

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

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Vol. XII, No. 4 (December 1987)

'Tis the season to rest, relax, and enjoy some good holiday reading. In this issue of the newsletter, David Chapman, director of the Writing Center at Texas Tech, offers us a delightful tale, "High Noon at the Writing Corral." Enjoy!

And this issue offers a new feature, the Tutors' Bulletin Board, which will continue to appear if notices are sent in. This bulletin board begins in response to requests from tutors who attended the recent Fourth Annual Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference and want to stay in touch with tutors from other schools. The board is like any other bulletin board--a place to put short notices, comments, hellos, questions, or whatever. Tutors from all schools are invited to pin up notices and join in the conversation and crosstalk. Anything I receive by the beginning of the month will appear in the following month's issue. That is, if you want something in the February issue of the newsletter, please send it in by January 1 (February 1 for the March issue, and so on).

In addition, please continue to send your articles, announcements, reviews, names of new members for the newsletter group, and your yearly donations of \$7.50 (in checks made payable to Purdue University and sent to me) to:

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

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO EVERYONE, and BEST

WISHES FOR A JOYOUS NEW YEAR!



HIGH NOON AT THE WRITING CORRAL:
A TALE OF THE WEST

The air was still in Leadville. The sun was straight overhead, bright as a branding iron and just as hot. The folks down at the Writing Corral had their sleeves up and were trying to teach some greenhorn writers the difference between a posthole and a post hoc. That's when we first saw him.

His name was Slim Hopes. He had a reputation from the Red River to the Rio Grande as the orneriest critter ever to lay hold of a Bic. Many had tried to make a writer out of Slim, but their best efforts had bounced off him like hailstones on a tin shed.

As he strode through the gate, I knew he was looking for me. Mothers grabbed their children by the hand and pulled them inside. Shopkeepers closed up their doors and covered their windows. A few old writing hands lined the streets to watch the shootout.

I was trying to help a youngster tighten up some loose sentences when Slim came over and stood by me. A black Stetson was pulled low over his eyes. His thumbs were stuck behind a big silver buckle at his waist.

"Doc, I've been lookin' fer you," he said. The final word echoed like a gunshot off a canyon wall.

"I've been expecting you," I replied without looking up.

"They say you can fix up any kind of ol' mangy, no account paper. I heer'd tell you once took a wild draft and thesis-broke it in one sitting."

I knew this was more of a challenge than a compliment. "People do talk," I said.

"Well, a'hm heer to see whut you kin do with me." He spat out his words as if they were tobacco juice.

I caught Slim's eyes and saw a look that was at once desperate and dangerous. I mentally went over every book I had ever read that might help me now. I remembered reading about learning disorders, personality problems, non-native speakers, and cultural barriers, but never once had anyone said what to do with a cowboy. I knew I was on my own here.

"Well, Slim, I see you can talk, but let's see what you can do when you write," I said loudly, hoping my words didn't betray my inner misgivings.

Slim pulled a paper from his vest pocket and held it out. He chuckled a little--like a gambler who's been caught trying to bluff his way through a hand of poker with nothing more than a pair of deuces. "It's been shot up pretty bad, Doc." he said, trying to hide the pain that he obviously was feeling.

Then I knew what Slim had been hiding all along. The paper was stained red. A lesser man would have staggered in, but Slim wouldn't let on that he had been hurt.

"What do you think, Doc? Can you save her?" He was almost begging me.

"I'll do what I can."

Slim and I worked on that paper for an hour or more. We coaxed it like a mare in foal until we finally pulled a thesis out of it. Some of the limbs were so useless we had to amputate. Others we bandaged and doctored until we thought that they had half a chance to make it. We didn't have a grand champion when we were done, but she could stand on four legs, and that was good enough for Slim.

I lost touch with Slim after that. I heard at the semester roundup he wound up with the "C" bar outfit.

Once, at the end of a long day at the Writing Corral, one of my partners asked me, "How come you did what you did for that Slim fellow? Everybody said he was no good. You were just wasting your time."

"Could be," I told him. "But I figure we all have a little Slim Hopes in us. And maybe someday when I'm all busted up inside, somebody will come and help me along."

As we turned to go, the shadows stretched long across the streets of Leadville, and the sun dyed the western sky a deep red. It was moments like these that made one glad to be a writing hand.

David W. Chapman
Texas Tech University

(Ed. note: Newsletter readers may remember another of David Chapman's delightful stories, "The Rogue and the Tutor," in the March 1987 issue of the newsletter, a medieval tale of the Knight Director challenged by a young knave's errant perception of the Place of Writing. We all eagerly await future Tales of Chapman.)

WHAT DO TUTORS LEARN WHEN THEY ARE NOT TUTORING?

Writing tutors, by their own admission, learn a lot on the job in writing centers. In our Writing Lab at the College of St. Benedict, the tutors always say they seem to learn more than they teach. One of the veteran tutors last year even said she felt guilty because she was getting more from her job than she was giving. In every exchange with clients, the tutors say some light is always shed on some part of that vast field called composition. Every short lesson reveals something new: a clever turn of phrase, a new way to explain an old grammatical construction or convention, yet another way to describe how a reader's view differs from a writer's, or sometimes the frustrating realization of how little one really knows. Day by day, a tutor's education is steadily enhanced.

Most of what peer writing tutors learn is immediate. Yet while they learn about grammar and revising and questioning and tact, they are also developing an attitude about writing. They are developing a confidence in their own abilities, and they are improving their tutoring skills and increasing their knowledge as the foundation of that confidence. And yet, at the same time, they are continually confronting their own limitations--their ignorance, their impatience, their confrontations with human nature. Once they acquire this attitude or

disposition toward writing--a confidence tempered with a wise acceptance of their own limitations--I believe they are ready for serious intellectual pursuits.

As the director of our Writing Lab, I have sought to offer my tutors many opportunities to build on what they are learning on the job. I want to challenge them to expand and develop a constructive disposition toward their own learning. I want to present them with supplemental activities that will spark their interest and stimulate their creativity.

Tutoring sessions in our Writing Lab often follow an erratic schedule: sometimes we're faced with queues of students waiting for help, but sometimes we're left with sizeable stretches of free time. Although I have always encouraged the tutors to write or do extra reading when finished with Lab matters, I have thought that tutors' talents were not being fully used. So I proposed some activities for the tutors that would deepen their own intellectual life and give them, moreover, an opportunity to present their work to the college community. Not only, it seemed to me, would this promote an attractive image of the Writing Lab, but it would enable the tutors to connect their tutoring with their own learning as well.

I began with an idea borrowed from my counterpart at a neighboring college: assign each tutor a project to work on during the academic year. Other ideas grew out of our enthusiasm for the written word. The following list includes a number of our activities grouped under four headings: writing, reading, teaching, projects. Here is a brief summary of what the tutors have accomplished during our Writing Lab's unanticipated free time:

I Writing

-Write a regular column for the college newspaper

-Keep a journal in the Lab. We write to each other, not only about the work in the Lab, but ideas about classes, love life, soap operas, etc; I find the tutors look forward to talking with each other in the journal about a variety of notions and ideas, and they get to know one another in a way that binds them with a common purpose

-Review and rank new writing texts

-Once a week, write sentences in different styles based on sentences from master writers

II Reading

-Subscribe to various magazines and writing journals, such as New Yorker, The New York Times Book Review, The Atlantic, The Writing Center Journal, The Writing Lab Newsletter

-Send out a summer reading list to the student body, compiled by the tutors

-Read and post current articles about composition

III Teaching:

-Give a 15-minute presentation on some aspect of writing at one of our regular meetings

-Tutor each other

-Help conduct "papers-in-progress" sessions for the first-year composition students

IV Projects:

At the beginning of every fall semester, each tutor must decide on a project; it can be of his or her own choice and design, but it must have something to do with writing and it must have some substance. During the past four and a half years, our tutors have worked on the following projects:

-A poetry workshop conducted during the January period for interested students

-Strunk and White's Elements of Style read and an essay written making the connection between thinking and writing. (The article was published in the Writing Lab Newsletter and has been selected by CCC as one of the best 100 pieces of scholarship written for writing centers in 1986.)

-Design of a resident, week-long creative writing camp for high school students, which we subsequently taught together. (This project was done by our mathematics major tutor, who had taken the poetry workshop in her freshman year before even considering being a tutor.)

-A video tape made from several tutoring sessions (just the tutors), then worksheets

designed for the fall training sessions: one from the perspective of the piece of writing, one from the tutor's viewpoint, and one from the client's.

-Reorganization of the files and several new handouts written; also letters asking for permission to use excerpts for handouts.

-A tutor handbook written.

-Revision of the brochure for the Writing Lab.

-Design and production of a series of ads for the student radio station advertising the services of the Writing Lab.

I would recommend a vigorous start at the beginning of the school year to get the tutors started; work in writing centers isn't as demanding then. I have found it only takes persistence and enthusiasm to keep them going. And the reward is great--pride in accomplishment.

Elizabeth A. Spaeth
College of St. Benedict
St. Joseph, MN

INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATORS

The Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators will be held from June 25 through July 22, 1988, on the campus of Appalachian State University in Boone, NC.

The 1988 Kellogg Institute will train faculty, counselors and administrators from developmental and learning assistance programs in the most current techniques for promoting learning improvement. The Institute program consists of a summer session followed by a fall term practicum project on the home campuses of participants. The 1988 summer program will focus on the use of learning styles and their implications for instruction, the process of developmental evaluation activities, the use of academic intervention and counseling techniques, the management of programs and classes, as well as the use of computers for management, data collection, and instructional purposes.

Institute fees are \$625 plus \$330 for room and board. A graduate credit fee for the fall semester practicum will also be

charged. Up to eight (8) hours of graduate credit may also be obtained for participation in the summer program. Leaders' Scholarships consisting of a \$500 fee waiver are available.

Applications for the Institute may be obtained by contacting Ms. Elaine Bingham, Assistant Director of the Center for Developmental Education, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608. The application deadline is April 1, 1988.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Syntax in the Schools is seeking papers on pedagogical grammar. Articles may concern teacher preparation; the theory of pedagogical grammar; classroom practices; integration of grammar with reading, writing, and thinking; or suggestions about books that other teachers may want to read. Syntax is devoted to coordinating grammar instruction, K-college. We are particularly interested in teachers' descriptions of and attitudes toward what they are currently doing. Subscriptions are \$2.00 per year (four issues). Contact Ed Vavra, Shenandoah College, Winchester, VA 22601.



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Janice M. Lauer
Rhetoric Seminar
Purdue University
Department of English
West Lafayette, IN 47907
(317) 494-4425



The Tutor's Corner

OH MY, I'VE NEVER DONE THIS SORTA THING BEFORE!

Mark Twain once said, "Get your facts first, then you can distort them as much as you like." Well, since I've only been a tutor for about two weeks now, I have little to distort about the art of tutoring. So I'll keep it short.

Despite my inexperience, I am going to impart my limited knowledge. I pursue this dubious course, not because I have been struck by an overwhelming desire to do so, but because the Writing Center Director (my boss) strongly advised me to.

Huhhhh . . . Excuse the extended pause, but I'm trying to think of something brilliant to say. By Jove, I think I've got it! I'll tell you about what I hope to get out of tutoring. I'm certainly not here in hopes of pecuniary gain. I understand that tutoring pays almost as much as janitorial service. I'm here mainly because I believe tutoring benefits tutors as much as it helps student clients.

Only through practice can we master languages, and the Writing Center provides an excellent environment for practice. Here, I want to learn not only from my own mistakes, but also from others' mistakes. Moreover, I can use the Writing Center library, which has all kinds of books, journals, exercise sheets and workbooks, and even a few cassette tapes about writing.

Thus, whether I am assigned to tutor clients who seem hopelessly lost in a maze of language or work with those whose imagination and talent rival Mark Twain's, I know that at least one person will learn something at each session--me.

Mark Collins
Peer Tutor
Wright State University
Dayton, OH

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

We can't help being influenced by first impressions, which can easily be misleading. I learned this during my very first quarter as a writing center tutor. Because of a silly misunderstanding, I missed out on making friends with one of my student clients. And to this day, it bothers me.

I met Jennifer during the first week of classes. She came into the Writing Center and after we said, "Hi" and signed in, we took our seats at one of the tables in the middle of the room. That week I'd met many students, and I was getting used to meeting new people and learning to overcome my shyness in talking to strangers. However, when I tried my "routine" on Jennifer, it didn't work. I started by asking her the usual questions: "How are you?" or "What's your major?" or "What are your hobbies?" You know, things like that. But she just sat there the whole time, staring at a piece of paper on the table. She never looked at me. She never made a sound. When I asked her questions, she just shrugged her shoulders, chewed on her bottom lip, and tapped her pencil on the table. Granted, not everyone looks forward to that first visit to the Writing Center, but most students are at least friendly and considerate. I mean, at least they talk to you! But when Jennifer made no attempt to join in the conversation, I didn't know what to do. I thought maybe she was having a bad day and that things would be better at the next session.

The next week came, and then the next, but nothing changed. Jennifer was still quiet and distant. She would always sit there, looking tired and somewhat sad. I was sure she didn't like me and that she resented coming to be tutored. Her coldness made me feel so awkward and uncomfortable that when I talked to her, I was tongue-tied and sounded stupid. I paid so much attention to what she was doing that I kept forgetting what I was talking about. I've

never said "uhh" and "well . . ." so many times in my entire life. Finally, I decided to give her as much space as I could. I would greet her and then leave her to work alone on her drafts and exercises until near the end of each session.

At the end of the quarter, I found a note from Jennifer in my mailbox. She said that although I knew my stuff, I was cold and unfriendly and would have to loosen up to be a good tutor. I couldn't believe it! All that time, I tried to leave Jennifer alone because I had the impression that she didn't like working with me; instead, she thought that I disliked her.

Unfortunately, I lost the chance to get to know Jennifer, and she'll probably always think of me as an indifferent and unfriendly tutor. All I really wanted to do was help her with writing and maybe become her friend. Tutoring is certainly a learning experience for both the student client and the tutor. While I was teaching Jennifer about writing, she was teaching me about people. The next time I have a student client who is reserved or seems to have a bad attitude, I'll remember that a shy person may be lurking within, waiting to be found.

April Wilson
Peer Tutor
Wright State University
Dayton, OH

BOOK REVIEW

The Right Handbook by Pat Belanoff, Betsy Rorschach, Mia Rakijas, and Chris Millis (Upper Montclair: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1986, 229 pages)

Written for students, The Right Handbook tries to empower inexperienced writers to "transfer (their) knowledge to the printed page" (42). The book also offers writing center tutors a philosophical and practical framework within which we can help clients deal with (if not solve) their problems of dialect speech and non-standard usage of written English.

The text proceeds from a statement of philosophical beliefs (which encourages students to value their spoken dialect as a

sign of their cultural heritage) to sections on paragraphs, sentences, phrases, and words. A chapter devoted to "mechanics" comes near the end, as the authors promote writing fluency before obedience to grammatical convention.

Chapter One, "Debunking Myths," discusses the richness of regional variations and the mutability of language throughout history. This section makes interesting reading for the tutor who, sympathetic to her clients' native dialects, must convince them that they have something to say, yet need to be able to "say" it within the standard forms of academic discourse. The authors call this "aligning personal language with accepted conventions" (151). In discussing the discourse values of the academy, the book does not try to change anyone from "wrong" to "right." Rather, it offers students ideas on how they can improve their writing so that they can participate more fully in the academic community.

Tutoring strategies involve having clients write in the margin of their drafts a summary of what each paragraph "says" and "does" (22), and read each sentence backwards to isolate fragments from their discursive context (42). Tutors can also help clients analyze the effects of their individual sentence styles through the book's examples of published writing drawn from poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. As in Winston Weathers' An Alternative Style (Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook Pub., 1980), students are exposed to ways in which experienced writers expand the standard rules of written English, so that they too may take risks in their writing. What makes this section interesting is that it turns issues of word choice into questions of rhetorical purpose--showing, for example, Alice Walker's use of complex sentence structure to involve the reader in the narrator's feeling of being "smothered" (45). The philosophy behind this sense of "playfulness" (159) is that in writing, as in life, "context determines usage" (107).

This sensibility of knowing your context (and your audience) spills into the book's most radical section, and one of the most potentially fruitful collaborations between classroom teachers and writing center tutors. To assure themselves of meeting their teachers' criteria of a "formal essay," students are asked to request that the teacher show them a paper that demon-

strates an acceptable level of academic formality (163). They are then encouraged to compare their work (with the help of a tutor) to pinpoint the differences between that essay and their own writing. The next suggestion is that the tutor help them "imitate the characteristics of the other paper" (163). The teacher is then asked to identify any remaining segments which she still considers too informal. This prescribed student-teacher-tutor dialogue puts us in a precarious position--one in which the danger of modeling texts is balanced by a call for teacher accountability, as instructors are held responsible to explain their standards about student writing.

In this way, The Right Handbook reads like a "liberation handbook" (suggesting the influence of Paolo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed mentioned on p. 216). This highly political text encourages student activism by asking writers to become aware of the values of the academy ("you need to become sensitive to which words are slang and which are not" 161) and finally to challenge them in a critically conscious way: "Perhaps you could write a paper on slang or work collaboratively with a group to compile a slang dictionary" (161).

Sentence "decombining" and "recombining" are discussed in a section called "Major Surgery" (85). Although students are warned that this may result in "paragraph disintegration" (87), the text contains no formal "Revision" chapter. Instead, revision is treated as a dialectical "recursive" process (see Lucy McCormick Calkins "Learning to Think through Writing" Observing The Language Learner, NCTE (1985): 190-198 and Sondra Perl's "Understanding Composing," CCC 31 (1980): 363-369). "Changing a word is similar to dropping a pebble in a pond," the authors advise, "you can never quite tell how far its influence will go" (170).

In the sections on grammar, detailed explanations about word usage are followed by practical illustrations. Punctuation, for example, is portrayed as "integral to meaning" (90). (We are asked to consider that a "velvet-lined coat may not look the same as a velvet, lined coat" 108). One exercise which asks the student to underline each verb in her essay and conjugate them with a tutor's help to see if the tense used is in synch with her intended meaning (151) strikes me as a useful way of dealing with ESL problems. The stated belief throughout

is that this kind of practice results in an internalization of these rules (what Sondra Perl calls that "felt sense" Ibid) as students develop" that intuitive sense of context which (they) need to have in order to use words properly" (168).

Chapter Seven deals with research as a method of personal inquiry. It strikes me as a highly distilled (but still interesting) version of Ken Macrorie's Searching Writing (Upper Montclair, NJ, Boynton/Cook, 1980). Reading this chapter will enable tutors to make suggestions about generating ideas, forming research questions, conducting interviews, and keeping dialectical notes. Finally, there is a section which helps us speak to the naive plagiarizer about the difference between paraphrasing and the need for explicit citations.

The final chapter deals briefly with personal computers, discussing them in terms of the various program capacities available and their suitability for college writers. Experts may wish that there were more mention of the powerful revision possibilities that the new technology brings, yet the authors stick mostly to the surface, mentioning editing and spelling checkers, and "the mechanical aspects (of) inserting and deleting" (222). This section will probably need the most revision as the influence of computers on our composing process makes itself known.

Tutors may find that they have two other reservations about this book: we are not its primary audience, and there is too little discussion of "error" as a sign of intellectual growth. However, one must respect a text which foregrounds its own tentativeness by declaring that all handbooks "provide only a partial view of the whole language picture" (227). This revisive approach toward written English is made clear, as the authors announce that they are dealing with only one language at a particular stage of its development:

Problems of language usage will always be with us; they're inherent in the nature of language. As the language changes, old usage problems fade away, new ones appear (140).

In combining an awareness of the mutability of linguistic standards with practical strategies for improving student writing, The Right Handbook provides tutors with a

critical vocabulary for introducing clients to the complexity of language use in the academy. The final note is one of a variety of options rather than a prescriptive list of rules: "we hope you'll realize you've got some choices" (87).

Joseph Janangelo
New York University

A READER COMMENTS....

I enjoyed reading the article "Exploiting the Writing-Speaking Relationship in the Writing Center" in the October 1987 issue of the newsletter. I felt that it was well written. It does help students to hear their essays read aloud. Many of my conferences are sessions in which I just talk with the student, and we communicate with each other. Together, we try to establish an audience. I am usually amazed when the papers are handed in. After the tutoring session, the student gives the paper a dose of life, and the voice shines forth. It is refreshing to read an article that supports my own contentions. The Writing Lab Newsletter is helpful in my teaching, writing, and--of course--writing lab administration.

James Boswell, Jr.
Harrisburg Area Community
College
Harrisburg, PA

A READER ASKS....

The well-established Writing Lab at Paris Junior College in Paris, Texas, is seeking consultation and assistance from writing lab personnel who have recent experience in setting up computerized aids for writing laboratories. Knowledge of the intelligent choice of useful and practical software programs (i.e., grammar drill) is particularly sought. Please write or telephone collect:

Joan Mathis, Instructor
Writing Laboratory
Communications Division
Paris Junior College
2400 Clarksville Street
Paris, TX 75460

214/785-7661

Job Listings

DIRECTOR OF THE WRITING LAB
LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY
APPLETON, WI

The director administers the writing lab; works individually with students who need help with academic writing; recruits, trains and supervises peer tutors; conducts workshops; gives presentations on topics such as writing the essay exam, overcoming writing blocks, organizing the research paper; evaluates the degree of writing improvement shown by students who have been tutored.

Qualifications: M.A. or Ph.D., with training and experience in teaching writing. Evaluation of credentials will focus particularly on quality and extent of experience.

Nine month position; salary determined by qualifications and experience. Send application and vita with names of three references to Charles Lauter, Dean of Students, Lawrence University, Appleton, WI 54912 by January 8, 1988; position begins September, 1988.

Lawrence University is an equal opportunity employer.

MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Positions Available: Two tenure-track positions in rhetoric and composition for Fall, 1988

Application Deadline: December 1, 1987

Rank of assistant, associate, or full professor. Ph.D required. Positions are in support of a developing graduate program. Salary competitive. Send letter, vita, and dossier to Elizabeth A. Flynn, Department Head, Department of Humanities, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI 49931.

ASSISTANT OR ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION

The new member would be either an ASSISTANT OR ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION and would be on a tenure track.

He/She will teach three classes in freshman composition and developmental writing with one-quarter released time for research. One-quarter released time to supervise a developmental program and occasional opportunities to teach more advanced courses may arise. Salary is competitive and commensurate with degree and experience.

Preferred candidates will have a Doctorate in Rhetoric/Composition and experience in teaching freshman composition. Candidates should work well with adult students and should have experience in such areas of developmental writing as tutor training, writing centers, and testing.

As part of a multi-campus Indiana University system, the Kokomo campus offers degrees at the associate and baccalaureate levels in a variety of disciplines, as well as some graduate opportunities. Indiana University at Kokomo is located forty-five minutes north of Indianapolis, Indiana, in a town of approximately 45,000 people. Of the 3,500 students enrolled in this non-residential institution, 70% are over the age of 22, 61% are female, and approximately 50% are part-time.

Please send a letter of application, curriculum vitae, and a list of three references by February 10 to Stuart Green, Division of Humanities, Indiana University at Kokomo, 2300 S. Washington, Kokomo, IN 46902. Women and minority candidates are encouraged to apply.

The Writing Instructor is an innovative quarterly publication for composition professionals at both the secondary and university levels. Committed to the field of writing and composition instruction, TWI publishes articles grounded in rhetorical and educational theory. Its editorial board is made up of professional writing instructors, many of whom are involved in graduate studies in composition and linguistics.

For information about manuscript submission and subscriptions, please write to:

The Writing Instructor
c/o The Freshman Writing
Program
University of Southern
California
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0062

TEACHERS . . . WRITE AND SHARE YOUR IDEAS!

The NCTE Committee on Professional Writing Networks for Teachers and Supervisors is ready to help you. If you are interested in sharing your ideas, but feel you would like some help in writing an article for publication in a professional journal, the Committee is available to give you suggestions and support. Send your partially completed or fully completed manuscript to Dr. Gail E. Tompkins, University of Oklahoma, College of Education, 820 Van Vleet Oval, Norman, OK 73019. Your manuscript will then be sent to a committee member who will read and respond to it and then return it to you with suggestions.

Tutors' Bulletin Board

Hello to the tutors/faculty members at the Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference, (Nov. 6-8), especially those from Little Rock, the Colorado College, Randolph-Macon, Purdue, and Georgetown.

Loved discussing our tutoring programs, exchanging ideas, and socializing with you at Purdue. Think about a visit to College Park. We'd like to continue our tutoring conversations, visit, and go dancing again! We can certainly put any visitors up. (This invitation goes for tutors everywhere, whether they came to the conference or not.) Write or call Shoshana Konstant, The Writing Center, English Department, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, (301)454-4011 (work), (301)474-7613 (home).

Rebecca Fong
Alphonso Franklin
Lisa Gottlieb
Shoshana Konstant
Mike Munson
Harry Pritchett
Leigh Ryan
Becky Spracklen
University of Maryland
College Park, MD

HATS AND FEATHERS: ROLES AND ATTRIBUTES OF TUTORS

As Muriel Harris points out in Teaching One-to-One (NCTE, 1986), tutors must wear many hats and be able to change them quickly and often (35). Harris discusses several roles that tutors can play. One role is that of a coach who stands at the sidelines watching, cheering, and helping when necessary (35). Another role is that of commentator, someone who gives the student the broad picture and puts the student's problems in context (35-6). A third role is counselor. The tutor as counselor looks at the whole person, not just the errors, and possibly helps students identify factors in their lives which may be affecting their writing (36-7). Another role is that of listener. The tutor as listener listens to hear how another writer thinks and writes, listens to the process the student is using, and listens to the paper to see if the product is what the student intended (38). A final role Harris discusses is that of diagnostician. Tutors must, as a doctor does, use both art and science to discover problems with a student's writing and uncover the probable cause of those difficulties (39). Other possible roles for tutors are fellow writer, collaborator, supportive editor, and friendly critic (39).

Tutors do indeed play many of these roles at one time or another. The roles are neither opposites nor totally distinct, however, which makes switching hats a little easier. For example, a tutor must often be a listener in order to diagnose and be a commentator (give the larger picture) while being a coach.

There are other roles that tutors can play which are not stated in those terms by Harris; instead she has defined them as activities tutors do. Considering these functions in terms of roles, however, adds to an understanding of how tutors operate. One of those roles is that of observer (64-6). A tutor may act as an observer in order to diagnose and help foster student independence. Another role is that of questioner (61-4). Tutors can ask questions in order to diagnose problems and foster student thinking. They might also question before listening and as a way of demonstrating problems with a paper. For example, asking a student about reader needs--"What does your reader need to know about this? Have you provided this

information?"--might make it apparent that there are problems with audience in the paper. Another hat a tutor might wear is that of demonstrator (66). A tutor can show the student how a particular invention strategy works, for example, much like a salesman demonstrating a new appliance in the housewares department of Dayton's. Another possible role is that of "dumb bunny." One reason a tutor might play dumb is to point up weaknesses in a student's paper. For example, a tutor might say to a student who is having trouble staying on track, "Am I missing something here? I thought you were talking about how to play pool in this paragraph, but here you say that pool tournaments are fun." A final role is that of explainer (69). This role comes closest to traditional ideas about teachers. The tutor as explainer explains a rule (punctuation, grammar, etc.) to a student--hopefully, in a way that the student can understand.

These roles, along with the previous ones, overlap and interweave. A coach must also be an observer, for example, and a tutor can be both an observer and a listener at the same time. A tutor could also be an explainer and a demonstrator simultaneously. Switching hats is not as difficult as it might seem because the hats are not really distinct at all. It is less like putting on a whole new hat than like changing the feathers or ribbons on a hat (the basic black tutoring hat). Harris has simply broken the whole down into parts to better analyze how a tutor acts in a tutorial.

Nevertheless, while switching trimmings is easier than switching hats, it is not easy. What kind of a person can play these roles in a way that is most beneficial to the student?

Two of the most important attributes good tutors must possess are obviously flexibility and quick thinking. Tutors need to decide almost instantaneously which feather to put in their hats--a decision that may have to be remade five, six, or even more times during one half-hour tutorial. The tutor may act first as counselor (pink ribbon) to put the student at ease, then switch to diagnostician (blue feather)--further switching from questioner (add yellow feather) to listener (change yellow

feather for green) and back again while still wearing the blue, diagnostician feather. After discovering a problem and its likely cause, the tutor may switch to explainer (red feather), then to demonstrator (orange feather), and finally to observer (white feather). The tutor may end the session with some encouraging words as coach (blue ribbon).

No matter how adept tutors are at changing the trimmings on their hats, they will not be much help to the student if their ribbons need ironing and their feathers droop. In other words, tutors must be good at playing their various roles. This means they must have not only a knowledge of the subject but also the ability to communicate well. Communication involves presenting ideas clearly in a way that the student can understand. This may mean explaining the same concept using several different techniques--explaining verbally, drawing a picture, using an analogy, using examples, etc. When the audience is only one, a tutor can't afford to lose the audience. Communication also involves listening and knowing when NOT to speak. It can be very hard to wait for a student to come up with an idea or answer a question, but such waiting is very important. (Many experienced tutors have severely bitten tongues.)

Tutors can learn, through instruction and practice, to think more rapidly and communicate more effectively. When tutors have learned strategies for diagnosing, demonstrating, communicating, etc., practice will improve their performance of these skills and the speed with which they can switch from one technique to another. What are more difficult (and perhaps impossible) to acquire, however, are probably the most important attributes: good tutors have empathy with their students; they sincerely like students and want to help them. Good tutors are non-judgmental; they respect their students and acknowledge students' individual experience, learning, and intelligence. Without these attitudes, tutors will not be effective. Students can quickly sense when tutors do not really care or when tutors think the student is stupid. Students will not learn in an environment in which they are not respected.

A final requirement for tutors is a large bladder! Finding time to go to the bathroom

is extremely difficult.

So armed with knowledge and motivation (the basic black hat) and nimble fingers, tutors can iron their ribbons, fluff up their feathers, and make a positive difference to students.

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Job description in the American Sociological Association *Employment Bulletin*:

"UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS. Department of Sociology is seeking a limited number of temporary faculty to teach various courses during academic year 1987-88. . . ."
Darn.

From a news release:

"The National Council of Teachers of English is a non-profit organization of teachers of English at all levels of education. It's aim is to improve the teaching of English."

There's no time to waste. —C.G.

From The Chronicle of Higher Education
(March 25, 1987)



TECHNICAL WRITING AND TUTOR TRAINING

At Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, students have few humanities electives in their lockstep programs to become pilots, airport managers, airplane mechanics, aeronautical engineers, and so on. Consequently, as director of the Writing Center and instructor of the tutor training course, I have spent a good deal of time recruiting potential tutors. Finding students who have the aptitude, the interpersonal skill, and the interest is difficult enough. Finding among those, students who have room for a

tutor training elective is still more difficult. For several terms I sweated out rounding up the requisite ten bodies for the class to make. Finally, to insure a steady supply of Writing Center tutors, we linked the peer tutor training to our technical-writing course, a sophomore requirement of every bachelor degree program. In ways other than the enrollment guarantee, the marriage of tutor training and tech writing has been a happy one.

Mainly the application of the collaborative method to technical writing worked better than I had expected. In fact the course went so well that as the proposals, letters, and reports came in, I set aside the best to use as samples for future classes. By the end of the term, I had pulled into my office from a nearby classroom a desk to hold the stack of papers my assistant was to copy. When he complained that I had enough for a book, I took him literally. This first tutoring/tech writing class did indeed have enough for a book. They could easily compile, edit, and publish their own work.

What could be better P-R for our fledgling writing center than its own publication, a handbook of peer models for technical writing? I could insure a small market with my own tech writing sections. The publication would relieve me of the burden of all those handouts. And how nice it would be for the students to see themselves in print and for other students to see their peers' work. This seemed the perfect writing center endeavor.

This summer, one term later, our first printing of Peer Models for Technical Writing came out, in time for me and several colleagues to use in our tech writing classes. The models in it represent the unique interests of our student body: aircraft maintenance, aeronautical engineering, flying, avionics, flight instruction, etc. The selections are arranged to demonstrate various technical modes--description, process, analysis, etc.--and the forms these take in reports and business correspondence. Students especially appreciate the sample resumes and job correspondence geared to aviation. Naturally, we included in it peer critique forms for technical writing and a sample critique. The book, which is 87pp.,

is on sale in the Writing Center for \$4.00. At that price we have already recovered our printing expenses and earned a small profit.

Another side effect of the emphasis upon tech writing in tutorial training has been the boost to business in the Writing Center from tech writing students. It seems we have gained clout with students other than remedial. Perhaps we've grown heady, but at our publication celebration we entertained many ideas for future publications. Our next project will probably be peer models for literary analysis. As with our tech writing book, we will print in large type on the front cover, from the WRITING CENTER.

For a copy, send a 10 x 13 self addressed manila envelope with 56 ¢ stamp and \$4.00 to Ann Magaha, Humanities Dept., Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Regional Airport, Daytona Beach, Florida 32014.

Ann Magaha
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical
University
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FIVE YEARS ON THE HOTLINE: ANSWERING A WRITER'S HOTLINE

The phone rings. Work with a client in a writing center halts as a tutor reaches for the ringing instrument. It's another hotline question from a writer desperately seeking not Susan but answers to all kinds of questions.

According to a recent report (Benton 1), at least nineteen writer's hotlines (also called "grammar" hotlines) exist across the nation. For the last five years, tutors in the Writing Center at the University of South Carolina have answered nearly 7500 phone-in questions on U.S.C.'s Writer's Hotline.¹ Although our service is not the oldest in the country, during the last half decade tutors have learned much about the psychology of the callers and about themselves as "hotliners," insights which would

be helpful to any writing center director who is considering setting up such a service.

Various types of callers utilize a hotline, and tutors would do well to learn to recognize these types in order to make their work easier. Some callers call to test the tutors. These callers think they already know the answer and only want the tutors to reaffirm their judgment. One woman, for instance, questioned the style of a letter she had read in the newspaper. "Can a sentence end with a preposition?" The tutor patiently explained that such a practice was permissible as long as the writing was clear. As support, the tutor quoted Winston Churchill's famous statement, "Such behavior up with which I will not put" as a humorous, barbarous example of too strict a following of the preposition rule. The lady was not convinced. Before she hung up, she said, "Well, I was taught not to end a sentence with a preposition." Another gentleman phoning from Washington, D.C., was incredulous when a tutor told him that a plural verb was needed in his sentence "Recycling operations using the heater approach take many forms." He asked, "Are you sure?" Tutors who work with such callers need to recognize the testers and should expect merely to inform, not convince them.

Not all callers disagree, however. Some are happy the tutors can answer since these callers are trying to settle bets. It is not unusual for these callers to summon a co-worker to another line just to have a tutor repeat an answer. In fact, these "bet settlers" sometimes put the tutor on a speaker phone to the caller's office so the caller can prove to all his co-workers that a sentence does take a singular, not plural verb.

Besides the "testers" and "betters," there are the "quickies." They want an answer, want it fast, and do not want to hear an explanation. They read their sentences, ask where the apostrophe or comma goes, or if they use who or whom. After the tutors answer, the "quickies" politely say "Thank you." Then the line goes dead.

Other callers can be labeled "the desperate ones" since they do not know where else to turn in order to find information. Incorrectly perceiving the Hotline staff as

being "all-knowing," they call with questions not usually expected on a "writer's" hotline. One caller who was taking part in a round-table discussion asked a tutor to describe scurvy since the panelists had brought up the topic. Another asked in which Shakespeare play these lines appear: "I can call spirits from the vasty deep." "Why, so can I, or so can any man. /But will they come when you do call for them?" Luckily, one of the tutors had taught the play so she could answer "Henry IV Part I 3.1.52-54--Glendower and Hotspur." Another caller was writing to the editor of her local newspaper in order to complain about the garbage pick-up in front of her retirement home. In her city, residents roll green garbage containers out to the curb for twice-weekly collection. She asked, "What's the name for these cans?" (The answer is "herbie curbies").²

Finally, some callers are "true scholars" who want an explanation as well as a quick answer. Most tutors prefer these callers who seek wisdom as well as knowledge. They ask the difference between effect and affect. They ask why they should write "a unanimous vote," not "an unanimous vote." They ask when they should use hairless or glabrous. They ask why rabies takes a singular verb.

The wide variety of questions is, of course, most appealing. Such variety keeps tutors entertained (to say the least) and forces them to keep well versed in common (and not so common) points of grammar, mechanics, and diction. The inquiries, however, affect tutors psychologically. During the initial weeks of answering a hotline, tutors feel like gurus on the mountain. They are being sought out for "life-saving" answers, or so the desperate tone of the callers indicates. Unless tutors have enormous egos, this position is not always desirable because of the pressure of having to be correct call after call. Gradually, however, the tutors adjust to their guru-role. As the same questions come over the line and patterns emerge, the tutors gain experience and confidence.

Then, the next stage for the hotliners starts. They wonder why these callers do not know some of the answers to the more common and seemingly easy questions like when to use who and whom or where to put a comma. Any hotliners worth their Harbrace

College Handbook start to believe that no one in the public knows any usage, grammar, or punctuation. Of course, this is not the case. As Dr. Michael Montgomery, a hotline expert, has said, "We're not battling a tide of ignorance. The people who call are intelligent people. They usually have a very good idea of what they're doing, but they're not 100 per cent sure" ("Writer's Hotline"). The tutors also provide a personal touch which so many writers need as they compose. When stumped, writers need to reach out and touch someone (via their phones). The hotline tutors get them writing again. So, if tutors do not perform any other service on a hotline, it is to give confidence to those who can write and merely need extra help.

Hence, five years on the Writer's Hotline at U.S.C. has taught the Writing Center tutors about human nature, both of the caller and of themselves. Answering the hotline is, indeed, an exercise in understanding human nature.

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Endnotes

¹The Writer's Hotline at U.S.C. averages 1500 calls a year. Thanks should be extended to the many tutors who have staffed U.S.C.'s Hotline over the last five years, but special kudos go to Betsy Baker, Susan Gunter, and Marilyn DeMario, who compiled data on the calls.

²By the way, the local newspaper published the letter.

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