

The  **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

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**....from the editor....**

You'll find two items of special interest in this month's issue: 1) a reader interest survey designed to make the newsletter more useful for you, and 2) a listing in the job announcements for a tutor who may want to work as a business writer.

Please return your reader interest surveys along with articles, announcements, and \$7.50 yearly donations to:

Muriel Harris, editor  
*Writing Lab Newsletter*  
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Purdue University  
West Lafayette, IN 47907

**Collaborative pedagogy and  
Perry's stages of cognitive growth:  
Some thoughts on conferences as  
learning environments**

Like many other writing center directors, day by day I am overwhelmed by the tasks of monitoring our program, creating tutors' schedules, designing workshops, and talking to tutors and students. Going to a conference such as the National Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference at Purdue this past November is rejuvenating. Talking about important things like influencing the writing process through tutorial intervention makes my spirits soar: I am renewed, refreshed, restored to my old enthusiastic, inspired self. Seeing my old and new writing center friends reminds me of why I got into this business in the first place—because I believed in it—and gives me that old-time feeling of being known and being welcomed.

I need to carry this feeling back home with me: administrative tasks and the inevitable involvement in institutional politics take time away from the real work of writing centers: talking to tutors and students. I go to conferences hoping to discover other ways of doing things so I can do my work better. The differences among programs—dependent upon such things as the nature of the institution, the nature of the student body, and the role of the school within its region or state—are subsumed by the imperative of flexibility, tolerance, and change that writing center programs share: we offer radically unstructured approaches to learning—no classrooms, no syllabi, no authoritarian arrangement of furniture. We learn to be masters of spontaneous instruction, thinking on our feet, hands, heart, and anything else that works. At writing center conferences, I hope to exchange ideas in this same spirit of tolerance, flexibility, and spontaneity. Seeing one's daily working philosophy manifested in the design of a national conference is extremely gratifying intellectually, socially, and spiritually.

After the conference, I listened to the tutors who went with me talking about their experiences. They were exhilarated by new ideas and the overall experience of being at a professional conference. They were especially delighted to meet folks from other places and regions of the country. For example, they compared tutoring in a rural Pennsylvania state school to tutoring in a rural state school in Iowa. The major difference seems to be that it's a lot colder in Iowa in the winter. I hope that those of us involved in this conference can determine a way to raise funds to assist tutors with their travel expenses so that the conference can remain equitably national. Mingling with people from other regions of the country gives everyone a chance to learn from the varieties of writing center programs.

Although most of the tutors' experiences exchanging ideas with tutors from many other schools were very positive, they were surprised to find that some people were less interested in exchanging ideas than in promoting their own programs. Reflecting on Barry Kroll's talk in which he described William Perry's stages of cognitive development—from dualistic to multiplicitic to relativistic—and applying the theory to the growth process for tutors, we can understand why pride in a program is a natural feeling that tutors might bring to a conference. Tutors and directors both have a strong personal commitment to their programs. For many, the writing center contributes to the development of tutors' identities, helping them grow as students, workers, peer helpers, and at conferences, professionals.

However, so that pride in one's program does not dominate the conference experience, writing center directors can provide guidance for showing tutors how it is positive to explore differences. Discovering through conversations and presentations that there are different yet equally successful ways to accomplish similar tasks helps peer tutors move beyond a dualistic perception of tutoring effectiveness—"Our way is the best way to tutor"—to a multiplicitic one—"Hmm, there are many ways to tutor." Through continued consideration of the issues in peer tutoring, tutors can develop reflective stances toward their work, writing, and themselves: "OK, what will work best in this situation, in this context, with these people?" Directors, in their discussions of pedagogy and theory, should model a relativistic view. Focusing on differences for differences' sake or emphasizing regional loyalties, pedagogical practices, or institutional status works against this intellectual and personal growth process for the tutors. Growth—

whether for administrators, teachers, or tutors, for the conference or for individual programs—is best promoted by the collaborative spirit that incorporates the kind of continual review, evaluation, and assessment that is part of a relativistic stance.

Lea Masiello  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Indiana, PA

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## **Tutoring non-traditional students: Blending writing and informal counseling**

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What do day-care centers, unsupportive families and the 11-7 shift have to do with tutoring writing? Quite a bit, especially when those you tutor are non-traditional students. My colleague and I have found that, because of the multifaceted lives of these students, 30-minute tutoring sessions must often balance writing needs with informal counseling.

Mary Gorman and I tutor writing at D'Youville College's Learning Center, which is under the auspices of the federally-funded Special Services Program. D'Youville is a relatively small (1,000 students), private institution, which, like many other colleges and universities, has tapped the population of returning students. This, coupled with the eligibility requirements of our program, means that many older students come to us for help in writing.

No matter what the student's age or status, though, the one-on-one relationship of tutor-tutee can lend itself to openness and confidentiality. This rapport results in two different sorts of counseling. First, Mary and I deal with the usual anxieties of writers. A paper may be due in a matter of days or even hours; a draft may be full of punctuation errors; or, a student may have no idea how to incorporate indirect quotes. These concerns require a sort of academic counseling. We not only teach correct uses of the comma and research paper techniques, we also talk a lot about issues such as time management and succeeding despite an unsupportive family member.

However, academic problems can be more acute for students who have been away from school for a number of years. Some of these writers, we find, lack confidence. Others feel that,

at age 40, they shouldn't need to ask questions. So as we address specific writing problems, we simultaneously boost the morales of writers. The cognitive and affective domains are most times inextricable.

In addition to their writing anxieties, our adult tutees frequently share personal concerns with Mary and me. The needs and outside demands of this student population differ significantly from those of the more traditional college students. Many older students have families. Indeed, on elementary school holidays, their children can be seen on campus. Students with infants and preschoolers continually face the demands and expenses of dealing with sitters or daycare. And because the non-traditional student is more likely than not to have a family, financial concerns are prominent. Many of the students we serve have outside employment, some full-time. A few even work the night-shift, and try to fit classes and studying around their sleep time.

Because non-traditional students have many commitments above and beyond course work, they need an additional sort of attention during writing conferences. Personal issues must be dealt with differently than strictly writing-related concerns. A second sort of counseling, more personal in nature, occurs. Still, the focus must remain on the writing task at hand. How can all this be accomplished in a mere 30 minutes?

Probably the most effective solution is for writing centers to hire tutors whose life experiences are not unlike those of the students they serve. This is critical. At D'Youville, the majority of our adult learners are women, many of whom have children. Mary and I are both mothers, so we share experiences and struggles with our non-traditional students. Mary, whose children are adolescents, understands the demands of high school and college life. I have young children, so I know well the realities of sitters, day-care and sleep deprivation. Clearly, we are both sensitive to the realities of our students. Although we acknowledge our lack of formal training in counseling, we do understand the life experiences of our students. This empathy enhances our tutoring sessions.

But what about the writing task? Mary and I know that, after a brief chat, we must get the student working. It is difficult to tutor and counsel in only a half-hour, so we often suggest that, if work begins promptly, perhaps the last few minutes can be reserved for personal concerns. It's

important to be gentle yet firm. Older returning students often have little free time in their lives to talk to anyone about their problems. Because they know that we, too, have similar life situations, they sometimes feel that they can "unload" on us. That certainly makes it hard to switch from personal problems to the task at hand. But it must be done.

If five minutes at the end of a writing conference is insufficient, Mary or I occasionally meet a student at another time, say, for lunch on campus. Moving from an office atmosphere to a lounge or eating area can be more conducive to sharing. Going this extra mile demonstrates that we writing tutors are human. It also increases the likelihood that the student will return to the Learning Center for future assistance.

If a student's problems are too serious to be addressed at the end of a writing conference or over lunch, then one of us will, of course, refer her to a counselor. At D'Youville, our students have access to a Personal Counselor, who is available to the entire student body, as well as a Special Services Counselor within our Learning Center. Nonetheless, Mary and I sometimes find that, because we are mothers, we share more life experiences with older, returning students than do either of the counselors.

One last hint. We have found that some non-traditional students feel they have little to write about. Encouraging them to draw from their wealth of experiences, beginning with freewriting or brainstorming techniques, can turn a near-counseling session back into a writing session. Rather than simply talk about a concern, a student can be encouraged to write about it. By doing so, she will not only feel better but will also gain a new perspective on the problem through her writing. This technique also serves to lessen the anxiety felt by a writer who has not been in an academic setting for some years.

So when we tutor writing, Mary and I continually strive for the best balance between personal concerns and writing concerns. However, we both find our tutoring most rewarding. We not only understand the everyday realities of our non-traditional students; we have learned much from them, too.

Sharon Green and Mary Gorman  
D'Youville College  
Buffalo, NY

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## Conference Announcements

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### 10th Annual Writing Centers Association: East Central

May 5-6, 1988  
Indiana U. of Pennsylvania

Participants will explore collaboration in writing centers, focusing on approaches to the composing process, tutor preparation, tutor-tutee interaction, and the use of computers. Featured speakers include Dr. John Collins from "The Network," who will discuss "A Writing Program that Works: Using the Writing Folder." Dr. Muriel Harris from Purdue University will offer a workshop on "Collaborating Effectively in the Writing Center." Professor Linda Reif from the University of New Hampshire will speak on "Teacher as Learner: The Teacher as Collaborative Writer in the Classroom."

Registration fees are \$35 for full-time college and school faculty, \$25 for part-time faculty, and \$15 for students. Tutors who are presenting will have registration fees paid by the association.

For registration information, contact Dr. Lea Masiello or Dr. Mike Williamson, the IUP Writing Center, 206 Eicher Hall, IUP, Indiana, Pa 15705-1087 (412-357-3029).

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### Fourth Annual Long Island Writing Conference

### "The Writer's Voice: The Reading-Writing Connection"

April 21, 1988  
Melville, New York

Speakers include Robert Boynton, Boynton/Cook Publishers, and Dr. Robert Bone, Columbia University. There will be a series of workshops presented by teachers of writing, journalists, poets, storytellers, writing project people, and others. For further information, contact Joseph A. Morra, Farmingdale High School, Lincoln Street, Farmingdale, NY 11735 (516/752-6643) or Patricia Mintz, North Shore High School, 450 Glen Cove Avenue, Glen Head, NY 11545 (516/671-5500 or 212/549-0863).

### The Second Merrimack College Confer- ence on Composition

in combination with

### The New England Writing Centers Association Annual Spring Conference

### "Connecting Approaches to the Writing Process" April 15-16, 1988

For further information contact Kathy Cain, English Department, Merrimack College, North Andover, MA 01845. Telephone: 617-683-7111.

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### Call for Conference Proposals

The Midwest Writing Centers Association has issued a call for papers to be presented at their 1988 conference, October 28 and 29 at the Embassy Suites in Kansas City, Missouri. Papers, workshops, and panel discussions should address the theme, "Writing Centers: Trends and Traditions." Send a 150-word abstract for papers and workshops or a short description for a panel discussion to Sally Fitzgerald, program chair, Center for Academic Development, UM-St. Louis, 8001 Natural Bridge Road, 507 Tower, St. Louis, MO, 63121. The deadline for proposals is May 2, 1988.

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### Interested in teaching in China?

The Guangdong College of Education, in Guangdong, People's Republic of China, needs teachers qualified in teaching literature, writing and linguistics, and have at least an M.A. and teaching experience. Contact Professor Lin Chi Hai, Foreign Languages Department, Guangdong College of Education, Guangdong, People's Republic of China.

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## Non-Directive Tutoring Strategies

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For the past four years we have trained peer tutors to staff three drop-in writing centers at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Our class is a three-credit, upper-division English course that emphasizes equally the academic and experiential aspects of tutoring writing. Through our work as tutors and as trainers of tutors, we have become committed to the development of what we call non-directive intervention.

Our belief in non-directive intervention is largely based in our criticism of the current educational system which operates by virtue of unequal power relations between students and teachers. Much has been written about the potential to upset such inequalities—and the disenfranchisement they engender—through the use of peer interactions. Increasingly, teachers, tutors, and tutor trainers recognize the importance of a non-directive approach; however, the concrete feasibility of non-directiveness seems to be a matter of less certainty. Although a considerable body of literature addresses collaborative learning and conferencing in the abstract, little of that literature is devoted to specific tutoring or teaching techniques. In addition, whereas tutoring handbooks presumably fill this void through their discussions of techniques, their assumptions about what constitutes non-directiveness are problematic. For instance, many of the client/tutor protocols that have been published as models of successful tutoring violate non-directive objectives insofar as they impose upon the client the tutor's determination of meaning. The clients in these conference excerpts may leave the writing center with a more coherent paper, but we question whether they also leave with a heightened sense of authority over their texts. In other words, in reviewing the literature, we do not see the empowerment of the student, but rather the reinforcement of the prevailing educational hierarchy with tutors replacing teachers in the knowledge position.

Non-directive interventions in the writing center context serve as a contradiction to the prior writing experience of most students—an experience that provokes anxiety and insecurity for many. The first contradiction is the simplest yet the most powerful—that of being listened to by an attentive tutor. How many of us have had the opportunity verbally to generate ideas and puzzle over problems for as long as we want or need with someone who does not have an agenda of his/her own that s/he is impatiently waiting to interject?

The tutor also embodies for the client the immediate presence of an interested and engaged audience who is *affected* by the force and clarity (or lack thereof) of the writer's ideas—a second contradiction to the client's experience of writing as an isolated, lonely activity, and a reinforcement of the writer's awareness of his/her own rhetorical situation. Thirdly, non-directive intervention contradicts the client's past relation to authority: the tutor does not pass judgment and instead shifts the emphasis away from the apprehension of error toward the development of meaning.

The benefits of employing non-directive techniques also accrue to tutors. By virtue of their involvement in the educational system, tutors inherit the prevailing models of learning, and more often than not, enroll in a tutoring course harboring inflated visions of their soon-to-be-enacted masterful tutoring performances. Teaching non-directive strategies to tutors interrupts the cyclical dynamic whereby those who have been put down by a system attempt to gain power by adopting the guise and mode of authority. These tutors, many of them planning future careers in education, leave their peer tutoring course with an awareness that the educational system is not a monolithic hierarchy, and that alternative ways of exchanging and developing knowledge and skills do exist.

As teachers, we've also inherited our models of education. Because of our own experience as students in a competitive educational system, we may feel the impulse, once we are legitimized as authorities, to retain as much power as we can. Or, we may simply unconsciously repeat the techniques we have observed our own teachers employ, techniques that seem axiomatic with the term "teaching." However, if you intend to teach non-directive strategies to tutors, you need to be willing to use them in your own context—as you share information or elicit it from students; as you encourage their thinking; and as you respond, verbally or in writing, to their writing. We have experienced a payoff, however: handing power back to students, we benefit from their increased involvement and investment in the learning process.

Our understanding of just how non-directive strategies work—how they empower a student by engaging him/her more fully in the thinking and communicating process that is writing, how they help a student create a more effective text—



is based on several beliefs about the writer and the role of the tutor. First, we believe that what our clients have to say in their writing is important, interesting, and valid. We also believe that students already possess many thinking and communicating strategies, and that these tacit capabilities can be useful tools for creating effective writing. Thus, we believe (and want writers to see for themselves) that writing is not a mysterious, privileged enterprise, but is largely a matter of deliberately employing the capabilities they rely on every day to make sense of their world and to communicate with others.

One job of a non-directive tutor is to discover ways to help the writer recognize and exercise these tacit thinking and communicating skills. Instead of simply telling the writer what to say, or how to say it better (which only reinforces the writer's feelings of inadequacy and encourages his/her resignation of author-ity) the tutor takes on the role of prompter. S/he asks questions—the whats, whys, and hows—that the experienced writer has internalized: “What do you mean by this?” “What's the connection between this idea and this one?” “Why do you want to include that?” “Why do you want to put this here instead of here?” “How could you make that idea more clear—explain? illustrate?” These non-directive questions encourage the writer to explore and expand his/her ideas and connections, and to think about how to communicate them most effectively to his/her audience. The tutor must resist the temptation to second guess the writer's meaning, and impose his/her answers to the questions. For non-directive strategies do not just help the writer “get out” or “fully express” what s/he already knows about a topic, or what may seem to the tutor to be the implicit message of the piece of writing. Rather, as the writer engages more consciously in the process of using language, prompted by the tutor's questions, s/he generates new meanings. By helping writers exercise this process, rather than showing or telling them what to do, non-directive techniques provide writers with problem-solving strategies, which are, in some sense, already their own possessions. Because of this sense of ownership over the content of the conference, writers experience a heightened involvement in the process of writing, and are thus more likely to employ these strategies on their own in later writing.

The tutor's second job is to share knowledge of standard conventions with the writer. Because the writer's audience is most often a member of the academic community, the tutor should know and be able to explain at least some

of that community's criteria for effective writing. Often, the writer is already aware of these criteria (the need for a focus or thesis, the need to support generalizations, the ways to use commas or semicolons) and knows how to use them. In other cases, the writer is entirely (too) familiar with the words “thesis” or “support” or “comma,” but has only experienced them as disembodied rules, and had never learned how they relate to *meaning* in writing. The non-directive tutor is in a good position to help the writer better understand the conventions. S/he first explains it in terms that relate to meaning, and then helps the writer practice the convention with his/her own content. The challenge for the tutor is to incorporate these criteria into non-directive strategies—to help the writer gain facility with the conventions without becoming error-bound, without preempting the more important evolution and articulation of the writer's meaning.

As we attempt to define non-directive strategies in concrete terms, we return again and again to the question of how to navigate between the extremes of appropriation, which only reinforces the writer's sense of inadequacy, and a laissez-faire approach where the tutor is nothing more than a sounding board and, more often than not, contributes to a writer's sense of frustration. We believe that when the line is successfully navigated, the tutor is in a position to offer the writer productive, yet non-invasive guidance. Through open-ended and honest questions and responses, the tutor acts as both explorer and prompter, a companion to the writer as s/he creates and communicates meaning. As a result of this kind of guidance, the writers' active and tacit skills in thinking and communicating are validated and enhanced, and they gain a more useful understanding of the conventions. In short, while non-directive strategies increase the writers' sense of authority over their own writing, they also encourage them to develop a more conscious repertoire of strategies and knowledge for use in future writing tasks.

Kay Satre and Valerie Traub  
University of Massachusetts-Amherst

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(For those who are interested, we have handouts which attempt to demonstrate, in concrete terms and strategies, the characteristics of non-directive interventions and where we locate them between appropriate and laissez-faire approaches. Those who would like copies of the handouts should direct their request to Valerie Traub, c/o Writing Program, 305 Bartlett Hall, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003

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# Tutor's Column

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## We used to help them with writing

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What's that, young man? The Wright State University Writing Center? Yeah, I remember the Center. I remember working there back in, oh, let me see now . . . I think it was sometime back in the 1980s. It was '86 or '87, something like that. That was before the Rellikarian/Jerillin War, back before Earth became the cesspool it is today.

Oh, I tellya kid, those were the good old days. You didn't have to worry about going outside without your oxy-tanks, and there were no clone patrols to hassle you. Hmmmm? Yeah, sure they had the missiles, but we didn't worry about them. What were we supposed to do anyway? Good thing the Jerrillin metal-plague took care of them all before they could fall into the hands of Emperor Vyril.

What did we help them with? Haven't you been listening to a thing I've said, boy? Writing! We used to help them with writing! That entailed a lot of things. See, in the good old days we had universities, big schools where thousands of people would go to learn. One of the things people would study there was English. That's the language we speak. 'Course, most everyone could speak it before they came to school. What they studied was how the language was used in a written way, and they studied written works by all kinds of famous authors, like Shakespeare, Joyce, Austen, and Whitman and . . . oh, all kinds of people.

Well, people just entering college, that means the same thing as university, were sometimes called "freshmen." No matter what courses students took, they were all supposed to have a similar background in certain fundamental subjects, like the use of language. But some students were stronger than others. For instance, Jeph, you're good at swimming, but I'm not. So if I wanted help with swimming, I'd come to you. 'Course, I'm too old to do much swimming nowadays. Well, that's just like the Writing Center. It was a place where people who needed help with

writing could come.

Hmmmm? I tutored all kinds of different people, Jeph. Staff people, nurses, science students . . . students just starting out and students older than I was. Anyone could come to the Writing Center. Working there, I had some of the best times of my life, Jeph.

Well, enough of this. We should get moving. The rest of the rebels will be meeting at Terriff Point soon. I don't know how long it'll take us to cross the Kaggo Sea.

What's that you have there, Jeph? Let me see that. I don't understand. It's a blank piece of . . .

Well, I suppose we could wait until the morning to start across the sea. Do you have a pencil, Jeph?

Tim Waggoner  
Peer Tutor  
Wright State University  
Dayton, OH

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From the *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

From the minutes of a faculty meeting at Bethel College (Ind.):

"\_\_\_\_\_ requested the faculty to return van keys immediately after use, and to be sure the interior of the vans are clean and filled with gas."

Be sure to roll up the windows.

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## Job openings

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### Writer

Major employee benefits consulting firm seeks entry-level writer with excellent business writing skills and potential to grow into consulting role.

Duties include drafting and revising materials to explain benefit plans to our clients' employees, including booklets, brochures, video scripts, newsletters, and other employee communications.

Knowledge of clear, concise, persuasive writing style a must. Knowledge of employee benefit plans helpful, but can be learned "on-the-job." College degree in English with advanced courses in writing preferred. Starting salary \$18,000 or more based on background, plus a comprehensive benefit package.

Send resume and letter summarizing your qualifications to: Ms. Jane M. Lump, Communication Consultant, Wm. Mercer-Meidinger-Hansen, 222 S. Riverside Plaza, Chicago, IL 60606

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### Director Of The Center For The Advancement Of Language In Learning

#### Saint Peter's College

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We are looking for a Director of The Center For The Advancement Of Language In Learning. The Director is responsible for training and supervising peer tutors in a program which emphasizes tutoring in writing and mathematics and offers tutoring for all courses. The Center is equipped with Apple computers which are used for computer assisted instruction and wordprocessing.

Candidates should have an M.A. or Ph.D. with course work or degrees in rhetoric, linguistics and/or compositional studies. Experience directing tutorial programs is desirable. There is opportunity to do research in language. Salary is competitive. This is a 12-month, renewable appointment starting June 1, 1988. Applicants should submit a resume and arrange for three letters of reference to be sent no later than May 1 to: Dr. Patricia A. Sullivan, Chair, C.A.L.L. Search Committee, Saint Peter's College, 2641 Kennedy

Boulevard, Jersey City, New Jersey, 07306. The person now holding this position, Peter Ferris, has offered to supply further information. Telephone: 201-915-9417.

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### Developmental Reading and Writing Instructor

#### Community College of the Finger Lakes

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Full-time permanent position, beginning September 1988. Teach reading, writing, and study skills at main campus and Geneva Extension Center.

**QUALIFICATIONS:** Master's Degree in Reading or English Composition required; at least three years experience in developmental education at the college level preferred; teaching experience with computer-assisted instruction desired.

**SALARY AND RANK:** Instructor, \$20,000+. Send resume, copies of transcripts and 3 letters of reference by 4/8/88 to: Personnel Office, Community College of the Finger Lakes, Canandaigua, New York 14424, EOE/EE.

For more information call Gretchen Starks (716) 394-3500, Extension 390.

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### Interested in teaching in China?

The Zhejiang Normal University in Jinkua, Zhejiang, People's Republic of China, is looking for teachers for September 1988 to July 1989, to teach students in their Foreign Languages Department. They need teachers in two categories:

1. *Experts:* These should have a Ph.D., D. Ed. or M.A., M. Ed. and have studied English and have at least three years of teaching experience. Salary, plane ticket, plus free housing and medical care.

2. *Teachers:* These should have an M.A. or B.A. and five years of teaching experience. Salary, plus free housing and medical care.

Contact Mr. Yu Ze-Chao, Foreign Affairs Office, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinkua, Zhejiang, People's Republic of China.

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## A high school writing center grows—and grows

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The Pattonville High School Writing Center, in St. Louis, has just been recognized as one of NCTE's Center of Excellence programs. In our four years of existence we have undergone some significant changes. We began with one teacher, one borrowed computer, and three hours a day for both semesters. Because of diligent recordkeeping and the enthusiasm of our teachers and students, we were able to expand to a full day's operation the following year, bringing in three additional teachers to serve as writing coaches. Assigning teachers to the Writing Center was the beginning of our most complex problem.

Our large department of twenty-four teachers made staffing the Center a delicate and often fiery ordeal. Teachers working in the Center do not have students assigned to them. Instead, they are free to conference with students, prepare and give classroom presentations, learn various computer programs, and build an activity file. Admittedly, this release time from assigned classes increased the class size for everybody. Some of our colleagues saw the opening of the Writing Center as an opportunity to obtain a "cushy" schedule and felt that we should immediately set up a rotating list for scheduling, according to seniority. Others believed that teacher training and experience in writing should be our criteria. The major problem centered on the disagreement between the need for actual course work in teaching writing and experience in teaching writing as a process. Finally, we developed the following recommendations: we prefer to use teachers who have Writing Project experience, or recent course work in writing process; who teach primarily writing courses; who have the ability to work one-on-one with students, using questioning techniques; who are able to give large group presentations effectively; and who have command of at least two word processing programs. However, tension still exists among several teachers.

In addition, our department chair was able to obtain nine Apple Plus computers for our Center. We were somewhat leery of tying ourselves to the computers because we wanted our primary focus to be on student conferencing. We also know that we still had a number of teachers to win over to teaching writing as a process. Despite our concerns, our first full year of operation resulted in a 33% increase in student

conferences and a 40% increase in classroom presentations.

During our third year, we were given nine Apple IIe computers. This was probably the most frustrating time we had. We now had a Center that tried desperately to accommodate as many as sixteen students at one time using BankStreet Writer (since it was all we had that worked on both types of computers) but giving two different sets of control commands. Then we tried having everyone on the IIe's use Applewriter while staying with BankStreet Writer for the Apple's. Talk about confusing! In addition, we went to a staffing of co-directors who each had a two-hour block of time in the Center. However, we managed to continue in our writing-across-the-curriculum efforts and presented our ideas for this at a writing conference in the spring.

Our fourth year brought with it many more successes. We converted to an all-Apple IIe Center with five printers. We continued with co-directors and four additional staff per year. Our students were entering contests and winning; other content area teachers were asking for help in lesson design as well as for presentations; we managed to reach all of our ninth-grade English classes and almost all of our writing classes; a journalism class was printing with Newsroom, and yearbook classes had their own special programs. It was a busy Center indeed.

This current year brings with it even more changes. Our Center has been recognized by NCTE as a Center of Excellence, and we have also received a grant for "Peer Writing Tutors Across the Curriculum." We now have eighteen seniors who have been trained to conference with students and give presentations. We have added five additional Apple IIe computers, a computer projection screen, and a Macintosh Desk Top Printer set up with a scanner. We returned to having a single director who is in the Center for two consecutive hours with eight other teachers filling the rest of the time for the year. We gave a presentation at a recent conference. We are contemplating opening our Center staffing up to other content area teachers for next year.

To sum things up, my advice to anyone contemplating operating a Writing Center—DO IT! But, remember:

- Have a clearly written philosophy
- Communicate your criteria for staffing effectively from the beginning
- Don't worry about equipment; one set-up will do for record keeping
- Promote yourself at every opportunity
- Work *with* teachers, not *for* them
- Begin with friends for writing-across-the curriculum presentations
- Be prepared for challenges and frustrations
- Be flexible

Barbara Brooks  
Pattonville High School  
St. Louis, MO

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### A reader asks. . . .

Our high school Academic Committee will not honor a request to award a half-credit per year for tutors even though they spend one period per week in a formalized classroom with a structured course and one period per week in the lab tutoring. The committee's rationale is that this is not academically oriented because it is a voluntary service to the school. They object also because my curriculum centers around the instruction of communication techniques and not on the emphasis of hard core writing *per se*. My position is that these tutors are already hand-picked with demonstrated good writing skills. They are also in a creative writing course along with their regular honors English course, and to teach writing for the sake of content is merely beating the same dead horse. My emphasis is on the cues of building rapport, dealing with bad attitudes, directing a lesson, drawing responses from tutees, when to end tutoring, etc. etc. This, of course, is not writing content but theory, and theory is not considered academic (even though we teach Music Theory and Pythagorean Theorems here). The summarizing statement is – well, why do you need credit? My reply is that the program would be solid when the tutor knows that he has made a commitment for which he receives credit. Right now, students come to class when they want to because it can not be required. Keep in mind, I teach senior high and not college level.

I will be very interested in readers' re-

sponses addressed either to the newsletter or to me as to whether tutors should have incentive and reward for what they do and what kind it should be.

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### A reader asks. . . .

It is a challenging and often deeply gratifying profession that we are in. I have taught both in the classroom and in writing centers for five years now, and I much prefer the lab set-up. Teaching one-on-one, you know whether or not you are getting through to a student, and you don't leave his or her side until you are satisfied that he or she understands the material.

I cannot count the times that I've heard a student in the lab say something like, "So *that's* how a semicolon is used. Nobody ever told me before." The student can now employ what once seemed mysterious and arbitrary.

But for the teacher who enjoys lab work there is one rather large problem: making a living. At the junior college where I work now, the lab teachers are highly qualified (all have M.A.'s or Ph.D.'s), but we are paid as part-time employees with no benefits or job security. And at four-year colleges, lab teachers are generally graduate students.

The purpose of my query is to ask this: Are there writing labs that hire permanent, full-time employees?

I am good at my work and would love to make a career of it. Any information would be greatly appreciated.

Chad Hautmann  
312 Lipona Rd., #3  
Tallahassee, FL 32304

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## Fear and trembling at the center: Student perceptions about the tutorial

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If those of us connected to the writing centers in our schools are really committed to improving the quality of the service offered there, we must obtain honest and detailed feedback from the tutees concerning what works for them and what does not. Unfortunately, we are reluctant to ask their opinions, partly because we are afraid of failure, partly because we cannot be sure we will receive sincere answers.

Working on the theory that tutees will give their most honest opinions to an impartial third party, I had four of my English classes bring drafts of assigned essays to the Writing Center at Rhode Island College (Director: Dr. Mary E. McGann) and write about their experiences there. On the day their work was due they submitted to me the draft taken to the center, the final draft, and comments on the tutoring session. They were to tell me what happened, what worked, what didn't, and how the session affected their view of themselves as writers.

Before continuing, let me further clarify the context of the project. About two-thirds of these students were freshmen or first semester transfer students taking core courses in writing or literature. The rest were either sophomores or juniors who had put off completing their English requirement as long as they dared. Only one in the group of 96 students had ever used the center before.

I went into the project with my own expectations. The students would want a "quick fix" and resent the center's collaborative approach; they would see the session as a necessary nuisance, an inconvenience. Going to the center would not evoke fear and trembling, merely a healthy anxiety. At the conference session one peer tutor thought I would confront yawning apathy.

So much for expectations. What I discovered has changed my whole attitude about how we should respond to our tutees, how we should train our tutors, and how we should promote the writing center. Let me divide my findings into perceptions before entering the center and perceptions after the session ended.

### Perceptions before Entering the Center

– Granted, many of these students are freshmen, but hardly anyone knows anything about what actually goes on at the center.

– They do not expect to get much out of the experience.

– They think tutors are all English majors coolly ready to lord their superiority over the tutee. As one student put it, "After all, they are getting paid to do this so they must be pretty good." Or as Jim, a student, wrote, "When I first heard that our Writing 100 class had to go to the Writing Center I got all depressed and worried. I felt that there would be a lot of geeky English majors there who were going to laugh at my work and rewrite it for me."

– All assume that the tutor will control the discussion and show them how they should have done it. Jim's fears already allude to this. Shelley's response is even more typical: "I assumed my work would be torn apart and organized by the person I met with the way *he* would have written the paper."

– All are secretly seeking approval, any kind.

– The large majority, convinced they are poor to terrible writers (who told them this? not I), are ashamed to reveal this failure to another. Time and again they seem like penitents offering up their papers to a wrathful god ready to inflict judgment. Tracey writes about waiting for the moment when the tutor would read her paper, then "rip it apart, shred it, and murder it." Patricia writes that in consequence, "I am frightened to hear other people read what I have written." Why are they so frightened? Perhaps the key lies in Teresa's admission: "Before writing this paper I never knew what the Writing Center was all about. My first visit I was very nervous. I felt as though these people would think to themselves 'Does this girl belong in college?'"

– Above all, for at least 90% this *is* a place that inspires fear and trembling. In *Danse Macabre* Stephen King discusses one of his favorite archetypes, the "Bad Place." This is where we face our worst repressed fears: dark forests, cemeteries, the haunted house. To the extent that enter-

ing the Writing Center for many of these students means facing their deepest fears as writers, we might add another "Place" to the list. When we train our tutors and our clerical help, when we think about the atmosphere in the center, when we consider our promotional efforts, including links with the teaching faculty, we must keep their fear in mind.

### **How Perceptions Change after a Session**

Not surprisingly, Dr. McGann's staff altered all these perceptions. The students found that this place is not so Bad after all. In fact, it is a Good Place.

— Over 80% of the students told me that going to the center was well worth the effort and that they would go again on their own. The insecure writer finds a friendly, supportive atmosphere in which what he or she has written is valued. A typical response is that of Michelle, who discovers that she is "not really that bad at writing a paper" and realizes "that I am coming along and that I have improved." The majority appreciate the interactive, collaborative approach. Clearly these students do not want anyone to try to rewrite their papers for them. Jim was "pleasantly surprised" that there were no geekish types around and that above all, "they made me do the work and didn't do it for me."

— Interesting trends emerge from those students who do *not* find the tutoring sessions valuable. Matching the very insecure writer with the efficient, analytical, and slightly aloof tutor produces disastrous results. The tutee leaves the session defeated, determined never to return. In addition, some students need more direction, more modeling than they get from the collaborative approach. Often I read the complaint that "there wasn't enough criticism." Kathy leaves the session "thinking I either had a good paper or I wasn't told everything I should have been. I'm not foolish enough to think my paper was that good!" As a result, Kathy thinks about it for a night, then decides to throw the essay away and start over. Like others who complain of a lack of specific criticism, Kathy has more confidence about her abilities and therefore can take more criticism. Most importantly, if she doesn't get more, she will not return. Finally, with the ESL student the hands-off, non-directive approach fails terribly. Makna, a Southeast Asian student, felt frustrated by his tutor's resistance to telling him what was wrong about a particular sentence. He told me he did not want a proofreading service, just more

guidance than he was getting.

Out of this project emerged the following suggestions for improving the services of our writing centers:

1. To make us better at what we do, we must provide a mechanism for getting reliable tutee feedback. Perhaps writing center directors should ask more of the teaching faculty to do what I did.

2. In tutor training, we can never over-emphasize the affective aspect of the tutoring session. Despite appearances, our tutees are more anxious, more frightened, than we imagine.

3. We must respond to those who want more guidance by alternating between a directive and a collaborative approach. We must not let a "hands off" credo get in the way of helping the student improve. Not all students are alike. Some need more guidance. The complaint, "If I knew what was wrong, I would have fixed it," is a valid one.

4. We should train our tutors to help the more advanced writer as well as the basic one.

5. We should train our tutors to help the ESL students. Better yet, we should hire as a tutor a successful ESL student who can better understand their needs.

6. To help broadcast the many virtues the center has, we should ask the teaching faculty to consider coercing their students to use the center at least once during the semester. I recommend this not because I am a "fascist" at heart but because all too often I read comments similar to those of Brenda, "If you hadn't force me to go, I wouldn't have, and I would have missed out a lot."

Let me conclude by noting the obvious, that it is Mary McGann's Good Place, the Writing Center, that offers so much, not me. We members of the teaching faculty should take greater advantage of what writing centers offer. We should at least get our students to the door.

Paul Ady  
Rhode Island College  
Providence, RI

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## Book Review

*Analyze, Organize, Write: A Structured Program for Expository Writing*, Arthur Whimbey and Elizabeth Lynn Jenkins. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1986. 208 pages).

In the fall of 1986 I wrote a love letter to a basic writing book, a work so different in type from similar works as to belong to a different species. With this book, Whimbey and Jenkin's *Analyze, Organize, Write*, for the first time in my teaching career, I have found it possible to give more than just lip service to the idea of teaching thinking skills to freshman writing students, specifically to my basic writing students.

Typically, students have much difficulty with the concepts of the general and the specific as well as of classification, concepts basic for first thinking and then writing. They also have problems internalizing the writing processes used by successful writers. The Whimbey-Jenkins book addresses these areas by using text reconstruction, described by Benjamin Franklin in his *Autobiography*, a process in which the student arranges jumbled passages in order and writes them as much as possible from memory. Later, the student does his own, original papers. A section on sentence-combining is also included. In effect, as the Preface to Students points out, the student is given the opportunity to improve his writing by following an "intensive program" in which he is able "to read, think, and write a great deal." In fact, two chapters alone are worth the price of the book since they offer foolproof approaches to guided writing of full-length essays: Chapter 8: Writing a Paper Beginning with a Thesis Statement That Includes an Opinion and Supporting Evidence and Chapter 9: Writing a Paper for a Competency Test.

The book is ideally suited for one-on-one instruction. Through such tutoring in logical organization, especially in furnishing specific details to support generalizations, the basic writer can improve his study skills in note-taking and outlining as well (Morton). Further, from practice in text reconstruction the student learns the use of coherence devices (Morgen discusses text cohesion extensively). Finally, practice in standard written dialect will enable students to master it (Friedmann and MacKillop v-vi).

This seminal work is based upon fifteen years of research by Dr. Whimbey in the teaching of thinking skills. "The Whimbey Method" was introduced in *Intelligence Can Be Taught* (1975,

co-author, Linda Shaw Whimbey). He has had numerous articles published about the method including one in *Psychology Today*. It has also been reviewed in the *New York Times* twice. An instructor's manual is available for the book.

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### A reader asks. . . .

In the University College here at the University of Cincinnati we do not yet have a writing center for freshman English students (we do for developmental students), but we probably will have one by 1989 or 1990. The new center will undoubtedly house the peer tutors as well as professional tutors. My concern is that the peer tutor program could lose its identity in such a situation, and I am wondering if anyone has ever met this kind of problem and, if so, how you dealt with it. Your thoughts on the subject would be most helpful to us as we plan for the future.

Hurst R. Sloniker, Co-director of Freshman English and Director of the Peer Tutor Program, University College, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH 45221.



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## Another unanswerable question

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Here is another candidate for the newsletter's contest for "Most Mystified Comment of the Month."

First, some background: A teacher of Introduction to Sociology employs a rather jocular tone in his classes, which sometimes interferes with clear communication. About half-way through the semester, he reads to the class a satirical article, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema," by Horace Miner. He then assigns a writing task, a one-page imitation of the article. Unfortunately for students, he phrases the assignment as follows: "Do a Nacirema job on some other aspect of American society." The student's situation is further complicated by the teacher's withholding any discussion until after the papers have been written— including the information that *Nacirema*

is *American* written backwards, as are many other names in the article. This feature is fairly noticeable to the reader, but remember, these students are *listening* to the text rather than seeing it.

We acquired a copy of "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema" after our first experience with a frustrated class member last year, so that students and staff can have a fighting chance with the topic. We've worked to straighten out many confusions over this poorly-designed assignment, but the Most Mystified Comment to date came from a young man who dutifully sat in the Lab and read the article with frequent trips to a dictionary on the table. He strove manfully, but finally gave up and turned to a tutor to say, "What's a 'Nacirema job'? I can't find it in the dictionary."

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