The WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

....inside....

....from the editor....

In our tutorials we expect our students to help decide what we will work on together. Thus as a group we are decidedly uncomfortable about generally setting agendas for others without their input. A member of our group referred to this as being "collaboration junkies"--unable even to make up agendas for tutor staff meetings without soliciting suggestions from tutors. For the same reason, it has seems inappropropriate for *me* as editor to decide what *you* are interested in reading about in the newsletter. Now, with the surveys (included in the April issue), I'm getting a clearer picture. So do return your survey (if you haven't already done so),and next month I'll list those topics for future articles that you've said we need.

In the meantime, keep sending your articles, reviews, announcements, names of new members, and yearly $7.50 donations (made payable to Purdue) to me:

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Peer professionals

At the 1985 CCCC in New Orleans, there was a session called "Writing Tutors: Peers or Professionals?" Although we think of these as separate groups, I would like to entertain the idea of a hybrid tutor, the peer professional.

Ellen Mohr ("Employing Undergraduate Students as Peer Tutors," *Writing Lab Newsletter*, February 1986) describes a professional tutor as a "person who has at least an M.A. and works on a part-time basis in the writing center." This seems a common definition. But what about graduate assistants working on M.A.s? Are they professional tutors? Peer tutors? Or possibly the hybrid I am suggesting? These graduate assistants might also teach freshman composition or work in a developmental program where professional work is expected. Besides, they are probably given mailboxes in their departmental office—a sure sign of professional status.

I wish to focus, however, on those students normally considered peer tutors: undergraduate students (and some graduate students) who, again in Ellen Mohr's words, "may lack the knowledge and experience needed for in-depth tutoring sessions." They are peers of those students who most frequently use our writing centers. As peers, these student tutors have an advantage, it seems, over professional tutors. Again, I cite Ellen Mohr:

Many of the students visiting our writing center actually prefer to work with our student tutors over our professional tutors. . . .So often these students are uncomfortable revealing their writing problems to a "professional" whom they believe to be a perfect writer. They feel comfortable, on the other hand, discussing (brainstorming) their writing assignments with peers. . . .The barriers made by marks and negative comments were built by past teachers, not peers, and are easily broken down when two people have a peer relationship.   Besides, students have

always helped one another.

I agree with Ellen Mohr, but there is another set of expectations which I find students bringing to our writing center. They expect to find a tutor capable of handling "in-depth tutoring sessions"; they expect the tutor to "know" more about writing than they do; and, they expect to leave the center having learned from an "expert." In short, many students expect to find a professional tutor, whether that tutor is another student or a faculty person.

Accounting for both sets of expectations—the comfort of working with a peer and the assurance of working with a professional—presented a challenge when I became director of the writing center at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Most of the tutors each semester are students working in the center as a course requirement (English Composition Practicum), which students take during their first semester of tutoring and may repeat once. Currently, the center is also staffed by five graduate assistants, each working 13 hours per week. Even so, more than half of the available tutoring hours are filled by student tutors.

My goal as director of the center and teacher of the practicum has been to use the practicum as a means of producing professional tutors ready to work in the center. The content and format of the practicum, coupled with a support system within the center, are designed to provide inexperienced tutors with the attitudes, skills and experiences to become professional writing tutors, to become peer professionals.

The practicum operates as a series of staff meetings rather than as a class, even though it meets three hours a week and usually in a classroom. During the first few weeks of the semester when the center is not yet filled with students seeking assistance, the class meets in the center. Breaking students out of the classroom setting establishes a more informal structure, making it easier to create a "staff meeting" frame of reference. New tutors learn about the center amid the rush of those early days of the semester: people are busy preparing the appointment book, typing schedules, organizing files, answering the phone, and assisting teachers in search of materials for their classes; experienced tutors are milling around drinking coffee and telling war stories from the past semester or getting geared up for the new one; and I am always distracted by last-minute details needing attention. It becomes clear

to new tutors—filled with anxieties and questioning my "Of course, you'll be wonderful"—that this class is not going to follow patterns for learning to which they are accustomed.

There are several goals for these first days of class:

1. I want to get new tutors "hooked" on the center.
2. I want them to see it as an exciting and growing place.
3. I want them to feel an important part of the center.
4. I want them to be included in the planning of the center; and,
5. I want them to begin to think of themselves as professionals.

The first day of class introduces new tutors to the center. They learn where things are: forms to be filled out, appointment books, resource materials, mailboxes, coffee pot, supplies, etc. The students fill out the forms required of everyone using the center; they also create a file for themselves—just as they will for students whom they tutor.

We then talk about the importance of accurate record keeping. We discuss the type of information required and which office or administrator wants to know what information. This is also when we begin to talk about the "professional" nature of the center. Professionals are held accountable, and a writing center needs everyone's cooperation if it is to be accountable for its operations. Professionals also sit around and talk about their profession—so do we.

The first class session ends with a discussion of plans for the center. We begin with what we have already accomplished: we have a telephone, typewriter, reception desk, lounge area, and computers. Students are surprised when they learn that none of these existed before 1985. This year, new tutors were thrown into the challenge of rearranging the WRC to accommodate new computers within our existing space. This happened two days before the center opened. Then we plan: our need to expand into the adjoining classroom; the creation of a separate computer classroom, writing center; the use of new brochures (designed by an earlier practicum class); the duties of the receptionist, soon to be hired; the spending priorities for our new (and first) budget; and the incorporation of the new computers into our tutorial efforts.

The second day of class we return to the center and begin the slow work of acquiring skills. Picking up on the first session, we begin by examining the required paper work, those forms which must be complete and accurate. Each student studies files from prior semesters, reading through them and taking notes on what they discover. We then discuss these files which are kept for our information. Many things occur: first, new tutors notice when a former tutor failed to fill in required information (for example, tutors frequently forget to write in the time tutoring sessions begin and end); second, they discuss what happens in a tutoring session, the topics most frequently covered; finally, they talk about the types of students who use the center.

We then examine the forms which are filled out and sent to instructors after each tutoring session. After my first semester in the center, an instructor gave me a complete set of all tutor

> Becoming a professional is, in many respects, a process of naming and expectation.

information sheets and her responses to them. New tutors reading this semester-long dialogue begin to see the value of communication between tutor and instructor. They also notice the differences between our internal record keeping (the student files) and our external communication (reports to instructors).

The second week is spent tutoring and being tutored. New tutors come to class (again in the center) with a draft of an essay. They then tutor each other for thirty minutes, the same amount of time that we tutor students. This is usually awkward; new tutors are exactly like new students in writing groups. It takes time for novice writers to criticize each other's work; it also takes time for new tutors to begin to offer critical help to each other. After everyone has tutored and been tutored, we discuss what happened. And did not happen. The remainder of that class session and all of the next one is spent discussing what was beneficial about the tutoring sessions, what they wish would have happened (both as a tutor and as a student writer), and what went wrong. During the next week, each new tutor makes an appointment in the center to be tutored by an experienced tutor. The new tutors also make arrangements to

observe experienced tutors tutoring. An experienced tutor is one who has already completed the practicum. Once the new tutors have been tutored and have observed experienced tutors, we discuss these sessions in detail. In addition, each new tutor is assigned an experienced tutor for a mentor. The mentor works with and observes the new tutor throughout the semester.

During that third week, class time is spent learning about the students who use the center. Since a large number of students are second language students, new tutors examine and discuss papers written by students from a variety of countries, and guest lecturers with ESL training discuss the cultural and educational backgrounds of our international students. The goal of these sessions is to move tutors beyond any homogenous view of international students. We also have guests discuss the needs of disabled students, minority students, and nontraditional students. Another session deals with the various students we encounter in the WRC— usually personality types. In addition, new tutors meet with their mentors and other experienced tutors to discuss the students they have worked with in the past.

During the fourth week of the semester, most new tutors begin to tutor, so class time is spent on establishing priorities in tutoring sessions. Four activities take place:

> 1. We list writing problems and needs: brainstorming as many situations as we can imagine; then we establish priorities, beginning with those problems or needs which seem to call for immediate attention and ending with those which can be handled at a later date.
>
> 2. We look at teacher referral forms to see e what priorities instructors establish for us, noting that we ALWAYS begin with those problems identified by the classroom instructor as most important.
>
> 3. We break into small groups and work with a student paper, usually a rough draft that a student has given me permission to use. After working with the paper in small groups, each group lists, in order of importance, those items that they would focus on in a tutoring session. We compare and discuss these different lists and generate a class list with explanations for our priorities.

4. Finally, new tutors meet with experienced tutors and generate profiles of tutorial sessions already conducted that semester. We also look at student folders and compare notes.

During these first four weeks, new tutors also read and discuss material in the text and articles from the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and the *Writing Center Journal*. Ending the fourth week discussing what has occurred in actual tutoring situations establishes the format for the remainder of the semester. The class becomes a true staff meeting with the agenda determined by what occurs in the WRC. Writing center ethics, the differences between helping and doing, explaining prepositions to ESL students, explaining ourselves to teachers, and working with difficult students are topics frequently discussed. This is also when the support system within the center becomes more important.

In the WRC, all tutors have a common goal: helping students become better writers. And, we support each other in achieving this goal. No one is expected to know everything, not even the director. We know that we can ask for and receive help from each other. This help might be locating materials in the files or on the bookshelves; it might be joining a tutoring session; it might be sitting around and discussing our sessions; or, it might be sharing techniques with each other (a "this worked for me" discussion). Another important part of our internal support system is developing materials.

Each semester, tutors develop new material for use in the center or in small group workshops. Tutors are encouraged to develop materials in areas where they feel most comfortable or where they see the greater need. These activities make new tutors more familiar with the WRC and establish them as participants in the support system.

What I have discussed so far is the process involved in moving new tutors from peer tutors to peer professionals. Since all tutors, including faculty members, either audit the practicum or take it for credit, they automatically become peers with the student tutors in the classroom. Working together on developing materials, discussing tutorial problems and techniques, and assisting each other with their own writing also develop close peer relationships among the tutors, whether they are new or experienced. I bring my own drafts to the practicum and the center for tutorial assistance. As the director of the center, I am probably expected to be the most professional of the tutors. If, however, I need and value the assistance of my tutors, then the peer relationship which exists among us becomes stronger.

Perhaps a unique feature of UNCC's writing center is the age range among the tutors. Many of our students are "nontraditional," not falling in the 18-22 age group of traditional university students. WRC tutors have ranged in age from their late teens to their late fifties; all of our "professional" tutors have been well under 50. The diversity in age, and in experience, also helps establish a genuine peer professionalism within the staff.

In closing, what takes place in the Writing Resources Center and in the practicum probably is similar to what takes place in most writing centers or training classes. Becoming a professional is, in many respects, a process of naming and expectation. Student tutors become professional tutors, in part, because we call them professional tutors; professional tutors become peers through the same process. In the naming, expectations are established. In the WRC, we expect all tutors to be peer professionals. Activities in the class and in the WRC are aimed at realizing this expectation. When we succeed, the goal is realized: peer professionals prove a workable hybrid. The final word, however, belongs to a WRC tutor. In her self-evaluation a tutor wrote: "I never cease to be amazed at the professionalism of all the tutors. In an educational situation where the rule seems to be 'do as little as you can get away with,' WRC tutors give far more than necessary. They take the job of tutoring seriously, not as merely a means of acquiring academic credit" (Hall Lovell, May 1986).

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Optimizing the writing center for an interdisciplinary course

An article in the September 1986 issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* touts mandatory attendance in the Salem State College Writing Center for students in the Developmental Skills (DS) Program. These students are placed in the program on the basis of scoring below 350 on each of the verbal and mathematical Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) and are admitted to the college with the understanding that during their freshman year they will regularly attend the writing, reading, and math labs. Two years ago, we wrote the attendance requirement into their composition syllabus for course credit, a strong incentive for visiting the Center. But the students gained many other benefits from mandatory tutorials besides credit. For them, having a scheduled weekly appointment with the same tutor offered personalized instruction, support, and even friendship, and was an important factor in their adjustment to college-level work. The tutors, on the other hand, gained invaluable experience in developing a long-term approach to tackling the specific writing problems of their individual charges.

Last spring, our tutorials took on another dimension. DS Composition II was offered in conjunction with General Psychology, and in the Writing Center, we had to come up with strategies to help tutors effectively manage this interdisciplinary perspective. The tutors adapted easily to some demands, such as working in American Psychological Association (APA) format. Others seemed more challenging, such as handling relatively technical materials from the field of psychology.

Our main concern was that the writing assignments designed to interface with psychology could also be managed by tutors who were themselves students, and largely unfamiliar with this field. These were five assignments that would go through a series of drafts with the help of the tutors: a summary of an empirical article, two papers that asked the students to apply psychological instruments to characters in literary texts, a standard scientific report of an in-class experiment, and one essay relating an area of study in psychology to their own experience. Our worry was that the tutors might not be able to assist the students with these specialized writing tasks. What was found, however, was that a combination of the usual preparation given the tutors, and the presence of a well-informed laboratory instructor was extremely successful.

The tutors are typically prepared to work with all kinds of writing tasks in a Practicum taught by another Writing Center co-director, Frank Devlin. His training provides the tutors with a strong foundation for tutoring in any subject area, by emphasizing the importance of structure and clearly articulated ideas. But when *all* the writing is in an unfamiliar area, the tutor may not feel qualified to offer continuing assistance to the tutee. For example, in a typical tutoring session, a psychology major may come to the Writing Center with a paper on Erikson's theory of identity development. Even though the psych major has more knowledge in her area than the tutor, the tutor is seen as the expert in writing. But in this interdisciplinary course, the student is paired in a weekly tutoring session with the same tutor. While the DS student is gaining knowledge about the area of psychology, the tutor's knowledge remains the same. Newsletters helped defuse this potential problem. These kept the tutors aware of any specialized terminology and gave them the information that they needed to see themselves and be seen as experts.

The newsletters were the most essential ingredient in establishing the line of communication between the classes (psychology and composition) and the tutoring session. The instructor's expectations for how each assignment should be completed needed to be explained in these newsletters, so she and the laboratory instructor met regularly to discuss each week's classwork, as well as the specific problems of individual students that the tutors might help circumvent. The lab instructor wrote up the newsletters and distributed them via the mailboxes to the Center's ten student tutors.

One newsletter, in particular, was necessary to the tutors' effectiveness because of the wealth of information that it contained. It outlined the sections of a scientific report of an in-class experiment about the functions of the left and right hemispheres of the brain, which, in effect, was an attempt to measure the creativity of the test taker. The students were asked to take a word association test, then write up the "experiment" as if they had been the researchers, not the subjects.

To complete this task, the students had several materials to incorporate: a table of data from which to draw inferences, a psychology text, and two articles reviewing empirical research. The

tutors needed to carefully coach the students to understand these materials and to follow the specific format required. The writing needed to be focused and thorough, and to be most successful, the student needed to follow a certain chronology in writing the report. So, our newsletters explained that the "abstract" section, for example, should be written in a concise, accurate and nonevaluative manner and should include the hypothesis, as well as information on the population, the method, the findings and the conclusion.

As it turned out, up to three tutorials were spent on the above assignment. Since the students themselves had little experience with scientific writing, they needed to go through several false starts before they caught on. Many of their first drafts fell short of requirements, so the tutors became instrumental in sorting out the problems identified by the instructor. At this point, the tutors became a valuable resource in the students' eyes.

This scientific report became an important model for other assignments in the course, since students and tutors alike discovered that its explicit and carefully delineated sections (abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion) in fact mirrored the implicit structure of any piece of expository writing. The assignment, therefore, adapted well to an interdisciplinary approach, and the Writing Center adapted well to it.

The newsletters, and by extension the Writing Center, clearly had the advantage, then, over published guides to writing for a particular discipline. We were able to tailor the writing conventions of a single field to the individual assignment the student was being asked to complete. The newsletter helped carve out for the Writing Center a unique role in the interdisciplinary writing process: that is, it provided the usual approach to the basic principles of good writing: strong thesis, good organization, well-constructed paragraphs, with the specialized information that students needed to properly complete writing tasks in a particular field of inquiry. During the course of the semester, both students and tutors learned to write in a specialized field and discovered how work in a specialized field creates writing.

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A reader responds . . . .

The questions about funding raised in the March issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* are some that I hear often too. Even schools which invite me to discuss writing centers are not always eager to fund them. I'm not sure that our efforts in getting our center started will work in many places, but a little shame and humiliation of the board seemed to help.

I assume that most people would investigate all possibilities of federal, state, and local grants. We have discovered that some corporations will provide funds for new and innovative programs (although this is often a one-time funding). Those interested in working in a center may have to sell their services. Teachers can make arrangements with local businesses to sponsor communication seminars and use the money to help fund the center. Although most of the expense goes to pay for the time of the personnel, people need to contact publishers and book distributors about using their materials for pilot programs, contact business supply firms about use of typewriters and computers.

Some centers sponsor "book fairs" or are the center for book swaps and charge 10c for handling each book. This does not generate a lot of money, but many centers can use all of the small change possible. Contacting local or state education associations for support (financial or personnel) has been effective in some instances. Peer tutors are one way to reduce the money needed for certified staff, and the use of retired teachers or adult volunteers is another way to save on expenses.

To be most effective, a center must be a full-time viable part of the school, and the administration/board/community must support the efforts. The more recognition and awareness of the center and its value that can be created, the greater the chances of eventual full funding. Sadly, most centers must begin with the shoestring when they should be given a full set of shoes.

These ideas are not new, but those of us who have been involved know that everything must be tried.

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Tutor's Column

A knot of questions: An exercise in training tutors

"It is better to know some of the questions
than all of the answers."

— James Thurber

Asking the right questions in a tutoring session is vital to the success of the conference and the learning process of the student. The necessity for tutors asking the appropriate, nonthreatening questions may seem an obvious fact in the writing lab business, but so often it is the obvious that is most easily overlooked. The wrong questions can lead the tutor and student astray, causing them both to concentrate on unimportant issues. A successful writing center needs to keep the spotlight on the obvious.

To discover what questions tutors were asking most often and how effective those questions were, our writing center staff developed the following training exercise. In one of the tutors' weekly meetings, the tutors contributed the questions they thought they asked most often. They also considered questions for conferences suggested in Donald Murray's *Learning by Teaching*. From this list, the Writing Center Director selected ten model questions and reproduced them on a worksheet (see A Set of Model Questions included at the end of this essay). Spaces 11 and 12 were left blank for tutors to write in any questions they found themselves asking that were not on the sheet.

In addition to discovering the staff's most popular questions, the study had three further objectives. First, the exercise was designed to remind tutors that their role as askers of questions is often more important than as givers of information. Most tutors had already discovered that when they did not use questions for inviting students to participate actively in the conference, the tutors found themselves dominating a session, jumping to conclusions about the writer's intentions, and never learning what the writer thought of her paper. Communication broke down and the conferences were not effective.

The second objective was to help tutors perceive what kind of questions they asked, how often they asked them, and how effective each question was. In addition to informal tutor discussions, staff training sessions, and each tutor's journal writing, the project sought to help tutors become conscious of their tutoring techniques.

A third objective was to broaden the tutors' range of questions. For each tutor, the list contained several unfamiliar questions. The model question form was not intended to impose a rigid format for each conference. Rather, the form gave the staff a disciplined approach for exploring new questions and discovering their impact on the tutoring session.

The exercise proceeded in the following way. Each tutor received a sheet with the ten questions. After each tutoring session, tutors marked the number of times each question was used. For each question, the tutors chose one session in which they described how the question was used and analyzed its effectiveness. The sheet also required tutors to estimate how many times they asked a follow-up question of the original listed. This data would suggest which questions most often required follow-up tactics to elicit the desired information.

At the end of a month, each tutor evaluated the questions. They sorted the questions into three groups: excellent questions that consistently proved helpful; good questions that worked occasionally in the right situations; and finally, ineffective questions or those seldom used. The tutors completed the exercise by discussing the one question that was most effective in the majority of sessions.

Over 60 conferences were held by the eight tutors who completed the study. Six filled out the questionnaires in great detail; two made only minimal comments. Despite a wide range in responses, some patterns were immediately evident. The tutors most often asked, and ranked as most effective, questions 1, 3, 4, and 10.

Question 1, dealing with the main idea or thesis, was asked in almost all conferences. One tutor commented that "if the student is unable to tell you this in a few sentences, the paper probably does not either." Questions 3 and 4, asking students what they liked and disliked about their

papers, were asked in over 90% of the conferences. Also, the majority of the staff frequently used question 10, asking if the students had any questions concerning what the tutor had said or suggested in the conference.

Only two tutors asked about the future direction of the paper or how it compared with previous works. "Most times there was nothing to compare it to," commented one tutor. "Many of the students I saw were writing on their particular subject, and for this professor, for the first time."

Six of the tutors added questions of their own in spaces 11 and 12. All six added some form of a two-part question: What is the assignment for this class? Do you understand the assignment? The tutors found that many students did not understand the nature of the assignment or what the instructor expected. Tutors found that most conferences concentrated on helping students more fully understand the assignment's requirements.

Many tutors used the sheet to remind them of useful questions and to check themselves as well. Other tutors found that helping the students find their mistakes was far better than simply identifying the problems. On question 4, asking students to point out their weak areas, one tutor admitted that she was still locating problems for a student and not letting the writer discover this herself.

This same tutor switched question 6 around and found it to be more effective. "Instead of asking the students what they were surprised to learn in their papers, I told them what I, as a reader, either did or did not learn." She hoped this sharing of response would give the students a better idea of audience, and how at least one friendly reader responded to the text.

The tutors said they found the handout to be useful. One tutor commented, "that the sheet reminded me which questions were most effective." Another tutor noted that "these were useful for me to look at when I was stuck in a particularly difficult conference and did not quite know where to go next."

Perhaps the greatest danger from this system is that tutors will begin mechanically repeating these 10 "best" questions and always sticking to them. We hope that tutors would still strike out and explore new questioning techniques. At the same time we need to continue

evaluating the questions we ask. Exercises such as the one described in this paper are just one of the many techniques for keeping the obvious obvious.

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A Set of Model Questions for Tutoring

(For each question indicate the number of times used, the follow-ups, and a description of one session.)

1. **Main idea.**
   What is the paper's main idea? What is your thesis?

2. **History of paper.**
   How did this paper develop? What changes have you already made?

3. **Good points.**
   What do you like best about the paper? What works best?

4. **Weak points.**
   What do you like least about the paper?

5. **Incomplete.**
   Where is your writing incomplete, or missing supporting details?

6. **Surprise.**
   What surprised you in writing this? What did you learn?

7. **Readers.**
   How will your audience respond? Where will the audience have trouble?

8. **Future direction.**
   Where is this paper going? How will you revise this paper?

9. **Comparison.**
   How does this paper compare with others you have done?

10. **Questions.**
    What questions do you have of me?

11. _____

12. _____

"Aerobic" writing: A writing practice model

Introduction

The writing center I oversee is rich with resources: I have graduate assistants and peer tutors; we use computers and software, cassette players and tapes, books and handouts. And we have a lot of strategies to help people with their writing. But one of our best strategies— what I call "aerobic writing"— requires none of our fine resources.

I first used writing intended just for practice years ago in comp classes— something on the order of free (or as some students called them "forced") writings done in and out of class and saved like a journal. I believe strongly that, as Donald Hall put it in *Writing Well,* "if the habit of writing remains alien to us, we will never learn to write with any naturalness" (20).

But as we all know, our students, whether in a traditional classroom or in the writing center, will not write regularly simply because we believe in it or say it's good for them. In fact, the idea of writing for practice (for fluency, for comfort and confidence) is so foreign to most students, indeed to many teachers, that some will rebel at it. At the very least, what is called for is a writing-for-practice schedule or model.

I first developed a systematic writing practice model for writers in my classroom; in the last few years I've developed and honed it for writing center writers as well. I use the writing practice model with all students enrolled in my writing lab credit course and some version of it with many drop-in students.

Theory

I always tell my writers not to apologize for what they are about to say, but I can't seem to resist an "apology": what I'm about to discuss as "theory" is basically some beliefs I hold. Indeed, the theory behind the writing practice model amounts to not much more than the fact that in developing any performance area skill— and writing is performance— two basics are required of the would-be performer: a "can-do" attitude and lots of practice.

Having confessed the relative insubstantiality of all this, here are some of the ideas in the background, a sort of credo. To begin with, I think that the writing center can offer writing opportu-nities that are not offered in or that are in addition to those offered in the traditional classroom.

I think writing students whether in the classroom or in the writing center need to do more writing. And I think that writing for practice— with no teacher marks or response— can be worth-while. Donald Hall again: "Writing is a skill, like an athletic skill, which comes more naturally to some people than to others but which improves with practice for everyone. Practice is a necessity" (18).

I think that in the writing center we may be able to undo damage that's done in the classroom to writers...that while students do too little writ-ing, teachers typically do too much— in red ink, that is, finding errors, scrutinizing and respond-ing to every little thing. Ken Macrorie says it well in *Telling Writing:*

> Marginal comments pointing out slips or mistakes in grammar, spelling, or mech-anics are not ordinarily useful to a writer until he is polishing his work in final draft. The experience of thousands of teachers in American high schools and colleges has showed that such reading for correction...has had little positive effect. (67)

Finally, I think that spot reviews and exer-cises may be appropriate for usage/mechanical problems, but that these problems may be ad-dressed through writing practice also. And I think that as writing center staff we can always consider writing as an alternative to help a writer improve. (I don't think this always happens at all; I think altogether too often we turn to an exercise or a lesson.)

I know that I am not in uncharted territory here; comp theorists from Donald Graves to Mina Shaughnessy to Sondra Perl have covered this ground for us. The thing is that while writing practice may not make perfect writing (is that even a worthwhile goal?), it certainly gives the writer experience in finding her own voice and turning ideas and feeling into words, and this in turn builds confidence and comfort and fluency and ultimately promotes willingness to take risks with the writing.

Model

"Aerobic" writing is like aerobic exercise— at least in terms of scheduling, that is; "aerobic"

writing is sustained continously for a certain length of time and done on a regular basis at regular time intervals. Regularity is the key because, as Ben McClelland (*Writing Practice*) puts it,"Setting and adhering to a schedule of regular workouts is essential to...writing improvement."

Here's the model I use: writers write at least two times a week for about an hour each time. (Fairly often, I prescribe four writings, two done in the center, two at home; occasionally when the situation warrants it, I set up a plan for daily writing.) I usually require Gene Krupa's *Situational Writing* as a source book; most students can respond readily to the situations Krupa offers.

In the beginning, a writer on the writing practice model simply writes and saves her writings by date. I ask her to show me her work when she has accumulated eight to ten pieces (usually at the rate of one piece per day). At that time, I give verbal reader-response-type feedback. I do not critique at all this first time; instead, I try to do the opposite of what the classroom teacher may be doing: that is, I may say, "This is fine; you're doing so many things right: you make complete sentences, you make sense, you have something to say...." I keep the content and the tone of the conversation positive. I may say things like, "I used to go fishing with my grandfather, too." Or ask questions like, "When did you go to school in Dallas?" In other words, I acknowledge the meaning in the writing. At this point, I do not even look for errors. (This takes considerable discipline for someone trained in the era of error-finding-as-teaching-writing.) At the end of the first conference, I usually say something like, "This is a good body of writing. Keep writing, and show me the work when you have another six to eight writings done."

When she presents me with another batch of writings, I typically read through these pieces, "listening" to the writer as she "speaks" in her texts and talking back occasionally as an interested reader. Then I look through everything she has written to this point, trying to find one or two promising pieces to be expanded, revised and perhaps polished. This is usually about the middle of the term, and she then may take a break from the practice writing schedule and work on revising a piece. After a piece is done, the writer returns to practice writing, and I say "Keep writing" and give all the encouragement I can. (Donald Murray writes about this technique in a reverie called "The Listening Eye: Reflections on the Writing Conference." It is required reading for my staff.)

During the course of a term a typical writer will produce thirty to forty pieces of writing, ranging from one to three pages, and I, or an intern, will have from three to five conferences with her. In each conference I say more than anything else, "Keep writing."

A "Case Study"

Nancy R. is a young woman in her late 20s who enrolled in our English 2100, "writing lab," after having finished freshman comp and world lit. She is bright, pretty, has worked as a model to help send her husband to medical school. On her first day in the writing center, we, an intern and I, signed her in and explained the writing practice model we require. On her second day here, Nancy learned to word process. On the fourth day, Nancy wrote the following response to Krupa's "Situation One." (I include her work with her knowledge and permission.)

> I am Nancy R_____, I'm an older student who returned to college after working for four years. I am having trouble with classes requiring essays or papers to be written. I have a poor background in grammor, spelling and writing. I tend to avoid classes which will be requiring papers to be written because I don't write well.
>
> I hope to gain the knowledge I missed in my education so that I will be able to write letters, papers or essays correctly.

Nancy had no trouble expressing her concerns: her length of time out of school, her age, her "trouble with classes requiring essays," her "poor background," her avoidance of classes with a writing requirement, her hopes. But we could see her discomfort in the hour she spent to produce these eighty-two words.

The fifth day (second writing), Nancy was still uncomfortable— with us now as well as with herself and her writing. She spent an hour with us and produced one small paragraph: 111 words. On the fourth day, Nancy rather angrily (and it seemed out of character) demanded that we put her on the grammar modules, saying that she couldn't see how "writing is going to help me" improve in writing. The intern and I listened but

explained very little; we assured her that the writing practice would help and we encouraged her to keep writing.

Nancy did keep writing. She wrote twenty-nine pieces and, at my suggestion, revised several of these. Here, taken directly from her floppy disk, is the first paragraph of writing #27, which totalled 576 words:

My husband was in his Radiology residency while I was attending school full time and modeling part time. I was making extra money as a fashion model and I wanted to do something different with it instead of putting it into our savings account. I decided that I wanted to learn about the stock market, so I could invest the money that I had earned and hopefully make more by investing wisely. I didn't really think I would make any money at first, I just thought it would be fun to learn how the stock market worked. I did some research by reading a few books and by reading the financial section of the newspaper. I found out you can invest as little as one hundred dollars in the stock market and still buy enough shares in a company to make a profit if the stock goes up. I called a girlfriend who was a stockbroker and asked her for some advise. She advised me to invest in a stable long term growth stock, which is good advise but I wanted to play a little and accept some risk in my venture since this money was extra income. I was more intrested in a local yogurt company. I realized I was eating This Can't Be Yogurt every day for a snack, so I checked into the company and found out that it was a locally owned company and that the company would soon be selling stock to the public. The shares would be less than ten dollars a share which fit into my plan of investing. I remembered reading that for first time investors you should pick something you are familiar with or invest in a locally owned company. T.C.B.Y. fit both areas.I did not take my friends advise and I invested in the yogurt company. That investment turned out to be a wise move the company has had three stock splits in a year and a half and the stock has gone from seven dollars a share to thirty-five dollars a share. I have also been looking for an area I might enjoy as a career and investing now looked like a possiblity.

Although she did not polish this piece, Nancy clearly by this time had found her voice and a good measure of comfort in "extending her discourse," as a colleague who teaches comp theory puts it. Best of all, she is on her way to learning to write well because she believes she can.

Addendum: Nancy returned to the writing center as a drop-in student the following term for some help with her polishing skills. She and I both know she has work to do in mastering some usage conventions, but I am certain that we could not have succeeded with Nancy by focusing on the conventions at the outset.

Conclusion

The writing practice model—"aerobic" writing—works well for students with "writing anxiety," as I hope is evident from Nancy R's experience, and with most other inexperienced writers as well. I think this is so because what we are asking of students is something constructive in the most basic sense of the word: they must construct the words that become the sentences that become the paragraphs that become the discourse. It—the writing practice—is also constructive in the sense that it is positive as compared to the usually destructive/negative find-the-errors approach. Finally, writing for practice is constructive precisely because it is practice—practice that builds comfort and ultimately, like any practice, greater proficiency.

Sally Chandler Crisp
University of Arkansas
at Little Rock

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Southeastern Conference Growing

Historic Charleston, SC, welcomed almost 200 registrants to The Eighth Annual Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference. Reveling in everything from buggy tours to The Citadel Dress Parade, participants from as far as Utah and Vermont enjoyed the setting as well as the professional camaraderie.

The 1988 Conference broke past records for number of presentations (37), number of presentors (47), and diversity of topics. Concurrent sessions allowed for workshops and papers beyond the Conference theme: "The Composition/Computer Connection." Apple Computer, Inc. provided two days of on-going computer demonstrations for those participants interested in reviewing word processing programs and instructional software. Several presentations dealt with networking and the specifics of teaching composition on computers. Donald Gallehr, Co-director of The National Writing Project and professor of English at George Mason University, delivered the keynote address "Pay Me Now, or Pay Me Later" and also lead a workshop on "Drawing, Visualizing, and Writing." Joseph F. Trimmer, of Ball State University, received the SWCA's Annual Distinguished Service Award for his outstanding work with writing centers.

William Wolff, of Appalachian State University and Editor of the new, hot-off-the-press journal linking composition programs and writing-center practice, introduced *FOCUSES* at the Conference. SWCA is proud to help sponsor such a high-quality publication with articles by Janice

M. Lauer, Winifred Bryan Horner, Richard L. Graves, and James C. Raymond. Contact Dr. Wolff to subscribe. Also, 1988 Conference Proceedings will be available. Contact John Burrows, Florida International University, Miami, FL. 33199

SWCA decided to create a board of representatives from the nine Southeastern states to help with communication in the growing organization. As Tom Waldrep, one of the founding members and this year's conference co-chair, reminded the group, "We've come a long way in eight years when Gary Olson served as its first president. We're not munching burgers in Tuscaloosa, AL, on our own budget; we're eating crayfish canapes, compliments of Houghton-Mifflin in the Gazebo of the Omni Hotel in downtown Charleston." The 1989 SWCA Conference will be held in Knoxville, Tennessee, April 14-16. Make plans now to join us!

Angela Williams
The Citadel
Charleston, SC

New book on computers

Deborah H. Holdstein. *On Computers and Composition* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1987) 101 pp., $27.50 ($16.50, paper).

On Computers and Composition is described in the Introduction as a book containing "practical information on how to use the computer in a writing course and on what kinds of considerations the teacher should take into account before adopting computer-aided instruction (CAI) software. It also includes some political and practical issues associated with teachers' developing their own software." Especially useful for those who are plunging into the world of computers is the first chapter, "Assumptions, Definitions, and Techniques," which defines and illustrates categories of software (e.g., drill and practice, tutorials, simulations, etc.), and the second chapter, "Software and Hardware: Issues for Implementation," which suggests criteria for evaluation of software and offers a brief guide to hardware. This useful book can be ordered from MLA, 10 Aster Place, New York, NY 10003.

Book Review

J.N. Hook and William H. Evans. *The Writer's Tutor: One Hundred Self-correcting Lessons.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988. $20.50, 516 pages.

Hook and Evans have created *The Writer's Tutor* to enable teachers of freshman composition to provide their students with instruction and practice at the sentence level without taking up class time. Each of the autonomous lessons addresses a specific problem such as choppy sentences or pronoun reference. The lessons are grouped under four headings: sentence structure, usage, diction and style, punctuation and mechanics. Each section begins with a diagnostic test and ends with a mastery test.

These lessons follow a formula which the authors developed some years ago. In a preface directed to the instructor, they explain that "The formula has four parts, presented—with occasional slight variations—in the same order in every lesson: 1)inductive learning of a principle, 2)summary of the principle, 3)application of the principle, and 4)review of the principle."

In completing a lesson, the student works through three to five pages of large-format text divided into two columns of frames. The first frame in the right column presents an easy, obvious example and asks a question about it. The student answers the question and checks her answer in a frame in the left column. If her answer is correct, she returns to the right for a new frame; if her answer is incorrect, she completes another example in the left-hand frame. As she works her way through the remaining frames, she encounters both examples and principles. Eventually, she is asked to create her own examples. In the last block, she articulates the principles for herself by completing the sentence "One thing I hope to remember from this exercise is that . . . ."

These autonomous, self-correcting lessons can work very well in a writing lab, where tutors can assign them as supplemental practice while continuing to devote tutorial sessions to paragraph and essay writing. I assigned a lesson apiece to a very random sample of students, including basic students and peer tutors enrolled in my technical writing class. They all completed the lessons with little or no difficulty and indicated that they found the explanations clear and the material generally interesting. I notice that most of them did the extra practice examples even though they had answered the questions correctly.

Though the verb exercises I chose for them worked well with my basic students (one of them a Mina Shaughnessy classic case), the book is designed primarily for average and above composition students. It covers many problems (such as"the dangers of hyperbole" and the correct use of brackets) that students don't usually encounter in basic classes. Conversely, the lessons don't cover in any detail the confusions common to basic students— "s" endings on third person plural present tense verbs, capitals at the beginnings of sentences, etc. As a teacher and tutor of basic students, i would welcome another version of *The Writer's Tutor* designed especially for them.

I make this suggestion because I find Hook and Evan's text more interactive and therefore more effective than most workbook exercises. With most workbooks, students review a principle, then complete a number of examples whose similarity may elicit an almost automatic response. With *The Writer's Tutor*, students must look back and forth and write alternatively, and in doing so they encounter both principles and examples. Furthermore, they may master a principle more thoroughly since they must discover it themselves before it is articulated for them. In some of the lessons, the inductive process also reveals why the principle— the "rule"— is needed. Finally, the lessons provide instant feedback in the form of correct answers.

The lessons must provide these answers in order to be effective, but at times the authors are forced to oversimplify in order to supply unequivocally correct answers. For example, the section on "flowery writing" could leave a student with the impression that writing must always be "true to life" and "honest and realistic" in order to be good— an impression that some much-admired works of modern fiction would contradict. In the lessons on "there is" sentences and unnecessary passive voice, the authors must supply weak sentences with obvious candidates for new subjects and verbs in order to provide clear and easily corrected examples. However, the sentences which tempt even experienced writers to resort to weak subjects and verbs are precisely those which seem to lack qualified candidates for the subject. Teachers and tutors assigning lessons in the section on diction and style might want to combat the effects of this inevitable oversimplification

with brief discussions or additional writing samples.

The Writer's Tutor serves the needs of teachers and tutors very well indeed, but a few modifications would have made it easier to use. If my own experience is typical, tutors often hastily leaf through one or more texts in search of just the right supplemental exercise for a particular student. Though the index in the *Tutor* thoroughly covers the contents according to the authors' nomenclature, it doesn't include other terms teachers and tutors might use. For example, a tutor might search in vain for a lesson on *faulty predication* when an index entry for that term could have directed her to the lesson on *definitions*. While most of the headings in the table of contents specify precisely, a few (such as "More About Clauses—A Slenderizing Diet") sacrifice clarity to charm.

These minor flaws I have cited do not detract from the book's overall effectiveness in providing supplemental review and practice. Most such practice consists of repetitive *exercises*. *The Writer's Tutor* provides *lessons*.

Priscilla Leder
Louisiana State U. at Eunice

NWCA news to note

The following items from the Executive Board meeting of the National Writing Centers Association (held on March 19, at the CCCC meeting) will be of interest to NWCA members.

Nominations for New Board Members

The Board received nominations for the three at-large positions, the high school representative, and the two-year college representative. The following will be asked for biographical information for a ballot that will be sent to the membership in May: At-Large — Kevin Davis (East Central University): Bonnie Debet (U South Carolina); Lois Green (Clarion); Teri Haas (Hunter); Carol Haviland (Cal State, San Bernardino); Judith Kilborn (St. Cloud SU); Ed Lotto (Lehigh U); Community College — Ann Higgins (Gulf Coast CC); Ellen Mohr (Johnson County CC); High School — Lera Lich (Waco HS); Jim Upton (Burlington Community HS, Iowa).

Vice-President Split into Two Offices

In order to reduce the workload of the vice-president, the Board divided the position into 1st and 2nd vice-presidents. The 2nd vice-president will be elected from among the Board members and will be responsible for planning the CCCC Special Interest session; that person will become 1st VP the following year and plan the NCTE all-day workshop, moving on to President the next year. Bonnie Sunstein and Julie Neff, who currently hold the VP position jointly, will now hold 1st and 2nd VP jobs respectively.

1988 NCTE Workshop

Sunstein, organizer of the 1988 NCTE workshop, announced that the focus will be on high school writing centers, featuring Pam Farrell and Jim Upton as well as Susan Nugent. Besides looking at how we define writing centers in public schools, the participants will end the day with a position statement that will be the basis of an article in *English Journal*, written by Farrell and Sunstein. The next meeting of the Board will be in St. Louis during NCTE. Neff, organizer for the 1989 CCCC in Seattle, reported that the session will repeat the successful roundtable format of the 1988 session.

NWCA Collaboration with Writing Projects

In discussing possible collaboration with other NCTE organizations, Sally LeVan noted a need to contact Writing Project site directors and offer to do presentations on writing centers— a topic that has been popular with WP teachers. It was moved that each board member contact a local site director and also communicate with Jim Gray.

BITNET Addresses

Joyce Kinkead suggested collecting BITNET addresses of writing center directors to form an electronic network. If you are on BITNET, send Joyce a message with your BITNET address, and she will compile a "Writing Center Network" of BITNET Addresses (her BITNET address is FATCG@USU).

Regional WCA's Map

A map showing regional WCA's was suggested; however, some regionals overlap, so drawing the map is difficult. Regionals should send an outline of their territories to Kinkead (Utah State

University, Logan, Ut 84322-3200). Regional WCA's are invited to include notes in both the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and the *Writing Center Journal.*. Thomas Bateman of the Maryland Council is organizing a regional; New York City writing center directors are also getting together.

Summer Computer Workshop

The NWCA Summer Workshop on "Computers in the English Curriculum" had received inquiries from across the country. The Board is seeking sponsorship by regional WCA's to hold a 1989 summer workshop (the first two workshops have been located in Logan, UT). The topic for a week-long workshop should focus on writing centers.

Graduate Student Scholarships Available

For students working on a thesis/dissertation that focuses on writing centers, scholarships of $200 are available. Applications forms are available from Kinkead; completed forms must be accompanied by a letter of support from the Chair of the student's committee as well as the thesis proposal. Past recipients of the Scholarship Award include Evelyn J. Posey and Mary Killmer.

Grants to Regional WCA's

NWCA offers $100 grants to regional WCA's to help provide an honorarium for a key-note speaker at a regional conference. Regionals may also want to obtain NWCA brochures and sample "Starter Kits" for their conference participants.

Awards

In its annual recognition of outstanding scholarship on writing center theory and practice, the NWCA presented two awards: the award for best book went to Muriel Harris for her *Teaching One-to One:The Writing Conference* (NCTE) while the best article award went to John Trimbur for "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" which appeared in the *Writing Center Journal.* Both writers received plaques at the CCCC meeting.

Joyce Kinkead, NWCA Executive Secretary
Utah State University

....a reader asks....

I need direction about the best method for writing a proposal for a writing center at our high school. Any ideas or model proposals?

Dr. Jean Copland
Hardaway High School
2901 College Drive
Columbus, Georgia 31995
(404-327-6527)

Call for papers

Midwest College Learning Center Association

**2nd Annual Conference
October 5-7, 1988
Chicago**

"Learning Centers of the 1990's--New Directions"

Deadline for paper/presentation proposals: May 20, 1988. Submit to Martha Casazza, Vice President, MCLCA; National College, 18 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60603 (312-621-9650).

Call for presentations

6th Annual Michigan Tutoring Conference
Oct. 14, 1988
Grand Valley State University-Grand Rapids

The Michigan Tutoring Conference addresses tutoring issues in all fields. We welcome proposals on any aspect of tutoring writing. Presentations which involve audience participation are preferred to formal papers. *Presentations by peer tutors are especially welcome.*

Send a 300-word description of your proposed presentation by May 2, 1988 to Prof. Walter Foote, Director; Writing Center, 126 Commons; Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI 49401. Guidelines for proprosal writers and additional information available.

New publication for composition instructors

Composition Chronicle: Newsletter for Writing Teachers began publication in February 1988. It publishes news and features of interest to college writing teachers: writing programs, issues, personality profiles, computer applications, journals and books, conferences, testing and placement programs, etc.

The editor is Bill McCleary (PhD University of Texas at Austin), recently of Genesee Community College, New York. Bill has spent 25 years as a writing teacher. Assistant editor is Maxine M. Long, also of Genesee Community College. Contributing editors are Roger Cherry, New Mexico State University, and James L. Collins, SUNY at Buffalo.

College writing teachers are invited to submit news about any aspect of their composition programs or features about subjects of interest to their colleagues. Please send a query letter to the editor before writing a feature, however.

Composition Chronicle is published monthly during the academic year (9 issues, from September to May). A subscription is $25 per year for individuals, departments, libraries or writing teachers' resource rooms.

Send inquiries or subscriptions to *Composition Chronicle*, P.O. Box 39, LeRoy, NY 14482. Phone: (716) 768-7656 or 2163.