections: 51
Total responses: 46

1. Had you heard of the Writing Lab before enrolling in this course?

Yes: 26%
No: 74%

2. When first told that Writing Lab appointments were required this term, what was your response?

Positive: 13%
Neutral: 63%
Negative: 24%

3. How many times did you meet with a Writing Assistant?

2 times or less: 11%
3-5 times: 27%
6 or 7:   48%
more than 7:   11%

4. Did you work with the same Writing Assistant each time, or with several different Assistants over the course of the term?

Mostly with one: 67%
With several: 33%

5. How often were Writing Assistants' comments useful to you as you worked towards the final drafts of your papers?

Comments always useful: 31%
Comments often useful: 33%
Comments sometimes useful: 33%
Comments rarely useful: 2%

6.   What did you work on during your Writing Lab conferences?

Brainstorming
        Always: 2%
        Often: 18%
        Sometimes: 25%
        Rarely: 55%

Revising an early draft
        Always: 27%
        Often: 33%
        Sometimes: 33%
        Rarely: 7%

Revising a later draft
        Always: 9%
        Often: 30%
        Sometimes: 37%
        Rarely: 23%

Checking specific sentences for errors in grammar/spelling/punctuation
        Always: 34%
        Often: 16%
        Sometimes: 23%
        Rarely: 27%

7.   As a result of your Writing Lab consultations, did you spend more time writing your papers, less time, or about the same amount of time?
More time: 20%
Less time: 6%
About the same amount: 74%

8.   Overall, do you think your Writing Lab visits made a difference in your performance for this course?
Made no difference: 11%
Helped somewhat: 67%
Made for significant improvement: 20%
Actually hurt: 2%

9.   Will you use the Writing Lab again when assigned other writing tasks in other courses?
Yes: 72%
No: 28%

10.   Would you recommend Lab use to other students who must write papers?
Yes: 93%
No: 7%

The responses tabulated above suggest several conclusions:

--the fact that 74% of the students had not heard of the Lab confirms our concerns about Lab invisibility.

--most students (76%) did not initially object to the addition of Lab visits as another requirement for the course.

--about 60% of the students actually made the minimum 6 visits (based on the week the survey was distributed).

--over 85% made 3 or more visits

--most students used their Lab visits to work on revising an existing draft.

--few students used Lab visits for brainstorming.

--roughly half of the Lab visits were devoted (in some part) to checking for specific sentence errors.

--the Writing Lab visits did not appreciably change the amount of time a student spent working on a writing task.

--in terms of their overall course performance, 87% of those surveyed reported that their Lab conferences were a positive factor.

--nearly 3/4 of those surveyed indicated they would use the Writing Lab again.

--a whopping 93% indicated they'd recommend Lab use to others writing papers.

Obviously, there are limits to the number of sections any writing center could "service" in this way. At O.S.U. this term, we have three composition sections making required appointments, as well as a section of precomposition for non-native speakers. That works out to roughly 100 students with regular appointments, and it puts us at very nearly our limits, both in terms of space and in terms of staff. In addition to these obvious constraints, such close cooperation between a writing center and instructors demands regular contact, either in person or by phone.

Should weekly writing lab conferences be required for composition students?   The

students in our admittedly small sample seemed pleased with the results of their required conferences. Would these students have used the O.S.U. Writing Lab without being required to do so? The infrequent Lab conferences with students from other sections suggests probably not. Yet to have every Oregon State University composition instructor require weekly Lab conferences for every composition student would, because of sheer numbers, overwhelm us.

Perhaps the best solution to our relative invisibility is a vigorous writing-across-the-curriculum program. Such a program would stress written communication in every discipline, resulting in a much wider campus awareness of the Writing Lab and its usefulness. In the meantime, given the historically scientific orientation of our campus and the location of our writing lab, the contacts (and word-of-mouth publicity) generated through close cooperation with composition sections will remain important.

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NEW BOOK ON INVENTION

Karen Burke LeFevre, Invention as a Social Act (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 188 pp., $8.50, paper.

For those interested in the collaborative aspects of invention, LeFevre's book provides a background by building a view of invention as a social act rather than as the solitary act of an individual. LeFevre, the Writing Center director at Rennselaer Polytechnic Institute, argues that invention is affected by the relationships of the individual to others. Through language and other socially shared symbol systems individuals act dialectically with society and culture in distinctive ways. In the final chapter LeFevre suggests taking note of people who affect invention, including editors, colleagues, and collaborators, and encouraging group authorship and other collaborative activities.