

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in
one-to-one teaching of writing

Volume 13, Number 10

June, 1989

...from the editor....

Congratulations! We've all survived another academic year. I hope it's been a good year for you- more students than ever, enough skilled tutors who have grown and matured under your watchful care, and even some understanding from others out-side your writing lab as to what tutorial instruction is really all about. Like the rest of us taking a breather during the summer months, with this issue the newsletter ceases publication until September. Then we hope to be back with more useful articles, announcements, materials re-views, and tutors' essays.

Thanks to all the authors of this year's articles and to our guest editors who have written columns this year: Paula Gills, Terri Haas, Rebecca Moore, and Evelyn Posey. If the newsletter could afford the postage, you'd each get copies of the letters that come in affirming how useful your articles have been. Thanks for sharing your insights and experience with the rest of us!

Best wishes for a restful, relaxed, calm, quiet, languid summer. (Enjoy- September isn't that far away).

Muriel Harris, editor

....inside....

**On Gaining Insight into
Ourselves as Writers
and as Tutors**
-B. Maid, S. Crisp,
and S. Norton 1

Micro Style
-Rebecca Moore 6

NWCA Report
-Bonnie Sunstein 7

**Peer Tutoring Conference
Report**
-A. Bilansky, T. Brad-
ford, and A. Vietto 8

Tutors' Column
-Isabel Spilman 9

**Literacy and Authority as
Threats to Peer Tutoring**
-Albert DeCiccio 11

Credit in the Writing Center
-Ellen Mohr 13

On gaining insight into ourselves as writers and as tutors: Our use of the Myers-Briggs type indicator

In the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Writing Program and the UALR Writing Center, we have been using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) for the past several years. While we do not routinely "type" Writing Center clients, formally with the test or informally (by guessing!), both teachers and students here have begun to consider how the understanding gained from using the MBTI may enhance our understanding of the writing process and of ourselves and others as writers.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a standard psycho-logical personality profile. Many colleges and universities use it for a variety of purposes. Be-cause the MBTI reports personality differences and helps to explain those differences, users of the MBTI are more likely to be found in an institution's student affairs division than in an academic discipline. But those of

us who work with the development of an individual student's skills, such as writing, can find "type theory" a powerful tool in helping us be more effective teachers.

Teachers, tutors, and researchers interested in the relationship of personality type to an individual's writing process will want to begin with "Personality and Individual Writing Processes" (College Composition and Communication, Oct. 1984) by George H. Jensen and John K. DiTiberio. Much of what follows is drawn not only from that groundbreaking article but also from conversations with Jensen and DiTiberio.

The MBTI

The MBTI is based on the work of Carl Jung. The instrument, a result of Isabel Myers' refinement of Jung's system, delineates sixteen personality "types" derived from four bipolar oppositions:

1. Extraversion/Introversion (E/I)
2. Sensing/Intuition (S/N)
3. Thinking/Feeling (T/F)
4. Judging/Perceiving (J/P).

1, Extraversion/Introversion

The first opposition, Extraversion/Introversion (researchers who work with type theory always keep Jung's spelling of extraversion), describes where we get energy. It is important to remember that this opposition deals with energy and does not use the terms introvert and extravert as they are commonly used: both extraverts and introverts can like people and interacting with people. This opposition has nothing to do with how people interact with others but rather where people get energy. Extraverts draw energy from other people; introverts get energy from within themselves. What is important here is the source of the energy.

In terms of the writing process, extraverts and introverts apparently go through the process very differently. For example, introverts usually go through the writing process very slowly and deliberately; they are thoughtful writers. They like composing. They like quiet. If they stop during writing, it's most likely that they are just thinking and are not necessarily blocked. Writing for introverts is very often a process of thoughtful introspection.

Matt Nagle, an introvert, comments on the E/I opposition in his tutoring:

Because I could not effectively talk about my own writing, I found it difficult to talk to the students about theirs... I continue to be amazed at how easy it is now for me to "diagnose" a student's writing problems, and I am sure that it is due to my efforts at balancing the two sides of my Myers-Briggs Personality Type: my introversion and extraversion.

Introverts are likely to shy away from sharing their writing with others. Nagle testifies to this, "If I came to a stopping point, I preferred to rely on myself to solve my own problems and figure out how to structure my paper on my own." Stephanie Zerkel, also an introvert, comments on how hard it is for her to show her writing, "It is like taking a cold shower in wintertime in the Antarctic for me to have other people read my writing."

Extraverts, on the other hand, like lots of action. Movement can be very important for them. When they actually write, they tend to write very quickly. Barry Maid, an extravert, can see this tendency at work in his own writing process. As one of his colleagues, an introvert, has observed about Maid's process, he "dumps text faster than anything I've ever seen." This apparent ease with which extraverts can pro-

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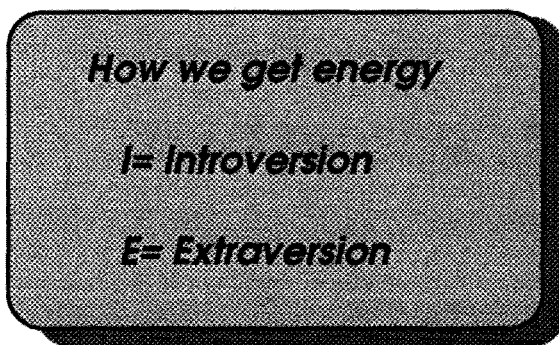
Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is eight to twelve double-spaced typed pages, three to four pages for reviews, and one to two pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose self-addressed envelopes with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g., Aug. 15 for the Oct. issue).

Please send all articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly donations to the editor.

duce words can be deceiving. What this observant colleague doesn't realize is that it can take him days to reach that point. Before reaching the "point" at which he can create, Maid explains,

I pace constantly. I flit from office to office talking to anyone who will put up with me and, to use a colleague's phrase, I "vampirishly suck energy" from all my colleagues. Once I reach the point when I feel ready to begin composing, I return to my own office, sit down, and all of a sudden words just start to pour out. That's extravert writing.

As seen in Maid's description of his own writing behavior, extraverts thrive on being around others while writing and typically get their creative energy through discussing their ideas. Sandie Jacobi, a Writing Center staff member and nuclear medicine major, also utilizes the MUTT, "I tend to use it as a personal



tool for me to understand how I relate to people and how I can keep them in my mind in dealing with them as a tutor or friend or any other aspect of my life." Jacobi feels being an extravert helps her during the tutoring process to set up a comfortable rapport with students;

I derive energy, motivation, and excitement from people that I work with. And as a result, the more I talk with some-body the higher I feel and the more energy I get. I really have to concentrate on keeping myself calmed down so I won't blow up in their face or something with an idea. It's kind of like a snowball effect when you see something starting. It's easy for me to approach people being like that and have them develop a relationship with me pretty quickly, and I think you need that in a tutoring situation.

These realizations clearly have implications for writing pedagogy. Some of the assump

tions that we as writing teachers or writing tutors may have about how people are supposed to sit down and start writing come into question. Use of the MBTI can help us realize that some people will indeed be able to sit and thoughtfully plan before they write. Others may need to get up, move around, and talk to people before they're ready to start composing.

Anita Buswell has found that "flexibility is the key in the composing process: introverts need privacy plus time to thoroughly explore topics with themselves, but they might try to develop extravert features whereby they can accept helpful criticism from their peers."

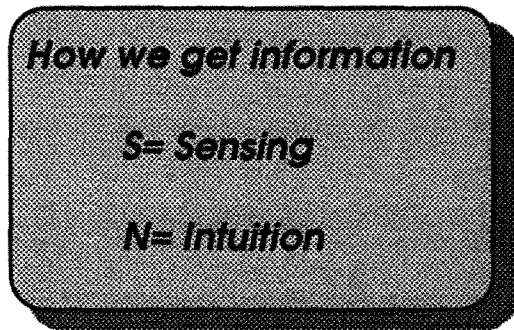
2. Sensing/Intuition

The second opposition has to do with how we get information. It's what Jung calls Sensing versus Intuition. Sensing types see details. They like concrete details and tend to be very procedural about those details. Intuition, on the other hand, see the whole picture. An easy way to explain this difference between sensing and intuition is this: at first glance, the sensing type can't see the forest for the trees. A sensing type might look out and say, "That's a gorgeous red maple" or "Look at that white oak." Then he'll back off and say, "Forest? Oh, they're beautiful trees, but forest?" Meanwhile, the intuitive is likely to say, "What a gorgeous forest. An oak tree? Is there really that big a difference between an oak tree and a maple tree?"

The difference in perception is Important in writing. For finished writing- revised writing- writers may need to draw on both sensing and intuition skills. As a result, part of what we do is encourage students to go with their preference in the early drafting stage. It makes it easier for them initially to get work done. Then, knowing their preference, knowing the opposition and what it means in terms of revision, they can work on developing that opposition.

When an intuitive's writing contains only a grand scheme of things and no details fully describing that scheme, the implications of using only the preferred mode of perception can be seen. Writing in a general manner, focusing on what they might term "creativity" instead of information, is very common for "N"'s and can pose a communication problem which needs to be corrected during revision. As an "N," Stephanie Zerkel supplements her writing process by adopting her opposite type, "I become so blocked

sometimes by this drive for uniqueness that even easy assignments are hard to begin. I adopt the "S" attitude and focus on the assigned topic, collecting data that relates to that topic, and forgetting, for the time being, to try for



creativity." As she suggests, the "S" type likes to deal with concrete information in a procedural manner.

Having touched on just two of the MBTI oppositions, we have already begun to see that understanding how different personalities compose differently can affect pedagogy. Perry Kennedy makes an important statement that is central to the MBTI, "The MBTI is simply a tool that elucidates our understanding of ourselves which, in turn, lets us help ourselves." And indeed, the MBTI gives us insight into ourselves as we see the implications of the oppositions. The MBTI can help us feel comfortable with ourselves as well as our own method of writing.

3. Thinking/Feeling

The Thinking/Feeling opposition has to do with how people make decisions. For thinkers, fairness is of prime concern. Thinkers might forego a little harmony just so long as a decision appears to be right and fair. Feelers, on the other hand, tend to adopt harmony as their credo. They like it when people feel good

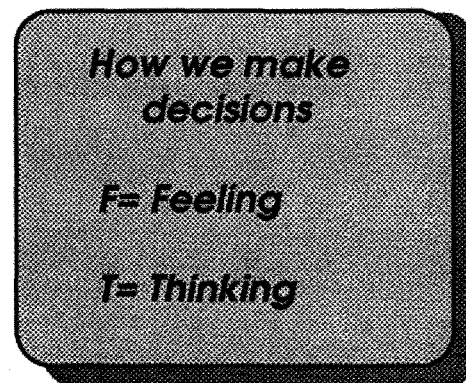
and things work out. Sandie Jacobi comments: Being an "F" lets me temper what I say and how I say it. I'm comfortable in taking a client's feelings and his ego into consideration first and above all whether its the "right thing" to do or not. The goal in tutoring in my opinion is establishing the rapport, helping a client to maybe see a different way, or a better way, or a way of expanding what they do and how they approach their process to writing and how they look at themselves.

In terms of the writing process, feeling types

tend to have a better Initial sense of audience than thinking types. Thus feeling types will probably need to revise less in terms of audience than will thinking types.

Thinking types do tend to have problems with audience in their initial drafts. Rather than focus on the audience to whom they are writing, thinking types tend to be more concerned about getting their ideas out, and usually about getting the ideas out in a logical fashion. As a result, with thinking-type writers, understanding who the audience is becomes a serious issue for the revision stage. "One of the biggest problems I have with a paper is determining who my audience is. I remember teachers beating me on the head with audience awareness, and I couldn't understand why it was so important as long as my point was illustrated," states Suzanne Norton, a "T."

While feeling types do better in their first drafts with respect to audience, thinking types seem to have an easier time in their first drafts when it comes to organization. Thinking types tend to structure more internally- in their heads, while feeling types apparently need to structure externally- on paper. That may mean the feeling types need to use more formal organization strategies beforehand.



Though some thinking types like to address organization in the prewriting stage, others don't. In any event, thinking types are less likely to need external patterns early in the process. Feeling types, however, do seem to need more formal organization on the front end. Whether that means outlining, treeing, or whatever, feeling types do seem to benefit from early attention to structure.

4. Judging/Perceiving

The final opposition, Judging /Perceiving, concerns how we organize our world. Once

again, we are dealing with terminology specific to the MBTI, and we need to be cautious in our usage. Just as extraversion, as it is used here, does not refer to people who are outgoing and introversion to people who are not outgoing, judging does not mean being judgmental. All of us, perceivers and judges alike, make judgments. The quality that marks judging types is that they like structure. They are the list-makers of the world. They try to plan things out ahead of time. Perceivers, on the other hand, love contingencies and are more likely to describe themselves as "spontaneous."

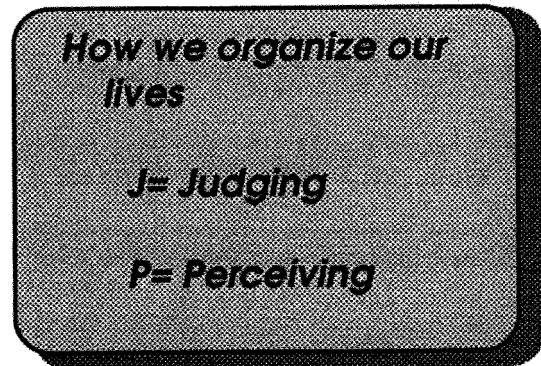
Judges and perceivers also tend to structure their writing differently. Judges are goal-oriented and have more of a need to know where their writing is going. Although having a sense of direction can be helpful, sometimes being a judge can hinder one's writing process as Anita Buswell illustrates:

Before I could begin to compose on the word processor, I had to have each item on my desk lined up neatly and in its proper place: the pens and pencils in the holder on my left; the dictionary neatly placed on the table in front of the printer; my notes, outlines, and other writing aids sorted with all the paper edges even; the TV off, and the telephone moved into the next room. My family groaned when I sat down at the computer in the family room.

Yet ultimately, Buswell found the helpful in accepting her personal writing process, as she states, "Upon learning about MBTI, and my judge category, I began to understand my need for order and organization, and to accept that this is the way that I write, and that it is all right to be this way."

Since judges are much more likely to know where they are going with a piece of writing from the beginning, they tend to be more comfortable with forming a thesis statement up front. Perceivers, on the other hand, are more likely to write and write without a clear sense of direction. Stephanie Zerkel is a perceiver who sees her opposition as beneficial in certain instances: "The characteristics of the 'J' type that I like to adopt in a crisis are the way they set objectives for themselves and, as they reach their objectives, analyze and revise their writing." These "J" characteristics contrast with the characteristics of many perceivers

who write with no idea where they are going. It is not unusual for perceivers to sit and write until they reach their last paragraph. Finally reaching the end of the draft, a perceiver might look up and say, "That's what I've been trying to say in this paper." Letting the writing lead the writer is perceiver writing.



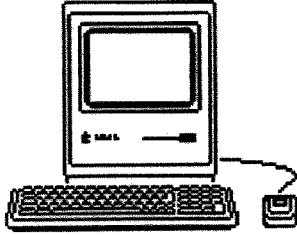
Zerkel comments, "I can't bear to start writing in case I miss some wonderful idea after I've finished," revealing a perceiver attitude. The preferred writing processes of perceivers apparently force them to go through all of their material before coming to a conclusion. Once perceivers know where they're going with their writing, they feel that they have already done the work. As a result, it can be counterproductive to force perceivers into forming a conclusion too early. They may get bored with the assignment and want to do something else. However, after the initial draft, they very often must use word-processor terms- "block and move" their ending to the beginning so that readers can have a sense of what will follow.

Implications

By using the MBTI and coming to understand the sixteen possible personality types, we have discovered that we can understand and accept both ourselves and our own writing processes better. Through this understanding, we continue to grow as writers and help others grow.

Barry Maid, Sally Crisp, and Suzanne Norton
(With contributions from Matt Nagle, Sandie Jacobi,
Perry Kennedy, Anita Buswell, and Stephanie
Zerkel)

University of Arkansas at Little Rock Little Rock,
Arkansas



Micro Style *by Rebecca Moore*

Students and Norton Textra Writer

When working with computers, it is essential to know the programs that will suit your particular situation and needs. With so many programs on the market today, finding the right one for you and your students is a difficult task. On the surface the software appears to work wonders; however, when you look further into the program, it is not what it appears to be. Such is the case with Norton Texts Writer and The Confident Writer hand-book. When I first looked at this program, I was thrilled with the possibilities; however, upon further viewing, I found that most of what this program entailed was a word processor and a summarized handbook on disk.

The word processing portion of Norton Textra Writer is fairly easy to use. It provides the user with several prompts which aid the writer. When the user enters the program, a menu will appear which asks the user to make a choice: "R" for Retrieve or create a document, "I" for Information on getting started, and "X" for Exit from Norton Textra. The logical choice for the first time user would be "I" for Information on getting started.

When a person begins a new word processing program, it is essential to understand most of the common commands before trying to write. "Information on Getting Started" does exactly that. This selection on the menu allows the user to be tutored on the computer by several paths. Path one introduces the student or writer to the concept of writing on the computer instead of paper. This introduction also has "film tutors." These "film tutors" are small tutoring lessons which aid the writer to understand how to use the various function keys. Path two, however, skips the basic idea of why it is important to write on computers and refers to the nine films on how to use the processor. Path three is for the more adventurous

or for people who are already familiar with word processing. This path is referred to as "Textra Quick Start," which is excellent for people who have already worked on computers before and want to try this new word processing program. It would not take a student long to learn how to use this program; therefore, the Norton Textra Writer is a good word processor for students.

Along with this disk, the user or student will also get a handbook called The Confident Writer. This is an English handbook which guides students through varying aspects of writing and grammar. The basic difference between this handbook and any other regular English handbook is that The Confident Writer has many guides through the writing process which have been condensed and placed on the Norton Textra disk. At first glance, the user gets the impression that this handbook analyzes the student's writing. This is not true: the hand-book just condenses the various lessons of writing for the student to refer to during the writing process. However, this handbook is beneficial since the grammar lesson or punctuation question may be accessed on the screen quickly and easily.

Some of the sections in the handbook include such selections as "Discovering Ideas" and "Finding a Thesis" to aid the student in brainstorming or generating ideas. If a student is working on a research paper, then the section on notations is very helpful. This demonstrates on the screen how to make notations in both MLA and APA style. Additional sections include paragraphs, coherence, sentence structure, punctuation, and grammar. An added "plus" is a list of commonly confused glossary words. Editing symbols are also explained to the student. When the student or user highlights one of the symbols, then an explanation of that

symbol is displayed on the monitor with various examples.

Even though having a handbook on the computer is a "plus" for some students, it is only as good as the students' use of it. At first glance, I thought that the handbook was going to provide feedback on the student's writing similar to the programs Writer's Helper and Writer's Workbench. This is not true; in fact, with the exception of the word processor itself, no actual interaction takes place with the student's text. Moreover, most word processors today offer the spell checker when you purchase the program. A spell checker is available for purchase, but is not automatically included with Norton Textra Writer. This will be an added expense for the students who want to have the spell checker for their writing.

Even though Norton Texts Writer does not interact or analyze the student's text, the word processor with an on-line handbook is useful. The program, which is \$19.95, provides the student with a manual and one disk. Tice Confident Writer (the textbook) is an additional expense.

Working with students and their writing is a challenge many instructors face today. We want to encourage students to write and re-write, but we also need to teach grammar as it pertains to writing. The convenience of having the handbook on computer may motivate students to look up the rule and learn more about writing, grammar, and usage. As a result, students might find writing more enjoyable if they try Norton Textra Writer and The Confident Writer.

UPDATE

In her Troubleshooter Column in the April 1989 issue of the newsletter, Paula Gills offered to send out copies of her booklet *College Students with Learning Disabilities* at a cost of \$2.00 per copy. Paula now finds that she underestimated postage costs and must ask \$2.50 per copy. Send to Paula Gills, Learning Skills Center, Norwich University, Northfield, Vermont 05663.

TWO MESSAGES FROM NWCA

Nominations for Road Members

The Executive Board of the National Writing Centers Association (NWCA) is made up of representatives from each regional affiliate organization, as well as three at-large members. There are two meetings per year, one at NCTE in November, and one at CCCC. Right now, we are accepting nominations for three at-large members. The Executive Board will select three, and notify them before NCTE will. Please send name, address, and a one-paragraph vita to Bonnie Sunstein, President, NWCA, Writing Process Lab, 106 Morrill Hall, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

Wyoming Resolution Revised

The Wyoming Resolution, proposed to CCCC to protect the rights of all part-timers working in the discipline of writing instruction, as well as other people "on the margins," contained a rather bothersome marginal view of writing centers. The text as it read in CCC, Feb. '89, p. 64 under "Standards of Good Classroom Practice" was:

"D. The institution should provide the necessary support services for the teaching of writing: writing centers, media service centers, office space, supplies, duplication services, secretarial assistance, etc."

In the waning moments of the CCCC convention, Jim Upton, Joan Muffin, and I lobbied for a clause just for writing centers, separate from the others, rewrote it, and asked for a change. When we presented our logic to the committee, they apologized for the oversight and changed it promptly. Our revision read as follows:

"F. The institution should recognize the establishment and operation of writing centers as appropriate complements to the success of both writing instruction and instructional training, for both students and faculty."

Long live revision and the collaborative spirit! Best to all for a productive and peaceful end of the year.

Bonnie Sunstein, President, NWCA

Report on the 5th Annual Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing: Tutors' Views

If you weren't at the Fifth Annual Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, you missed a unique experience. Held October 28-30, 1988, at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY, the conference was titled "Tutoring Writers Throughout the Disciplines." The keynote speaker was Ann Matsuhashi, Director of the Writing Center, University of Illinois at Chicago, who spoke on "Designing a Collaborative Space for Learning in an Academic Discipline: The Chinese Room vs. the Writing Room." Evan Rivers, Conference Chair, and Skidmore College made us all very comfortable, providing hot drinks throughout both days in Skidmore's Writing Center and a reception Saturday night at Falstaffs, the Student Pavilion, including music by "Not Necessarily the Blues." Despite a few snowflakes and a one a.m. false fire alarm at the Holiday Inn, these few days were as enjoyable as they were informative,

As usual, the range of topics and programs at the conference was as diverse as the professional and student participants. Pro-grams included hands-on workshops, panels of short paper presentations, and round table discussions. An ample number of programs were related directly to the conference theme: Dickinson College's workshop on "Using Writing Group Tutorials for Biology Lab Reports," Georgetown's workshop "High Tech, Low Tech, No Tech: We are Tutors, Not Experts," Swarthmore's panel discussion "Working with Writers in the Sciences," and Bucknell's round table "Is Ignorance (of the Discipline) Bliss?" Skidmore organized a series of round tables on disciplinary expectations in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. These and other programs provided a depth of focus on interdisciplinary tutoring.

But we all had plenty to say that wasn't directly related to the conference theme. Jim Bell did a content analysis of the Writing Lab Newsletter and commented on the need for more research. Tort Haring-Smith raised questions about the dangerous relationship between collaborative learning and the academy. Other topics included: Brown's workshop "Mission Impossible: Decoding Faculty Assignments," Bucknell's workshop "Must You Be a 'Good' Writer to be a 'Good' Tutor? Maryland's workshop "So What Does the Writing Center Do anyway? - Explaining Ourselves to Teachers."

Page 8

For directors and tutors, these diverse programs were a chance to get outside our own programs, find out what others are doing, refresh ourselves on the basics of tutoring, and explore the ideas on which our work is based. But meeting other tutors was just as important- we believe this is especially true for the tutors, since most of us are still so new at what we do. Discovering other tutors with different ideas and similar experiences is part of what makes this conference so special and important. Our school has attended every conference, and each group of tutors has reported it was worth the missed class or two, the travel, the fund raising. We hope all of you will try to make the conference a priority this year, and in the future. After all, good talk is what it's all about, isn't it?

However, we have a few recommendations if you choose to participate. Come pre-pared to work and talk: we found it amazing that at a conference devoted to collaborative learning, someone would walk out of our work-shop after being put in a discussion group because she "had come to get information, not figure it out herself." We taped with others who had similar experiences, and we hope that everyone would take the ideas seriously enough to be willing to work together on them. Students especially should come prepared to talk with each other. We found this conference much more valuable than the last one we attended simply because we made an effort to meet more people. Presenters, too, should strive to keep in mind the unique nature of this conference. Although it's sometimes difficult, we hope everyone will keep in mind their mixed audience; we never know when we're going to go to a presentation in which we won't understand the technical terms. Also, we found that some people advertised workshops, but mostly talked at us. We hope, again, that a group devoted to collaborative learning would make as much use of it as possible in their conference. Armed with a desire to make the most of it, the Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing can be some of the best training we as tutors or directors can get.

Alan Bilansky, Terri Bradford, and Angela Vietto Peer Tutors
Penn State University
University Park, PA

Tutors' Column

Tutoring five on five

When one thinks of the word "tutor," the picture that immediately comes to mind is of one student helping one student. However this is not always the case, nor is it always the most effective tutorial session. I went through an experience recently that greatly changed my views on tutoring.

Randolph-Macon College began a new program designed to help its incoming freshmen excel in their required composition classes. For two weeks before the start of classes in the fall, all of the freshmen who volunteered for the Peer-Response Education Preparattonal Pro-gram would come to the R -MC campus. The class size was small- ten students per class-and the first summer program was offered free because PREP was funded by a grant from the duPont Foundation. Bill Pendleton, with expert guidance from Muriel Harris, developed the special techniques used in the program, and he asked me to be one of the first three writing fellows working for the Peer-Response Educational Preparation Program. My job was not necessarily to tutor the freshmen but to lead them in a collaborative learning process within their groups of five.

This process enabled the freshmen to create a paper from a nonstop, free form to a final draft through a number of stages. At each stage, they elicited from each other different kinds of responses about their paper. We encouraged them to phrase all their comments constructively, and negative comments were only given in the second half of the Peer-Response sequence. My basic role was to make sure that the students were engaging in the process correctly and to help them with any questions they had.

I was skeptical at first. These students had only recently graduated from high school. I wasn't sure that eighteen-year-olds had the discipline to tutor themselves, nor was I sure that all these kids really wanted to cut their summer short by two weeks. Also, this procedure went against my idea of what tutoring was- a one-on-one process, not five-on-five! On our first day of "class," my group made it per

fectly clear that they certainly hadn't volunteered for this program- their parents had decided that they should attend. Of course, I thought, this is going to make my job even harder. Few of them truly wanted to improve their writing skills, and those that did were so outnumbered that they also acted apathetic in order to fit in.

I explained to them, however, that they would actually be tutoring themselves, with a little assistance from me, and this seemed to spark their interest. The idea that no teacher would be teaching the classes relaxed them a little also. Apparently things were going to be a lot different from what they had expected. They were used to a formal high school environment, and this was a very casual atmosphere. We read a short story aloud, discussed it, and then brainstormed. After brainstorming, they discussed the results of their brainstorming and attempted to develop their rough ideas even further. They went to their dormitory and wrote the first draft of their papers that night.

The following day they arrived in class with their very rough drafts, and we began the collaborative learning techniques. They got into their groups again and began working through the stages after my explanation. "Main Idea" was the first step they went through after the gaper was already written. Each student read his paper aloud and the other students gave brief but positive responses as to what the main idea was and whether or not this idea was continued throughout the paper. Immediately after "Main Idea" they went through "Citing." In this stage, the students would ask the other students which passages caught their attention. Again, comments were supposed to be brief. Next came "Query." At this point, students would ask questions about their own paper and the other students could then answer them both positively and negatively. At this point in the second draft of the paper the other students were allowed to point out problem areas in the paper to the writer.

For each of three papers written during the program, the students wrote three drafts

and participated in these techniques for each draft. Also, before each paper was written, they would either freewrite or brainstorm and then discuss their brainstorming efforts with the other students in their group in order to sharpen their ideas.

Slowly but surely, all the students' papers began to improve. For the first time in their lives they finally had a real audience made up of their peers rather than just their teacher. They were able to write more naturally and didn't attempt to use words that they did not understand. They likewise felt much more comfortable reading their work aloud to these students because they now realized (after hearing everyone else's work) that all of the other papers were basically on the same level with theirs. Up until this point, a lot of the students had been extremely self-conscious about their writing because they had falsely assumed that they weren't as capable as their peers. Also, through helping each other, these freshmen predictably learned more about their own writing mistakes by seeing them in other people's papers.

I feel that there is much to be gained from group tutoring, and this method of tutoring would similarly be helpful in a writing center. Centers become so busy at times because each tutor can only help one student. If these peer-response techniques were employed, one could receive help on one's paper without necessarily having to wait for a trained tutor. The main-idea stage would be the most helpful because it needs the least amount of training. For example, a busy tutor could have two students read each other's papers and cite the main idea. The students would realize from this just how clear their themes were. If a tutee were at the beginning stages of a paper, the tutor could also suggest brainstorming or freewriting if the center were busy. Also, the larger amount of responses that group tutoring gives one will naturally enhance the paper-maybe even more so than tutoring one on one!

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Credit in the writing center

(cont. from p. 16)

search section of the module, Collaboration with JCCC's research librarians will enable the course to include more up-to-date information

Page 10

about computer searches. Although the course will continue to be a part of the Writing Center's offerings, it will also be taught in part by the library. It will reflect work done by instructors from history, psychology, biology and other disciplines, making it truly an interdisciplinary course,

In addition, I hope to offer the courses with an open entry/exit choice. In other words, students may come into the course any time during the semester and finish even into the next semester without having to take an incomplete.

One last enhancement for our courses is a computerized inventory of all our materials. This inventory will categorize our materials so that we can draw out those holdings which are pertinent to students' needs. For instance, a student who needs to work on sentence structure will be provided a list of all the best materials to help him with his sentence skills in addition to the module booklet already provided.

In conclusion, the one-credit course has the potential of not only providing revenue for an institution but can also give needed tutoring instruction in areas which the instructor cannot provide in the traditional classroom. Thus the one-credit course, better than a workshop which presupposes what must be taught, can individualize instruction.

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Johnson County Community
College Overland Park,
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Midwest College Learning Center Association Conference

**October 11-13, 1989
Evanston, Illinois**

Pre-conference workshop leaders:
Muriel Harris (Purdue University) and Sharon Silverman (Loyola of Chicago); conference keynote speakers: K. Patricia Cross (University of California-Berkeley) and Wilbert McKeachie (University of Michigan). For more information, contact Carol Eckermann, National College of Education, 18 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60603 (312-621-9650).

literacy and Authority as Threats to Peer Tutoring: A Commentary Inspired by the Fifth Annual Conference for Peer Tutors in Writing

Accomplishments

I think we should reflect on what the conference for Peer Tutors in Writing has accomplished. In the past five years, we have affirmed the value of conversation through our tutoring in the writing center. We have invited those who were silent and whose writing was concealed to read and to write with us. Upon their entrance to our community, these writers have come to a new awareness of themselves: they now look more critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, often taking the initiative to act within the main-stream that wishes to deny them opportunity to participate. We who practice tutoring have become the support group for these writers- the ready auditor Stephen North talked about- even those who cringe at the word collaboration.

Where once writing labs and writing centers were set up as ad hoc panaceas for the discourse wounds of basic writers and outlanders, they are now informed with the ideas of Ken Bruffee, Thom Hawkins, Muriel Harris, Ann Matsuhashi, Harvey Kail, Molly Wingate, Tori Haring-Smith, Ron Maxwell, Leigh Ryan, Dan Moshenberg- with the notion that knowledge can be socially constructed and that writing papers can be consensually justified. Today's tutors refuse to give cures: they are beginning to offer inexperienced writers a praxis: negotiation, compromise, reflection, action, and social change. We are seeing that the purpose of tutoring is 'to celebrate (writers') acculturation. . . to reaccculturate ourselves . . . or [to] reaccculturate both at once" (Bruffee 3).

Crossroads

I think we should also acknowledge that there is a task still before us. We have some problems to resolve. We can seek a viable solution if we don't get fooled again ! Recently, at my school, the Curriculum and Educational Policy Committee brought before the faculty its Freshman Profile. It painted the picture of an illiterate mass of students who were doing miserably in all phases of their work, except-oddly enough- writing. There was talk of grade inflation in the English Department, not that many there (some of whom work in our Writing Center) were offering students the chance to

talk through the process of writing, in the company of others, in their classrooms and in the Writing Center. This same Committee did announce that some-1 believe the word was- interesting pedagogy was going on in the writing courses. However, I think this Committee missed the point that such pedagogy was responsible for helping struggling, inexperienced writers see each developing text anew by engaging these writers in a critical process of questioning that would lead to a text expressive of themselves and ready for the reader.

Not only did I begin to feel guilty- you see, St. Augustine looms large over Merrimack College- I became scared as well. I had thought the prevailing Generation/Transmission, Banking approach to teaching had been replaced by what we called collaborative learning. Well, from attending four Conferences on Peer Tutoring, I knew that this had been the case just about everywhere else. We have been affirming that learning is not "a shift inside the person which now suit him [or her] to enter . . . new relationships" with reality" and with other people. Learning is "a shift in a person's relations with others" period (Rorty 187, my italics). In fact, at the Skidmore Conference on Peer Tutoring we celebrated collaborative learning. That conference was entitled "Tutoring Writers Throughout the Disciplines." Now I can see the value in tutoring across the disciplines, for each discourse community offers a new challenge for writers that is a dynamic for change and growth- the kind of change that will empower writers to become citizens in a developing democracy. But at my school (which is as mainstream as they come) and at more diversified schools, we may be prevented from em-powering anyone: first, because we have been duped into believing there is a literacy crisis that we must solve and, second, because of the authority struggle in the educational system.

Literacy as a Threat to Peer Tutoring

In "Readin' not Riotin': The Politics of Literacy," Andrew Sledd writes that there is no literacy crisis, "that both the crisis and the means to resolve it have been manufactured in order to serve purposes of which teachers

should not be servants" (495). Sledd contends that "literacy has been declining since it was invented ..." (496). As a result, Sledd argues, we have been led to "naively undertake regressive educational reforms" (497). (Recall the aforementioned Curriculum and Educational Policy Committee story, as well as the fact that, originally, tutoring programs were set up to help solve the literacy crisis!) Sledd believes, and I agree with him, that we do ourselves and our writers a disservice when we are "afraid to name the follies of the learned or the incompetence of the mighty to solve the problems that they cause" (505). Peer tutoring, a form of collaborative learning, is at the cutting edge of real educational reform. Sledd would agree, for he sees real reform resulting from 'a cooperative, dialogic pedagogy that allows students' voices to be heard, not just unending teacher. It requires curricula not afraid of the forbidden-of the un- or half-told stories of women, minorities, working people, others unlike ourselves ... it recognizes that our crisis is first in our society and government, only second in literacy, just as it redefines the fundamentals of literacy themselves" (505).

Authority as a Threat to Peer Tutoring

At the first Conference for Peer Tutors in Writing at Brown University four years ago, Ken Bruffee talked in a similar way when he addressed the authority question. He recognized that if teachers buy peer tutoring they buy a fundamental change in education and in the authority of knowledge. Teachers let student tutors talk with their own students; they share authority. Through their involvement in peer tutoring, writers and tutors learn to be a little less awed of teachers. They've seen the teachers' strengths and shortcomings. Peer tutors, in fact, are asked to do some of the teachers' dirty laundry. Bruffee then recalled his conversation with a tutor who explained that the traditional teacher was intimidating. He (and Bruffee consciously used the male persona) sat at his desk with his books and diploma behind him, appearing to offer shaking students the Right Answer- capital R, Capital A. In a peer tutoring environment, a collaborative writing center, the peer tutor and writer have learned to look for alternative answers. They recognize that, in the company of others and through dialogic conversations, there may be a variety of acceptable ways to reach answers. This is empowerment.

The problem, though, is that too many of

Page 12

us teachers see ourselves in a traditional way, especially when we think we have to solve a literacy crisis. In this way, teachers and others of authority come to see the tutor as disrespectful and a "smart-ass." Inevitably, then, the peer tutor and student writer are going to regard themselves this way, shivering before the spec-ter supposedly guarding the Right Answer. Sadly, this kind of self-denial will minimize or halt altogether the genuine educational growth in the students involved in peer tutoring.

The Hope

If we look around ourselves to see- at conferences like that for Peer Tutors in Writing- students interacting intelligently with teachers, if we remember what peer tutoring and collaborative learning teach, if people like Sledd continue to talk with us, then we can maintain that there is an alternative pedagogy. In this way, there is great hope, for both students and teachers will see themselves as participants in a discipline that will determine a great deal of their lives. We can be empowered by the community of knowledgeable people whom we call our peers- the people with whom, in even our everyday lives, we feel most comfortable. The participants in this transaction will be no longer locked into traditional stances. The relationship between them will be more equitable, and issues pertaining to the authority of knowledge will be negotiable.

Peer Tutoring in the Writing Center, operating on the principle of shared authority, offers a process- conversation, support, etc. - that makes possible success in writing. This process empowers writers and tutors alike who constantly see the world anew, continuously deconstructing reality with dialogic intensity, moving between two poles of reflection and action, making use of the process of negotiation and compromise to reach insight and to achieve identification. In this environment, though dropping slowly, those who fear authority learn to be unafraid. The wonder of a phenomenon like the Conference for Peer Tutors in Writing is that students and teachers are enabled to converse constructively with one another- and then with others who may utilize such conversation to advantage. And when people talk, there's always a chance.. .

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Credit in the writing center

The Writing Center at Johnson County Community College began in 1977. It has always been an offspring of the English Department out of a need to give individual attention to students' writing skills. A survey of students enrolled in composition classes, as well as feedback from counselors, confirmed the necessity of creating a Writing Center. The need for a Writing Center was further substantiated as standardized test scores for students dropped and as students enrolled in composition classes without prerequisite skills.

The Writing Center began primarily as a drop-in service for students needing to improve their writing skills for their composition classes. As time went on, the Center increased its staff and hours open, to handle the growing number of students using its services not only for their English classes but for classes from other disciplines as well. Community members also began to seek the Writing Center for help with writing skills. Workshops were designed to handle generalized problems such as comma usage and agreement. These occasional work-shops dealt with small groups but were relatively unsuccessful because they tended to generalize when students needed specific individual attention. Many of the people coming to the Writing Center wanted prescribed pro-grams, not just one-on-one tutoring. So to show some financial independence and to answer a need for actual writing programs in the Writing Center, one-credit courses were designed and first offered in the fall of 1983. The criteria of the one-credit courses is multi-fold: to fulfill a need of the community, to tie in

to the English Department program, to emphasize the importance of writing, to connect rules to actual writing, and to provide materials and resources which meet individual needs.

Once the one-credit course was approved as the means to address students' needs, I needed to decide what kind of programs would be best. After working with individual students for several years, I became accustomed to the problems most students encounter and need help on. Through assessing the students' writing skills, accomplished by writing samples and standardized tests, I learned that many students would benefit by courses in grammar, usage, and proofreading skills. I furthermore saw a need for a basic writing course where students would learn organizational patterns and skills in developing a good piece of writing. I wanted all the courses to incorporate writing to show the correlation between the writing and the rules, and I wanted each course to tie in to the English Department composition program. I knew that many of the people from the community who wanted help with their writing had taken composition courses many years before, so the one-credit courses would serve not only as developmental courses for students who, for one reason or another, had never learned these skills but also as refresher courses for those who wanted to review and improve skills. Thus, I decided to begin with three courses- Sentence Pattern Skills (a grammar course), Proofreading Skills (a mechanics course), and Composing Skills (a developmental or basic writing course). Now materials would need to be gathered.

After pursuing workbooks and other materials, I decided I would write the courses. Later, software was integrated into all of the courses, enhancing the material taught and offering computer novices an introduction to computer use. No publication existed which presented the content I desired in the format best suited for a one-credit course. I gathered materials (from Writing Center generated hand-outs, teacher materials and research) into booklets, wrote tests and course abstracts, and included writing assignments and assessments.

Because the Learning Center already offered credit for work done, the mechanics were already set. Students must spend approximately twenty hours in the Learning Center to receive one hour of credit. They are initially assessed and then put at the level on

which they test. All work is done in the Center so it can be monitored and hours can be re-corded. Periodically, the students are tested to make sure they are mastering the materials. All of the record-keeping and test scores are kept on a data base (TRS-80 Profile-Plus). At any time we can pull a student's record to find out how many hours he has completed in the course, how many tests have been taken, and what the average score of the tests and written assignments are. Monthly, an alphabetized list of students in each course provides a report for administrators. This report also aids in sanding out letters to students who are falling behind. At the beginning of the semester, a letter is sent to students who took incomplete the semester before. Another letter is sent to students who have not reported to the Writing Center by the third week. Letters are sent at midterm and again toward the end of the semester to remind negligent students to get their work completed. Again, because all of the records and letters are computerized, the process is simplified.

Later after discovering that these courses did not address the needs of our English-as-a-Second-Language students or the hearing impaired, two growing groups in our Writing Center population, I added Practical Writing Skills which teaches skills from a structural viewpoint and usage, idioms, etc. I also added Research Skills to address the needs of the writing-across-the-discipline's population.

Sentence Pattern Skins

The content of this course covers traditional grammar- parts of speech, parts of a sentence, sentence combining, and sentence variety. Most of the content was teacher-generated, gathered from research and hand-outs already used in the Writing Center. Students who benefit from this course are in need of terminology and basic rules. I also have requests from people from the community for a traditional grammar course which can be individualized to fit their tight schedules and is free from the pressure of the traditional class-room and grades. It is most successful when used with student writing because grammar in isolation will not improve writing skills. To accomplish this feat, I have students write their own sentences when possible. The major assessment is standardized tests which accompany published materials, such as Little, Brown or Houghton Mifflin grammar handbooks. Because the individualized tutoring is still

available, students can get immediate questions answered, feedback on their work, and the opportunity to work at their own pace.

Although a course outline is offered, instructors may use other materials or change the order of content. After students are assessed, they begin working on the level at which they show a need for skill building. Thus, the fact that this course and the others are individualized to students' needs remains an important facet of the Writing Center. If a student tests at below 70% on any content exam, the tutors can repeat the information using different materials. One major source I now use is computer-assisted instruction.

For the Sentence Pattern Skills course several programs are used. One is from Queue-Intellectual software, and the other is Grammar Lab from Little, Brown Company. This computer software is integrated into the program. Actually the students have a choice as to whether or not they use the computer lessons.

Proofreading Skills

This course arose rather easily out of the need in composition classes for students to be able to proofread their own essays. Tutors in the Writing Center have always been instructed not to proofread essays brought in. Students who showed a need for proofreading skills due to low grades on essays came flocking to the Writing Center. The focus in the composition classes is on the process of writing, not on mechanics, yet students are responsible for error-free prose. The departmental standards are clearly set: seven major errors on a 500-word or more essay constitutes an F. Using the list of major and minor errors decided on by the English Department, we generated a course for students to review rules which would help them proofread their essays.

Students are assessed several ways: (1) through writing samples done in the Writing Center, (2) through graded essays upon the advice of their instructors, (3) through an assessment test, the primary test being a computerized assessment which tells students exactly what rules they should work on (Houghton Mifflin Micro-lab).

Composing Skills

The Composing Skills course focuses on

developing writing skills by teaching a process. It works through heuristics for discovering and exploring topics and emphasizes strategies for developing and organizing those subjects. It teaches sentence combining techniques to help students write more readable prose. Although there is an Introduction to Writing course which is part of the composition curriculum, this one-credit course does not try to be an alternative or substitute. It instead acts as a supplement or interim course for any of the composition courses. It serves as a review for our returning adults. Again, because the one-credit courses are individualized, this course can provide the content desired by the student. For instance, several semesters ago a woman who has had over 20 years in scouting came in wanting to develop her writing skills so that she could share her many experiences. I put her in the Composing Skills course and then worked each writing assignment around those experiences. She developed short vignettes in two aims-expressive and expository- developing her experiences through narration, description, etc. In some of her writing she instructed; in others she shared experiences. What she ended up with was a delightful collection of memories and knowledge. I have had other students who wanted to focus on business or technical writing, and because of the course's flexibility, I could provide materials and format.

The fact that this course provides the student with Immediate feedback from tutors or instructors enhances the revision process. The student receives constructive criticism, Jew' it's and then is given a grade on the finished project by the instructor. This sort of interaction keeps the process recursive and teaches the student to revise.

I use several computer programs to help the student in his writing. Writer's Helper is a program which takes the student through a process. PreWrite helps the student with invention techniques. Writing is Thinking is a pro-gram which removes the confusion of writing by assisting a user in logically transforming thoughts into words.

Although writing programs on the computer are not a substitute for the student going through the process on his own, they can be an enhancement or an alternative teaching method. I give students a choice. Of course, I also keep available to the writing students word processing programs such as PFS Write, Apple-

Works and Bank Street Writer. Although we don't give instruction in these programs, we do encourage students who have familiarity with word processing to use them as they do encourage revision. In the proofreading step of writing, students may use the computer drills to learn or review rules of punctuation or usage when-ever their writing so warrants.

Practical Writing Skills

Practical Writing Skills is a course especially designed for our hearing impaired and English-as-Second Language students. Both of these groups come to the Writing Center on a regular basis. Because their needs are special, I felt that a one-credit course addressing those needs was inevitable. Luckily, two of our English instructors had designed an ESL course which was no longer being offered. I took that course, rearranged it, and added reading and speaking. The course focuses on articles, prepositions, sentence structure and sentence combining. A new software program, A Course of Lessons in Writing Better Sentences from Minnesota Educational Software, enhances the reading/writing focus of the course. Again, I can look at the students' writing initially to find out what materials are needed. Some need the very basics; others just need to improve on the basic writing with lots of practice. I believe that this kind of one-on-one tutoring is necessary for these students. The Writing Center provides it in a warm, non-threatening atmosphere. Improvement is slow and patience is necessary, but I can always draw on the many materials available until I hit on what helps.

Research Skills

After being asked by students taking the composing skills course to teach research, realizing many students across the curriculum wanted a research course, and considering the reticent student who avoids courses where research papers are assigned, we created the Research Skills course. The course simply provides a process for writing a researched subject. The students taking the course work in the library. Here they become familiar with materials and gain techniques to evaluate those materials. They then work in the Writing Center to learn how to synthesize those materials into well documented prose. They work at their own pace, again receiving help from librarians and instructors each step of the way. Several styles of documentation are taught so

that students learn there are different ways. MLA, APA, footnotes, CBE, etc. are some of the formats taught, The final product is the main evaluation tool of the course; however, the student's progress is monitored very carefully all through the process.

We teach the philosophy that research is a life-long skill. One student who exemplifies that theory is a retired railroad man who wanted to find out about what was available in retirement homes. He began by researching criteria for a good retirement village and branched out to find what was available. We have other students who want to do family histories or research area history. We truly believe this course provides a service for the community and college, even though research is taught In Composition I.

A constant on-going evaluation of the one-credit course is undeniably necessary. Communication with the instructors about their students is one vital way of keeping in touch with students and their progress in their classes. The proofreading course is often taken on advice of the composition instructors. Be-

cause we have late enrollment, students can come into the course after instructors have determined their needs. In addition, instructors will advise their students to take a Writing Center course as an interim review before taking Composition I or II. So we are not only evaluating the courses but also recruiting possible candidates. Another means of evaluating the courses is through an evaluation designed by Institutional Research. Of course, we are constantly asking students for feedback so that we can provide the quality of instruction they desire.

Recently I rewrote the Research Skills course to update the documentation styles, getting feedback from the various disciplines. I also rewrote portions of the Composing Skills course to better emphasize the process of writing. And, all of the courses' abstracts have been revised to reflect the new computer pro-grams purchased for the new Apple Ile's housed in the Writing Center.

In the future I hope to change the Re-search Skills course to better teach the library

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WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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