

# WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Vol. VII, No. 8 (April 1983)

For some of us spring arrived in the middle of winter. For others, balmy days and soft breezes are behind schedule and haven't yet materialized. But for all of us, the end of the semester is approaching rapidly, and with the June issue the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER goes into its usual summer hibernation until next September. Please remember that all announcements, notices, and calls for papers that you want in this semester's issues need to arrive in my mailbox by May 1. That deadline is not an arbitrary one but imposed by the complexities of duplicating and mailing the newsletter. If you anticipate any problems, please call or write.

However, there is no deadline for continuing to send in your articles, reviews, names of new members, and donations of \$5 (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, Ind. 47907



S-0-S

New Writing Lab Director looking for professional assistance in the southeastern region. I need information on workshops and seminars being held near-by, graduate courses being offered at area colleges and other sources of professional development. Contact: Anne Ogle, Writing Lab Director  
North Greenville College  
Tigerville, S.C. 29688

## COMPUTER-ASSISTED INSTRUCTION IN THE COMP-LAB AT YORK COLLEGE/CUNY

My colleagues, Mary Epes and Carolyn Kirkpatrick, and I have reported in earlier issues of THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER and at various professional meetings on our development of the COMP-LAB, the autotutorial writing laboratory at York College, and on the philosophy behind the COMP-LAB exercises (published in 1980 in a workbook format). Students in COMP-LAB basic writing courses receive rhetorical instruction in the classroom, while working by themselves in the lab on a series of modules or packages of self-teaching exercises, each dealing with a distinct grammatical or syntactic problem. The exercises go beyond simple tasks like filling in blanks or choosing from a list of multiple alternatives; they employ techniques of English as a Second Language instruction to help students use correct word forms not in isolation, but in the context of sentences and even paragraphs. This systematic program of grammar instruction is integrated with students' classroom work. Readers interested in details may look at "The COMP-LAB project: An experimental basic writing course," in the Spring/Summer 1979 issue of *Journal of Basic Writing*, or at "The autotutorial writing lab: Discovering its latent power," in *Tutoring Writing*, ed. Muriel Harris (Scott, Foresman, 1982), or may write us for an information packet which includes the 1979 article.

As a normative rule-based system subject to clear and unambiguous definitions of correctness and incorrectness, grammar is a subject which is perfectly suited to computer-assisted instruction. So, over the last two years, I've been working on translating the lab exercises into a CAI format, first for CUNY's large time-sharing system, and recently for microcomputers. In the CAI format, these exercises are known as The COMP-LAB Writing Modules. Two modules, one on noun plurals and the other on verb agreement, con-

stituting about seven hours of lessons, or two weeks' worth of assignments, are presently available.

All computer-assisted instruction is by its nature autotutorial, and autotutorial instruction, as Carolyn, Mary, and I have often argued, can have significant advantages over conventional workbook or classroom instruction. Using computers to provide the instruction actually amplifies those advantages. (1) Autotutorial instruction takes the burden of supervising and correcting hours of homework off the teacher, and puts responsibility for learning where it properly belongs, on the students. Felicia, like many students, is willing to work very hard at learning correct standard English, sometimes spending as many as ten hours each week on her assignments; as her teacher, I feel freer to encourage her at this when I know that she can do it without me. And when she does her work at a computer, I can be certain that she won't skip any work, or go on without mastering something, or check her work inaccurately. (2) All autotutorial instruction gives students the feedback which transforms learning from a passive experience into an active (and therefore more effective) one; but computers provide powerfully immediate feedback. Instead of drowsing over a workbook or (do I dare say it in these pages?) a lab exercise, Lambros must stay wide awake and involved as he interacts with a computer, actually talking back and forth with it through the keyboard and screen. (3) Autotutorial instruction increases motivation by permitting students to proceed at their own pace. Sharon likes working in the morning, and comes in early to get a good start; Carl can't seem to get going until late afternoon. But in an autotutorial system, both can spend however much time they need to master their lessons. And working by themselves at a computer, neither is bound by the schedules of lab personnel or tutors.

Using computers to provide instruction has proved to have important benefits beyond those which come from other kinds of autotutorial instruction. (1) The computer program has been designed to branch according to the accuracy of students' responses; this permits adaptation of both the quantity and the kind of instruction to a learner's individual needs. Ramon makes lots of mistakes with verb agreement, so the computer will give him lots of work. Chang doesn't, so it can give less to him. And Ernestine has problems with

only a few common irregular verbs, so the computer can emphasize those for her. (2) Because the computer by its very nature is always patient and impersonal, students are frequently more receptive to its responses than they are to those of their teachers. Perla never seemed to be very willing to ask questions in class, but she's eager to have the computer tell her whether her answers are correct. And because the computer is more accurate than any human could ever be, it will never skip over any of her mistakes, or (if programmed correctly) misinterpret them. (3) The dynamic and interactive quality of the computer's presentation simply can't be attained in any other way. No print materials could ever put students through the experience of (for example) switching back and forth between singular and plural subjects to see the effect on the verb. Clarence comes to understand how the form of the verb is affected by the number of its subject by actually watching those sentence parts change. (It should be noted that it's possible to design exercises which go far beyond the simple fill-in or multiple-choice format that has been so common in previous computer-assisted instructional materials. Even the most richly contextual of our lab exercises can be adapted in some way for presentation by the computer.)

The constraints of the static printed page make it impossible for me to give any sense of the actual experience of working on the CAI lessons. But I'll be happy to send further information, including some sample runs, to anyone who's interested. In addition, I'd like to hear from others who are working on using computers to help students learn to write better. Please contact me at the following address:

Department of English  
York College  
Jamaica, NY 11451  
212/969-4077 or 864-2080

PS. Readers might be interested in knowing about a Pre-Convention Workshop scheduled for Wednesday, 16 March 1983 (the day before next year's CCCC Convention in Detroit), entitled "Computer-assisted Learning for Writing Programs: A Hands-on Demonstration of its Potential." Portions of The COMP-LAB Writing Modules will be among the programs to be demonstrated.



Michael G. Southwell  
York College/CUNY





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For further registration information,  
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SELECTING TUTORS:  
A TWO-STEP PROCESS

Many writing centers use graduate students or undergraduates as tutors. Selecting from among the applicants which ones will be effective in one-on-one tutoring is an important part of any director's job. I have found that effective selection depends on a two-step process: the recommendation of a colleague and an interview. The former guarantees that at least one professional thinks highly of the applicant; the latter, and more important step, allows me to identify in an applicant those qualities I think are essential in a tutor.

In the interview I look for a person who is, by experience, aware of the complexity of the writing process and who demonstrates a good deal of tact. The following procedure has helped me to identify these qualities.

I. Read and Comment on a Short Paper

I set up a role-playing situation: the

applicant becomes a tutor and I become a student who has come to the center. I pass over a short (250-300 word) paper and say I need help. The applicant whom I do not want working with students begins by making suggestions on how to improve the paper, focusing, generally, on mechanical matters--spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, diction: sentence-level errors that elicit a formulaic response. On the other hand, the ideal applicant begins by trying to understand the general assignment and the student's response to that assignment, asking questions that focus on the writer's intentions. I interview very few ideal applicants, alas. So I listen and watch carefully for ANY sign that the would-be-tutor is interested in what the writer wants to say. For example, a simple "I'm not sure what you're getting at here" or "What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?" or "Huh?"; or a frowning of the brow is often enough of an indication that the applicant is struggling with the writer's intention. With this opening, I try to lead the applicant to asking questions about the particular assignment that produced the paper. In short, any person who wants to help a writer improve must demonstrate some willingness to become absorbed in what the writer is trying to say.

II. The Questions

1. What have you learned from your own writing experience that you feel you could teach others?

"Writing, at its beginning stages, is very messy business" is the ideal response. Generating material and ideas about that material is often painful and almost always chaotic. A successful candidate will have recognized this from personal experience and developed some sense of how to work through this stage. ("Heuristics," "free-writing," "listing," "looping," etc., etc., can be added to the tutor's repertoire during in-service training.) Only after material and ideas about the material have been generated can they be organized and stylized effectively, punctuated and spelled correctly. An applicant who concentrates exclusively on surface matters will probably not make a good tutor. Not because these features are unimportant, but because they do not press back far enough to the beginnings of the writing process. And a person who, for the most part, is unaware of the difficulties of the preparatory stages of writing cannot help the many students who, in guilt, know that their own writing is, initially, a mess. The suc-

successful applicant may bring up a host of other matters, but unless s/he is conscious of the chaos at the beginning of the writing process, I offer no position at the center.

## 2. What are your strengths as a writer?

With this question I frankly encourage the applicant to brag while I listen for his/her pride in successfully crafting language into meaning. "I organized my ideas well;" "I'm pretty ruthless cutting unnecessary words out of my papers;" "I've never had much trouble with punctuation or grammar because I had a great teacher in high school/Freshman English." If an applicant had earlier shown an awareness of the preparatory stages of the writing process, such responses cause me no alarm. On the contrary, once any writer has discovered a worthwhile idea, paying attention to the needs of an external audience or to the internalized need "to get things right" is characteristic of a person who is conscious of the power and flexibility of language.

## 3. What are your weaknesses as a writer?

After the rush of bragging about successes, the applicant is, once again, brought back to the difficulties inherent in producing effective prose, and now on a very personal level. By this time in the interview, I must admit, I have almost decided whether the candidate is a good writer who could, with some training, help others become more effective writers. But I want the assurance that s/he is still struggling--as we all must--to produce effective prose. The successful applicant returns to the problems that arise immediately after the assignment is made: "Getting started" (or some variation of this) is what I am looking for, while almost any additional responses are acceptable. The candidate, however, who is reluctant to admit personal trouble at any stage or only at the proofreading stage becomes suspect, regardless of previous answers. I don't want anyone working at the center who has only a generalized notion of the problems a writer faces: those problems must be real and important to the candidate.

So far during the interview I have been trying to find out if the applicant is aware of the difficulties all writers experience in crafting language into meaning. In addition, the opportunity to brag and the recommendation by one of my colleagues provide me with

some assurance that the candidate has, at least to a certain extent, overcome the difficulties. The successful candidate, however, must possess another quality: tact. So I set up two "what-would-you-do" situations, both of which, in some form or other, my tutors have faced.

Situation #1 "Suppose a student came in with a paper that s/he felt has been unfairly graded. What that student is looking for, of course, is the assurance that the professor is wrong. And just to complicate matters, suppose that you read the paper (and the comments, if there are any!) and basically agree with the student's position. What would you do?"

The applicant's response is crucial, so I silently allow as much time as necessary for it to emerge fully. I listen for the candidate's ability to separate his/her personal (and apparently justified) outrage at the grader's perceived incompetence from the real concern of the center: to help students write more effectively. While working with a disgruntled student, therefore, a good tutor avoids taking the student's (or the professor's) side and concentrates on the student's future performance, helping the student either to revise the present paper or to begin work on the next. The would-be-tutor has to have sense enough to know that s/he must avoid being cast in the role of referee between professor and student.

Situation #2 "What would you do if a student brought you the draft of a paper that you strongly suspected contained plagiarized material?"

I do not want snitches in the center, so "I would alert the professor" is totally unacceptable. Rather, the successful candidate will know that the student must be alerted. The observation that most professors are impressed by students who take the time to do some library work in preparation for a paper is one effective way of doing this. In addition, a word or seven about the seriousness of academic dishonesty would be in order, though the student should be assured that the confidentiality of the tutor-tutored relationship will be kept intact.

Those candidates to whom I offer positions at our center are successful writers themselves, aware that writing is a complex and often messy business, and are tactful enough

to win the student's confidence without compromising the purpose of the center.

Peter A. Lyons  
Trinity College



Research and Instruction in Practical Writing (edited by Larry Gentry) includes five papers presented at a research/practice conference held at SWRL Educational Research and Development on October 15, 1982.

"Youth, Jobs, and Literacy" by Mahlon Puryear (Orange County Urban League)

"Negative Entropy at Work: A Theory of Practical Writing" by Ruth Mitchell (University of California at Los Angeles)

"Research in Practical Writing in Business and Industry" by Evelyn Jacob (George Mason University and Center for Applied Linguistics)

"Functional Writing in the Workplace" by Larry Mikulecky (Indiana University-Bloomington)

"Written Language: An Essential Communication Skill for the Competent Adult--A Curriculum Model by Gertrude s. Meyers (Northeastern Illinois University)

This 90-page report is available for \$5.00 (check or money order made payable to "SWRL"; California residents add applicable sales tax). Send orders to Accounting Department, SWRL Educational Research and Development, 4665 Lampson Avenue, Los Alamitos, CA 90720.



LONG BEACH HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH  
DEPARTMENT WRITING LAB

In September of 1974, long before the talk of the Basic Competency Test (B.C.T.) or Regents Competency Test (R.C.T.) remediation mandates, the Long Beach High School English Department, under the able guidance of Robert Nardella, created a writing lab. As originally conceived, this writing lab, then known as the Open Lab, was to provide concentrated

and individual work in the language arts discipline. A program of reading, writing and/or speaking was available. Lab participants were identified through teacher recommendation or volunteered to avail themselves of the services. This support service was offered to students at all grade and ability levels. Instruction was done in small groups as well as in tutorials.

As the year progressed, the focus tended to center upon students who had apparent deficiencies in language skills. No credit was given for this lab. During the first two years of operation, the lab primarily served sophomores, though not to the exclusion of 11th or 12th grade students. The lab services were offered during five periods of the day by three different language arts teachers. Honor Society student volunteers also worked in the lab on certain days. As time went on, the need to prepare and remediate students for the B.C.T. exam was considered. Priority for lab placement was given to those sophomore students who had not yet passed the Basic Competency Test. Priority placement was also offered to sophomore students in required English classes who would benefit from the additional help which the lab teachers could provide. In the 1977-78 school year, the English class teacher was also able to send a small group of students from his/her class to complete a definite assignment during a given series of meetings.

Between 1974 and the present, the need for the writing lab grew. The lab sought a permanent home. During the 1979-80 school year the lab was housed in one classroom and round work tables were brought in so that students could work in small groups. The Writing Lab, as it is presently being called, found a permanent home. A resource room next door to the English Department office, with a connecting door to the Humanities Resource Center, is the ideal setting. The room is carpeted, has 10 carrels for independent study, comfortable padded chairs, a few round tables for small group work, a moveable blackboard, locked storage units and file cabinets, and a mini-library. It is the ideal laboratory environment.

This year the lab is open seven of the eight periods each day. It is being staffed by four different teachers. While the lab students are homogeneously grouped in that they have not yet passed the R.C.T., they have a wide range of abilities. At one end

of the spectrum are students who have no recognizable language arts skills; at the other end are students who are functioning somewhat below grade level.

A three consecutive day organization, with a maximum of 15 students per class, provides time for talking, pre-writing activities, planning, outlining, writing and revising. Each student is encouraged to speak, hear, listen and write at each class meeting. Individual drill is occasionally offered for specific students when particular weaknesses are revealed. Follow-up testing on these skills is done to determine if further remediation in that skill is necessary. Folders of writing samples are maintained for each student.

On a pragmatic level, the lab provides an opportunity for the student to analyze his/her writing strengths and weaknesses. Instruction in first draft analysis and the editing process in a workshop setting encourages the student to see writing as a process. The focus of the program is on practical, skill-oriented instruction. Highly structured, specific topics are assigned by the teacher or are developed by the student and teacher during prewriting time. The audience and purpose of the assignment is specifically articulated.

In order to deal realistically with the incredible amount of papers to be graded and not to delay feedback, often only certain elements of composition or errors are corrected for a specific assignment. Writing lab teachers encourage self-evaluation as well as peer evaluation of written work. Writing assignments vary in length according to the purpose of the assignment. Students are taught to handle a variety of writing forms. In specific preparation for the R.C.T., students are given direction and experience in the letter, report and composition formats. Students are encouraged to revise, edit, improve, correct first drafts and resubmit. A grade of Pass or Fail is given based upon effort and attendance.

The lab has continued to function as a supportive service. Assignments for lab writing will often come from assignments given by teachers in subject area classes, i.e., social studies, biology, language arts.

Staffing the lab with four teachers has had positive consequences. This situation allows for cooperative teaching and the sharing of responsibilities in developing curriculum and materials, and it has provided for the greatest variety of teaching techniques.

In the affective domain, the writing lab has also had a profound effect. E. B. White

once said, "Writing is an act of faith." In order to express oneself, one must have faith in one's ideas and in one's ability to express those ideas on paper. It is in this realm that most of our students have their greatest problems. The writing lab helps the student to overcome the fear of putting thoughts on paper. It provides the support necessary for developing confidence in the writing effort. Working in the lab, students build their self-confidence through successful writing experiences structured by the teacher. The lab experience aids in the process of growth and self-discovery through offering the students the opportunity to synthesize their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the world.

The Long Beach High School English Department is quite proud of the Writing Lab. We see ourselves as a part of an evolutionary process. We have been and we are going to continue to be cognizant of the changing needs, techniques and goals. We believe our lab can serve as a model and invite our colleagues to visit and learn from our efforts.

Ivy Leibowitz  
Chairperson, English Dept.  
Long Beach High School (NY)



#### DISSERTATION ON WRITING LABS

Simpson, Jeanne, "A Rhetorical Defense of the Writing Center," dissertation, Illinois State University, December 1982.

A writing center director may be assumed to have some background and preparation in rhetoric for the purposes of teaching writing. However, the same knowledge of rhetoric may be applied to the task of defending the writing center against institutional pressures. Given this double usefulness, it is important that a director study the methods of rhetoricians and develop for herself a fully articulated theory of rhetoric from which to establish strategies for defending the writing center. The dissertation is made up of the steps just described: studying the methods of rhetoricians, defining a theory of rhetoric, and applying that theory to the defense of the writing center. In the first section, I study the methods of Aristotle, Burke, and Young, Becker, and Pike. Second, I define a theory



of rhetoric in which I place the chief source of rhetorical decisions on the audience. Then, I define my audience theory more carefully. Next, I analyze the nature of the academic, administrative audience who will be the receiver of my rhetorical efforts. Finally, using two end-of-year reports from two different writing centers (my own and the one at Illinois State), I analyze the defensive strategies employed by the directors in light of the rhetorical theory developed earlier in the dissertation.

For further information contact:

Jeanne Simpson  
Director, Writing Center  
Dept. of English  
Eastern Illinois  
University  
Charleston, ILL. 61920



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#### HELPING THE RELUCTANT STUDENT

The Writing Center at Winthrop College, a state institution of 5,000 students, is now in its seventh year of operation. Like other writing labs, it operates largely by referrals from instructors teaching writing courses. However, attendance is voluntary, and all students, not merely those in writing courses, may use the Center.

Whether students are referred or come on their own, they must contact the Center either in person or by phone to schedule an appointment. Because of the voluntary system, not all referred students follow their instructors' recommendations, even though they may desperately need help. Some don't follow through because they're too shy or self-conscious, others because they hesitate to come on their own, and still others because they're not aware that they can come without a referral. (We've discovered that even among faculty teaching writing, a few rarely refer students.) There are also those students who don't come because they have the mistaken notion that only "dummies" seek help. Then there are the procrastinators; they'll get around to making an appointment--sometime. This sometime often comes rather late in the semester, perhaps after the mid-term exam on which they've done poorly or after they've received their third D or F. Then we're swamped. Even with six faculty each assigned eight hours a week to

the Center, when the crush comes, there are not enough appointment slots to accommodate the onslaught.

The solution? The Help Session, an hour-long workshop conducted by one member of the Writing Center Staff, limited to twenty-five students and devoted to a specific aspect of writing, ranging from such elemental ones as "Subject-Verb Agreement" to more complex ones such as "Informal Fallacies" or "Incorporating Quotations, Summaries and Paraphrases into Research Papers."

While we offered Help Sessions originally to handle the crush of students around mid-semester, we've discovered they help to solve other problems also: namely, reaching the "reluctant student." We found that the student who was reluctant to schedule an individual appointment, with or without a referral, didn't mind spending an hour, usually in mid-afternoon (evening and morning Help Sessions don't seem to be very popular) in the company of other students going over material he didn't grasp in class or material not yet covered.

How did he hear about the Help Session? If he has eyes, he might have noticed the weekly announcements in vivid color and bold print on the flip charts posted inside the entrances of the Arts and Sciences classroom building or outside the Writing Center Office--both strategically located near classrooms where writing classes are taught. If he's in class and pays attention, every Monday (or Tuesday) morning he has a chance to sign up on a sheet his teacher passes around. These weekly notices the Writing Center Staff sends out to all instructors teaching writing. Though we prefer that students sign up, any student can show up at the appropriate time on the appropriate day. Although usually only about half of those who signed up show, the sheets give us some idea of how many to expect. If the number expected (that is half of those who signed) exceeds twenty-five, we line up additional staff. The largest number that ever signed up was about 250; about 100 showed up. We had four sections going simultaneously. Except for the more "popular" sessions such as "Pronouns," "Commas, Comma Splices, Semicolons, and Sentence Fragments," "Introductions, Conclusions, and Transitions," "Paragraphing," and "Thesis Statements and Outlining," which are offered several times during the semester and almost always have

their full complement of 25 students and at times require duplicate sessions, the usual number of students who show up is about a dozen--an ideal number to make the student feel comfortable while still enabling the instructor to answer individual questions and to have time to discuss the exercises students are doing in class. Sometimes we have only a handful. We've given the "Paraphrasing" Help Session to one student, on a tutorial basis.

You may well ask about the scheduling and format of the Help Session as well as the kinds of materials used. The week before classes start, the Writing Center Staff gets together and makes out the schedule, relying heavily on attendance statistics from previous semesters, class schedules (hours, days as well as dates) and syllabi, and staff members' preferences. Since we're a pretty congenial group, we have no problems. Before the semester is over, we'll each have taught at least six to eight Help Sessions, excluding backup sessions. And if a staff member's been around for a few years, she's probably taught every Help Session on the books.

As for material, we have no prescribed exercises. We try, however, to follow certain guidelines; avoid duplicating approaches and materials used in the Writing Center units and in textbooks in current use. We also try to use audio-visuals, usually transparencies, and to give the students handouts to take home. Each instructor is free to make up his own materials. When we first started, we had little choice; there was no material. Now we have materials available for just about every Help Session which any instructor may use, though he needs to check if there are enough copies of handouts to go around. Most often, we find ourselves using available material but adding or altering parts to suit our preferences or the particular group of students. Generally speaking, we often revise and change materials and methods of presentation, comparing our materials with those of others, discussing what "works" and what "doesn't work." We all tend to groan a little if we've introduced a new Help Session for which there is no material. This fall, for instance, we added three new sessions on Sentence Construction. Still, we try to keep our ear to the ground to find out what students and instructors need, and we find ourselves stimulated too by the need to find new

materials and approaches.

As for the format of a Help Session, well, armed with the materials described, we meet students in one of the rooms assigned to the Writing Center which has an overhead projector. First, we take attendance so that, at the end of the week, we can send instructors the names of their students who attended along with the original sign-up sheets. Every semester each of us has at least one student who faithfully signs her name to the sheet that is passed around in class--and never shows up at a single Help Session.

To begin the Session, we usually ask students what they've found particularly troublesome when trying to understand the subject we're discussing. Starting with their questions, we explain the particular concept. For example, we frequently talk about the differences between clauses and phrases, and main clauses and subordinate clauses, before explaining the use of commas. Students seem more at ease voicing their concerns during a Help Session than in class, perhaps because they know they won't be "graded." We then work some of the exercises as a class or as individuals, or both. At the end of the hour, we remind students that if they need additional help they can schedule individual appointments for tutorial help not only on the subject covered during the Help Session, but also on any subject they'd like to work on.

So far we've discussed what we call the "General Help Session," open to all Winthrop students, but attended primarily by students in writing courses. We also have "Special Topics" Help Sessions, requested by instructors throughout the college, dealing with a particular writing assignment for a specified course. Thus, some of us have discussed "Writing Technical Reports" for a Business Administration course, explained how to take "Essay Exams" for a Sociology course, or shown students in a Social Work class how to shape and integrate library research and field experience into one unified paper. These sessions are scheduled at the regular hour that the class usually meets, but, instead of meeting in the regular classroom, the class meets in the Writing Center. In addition to having the necessary equipment handy, we are also able to get students physically to the Writing Center. Sometimes, we pick up new tutorial appointments that



way. Since we are invited often for a return engagement, we feel we're performing a worthwhile service. At this point only about half-a-dozen faculty at Winthrop take advantage of this service. We wish there were more, for we like reaching a wide audience. Indeed, with all of our Help Sessions we're reaching many students we would not have reached before.

The other benefits of the Help Session are many. Obviously, the student who attends reaps the immediate benefit of learning, let us say, how to paraphrase--or at least gets additional help in trying to master this inscrutable process. But there are other, long-range benefits. The student who heretofore hesitated to make an individual appointment gets some help. Discovering where the facility is located and getting to know the personnel tend to make him more comfortable. Seeing other students make appointments, listen to tapes, or work on units makes him realize that he isn't the only one who needs help. Frequently, we find students hanging around at the conclusion of the Session asking more questions and at times going over to the desk and scheduling an appointment--often to work in areas other than the one covered during the Help Session. Furthermore, if a student has attended a Help Session early in the semester, he may start getting the extra help he needs in time to avoid poor grades later on.

We also end up serving those students who do not need individual tutoring but who can profit from reviewing material already covered or about to be covered in class, particularly at crisis points in the semester. For instance after the Department-wide Mid-term examination, we have several "Mid-term Review" sessions, and just before the Final exam, we offer several "Final Review" Sessions. The former is well attended by students who did poorly at mid-term, the latter by students who want to review the course material once more. (Most instructors do this in class, but often students like to get an additional in-depth review.)

Acually most of our Help Sessions are geared to material being taught at certain points in the semester. For example, we schedule "Essay Exams" shortly after the first essay exams have been given. We discovered, to everyone's chagrin, that students need to "do poorly" before they'll

attend this type of Help Session. Scheduling it before that time usually drew almost no students.

Students, however, are not the only ones who benefit from Help Sessions. The Writing Center Director is able to maximize his staff's time. A staff member can handle two to three students per hour on a tutorial basis in the Center; in a Help Session, he can handle up to twenty-five. Quite a saving--one that appeals to administrators who must now deal with austerity measures. The staff member benefits because he is constantly reviewing and rethinking ways of presenting materials. Being stimulated, he often finds there's a carryover to his regular class.

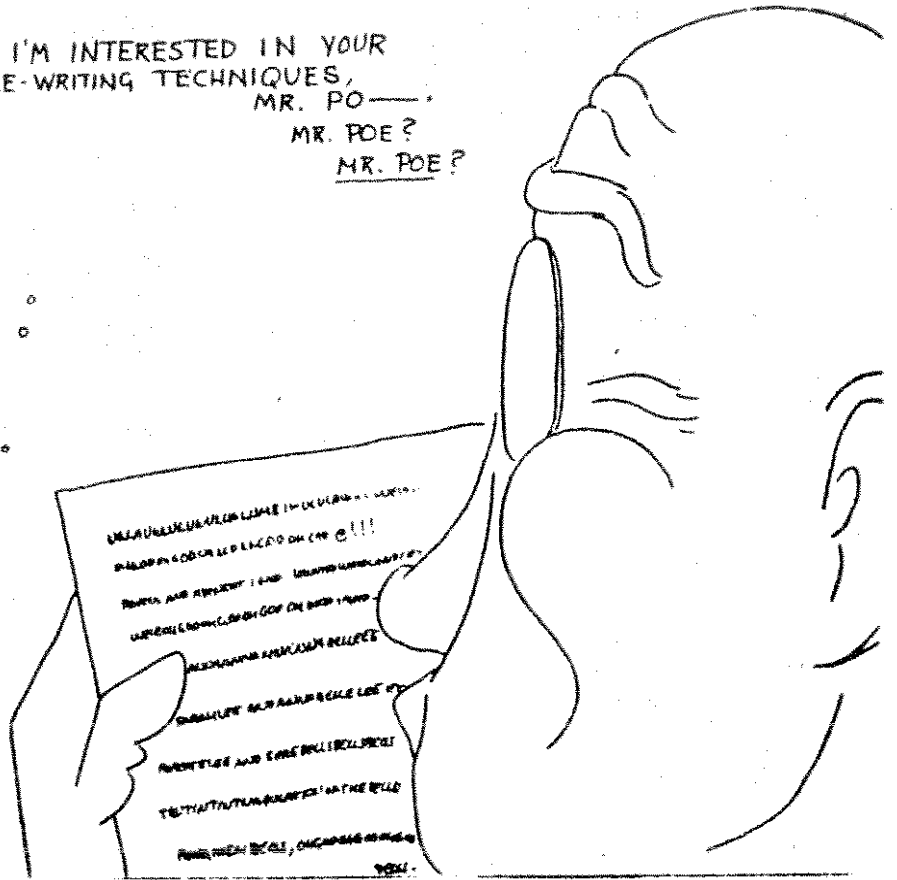
You may say, "That's all very well for you at Winthrop. You have a professional staff and you have students who attend voluntarily. We have peer tutoring and required attendance." If your students are required to attend, you obviously don't have the recruitment problem, but you may still have more students than you can handle. But what happens if you don't have a professional staff? Could you "draft" some of your departmental colleagues or ask them to volunteer an hour or two a semester to a worthy cause? If you have peer tutors, could you or some other colleague develop materials and train these student tutors? If you're lucky enough to have a professional staff, but they're overloaded, can you give them released time from regular duty to conduct a Help Session? That's the way we handle it at Winthrop. Whenever a staff member conducts a session, he receives an hour of released time when the Center is least busy--say, right before holidays. If he spends additional time preparing himself or developing materials, he receives additional time off.

Over the years we've toyed with the idea of calling our workshops something other than Help Sessions, but we've never come up with a more appropriate name because they HELP students, administrators, and staff, and they HELP us solve, at least in part, the problem of recruiting the reluctant student.

Eva B. Mills  
Winthrop College  
and  
Stella Nesanovich  
McNeese State University

GREAT MOMENTS  
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