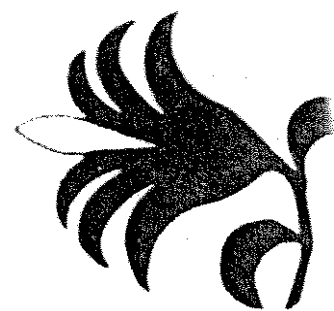


WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER



Vol. VII, No. 2 (October, 1982)

Responses to Phyllis Sherwood's article in the September newsletter have already begun to come in. Two of those responses, addressed to all of us, appear here and like Phyllis Sherwood's article, raise issues of vital concern to all of us. I look forward to including more responses as more of us join the discussion.

Please continue to send your articles, announcements, reviews, names of new members, and donations of \$5/year (in checks made payable to Purdue University, but sent to me) to:

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



A NOTE ON THE COLLAPSE: LET THEM EAT CAKE

I want to respond to Phyllis Sherwood's cri de coeur in the September WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER by suggesting that two pretty obvious things have happened--whether logical or not. First, the lady has surely lost contact with her department (or they with her). A 13-2 vote bespeaks organized opposition, considering that no English department anywhere can ever agree so wholeheartedly on even the simplest matter; the little-endians have almost certainly prepared their triumph well in advance, for reasons one can only speculate upon from the article. Was this a plain old personality clash, did the thirteen feel threatened somehow by prospects of only a service department (in a two-year college?), or was there some kind of hidden

agenda coming from over there in the admin building? One doesn't know, but a program so admittedly successful for at least six years does not lose support in ten minutes, not without the program director's knowledge if she is at all in contact with her departmental colleagues, I submit.

What to do? Although it is too late for this fall's closing to be reversed, I suppose (and how curious to close a lab in order to analyze it--post mortem?), Ms. Sherwood ought to meet individually with each of the thirteen, if only to hear their lies, lies that might eventually lead to the truth. More importantly, however, she ought to throw the thing right back on them, refusing further to solve their problems until another subcommittee, one that addresses the substance of what is expected from freshman writers at Raymond Walters College, and I mean expected not only by the English people but also by faculty from almost all other disciplines, gets formed and activated. Ms. Sherwood must in no case become regarded as the Big Remedial Mama, the one who stays until eight every evening just to tutor her beloved basic writers. And finally, she ought to check and recheck with those in the reading lab. Has it, too, been suspended? If not, perhaps a closer liaison between reading and writing might be in the offing, a consummation devoutly to be wished in all of higher education (and something we are attempting here at Peru State in a three-year communications skills program grant).

The second obvious thing that has occurred there is that the English staff itself has adopted a royalist attitude, refusing to acknowledge its mission and responsibilities while at the same time relying upon statistics convenient only because they permit the lab to look bad. If an open-door institution cannot provide remediation, then a basic sup-

port for retention is lost; and retention, such a prominent buzz-word in education today, qualifies as a concern far beyond only the English pedants: administrators are vitally interested (and Ms. Sherwood does admit to having had administrative backing). After all, when you lose enough of your student bodies, you begin losing jobs--at all levels. So why not begin mentioning some of these ramifications of the 13-2 vote to people in power, people who just might interest themselves in preserving a support mechanism?--that is, unless the University of Cincinnati and its college have so many students knocking down their doors that they are not worried about retention at all. Someone around there must be concerned when you go from nine sections of basic English to one, after all! And what is this two-track system? If you have now only 101 and no lab, you have a one-track system, say what you may about upper/lower scores (and one bets that upper and lower sections proceed most independently, depending upon the whims of the thirteen anyway). It is interesting, too, to speculate on what besides 101 is being taught: Skelton? The Minor Poetry of Chaucer? The Medieval Romance, 1345-47? Or does everyone simply have five sections of 101, big or little?

I cannot in this brief note address all the questions Ms. Sherwood concludes with, but I want to try to suggest at least a few more tactics aside from despair and dismay: first, try to get a consensus from the faculty about what determines success or failure of the lab or the developmental course. Do not move without such consensus. Listen to Dan Fader if in doubt. Second, argue with those further up the power structure, not with these already committed thirteen; and try to make a case for data that would include your students' plans for withdrawing or completing work in a succeeding quarter; or maybe persuade people that data in itself is not entirely reliable, certainly not as reliable as it is in the reading lab. And finally, if I faced a similar situation myself (and I probably will in a year or so), I repeat that I would make very sure not to position myself as the sole custodian of remediation, that person so easily left with a broken heart, an apple, and a road map. Come to think of it, I would look about for other work, too. Or maybe those thirteen could do that, including that person who is so into computer programs for basic English students who can no longer be basic English students:

in our own lab we are holding out against computers for reasons too far-reaching to discuss here (but see my "The End of Us: 1986," Arizona English Bulletin, May 1982, pp. 1-3, for a hint or two). A hands-on human experience is what these writers need, not hebetation by machines, be they computer games, television programs or micro-computers. And what Raymond Walters College and many others need is to realize that their bread and butter depends upon providing (mandatory) remediation in order to increase retention.

Russ Stratton
Peru State College



TO ARMS! TO ARMS!
DEFENDING THE WRITING CENTER

Phyllis Sherwood's plea for help in saving her writing center particularly struck home with me. I just finished a dissertation, A Rhetorical Defense of the Writing Center, on that particular problem. No doubt after reading Sherwood's article, all of us who direct writing centers feel threatened. Because writing labs are, in spite of their directors' commitment, peripheral services, they are always in danger. Outlined here are three strategies for defending the writing center which I have developed and upon which I base my efforts.

First, the director should avoid letting the center be too closely associated with the concept of remediation. Sherwood clearly associates her center with a basic writing course, and, not surprisingly, her department does also, even though she states that the center is open to all students on a walk-in basis. As soon as a faculty considers that remediation is no longer necessary, justifiably or not, anything associated with remedial or what may be construed as remedial work is in danger of disappearing. Sherwood should consider revising the philosophy of her lab so that its service to all student writers becomes more apparent. All writers need help at some point, and it is efficient to concentrate that help in a place such as a lab, complete with expert staff, resource materials, exercises, and so on. The lab

should be conceived of as a support system for regular students, not as a remedial facility, and as much of the director's effort as is necessary should be aimed at spreading that idea.

Second, the director needs to work at making the writing center seem indispensable. One good way to perform this trick is to see that the center serves more than one function. If Sherwood's institution offers any sort of teacher-training program, I suggest that she get that program involved with the lab as soon as possible. Here at Eastern, we invite teacher-certification students to spend some of their clinical observation hours in the writing center. We also have them use our resource materials and "neat ideas" files for working up assignments in methods classes. We also keep our English faculty informed about our "neat ideas" files, about professional publications we receive, and important books we have available. We served last spring as a place for faculty to inspect proposed new textbooks for our freshman writing courses, as well as serving as consultants about the relative merits of those books. We make an effort to give tutors in the center a course in teaching writing as part of their professional preparation. It is, unquestionably, a crash course and far from adequate, but it is a start and we take it seriously, with readings, reports, discussions on ethics, record-keeping, classroom practices, and so on. We also conduct research in the center, and we have become a magnet for all the ESL students on campus. Other labs supervise placement testing, though we do not. While all this sounds ambitious, we have in fact done it in our first year and on a tiny budget. The point is, the writing center is considerably more than a tutorial service.

Finally, establishing careful relationships with faculty and administration is the keystone to the whole thing. Sherwood mentions student enthusiasm for the center; she should compile written evidence of that enthusiasm to show to administration and faculty. English faculty need the care and cultivation of hothouse orchids; they can never be taken for granted. The director needs to involve them with the center at every stage: developing the philosophy of the center, getting sample assignments, books, favorite exercises. When we first opened our center we didn't even have a dictionary. I mooched old ones from faculty, which meant a lot of cof-

fee drunk in a lot of offices. The time thus spent has proved worthwhile--I get support from really surprising sources. It is vital to avoid establishing an us vs. them relationship with faculty, especially if basic differences exist between approaches to teaching writing. Somehow, no topic is more likely to bring out the worst in people; no issue is more volatile than how to teach writing. Suggesting to a faculty member that his views are wrong in some way is dangerous indeed. The writing center director must resort to subversion and use rhetoric at its most accomplished when coping with this issue.

Furthermore, the director should be careful not to rely exclusively on English faculty for support. She should do her best to gain the active help of other departments. She also should marshal the strongest administrative support she can, both financial support and moral support. If she can present written evidence of all this support, so much the better. The one thing I learned immediately as director of this center is that my intuition about the success of our tutoring service counts for nothing; only hard evidence in black and white convinces anybody who affects the center's fate.

I hope Sherwood can save her writing center. I think her willingness to fight for it is certainly the first thing she needs. And I thank her for reminding us that while we think writing centers are terrific, not everyone does.

Jeanne Simpson
Eastern Illinois University



BOOK REVIEW

Steward, Joyce S. and Mary K. Croft. The Writing Laboratory: Organization, Management, and Methods. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1982. 155 pages. \$9.95.

One of the key reasons for the rapid growth of writing labs in the last decade is that their adaptability and flexibility have en-

abled them to meet the needs of students, faculty, and administration in their respective institutions. Because the birth of labs most often occurred to fill a particular void in both the teaching and learning of writing, each one has developed its own characteristics, procedures, and activities. Yet, despite the diversity to be found among them, some common pedagogical assumptions underlie the operations of most labs.

Both this diversity and these similarities are reflected in Joyce S. Steward and Mary K. Croft's The Writing Laboratory, a handbook for the operation of writing labs. The authors have drawn upon their own extensive experiences as lab directors on two different campuses of the University of Wisconsin, as well as on those of colleagues, to describe the organization, management, and methods necessary to establish and maintain a lab. Fortunately, the book leans heavily toward the practical, and there is much that both new and experienced directors can learn from it. Six years ago when I was beginning the lab I now direct, this book would have been an invaluable guide, but I also found at least a dozen suggestions in it that I still can use.

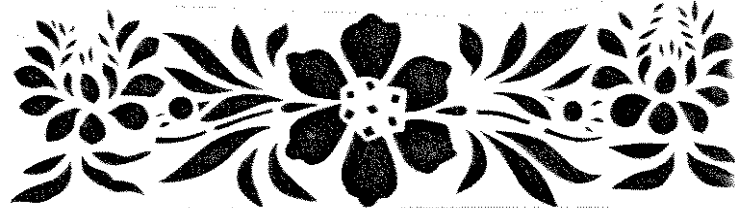
The book, which focuses on the "tutoring lab" as opposed to the "self-instructional lab," is organized into four chapters--"The Lab Phenomenon," "The Lab Organization," "The Lab Process," and "The Lab Management"--and includes topics such as budgeting, staff selection, peer tutoring, conference teaching, record keeping, publicity, and evaluation. Throughout, the lab as a place to encourage writing as process rather than to administer first aid is emphasized. Although it may seem too obvious to mention, Steward and Croft's admonition that labs not be cluttered with gimmicks, tests, expensive gadgets, and other so-called necessities which become barriers between tutors and students is advice that none of us can afford to ignore. The key to running a writing lab is, "Essentially, nothing is essential . . . except the tutor, the student and the student's writing" (p. 94). This is indispensable counsel for all of us who get enmeshed in administrative duties and become charmed by books, programs, hardware, and software that promise to solve our students' problems for us.

All of the material in The Writing Lab is useful and important, and there are more suggestions, methods, and plans than any one lab could hope to use within a limited period of time. But the highlights of the book are the sections on tutor training and conference teaching, and the bibliography. Both the tutor training and the conference teaching sections contain material that can be used directly for staff development or that can be adapted to meet the needs of a particular program. The bibliography includes approximately three hundred items divided into "Aids for the Lab Teacher" and "Aids for Lab Teaching," again too many for any one lab to use or to own, but a comprehensive list to allow staff to select those which are best suited for their program.

Although the authors state in the preface that the information presented in the book is the best that they learned from their own labs, they do make some generalizations based upon procedures in other labs. However, they never offer sources for this material, which would be more useful if readers knew how it was obtained.

But despite this minor flaw, The Writing Lab is an important new book that every writing lab director should read. It is not only helpful in developing new labs, but it can suggest ways for existing ones to improve or expand their services.

Susan Glassman
Writing/Reading Center
Director
Southeastern Massachusetts
University



A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them.

-William Stafford



Now available from the Communication Skills Center at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, MA, is the Standardized Test of Essential Writing Skills. Developed by Dr. Shirley M. DeShields and tested over a period of one year, the test is the only existing instrument of its kind which provides a reliable analysis from writing samples submitted by the student. Normed for high school and college students, this diagnostic test explores the student's knowledge of practical writing skills in the areas of composition, organization and identification, and use of main and subsidiary ideas. A highly specific analysis of the student's strengths and weaknesses, pinpointing the areas in which skills are weak and remediation is necessary, can be developed. The two-part test is self-contained and takes less than one hour to administer. For more information, or a trial packet of 15 tests to give to a sample of your students, please write to Dr. Shirley M. DeShields at The Communication Skills Center, 73 Bartlett Hall, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003.



BEYOND THE BASICS: DESIGNING A LAB FOR ALL STUDENTS

This paper is addressed to those of you who are currently starting a lab or considering expanding your present lab and especially those of you who now feel like your lab is too limited, like it is not addressing itself to the real writing problems students face at the university. However, before I can tell you what an effective lab ought to be doing, I feel obligated to discuss the reigning Writing Lab stereotype. It is important to remind ourselves of this stereotype because it is the stereotype that limits so many writing centers so severely.

Most faculty and students outside the lab think of the lab as a kind of fix-it shop. Those menial tasks that cannot be performed in the sophisticated setting of the college classroom can easily be performed in the Writing Lab. The lab will "fix" those nagging spelling, punctuation, and grammar problems. The danger of allowing such a stereotype to persist lies in the assumptions that stereotype is based on: 1) That a student who has not mastered the "basics" in twelve years or more of schooling will somehow manage to master them in a few sessions in

the lab. 2) That these basics can be taught quickly, easily, painlessly, cheaply. 3) That a student will become a better writer if that student becomes a better mechanic. 4) That you can divorce the basics entirely from the composing process and teach only to them. 5) That the Writing Lab can and should limit itself to drilling students in mechanics.

In reality, you will rarely see students whose writing problems are limited to spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors. An effective Writing Lab must recognize that. It is true that now and then you will see students who have trouble catching their spelling errors but nothing else or students who confuse semicolons with colons or students who can never seem to write in a consistent tense or person, but we all know that these are not the students who need the most immediate help. Any tutor can tell you after only one short session with what Mina Shaughnessy has called a basic writer, that simple drills in mechanics are close to useless. Basic writers have their most serious problems with concept development first, mechanics last. They certainly will not benefit from a quick tune-up.

The kind of lab you create must be designed to handle not one need but many different needs with the emphasis on aiding concept development. And this is a need all across campus with students at all levels. Those of you who are working with Writing-Across-the-Curriculum programs have probably already discovered this. Our own experience with faculty from other disciplines has been revealing and supportive. In more than a dozen WAC workshops when faculty from all disciplines and all teaching levels were asked to list what they thought were their students' most serious writing problems, in order of priority, mechanics have never been at the top. In fact, they rarely even come in the top five. Instead (and this is consistent) these faculty list organization, complete development, coherent presentation of ideas, "thinking problems," even reading problems above spelling, punctuation, and grammar. When forced to name their students' real writing problems, these faculty admit that many students cannot spell or punctuate, but they do not put that on the list as a priority item.

Why, then, the stereotype? The truth is that faculty in other disciplines often recognize poor writing but very often are not trained to explain why the writing is so poor. They then mark what they can, usually

surface features, what many call the basics. Many tutors consequently find themselves faced with students who have been sent to revise a paper. The paper has only mechanics marked. A quick consultation with the instructor suggests that the student's writing problems go far beyond the basics, however.

All of this, of course, is not to say that an effective Writing Lab should not offer work in the basics. In fact, it must offer such work. This is to say that the lab that confines itself to remediation or fix-it work is not doing its job. In creating a Writing Lab that reaches all students, that goes beyond the basics, you must recognize the following kinds of students: 1) Those who really do need just a quick review; 2) Those students faced with special assignments such as lab reports, feasibility studies, and the like; 3) Those students who have serious writing apprehension problems; 4) Those students who I will call immature writers (the thinking in their papers is weak, the mechanics are not bad); and 5) Basic writers.

The first two types are the simplest. They, more than anything else, remind you of the service function of the lab. You should be open to all needs and many pedagogies. If you are not, you are not a functioning lab.

Students who need simply a quick review are few, but they do exist. They are the students who are successful writers who get a few things wrong now and then. They once knew the rule. Now it has fled their memories. They know they are making mistakes, but they cannot remember why. They are the easy ones. Different labs handle quick review cases in different ways. Some use self-paced tapes. (If tapes are good for anything, they are good for review.) Some save time in the lab for drop-in sessions. Students know that someone will be open to answer a question at that time. Some provide short one- or two-hour one-shot sessions on particular problems. Some provide handouts that review specific problems. Some design short-courses to meet the needs of these students. Whatever you decide on, you should understand that these are solutions only for the student who is fairly advanced and who only needs a quick review.

Working with students who must write special assignments is another service of the lab. It is a minor, easy, and necessary function. The best way to provide this particular service is to work closely with fac-

ulty across campus. Have them provide you with files of their assignments, their style sheets, their particular formats. You will be even more effective if you have these faculty members provide short training sessions for your tutors. In these sessions, faculty can not only provide particular assignments but explain how they present the assignment to the class and what they expect the class to be able to do with the assignment. They can bring style and format sheets and point out places where students most often go wrong. Better yet, they can bring strong and weak samples of student work and explain why the one is good and the other bad.

Such training sessions can be invaluable. Tutors are no longer put in the position of guessing what an instructor wants. These sessions are also excellent for public relations. They help break the stereotype, and they get faculty from across campus into your lab to meet your tutors and to see what your concerns are. These faculty even have a sense that they have helped train tutors so they are more likely to send you students at first, perhaps, for surface problems, later for more complex problems.

The real core of an effective Writing Lab, however, must be the tutoring program. Furthermore, in developing the tutoring program, you must recognize the real function of the lab which is to deal with the most complex issues and aid concept development. No fix-it shop attitude will work here. Whether you have peer tutors or professionals, you first must institute a strong and continuing training program for these tutors. My own experience convinces me that for consistency and growth, professionals make the most effective tutors because they can teach beyond the basics, they can handle students from the freshman to the graduate level, and they effectively eliminate the Writing Lab stereotype. Peer tutors usually cannot stay with a lab from year to year. They need stronger direction. A program like the one Ken Bruffee has is an excellent one, but you must remember that it is carefully organized, well funded, and carefully controlled. Whichever you choose, the working relationship between you and your tutors ought to be one of mutual respect.

You will immediately, upon proposing a heavily tutor-centered lab, be told that such a lab is much too cost-inefficient. However, you must understand and make others understand that this is the only way to teach

those students who need the most help. Tutors should specifically be aiming at aiding concept development (and in some cases confidence) rather than correcting surface errors. Furthermore, you cannot expect to tutor effectively if you try to spend only 15-20 minutes with a student. Twenty minutes is just enough time to find out what the student's assignment is, what he thinks he needs help with, and what he has done with that assignment. For many students you must spend an entire hour, certainly no less than 30 minutes, which is pressing it.

With one-hour sessions, you can really get work done. You give the student time to talk, to work out his own thought and confusions. You give yourself time to provide feedback. And you have time to pursue some course of instruction. You cannot expect to do more than check a paper for proofreading errors in 15-20 minutes, something your tutors should not be doing, anyway. Furthermore, these students should have regular appointments to meet with the same tutor throughout the term. They should probably get some credit for the work they do, even if the credit does not count toward graduation. Tutors should have weekly paid meetings or training sessions to talk over problems they are having with specific students, with teaching specific skills and to present new material to them.

An effective Writing Lab is a learning center, and a student who needs help is not going to learn from a quick drop-in session an hour before the paper is due. Tutors are not going to continue to learn if they have one little bag of tricks that they have been handed at the beginning of the year.

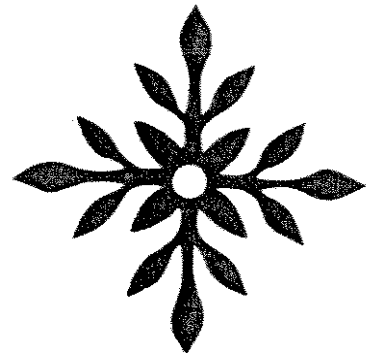
In working with students, tutors must also learn to work with referring instructors. Here, again, it is best if you can get these instructors to provide workshops for your tutors on their assignments, their expectations, and their most frequent disappointments. They should also provide sample essays and explain what in the essays is acceptable and what is unacceptable.

Since you will be meeting with these students regularly, you should concentrate on working with papers in progress. Some schools do not like this. They insist that no tutor should work with a paper until after it is graded. This kind of wrongheadedness springs from that early stereotype of the lab as a proofreading place. Once you understand that

the tutor's job is far more complex than this, you will see why papers-in-progress must be your priority. This kind of work focuses on finding a topic, developing ideas, organizing the essay, polishing style, and when there is time, proofreading.

An effective Writing Lab goes far beyond the basics. It does cater to students who need a quick review. It provides special services for departments across campus. It probably provides its own one-hour courses (taught by tutors) on mechanics--spelling, punctuation, grammar--designed, even here, to find each student's patterns of errors. It focuses primarily on the tutor program and on helping students with their most serious writing problems, thinking problems. It is not cheap. It is not simple. It will not run itself.

Diana Freisinger
Michigan Technological
University



A COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES TOWARD WRITING

While training upper-division college students to tutor in our developmental freshman English composition course, English 100, I wanted to introduce them to a problem that most composition teachers, at any level of education, face rather chronically: how to deal with the less-than-enthusiastic student who is frequently also the under-prepared "marginal" student. This is particularly a problem in developmental courses in which class members have been pre-selected, usually with some kind of placement test, and have been, therefore, identified as deficient in some way.

As composition teachers, we have digested our subject matter and developed our skills relatively easily. We are generally comfortable in the academic world and at home in the classroom. It is not always easy for us to understand or to deal with the problems some of our students have with concepts and situations that have given us so little trouble. By virtue of the fact that the tutor-trainees in our program were all "successful" students with GPAs of 3.5 or better, I felt that they probably shared with us this common background and could benefit professionally from a closer examination of attitudes toward writing held by our English 100 students, as well as some of their own--perhaps unexamined--attitudes.

Thus at the beginning of the semester, I launched a full-scale, if informal and unscientific, project in which I asked the English 100 students to write a description of themselves as writers (or as students if they felt more comfortable with that label) and then, separately, I asked the tutors to write the same. Because I did not want to bias the results of the study, I gave no directions for content to either group; however, in order to establish a basis for comparison, I devised a list of nine items I would look for in each paper. I was interested in whether or not the author of any given paper would mention, for example, a specific past experience or a teacher or grades, etc., and if those comments would be positive or negative. Finally, I decided that since I was trying to locate a "typical" attitude pattern, I would not evaluate any one paper as negative or positive; rather, I would focus on the nine items and determine how many negative or positive or neutral responses I received from each group. In all, I examined approximately one hundred and twenty papers.

Most English 100 students took a direct approach in their self-descriptions: "When it comes to writing I am the worst." However, sometimes even descriptions that began positively and confidently ended with a shift in meaning. For example, one art student began by saying, "I am a good art student," only to add, "It takes no intelligence or deep thought with hours of study to be a student of art." In other words, this student claimed that anything s(he) is capable of doing well must be, by definition, inferior. Over and over I found variations of these self-concepts in a noticeable number of the English 100 papers.

As a group, these students mentioned, if not dwelled on, the fact that writing a paper is extremely difficult. The most representative comments were, "I have a hard time thinking of anything to say," and "I just can't get my papers to sound like what's in my head to say." These observations, shared to varying degrees, I suspect, by all writers, translated to these students as barriers to good writing: because writing is hard for me, I must not be any good. They expressed no tolerance for the struggle with subject matter or content, and they placed little value on achievement per se and little faith in having done their best: "I can understand what the instructor wants me to do and then I will go and do exactly what I think she wants me to do, with the best of my ability and I still crumble."

In their papers, the English 100 students frequently pinpointed their specific skills problems. Most of the students who did so even identified their problems by name: subject-verb agreement, fragments, run-ons. Although few of the students referred directly or specifically to either high school or past teachers, the disembodied labels they used so facetiously spoke for them. However, at best these past encounters with the system had been neutral. The errors, by and large, still cropped up in the papers, and the students expressed no concern over this and described no efforts to change the pattern. Furthermore, these students tended to confine their remarks about specific problems to those concerning grammar and punctuation rules. On the whole, they did not see organization of the paper or development of ideas within the paper as areas of particular concern. Most students completely divorced the process of building a paper from the conscious control of the author. Ideas just happen and, therefore, by implication so do successful and unsuccessful papers.

At this point in the study, I had learned some particulars that gave me insights into the English 100 students with whom I would be working during the semester: they saw themselves as poor writers; they could give various and technical descriptions of what was wrong with their papers; they saw this state of affairs as a fact of life. Whatever else my reactions to these trends were, I was not surprised.

To a certain extent the comments made by the tutors to this same assignment paralleled

those of their less-experienced counterparts. To a person, the tutors also said that writing is difficult for them, and not a one admitted liking to write, although one said s(he) liked "having written." However, their attitudes differed from those of the English 100 students in one crucial area: "In the back of my mind, I never quite accomplish that fulfillment of knowing I've said it better than anyone else could have. I think that is what I keep striving for in my writing--I always try to make it better." These sentiments were repeated in other papers in very similar words. One element seemed to remain constant throughout the group: the standards being imposed are internal personal ones. These students do not worry about satisfying someone else, for they know they can easily do so. The real problem is in reaching their own standards.

Along with the tutors' admission of the problem, they usually demonstrated an understanding of it and described a way of dealing with the difficulties of writing. For example, "Creative thoughts positively elude me until four hours before a deadline. Then I simply amaze myself with the number of really good ideas I can produce. . . ." This student has learned to use deadlines to her benefit, as a spur to creativity rather than a cause for panic. This process, certainly not appropriate for everyone, obviously works well for this student, allowing her to cope successfully with the natural anxieties connected with writing. Others in this study described totally different strategies: "Once my thesis statement is formed, I then begin to break it down into major areas from which I can make certain points and draw a final conclusion."

This study argues, then, that a fundamental contrast exists between the self-descriptions of remedial students and those of the upper-division one. The more experienced students have higher expectations of themselves than other people have of them, and, therefore, they frequently express dissatisfaction with their own work. However, they have learned to accept their insecurities as a natural part of the composing process, and they have developed personal ways of dealing with or combating anxiety. They know that recognizing a gap between their accomplishments and their ultimate goals is not necessarily a sign of failure; likewise, they do not confuse a difficult task with an unsuccessful one. The English 100 students as a group and as individuals lack this perspective. Perhaps because they lack experience

as writers, they do not sense their own control over their writing. They see the typical, necessary stages of grappling with subject matter, rephrasing and changing content, trying new ideas and approaches to a paper as admissions of an inherent inability to write. More seriously, they do not expect much from their papers, either immediately as successful course assignments or ultimately as a means of communication with their readers. All too often, they describe--and presumably think of--their papers not as clear, logical statements of idea, but as collections of connected misspelled words with occasional sentence structure shifts.

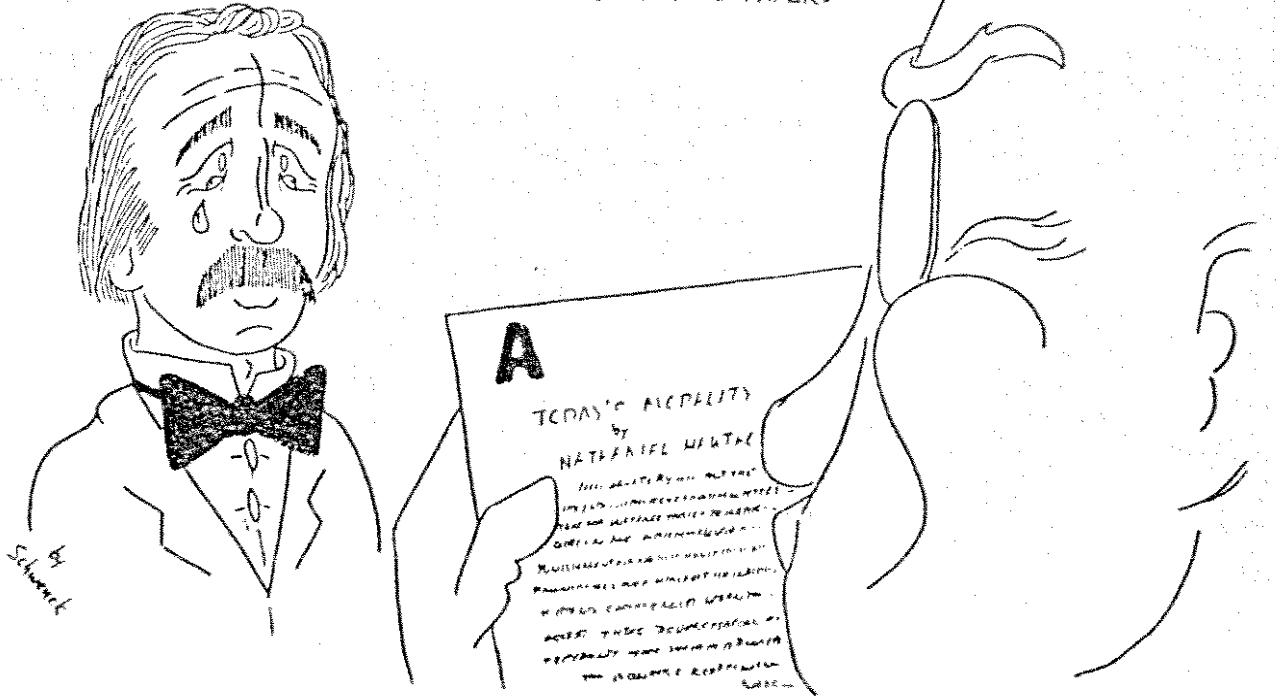
During the course of the semester, the tutors and the English 100 students worked enthusiastically together, discussing ideas, exchanging opinions, working on specific grammar/punctuation problems, revising papers, evaluating each other's work, and sharing with each other both the successes and the failures. Each group was able to add a dimension to the other group's conception of what it means to be a person writing.

By the end of the semester a post-test (which was a repeat of the original assignment) indicated that the percentage of English 100 students whose attitudes toward writing and/or themselves as writers were positive had increased dramatically. In addition, they were more enthusiastic about writing, sometimes reworking for their own satisfaction papers that had been officially accepted for the course. The tutors learned just how complex the English language can be, and they recognized in more urgent terms the need for precision in both oral and written communication. They learned to explain concepts they had long ago taken for granted, and because they were dealing personally, face-to-face, with their students, they could tell immediately when their explanations were not clear, as well as when they were. By explaining to others how to shape, write, and polish a paper, the tutors reinforced their own skills. By watching their students succeed, they found reassurance about themselves. The words of one of the tutors not only describe her own experience, but also sum up our general consensus of the semester: "Tutoring remedial English students helped boost my confidence and though I'm still not entirely self-assured, I do feel good about my writing."

Elizabeth Bell
University of South Carolina
at Aiken

GREAT MOMENTS
IN WRITING LAB
HISTORY, # 2

NO, NO, MR. HAWTHORNE—
THE "A" MEANS
THAT IT'S A GOOD PAPER!



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
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