



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER



Vol. IV, No. 5 (January, 1980)

This month's newsletter is a particularly lively exchange of information, requests, ideas, and suggestions. There are materials to send for, manuscript requests to respond to, a form to fill out, questions to answer, and articles to read and consider.

Please continue to send these contributions, plus names of new members and donations of \$3 (with checks made payable to me) to:

Muriel Harris, editor
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907



The SMSU Syllabus

Although Southwest Missouri State University (Springfield, MO) does not have a Writing Lab as such, we do have a Developmental Reading Laboratory and an Individualized Instruction Laboratory. The latter is quite new, and we are still in the process of figuring out what we can do with it to reach more students, cover larger areas of instruction, and assist students to resolve problems they encounter in their classroom experiences.

However, we have had a "Departmental Handbook" for a number of years, and Robert L. Meredith's comments (WLN, June, 1979) prompt me to describe this handbook, its genesis, and its history. The description will perhaps be useful to others.

For many years the Department of English operated on a handout basis. We had exer-

cises, policy statements, descriptions of principles; we kept them in file cabinets accessible to all members of the staff. These were used in classes and were distributed free. We printed them on our own departmental mimeograph, a venerable machine that probably was dropped off in Springfield by Cherokees too weary to carry it farther on their Trail of Tears.

But what we could do for 500 freshmen suddenly became impossible when we had a 1000 or 1500 freshmen. Our file folders were often empty; the office staff simply had no time to cut stencils, run copies, and keep things in stock, and worse--we did not have the budget to continue to hand out freebies to everyone.

In 1963, therefore, we decided to gather all of our most useful documents under one cover and print enough copies for our students; and we would sell these through the campus bookstore, which consented to pick up the printing tab, and thus get out from under a labor, distribution, and budgetary situation too complicated to continue. All we had to do was to edit our papers into one separate publication!

Included in the first handbook (we were not inventive about the title; we simply called it English Syllabus, a title it has unto this day) were directions for manuscript preparation; word lists for students to study before they took the Minimum Essentials Test (a test of mechanics; it is still required of our students); a sample ME Test; a list of nine "major errors" of writing; information about documentation in research papers--including sample footnote and bibliographic forms; and in response to a felt need of many, a list of suggested readings in poetry, short fiction, and British and American novels.

Each of these items was faculty generated, faculty prepared, faculty approved. And we

proposed to reprint the Syllabus each year and thus keep it up to date.

In subsequent editions, Syllabus was expanded to include other materials. These were statements and descriptions not found in textbooks, or in the opinion of Department members, more clearly and completely written by us than by anyone else. For example, the Department spent a year devising a comprehensive statement about that perennial problem for freshman writers--plagiarism. Other additions have included notes on writing fiction, a sample research paper (non-literary), information about the Junior English Examination (as long as we had it), how to write a theme, alternate forms of documentation (for science and other majors outside the humanities), useful hints for learning to spell, agreement (S/V, pronoun/antecedent), punctuation principles, and in the latest (7th) edition a kind of condensed grammar.

Serendipitously we discovered that Syllabus served as a kind of handbook for all students. This came about with an increase of transfer students, student mobility, and the fact that we no longer clung to a single handbook for a generation. In 1972 our Faculty Senate designated English Syllabus the accepted manual of style for preparation of undergraduate papers and reports at the university.

Of course, we soon discovered that although faculty members were enthusiastic about suggesting improvements for Syllabus, their enthusiasm flagged when they were asked to compose contributions. Therefore, the work devolved upon three or four editors who annually circulated new statements, sought approval, generated rewriting, and each summer went crazy trying to re-edit Syllabus and meet the printer's deadline so copies would be available at the beginning of the fall semester. With the fourth edition we went biennial, and the last two editions (10,000 copies each) have been designed to be a three-year supply.

The 7th edition now has 132 pages (the first edition had 23 pages) and contains an expanded list of documentation forms, a thorough reworking of most sections, and general updating and de-sexing of all carry-over material. In addition, faculty members in other Departments were asked to make suggestions for improvement, and--if possible--to supply statements. We received no statements, but we did receive suggestions for titles to be added to the list of readings. The list now includes not only titles

from classic, "good stuff" in American and British literature, but also titles in the areas of junior novel, science fiction, environment and conservation, life science, physical education, and other disciplines.

All this for the bargain price of \$2.95.

Through the years Syllabus has grown to be more than an in-house publication for the Department of English. Copies of the third edition were distributed to high school English teachers in our district, to each Department Chairman on campus, to administrators, and to both the university and public libraries. As a PR tool, Syllabus lets students know what we expect of them when they come to SMSU. Some high school principals have purchased copies for all their senior students to study. We have even sold multiple copies to a few colleges.

Perhaps we garnered the ultimate recognition last year when the college Annual included double mention of Syllabus. The 6th edition had a bright green cover--deliberately chosen to make it attractive and visible. The new edition has a blue cover, and when you get 3000 freshmen packing blue-covered copies of Syllabus all over campus, you've got visibility! No wonder the Annual staff mentioned the new edition--with a picture, yet.

Is Syllabus worth the effort?

We think so.

It is our own best seller, and its content and uses have multiplied far beyond anything we envisioned in 1963. Spiral-bound, it lies flat when a student is studying it. (A printer convinced us to try one printing with a perfect binding. That was a disaster; the thing fell apart shortly after it was taken from the book store.) We keep it an 8½ x 11 size, and examples thus match student papers--or vice versa. Available all over campus, we have tried to make it readable by all. A local publication, we encourage and collect suggestions--from students as well as faculty--for improvement by inclusion, deletion, or revision, and these are considered each time we prepare a new edition.

Syllabus is a useful supplement to the instruction sheets and exercises that our faculty still generate in profusion (our duplication machine pumps all the time).

And we've discovered yet another dimension

of Syllabus. A student asked me the other day, "Can I use the Syllabus with the green cover?" "Sure," I replied. Then I asked, "Where'd you get one with a green cover?" "Well," she said, "my brother gave it to me; he used it when he was here."

So Syllabus may have developed into a kind of heirloom.

Do you suppose it might become a collectible?

George Gleason, Head
Department of English
Southwest Missouri State University

A CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

EXERCISE EXCHANGE, a journal for teachers of English in junior high school through college, formerly published by the English Department, University of Vermont, will be published, beginning in the spring of 1980, by Murray State University. The journal is seeking manuscripts on any aspect of teaching English; topics should be practical, classroom-oriented descriptions of teaching techniques. Contributors' guidelines are available on request; address all inquiries to Charles R. Duke, Editor, EXERCISE EXCHANGE, Department of English, Murray State University, Murray, KY 42071.



A
READER
ASKS . . .

Does anyone have any information or sources of information for diagnostic pre-tests and post-tests for a remedial English writing lab?

Matthew Diomede
Communications Program
Coordinator
Center for Academic
Development
510 Tower
University of Missouri
St. Louis, MO 63121

(Editor's note: If you wish to reply directly to Matthew Diomede, please write to the address given above. If you wish to share

your response with other newsletter readers, please address your reply to the editor.)



MATERIALS EXCHANGE TABLE AT 4 C's

In conjunction with the Special Interest Session on Writing Labs at next spring's 4 C's meeting in Washington, a materials display and exchange table will be open during the session.

The procedure for participation will be as follows:

1. Donors of display materials are to fill out a standard form (included as the next page of this issue) listing and describing materials. This form is to be sent to the indicated address as soon as possible, so that we may plan for space requirements.
2. Donors are to bring the materials with them to Washington and turn them in at the table. Where possible, materials are to be in standard manila folders, identified by school and individual, and plainly marked: "Display Only/Don't Take." A yellow pad (with school, individual identification and the cost of postage) should be included for names and addresses of those requesting copies.
3. The exchange is primarily for display, with exchange by mail, but, space permitting, there can be some handout items: up to 200 copies, single sheet, 8½ x 11, or equivalent space (until we know the amount of materials, we can be flexible about this).
4. Some volunteers will be needed to help out at the table. You may sign up when you turn in your materials.
5. Donors are to pick up materials and yellow pads before leaving the meeting.

The criteria for materials are still wide open: anything that the donor believes others might find useful.

Address questions or whatever to Lil Brannon, Department of English, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington, NC 28403.



TO: Lil Brannon
Department of English
University of North Carolina-Wilmington
Wilmington, North Carolina 28401

Date: _____

FROM: (name) _____
(school) _____
(address) _____

MATERIALS FOR EXCHANGE TABLE:

(List and describe briefly as to type, size, content, etc.)

(use additional sheets if necessary)

- I will bring materials to Wash.: Yes__; No__. (If no, mail to above address well before meeting date.)
- I will be able to send copies to those so requesting: Yes__; No__.

Signature _____



A
READER
ASKS . . .

I am the Director of a "brand new" Lab at Drexel. We got our feet wet last semester, and now we are launched!

One of my projects for the winter semester is the designing of a brochure. We had a rather simple information pamphlet to start with, but I'd like to have a more eye-catching piece. I would like to get some ideas by looking at brochures from other labs. Would newsletter readers from other labs please send me copies of their brochures?



Margot Soven
Drexel University
Philadelphia, PA 19104

The Queens College Reading Lab:
Programs and Alternatives

The Queens College Reading Laboratory is designed to help Queens College students improve their reading and study skills. To accomplish this objective, we believe that help in reading does not mean that the reader is ill, but that the reader grows and develops in his or her skills and that every reader reads differently.

The Lab began operation in 1975 under the direction of Betsy B. Kaufman and Pauline Perahia. The students mainly were open admission freshmen who were required to take freshman reading courses. Since then, open admissions has ended; subsequently, our student population is more diverse. The Lab services foreign students, minorities, and older adults who are returning to college. These students come into the Lab by one of three ways. Students can walk in and request help or they can be referred by a faculty member or a tutor from another Lab. If students are enrolled in our college reading and study skills 95 course, they are required to spend the third hour in the Lab.

The Lab offers several programs designed to meet the needs of this diverse population. Programs encompass peer tutoring, testing, rapid reading, media, and graduate school preparation. All programs are individualized, so that students can work at their own pace.

The tutoring program is by far the most successful of our programs. Students enjoy working with peers on a one-to-one basis.

Moreover, students work throughout the semester when they know that they have a weekly appointment. Tutors are undergraduate and graduate students who receive training throughout the semester in reading and study skills.

Many reading labs require their students to take a standardized reading test when they first enter followed by a formal conference. We found this procedure to be too impractical and impersonal for the student. Students tend to request immediate assistance and therefore know what they need. This does not imply that testing is valueless. We give each student a sheet which describes the tests we offer and their purposes. Students are given the option of taking the test which they feel is most appropriate to their needs.

The Lab incorporates media into its programs of instruction. Students can view videotape cassettes on note-taking from lectures, research papers, figurative language, etc.

Frank Smith in Understanding Reading says that reading fast is not a matter of "accelerating one's eyeballs." We readily agree. Every student who wants to read faster is advised that speed in reading depends on practice, the reader's purpose, the difficulty of the text, and the reader's experiential and conceptual background. We emphasize comprehension development as the chief means of improving rate. Successful Lab programs like Time/Life's Dick Cavett Speedreading System are complemented by instruction in comprehension strategies.

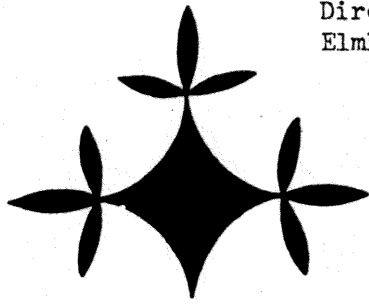
Another program services those students who wish to improve their scores on graduate school entrance examinations. SRA's 4a Rate Builders, Senior Reading for Understanding, EDL's Controlled Reader, and Jason Milman and Walter Pauk's book, How to Take Tests, are useful in helping students prepare for these exams.

In addition to these programs, the Lab has alternatives to commercial materials. One of these alternatives is an informal reading evaluation where students write, and are retrospective about how they read and answer the questions. (For a greater description, see the October, 1978 issue of the English Journal, pp. 66-9.) Another alternative for students is a booklet developed by tutors sensitive to the needs and interests of our population; this booklet consists of twenty-two articles, essays, and poems followed by free questions.

These programs and alternative materials are motivating for our students. In addition, we are firmly committed to the idea that the best way to improve comprehension is by reading. We wish to convey to our students that reading is a lifetime habit to be enjoyed. Of course, this attitude is difficult to get across when students desire immediate assistance concerning their reading difficulties. Nevertheless, the Lab staff encourages students to use the Lab in situations other than crisis times. Students are told to think of the Lab as a place where they can come to read for pleasure or study.

Developmental Learning
Lab
College of DuPage
Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137

Janice Fodor
Director, Learning Center
Elmhurst College



Larry Heller
Academic Skills Center
Queens College, CUNY



TEACHING COLLEGE STUDENTS HOW TO WRITE:
TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DOCUMENT DESIGNERS, by Janice C. Redish and Kathryn Racette (A publication of the American Institutes for Research, November, 1979, ii + 39 p p.), \$3.50.

This pamphlet, a survey of current college composition programs on the undergraduate and graduate level, covers the following areas: freshman composition, advanced composition, writing labs, writing across the curriculum, technical writing, and graduate programs. Though useful, the survey is necessarily somewhat selective because it cannot report on the vast number of writing programs across the country, and it is already somewhat dated because of rapid changes in the field. For example, Purdue's new Ph.D. specialization in Rhetoric and Composition, instituted last spring, is not yet included in the list of graduate programs.

Perhaps we can help each other update this survey, especially for the section on writing labs, by using the newsletter to transmit even brief postscripts or addenda to this report. We could call the section "Notices" or "What's New," or whatever clever and/or appropriate title you can think of.

Copies of the report can be obtained by writing to:

The Document Design Project
American Institutes for Research
1055 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20007

Please note: On the next page of this newsletter is a questionnaire which Professor William H. Evans, Department of English, Purdue, asks you to complete and return to him. The deadline is February 11, but Professor Evans will appreciate an earlier response. Do not include your name unless you wish to do so. You will see the results in a future issue of WLN.

Resources List for ESL
Students

As the director of a new learning center at Elmhurst College, I have found in the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER many suggestions and bits of information on both materials and strategies. As a consumer of such advice, I would like to pass along just a small amount of information. Last spring, on assignment from the Alternative Learning Unit of the College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, I assembled a resources list for ESL students using materials available in the College's Developmental Learning Lab at the time. The list is only a beginning, but its information and/or format might be of use to others. Copies of this "Intermediate English Resource List" (complete with typos--we're not typists, just English teachers) may be obtained by writing to:



QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WRITING LAB TEACHERS

Apparently very little is known about the background and training of writing lab teachers. Does teaching in a writing lab require any special knowledge, a special philosophy, or special pedagogical skills and methods? Can any English major, given a typical background in that major, just walk into a lab and do what should be done there? Does high school teaching or college composition teaching provide sufficient background? Your answers to the following questions may help to support or question some assumptions. Please return this form to Professor William H. Evans, Dept. of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907. Do not include your name unless you wish to do so.

1. Briefly describe your position and role as a lab teacher _____

2. How many English composition courses have you had in addition to freshman comp? (Please check) 1 () 2 () 3 () 4 () 5 ()

3. How many college courses that included useful information about teaching composition? 1 () 2 () 3 ()

4. Rank the following sources in the order of their usefulness to you as a writing lab teacher. For each think of a five-point scale. At the low end, 1 means no help; at the high end, 5 means great help.

- _____ A. Composition textbooks
- _____ B. Teachers' manuals to composition textbooks
- _____ C. Articles in professional journals
- _____ D. Conferences with a writing lab director
- _____ E. Observations of experienced lab teachers
- _____ F. The Writing Lab Newsletter
- _____ G. Professional conventions
- _____ H. In-service workshops
- _____ I. College composition courses
- _____ J. College literature courses
- _____ K. Trial and error
- _____ Other(s). Please rank, too.

_____ L. _____

_____ M. _____

5. What special knowledge about composition must a writing lab teacher have?

6. What special philosophy about teaching must a writing lab teacher have?

7. What special teaching methods must a writing lab teacher be able to use?

Note: Use the back of this form to make any extra statements which describe the kind of background and training a writing lab teacher should have.

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER-Supplementary Mailing List - #26

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Rochester, N.Y. 14610

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CANADA V7J 3H5

Crockett, Beverly
4205 DeCoursey Avenue
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Cuesta College
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San Luis Obispo, California 93406

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Hoiness, Annette
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Learning Center Director
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Green Bay, Wisconsin 54302

Upward Bound-Morlan
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Northeast Missouri State University
Kirksville, Missouri 63501

A complete mailing list directory
can be obtained, for \$2, from:

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Montgomery College
Rockville, Maryland 20850

