

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

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

Volume 14, Number 9

May, 1990

...from the editor....

Finances are not a fascinating topic, so I'll be brief. After years of juggling expenses to keep the newsletter in existence, I now find that we need to increase prices to stay solvent. As of July 1, 1990, yearly donations will be raised to \$10. That should just about cover our duplicating and mailing costs, especially given the surge in postal costs expected next fall.

As usual, we have no billing procedures (a cost-cutting device) and ask that you re-member to send in donations or that you prod your business offices into pre-payment. (We have none of those invoice forms they seem to thrive on.) Now that we are computerized, we are copying that clever magazine feature of listing your expiration date on your mailing label.

Please, as usual, make all checks payable to Purdue University and send them to me (or, if you wish, include payment when paying dues to the National Writing Centers Association- funds will be forwarded to me). Well, enough on finances for a long while- I hope.

Muriel Harris, editor

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The Writing Center Model at the Heart of Writing Instruction from Kindergarten to College

At the 1989 Writing Center Association: East Central Conference, I listened with interest as an eighth-grade teacher described how she taught writing and shared with us delightful samples of her students' work. At the end of the session, during the time for questions and answers, I commented that it would be interesting indeed for those who work in college writing centers some-day to see students from such classrooms appear in college writing centers. My comment got the response from the audience (primarily college-based writing center stall) that I anticipated- chuckles of laughter. And I have to admit that was part of my devilish reason for making the comment in the first place. "Sure," I imagined them saying to themselves, "I'd love to see writers like that in my writing center!"

Later I thought a lot about that incident. I know that

college writing centers more typically see very different students from those eighth graders-that they more often see writing-anxiety-ridden students who have for a variety of reasons come to think of themselves as poor writers.

Still, I want to suggest that it's becoming more and more likely every day that college freshmen will arrive on campus having encountered teachers like that eighth-grade teacher or like teacher-authors such as Natick Atwell, Lucy Calkins, and Tom Romano; that such students will be more confident and experienced writers; and that they will seek the college writing center because they know already the value of talking over a writing project with a trained writing consultant. I base this optimism on my experience of the last ten years. When I taught composition courses at Ohio Wesleyan University ten years ago, I witnessed the effectiveness and success of a writing center in a university setting. A few years later, after a move to Cincinnati, I helped develop and operate a high school writing center at Madeira High School and have since consulted with several schools eager to design centers of their own. Now, having moved to Michigan, I have during the last three years been teaching preservice English and Language Arts teachers and have emphasized in my classes the important role of the writing center model in writing instruction. My observation and experience, then, have led me to believe that students of the future may

encounter very different writing instruction and may consequently possess very different attitudes than they typically do today. Further-more, I believe writing centers-especially high school centers-will come to play an even greater role at the very heart of writing instruction and learning.

The history and success of college writing centers have been well documented in such publications as The Writing Center Journal, The Writing Lab Newsletter, and a number of books and composition journals as well. It is easy now with hindsight to look back and both praise and criticize the activities of early writing centers, but one thing is very clear- those who wrote about writing conferences, such as Roger Garrison, Donald Murray, and Thomas Carnicelli, who persuasively advocated the conference method for teaching writing, provided a powerful theoretical and practical base to support the development of writing centers. Recent theorizing about writing as a social process rather than an isolated, solitary activity

(Ede) provides additional grounding for continued support of writing centers.

It has been interesting, however, to move beyond the college setting and to observe that writing conferences have taken a more prominent place in elementary and secondary writing instruction as well. The whole language movement, now beginning to sweep into the country's elementary schools, has created classrooms where very young children begin to write- that is, to use whatever letters they come to school knowing (usually letters from their own names) to compose messages and express thoughts that are important to them. They are encouraged to collaborate with their teachers and with classmates as they decide what to write and how to write it, and what follows the writing session are writing conferences with the teacher or with peers. Donald Graves' groundbreaking text, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, includes five chapters (out of 29) on the value and how-to's of writing conferences, and his encouraging words have persuaded countless elementary teachers to try the conference method. Lucy Calkins' *The Art of Teaching Writing* includes a similar proportion of text devoted to discussion of conferences. Her description of conferences focused on content, design, process, and evaluation has been illuminating and useful even for those who don't work with elementary writers, and her heart-warming classroom anecdotes have inspired

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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.

thousands more elementary teachers to make writing conferences an important part of writing instruction.

In elementary schools frequently the writing center is an actual space within the classroom- a place where a variety of writing materials is provided, a place where students' writing folders are kept, a place where students consult and collaborate with peers. Because the student compositions are relatively short and easy to respond to quickly, elementary students don't have the need for out-of-class writing centers that older students have. However, students in elementary writing workshops quickly come to expect time for discussion and response to their writing and surely will be eager to continue this practice as they move to higher grades.

Nancie Atwell's text, *In the Middle*, describes the growth that can happen when middle school writers are given the opportunity to work with classmates and their writing in the "conference corners" (64) of her classroom. Atwell's program also uses in-class conferences, a system that seems appropriate for middle schools, where frequently the English/Language Arts class consists of a two-period block of time that makes classroom conferences possible.

High schools, however, present an entirely different situation. Recent texts similarly advocate in-class writing conferences. For example, Tom Romano's candid text, *Clearing the Way*, based on his classroom experience with high school writers, devotes a chapter to "The Crucial Role of Conferencing." Further-more, even the title of Zemelman and Daniels' text, *The Community of Writers*, reflects the social nature of composing, and these authors also recommend writing conferences for secondary classrooms.

It is interesting to notice, however, that the most recent and popular texts focused on writing in secondary schools describe writing conferences which take place only within the confines of the classroom itself, only within the prescribed time set aside each day for English class. What is missing is the recognition that what high school students need is a more extended opportunity to conference about their writing. Romano explains that for a major writing assignment, he will spend two and a half class periods in conferences with students-with the result that each student gets

about five minutes of his time. But five minutes isn't always enough. Furthermore, most high school teachers I know best teach literature and research methods and oral language skills and more in addition to teaching writing, so a continual classroom writing workshop is seldom a possibility. As students write longer pieces and attempt more complex forms of writing, they need the resources available in a high school writing center.

Of the five elements needed to create a high school writing center, three already exist in any given school: (1) student writers, (2) writing consultants- i.e., teachers and/or peers, and (3) pieces of writing to discuss. The two other elements, however, are usually lacking, and they make all the difference- (4) the time and (5) the place which make significant writing assistance a practical possibility. Fortunately, in spite of the obstacles, high school writing centers are springing up all across the country, and the word is spreading. Articles are beginning to appear, papers are being presented at conferences, and NCTE has just published *The High School Writing Center*. An amazing variety of high school centers are being described and suggestions provided for designing and implementing new centers as well. How exciting it will be to observe and participate in the future of high school writing centers.

I believe that writing centers have the potential not only to serve and to empower student writers but to empower English teachers as well. Such centers provide that rare commodity- time- to work one-to-one with students. In fact, I have argued elsewhere ("Roundtable," *English Journal*) that high schools need writing centers even more than the colleges do because secondary students and teachers are locked into schedules which make no provision for office hours for student-teacher conferences. English teachers are further empowered if writing centers are designed to be staffed by English teachers so that class loads, and the paper load, can be reduced. Another benefit of such a plan is that by working in a center teachers can learn firsthand about students' writing and thinking processes, resulting in discoveries that can lead to re-evaluating and refining writing assignments and instructional practices.

I have come to believe, then, as I teach preservice teachers of writing that eventually as they become classroom teachers, they will know

the value of teaching writing one-to-one and will make that concept an important part of their own classrooms. They will seek in their own schools the empowerment that writing centers can provide. In turn, their future students, like the students of that eighth-grade teacher and Tom Romano, will grow up understanding and seeking the help writing centers can offer. (And indeed, why stop there? Why not consider corporate writing centers to provide services to employees as they engage in professional writing projects? Indeed, some corporations already provide the services of in-house or outside writing consultants to meet that need.)

At any rate, future college writing centers may eventually, then, be faced with new challenges. They may see fewer students whose writing has been labeled "ultimate failure" (Bishop 39) than they do today, and thus need to spend less time building writers' confidence, but they might also then find themselves freed to spend more time intervening in students' writing processes- nudging students to generate topics, shape ideas, rethink, revise and edit.

Just as the writing center model has provided the means to fulfill the concept of the conference method for teaching writing, it also matches today's emphasis on the social inter-action between writer and responder. This model can play an important part in the writing instruction of all students- kindergarten to college.

Ellen H. Brinkley
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan

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Call for Conference Papers

The Future of Grammar in American Schools

August 10-11, 1990

Keynote speaker: **Martha Kolln**

We invite proposals for papers that attempt to 1) define "pedagogical grammar," and/or pedagogically useful grammatical concepts ("usage," "syntax," etc.), 2) explain what is being taught, or what should be taught, when, why, and how, 3) explore the relationships between knowledge of grammar and reading, writing, and thinking skills, 4) give practical reviews of textbooks currently being used. The conference will address the question positively—no papers that argue that grammar should not be taught will be accepted. We hope to have participants ranging from primary school teachers to college professors. For more information, contact Dr. Ed Vavra, Shenandoah College, 1460 College Drive, Winchester, VA 22601, or call 703/665-4587.

Call for Papers

Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association

Oct. 13, 1990
LaGrande, Oregon

Papers are being accepted on issues relevant to writing centers: writing across the curriculum, writing to learn, theoretical concerns of writing centers, use of computers, training of writing assistants, history of writing centers, writer's block, faculty development, and future trends. Send 150-word abstracts to the program chair: Mark Shadle, Writing Center, Eastern Oregon State College, LaGrande, Oregon 97850. Deadline: June 22, 1990.

Call for Proposals

Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association Conference

October 11-13, 1990

Salt Lake City, Utah

The conference, being hosted by Brigham Young University and Weber State College, is being held in conjunction with the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association. Both formal and informal presentations or discussions acceptable. Presentations one-half hour. Please indicate your audio-visual needs. Send proposals by June 15 to William O. Shakespeare, Director, Reading-Writing Center, 1010A JKHB, Provo, UT 84602.

Call for Proposals Midwest Writing Centers Association

Oct. 5-6, 1990
St. Cloud, MN

"Centers for Collaboration: Diversity for the New Decade"

Keynote speaker: Andrea Lunsford

The Midwest Writing Centers Association invites proposals for one-hour presentations and for individual presentations (20 minutes), workshops, panel presentations exploring collaboration and/or diversity— racial, ethnic, economic, social, age, sex— as we encounter them in writing centers.

Submit a one- to two-page proposal, indicating type of presentation (individual, workshop, panel); target audience (high school, college, or both); names and school affiliations of presenters, titles of presentations; and required audio-visual equipment. Mail to Judith Kilborn, Director, The Write Place, English Department, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN 56301. Proposal deadline: June 1, 1990. (Notification of decision: no later than Aug. 15, 1990.)

Calendar for

Writing Center Associations (WCAs)

Oct. 5-6: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Minnesota.

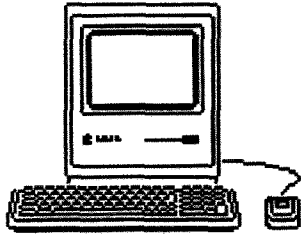
Contact: Judith Kilborn, English Dept., St. Cloud State U., St. Cloud, MN 56301.

Oct. 11-13: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Contact: William O. Shakespeare, Reading-Writing Center, 1010A JKHB, Brigham Young U., Provo, Utah 84602.

Oct. 13: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in LaGrande, Oregon.

Contact: Mark Shadle, Writing Center, Eastern Oregon State College, LaGrande, Oregon 97850.



Micro Style *by Renee Berta*

Computer Modifications for Disabled Students

The advent of personal computers has created new employment opportunities for many disabled populations. With a few equipment modifications, even severely paralyzed or blind individuals can learn to use a computer as well as anyone else, while modems make working out of the home a viable and profitable alternative for people who have little access to transportation.

Ironically, however, education has lagged far behind technology, providing few disabled students with accessible computer training. This situation still holds true even though most experts interpret federal law to mean that any educational institution receiving federal funds must provide its disabled students with equal access to all campus services and facilities. And most experts also interpret the law to mean that computer lab directors cannot just point disabled students toward existing computers, but instead must provide the adaptations necessary to make existing computers accessible to disabled students. Fortunately, researchers have developed numerous devices which make it possible for the disabled to use computers as easily as anyone else. And although such devices are costly, both private and public funding sources seem willing to donate money to enable the disabled to become computer literate. In this article, I will touch briefly on these issues. In essence, I will lay out the bare-bones knowledge necessary to begin adapting a computer lab for use by disabled students, including those with learning disabilities.

When making decisions about computer accessibility, you should bear in mind two general ideas, including the fact that disabled

students cannot be "ghettoized." You cannot, for example, send wheelchair students into a separate room because your predecessor has not allowed enough space for them in the existing lab. On the other hand, not all the computers in a lab need be accessible to the disabled; rather, the number of computers adapted for disabled-student use should reflect the proportion of the student body that is disabled. To get an idea of the number of disabled students on your campus, contact the disabled-student office. If your institution seems to have an inordinately small number of disabled students enrolled, remember that federal law entitles even one disabled student to equal access. Many schools have noticed, furthermore, that the enrollment of disabled students increases as access and facilities improve. Making your computer lab accessible to disabled students, thus, could represent an important step forward for disabled individuals in your community as a whole. In addition, computers modified for disabled students may also be used by able-bodied students. The customary procedure is to give disabled students first priority on the modified machines.

The other factor to consider in making computer facilities accessible to the disabled is that while less severely disabled individuals can use the same equipment as those most severely disabled, the reverse does not apply. Thus, although both a blind student and a student with moderate visual impairment can learn what's on the computer screen by listening to a talking computer, the blind student will not be helped by the enlarged typeface that may be adequate for the student with moderately impaired vision. If you face budgetary constraints, therefore, you might want to begin

by purchasing equipment for the most severely disabled students and later add adaptations for those with less severe disabilities.

Although hearing-impaired students may require the services of a translator or well-written instructions to explain computer use to them, they can interact with a computer with-out any special equipment. As a consequence, you will need to consider primarily three disabled populations when adapting your equipment: the visually, orthopedically, and learning disabled. Fortunately, most adaptations for the visually disabled also benefit the learning disabled.

Both the visually disabled and the learning disabled may, for example, benefit from speech synthesizers, which often take the form of a special card within the computer. These synthesizers literally enable the computer to talk back to disabled students, so that they can ask the computer to read aloud what is on the screen. For many students with more moderate visual impairments, and for some learning disabled students, the problem of reading the computer screen is solved by programs that enlarge the characters on the screen. These same students can enter data more easily by using a set of keys with enlarged letters. Some learning and visually disabled students also will be aided by a lucite template that fits over the keyboard and causes each key to be recessed in a well, thus decreasing the students' chances of hitting the wrong key. These templates also help students prone to spastic movements. For blind students, how-ever, the best solution to the data-entry problem is a braille keyboard.

The last group to require computer adaptations is the orthopedically disabled, people with limited use of their limbs or hands. including people in wheelchairs. To accommodate a wheelchair in your computer lab, you will need work stations of a suitable height and width. Your congressman, the local office for disabled accessibility, or your state rehabilitation commission can help you obtain information on proper wheelchair accommodations.

Of all the orthopedically disabled, quadriplegics have the most extreme disability, but even quadriplegics can now interact with a computer either by sipping on a straw connected to a special keyboard or by wearing a

special headband. This headband attaches either to a stick which hits the keys or to a light wand which activates photosensitive keys. For students with a bit more arm and hand motion, joysticks are available, as are one-handed keyboards and smaller keyboards requiring less motion. All these students can also benefit from programs that enable users to enter data with fewer keystrokes.

For more information on these devices and disabled accessibility, contact your school's disabled-student office; your city's accessibility office; the occupational therapy department of a physical rehabilitation hospital; your state rehabilitation commission; agencies for the disabled, including those dealing with one specific disability; and any local independent-living programs. In addition, IBM has set up a special information center (1-800-426-2133) on adaptive equipment and programs.

Modifying a computer lab may seem an overwhelming task, but as stated earlier, many funding sources will gladly contribute money to assist in the training of the disabled. Among these are both business-affiliated and private foundations, organizations for the disabled, and state rehabilitation commissions.

In the end, the most important thing required to adapt a computer lab for disabled student use is the director's will to do so.

Ed. notes:

- Renee Berta is the Writing and Microcomputer Lab Coordinator in Study Skills and Tutorial Services at the University of Texas-El Paso.
- If you want more specific information about organizations devoted to helping the handicapped gain access to computer-related technology (including I.B.M.'s National Support Center for Persons with Disabilities, Apple's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation, and A.T.&T.'s National Special Needs Center), see the Science section, page B9, of the February 20, 1990 issue of the New York Times.

Scheryl's Collection of Bloopers

We enjoyed the list of student "bloopers" that appeared in the December 1988 issue of the Writing Lab Newsletter. Here at the Writing Center of Tallahassee Community College, we have been compiling a list of our favorites:

- *Although there are times I am moody, I still feel as if I'm a fun and obnoxious person.
- *Cannibalism is frowned upon in Western Culture, while being a palatable endeavor in some parts of Africa and South America.
- *In the last year there have been over 2000 wars, many of which lasted more than fifteen minutes.
- *Several years ago, let's say about 1587, a man named John White set sail for America with 100 colonists.
- *As the bright yellow sun hit the next morning, I jumped out of bed practically.
- *Mr. El Greco was not "the Lone Ranger" of the painting world. There was Diego Valasquez riding shotgun.
- *Whiplash is when the nerves in the neck get pulled out of their sockets.
- *I used to take things for granite but I don't anymore.
- *The suicide rate for girls and other races, while not as high as boys, has increased tremendously.
- *So, atlas, with two and a half years of work experience behind me, I changed jobs.
- *Napoleon's ambition is unique because of its absolute purity. It was not bound by poultry aims.
- *Off course, this problem has many faucets.
- *Obviously there must be some compromise made between brotherly (or motherly or any otherly) advice and freedom of learning for oneself.
- *Throughout the United States there are about 45,000 thunderstorms per day. Out of these 45,000 about 2,788 were struck by lightning per day.
- *There are several choices why I have chose podiatry as the field to go into.
- *Russia's impatience was her downfall. If she would have allowed Germany to mobilize her army first, then the world would realize that Germany, not the Triple Alliance, caused the war.
- *The killer was sentenced to 99 years without payroll.
- *One might not think about all the things that were started back when the Greeks were first starting out, but they certainly would notice it if the things that were started were never finished.
- *Romanticism began in Germany, then flew the map and spread throughout Europe.
- *For all its eggs to be hatched, a spotted salamander must be laid in shallow water.
- *My father is a podiatrist, but no one has yet considered following in his footsteps.
- *Dwelling on fantasy can become detrimental, even for those only indirectly involved with the dweller.
- *In my opinion the Parthenon is not only well constructed but well unconstructed.
- *Scientists have proven that if a monkey is forced to watch "Miami Vice" 24-hours a day, seven days a week, for twelve days, he will have mental problems.

Scheryl Rutland
Tallahassee Community College
Tallahassee, Florida

Tutors' Column

Mother Vs. Tutor

The timid, non-traditional student entered the Writing Assistance Center and gingerly slid into the concave of the bright blue plastic chair. An explicit message of fright and self-doubt was reflected in her eyes.

"May I help you?" I asked.

"Oh yes, please," she replied seemingly relieved that a seasoned assistant offered help. "I have to write this paper for my 101 class, and I can't seem to get it right. I've rewritten it at least six times, and finally my English instructor suggested I come to the Writing Center for help. Oh, by the way, my name is Gail."

"Okay, then, Gail why don't we look at you paper together," I suggested. "Will you please read it out loud?"

As I listened to her read, I could tell that she lacked organization and that she was having trouble connecting many of her thoughts. When she finished reading, she set her paper on the table and sighed a familiar sigh of despair, one I knew so well.

As the mother of eight, I have repeatedly rushed to the rescue of my children by typing their assigned papers the night before they were due. Because time was limited, I corrected their punctuation and spelling errors and connected sentences or phrases they left dangling. My children had learned through the years that if they procrastinated long enough, good of Mom would always come to the rescue, and all it took was a hug, a kiss and a "gee, thanks Mom, you're the greatest," and their papers would be letter perfect. I took pride in being "the greatest Mom."

When I first came to the Writing Assistance Center, I had to learn to separate the mother-instincts imbedded within me from the teaching guidelines offered at the Center. During my first weeks as an assistant, I often went home feeling guilty because I didn't offer to rewrite or type a paper for a student that should have been turned in yesterday. After

all, this is what I was used to doing. For me, the separation process did not come easily.

My first experience with tutoring was with a young lady majoring in nursing. She came to the center feeling stressed, because she had written what she thought was a near-perfect paper. However, when she received it back from the instructor, she had been asked to visit the Writing Assistance Center for guidance in rewriting the paper. The revised essay was due in two days, and she didn't know how to go about revising. Besides, she liked what she had written. She had sentence after sentence of great description, only most of her thoughts were not connected to the others. Frustrated and discouraged, she felt she had given all the time she possibly could to the first paper.

Immediately I felt the need to step in and offer help. Only I didn't know what to do. I knew I couldn't revise or rewrite the paper for her. I went home that night, stared at my own heavy load of homework, and felt as if I had failed as a tutor. I kept thinking about her paper and different ways she could write the second essay. I scratched down ideas to help her organize some of her scattered thoughts. I was excited with my suggestions and couldn't wait to work with her again the next day. Luckily she never came back.

I have come a long way since those first weeks. Through trial and error, I have learned that I can only help students as much as they are willing to help themselves. Occasionally, when a timid, but sincere student like Gail comes to the Writing Center, I still find it hard to set the parent in me aside and allow students, who are often the peers of my own children, to be responsible for their own papers. But the important thing is that I have learned. I can now help a student to help himself.

Coral Lou Glenn
Peer Tutor
Weber State College
Ogden, UT

The Technical Communication Resource Center and Writing Lab: Special Services for Basic, Technical, and Learning Disabled Writers

Background

At the Technical Communication Resource Center and Writing Lab (University of Wisconsin Stout in Menomonie), student writers have access to traditional one-on-one English tutoring as well as IBM-compatible computers equipped with word processing software and spelling checkers. Although technical writers most often compose in the lab, basic (freshman composition) and special (learning disabled) writers are also represented.

Specifically, technical writing, basic writing and learning disabled students appreciate the computers with word processing programs and spelling checkers as they develop academic and professional documents. Moreover, English teachers appreciate assistance with the composing process that students receive from trained tutor/facilitators.

The principle upon which operation of the writing lab rests is the belief that students must see word processing as a means of developing and communicating information, and not simply as a tool for processing data. The structure of the TCRC lends itself to precisely that presumption; as students compose electronically in the lab with the help of computer facilitators and English tutors, they experience the entire process of communication (first draft to final product) made possible by new electronic systems.

Technical writing is a required and popular course at Stout. Unfortunately, many students—perhaps more than at other schools because of the open admissions policy—have difficulty with the composing process. Therefore, help is a must for a number of the technical writing students who have barely made it through freshman composition to the advanced writing course. This was a problem until the writing lab at Stout became the "technical communication resource center" as well. Students now feel comfortable receiving traditional one-on-one tutoring help and composing on computers in a supportive environment.

Because they respect the IBM's as

equipment reminiscent of a professional office setting, the students see the lab as an important work and study area, even if it is part of the English Department. Again, although the lab was initially designed for technical writers, we were pleased to see the value of the setting for basic and learning disabled writers who began composing in the lab. We quickly expanded our services to include these groups as well.

Procedure

When students visit the TCRC for training, they have access to 31 IBM and compatible computers, ten dot matrix printers, one letter quality printer and one laser printer. Also, they are assisted by fourteen student tutor/facilitators who are above-average English students and are, therefore, able to help the writers compose documents for English classes. The facilitators are trained to use the available software: WordStar, Word Perfect, Bank Street Writer, HBJ Writer, Volkswriter, Graphics Assistant, Grammatik, Proofreader and Writer's Helper II. Finally, students may purchase a word processing user guide (available at the University bookstore) that was designed to be used specifically by the specialized Stout student population.

A step-by-step approach is used to introduce students to the lab. First, English teachers in the classroom introduce software, lab procedures and the importance of the process of electronic editing. Also, they use a videotape filmed in the writing lab to help students understand the personal computer and word processing software. Then, students complete an hour long, "hands-on" training session during which they experiment with computers and software. Learning disabled writers are often referred to the lab by campus support service personnel, and thus these students have access to tutoring and training even if they are not enrolled in English classes.

The training session is structured around the practice lesson found in the user guide. Finally, students receive a specific assignment and sign up for an appropriate

number of computer hours. Over the course of each semester, approximately 1500 individual student writers work in the TCRC. After training, students may also work in the other computer labs on campus; these labs, however, do not offer the same high level of support.

Special Services: Basic Writers and Learning Disabled Writers

Basic Writers

Although technical writing is the main emphasis of the TCRC, the lab must also serve the needs of all students enrolled in English classes. As noted earlier, in addition to the technical writing students, freshman composition students use the lab facilities. The emphasis for beginning writers is on computers and the composing process; the students use word processing and proofreading software to compose, edit and revise. The computer and its word processing and correcting software are particularly compatible with the writing process. Because of the ease of revision, many students discover for the first time the rewards of rewriting an initial draft.

There is also a tremendous sense of accomplishment for students in seeing the printer type a professional-looking final product. Students are able to revise as they compose, and they are also able to see immediate proof of success. Should students have questions as they go through the process of writing a paper, tutors are readily available to assist. In such a supportive environment, composing becomes a pleasant process for the beginning writer.

Learning Disabled Writers

The supportive environment and the computer assisted writing process are especially important for learning disabled students. For the first time, many of these students are able to leave their frustrations behind and realize their full potential as mature and intelligent writers. Not only is the computer a patient, objective "tutor," allowing the students to make repeated revisions, but it also is nonthreatening.

Never does the computer criticize the writer. Instead, it responds positively to the students' commands and, very importantly for learning disabled (LD) students, prints a finished product which looks as good as, if not

better than, other students' papers. The success these students experience simply could not be accomplished without the aid of computer word processing and checking programs.

For the last four years, staff members of the writing lab have been working with learning disabled writers who compose the majority of their papers on the computers with word processing software and spelling check programs. Because Stout offers special support services and thus enrolls a number of learning disabled students (150 identified in the 1988-89 academic year), we in the English Department have become aware of the needs of the LD writers and have designed special teaching strategies to accommodate this important group.

Before computers, special teaching strategies meant extra time for papers, less in-class writing and special English tutors. However, when we developed the computer component of the writing lab, we discovered the best special service for our LD writers: word processing software in a supportive environment with lots of special help always available-English as well as computer help. We have found the components of this lucky combination-computers, special assistance, and supportive environment-to be inseparable.

Over the years, we have discovered that word processing without a positive environment and tutors is only marginally important for learning disabled writers. However, when word processing is combined with English tutors and computer support, the combination can help LD students become more competent and relaxed college writers. Furthermore, the correct environment allows the learning disabled writers to experience added benefits of computer assisted writing- benefits that we believe are particularly important to many of the LD students because of the nature of their disabilities.

The traditional basic or technical writing student will also benefit from word processing software; indeed, all writers who choose word processing appreciate the ease of revision. Although word processing seems to help us all as we compose and edit documents, most of us choose the computer because of mere convenience. We could return to the pen, paper and dictionary days. Learning disabled writers, in contrast, need computers and word processing

for much more than the convenience of modern technology,

We believe that word processing allows LD writers to finally transcend the problems that kept them from achieving success when writing papers. We believe that the computer can eliminate the burden of penmanship, spelling, vocabulary and revision problems that has traditionally discouraged learning disabled writers.

Finally, we believe that word processing can help capable and yet frustrated students become successful and even confident college writers.

Measurement: Tech Writers and LD Writers

This area is, of course, very important. Computers work for TCRC writers. However, we, as most teachers interested in computers, have tried to determine the extent to which word processing actually helps students through the writing process. Several procedures have been developed in order to determine why students seem to profit from computer-assisted writing.

To begin with, sign-up sheets have been closely monitored to find students who are coming back consistently to use the computers in the lab. Students initially use the lab as part of their English class; after that experience, they are eligible to come back and use the machines on their own. When students are identified as repeaters, they are interviewed to determine:

1. why they prefer computer-assisted editing,
2. if grades have improved, and
3. how they go about composing on the PC's.

Although this information has been gathered informally, several conclusions about the importance of word processing and exclusive groups of Stout students are obvious.

Technical Writers

Of special interest are the academically slower but highly motivated students in the field of industrial technology who were intro-

duced to the computers as part of technical writing class. A number of these students experienced success for the first time in English class (a grade of at least B) and directly attribute this success to the computer lab and electronic editing.

These students say that they no longer feel intimidated by English class or writing. Also, they say that grades on papers for other classes are higher. The majority of these students attribute their success to the ease of revision made possible by the word processing software; the technical students also like the professional look of the final product made possible by modern technology and remarkable software.

To repeat, this research is certainly informal; however, the many students reporting these results substantiate (for the Stout lab, at least) the importance of word processing. Since January of 1984, approximately 65 industrial technology students per semester have been queried, and their comments have led to our conclusions about the importance of our lab for this group.

Learning Disabled Writers

At Stout, many learning disabled students have enrolled due to the school's special mission as a vocational/technical university geared to the needs of non-traditional students. Clearly, computers work especially well for them. The computer is a patient teacher, and the special students are encouraged by their ability to print out professional-looking documents with ease. Because of the spelling checker, these students are motivated to expand their vocabularies. In short, the computer allows the learning disabled to worry less about sentence editing and spelling and more about drafting and revision.

This group has been particularly important for the TCRC staff. Learning disabled students receive traditional tutoring help in the lab, and they compose on the PC's. In order to substantiate the students' progress, six severely learning disabled students who worked in the lab on a regular basis were interviewed. The purpose of this paper is not to report the findings of the informal study. However, an overview of the results does lend credence to the contention that the Stout writing lab is serving the varied student population reminiscent of the specialized university.

The LD students whom we work with are similar to many LD college students in that they have above average intelligence. Indeed, the average grade point average of these writers is a 3.1. However, these writers, like other LD students, are different from the group of writers usually described as beginning or basic writers in that they:

1. are highly motivated, and
2. exhibit a startling gap between their ability to conceptualize ideas and their ability to express these ideas in writing.

Unfortunately, too often LD students are channeled into basic or remedial classes which focus on mastery of grammar and mechanics. At UW-Stout, what has seemed more effective for our writers is the opportunity to learn word processing software and the time to compose in a supportive environment where extra help is readily available. More specifically, we have learned that the computer and word processing software help students improve their papers by lessening worries about penmanship, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, revision and content.

After checking grades of the six LD students and interviewing them, it is clear that the computer positively influences these students in the areas mentioned below.

1. Spelling and Vocabulary: Students report that the spelling checker allows them to use "big" words, and they write freely without the constant worry of a spelling error. Finally, the students report that the checker helps them spell words that have been impossible in the past. They feel that the constant appearance of the word on the screen acts as positive reinforcement.

2. Punctuation: Punctuation is for the first time accomplished during the writing process for the LD students. All six of the students reported that previous to their days on the PC's, writing had been, as one student said, "a two-part process." The students wrote the papers; then they went back and added punctuation. As the student just referred to exclaimed, "For the first time, I'm a whole writer; before, I was always a two-part writer." Another student reported that the computer allows him to "see" where the punctuation should go because the screen looks like a "book."

3. Physical Presentation: LD students love the appearance of the printed paper. Handwriting is a serious problem for many LD writers; indeed, it is one of the most serious concerns for the six Stout LD writers. Students believe that teachers grade on appearance; therefore, the professional-looking hard copy boosts confidence levels for the special writers.

4. Content: The majority of the LD writers interviewed reported that the people who had "helped" them in the past had actually changed the content of their papers. In contrast, computer-assisted writing allows students to express their own original ideas. Most felt insulted by the fact that people whom they felt to be inferior thinkers (and yet better at sentence structure and spelling) were changing the original intent of the papers.

5. Writing anxiety: All writers reported that writing anxiety had "paralyzed" them throughout their school years. They hated writing and wished so much that they could orally report the information they knew was important. The computer, they contend, allows them to finally write what they know they can "say."

6. Revision: Because the computer provides readable hard copy throughout the composing session, LD writers are better able to "see" what they have written. As a result, they are more likely to revise text by adding, deleting and re-arranging.

In short, the LD writers feel that they are finally able to transcend the little things and become, as one student put it, "the writer that I knew I could be."

Conclusion

The Technical Communication Resource Center and Writing Lab seeks to meet the needs of technical writers, beginning writers, and learning disabled writers in a supportive environment. The lab itself houses a limited number of computers. However, the English

Department's belief in word processing technology has led to a campus-wide commitment to electronic editing.

We have a 30-minute videotape, Computers, Writing, and the Learning Disabled, that we produced because of our belief in the importance of word processing software and spelling check programs for college-level learning disabled students. Our videotape consists of background information on the effects of learning disabilities on the writing process. We then use student testimonials to highlight the areas in which students seem to show the most improvement when using the computer for writing and editing. Our film is available for any academic audience: we welcome inquiries about it and our writing/computer lab. (Contact us at the following address: English Department, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751).

We are not computer or special education experts. Any knowledge we have of computers or learning disabilities is the result of an interest that has grown because of the success our LD students have experienced as they compose, edit and revise in the supportive environment of the English writing lab. Our observations are based, for the most part, on student testimonials: they are by no means statistically proven conclusions. However, we believe, as do other English teachers, that word processing just plain works- especially for learning disabled college writers.

Helen Quinn and Carole Flint
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Menomonie, WI

Hosting a Mini Peer Tutoring Conference: Easier Than You Might Think

As all who have attended them know well, the national peer tutoring conferences are quite extraordinary events. After these heady festivals, we return to our campuses revitalized and better informed, benefiting from the intellectual interaction with new acquaintances, and feeling a surge in professional pride. Back at Dickinson, our only complaint has been that

these conferences are not held often enough and that sometimes they are so far away that transportation costs prevent the whole writing center staff from attending.

When we learned that our counterparts at other writing programs in the area had similar feelings, we decided to try sponsoring our own annual mini peer tutoring conference in central Pennsylvania. We've now held three successful conferences with four writing programs and will soon be planning our fourth. The benefits have been almost as impressive as those of the larger conferences, with the additional one of getting to know and work with our not-so-distant colleagues.

Before encouraging others to try our approach, I must confess that three of the colleges involved in our conference belong to the Central Pennsylvania Consortium of Colleges which entitles us to the assistance of the Consortium director, plus a modest budget. Other fortunate colleges and universities may be able to rely on the help of a conference office. If, however, you do not have such amenities available, don't give up on the project. The conferences are not as expensive, time consuming, or difficult to plan as you might expect.

How to Organize a Mini-Conference

First, we have a meeting over dinner early in the fall semester. (Since our colleges are within 60 miles of one another, we can take advantage of nearby restaurants!) At this meeting we decide on a date for the conference- always a Saturday in the spring semester- and where it will be held. It seems to work best if the writing center or writing program director at the host campus begins to serve as coordinator of the conference at this point.

Later in the semester, after discussing the project with tutoring staffs at each college, we have a lunch/follow up meeting at the host campus with directors and peer tutors present. At this meeting we will get down to the basics of conference planning, making decisions about:

1. The conference program schedule

-How many workshops, individual presentations or other activities will we include? How long will they last, and who will be involved? (We make a special effort to be

sure that each college is participating equally.)

-When will lunch and other breaks be scheduled?

2. Expenses

-So far we have been able to pay for tutor transportation and lunches from the consortium budget. However, these minimal expenses could probably be met by the tutors themselves.

-We have not charged a registration fee.

3. Logistics

-Other planning activities have to be carried out at individual campuses. Each director is responsible for organizing his/her college's participation in the conference as well as transportation details. He or she reports to the host college director (preferably a month in advance) on how many people will be attending.

-The host college director makes room arrangements for the conference activities and finds volunteers to staff registration tables, supply name tags, give room directions, lead discussion groups, etc. He or she also has the conference program printed or zeroxed for distribution at the conference.

Last year's conference was held at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA and was attended by over seventy peer tutors. After the conference, directors have noticed the same animated discussions among writing center tutors that have taken place after the national conferences. The same renewed investment of tutor interest and concern pre-dominates. Staff meetings become the occasion for reevaluating our current practices and theories and our "taken for granted" policies. These follow-up discussions at our home campuses are another benefit of the mini conference. They lead to improvements in our writing centers and programs as well as in next year's mini conference.

Karyn Hollis
Dickinson College
Carlisle, PA

From Pens in the Leisure Lab

Retired writing lab directors sometimes follow the pattern of old generals - they refuse to fade away. And writing labs are seeing more and more returnees to school, not only older adults seeking new career preparation but elders who now have become courtesy-auditors in many universities and colleges. A glimmering of this phenomenon- part of the graying of our society- inspired the two of us to give our attention to elderwriters, "seniors" of another kind increasingly involved in writing workshops and elderhostel classes. Gradually, this new teaching led to the evolution of *The Leisure Pen: A Book for Elder writers*, published in late 1988 by Keepsake Publishers, Plover, Wisconsin.

A reader jovially pointed out that the title "Leisure Pen" carries a contradiction, for writing is never leisurely. We'll agree only partly, for pulling together our little book proved to be a lot of fun, albeit like the work of all writing. Many people have told us that the teaching principles and the methods we illustrate in *The Leisure Pen* apply to anyone who wants to write. Of course that's true. What's more, working with our older adult audience led to an affirmation of those principles.

We begin the book by asking "Why Write?" and rejoicing that here we can do it without any of the subtle threat inherent in grading systems or the need to prepare for future jobs. The memory generation writes for the sake of remembering, for preserving and passing along what they choose to give others of themselves and their lives. Writing becomes both review and a fresh view, the "look again" that Benjamin Franklin declared was a way of living life over, of putting it in perspective. We try then to help writers dig into themselves, to collect and give shape to their experiences by using lists, logs (Journals), and letters. With the letter, the writer looks outward, sensing the receiver as well as reflecting the self. Going on to short memories, these writers capture the traumatic, the outstanding, the unforgettable bits that make up the string of experience. Here a reader's response is almost always "I remember something like that"! or "That makes me think of" We move on to the longer work of memoirs, presenting autobiography as an evolving process with all the challenges and joys of research and the struggle to find suitable (and various) shapes. By illustrating

elements of structure and handling of facts, we move to writing that is biographical or historical, to writing for community or social purposes, to using information in different ways to present different angles.

Just as our "seniors" write to compose their lives and reach their families and communities, many of them want to put feelings and thoughts into poetry or fiction. No matter how hesitant some of the initial efforts, a good many reveal poetic feeling and narrative power. The book endeavors to say "try it" by providing professional and amateur examples that both illustrate techniques and are fun to read. We were rewarded when one class member said, "I never got anything out of poetry before, but I love these!" What's more, she went on to write some amusing bits of verse about her grandchildren! Some of these are things all writing teachers hope- and try- to do: lead students from why to what to write, to identify for whom they intend the piece they produce, to find materials and give them order and form, to strive for the meaning and, if possible, the beauty that make writing memorable.

You might like to know that in producing The Leisure Pen we also affirmed the practical possibilities of what some educators like to think they've just invented- collaborative writing. We did a lot of corresponding (we don't Fax, but we do mail our Macintosh disks!) and long distance phoning; but we also met and worked together now and then on a beach in Florida, on Bainbridge Island, Washington, or on the shores of the Wisconsin River. In a way, we've just transferred our experience and enthusiasm to new ground.

Yours for continuing learning and writing
labs,
Joyce S. Steward and Mary K. Croft

Editor's note:

Joyce S. Steward was founder-director of the writing lab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Mary K. Croft was founder-director of the lab at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. The Leisure Pen is available for \$10.90 plus \$1.50 shipping! handling from Keepsake Publishers, Box 21, Plover, Wisconsin. 54467; or from bookstores. (In Wisconsin, add .55 sales tax)

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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