WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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

....from the editor....

People in writing labs are well known for their willingness to share ideas and materials, especially handouts. In this month's newsletter, you'll find two handouts for guiding tutorials that are both the focus of articles. If there are readers willing to share other handouts, especially instructional materials, I'll also attempt to include some in future newsletter issues.

A more delicate matter to share is that of salaries. Recently, I've received several phone calls from people In need of statistics about salary levels for writing lab directors. I don't know of any data that has been collected, but if you do, please send it in.

Along with these contributions, please keep on sending your articles, reviews of materials, announcements (see dead-lines on page 2), names of new members, and those always appreciated yearly donations of $7.50 (in checks made payable to Purdue University) to me. And do write if you just feel like saying hello.
-Muriel Harris, editor

Write with confidence: A writing lab workshop for returning adult students

As the number of students returning to school after a significant break in their education grew at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the number of older adults using the Writing Lab also increased proportionately. Many adults are easily intimidated by the 44,000 students on our campus and by the vast number and diversity of classes. The staff began to realize that these students had some common concerns and that working with them required methods somewhat different than those used with traditional students. As a result, a short, non-credit, writing course evolved which is designed specifically for returning adults. Any adult returning to school may enroll, whether a freshman or a graduate student, regard-less of major.

When planning a short course in writing, an instructor must take into account the special concerns and talents of the older students and realize that their analogous life experience may provide both the background and the skill for many successful writing tasks. Because of family and job responsibilities, many returning adults have a very limited amount of time to study, do research, and prepare assignments. They are reluctant to take advantage of the many enrichment and support services avail-able to them because these require a time commitment. Another, sometimes less obvious concern for them may be a significant life change, such as job transfer or a restructuring of the family through divorce, death, or children leaving home. The anxiety and confusion which are normal reactions frequently result in unrealistic goals or the need to produce excessive amounts of work as compensation for what they view as inadequacy. Ironically, since their time is so limited, they often write three or four times as many words as are necessary because they fear appearing inadequate or because they are confused about the need to focus on one or two points.

As in any group, a few have real writing, conceptual, or organizational problems; but most adults are merely anxious about competing with others who have been students recently and who are used to styding writing may and taking tests. The older students feel out-oftouch even though they are competent learners or successful wage earners. Without exception, adults express lack of confidence in their writing ability when they register for the short course. A usual comment is "I have not written a formal paper for ages and I don't remember any of the rules." In working or in raising a family, adults have had to organize and commu-nicate. The level of their skill, regardless of formal education, produces mature insight and organizational sense which younger students do not possess. In most cases, as soon as class discussion begins, both the students and the instructor realize that the students have verbal and organization skills which are quite sophisticated and that a review of academic writing across the curriculum bolsters their confidence enough for them to feel comfortable with their writing. Also, since adults are highly motivated, they are able to quickly realize that the knowledge and skills they have developed in the "outside" world can be integrated with "inside" academic information to provide realistic, immediate application of theory.

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The five, 75-minute sessions of the short course touch on several aspects of the writing process:

Session I: Reading and understanding a question or assignment, pre-writing and planning, choosing a focus, developing a thesis statement

Session II: Assessing assignments and taking tests in various disciplines, investigating common writing tasks and problems across the curriculum

Session III: Organizing ideas, integrating material from several sources, linking ideas

Session IV: Handling various rhetorical strategies: critical review or analysis, comparison-contrast, argument

Session V: Writing introductions and conclusions, building paragraphs

By reviewing writing skills and previewing writing requirements across the curriculum, the students learn to adjust their expectations and responses to individual situations, to the

courses in which they have enrolled, and to general academic standards.

We begin by discussing what all writing has in common and how writing is both a vehicle for thought and an instrument for thinking. We move to representative assignments from various disciplines: freshman geography to upper level sociology to graduate level educational administration. We talk about what an assignment asks and how to approach it. Emphasis is placed on beating key words and sentences, and then on restating the intent of the assignment in order to understand how to meet its requirements. In restating the intent, the students frequently realize that they need to go further than merely summarizing in-formation that they have heard or read. The discussion moves to pre-writing skills (such as mind-mapping, brainstorming, and listing) and forming a thesis statement.

The second session focuses on writing in specific disciplines. During this class, professors from areas in which some of the students are enrolled speak to the group about the types of assignments they give, the most frequent problems with student writing they encounter, and the best examples of student writing they have received. We have had visitors from education, sociology, and psychology and have discussed papers from theater and drama, women's studies, Afro-American literature, and other areas.

Organizing ideas and integrating material from several sources are the topics of sessions three and four. At this time we briefly discuss three rhetorical strategies: comparison contrast, critical analysis, and argument. Frequently students are asked to compare X to Y and evaluate common theories. With the help of two student essays, we discover how to create a structure based on individual analysis and then how to incorporate material from other sources to support an idea. Returning adults frequently slip into the trap of merely summarizing- in detail-what they have heard or read, without daring to apply that information to another situation or to synthesize it with their own ideas or experiences. Or they fear taking a chance on an idea, on thinking independently. This is perhaps the most crucial lesson that they can learn: that their life-experience and thoughts, feelings and critical skills can be a significant basis for their writing. When they see how to use information to sustain their

thoughts or to prove their Ideas, they become confident about their ability to succeed.

In session four, an extension of the third meeting, we discuss how to deal with sources who may agree or disagree and who may write about the same topic but with various biases. During this session we also discuss capturing a reader with a provocative introduction and concluding the essay with a graceful exit.

The final regular session focuses on paragraphs. We discuss levels of generality and various ways to develop an idea with sufficient detail. Transitions, both on the sentence level and on the paragraph level, are also examined. In this session, as in the previous four, two points are stressed: the audience or reader is an important component of the writing process and the helpful writer will ease a reader into each idea as gracefully as possible.

Since five, 75-minute sessions are too short to teach in-depth writing skills, since helping students overcome feelings of low self-esteem or disorientation are major goals, this short course focuses on both an overview of academic writing and using the students' life-experiences as a foundation for their writing tasks. First, we use several samples of student essays as a basis for illustration and discussion. The students seem to appreciate this because then they have a measure by which to judge their own work. During one session, we might analyze a focus of a paper and determine if the essay does what the introduction promises. During another session we might look at the overall organization and linking of ideas. And finally, we might look at individual paragraphs and how they are built and relate to the whole essay or controlling idea. To emphasize writing as a process and a tool, students are shown several versions of the same paper, illustrating how a writer moves from a rough draft through several refinements to a final copy.

In another session, students share a piece of writing that they are working on. This allows them to talk about their writing in progress, to receive immediate practical help with their work, and to complete an assignment while they are refreshing their writing skills. It also reinforces the idea that writing is both a process and a tool for learning. It also teaches them the value of peer review and collaborative learning. As the students discuss their individ-

ual assignments, they may realize, for example, that an idea is not clear because the writer does not have enough information or does not completely understand the concept.

The students in this course, more so than in other courses, value handouts. They do not have the time and frequently do not have the money, to either find resource material or buy additional texts or workbooks. As a result, they treat handouts as precious commodities. using and reusing them many times. Some of the more popular ones are Critical Reviews, Analysis, Comparison-Contrast Papers, MIA Documentation, Thesis Statements and Controlling Ideas, and Editing for Style. These hand-outs, created specifically for this student group, present some general principles and several examples, as well as choices a writer can make. The handout on comparison-contrast papers, for example, illustrates three ways to organize an essay which compares two or more items and sub tests that the writer choose the one most appropriate for the particular assignment.

In addition to the five sessions which have been described, we offer two optional sessions. The first is a review of research and library skills, incluctingg an introduction to the access for the computerized card catalogue. Taught by the library staff, this has been very popular: many returning adults, who may be doing research for the first time in several years, are usually not familiar with the new, electronic systems. The second optional session deals with editing, proofreading and polishing prose.

The class meets in the Writing Lab's computer classroom and gradually, through five or six weeks, the participants learn some basic word processing skills. For the first week, the computer is used merely as an electronic chalkboard. We have fifteen terminals connected to an instructor's computer and send it to all of the terminals, or to allow each terminal to be used independently. During the second session the students begin typing their own work and with each meeting, learn additional word processing functions. By the end of the five sessions, most students can compose, organize, revise, and edit their own work on the computers.

The introduction to word processing and the opportunity to work on an actual assignment allows the students to absorb a lot of information in a short time. Those few who are

already familiar with word processing can move along at their own pace without distracting those just beginning. They are encouraged to make appointments with the Writing Lab staff for individual discussion about their writing and to take advantage of additional computer lab hours to complete their assignments. The short course is structured so that the students can spend as much or as little time on writing as they want; each session is built on previous ones, yet each is as complete a unit as possible so that if a student misses one session, it is not impossible to participate in subsequent ones. By encouraging them to make appointments with other staff members and complete their assignments on a computer, we introduce them to other lab services as well.

Student evaluations of this workshop have been consistently positive and encouraging. The students like the mixture of having a short presentation, e x a m i n i n g assignments and sample papers, and working their own projects. They also appreciate the introduction to word processing as this gives them a feeling that they truly can compete in the modem academic world. And the students enjoy being in a class with others like them- adults returning to school. They share concerns and problems with each other that they might not share with those whom they meet in the regular classroom. Many of the students have subsequently en-rolled in other of our Writing Lab short courses and have made appointments with tutors for Individual instruction.

Because of the type of students in the class and the nature of their concerns, the class is constantly evolving. Each semester is different with different people who have different majors. The handouts, exercises and discussions change each semester to accommodate the needs and interests of each particular group. Also, this semester, the format of the class was quickly adjusted when fifteen people registered (the number of computers available) and twenty-three appeared on the first day. No one was turned away, but the "extras" were asked to make special arrangements either individually or in pairs to work on the computers at times other than during class. Having the students work on actual assignments- as opposed to one created just for this class-is a new technique this year. Some of the other changes which may evolve are additional sessions each semester, perhaps one for under-graduates. Eventually, we might also offer

Unexpected help from a form

One of the most enjoyable responsibilities I have had in training to be an English Composition teacher, both in my undergraduate and graduate work, has been as a writing lab tutor. During the spring semester of 1988 at Washington State University, I took a Writing Lab Internship. My project was to examine the subject of record keeping, and in the process I worked on a new form which was modified to provide a tutorial guideline.
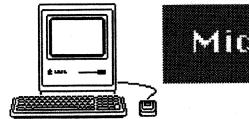
As a tutor, I have often felt that a tutorial guideline might be helpful. I developed a sample form which we tested in the lab, originally designed to be filled out by tutors and

filed. Tutor feedback provided useful information about its value. Experienced tutors found that the form was unnecessary for them, but they felt that it would be helpful for beginners, Several tutors, however, asked tutees to read the form, and this proved to be helpful in two ways. First, it bought time for tutors to read over the paper, providing a welcome relief when working under great time pressure. Second, tutees found the form valuable in understanding what needs to be accomplished during a tutorial session. As a result of this response, we decided to modify the form and use it as a guideline, not a form to be filled out. It is made available for tutors to use according to their own needs.

GUIDELINES FOR TUTORIAL SESSIONS

1. Discuss the assignment.

   (Items 2-7 may be taken up in any order. A successful tutorial will probably focus on one or two of these points.)

2. Discuss topic, purpose, audience in relation to assignment.

3. Discuss introduction in relation to the developmental paragraphs.

4. Discuss "content," the ideas and information of the paper.

5. Discuss "support," the specific illustrations, examples, references to sources used to develop description or support assertions.

6. Discuss "coherence," or "How well does it all hang together?"

7. Discuss sentence patterns (variety in length and structures?) and vocabulary (appropriate for proofing.)

   (Discuss #8 *only* if the paper is ready for proofing.)

8. Discuss grammar and usage. Do sentence structure, subject-predicate agreement, word endings, punctuation and spelling conform to the rules and conventions of Standard Edited American English?

Wayne Cosby
Washington State University
Pullman, WA

Micro Style   *by Evelyn Posey*

Purchasing Software for the Writing Center

You may be one of the many writing center directors who is still skeptical about adding computers to your center because you are not yet convinced that they make much difference in students' writing, and, therefore, you feel that they are too expensive or too frustrating to consider.

Those of you who feel this way have good reason. Sherry Turkle, writing in The Second Self Computers and the Human Spirit (New York: Simon & Schuster. 1984), cautions her readers to "maintain a 'healthy skepticism' toward any who propose simple scenarios about the impact of the computer on society" (232). This is also true about those who suggest that computers are a simple solution to students' writing problems. We all know that students bring experiences and anxieties with them when they sit down to write. Often they have systematized these into attitudes and methods that are difficult to change. A single tool, such as a microcomputer. cannot undo years of writer frustration or inexperience.

On the other hand, researchers such as Bridwell, Dauite, Rodrigues, and Wresch suggest that students using computers write more, put more effort into their writing, and report increased motivation to write as a result of using computers. So, though no panacea, microcomputers can be an extremely useful tool if integrated with sound writing instruction based on what we now know about teaching writing. If new and better methods of encouraging students to use the computer to facilitate this process are introduced, the computer can be invaluable to you. To ensure success, though, you must think carefully about the software you purchase and how it fits into your

theory of teaching writing. Most of us want to use computers to strengthen students' writing processes, so we look for software that motivates students to generate ideas, to draft, to review, and to revise.

Over the years, writing software has mirrored writing process research. As a result, there are four generations of writing software-chill and practice, word processing. single-purpose writing aids, and entire process aids. Each has a place in your writing center.

Drill and practice software has been available for over twenty years and was some of the first software designed to help students improve writing. Many of you looked at these programs and decided that you were not interested in computers because you already had workbooks that would work just as well as these early programs. For all of the reasons that we no longer expect students to improve writing skills by asking them to complete exercises in grammar handbooks, we don't expect improved writing as a result of working exercises on the computer. When students are referred to drill and practice software, they should be directed to those programs or parts of programs that will help them with their specific usage problems as determined by a review of their own written drafts. A student, for in-stance. who is having difficulty with subject-verb agreement in her own writing could be referred to a program to review this one skill.

Because I am not convinced of the value of drill and practice software, we currently do not have any in the UT El Paso Liberal Arts Computer Lab. However, the state of Texas is currently proposing that our students pass a

college-level basic skills test before they are allowed to take courses for upper-level college credit. Because this test is similar to all standardized tests in writing- recognizing errors in sentences, I am now considering some drill and practice software for students preparing to take this test. Although we are currently reviewing several such programs, we have not yet chosen one; if you have suggestions, I would love to hear from you.

The second generation of software, and the generation that truly revolutionized the teaching of writing, is word processing. Most of you are familiar with these programs. Word processing encourages students to use computers to enhance their own recursive processes. Because a student can generate ideas, easily change text, save, and come back to the text later to revise, word processing should be a staple in any writing center. There are many of these programs, and you may already have a favorite. In our writing center, we have several such programs. For instance, we have Bank Street Writer HI (Scholastic) for our basic writers. This program is so easy to learn that students can master it in thirty minutes. For those who are anxious about their writing, who have no computer experience, who have limited English proficiency, or who only need a program to write short writing assignments such as summaries and essays, this is an ideal pro-gram. For writers who need a more powerful word processor, we have WordPerfect (WordPerfect) and Microsoft Word (Microsoft). These word processing programs are a little more difficult to learn than Bank Street Writer, but are more appropriate for students who need a word processor with the ability to generate footnotes or endnotes or other more complicates text formats.

The third generation of software includes single-purpose writing aids. These are pro-grams that help students with one part of the writing process, such as to generate ideas, to engage in peer review, or to revise. Those that help students generate ideas include Writer's Workshop (Milliken) and Mind writer- (Daedalus). These programs give students the option of using the computer to brainstorm, nutshell, answer questions, etc. as a way of getting started on a paper topic. Descant (Daedalus), a recently introduced program, takes students through a peer review session, providing them with prompts to help them evaluate another writer's paper. Norton Textra (W. W. Norton), to

be reviewed in the next Micro Style column is an example of a program that enhances revision via an on-line grammar handbook.

The fourth generation of writing software is the entire process aid. These programs take students through more than one part of the process. Examples of these programs include Writer's Helper (Conduit) and HBJ Writer (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). Both offer several prewriting strategies, allow the writer to place the text into a word processing program, and then back into the process program for revision strategies. These programs offer considerable promise for students in a writing center because they provide individualized help with all parts of the writing process. Once you and your students have learned a word processing program, you may want to explore these single-purpose and entire process software packages that introduce students to more than just word processing as a means to improve their writing.

With all of these choices and a limited budget, you may wonder what to purchase first. My recommendation would be to begin by purchasing one or two good word processing programs. Then, supplement these with a few of the single-purpose process or entire process aids, Finally, add drill and practice if you wish to provide review in grammar and usage.

To select specific programs, you can send for stacks and stacks of catalogs, but it is difficult to judge the value of the software from the description in a catalog. The program always sounds wonderful when the vendor describes it. If you must pick a program from a catalogs description, request a demonstration or preview copy- most companies will let you try the program before you buy it. This allows you to see if the program will work on your particular computer system and if it is pedagogically sound. Probably the best way to choose soft-ware, though, is to attend conferences that offer computer writing sessions, read journals to discover what others in the field are doing, or talk with colleagues who are using computers in their centers. For the adventurous, there are also several national bulletin boards where computer users exchange information about instructional software.

In future columns, I will share specific instructional strategies for using computers in the writing center and review various software packages that have been used in our center. If

you have information that you would like to share with me or with other readers of this column, please write to me at the following address: Evelyn J. Posey, Director, Academic Advancement Center, The University of Texas at El Paso, 500 W. University Avenue, El Paso, TX 79968-0627.

South Central Area Writing Center Personnel

June 9, 1989 Little Rock, Arkansas

All interested persons are invited to attend the first organizational meeting of a new group of writing center personnel being formed. The meeting will be held on June 9th, at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, in the Student Union, Pulaski Room, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. (luncheon). If you have questions, please contact Sally Crisp, UALR, 501-569-8343.

Sixth Annual Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference

Nov. 3-5, 1989 Youngstown, OH

The conference theme is "Partnerships: Teaching, Learning, Growing." The keynote speaker for the conference will be Dr. Jay Jacoby, University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Sessions during the conference will be presented by peer tutors, faculty, and directors of tutoring centers, both in high schools and colleges. For registration information and program, write to Sherri Zander, Director, Writing Center, Department of English, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH 44555.

Midwest College Learning Center Association Conference

October 11-13, 1989 Evanston, Illinois

Contact Mary Anderson, Academic Support Center, DeVry Institute of Technology, 3300 North Campbell Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60618 (312-929-8500, ext. 2009).

Tutoring the Learning Disabled

For those interested in a pamphlet of articles on tutoring learning disabled students, the University of Northern Iowa publishes a journal of student research and writing called Drafting ands In . Vol.3, No. 2 (1988) focuses on " Tutoring the Learning Disabled Student in a University Writing Center." To obtain a copy, contact the editor, Professor Barbara Lounsberry, Board of Student Publications, 112 Maucker Union, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls. Iowa 50614 (319-273-2157).

Do You Tutor Graduate Students?

We are gathering information about instruction of graduate students in writing centers. If you teach a substantial number of graduate students or have special programs for graduate students in your writing center, we'd appreciate a post card so that we can contact you. We would also like to hear from you if your institution has a thesis or dissertation center that offers grads help with writing. Please specify (1) contact name, (2) name of writing center, (3) address, (4) phone, (5) best time for us to call. Joyce Sexton or Mary Berthold, 6165 Helen C. White Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706.

Dear Study Lady...

The May 1988 of the Writing Lab News-letter included my article on the advice column approach to teaching study skills. This column Dear Study Lady is now available in booklet form. Topics In the 20-page booklet include note-taking, study reading, test preparation, time management, and writer's block. Learning centers are invited to add information about their own services to the column.

Dear Study Lady is illustrated by Atlanta artist Clyde Broadway. If there is sufficient interest, these illustrations will be made avail-able on transparencies accompanied by a script outline for a study skills lecture/workshop. For more information, write to me: Nancy-Laurel Pettersen, Box 21116, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322.

T u t o r s '   C o l u m n

The seduction of a schoolmarm

Academic Discernment in the Last Days B.G.*
(*Before Graduation)

We all know that the most recent converts make the best fanatics. Well, Brothers and Sisters, I'm here to tell you the good news! You don't have to be a pompous pontificator in order to teach! Teaching 'done wrong' is a sin; 'done right' it's Beaulah Land and I'm on my way!

When I was young, I fell in among thieves and committed Motherhood. My motto was "Because I said so." Though I was charitable to non-believers, I secretly believed in the good old argument by design- I was bigger than they were. It worked until the model failed-they grew and I didn't. Still, I blamed my failures on my own sins, not the model, and I planned to early the divine plan right into the classroom. I could see it all so clearly. I would wander between the desks, always thinking on the Absolute, ablaze in the light of Pure Perception, carrying Sonnets between my teeth. My students would be inducted into the great company of those who seek the Vision, along with Norman Rockwell, Oprah Winfrey, and Dr. Ruth. I would occasionally play the violin for them, and never, never, would they, in any way, blunt the sharp edges of my matchless wit.

Well. This semester I have been transmogrified, transcendentalized, and transfigured. Hallelujah! I've seen the light and been converted, and all because of two classes- Linguistics and the Tutoring Practicum. If Sister Davis hadn't said to me, at least twenty times, "Figure it out, " I wouldn't have been able to face my first tutoring session. (Brother Patten! I can't possibly do this! I'm only half-way through the Holt Handbook, the computer has swallowed everything I've given it so far, and what if they should ask me- God forbid!- SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW!)

I was frantically searching through A Glossary of Literary Terms for "third person circular" as my first appointment arrived. Please God. let it be a freshman who needs help only with articles and commas! Request denied- in walks a senior who needs help with an engineering report! I don't know the difference between a bunsen burner and a rat, and I'm supposed to help him? The choice was mine- it was either self-destruction or transmutation, and I went for the latter. To make a long story short, his reports went from B's to A's, In addition, I can now speak laboratory lingo with the best of them. which may come in handy the next time I want to sound intelligent on the other side of the brain. (Quirk! Take Norman Vincent Peale- subtract Aristotle- add Miss Piggy, and multiply by Ralph Nader! What have you got? Tammy Baker!)

Anyway, I found it wasn't a sin to say, "I don't know, " though I had to practice it in front of the bathroom mirror with the door closed, in case anyone at home should hear. No longer will I be speaking The Pure Truth, The Higher Truth, and The Utter Truth. This is pure blasphemy, but it feels good. It's lonely in the Holy Vacuum.

The end of the mystic path is assuredly not silence. Now I have a mission, It's such a wonderful feeling to stand in the middle of the Writing Resource Center and feel at one with it all. I have to resist the urge to embroider wall-hangings and burn incense. Oh, the sacramental hum of the Macintoshes! The peaceful smiles of the saved as they are caught up from the snares of Writer's Block and Machine Idiocy! The only hard-core commandments are that Thy Cup Shall Not Runneth Over on the Computers, and Thou Shalt Keep Thy Appointments. And blessed are they who think I am

already a Professor!

Mea Gulps. The last shall be first. I have learned that to teach is to learn twice, and so I am continually blessed.

Janet Smith
Peer Tutor
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

A useful addition to your reference shelf

Pellegrino, Victor C. A Writer's Guide to Transitional Words and Expressions. Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii: Maui Arthoughts, 1987.

Dissatisfied with the meager treatment of transitions and transitional expressions in the current textbooks in the mid-1970°s, I compiled my own single-page classified list of such expressions for my students. A few years later I discovered the most useful list of introductory terms for quotations that I had ever seen, this in the sixth edition of Form and Style Theses, Reports, Term Papers (William Giles Campbell, Stephen Vaughan Bellou, and Carole Slade. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982, pp. 54-55). Periodic updating of my own list and the Form and Style list remained my transition mainstays until I discovered Victor C. Pellegrino's A Writer's Guide to Transitional Words and Expressions in 1987.

This ready reference is everything Pellegrino claims it to be: "a mini-thesaurus consisting of over 1,600 transitional words and expressions divided and indexed into 15 categories. Helps writers connect sentences and paragraphs to create a smooth flow of ideas in order to communicate clearly and effectively." The work has fifteen classified lists of transitional devices that cover the following relation-ships: time, sequence, repetition, examples, concession, conclusion or summary, addition, comparison, contrast, cause and effect, division and classification, spatial arrangement, emphasis, subordination and coordination of clauses, including the use of correlative conjunctions, relative pronouns, and conjunctive adverbs. The lists are thumb-indexed for easy access.

This user-friendly resource is like pea-nuts. I couldn't get by with a single copy any

more than I could eat a single peanut. There-fore, my order was for three copies: a lab copy, an office copy, and a home copy. It can be obtained from Maui Arthoughts Company, P.O. Box 967, Wailuku, Hawaii, 96793 ($3.50 a copy with a discount price of $2.63 available to college and university book stores with institutional purchase orders).

Pellegrino, currently chairperson of the Language Arts Division of Maui Community College, veteran English teacher from elementary to university level, has also written three other books and was awarded the 1985 Excellence in English Teaching Award from the Hawaii Council of Teachers of English (NCTE affiliate).

Myra J. Linden Joliet
Junior College Joliet, IL

Wife with confidence

sessions for those in the humanities, those in sciences, those in education; then we would tailor the content and material more precisely to the specific interest groups.

One of the very special rewards in teaching this class is that the students are warm, responsive, and positive. A camaraderie occurs with this group that does not happen in other groups. Another gratifying aspect of this class is that students frequently share information or skills that have been part of their "out-side" life. This information enriches discussion and allows us all to learn from each other. As students, adults are great resources for their peers as well as for the instructor. Working with returning adult students is very satisfying personally and is a rewarding activity for the Writing Lab as well. If any of you have the opportunity to become involved with an older student group, accept the challenge because it is fulfilling to help adults reenter academic life without being consumed by it, to support them in feeling comfortable about their life experiences as bases for growth.

Janet Fishbain University of Wisconsin-Madison

The writing center and the senior thesis: A context for writing as teaching

Writing a senior thesis, or any long work of scholarship, is a lonely business. The more you discover about your subject, the fewer friends and even instructors can share your excitement in that discovery. Your burden of responsibility for making decisions- such as "who did what," "what matters," and ever-insistent "what to save," " what to throw away"-increases with the specialization of your knowledge, and the ramshackle edifice of your topic is haunted by insecurity, doubt, and a growing sense of your own insignificance in the domain of almighty Scholarship.

The problems and rewards of writing a thesis usually perish in the tide of academic folk history, for seniors graduate and are swept along to other pursuits before they can bequeath their knowledge. This supposed pinnacle of an undergraduate career receives little attention in many institutions, even though for most students it is an important moment of intellectual development.

With these assumptions- or embryonic versions of them- in mind, staff members of Harvard University's Writing Center developed a Senior Thesis Tutoring Program from 1980 through 1984. As the program matured, we found that along with the satisfactions of working with capable, motivated students, the Writing Center staff gained new perspectives on many of its endeavors from these experienced students and began to define a more active role for itself in the preparation of advanced work in the university community.

Defining and Responding to Students' Needs

Writing a thesis is a particularly isolated and isolating experience. The complexity, accompanying expectations, and very large size of theses compared to other undergraduate essays make seniors feel that an hour spent on anything other than their own work is an hour wasted. Thesis writers want extended individual attention, not from peers, but from advanced graduate students or instructors-from those who have survived the mysterious rite of

passage that a thesis or a dissertation is perceived to be. Workshops and other group activities, though economically more feasible, simply do not seem relevant to senior thesis writers.

In light of this realization, we conducted only a few group sessions or "crash courses" on specific and generally useful topics, such as research strategies, and used them as opportunities to advertise the most important component of the program: individual tutoring by a writing instructor available to students at any stage of the thesis writing process, from the moment of choosing whether or not to write one at all, to the mixed joys and depressions of interpreting faculty evaluations of the work. These individual tutoring sessions were the foundation of the program and became, in turn, the most efficient means of advertising what we were doing, for the students we saw were so delighted to have an audience for their thesis ideas, drafts, and concerns that they brought that message home to their departments and to other seniors with uniquely persuasive power.

Rethinking the Teacher-Learner Relationship

The Writing Center had to define for the students, their faculty advisors, and its own tutors the role it would play in helping students with their theses: the senior thesis tutor supplements departmental advising by emphasizing the day-to-day, word-by-word, footnote-byfootnote reality of getting the work done from a writer's perspective. This definition represents only one side of the tutorial equation, however, for the student's ability to teach her research topic to the tutor was just as vital a part of her learning experience.

This "writer's perspective" was a new and refreshing concept for many students who had always conceived of the activity and the criticism of writing as ' mystical processes." One of these, Amy, was won over by what she called the "there-is-a-tomorrow" atmosphere of the Writing Center, where the focus on writing as a body of knowledge seemed refreshingly

down-to-earth, as compared to the abstractions of her major field, Like many initiates in discourse communities, Amy expressed her apprehensions by writing stiff, formal prose loaded with high-sounding but empty phrases that obscured the subtleties of her analysis. She was surprised and relieved to discover the very practical and concrete terms in which writing problems can be discussed and solved. The tutor encouraged her, for example, to transfer her verbal articulateness to paper and even took notes as she talked or taught her subject in the exchange of the tutorial to show her how well she was writing aloud. The experience of reading her work aloud to the tutor showed Amy its moments of confusion and lapses into vague terminology. Writing became for Amy the dominant mode of exploring and developing her topic and, finally, of resolving what she called its "scary conceptual aspects." Amy's new confidence in herself as a writer and a teacher helped her produce the thesis that she wanted to write, that is, one that challenged prevailing views in her field.

Seniors with the maturity to seek help, as Amy did, tended to perceive the tutor's lack of specialized knowledge in their field as an advantage, since most of them wanted to write a thesis that the general reader- usually envisioned as " my parents" or "my roommate"-could appreciate, as well as one that would genuinely enter the discourse of a particular field. Students regarded the tutor's lack of expertise in their disciplines as a reinforcement of their own independence- a dose of self-confidence that would serve them well in the barrage of criticism that was to come from all sides throughout the months of research and writing. If the writing tutor communicated expertise in language, conventions, reasoning strategies, and so on, the student communicated expertise in a particular content area, teaching her topic, as Amy did, through conversation and rethinking it in other ways in the presence of a responding audience.

The mutual confidence of such an interchange can take time to develop. Rob was not so easily convinced of the Importance of writing to writing a thesis. He suffered from what another student called "kitchen sink-ism"- the urge to include in his projected thesis everything that was ever known about his topic. When he did begin to write, it was only to assemble long strings of facts without guidance or interpretation for the reader in a draft that

ran to hundreds of pages.

Rob was surprised when the tutor asked him to produce one-sentence or one-paragraph statements of various points. He feared he was oversimplifying his argument, but when he
began to understand it himself for the first time through teaching the material to the tutor, he began to see the value of clear, simple, and sometimes even repetitious statements to provide his audience with a context for examples. The summaries he wrote or dictated eventually became, by his own choice, important parts of the thesis. In the process of extracting, stating, and restating his argument. Rob discovered sections of his thesis that were superfluous or that demanded conclusions he didn't have authority to make. He made cuts and began to feel somewhat in control of his material- a breakthrough that seems to be a necessary part of producing any long piece of writing.

like Amy and Rob, many of the students in the program began to see the thesis process as an opportunity to absorb as much as they could about writing with the help of a writing expert. For some, the thesis was an awakening to the value of communication: having some-thing to say- as opposed to producing an expected answer- meant that it was time to learn how to say it. As the students progressed, the distinction between writing expertise and expertise in their discipline blurred, and they learned even more about their subject through learning to express it, both in conversation and in the evolving written work. As one student observed in a tone of reverent amazement, "The writing can be the good part!"

How can a non-expert in a particular content area, such as a writing tutor, most effectively intervene in the production of a highly specialized document? Questions, which place the burden of creation and authority back on the writer, also reflect the tutor's response as a reader to issues such as lack of clarity; problems of subordination and emphasis; balance of factual, theoretical, and interpretive material including the handling of sources in the text and the level of argument; and above all, the teasing out of the writer's ideas from the mass of scholarship and mythology that accompanies and tends to dominate- in their own minds anyway- the topics that students choose.

This problem of expertise and authority

is illustrated by the case of Sylvia, who came for tutoring with her essay mostly written and stylistically elegant, but was worried because her thesis had failed: the conclusions from her research did not bear out her original thesis or any modification of it. She faced the difficult task of rethinking the nature of her work, of bringing unity to the thesis without forcing superficial conclusions on her results. The tutor was able to look at Sylvia's essay with a less personal commitment to results and to help her assess what was really interesting about the material, what fresh expressions of ideas it offered, and how these could be coherently grouped together, In the course of these conversations, Sylvia realized that the work was primarily descriptive, rather than analytical, and that description was an appropriate mode within the discourse community. Examples from published research in her field served as models for managing the data. In the course of rethinking her essay through teaching it to the tutor, Sylvia began to see a number of "mini-theses" emerging from her material, no one powerful enough to dominate, but each one compelling and valuable in itself. She replaced her unrealistic expectations for the thesis with narrower observations that told a more subtly shaded story and found alternate ways to maintain the work's unity through language, structure, and thematic intensity.

In tutorial relationships such as these, intensive work on a section from the thesis in progress generated strategies that the student can develop and apply to the larger document. The tutor breaks the problems down into manageable steps, so that the student's task for the next meeting might be to "pull the key sentence out of each paragraph to check the logic of the argument," or " underline topic and analytic sentences in this section to make sure each paragraph carries the argument a step further," rather than simply (or not so simply!) "improve the argument."

Strategies like these were especially useful for students facing some degree of writer's block or intellectual or personal crises that interfered with the writing of their theses. Nancy came to the program three weeks before her thesis was due- discouraged, anxious, and unable to concentrate. Her advisors had criticized her project but had not offered solutions to the problems they identified. The tutor first discussed with Nancy her commitment to finishing the thesis. What would be the goals or

rewards of writing a thesis that would probably not result in her graduating with honors? The Writing Center perspective- that the written work can be approached through a series of manageable steps- and the assurance that someone would be there to guide her through the necessary tasks helped Nancy decide to write the thesis for herself and to incorporate her department's values to the extent that she could. Nancy used tutoring sessions as dead-lines for small pieces of focused writing and turned in her thesis on time. She did not receive honors, but had accomplished a substantial piece of work on a topic of personal and intellectual interest to her. The Writing Center, by providing a context in which this outcome could happen and by supporting in various ways the process of writing itself, had improved the conditions for thesis writing within the community.

The undergraduate departments, though at first either wary or unaware of their students' participation in our program, eventually became collaborators in our efforts and were helpful in referring individual cases, like Nancy's, to our attention. They recognized the special needs of students engaged in long writing projects, though they were not always able to meet them. The students who came for thesis tutoring were discouraged by the lack of formal opportunities within their departments to share the content of their work, and their informal attempts to share their knowledge and experiences waned without such institutional support. This need became especially apparent as students reached the conclusion stage of their theses and groped for the perspectives and the sense of finality that they had long imagined achieving. Michael, for example, had written a sophisticated thesis, but immersion in the theoretical background had made it difficult for him to see whether or not he was really proving his case and to what extent he was letting terminology supplant real discussion. He wanted an audience to comment on these problems and especially to help him refresh the language while maintaining the idiom of the discourse. Through the tutorial dialogue, he was able to mediate among these demands; in the course of the discussion- the interchange provided by the Writing Center at the moment when it was most useful- Michael discovered conclusions he had only half stated and even some new perspectives on his material.

These students' experiences illustrate
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the isolation of thesis writing and a central problem plaguing undergraduate writing: unlike this essay or most professional writing, an undergraduate essay usually has no audience, meets no response, has no independent life of its own until it comes under the red pen of an all-powerful grader- and by then it is too late for the student to do anything about it. Upon receiving its alphabetic honor, the under-graduate essay is " consigned to oblivion," as one professor observed, in the mind of the student no less than in the mind of the teacher.

The Writing Center and
the Senior Thesis

The writing center offers a thesis writer the attention of an audience that talks back and talks about writing as writing: such dialogues reinforce departmental advising and serve as models for intellectual   during what can otherwise be an extremely lonely and all-consuming venture. Students evaluating their thesis year reiterated the importance of gathering multiple points of view on what they were doing, Many undergraduates mistakenly think that interchange undermines the authority of expertise, at least in the production of written work. But as one senior thesis writer said, "Interchange of all kinds and at every stage of the thesis process is what makes it exciting." Seeking such dialogue empowers the writer as well as the reader to reflect on the work and to make decisions about its course- decisions that establish the authority of the written work. In the words of another senior, "Get any perspectives you can, but be selective in what you swallow."

We found our association with these seniors to be enriching for us as writers and as teachers, for thesis writers usually have some to say and they care deeply about getting it right. Many of them are experiencing for the first time the satisfactions of intellectual discovery* even if in the judgement of their discipline that discovery is simply rediscovery. As one student said, "I did a piece of academic work that was important to me for its own sake, not just because somebody demanded it of me." Such internalization of values has positive effects on the writing itself. "In the course of writing," another student observed, "I narrowed my goals, because external judgements-whether or not my work was brilliant (it wasn't)- began to matter less than the satisfac-

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tion I was getting from actually pursuing my own interests."

Since senior thesis writers have the experience of nearly four years in the writing environment of an institution, they can contribute to the writing center's assessment of the needs and capabilities of the population it serves. Seniors in our program- reflecting on the hurried quality of writing done on the semester system- say " learning to rewrite" as the "big discovery" of their year-long thesis projects. Having more time and responding to enforced deadlines and periodic meetings with advisors emphasized the process of writing and showed them that revision was a re-seeing and re-evaluating of their work, not just a clean-up job. For most of them, writing had always meant "the big paper at the end of the course." and they were relieved to find that writing could be a means, as well as an end. "Don't wait to start writing until you've reached a sort of mental conclusion," one senior advised. "Start before you're ready, even if it's only stream of consciousness. You'll feel you've created some-thing, and the excitement will begin,"

The Writing Center's association with senior theses helped us in institutional, as well pedagogical, terms by enhancing our image as an organization that provided services to advanced as well as to "needy" and "normal" students and by involving us in exchanges with faculty about the educational goals and the day-to-day realities of thesis writing. Further writing center collaboration with departments would enhance the senior thesis process for students and would earn much deserved attention for this much neglected academic endeavor.

All that the writing center staff learned from the Senior Thesis Tutoring Program and all that we may have contributed to students' longest and last undergraduate writing experience can be summed up in the observation quoted earlier "The writing can be the good part," and the writing center can be the place where that point of view is discovered again and again.

Christine S. Cozzens Agnes
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NEW FROM NCTE

Two new books published by the National Council of Teachers of English include David Dobrin's Writing and Technique and also Writing in the Business Profession, edited by Myra Kogen (who described her Writing Center at Brooklyn College in an interview in the April newsletter).

Dobrin's book invites teachers and composition researchers to stand back, lay aside "standard wisdom," and take a long, dispassionate look at what they are doing, For example, Dobrin argues that computers and computer aids to writing manipulate symbols with no relation to meaning and that standard approaches to teaching paragraphing can result in absurdity.

The essays in the book edited by Kogen seek to conceptualize and define the field of business communication. Among the nineteen contributing authors are Linda Flower, Jack Selzer, Janice Reddish, Donald Cunningham, and other specialists in writing instruction for the world of work.

Dobrin, David. Writing and Technique. 312
pages, paperbound. Price: $18.75; NCTE
members, $14.95. No. 58927-015. Kogen, Myra, ed. Writing
in the Business Profes
sitns. 302 pages, paperbound. Price:
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A "WALK" in the writing center

One of the major problems for student writers and for those who work with them is that of uncertainty. The students are uncertain of what exactly the assignment is, uncertain of how it will be evaluated, uncertain of how it is to be organized, and most importantly, uncertain of exactly what it is they are trying to say in the paper. This student uncertainty is compounded for the writing center personnel be-cause we most often have the same vicarious uncertainties about the assignment as do the students, and we are most often uncertain of the students' writing competency and under-standing of the writing process. The Writing Assignment List of Keys" (WALK) is a brief worksheet (see page 16) developed for writing classes and for our work with writing in content areas which can help students in the composing process and help writing center personnel offer more effective assistance. The "WALK" is not meant to be a substitute for the actual writing, but it can be a means to provide more effective student and tutor work on almost all writing assignments.

The sections of the WALK" are relatively self-explanatory and can be modified for any classroom or writing center situation. The "Keys" can be an easy, organized way to engage students in a discussion of the assignment and/or the content and is an effective way to help diagnose major problems the student has with understanding of the assignment, the content, and/or the writing process. Suggesting that teachers have students complete the WALK" before they seek help in the center is also an excellent way to make work in the center more efficient.

In the writing center, "Key" #7 can be used in several ways. Students can include the instructor as one of those in the "group" helping with the assignment, and we encourage students to have the instructor double-check students' understanding of the assignment. We also encourage students to include other tutors, other instructors, friends, and parents as part of the "group" helping the students develop the paper. We hope to encourage students to see the value of "group" input into developing their ideas and creating a quality paper. Just as importantly, we encourage students to provide feedback to others working on the same assignment as a means of improving their own under-standing of the content, the assignment, and/or the writing process.

Again, the "WALK" is not a substitute for the actual writing or for the tutor-student interaction; however, it can be one effective method to help the student and the tutor become more efficient.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT LIST OF KEYS (WALK)

This "WALK" sheet is a suggested aid to help you with your writing assignments in all courses. Not all of the KEYS are equally important in each paper, but the "WALK" should help you more effectively develop your ideas and final draft.

1. SUBJECT: _____

2. ASSIGNMENT: (a) Formal assignment: _____ (b) Assignment in my words: _____

3. GRADING CRITERIA: How will this paper be graded? _____

4. DUE DATE: _____ 5. BACKGROUND INFORMATION NEEDED: _____

6. ORGANIZATION: (a) How is this paper to be organized? _____
   (b) Or, what do you think is the best way to organize the material? _____

7. GROUP APPROACH: Solicit input and reactions to your ideas and written work as they progress. Provide feedback to others.

8. THESIS: After thinking and pre-writing, what is the main idea that you want the reader to understand after reading your paper? _____
   (REMEMBER, the thesis is always subject to revision, but everything in your paper should help explain/develop/illustrate/clarify your thesis for the reader or it shouldn't be in the paper.)

9. FINAL DRAFT: Edit the final draft carefully for reader clarity and correctness.

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Address correction requested