

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 18, Number 6

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

February, 1994

...FROM THE EDITOR...

Managing to keep up with what has to be done today (or should have been completed yesterday) in our writing labs is a labor-intensive task. Yet we also expend energy in asking ourselves where we are headed tomorrow, and you'll find some interesting speculations in this month's newsletter. Thom Hawkins sees writing centers and classrooms looking more and more like each other, and John Thomas Farrell offers us his thoughts on how his writing center world has entered into his classroom and professional life.

And are writing centers going out into cyberspace? Michael Spooner and Eric Crump engage in a dialogue about the online environment that beckons. Is it preferable? Is it inevitable? What might we lose in the process? What might we gain? Are we even asking the right questions?

This month please welcome aboard Mary Jo Turley, who will be assisting with a variety of newsletter complexities. She is a problem solver extraordinaire and has both the patience and tenacity to keep our computerized subscription lists accurate and up-to-date, to handle the various requests that come in, and to cope with correspondence, printing, mailing, and all the other tasks hidden in the "etc." in her job description. I'm delighted—and relieved—to have her join us.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Writing centers: A panorama to teaching and the profession

Too often, because we are so focused on the daily tasks of tutoring students, on the constant effort to improve our conferencing skills, or on the exploration of writing center theories and practices, we seldom recognize the panoramic view of writing available to us in the writing center: writers and their processes, teachers and their assignments, administrators and their concerns, and writing and its many manifestations. As I begin my first tenure-track position teaching writing at DeKalb College, I realize how vital my three years as a writing center tutor have been in shaping my classroom teaching and influencing my professional outlook.

Working in a writing center prepared me for teaching more than any methods course or composition theory book. My experiences in writing centers have influenced every aspect of my classroom teaching. As a tutor, I encountered a myriad of writing methods, assignments, styles, and tools that I could assimilate into my own classroom. Moreover, I examined the effect of these writing instruction practices on student writers during each stage of the process.

These experiences encouraged me to develop a workshop format for my classroom which enables me to answer individual questions and concerns, to discover problems and

to discuss strategies sooner, and to open more lines of communication about writing with my students. Rather than structure a writing class with idiosyncratic rules, unspoken expectations, and formal lectures, I build my classes from a writing center model of dialogue with students over their writing concerns, needs, and processes and my goals, demands, and pedagogy.

Of course, the writing center's influence on teaching is growing, as evidenced by its role in teacher-training at the University of Tennessee (for first-year graduate assistants), Elon College (for teacher education majors), and other colleges. Not only do writing centers contribute to our knowledge of classroom teaching, they help tutors understand the emerging field of composition studies.

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

Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

My work in writing centers has afforded me an insight into my profession that would be difficult to attain in the classroom and from my studies alone. Through my tutoring, I learned a great deal about writing across the curriculum, not the theories and philosophies so much as the actual writing tasks assigned and performed in engineering, science, agriculture, health, and the humanities. I discovered, among other things, that group projects are commonplace in business and communication courses, that literary present tense is not acceptable in the sciences, that headings are necessary in science and technical writing, and that graphs, tables, and charts speak as clearly to some readers as the finest prose. Because tutors see many stages of a writing assignment, I saw the assignments given, the problems faced by students in completing the assignment, and the kind of products students from other disciplines should and do ultimately create.

Not only does this knowledge serve me well when I teach a business writing course, it allows me to prepare my classes for writing tasks in other disciplines. For example, I tell business majors to use graphs as part of their papers on the opportunities on Wall Street, and I encourage psychology majors to document with APA style. Also, my writing center experiences give me a voice of authority in the classroom because I can recount to my students various assignments in their chosen fields that I have encountered in the writing center. Now, when I hear someone speak of writing across the curriculum, I know the practical side to it as well.

In addition, tutoring allowed me to see many aspects to writing within my own discipline that classroom teachers rarely see. I not only know what writing tasks and performances are expected at different levels of English courses, I have observed the connections, and gaps, in writing tasks from freshmen to seniors and from literary courses to technical ones, which provides me with a broad view of the writing program at my school—a view open only through teaching and tutoring. I have seen students blossom into solid writers as they move from freshman composition to creative writing or business writing or advanced composition. Yet, I know that most freshmen are poorly prepared for the writing demands in non-English courses because I have watched them try to apply literary interpretation to technical matters. And I've worked with graduate

students who feel no more skilled in writing after years of performing writing tasks that seem unrelated and that demand different conventions without explaining why.

Not only does this help me prepare freshmen to recognize literary from technical writing, it has convinced me that some restructuring of writing programs is necessary. From the vantage of the writing center, I see the mixed messages offered to students in writing courses: some teachers present writing as if it has a single set of rules and one standard of style; course offerings suggest a range of writing forms from composition to creative to technical; and the required freshman sequence often provides literary analysis and personal narrative as the foundation for all academic writing. As a composition professional, I advocate a freshman composition course sequence that reflects the diversity of academic prose, a delay in the teaching of literary prose to sophomore-level literature courses where specialized skills are needed, and a creation of more writing courses that feature discipline-based discourse conventions. These are not new ideas, but they are more powerful for those of us who have observed the spectrum of writing courses and the confused students who muddle through them.

Much of my understanding of the demands made on writing centers and writing instruction by students and administrators derives from my writing center experiences. Of course, as a tutor, I was always confronted with the demands of students, who wanted to accomplish tasks, to achieve good grades, and to write better. But, through two writing center directors and my position as assistant director, I encountered administrators as well. As Assistant Director, I was exposed to the diverse needs of administrators from art, business, nursing, and law. For example, I developed a writing workshop for M.F.A. students with the head of the art department who wanted his students to see writing as a practical tool for explaining art, not another means of creative expression. The prose needed by these artists is clear, concise, and concrete. And I have heard Law School administrators direct the tutors in their satellite to dissuade law students from stilted, rambling, "legalese" prose.

And, I saw the darker side of writing center administration as the center faced limited space despite increasing traffic and uncertain

cont. on p. 12

Some of the challenges to writing centers posed by graduate students

My specific concerns are the formation of writing centers and the training of tutors who work with graduate and professional students. Most of the research and thought regarding the growth and development of writing centers has been at the undergraduate level and, if writing center professionals think about graduate students at all, they often accept the conventional wisdom regarding undergraduates as applying to graduate students as well—acknowledging perhaps that graduate students are a bit older and a bit brighter. So what I would like to do is initiate a dialogue concerning issues in the tutoring of graduate and professional students and begin to redress this imbalance. I come to this discussion from a unique perspective. I spent a year running a specialized writing center at the Yale Divinity School which serves a student body composed exclusively of professional and graduate students.

The writing program at Yale University is decentralized: there is no "one" writing center. Instead, there are a number of writing tutors and writing "centers" located throughout the campus serving specialized clientele. The logistics of this program are complex. At Yale, there is a director of writing programs who supervises graduate students assigned as writing tutors at each of the undergraduate residential colleges. At Yale's graduate and professional schools, various academic deans hire their own writing staffs according to criteria set by each school. These "Senior Writing Tutors" are usually writing center professionals who report to their deans and, depending on the size and needs of the unit, supervise additional writing tutors assigned to them.

My previous professional experiences were only a partial preparation for what I have learned at the Yale Divinity School about tutoring graduate students. Before I began my current assignment, I had been first a tutor, then an instructor at a large university writing center; the assistant director of an ESL composition program at a state

university; the director of a writing center at a private university; and the author of a business writing text. Even though I had worked with graduate students in my previous positions, I was guilty of the same myopia that I alluded to earlier: I believed that writing center norms established for undergraduates generally held true for graduate students.

So, what do we need to know about working with graduate students? What challenges do they offer us? To state the obvious, the first thing we need to know is that graduate students are not undergraduates. That is, their motivation for writing, background in writing, and attitude toward writing are different from those of undergraduates. Accordingly, working with graduate students requires a different dynamic between tutor and student and an understanding on the part of writing center professionals of the special needs of graduate students.

I hardly have all the answers. What I do have is an understanding of the question based on my experience of working with graduate students at a facility designed exclusively for them. The answers I do have are empirical and experiential, but I wish I had learned at least some of these lessons before I began my position at Yale. To someone who is tutoring graduate students, here then are the problem areas I have found are the most important to anticipate.

Motivation

When I was working with undergraduates, there was always a concern about the motivational attitudes of students. Why is a student writing this paper? Why is a student taking this course or that course? Is the student taking a course because it is required? Because he or she thought it was required? Do students actually enjoy their assignments? Do they understand what they are learning? Are students being inspired by their composition instructors? Why are students studying in this major or that major?

Do they come to college because of their parents or do they freely choose it? Why are they in college? Should they be in college at all? What can tutors do to motivate them? What should tutors do? Or to pose these questions in the terms Gary Olson once laid out, how then do we motivate the hostile, the indifferent, the diffident? (159-160).

Questions like these rarely apply to graduate students. At the graduate level tutors are dealing with students who have voluntarily stayed or returned to university study—frequently at great expense and sometimes at great sacrifice—because they have a high degree of professional and personal motivation. Graduate students are where they are because they want to be there. A writing tutor should capitalize on this motivation factor. Once a graduate student is convinced that writing skills are highly valued, a tutor can expect a high level of cooperation from that student. I have learned that there are three possible ways to "sell" graduate students on the writing center. The first, and least satisfactory, is to convince them that, whether or not they agree that writing is important, their professors think it is and usually reward those students with developed writing skills. The second, and more satisfying way than the first, is to convince students that good writing offers a potential for professional advancement. The third, and one which I have found actually works at this level, is to make a case for good writing as something valuable in itself and something that enhances one's outlook and perspective.

Student Attitudes

All this talk about motivation, however, is not to imply that graduate students do not have attitudinal problems. They do, of course; they just tend to manifest them differently from undergraduates. I have also found that negative attitudes toward the writing center can frequently be resolved by appealing to motivational attitudes. Here are the two attitudinal problems I have found

graduate students most frequently bring with them to the writing center:

1. A sense of grievance at being infantilized

Graduate students are adults; professors and administrators often forget this. As Fitzgerald, et al., comment, "graduate students frequently feel as if they are pawns in the academy where faculty members appear to be the authorities in control" (133). Students asked to attend the writing center are liable to feel a sense of grievance at being infantilized. It is important that tutors establish adult, professional relationships with graduate students, or they risk being associated with a hostile system adult students see as bent on turning them into children.

Some researchers have suggested collaborative writing teaching model might be the solution, because such a model would shift "authority" from the faculty to students themselves (Tebo-Messina 86-92). I am not convinced by this argument, however. A solution based on forming voluntary collaborative writing groups begs the question. First, it avoids any real consideration of what constitutes adult, professional relationships in an academic context and how to establish them between writing tutor and student. Second, it seems rooted in an approach to writing center self-definition based on the desire of some to assert the center's independence from institutional curriculum and goals, seeing the writing center as a protected enclave shielding students from the wider, hostile environment of the university. The implicit premise of the collaborative writing solution seems to me inimical to the full integration and participation of the writing center into the larger university community. It runs the risk of divorcing both tutor and student alike from the intellectual life of the university. David Hemmeter puts it this way: "It is as though the writing center seeks to create a new environment to protect students and in the process finds itself alienated from the old environment (e.g., the classroom) that it defines itself against. At the heart of the new environment is the personalized, human contact which overcomes students' alienation, a pedagogy relying on individualized instruction. We have, therefore, a tutor alienated from the larger university working with a student similarly alienated" (41).

My own answer to questions of authority and grievance is to develop a "consultant"

model for the writing tutor. In the adult world consultants are hired all the time for their knowledge—that is the essence of consulting. There is nothing intimidating about consultants; they know more because they are authorities and that is why they are hired. A visit to the writing tutor should be seen as consulting a professional, not visiting the assistant principal.

2. A sense of superiority

Graduate and professional students are frequently brilliant. Occasionally they have had successful and prosperous careers in the "outside world." It can be difficult sometimes to tell such students anything about something as mundane as writing. The consultant model for the tutor works well in this type of situation too. Here it is the responsibility of the writing tutor to tactfully, but assertively, insist on being treated as a professional who is performing a task at a high level of competence and training.

Special Writing Problems Graduate Students Have

In my experience, graduate students have a set of special writing problems. Here are some examples of what I have identified as some major problems tutors can expect:

1. Specialized writing formats

At the undergraduate level, a writing tutor rarely deals with assignments other than essays and research papers. At a graduate or professional school, however, students are expected to write in highly specialized formats. At the Yale Divinity School students routinely struggle with writing exegeses for classes in scripture, sermons for preaching courses, and case studies and "verbatim" for counseling classes. In addition, last-year students need to write specialized resumes for professional job searches.

Here again, the consultant model works best in a graduate or professional school setting. To serve their constituencies ethically and credibly, writing center professionals working with graduate students must master the forms required by specialized fields, so as to be regarded as consultants in the writing of those forms. Should we be assigning writing tutors who don't know how to write briefs to work with law students, tutors unable to write technical reports themselves to

graduate students in engineering, or people who don't understand the requirements for a thesis or dissertation to work with upper-level graduate students?

2. The use of jargon

I have never encountered jargon—sometimes highly technical jargon, sometimes just plain silly words—used with such a high degree of frequency as I have had at the Yale Divinity School. I would regularly see students in the center whose papers (and conversation, for that matter) used words like "hermeneutic," "ontological," and "parousia" in the same sentence; who "affirmed" just about anything that moved; who believed that "kronos" and "kairos" are the answers to major societal issues; who prayed "intentionally," that is, for specific intentions; who did "neat" things in their parishes; and who used "super" as an all-purpose term of approbation.

Since the use of jargon is an appropriate part of professional life for many, a distinction should be made here between students at graduate schools and students at professional schools. Graduate students are often preparing to enter rarefied professional worlds where a specialized vocabulary is a natural part of the environment. Professional students, on the other hand, are preparing to enter worlds where they will be working with non-specialists and where the use of jargon in many situations will simply make them incomprehensible. Writing tutors need to have two strategies regarding jargon. In assisting graduate students, tutors will have to know the meanings of specialized terms and how to use them appropriately. With professional students, however, tutors often will have to be able to help them translate jargon into understandable, everyday terms.

3. Reliance on outmoded concepts of writing

The average age of students at the Yale Divinity School is about thirty; there are many students who are older than that. All of them, however, remember their sixth-grade teachers who told them that contractions must not be used in formal writing and that a sentence must never end with a preposition; their eighth-grade teachers who ordered them never to use the first person and to split an infinitive was a felony; and their tenth-grade teachers who taught them the inviolable rules of documentation. In dealing with students' reliance on outmoded "rules,"

Joining hands¹

tutors need to be both vigilant in discovering the hidden assumptions students might have about writing and sensitive in teaching these students new attitudes toward their writing.

4. Returning students' anxiety intensified

I will not belabor this point because much has been written on the problems of returning students. Suffice to say, everything all college instructors know about the anxieties of middle-aged returning students can be multiplied several times if these students are in graduate programs.

One solution I devised to address some of the special writing problems of graduate students was to run writing workshops on documentation, writing essay examinations, writing resumes, preparing for interviews, and overcoming writer's anxiety and writer's block. Workshops seem effective for three reasons. They allow graduate writing tutors to address issues which affect a large number of students. They allow tutors to establish and reinforce the role of "consultant" in a public and positive way. And they effectively sell the writing center as a resource for the academic community and tutors as members of that community.

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Affirmative Action students on the Berkeley campus of the University of California are now persisting and graduating at unprecedented high rates. A recent campus report attributes this success to the students themselves, to better preparation for college, and to the efforts of support services such as the Student Learning Center (SLC).² The center is the university's primary academic support service for Affirmative Action (AA) students.³ Usually about half of our writing tutors⁴ are students of color, and most of those are AA students. We attribute much of our success in recruiting tutors of color to the efforts of our experienced tutors of color who visit classes and student organizations to talk about the joys of tutoring. Most of our recruiting emphasizes tutoring for credit, but almost all our AA tutors are paid because they must work to go to college.

We have refined our selection, training, and evaluation methods over the last twenty years and have been rewarded with the marked successes of our tutors and their students. The students, as several studies and reports have shown, have not just persisted, they have excelled. Although it is difficult to know how much of this success is attributable to our tutoring, students keep telling us and their teachers and the administration that the SLC has made an important difference. Many of those tutored have in turn become tutors, and nearly all tutors claim the experience in our program has helped make them even better students and writers.

So the news is good, but we do have to be judicious about how much student success we attribute to the efforts of a tutor, who is only one part of a student's educational experience. We also have to acknowledge that the improvements in tutor training over the last twenty years coincided with advances in the study and teaching of composition. The text for our tutor training course reflects the profession's new emphasis on process, revision, peer feedback, and the role culture plays in voice and communication.⁵ As instructors have embraced these principles in the classroom by using peer response groups, portfolio grading, and multicultural texts, the job of writing tutors has become more and more part of a joint effort between tutor, teacher, and student.

This larger revolution in the teaching of writing gives a different meaning to the old saw about the goal of tutoring, "We want to work ourselves out of a job." When most writing and learning center professionals use this maxim, they mean that they want to teach individual students to grow out of dependence on the tutor, to become *independent* learners. But as long as we supervisors spend less time training tutors so that we can tutor the students our tutors don't have time for, we never will work ourselves out of a job in a larger sense, because for every student we succeed with another takes his or her place. We will never be able to serve all students, and each entering class brings us a new batch of potentially *dependent* learners. Do students in fact ever reach that vaunted state of independence, or is their dependence relative, shifting and changing in intensity according to the relationships they develop with different teachers and other students as they proceed towards a degree? Our job ought to be to help create situations in which students can become *interdependent* learners, fully enfranchised members of the academic community who share in the common processes of making knowledge enjoyed throughout that community. This democratic inclusion can happen only when students find classroom environments that welcome diversity and give every student the opportunity to fully and actively participate.

We are not working ourselves out of a job but into a new one because our society is becoming more pluralistic, because a revolution has been taking place in the teaching of writing, and because in many schools around the country the classroom and the writing center are beginning to look more alike than different. Teachers and tutors are consulting more, joining hands of varied hues in mutually supportive activities, and learning from each other just as students are learning from each other. Knowledgeable peer tutors are making presentations to faculty groups, attending faculty symposia on multicultural and teaching issues, and publishing papers in national forums. Tutors and teachers are coming together to find ways to involve all students in collaborative classroom activities that are as responsive to individual needs and cultural differences as writing center activi-

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A dialogue on OWLing in the writing lab

Writing centers have the freedom, flexibility—perhaps even the responsibility—to fly a bit freer into the future and to test the waters of new ways to interact with writers. One of those ways, which some of us are now exploring, is electronic tutoring, that is, connecting to students in other locations via computers. There will be various forms for how these services will work, and the names will differ, but some of us (for now, anyway) are calling them OWLs (On-line Writing Labs). It's clear that the future of writing centers will include online worlds, and as our OWLs take wing, we need to think carefully about the implications of all this. Two people particularly well suited to considering where we're headed and what it all means are Michael Spooner and Eric Crump, the authors of the dialog offered here. Michael Spooner, until recently the Senior Editor at NCTE, has moved his talents and skis to the Utah State University Press. Eric Crump is the asst. director of his writing center at the University of Missouri while finishing his graduate work, planning the forthcoming Computers and Writing conference, editing the "Voices from the Net" newsletter column, and managing several electronic discussion groups. -Ed.

Some thoughts about online writing labs

Interested lately in questions about e-mail as a unique genre of discourse, I've been lurking happily while folks on the WCenter electronic bulletin board explore related issues. Discussions of net discourse conventions, speculations on the relation of gender to passion on the net, and thoughts on how to use technology better with students are all being pursued avidly just now. Though I'm not in a writing center myself, I'm particularly interested in one thread of discussion, which describes the experience of writing centers now establishing an online service. The OWLs (Online Writing Labs), as they're called, seem to hold both peculiar promise and special problems for writing centers.

Computers in writing centers are nothing new, of course, and probably most centers have their computers linked together into a local-area network. But extending the range of the center network to a wider area—through the campus electronic "backbone," for example—is something new. The idea is appealing in many ways. Research on the computerized classroom suggests that electronic journals and discussion groups may open possibilities for students who are unable or unwilling to speak up in class, and that it sets aside distracters like gender, class, and race that sometimes affect group discussions and even one-to-one conferences. Since everyone is faceless on line, and since no one can be interrupted, the technology has been hailed as a democratizing influence. In addition, an OWL could make the service of a writing center convenient for more writers, since usually features of it would be available at any time, day or night. More theoretically, some writing center folks point out that an OWL locates learning about writing "in" writing—as students on line must gloss their own text with questions and commentary for the tutor, and then must interpret the tutor's written response.

There are many practical problems, however, as the WCenter discussion has made clear. The chief discouragement seems to be a lack of participation from students. It's hard to know if this is a PR problem that will be solved with further communication or "advertising," or if it's perhaps a matter of student phobia or apathy, or—more likely—some impossibly tangled knot of factors. Aside from this, however, there are a number of difficult issues involving software, hardware, electronic security and such, and a few matters of writing center theory that invite discussion. As I'm professionally outside the writing center, I have the luxury of avoiding the practical prob-

Some thoughts on Michael Spooner's thoughts

New technologies are like mud wrestlers: they are tricky things to grapple with.

They often come in shiny packages (unlike mud wrestlers, now that I think about it), their proponents touting miraculous properties and glorious futures, and we are (some of us) drawn to them like moths to the flame. But the more cautious among us will eye new gadgets warily, prodding them with long sticks and cautioning against embracing them too enthusiastically. Michael Spooner, of course, favors the wary eye over the glad embrace when looking at online writing labs (OWLs), and I lean toward the embrace, but not so much because I disagree with Michael's arguments—rather, I think we start from somewhat different assumptions about the future of writing and how that future will affect writing centers. Or maybe it would be more precise to say that he is examining OWLs as solutions to current problems or as attempts to improve writing centers in current contexts; I look at them as the shape of things to come, inevitably in conflict with current writing contexts and necessary as elements in the exciting and painful process of change.

What we're headed for, I think, is a world in which writing will tend to take place on computer networks rather than in print, and OWLs are really first steps, baby steps, toward preparing for that eventuality. Network writing is not a homogenous thing any more than writing for print is, but inasmuch as generalization is possible, we could say that writing in a computer network environment is driven by a more immediate, dynamic, social context. To a greater extent than is possible in print, writers in networks are *conversing* as opposed to *essaying*, and that's a pretty significant difference when it comes to how we help writers develop. Learning how to write an extended, sequentially logical, linearly shaped text does not necessarily transfer neatly to writing in the heat of transactive exchange.

Yet our initial forays into online writing environments, currently in the form of OWLs, are almost always shaped to a great extent by the dominant technology and the prevalent culture. Take, for instance, Michael's assertion that "encountering a student *over a text* is best done face-to-face" (emphasis mine). His statement suggests to me an assumption that writing center business *necessarily* involves helping students shape these *things*—printed texts—that they have to turn in for grades. Not a bad assumption, right? That's what we do;

M. Spooner (cont.)

lems, and can enjoy myself with the theory, which is what I'd like to do for a few lines here.

But I want to pause and draw a frame around myself for you. I'm going to claim that I am computer literate, at least functionally so, and that I'm an e-mail addict. I use the Internet every day; I frequently send text back and forth across the country, and I have composed collaboratively on line. I'm comfortable with probably a dozen different word processing, spreadsheet, graphics, and communications packages.

I want to claim further that I am most comfortable giving feedback on writing "in" writing. As a professional editor (not to mention bureauocrat), I have been asked countless times to "tell me what you think" of texts—from sentence-length to book-length. I love the editing process, but I'm saying here that I'm most comfortable with it on paper or on line, not face to face.

I need to outline myself this way, so you won't be able to dismiss me as merely phobic in what follows. Because I think I'm going to argue "against" taking the writing center on line—at least in its tutoring function. I don't know why; it's just an instinct I have about what the writing center has taught composition studies about pedagogy.

In the role of the writing center that is concerned with disseminating generic information, I think an OWL may be wonderfully useful. Style sheets, announcements, bibliographies, practical discussions of common writerly problems, and similar resources—which many centers and labs make available in print—are ideally suited to online distribution through a bulletin board utility of some kind. I can see that it would be very helpful for a student writer to be able to connect at any time, day or night (and always at the last minute) to consult or download materials like these. But I tend to think that encountering a student over a text is best done face-to-face.

To me, this is what centers and labs have taught us about writing instruction. The teacher or tutor is most helpful to the student when they create a student-centered, non-directive, response-oriented, conference-style dynamic. Call it a Rogerian presence. And it is hard enough to construct this presence in a face-to-face encounter with a student; I'd argue it will be impossible on line for all but the most accomplished of tutors.

It is "not" true, I think that response is response is response, as some have said on WCenter. Issues of response look much different in the context of different discourses. The time-displaced, or asynchronous, nature of the interaction on line or on paper simply cannot accommodate the nuance of eye-contact, gesture, or thoughtful silence that are so deeply a part of the discourse in a face-to-face writing conference—to suggest just one difference. Further, it's my bet that typical online writing conferences will amount to only one round of turn-taking: the student sends a text with a question, and the tutor replies; exit. It's in the nature of online discourse to encourage this, yet it runs counter to what we know of the best in writing instruction.

I'm also concerned about the potential for students to confuse online comments from the writing center with the summative comments (usually with a letter grade) that students are schooled to accept from traditional teachers. Here, because online discourse so often resembles written discourse (maybe it's the same; I'm not sure),

E. Crump (cont.)

that's what we have always done. And I'll grant that working with students *over* a text electronically is not a tremendous improvement over working face-to-face. There are advantages, convenience mainly, and disadvantages, limited interaction the most obvious.

But that may not always be the typical writing situation. It wasn't, after all, a footnote chiseled on the tablets Moses hauled down the mountain that *thou shalt write on paper*. If, say, we shift our focus slightly and begin instead encountering students *who are engaged in the task of shaping ideas in language*, we're no longer chained to a thing with black squiggles on a processed dead tree and are free to talk, in writing, over a network, *with* students and about their ideas, not their papers. Of course, a curricular context for this sort of conversing doesn't exist yet, or not in many places anyway. These days, most students still write papers (essays, research reports, book reviews, etc.), and it is not easy to fit that kind of writing into an online environment.

I think that technological discrepancy is what explains specific problems Michael identifies. Lack of participation online, for instance, is understandable when teachers don't use that technology as part of the course work or even just to talk with students. Lack of training for students and teachers also contributes to lack of participation. It's much easier to use a familiar tool, feet, to find writing assistance than to use a complicated, sometimes frustrating, unforgiving machine.

I've found Michael's claim that typical online conferences (via e-mail) tend to consist of "one round" rather than an extended exchange to be true. But I attribute that, too, to lack of familiarity with the technology and its culture. It's certainly not a product of the technology itself, as anyone who participates on Internet mailing lists or Usenet newsgroups can attest. Discussion in those environments is often intensely interactive, often voluminous. When students learn to feel comfortable communicating that way, they may start writing until their fingers ache.

Michael also mentions the time-displaced nature of OWLs, but I think he's perhaps considering them too narrowly here. E-mail and bulletin board systems, which are asynchronous, do tend to extend interaction in time. A conversation that would take place in a few minutes face-to-face may take a week using e-mail. But e-mail is not the only shape networked interaction takes. There are numerous real-time, or synchronous, applications available, some of which are for local networks, some of which (like Internet Relay Chat and various textual virtual environments, like MUDs) are globally accessible. Using these programs, students and teachers and tutors and total strangers from around the world can talk in writing with the immediacy of a one-to-one, face-to-face encounter.

The immediacy and convenience of online environments do create opportunities for interesting new ethical conflicts, the "ethical gymnastics" Michael mentions. Of course, if the future I happen to believe in occurs, those quandaries are going to bubble to the surface eventually. The difference between plagiarism and legitimate collaboration will be one of the main issues we'll have to negotiate. Rather than use that difficulty as an argument for eschewing OWLs, I suggest we use them as motivation to get engaged in online environments, to meet those ethical challenges head-on and (mud) wrestle with them as best we can. Now is as good a time as any.

the student will be tempted to take the tutor's remarks as final, not negotiable. Students will not see the OWL as the freewheeling, infinitely interactive experience that many veterans of the net (including myself) claim it to be. They will see it as a source of written comments, which in their world means: Authority.

Finally, I'm worried about the ethical gymnastics that writing centers will have to perform. One of the features of working on line that users love is the ease of combining texts from different sources into a single whole. If you and I are co-authoring an article, this is a god-send; I simply take your paragraph and add it to mine. But between tutors and student writers, this same function becomes a problem. On the one hand, the ease of editing will tempt a tutor to intervene instead of teach—actually to modify the student's text in the course of responding to it. On the other hand, it will tempt the student to insert helpful language from the tutor into the text uncritically—or worse, intentionally. These are both constant ethical concerns in any mentoring relationship, and it seems to me that they could be very painful for an online writing center to manage.

There are, of course, answers to all of my comments. Perhaps these things could be addressed in tutor training; maybe they will ameliorate as we all get more used to the discourse of the net; or we could say they relate to unwieldy traditional concepts (like "originality," like plagiarism) that are beginning to change anyway or that we hope will change. That's as may be. Still, even as a person who loves technology, I am skeptical of it. I have to prefer the face-to-face exchange, the Rogerian presence in conference, as the most hospitable setting for student growth in writing. I don't think OWLs are going to show us anything better.

More OWLish thoughts

I won't argue with much of what Eric says. I, too, am excited by the evolution of technology and intrigued by the response of culture to it. I agree that writing centers are uniquely situated to lead the field toward the salutary changes that the future will reveal. However, I'm worn out with utopia. Let technology bring us what help it can—and God knows it will be helping the dark side, too—as the future is up to individuals to create, one-on-one. Eric doesn't disagree with this, I'm sure.

But I will argue with him on something basic. He wants to style our differences as a horse race between print culture and electronic culture: the old against the new, tradition fighting progress, and all that. To me, that isn't what we're talking about. The issue is an encounter with a student over a text. I don't care if the student's text is on paper, on diskette, on line, in hypertext, multimedia, song and dance, or graven in stone. Regardless, a teacher's response to that student is going to be most useful in person. And that's because flesh and blood is richer stuff than fiber optics.

I very much support online writing and exchange, outside the context of a tutorial. But it's my conviction that, of all possible forms of it, the teaching encounter is most effective one-on-one, face-to-face.

Michael Spooner
Utah State University
Logan, UT

I look at the problems OWL developers face as products of the friction between two rather different cultures, one informed by print technology (still dominant but fading down the stretch) and one informed by computer network technology (the new kid in town). If this were a day at the techno-evolutionary races—and in a sense, it is—I'd put my money on the new kid with the spring in her step and the juice in her veins. Writing centers these days need to straddle both cultures, however, serving the students still required to use the mature technology but preparing for the day when the emerging technology will assert.

Perhaps it's worth noting that, as Walter Ong and others would have it, technology significantly shapes our perceptions and thoughts. That being the case, it may be as much our technological acculturation as qualities native to the new technology itself that *creates* the problems we have with it. In other words, most of us really don't quite *get it* when it comes to living, working, and writing online. It ain't natural, not to us, no matter how much time we spend on the net.

But just wait. The kids who are now in junior high school are the first generation, perhaps, to grow into literacy in a world pervaded by video games, television, and personal computers. They will be as comfortable in computer-networked virtual environments as most of us are with pens and paper. If we want writing centers to be relevant to them, we need to use and understand the kind of writing technology their world will consist of. It's not too early to start learning and *using* that technology. The technocultural shift is coming faster and faster. Even the government is finally in the act, recently passing legislation supporting the National Research and Education Network. And business is (of course) already ahead of the feds. Watch an AT&T or MCI commercial on television these days. Even if you filter the glitz and unbridled profit-motivated optimism, you're seeing a glimpse of how the world will work as cyberspace becomes less science fantasy and more actual.

Michael's critique reminds me of the "revenge effect"; that is, any new technology creates as many problems as it solves (credit Edward Tenner for the term). I happen to think Michael's right about that, and the problems he lists for fledgling OWLs—lack of student participation, a poverty of nonlinguistic information, limited interaction, and new ethical quandaries—are very real, from what I can tell by our early efforts. He's right that OWLs using current computer network technology cannot quite replicate the kind of tutor-student relationship that flourishes (if we're doing things right) in the face-to-face writing center environment. And I embrace them anyway, as much for the possibilities they suggest as for the performance they provide.

Eric Crump
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

TUTORS' COLUMN

"Welcome to my web," said the student to the tutor

How skillfully can the student lure the unsuspecting tutor into his/her web of dependency. The maneuver is quick, the deed is painless, and the student leaves quietly with a smile and rich with booty.

I, the tutor, sat in my innocent seat of instruction waiting for my next student to arrive. My job is to inspire and facilitate the student's writing process. Students ideally come to the writing center to enhance their writing strategies and to create a final piece of writing which gives them pride. Unfortunately this romantic notion is aspired to by only some. In fact, many of the students come to the writing center just to get the job done. Upgrading their writing process is not a priority.

My last hour's appointment had been one of the ideal students. She had been inspired by my queries to repair and revise her own writing, and the final piece was definitely better. She concluded the session with a confident smile and "now I get it." Reflecting on this sweet success, I was abruptly jarred from my reverie. "Are you the tutor here?" inquired the soft but assertive voice of my next student.

"Yes," I replied, trying to reestablish a posture of knowledge and authority.

"Oh good. I just have half an hour, and I want to make sure the punctuation is right," explained the student.

Now this seemed like a simple request. A period here, a few commas there, and the student would be on her way. I read the first paragraph once, then twice, and finally a third time. The sentences did not seem to follow one another, and I had no idea where she was going. This piece of writing needed more than minor first aid—major surgery would be required. "I am a little confused with some of your ideas in the first para-

graph. Let's talk a little bit about what you are trying to say." I gently coaxed her into a discussion. A few minutes into our conversation her objectives became clear. "Now I understand," I rejoiced, "and you have explained it exactly as you should. Now write it."

"I don't remember what I said," the student pouted. I reminded her, repeating key points. "Oh yeah, so how would you say it?" she asked, her pencil now poised. I worked a few sentences around for her, and she wrote furiously. "Oh, that makes sense. That's great," she cheered. "Now how do you say that last sentence again?" I repeated it. Her face was now quite bright and eager. "Now, I see what you mean. That really makes sense what you are saying. So how would you do the next part?"

She was pleased and complimentary about my writing. She only needed to throw out a few more tasty compliments to my ego to complete the entrapment and secure me as her personal scribe. "The way you say it makes my writing flow. I have the idea, but you make it sound so good," she cooed. Her words were like honey, and I was now eating from her hand, accommodating her requests to rearrange her ideas and words. Her writing had become my writing, even though her name remained at the top of the paper.

We were on the last page, and I was feeling mentally drained. No wonder, I had just written a whole paper in half an hour. I needed a brain breather. "O.K.," I directed, "you conclude this. How can you pull all these ideas together?"

"I don't know," she scowled, "what would you say?"

"No, what would you say?" I threw the comment back to her. It was obvious that I was getting tired.

"I don't know. I like the way you say it."

It was then that the light dawned. What had I been doing? How could I expect her to conclude *my* writing? She had set the trap of apparent incompetence and confusion, and I had leapt right to the center of her dependent needs. She no longer had to write or even think. I had assumed all responsibilities and was tightly wrapped up in this role. Now, I had to begin the arduous task of disentanglement. "You have good ideas, and when you talk about them they make sense. Trust that." I instructed.

The student then spent the next twenty minutes rereading what had been written and then hesitantly proposed a few concluding sentences. I questioned some of the ideas. She became silent, wrestling with the desire to throw it back into my lap and with the effort to honor my instruction and keep it in hers. The silence was brutal as she churned her ideas around in her mind. But I waited, and she finally proposed a few revised sentences. They were better. In fact, even good. I was ecstatic. She smiled slightly but smugly. The session had been redeemed. My student's writing had been reclaimed, and I had been released from her sticky web.

*Heidi Simmons
Peer Tutor
Connecticut College
New Condon, CT*

WRITING CENTER ETHICS

As you may recall, in my last column, I offered a series of tutoring scenarios about students coming in for assistance with papers on the topic of affirmative action, and I also solicited your response—as readers and tutors—about how you would deal with them. This month, I am following the same strategy and making the same request, though with a somewhat different set of cases. Below you will find four slightly different versions of the same tutoring scenario. Some of the cases in this scenario may seem improbable for a tutoring session, but I would ask you to suspend your disbelief and treat them as if they were relatively accurate descriptions of actual experiences in your writing center. I would like you to read these four cases; decide how you would respond in each situation; determine how, why, or if the differences in each case would cause you to respond differently; and then let me know your thoughts. In each case, the questions I would like you to consider are these: What sort of ethical position (if any) would you take in this conference? Would you provide the kind of help the student asks for? Why or why not?

In my next few columns, I'll offer an overview of these scenarios and some sense of how you—the readers—responded to each of these cases.

Scenario #2; Case #1

A student comes into the writing center with a draft of a letter in hand. The letter is unrelated to any course assignment, but since your center offers to help students with any piece of writing they happen to be working on, you see no problem spending time with the student. When you ask about the letter, it quickly becomes evident that the student is feeling a great deal of anger. She tells you that it is a letter to her congressional representative, someone whose recent vote on an environmental issue infuriated her. As the two of you read through the letter, the anger she feels bursts through. There are references to “environmental rape” and “genocide” as well as more personal epithets such as “corporate toady,” “pollution-sucking slug,” and others far less polite. When you

hint that the language might be a bit strong, she replies that she is expressing what she feels and sees no reason to change it. In fact, she wants you to help her sharpen up the writing so that what she sends off “will really sting and make my representative sit up and take notice.”

Scenario #2; Case #2

A student comes into the writing center with a draft of a letter in hand. The letter is unrelated to any course assignment, but since your center offers to help students with any piece of writing they happen to be working on, you see no problem spending time with the student. When you ask about the letter, it quickly becomes evident that the student is feeling a great deal of anger. She tells you that it is a letter to her English instructor, someone who gave her a failing grade on a recent paper and, in her words, “refuses to discuss it with me.” As the two of you read through the letter, the anger she feels bursts through. There are references to “erratic grading” and “incompetence” as well as more personal epithets such as “illiterate swine,” “ignorant baboon,” and others far less polite. When you hint that the language might be a bit strong, she replies that she is expressing what she feels and sees no reason to change it. In fact, she wants you to help her sharpen up the writing so that what she sends off “will really sting and make my instructor sit up and take notice.”

Scenario #2; Case #3

A student comes into the writing center with a draft of a letter in hand. The letter is unrelated to any course assignment, but since your center offers to help students with any piece of writing they happen to be working on, you see no problem spending time with the student. When you ask about the letter, it quickly becomes evident that the student is feeling a great deal of anger. She tells you that it is a letter to her roommate, someone who has “been ignoring all her responsibilities around the household. She never cleans up after herself in the kitchen, and she always eats other people’s food from the refrigerator.” As the two of you read through the letter, the anger she feels bursts through.

There are references to “disgusting personal habits” and “stealing food from roommates” as well as more personal epithets such as “social misfit,” “filthy pig,” and others far less polite. When you hint that the language might be a bit strong, she replies that she is expressing what she feels and sees no reason to change it. In fact, she wants you to help her sharpen up the writing so that what she sends off “will really sting and make my roommate sit up and take notice.”

Scenario #2; Case #4

A student comes into the writing center with a draft of a letter in hand. The letter is unrelated to any course assignment, but since your center offers to help students with any piece of writing they happen to be working on, you see no problem spending time with the student. When you ask about the letter, it quickly becomes evident that the student is feeling a great deal of anger. She tells you that it is a letter to her parents, who have been refusing to let her fiancée sleep with her when the two of them visit the parents at her home. “We sleep together when we’re not visiting them, and we’re both adults,” she says. As the two of you read through the letter, the anger she feels toward her parents bursts through. There are references to “fascism” and “empty-headed morality” as well as more personal epithets such as “stupid prigs,” “blind hypocrites,” and others far less polite. When you hint that the language might be a bit strong, she replies that she is expressing what she feels and sees no reason to change it. In fact, she wants you to help her sharpen up the writing so that what she sends off “will really sting and make my parents sit up and take notice.”

(You may send me your comments on these cases via e-mail at michaelp@ux1.cso.uiuc.edu, via snail mail at the Department of English, University of Illinois, 608 S. Wright St, Urbana, IL 61801, or via a post on the WCenter newsgroup.)

*Michael A. Pemberton
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*

Minutes of the National Writing Centers Association Executive Board Meeting November 19, 1993, Pittsburgh, NCTE

Board Members Present:

Lady Falls Brown, Ray Wallace, Byron Stay, Sally Fitzgerald, Christina Murphy, Eric Hobson, Diana George, Steve Fields, Al DeCiccio, Kathleen Shine Cain, Pat Dyer

Guests Present:

Donna Reiss, Tom Waldrep, Ken Resch, Steve Fields, Joyce Kinkead, Tom MacLennon, Garry Ross, Alan Jackson, Jim McDonald, Martha Marinara

President Lady Falls Brown called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Minutes of the April meeting were approved.

Executive Secretary's Report:

Nancy Grimm, executive secretary, distributed the financial report indicating a treasury balance of \$5450.70. She reminded members of NWCA services, including starter folders, dissertation research support, and regional conference support. Grimm also distributed a list of board members indicating regional representative replacements and members elected over the past summer. The new at-large representative is Eric Hobson, and two people will share the community college position, Barry Brunetti and Clara Fendley.

Old Business

Lady Brown reminded the board of the importance of serving as reviewers for writing center proposals submitted to the CCCC convention. She expressed appreciation for the support of CCCC Chair, Jacqueline Jones Royster regarding NWCA concerns. Members were also informed that the CCCC's Writing Center Research Roundtable will have a position on the program after some confusion regarding whether it was a guaranteed spot or had to compete on a yearly basis. Because the roundtable had been on the program for years, participants had assumed it was a regularly featured event. Royster clarified that the session competed for a spot on its own merits.

Reports:

a. *Writing Lab Newsletter*. No report.

b. *Writing Center Journal*. Diana George reported that the next issue will be mailed in December and will include work by Nancy Welch, Carol Severino, Dave Healy, Wendy Bishop, Barbara Cambridge, and Joan Kaidesch and Sue Dinitz in addition to the annual bibliography. She also indicated that the spring issue of *WCJ* is already shaping up. In response to questions, George clarified that each submission to *WCJ* is reviewed by two members of the editorial board and the three editors. The editors are pleased with the timeliness, depth, and helpfulness of the comments made by the editorial board.

c. *1993 NCTE Workshop*. Ray Wallace reported that 38 people attended the workshop. He reminded the board that only six people can be listed on the program as workshop presenters.

d. *1994 NCTE Workshop*. Byron Stay reported that next year he plans to propose a workshop that will look at models of writing centers in a manner similar to what Harris and Kinkead did in their book, *Writing Centers in Context*. He stressed the importance of meeting the needs of two-year college and high school teachers at the NCTE workshop.

e. *1994 CCCC Special Interest Group Presentation*. Sally Fitzgerald and Molly Wingate will be presenters at this session.

f. *WCenter*. Lady Brown indicated that WCenter is alive and well. Eric Crump continues to report on WCenter in a column, "Voices from the Net," in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. David Healy has started a tutor list.

g. *NWCA Conference (New Orleans)*. Byron Stay and Ray Wallace reported plans for a highly interactive conference. Thanks

to the efforts of Tom Waldrep, Richard Riley, the U.S. Secretary of Education, will be the keynote speaker. Chris Murphy will conduct the concluding session which will pull together comments from the six catalyst sessions as well as the concurrent sessions and WCenter. Catalyst sessions include the following: Writing Center Directors' Symposium, Writing Centers as Teaching Communities, Writing Centers as Electronic Communities, Writing Centers as Research Communities, Writing Centers as Administrative Communities. Registration forms for the conference will be mailed soon. The conference is scheduled to begin about 3:00 p.m. April 13 and end at noon on April 16. Social events, including Cajun dance lessons, will be an important part of the conference. Stay and Wallace need volunteers to work at the conference.

h. *NWCA Breakfast (CCCC)*. No Report.

i. *Committee Reports*. None.

New Business

a. Nominations were solicited for second vice-president. The two nominees, Sally Fitzgerald and Chris Murphy, spoke briefly. Members discussed whether because of the limited attendance, the election should be conducted by mail. The board agreed that the by-laws need to be clarified regarding voting procedures, but moved to proceed with the election. Stay counted ballots and announced Murphy as the winner.

b. Discussion was held concerning the length of term for regional representatives. Terms are supposed to be for three years, but some regions find it difficult to place a person in this position for three years. Members discussed the need for continuity but also urged that regions make an effort to send a representative to the national meetings. They recommended increased communication with regionals to clarify responsibilities and the relationship with the national board. A motion was passed to

Writing centers: A panorama

Cont. from p. 2

revise the by-laws to have each region determine the length of term for representatives to the national board.

c. The position of executive secretary will be open after CCCC 1994. Alan Jackson was nominated, but again, discussion of by-laws revealed that those nominated for an officer position must already be members of the board. Caution was advised about overriding the by-laws. A motion was passed to move this year's election for new at-large board members forward to be completed before CCCC. The deadline for nominating candidates for the two open at-large positions is January 10. Nomination forms are available from Nancy Grimm.

d. Byron Stay will solicit nominations for the NWCA Scholarship Award.

e. Ray Wallace will convene the committee for deciding on the NWCA Service Award which is presented every three years. Nominations should be sent to Wallace.

Items remaining under new business (Starter Kit revisions, Relationship with Writing Center people in K-12 and two-year colleges, and Certification Program) were deferred to the next meeting.

Announcements:

Alan Jackson asked members to take the remaining NWCA flyers for distribution.

Lady Falls Brown turned the gavel over to Ray Wallace who will serve as president for the next year.

The meeting adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Maloney Grimm
NWCA Executive Secretary*

funding despite a successful writing center program. I watched writing centers become pawns in departmental political squabbles and turf wars, then dismissed as marginal again. And, I observed writing center principles and tutoring standards being subverted by outside elements of the university for their own ends. None of this knowledge, good or bad, would be possible from classroom teaching alone; the writing center opened new vistas into the workings of all writing programs.

Probably the most valuable contribution of writing center work to my career comes from contacts and activities made outside the university. My writing center experiences provided me with ideas for articles and conference presentations, forums that embraced theories, practices, and experiences from all layers of the writing center community. I took my ideas to standard forums such as regional writing center conferences, CCCC and NCTE, and to unlikely forums such as linguistic conferences and the College Language Association. And through these conferences, I met a wide range of people active in writing centers, writing instruction, and administration who shared their ideas about our profession. And, as a result of meeting so many interesting and dynamic writing center professionals, I decided to become active in the National Writing Centers Association and in my regional association (South-east).

The Writing Center has been more than a workplace that taught me how to tutor; it has been an observatory into the practices of writers, the demands of teachers in writing across the curriculum, and the expectations of administrators. Because of my work in writing centers, I understand my profession better: I have more ideas and strategies for teaching writing; I have a storehouse of assignments for every level of writing instruction; I have a solid grasp on the entire spectrum of academic writing and writing programs; and, I have a foundation of professional activities that should lead to a successful career.

*Alan Jackson
DeKalb College
Dunwoody, GA*

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations (WCAs)

February 4: South Carolina Writing Centers Association, in Columbia, SC
Contact: Glenn James, Midlands Tech. P.O. Box 2408, Columbia, SC 29202

March 4: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in Brooklyn, NY
Contact: Lucille Nieporent, English Skills Center, Kingsborough Community College—CUNY, 2001 Oriental Blvd., Brooklyn, NY 11235 (718-368-5405) or Steven Serafin (212-772-4212).

March 5: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Baltimore, MD
Contact: Tom Bateman, Calvert Hall College, 8102 La Salle Rd., Baltimore, MD 21286

March 5: New England Writing Centers Association, in Andover, MA
Contact: Kathleen Shine Cain, Writing Center, Merrimack College, North Andover, MA 01845

April 13-16: National Writing Centers Association, in New Orleans, LA
Contact: Ray Wallace, Dept. of Language and Communications; Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, LA 71457 (318-357-6272) or Byron Stay, Dept. of Rhetoric and Writing, Mount St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, MD 21727 (301-447-5367)

May 6-7: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Toledo, OH
Contact: Joan Mullin, Writing Center, U. of Toledo, 2801 W. Bancroft, Toledo, Ohio 43606-3390 (419-537-4939).

The reciprocity of high and low order concerns

J. Thomas Reigstad and Donald McAndrew, in their *Training Tutors For Writing Conferences* manual, posit that revision is best approached in terms of High and Low Order Concerns, or HOCs and LOCs. This useful strategy conceals a problem that experienced tutors immediately recognize. These authors state that HOCs concern "thesis or focus, appropriate voice or tone, organization, and development" (11). And certainly any weakness "in these areas can devastate a paper," as every tutor knows. Reigstad and McAndrew further propose that LOCs concern "units of sentence structure, punctuation, usage, and spelling" (18). By "sentence structure" they mean "problems with awkward or incorrect structure, with sentence length, and with sentence variety" (18). But in this conclusion they overlook a key point in revision. It is impossible to consider HOCs without focusing on sentences.

Edward Sapir, in *Language*, says the "sentence is that logical counterpart of the complete thought..." (33). And although no one sentence completely summarizes a paper's thought—even a thesis needs supporting points—each sentence encapsulates some element of a paper's larger focus. If a sentence fails to accomplish this, it does not belong in the essay. Every sentence plays an integral role in expressing a paper's HOCs.

Nancy Sommers notes the importance experienced writers assign to sentences, when revising, in her work with students and experienced writers. Sommers states that for "the experienced writers the heaviest concentration of changes is on the sentence level..." (126). The sentence, then, is primary, not secondary, in the experienced writer's revision processes. One writer states that "the kernel of what I have written, the content" is often reshaped in revision. But how does this restructuring of thought take place?

Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist, believed that there are no ideas outside of language, only amorphous thought and indistinct sound. When these two meet, "neither

a transformation of thoughts into matter, nor a transformation of sound into ideas" takes place, but rather "a somewhat mysterious process by which 'thought-sound' evolves into divisions, and a language takes shape..." (111). The absolute reciprocity of thought and sound mirrors the reciprocal nature of sentences and ideas. Just as articulated words contain both sound and thought, Saussure's signifier and signified, a sentence contains a series of speech sounds connected to ideas. The accumulation of these words and thoughts results in the primary idea a sentence promotes. Often, a slight alteration of the words reshapes the focus of the sentence-thought.

And this is where Reigstad and McAndrew overlook a very important notion of revision. The articulation of a thesis takes place within the confines of "sentence structure." Reshaping the concept a thesis sets forth necessitates restructuring the sentence the concept is packaged in. Two theses illustrate the point: "Recent Japan bashing reveals latent racism in the American psyche" and "America's racist attitudes have become apparent in Japan bashing of late." These sentences seem like inverse statements of the same proposition. But are they really? The obvious structural distinction between these theses lies in the use of the passive voice in the second thesis and the active voice in the first. The primary difference, however, lies in the effect each proposition has on its audience. "Japan bashing" is the subject of the first thesis and comes at the beginning of the sentence. Thus, the reader first encounters a morally reprehensible attitude, racism. The writer appeals to the reader's notions of right and wrong. The subject of the second sentence, "America's racist attitudes," also comes at the beginning of the proposition. The statement implies that Americans in general, not any particular group, hold racist attitudes. This problematic concept distracts the reader from other claims the thesis presents and so the reader misses the valid connection to "Japan bashing." The structure of the presentation of ideas, then, significantly

alters the reader's attention to the sentence's main concept.

Reigstad and McAndrew further propose that an inappropriate "voice or tone" creates unnecessary blockages between author and reader. They describe six "modern American prose styles—tough, sweet, and stuffy..." (16) and "formal, consultative, and casual" (17). They state that tutors should ask if the voice or tone is "appropriate for the given audience and purpose" (17). Here again one finds a reciprocal relationship between sentence structure and HOCs. What constitutes "style"? Certainly word choice influences it, and sentence length variations create a smooth or choppy flow. But more important to style is the organization of word-ideas in a sentence that produces a definitive texture. Our two theses show this. The first thesis compresses several ideas in its first five words. "Recent" indicates chronology; "Japan bashing" displays a deplorable action that connotes violence, and "reveals" implies the unveiling of a hidden notion. "Latent," however, is the richest word because of its implications to Freudian psychoanalysis. The term deploys an entire school of thought in the mind of the reader. These highly embedded terms create a rich texture. Not so with thesis two. "America's" states the possessor of, and "racist" describes notions of human valuation while "attitudes" relates a state of being. "Have" implies chronology and "become" shows a progression. There seems little coherency or directionality toward a larger concept in these nebulous terms. The texture is thin and empty. The structure of ideas, more than sentence length variation then, influences tone and texture.

Reigstad and McAndrew also state that students often need tutor assistance to reorganize during revision. The authors offer two techniques to aid this process: the issue tree and standard outlining (17). Sentence structure is particularly important to the revision stage as key issues usually become

topic sentences. The structure of a topic sentence determines the effectiveness of the rest of the paragraph; a poorly constructed topic sentence leads a paragraph in no strong direction. As tutors we see this everyday. An interesting thesis fails miserably when issues that support it lack organization. If we relegate our two theses to topic sentences, the point becomes clearer. Our first sentence, "Recent Japanese bashing," maintains an effective structure which could lead a paragraph in a productive direction. If a student presents the ideas of her paragraph in the same order as sentence one, hidden racism remains the paragraph's central focus. She may draw on numerous recent examples to validate her claim. However, writer two will need qualification and explanation of her main concept, "America's racist attitudes," before useful exposition begins. So, the structural statement of key ideas determines their fruitfulness as topic sentences.

The authors state the "final HOC that tutors are trained to consider is *adequate development*" (17). Tutors ask a student to use "focused freewriting" where they write "continuously for five to fifteen minutes, recording everything or anything that comes to mind about an aspect of the paper that needs expansion" (18). The writer incorporates the ideas generated from this heuristic exercise "into the draft." Sentence structure is relatively unimportant for the first stage of this exercise yet very important for the second. The structure of sound-ideas, words, strongly affects the tone of a paper, as we already noted. New ideas require new sentence structure. A preexisting draft contains a structure-tone already established. The tone of the new ideas should fit the rest of the draft or they will seem awkward. The tutor, the more rhetorically conscious reader, can look for differences of tone and suggest effective alterations.

"This is all well and good," the practical tutor responds, "but how do I read a paper with an eye to all four HOCs and sentence structure?" One cannot, I believe, and ought not try to. At the University of Oklahoma our sessions last forty-five minutes. It is impossible to analyze a five-to seven-page paper—our average—focusing on all HOCs and sentence structure for every sentence in that amount of time. I propose a simpler task: near the end of a session choose one section of a paper, a couple of paragraphs or a page, and read it carefully for sentence structure. This sample will show patterns of

a student's sentence structure habits. One can then make suggestions for improvement. But a more beneficial exercise might be to read thesis and topic sentences and then focus on tightening their structure. This would likely last from five to ten minutes. In any case, some time in every session should be devoted to sentence structure.

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Job Listing

Position Available at the University of Michigan-Flint: Composition and Rhetoric/Writing Center Director

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Send letter, curriculum vitae, and three letters of recommendation to Dr. Lois M. Rosen, Chair, Composition Search Committee, English Department, 326 CROB, Flint, Michigan 48502-2186. Review of applications will begin in early March and continue until the post is filled. The University of Michigan-Flint is an equal opportunity, equal access, affirmative action employer which encourages minorities, women, and persons with disabilities to apply.

Something for everyone

Our statements about tutoring in writing contain a seeming paradox. On the one hand, we say that we as tutors help writers work toward independence, toward the place where they no longer need us. As the opening statement in *The Practical Tutor*, the text for our Training for Writing Tutors course, states, "Its [tutoring] basic purpose is. . . to help writers gain the confidence and skill necessary for them to write well independently" (3). If we encourage writers to remain dependent on us, unable to write without our assistance, we are not doing them a favor. We want to help students take more responsibility for their writing and to be more confident and competent as they do it. On the other hand, we say that writing tutors work with all writers, not just weak ones or those with remedial problems, because any writer can benefit from the response of a critical reader. Both of these claims, though seemingly contradictory, are true: We want writers not to need us, but we encourage all writers to come to us.

Bob (not his real name) comes to mind when I think about dependence. When he approached any of us in the writing center, we groaned inwardly because we knew we were in for a stultifying hour—or two, or three—of plodding through a paper and having him ask, "Is this OK?", "How should I say that?", "How can I put that?", and on and on. Bob couldn't make a move on his own but needed feedback, prompting, and encouragement at every step. Working with him was tiring and tedious. He reminded me of a statement from Gilbert Highet's *The Art of Teaching* that working with a lazy student is like going hunting and having to carry the bird dog. Bob wasn't lazy exactly, but work-

ing with him was certainly arduous. He had to be moved toward independence because he couldn't count on finding someone to work with him for hours on every paper he had to write.

In contrast to Bob, I am independent as a writer and can turn out a respectable piece of writing without assistance. Still, I find great value in peer review of my work. When I'm struggling I can often get unstuck by talking to someone. Even when the writing comes easily, I find the response of a peer gives me new insight into what I've actually said—not what I think I've said.

Different colleagues give me different kinds of help. Marcia is very attuned to the details of wording, fact and logic. Her responses alert me to problems in these areas. Carol makes the one salient point about what needs to be done to improve a piece. For example, when she read my piece about the older women in our church, she said that the one thing needed was more images—and she was right. Sara helps me see the other point of view—especially when I am writing about tutoring—because her opinions about it differ from mine but are shared by many in my audience. When I was writing an article last spring about the kinds of help that tutors do and don't give, she helped me see the places where I needed to answer my readers' questions or reword my ideas slightly in order to make them less offensive to those of a different persuasion. When I worked with Liz, she always helped me to see what kinds of explanation might help, places where more information was needed. She also knew the hierarchy better than I did and was able to predict how they might react to certain state-

ments. In addition to getting help from these colleagues, I regularly write with the students in my tutor training course and learn much from their critiques of my work. In regard to all of the above, I can do it without them, but I can do it better with them.

To remain dependent on the feedback of others for basic competence is limiting. People aren't always going to be around to help us. Sometimes we simply have to do it on our own. But to know that feedback from others can help us to make an adequate or even good piece truly excellent—that's liberating.

Thus, we as writing tutors have different goals for different writers. We help incompetent writers gain the skills and techniques they need to write adequately on their own. Without such basic competence writers will be tremendously handicapped in college and in the work world. But we also help competent writers become more polished and persuasive. To them we offer the critical eye and fresh perspective that can move a piece from competence to excellence. We are here for all writers.

Mary M. Dossin
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Association for the Teaching of English Grammar

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We invite submission of papers on learning, teaching, and research in English grammar. To submit a proposal, send a short description or abstract to Irene Brosnahan, English, Illinois State U., Normal, IL 61761 (309-438-7590; FAX: 309-438-5414). Proposal deadline: May 15, 1994.

Joining Hands

cont. from p.5

ties. The only way to work ourselves into this new job is to join with instructors in a lasting partnership that makes the goals of tutoring and teaching synonymous. Our challenge now is to find ways to be more and more effective in each other's environment.

As the college population increasingly reflects our nation's ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity, such cooperation between tutor and teacher becomes an urgent imperative. New voices are enriching our intellectual life, and nowhere is that more apparent than in academic support services. Many of these new student voices will eventually become teaching voices. For them to be heard, the university has to become a different place, a place where collaborative learning and cross cultural understanding is the norm rather than the exception. That change is already happening at UC, Berkeley and other schools, as students, tutors, and teachers of all colors join together in finding ways to value other voices.

Yet, despite our progress, ever shrinking budgets keep us from providing services for

groups that we should be serving. At Berkeley, finite resources force the learning center to focus on the lower division, while many of our high priority AA students have a hard time of it when they reach the upper division and fail to graduate at rates comparable to non-AA groups (whites and Asians). Some groups, like African-American males, are at greater risk than others. Within the lower division population using SLC services, the number of males in general is far below the number of females, usually only about a third or less of the total users and tutors. This issue deserves more attention, especially since among African American, Native American, Chicano/Latino, and Filipino students, the percentage of males who graduate from UC, Berkeley is significantly lower than the percentage of graduating females in the same groups, and in recent years the decline is sharpening. Many programs and courses on campus address the problems of equal access. However, not enough is being done to mitigate economic hardship and traditional male restrictions on asking for help. If our diversity is to be truly inclusive, we must find ways to bring more men of color into the learning center and into the intellec-

tual life of the university. How can we continue to allow those very same young men who suffer the highest mortality rates in our society at large to remain the most vulnerable in higher education, where, ironically, they are supposed to be able to increase their chances for survival?

Thom Hawkins
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¹Adapted from an essay included in *When Tutor Meets Student: Experiences in Collaborative Learning*, a collection of essays on tutoring by Berkeley peer tutors and edited by Martha Maxwell (Ann Arbor, MI: U. of Michigan Press, 1993).

²*Berkeleyan*, 5/6/92. A campus publication for faculty and staff.

³AA students at Berkeley are Native American, African American, Chicano/Latino, and Filipino.

⁴From a total of about 80 writing tutors per semester, most of whom are juniors and seniors.

⁵Meyer, Emily and Louise Z. Smith, *The Practical Tutor*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

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