

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER



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I look forward to continuing to receive your articles for the newsletter, names of new members for our mailing list, and donations of \$2 to help defray duplicating and mailing costs (with checks made payable to me). Please write to:

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The Council of Writing Program Administrators invites articles for its WPA Newsletter. Material submitted should be appropriate to the particular interests and concerns of those who administer writing programs. Articles on teaching writing or research in composition are not acceptable, except insofar as these activities are related to writing program administration. Maximum length, 3500 words. Relevant announcements and correspondence (300 word maximum) are also acceptable. Address contributions to Kenneth A. Bruffee, Editor, WPA Newsletter, English Department, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, New York 11201.

USING REGIONALLY ORIENTED MATERIALS IN A WRITING CENTER

Tennessee Wesleyan College's Writing/Reading Lab is a flexible learning center serving a small student population with diverse needs. Operating under the supervision of the Developmental Studies program and with the assistance of student tutors, the Lab makes a particular effort to motivate and encourage as well as to offer up-to-date materials and instruction.

One aspect of our effort to motivate stu-

dents deals with the selection of regionally oriented materials as the basis for work with students. Many, although not all, of our students are from rural Appalachian backgrounds, and while this group is highly diverse in itself, all share a similar experience of country roads, small towns, and certain distinctive cultural patterns. While most of our students are not vocal about their regional roots, most have deep feelings concerning the extended families which still flourish in east Tennessee and about their love of the region. For many students materials such as J. N. Hook's Competence in English or Jamestown Publishers' Topics for the Restless, excellent though they are, do not strike that special note of personal concern that developmental students so often seek in their college experience. For this reason I have attempted to supplement standard print materials with worksheets, oral exercises, and readings that draw on what my students already know of their region. These assignments range in difficulty from a one-page exercise converting dialect to standard English through a longer theme responding to William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying-- a novel of rural America that moves my students to spontaneous digressions on "my friend who works at the bed factory and walks just like Jewel" or judgments such as "I don't think Dewey Dell is dumb because she's the only one who cried when her mother was dying."

Converting from dialect to standard English is sometimes employed as an oral exercise. This can be effective with anecdotes which the students speak into a tape recorder or with stories which they have collected and written down. Also, folktale collections from Appalachia such as Leonard Roberts' excellent South From Hell-fer-Sartin: Kentucky Mountain Folktales (Berea: The Council of Southern Mountains, 1964) ring familiar to my students and serve as the starting point for understanding dialect vs. standard usage. Hopefully, pride in one's own regional dialect

and a knowledge of standard English can be instilled at the same time.

I have found that the poetry of regional authors such as Jesse Stuart is a favorite for many students who have never enjoyed poetry before. Stuart's sonnets "Modernity" and "Anannis Tabor" speak of "dirt words" and "trailing arbutus." Since most students will eventually be required to write about literature in required English classes, an introduction to the sonnet serves a double purpose as the basis for a writing assignment.

I also ask students to observe and record their surroundings. Since many of them commute to school and work part-time, the college campus is not always the real center of their experience. Working from the assumption that motivation toward improved writing involves drawing on the student's real interests, I have assigned the following themes (one to two pages, to be returned to the Lab and reviewed with a tutor): describe a country farmhouse, the street where I live, what my grandparents told me, the poorest family I have ever met (this one produced some highly concrete writing from stu-

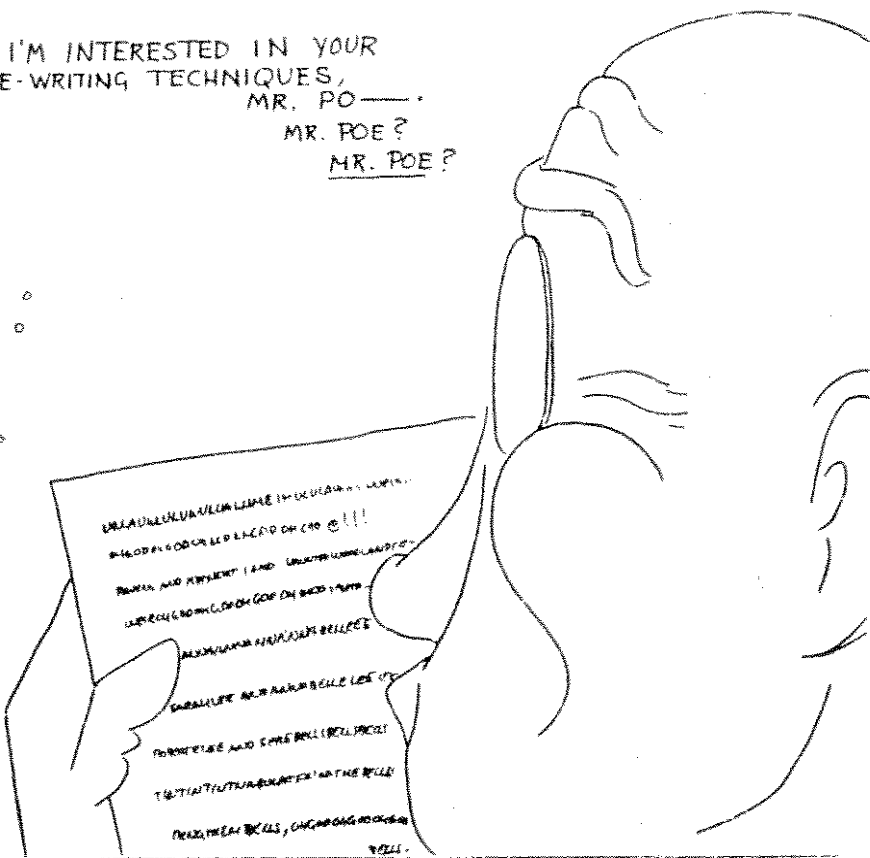
dents who were originally quite hesitant to write or "didn't have anything to say"). I have also suggested the interview/write approach for topics such as the Great Depression in Appalachia, Boom Town (for many this means Atlanta or Oak Ridge), and career choices in the country and city.

The use of regionally oriented materials is appropriate only in certain cases and in treating certain problems. However, I have noticed that students do respond better to locally produced exercises than to the geographically neutral materials in many writing textbooks. Whether they involve sentence fragment recognition, sentence core identification, generation of sentences, or paragraph and short theme completion, regionally oriented materials in a writing lab may effectively supplement other available material. Most important of all, regional material can replace a student's uncertainty about his or her culturally different background with a proud awareness of a unique culture and history.

Jeffrey J. Folks
Tennessee Wesleyan College

GREAT MOMENTS
IN WRITING LAB
HISTORY, #7.

I'M INTERESTED IN YOUR
PRE-WRITING TECHNIQUES,
MR. PO —
MR. POE?
MR. POE?



SOUTHEASTERN MASS. WRITING LAB
OFFERS MULTIPLE SERVICES

The Writing Lab at Southeastern Massachusetts University is part of the Cooperative Learning Center, a federally funded program established to assist disadvantaged and special needs students. The Cooperative Learning Center offers tutoring in reading, math science, and writing; counselling and supportive services; and programing and materials geared to the needs of foreign students and learning disabled students.

The Writing Lab works in close conjunction with the English Department, which gives an English placement test to all incoming freshmen. Based on the students' level of performance on this test, they are placed in a regular English composition class, in an English class requiring all students to attend the Writing Lab, or in non-credit tutorials in the Writing Lab (a prerequisite for English composition for those students who need much help in written English). Referrals to the Lab are also made by many instructors from the English Department, as well as from numerous other departments in the university. Students may, of course, also come on a walk-in basis.

The Writing Lab offers a wide range of programs. Besides instruction in writing skills and grammar, which is our most requested service, we also provide guidance, handouts, and instruction in writing research papers, writing critical papers, note taking, answering essay questions, and resume writing. In fact, we try to help students with any reasonable request for which we have staff available.

We try to use varied approaches and materials in teaching our students but have found that our most effective resource is a good tutor. Both students and faculty tutor effectively in the Writing Lab. Faculty tutors bring teaching experiences with them; students on the other hand, provide positive peer influences. We create many of our own materials in the form of handouts, exercises, and tests. Among our most-used purchased materials are Joseph C. Blumenthal's English 2600 and English 3200, George Feinstein's Programed Writing Skills, Kathleen Sullivan's Paragraph Practice, Sylvan Barnet's A Short Guide to Writing about Literature, and the CUNY-SUNY videotape series, The English Modules. We have found, however, that materials are in many cases more helpful in guiding tutors than in teaching students directly.

The greatest appeal that the Writing Lab has for students is the informal atmosphere and the friendliness and concern of the staff. Furthermore, students respond best to solutions which meet their immediate needs and to short term programs. It is often difficult to motivate students to come to the Writing Lab for an entire semester on a non-credit and volunteer basis. To be successful in long range programing rather than merely administering first-aid, a writing lab must have the support of the entire school. We have found that both the English Department's active participation in and concern with the Writing Lab and the good will of our satisfied customers have made the Writing Lab at SMU increasingly successful.

Susan Glassman
Writing Lab Director
Southeastern Mass. University

HANDBOOK FOR TUTORS

In order to save valuable time at the beginning of the semester and to provide our tutors (graduate assistants in English) with the information we felt they needed to function effectively in our Writing Center, we prepared a handbook for them. Outlining general policies and procedures of the Writing Center, this handbook proved to be an effective supplement to our initial orientation workshop, allowing us to spend more time on other important matters. The handbook has also been used in lieu of the workshop for those tutors who were assigned to the Writing Center late and missed the orientation session. In addition, the handbook provides anyone interested in our program with a fairly comprehensive overview of our operation and philosophy.

We plan to present a program for the Special Interest Session on Writing Labs at the 1979 4C's based on our ideas for training tutors. Our presentation will include a discussion of our handbook, which will be available for examination at that time. Those who do not plan to attend the conference or who would like to see the handbook sooner can obtain a copy by requesting it. Please include a self-addressed envelop (9x12) and postage (\$.80) with the request.

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