

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Member of the NWCA:NCTE Assembly
Information Exchange Agreement

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One of the stated purposes of the Writing Lab Newsletter--to provide a means for exchanging ideas among our group--is particularly evident in this month's issue. Included in the following pages are two responses to one new lab director's comment about the demands of being a lab director and some answers to the question about what we do to help dyslexic and other learning disabled students.

This kind of conversation is useful for the rest of us to overhear, and more comments, questions, and responses are enthusiastically invited, along with your articles, announcements, reviews, names of new members, and \$5/year donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University) sent to me:

Muriel Harris, editor
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JOB OPPORTUNITY

Southern Oregon State College, Department of English, Ashland OR 97520. James L. Dean, Department Chair

Full-time position, Assistant Professor of English, beginning Sept. 15, 1985. One year renewable contract. Candidates should have training in a writing laboratory. The position involves directing the Department's Writing Center, supervising and training tutors, and teaching and advising foreign students. Ph D preferred, with publication and evidence of teaching experience. Salary ranges: MA/ABD, \$18,500-20,500; Ph D, \$20,000-23,000. Deadline for applications, January 15, 1985. Send letter of inquiry and vita. SOSOC is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer.

1984 WRITING LAB DIRECTORY

The 1984 Writing Lab Directory is a compilation of two-page questionnaires completed by writing lab directors. The questionnaire answers describe each lab's instructional staff, student population, types of instruction and materials, special programs, use of computers, and facilities.

Copies are obtainable for \$13.50 each, including postage. Prepaid orders only. Please make all checks payable to Purdue University and send them to Muriel Harris, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907.

FROM WRITING CENTER TO CENTER FOR WRITING:
A HEURISTIC FOR DEVELOPMENT

As writing centers proliferate at colleges and universities across the country, a model has become visible. The model shows the writing center as an instructional unit that relies predominantly on one-to-one tutoring for students who mostly come from first year writing courses. Generally these centers perform well; students value them, and administrators praise them. Once the writing center becomes an established part of the available writing instruction, most centers begin to consider how they may be of more help to the students and the institution. At this point however they no longer have a model to follow because the centers that have expanded their services, and this is but a portion, have done so in ways that are unique to their individual institutions. It is the purpose of this paper to supply not a model of what an expanded writing center should look like but rather a model heuristic that can be used to explore the unique possibilities for expansion at each institution. Writing centers, once established, must grow to

meet the writing needs of the students, the institution, even the community at large. A writing center must become a Center for Writing.

A HEURISTIC FOR DEVELOPMENT

The evolution of writing centers to Centers for Writing begins when the center's staff considers the possibilities for development that exist in four areas: the clients that the center does now and could in the future serve; the role(s) these clients might play when they come to the center; the service(s) provided to the clients in one of these specific roles; and the location where the service will be provided. Client. Client's Role. Service. Location. These are the four dimensions to examine as the Center for Writing begins to develop. Each dimension can be divided into a number of possibilities, and ways to expand the center can be discovered by combining one or more of the possibilities from each dimension. Table 1 outlines possibilities in each of these four dimensions and can act as a heuristic useful to those writing center staff who begin to consider expanded uses for their services. Reading across Table 1, combining one or more items from each column, will yield many ways to develop writing centers. Each institution must then choose the combinations most appropriate to its specific situation. The rest of this article will discuss many of these combinations detailing the possibilities for development of Centers for Writing.

THE POSSIBILITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

New Student Roles, Services and Locations

The most frequent present user of writing centers is the student who comes to the center as a writer in need of help with a piece of writing. He/she is tutored in the center and leaves with the piece improved or with the knowledge of how to improve it. Even this most basic situation allows for much variation. Instead of the student coming to the center, he/she could have been tutored directly in class during a Writing Workshop class period in either an English composition class or a Content area class if that was where the piece of writing originated. Instructors could request that a tutor(s) visit their class on a certain day and work with their students' writing assignments. If the class is an English composition class, the writing

workshop could be an intensive period of both tutor(s) and instructor conferencing with students, greatly increasing the number of conferences possible during a given class hour and, thereby, overcoming one of the principal problems of during-class writing conferences, namely, the frequency with which each student has a chance to conference about a draft. If the class is a content area class, the instructor and tutor(s) could again conference with students, the tutor focusing on general writing problems, the instructor on those specific to the given discipline. Tutors working in content area classes would have the additional benefit of learning first-hand the requirements of writing in a variety of disciplines making them more effective tutors when back at the Center for Writing. Using tutors in classes across the disciplines has still another advantage for institutions with writing-across-the-curriculum programs underway or in the wings. Knowing that they could call on the services of trained writing tutors from the Center for Writing should increase content area instructors' willingness to stress writing skills and their confidence that this emphasis will indeed lead to increased quality in their students' writing.

If writing tutors could work in both English Composition and content area classes, they could also work at other on-campus locations. These locations should be the ones that students frequent especially when working on writing assignments. A Center for Writing satellite at the student union open during the afternoon or at the library or a dormitory during the evening would place the tutoring services right where the students are, and this increased availability should, hopefully, increase the frequency with which the students choose to work with a tutor.

Students may indeed choose to work with a tutor because of their own felt need, but students can also be referred by an instructor. In either of these cases they can work with a tutor once about a single piece of writing or several/many times about a single piece or several pieces. These meetings can be on a drop-in basis, or they can be scheduled in advance. Once the student agrees to scheduled meetings, the question of academic credit becomes germane. A one-hour-per-week-for-one-credit tutorial might be seen as an available supplement to the English

Composition program or as an intensive, continuing supplement available to content-area instructors in a writing-across-the-curriculum program. Again, the availability of support from the Center for Writing should increase content area instructor's willingness to participate in writing-across-the-curriculum and their confidence that the time spent on writing in their course will yield improved student papers.

All of the above possibilities assume the student plays the client role of writer. Yet many writing centers are staffed by peer-tutors, so here the student plays the role of tutor. He/she is usually trained in a short course and then required to work a certain number of hours per week in the center. However, writing centers can offer students more than just these two roles of writer or tutor. Business administration students might be asked to serve as administrative interns as part of the requirements in their Business course. They could work with the director of the center taking charge of budget, advertising, scheduling or any other of the many administrative requirements of a smoothly running center. Also students in statistics might act as research interns assisting in monitoring the center's operation or in answering the many questions that operating generates. They could collect data on the clients and the services rendered for operation profiles. Or they could assist instructors in measuring the type and amount of growth in writing skills of the students who use the center versus those who do not. Their statistical expertise would make them a resource for any staff person who had questions that needed answers. Finally, student teachers or education majors could join the center as teaching interns. They would also seem to be the ideal candidates to be trained as tutors. The center could offer them the opportunity for real teaching but on a small scale, a place to develop or hone skills for teaching writing and a place to test their tolerance for the frustrations involved in all instruction.

Other New Clients

After students, the next group of clients to consider would be faculty, but not just on-campus faculty. Faculty at nearby two and four-year colleges and high schools might be considered clients. Obviously, they might play the role of

writer and discuss a piece of their writing with a tutor. They might also be interested in being trained as a tutor themselves either because they are interested in the problems of student writers or because they see tutoring as a way to expand their own knowledge about and skill with writing. Or perhaps faculty from other institutions who might be interested in starting their own writing center could serve as both tutor and administrative intern to get a more complete picture of the center's operation. The writing center's staff could then act as a consultant to the other institution and assist them in setting up the most appropriate type of service(s) at their new center. In fact, the writing center staff could act as consultant to any organization wishing to improve the quality of their writing instruction. The center's staff and director, as experienced professionals in the field of composition, could share their insights about how to improve student writing skills with English departments, writing centers or writing-across-the-curriculum programs at other schools or colleges. The Center for Writing with its concentration of expertise in teaching writing could be tapped as a source of in-service training for faculty both on and off campus.

The center might also offer content-area faculty involved in writing-across-the-curriculum an in-service training workshop or mini-course in writing-as-a-way-of-learning giving them both know-how and ongoing support to begin or continue their work with student writers in their courses. This workshop or mini-course could also be open to content area faculty from other institutions. Additionally, the writing center could invite faculty to play the role of researcher using the center, its resources/facilities, and/or the data that it generates, usually voluminously, as the focus for faculty research or scholarly pursuits. A faculty member teamed with a research intern would seem a likely combination to begin to study not only those questions directly related to writing instruction at the center but also those questions central to composition theory and pedagogy. Again, faculty from other institutions could be invited to be research associates. These continual opportunities for inter-institution cooperation could make the Center for Writing the hub for a regional Writing Project similar to those

already underway in many areas of the country. The presence of experienced administrators, informed instructors and active researchers would seem like a natural sprouting medium for such large scale endeavors.

Administrators and staff are another neglected source of new clients. Again obviously, they could come to the center as a writer seeking help with an individual piece or with their writing skills in general. They might be interested in a quick tutoring session on a specific piece, or they might find a semester length course on writing improvement for professionals appealing. But administrators and staff can play more roles than just that of writer. They might be interested in being trained as a tutor. This might be particularly attractive to administrators or staff who have had teaching experience and might wish for a return to "the classroom" if only for a few hours per week. Tutoring would not only help them understand the nature of student writing problems, but also it would give them personal experience with just how difficult it is to help someone improve his writing. Administrators who had this experience would seem much more likely to commit institutional resources to improving writing instruction. Additionally, administrators and staff might participate in the in-service workshop or mini-course for faculty involved in writing-across-the-curriculum in order to get a clearer picture of just what this campus program is all about. And, finally, administrators and staff might act as a consultant to the center so that their own expertise could be directly incorporated into the center's operation. Librarians, systems analysts, counselors, grant writers and many others would be likely candidates for direct ties to the Center for Writing. Librarians could be used to catalogue and control instructional materials. This becomes especially important if the Center for Writing acts as a college-wide resource for the latest instructional materials and the most significant books and journals on composition theory, research and pedagogy. Systems analysts could evaluate, redesign and monitor the operational organization of the center, which, of course becomes more complex with development. Since the students who most frequently use the services of the writing center have more academic and personal problems than the student population as a whole, counselors

could be assigned directly to the writing center to work with referrals from the instructional staff. And, finally, grant writers could search for public and private funds to underwrite the development and expanded services of the center.

A final source of clients would be those not directly associated with the institution or education in general, namely, the community at large. Certainly, the community could be invited to seek help with pieces of writing or their writing skills in general. Members of the community could also be invited to be tutors. Retired teachers might be particularly interested in trying their hand at tutoring a few hours per week. The center might also be the source for writing consultants for local business pre-service or in-service training programs. Then again, members of local professions might be invited to act as writing consultants for seniors or graduate students about to enter those professions. They could give workshops or mini-courses on campus or at their institutions to prepare future practitioners for the types of writing done on the job.

THE CENTER FOR WRITING

Whoever the clients, whatever their role, the services they receive or the location, the new Center for Writing is an instructional service meeting the writing needs of the institution and community. The center itself has satellites in classes, at other campus locations and even off campus. The students not only work on their writing or tutor their peers, but now they intern as administrators, researchers, or student teachers, in many cases receiving academic credit. Faculty from both the institution and other colleges and high schools can work on pieces of their own writing, can act as tutors, can participate in in-service training, or can pursue their own scholarly research focused on the center. Faculty from other institutions can in addition study the center itself in order to begin their own Center for Writing. Administrators and staff can improve their own writing skills, tutor, or supply their specific expertise to the center. And the community at large can work on their writing skills, tutor, or participate in or conduct pre-service or in-service training to improve writing on the job. Whoever, whatever, the possibilities for development of writing centers are only

bounded by the writing needs of the institution and the community. These needs are many, varied and complex, requiring those who would address them to utilize resources that are just as many, varied and complex. Writing centers must, therefore, draw on students, faculty, administrators and community. Or, to put it another way, writing centers that would meet writing needs must become Centers for Writing.

Donald A. McAndrew
Indiana University
of Pennsylvania

A READER ASKS . . .

Our writing center publishes a newsletter about our activities and concerns twice each semester and distributes it to faculty, administrators, and students as part of our publicity for our program. I would like to get copies of back issues of any newsletters that other centers publish, and I will send copies of our newsletter to anyone who sends us theirs. Please mail material to me at the Writing/Reading Center, Southeastern Massachusetts University, North Dartmouth, MA 02747.

Susan Glassman
Southeastern Mass. Univ.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

7th National Conference on
College Learning Assistance Centers

--May 16-18, 1985--

sponsored by
The Office of Special Academic Services
Long Island University
Brooklyn Campus
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Proposals should be practical in nature, about 200-250 words in length, and include topics such as: Computer-Assisted Instruction, Program Evaluation, Critical Thinking Skills, Basic Skills, English as a Second Language, and Materials Development. Workshops should be planned for 75-minute sessions. Deadline: January 15, 1985. For additional information, please contact: Elaine Caputo, Conference Chairperson (718 403-1020).

A READER RESPONDS . . .

In response to the first paragraph of the Nov. '84 Writing Lab Newsletter: Yes, my job is very demanding. I receive 3.5 credit hours (teaching load) for coordinating the functions of our Writing Center. For this, I am to spend 8-10 hours a week in the Center. Unfortunately, the Center is open 20 hours a week, and it really needs at least a half-time faculty person to direct it properly. Lack of funds or the availability of such a position will prevent this from happening, however, in the near future. As a result, I will probably leave the position shortly. After one year, I am burnt out trying to do so much in so little time for so little compensation.

Kay Benton
Northern Virginia
Community College

A READER RESPONDS . . .

SO DEMANDING A JOB

"Do other writing center directors find their jobs so demanding?" It is just as well that the questioner can't hear the reply, since the shout of "yes!" would be deafening. Yes, we all serve as writing teachers, counselors, interior decorators, computer programmers, coffee go-fers, filing clerks, authors, attorneys, and so on. Obviously, the job requires incredible organizational skills as well as good teaching skills. But part of the problem is not just the nature of the job. Some specific professional issues caused what sounds a lot like a cry for help.

Too often, writing center directorships are academic orphans, poorly defined in terms of status, unreliably funded, shakily supported. The more we hear of directors who are overburdened and underpaid, the clearer it becomes that we need the strength of a professional organization behind us. We need the strength of numbers stating that writing center directors should have faculty status with the provisions for retention, tenure, and promotion that go with faculty status. We need to argue for released time and for clerical help so that we can get the job done at all. We need to push for consistent support, financial and moral.

In fact, I have begun to think like a radical on this subject, even though, from what I hear from other directors, I have an enviable situation. I am clearly defined as a faculty member, with access to the privileges of faculty (as well as the burdens, of course). I have strong administrative support, and, recently, some money has begun to trickle my way. But, like most directors, I "boot-strapped" this center into existence. Unfortunately, I set a precedent, and now, whenever my university hears a proposal for a learning center, the response is, "Fine, do it, but don't ask for any money; boot-strap it in like the writing center." I have become an expert at saving money, at cutting corners. But I wonder sometimes if I have really helped myself or the university by being so consistently thrifty. The trouble with being a miracle-worker is that you keep having to do more miracles. Worse, sometimes you have to rob Peter, pay Paul, and pretend that it was a miracle. Before we agree to be thrifty beyond the normal demands of the times, we need to consider the long-term effect on our students.

One particular technique of thriftiness I am hearing more and more about raises serious concerns for the whole writing center movement. Apparently a trend has begun to consolidate various specialized tutorial centers into single so-called learning centers. The administrative, economic advantages of such a move are obvious. However, as professionals committed to the best teaching of writing, we need to consider the ramifications of such a move. First, the director of such a consolidated center will once more enter that never-never land of poorly defined status. How can someone who supervises math tutoring, writing tutoring, and reading tutoring be a faculty member of any one department? What sort of skills could such a director contribute? I couldn't teach math if I had to. And I question the capability of the best math teacher around to teach writing. Clearly, either of us might be skilled at administration or at tutor-training. But subject-specific expertise is still the backbone of any learning center, and we must object strenuously to any attempt to dilute that expertise for a reason that cannot be classified as educational but only expedient.

Such professional problems as these distract directors from the fundamental task of teaching. The new director who wrote to the

Writing Lab Newsletter had her finger on the main issue, all right, since "the ideal format for teaching writing" (amen!) gets lost in the shuffle. We need to emphasize at every turn that a directorship involves teaching first and administration second or even third. There is no more important principle to guide a writing center than that.

While each of us has to fight these battles separately, we need to continue to work as well to present an organized, professional group to the world, to suggest that writing center directors are working together as well as separately, and to provide support not only in the form of "you are not alone in your struggles" responses to calls for help but also in the form of statements on issues that affect us all. Join a writing centers association, regional and/or national, and make your opinions count. Instead of simply responding to demands, make some.

Jeanne Simpson
Eastern Illinois
University

Microcomputers and Teaching English as a Second Language, by Gerard M. Dalgish, is a monograph published by the Office of Academic Affairs' Instructional Resource Center of CUNY. The monograph examines the shortcomings found in present ESL software, proposes some guidelines for improving it, and reviews some projects at CUNY to develop ESL instruction for microcomputers. Copies of the monograph are obtainable from Marie Jean Lederman, Instructional Resource Center - CUNY, 535 E. 80th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021.

DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING WORKSHOP

On Friday, April 12, 1985, the Writing Center of Old Dominion University will host its 5th Annual Developmental Writing Workshop. The goal of the workshop is to share ideas on how to better educate the basic writing student. Educators from the post-secondary and secondary levels of instruction are invited to attend the day-long workshop which will address issues ranging from computer instruction to diagnosing the learning disabled. If you are interested in attending, want to submit a proposal for a presentation, or desire more information on the workshop, write or call Steve Fletcher, Coordinator of the Developmental Writing Workshop, Writing Center, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia 23508. (Telephone: 804-440-4112)

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When we opened the Academic Resource Center at Davis and Elkins College, we were hoping to offer tutorial assistance in all subjects at the times the students needed help. And we were hoping to do this without creating the atmosphere of defeat which sometimes haunts learning centers. We wanted to create a center where students could receive assistance without feelings of inadequacy.

Offering assistance at a diversity of times was no problem. Our Center is staffed sixty hours a week by English and math tutors. Students needing help in other subjects can schedule appointments with tutors who specialize in more limited areas. Creating a good atmosphere took a little more planning. By borrowing a few ideas and by creating some new options, however, we seem to have avoided the pitfalls associated with a "place for dummies." Words such as "tutorials," "learning," and "laboratory" have been avoided. By referring to ourselves as the Academic Resource Center we hoped to show ourselves as a well of information to be tapped rather than as a room of impersonal exercises and pontificating tutors.

We encourage our tutors to use our tutors. Thus, a student will come in for math help and discover the math tutor being tutored in English. This delivers the message that even a student who is excellent in one subject may need help in another. By receiving assistance the tutors also learn how to be facilitative, responding to the students' needs and questions in personal ways.

We have also made great use of some Apple IIe computers with word processors by making them available to everyone. The computers have given us a steady stream of users in and out of the Center. When struggling freshmen walk by our door, they see seniors, "A" students, reporters from the student newspaper, and professors using our facilities; we have a clientele that defies categorization.

The computers are also being used for required programmed learning. French tutorial discs are available. Nursing students have access to special medical-math

discs. Beginning in January students in technical writing courses will be required to use tutorial discs to learn word processing and then do their papers on the Apples.

A study lounge is operated adjacent to the Center. Furnished with cast-off couches, rugs, and tables, the lounge is open the same evening hours as the Center. Warm coffee is available, and help is just down the hall.

Results have been gratifying. We have served over twenty percent of the student body this fall. Over eighty-eight percent of the students who have used the Center have been walk-ins. Most of the other twelve percent were recommended to our service; virtually no one has been required to use the Center. We feel this indicates we have been accepted by students who see us as a natural resource like the library, and not as the plague of a remedial center.

Kevin Davis
Davis and Elkins College



A READER RESPONDS . . .

UNDERSTANDING THE DYSLEXIC WRITER

In response to George Gleason's query, "How do others deal with such special people" (Writing Lab Newsletter, November, 1984), I'd like to share experiences I've had in tutoring dyslexic students at Syracuse University. These are only observations: I do not claim to be an authority. But because our jobs require that we teach learning disabled students, often without the benefit of formal instruction, I pass on these observations in hopes that others in turn will share theirs so that we may educate ourselves about this controversial learning handicap.

Unlike Gleason's students at Southwest Missouri State University, students here at Syracuse University seldom appear either heralding their dyslexia or using it as a defense. The English Department requires that the student declaring to have dyslexia be tested by experts in our Academic Support Center and produce an affidavit to verify his claim. It is only after the student

produces this paper to his classroom instructor and to his tutor that he is "taken seriously." He can then take advantage of the many special academic provisions available to him in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:

- proofreaders to correct spelling errors
- scribes to transcribe information from tapes
- readers to tape printed material
- tutors trained to help dyslexics improve their writing.

In addition, the classroom instructor is obliged to provide the option to type papers and to give the student extra time to complete in-class essays.

On the surface, this procedure seems fair and straight-forward: the student presents his papers verifying his disability, and we accommodate him. But certain attitudes some dyslexic students hold confound the procedure. Two of my students explained that they don't want the special privileges afforded them because they didn't want to be treated differently than their peers. Another student explained that his freshman year in college was the first time since kindergarten (where he was tracked initially as "learning disabled") that he could be regarded as an academic equal--to be in the same track as his peers.

But the situation is such that we deal with dyslexics of variable severity, with or without papers. And we are expected, as lay persons without expertise, to help dyslexic students work with their handicap and become respectable writers. Without the necessary training, we often rely too heavily on spelling errors in students' essays, to the neglect of other indicators in the essays reflecting disturbances in the ability to read.

In simplest terms, dyslexia is a condition where there is a short in the nerve connecting one eye to its home connecting point in the brain. This problem accounts for the student's difficulty writing phonetically and choosing the right symbol to represent the sound. It is just as conceivable that the student would transpose letters and not recognize the error.

I've examined numerous papers from

several "paper carrying" dyslexic writers in an attempt to learn more about the disability. The essays I've examined share these similarities:

- the writing is often in pencil
- the right margins are compressed or jagged
- two words may be conflated into one
- letters may be transposed
- verb endings may be missing (not accounted for by the student's dialect)
- homonyms may be misspelled

There were also common features reflected in the handwriting: incongruent letter sizes, uneven spacing between letters and words, numerous erasures. Other common traits may surface during conferencing. A student's verbal skills will often be more sophisticated than his written skills. It may be that errors in the student's original essay may be corrected in the rewrite, but there may still be transposed letters or yet a different misspelling, perhaps as a result of imperfect transference from a dictionary.

It seems that we do not know how to think about dyslexia because we don't know enough about it. Because we do not have the skills to correctly diagnose dyslexia, we can only surmise that the severity of spelling and semantic errors may be attributed to a physiological problem. There are many writing instructors like Gleason who are skeptical of self-proclaiming dyslexics. Many other instructors treat these students flippantly and insensitively because dyslexia has recently become a buzzword, and so many students use it as an excuse.

Our insensitivity towards dyslexic students is the result of being uninformed. Unfortunately, we sometimes express our attitudes too readily before examining pertinent information and without first considering what would be best for the student. One student recently came to my office for a tutoring appointment. It was obvious that he was very upset. I invited him to sit down, when, after a few seconds, he blurted out, "My teacher told me to come here and be tested for dyslexia. He thinks I have dyslexia. What is it? What does it mean?" After fifteen minutes of trying to calm this student down, I asked him why he came to me--a tutor--to be tested for dyslexia. He handed me an essay which he had done in class, where, at the top,

written in bold red ink, was the message, "Rich, have you been tested for dyslexia? Some of your spellings seem to hint at it. Go sign up in room 19 for a tutor and get tested." We cannot fault the instructor's concern or his awareness of the possibility of dyslexia as the cause for misspellings. But if we are to recognize and acknowledge dyslexia for what it is--a severe and untreatable physiological disability--then it is imperative that we be more sensitive to our students and to the ways we think and talk about this handicap.

The unalterable nature of dyslexia was evidenced when I asked a confirmed dyslexic to sound out the word "auditorium" to help him spell it correctly.

John: "Let's see. Auditorium. Well, the first part sounds like 'a-u-d-'." (John then wrote 'a-d-'.)

Me: "John, you wrote 'a-d'. That sounds like 'add', not 'aud'."

John: "Oh. . .yeah. . . .I meant to write 'a-u-d'. Now the second part sounds like 'a-u-d-i-t'." (John then wrote 'a-u-d-t-i'.)

Similarly, in another session, this same student recognized that he should have written "their" instead of "there". He wrote "thier" in his correction. It was not until after I pointed out the error that the student realized that it was wrong. Even when given all the time in the world to proofread, some dyslexics still may be unable to recognize certain errors.

Though we are not experts, we can employ simple strategies to give the dyslexic the best possible chance to succeed:

1. We can assess whether the student's verbal skills are more advanced than what is reflected in his writing.
2. We can cater to alternative learning styles. Dyslexics often compensate by relying on other cognitive skills such as memory. One student was able to cite rules governing to/too, its/it's word pair constructions as if quoting from a textbook, but could not recognize errors in his own essay.
3. We can give extra instruction in

proofreading, but we must realize that many errors may still remain.

4. We can allow the student to type or use a word processor to write essays. The visual illusion of a CRT (white letters against a green background) or typing (black letters against a white background) helps the student's visual depth perception. It may assist him in determining margins, paragraph size, sentence length, and perhaps, proofreading.
5. We can select errors individually, but in context of the essay when conferencing. Students can often recognize a single mistake, but they are unable to recognize it in a sentence.
6. We can stress the importance of taking advantage of special academic services; the student must learn to adapt to and work with his disability in writing situations he will face throughout his life.

Again, these are only observations. As Gleason affirms, the experts know how to deal with dyslexics. The important thing is that we encourage communication between experts, tutors, teachers, and students, and that we educate ourselves so that we can best serve the student's learning process. But what is more important is that we examine those attitudes and ignorances that lead us to form preconceptions about dyslexics and administer unfounded diagnostic tests and false remedies. We must be open-minded towards learning how to think about dyslexia until more is known about it.

Jacqueline Lauby
Syracuse University

A READER RESPONDS . . .

LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS
AT THE WRITING CENTER

Many WLN readers will have noted the coincidental publication of George Gleason's request for help with dyslexic students (Nov. 1984, 6-7) and The New York Times' extended consideration of learning disabilities in its Fall Survey on Education (Nov. 11, 1984). The Times reports that "ninety-five percent of the colleges in this country provide some type of facilities for

L.D. students," adding that in many cases these facilities consist of no more than a basic tutorial program (Sec. 12,56,58). In the face of the growing assertiveness of learning disabled (L.D.) students and of the competition for students, the extent of such services is a question that colleges must soon decide. In the meantime, writing centers confront the immediate needs of these students. As Mr. Gleason's inquiry suggests, sharing research and practice can help us develop useful programs.

At Clark University the number of L.D. students has almost tripled since 1981 when we began keeping records on them. In September 1984 we admitted 28 L.D. students in a class of 550. (The figures are not precise since all L.D. students do not identify themselves.) In the Writing Center, which I direct, the time spent on L.D. students has been increasing dramatically. In the first 10 weeks of this semester we have devoted 92 half hour sessions to L.D. students, an increase of about 50 percent over last year. Before describing the services the Center provides these students, I want to mention that they also receive assistance from a part-time coordinator for L.D. students, Dr. Renee Goldberg, of the Academic Services Center, which is separate from the Writing Center. Dr. Goldberg, a specialist on learning disabilities, provides testing, counseling, and some tutoring services for L.D. students. She also helps them to order recorded books and to make arrangements with the faculty for additional time for writing papers and for taking examinations. Coordinating her efforts with the Writing Center, Dr. Goldberg helps train the graduate students who tutor there.

Dr. Goldberg also coordinates the Committee of Concerned L.D. Students. The formation of this group by the students themselves suggests their growing willingness to make their disabilities public and their increasing assertiveness about their needs. Early in November ten of these students met with Dr. Goldberg and with the Writing Center staff to discuss how we could improve our services. After years of coping with school services, many of these students are knowledgeable and articulate about their needs. Their suggestions were useful to the staff--and to one another.

The meeting helped us to deal with a matter of Writing Center policy that had been creating problems between the staff and

the L.D. students. Our overall policy is to make students as active as possible in the tutoring sessions. We do this both as a matter of educational theory and as a way of assuring that the students' writing is their own. (Since the Clark faculty is almost universally willing to have students receive help on papers before submitting them, we must be able to guarantee that those papers are written by the students, not by the tutors.) The tutors' training stresses that they question students to elicit revisions rather than to suggest words or phrases and that they ask the students themselves to make any revisions. (To avoid temptation I urge the tutors not even to hold a pencil while tutoring.)

These methods aroused anxiety, frustration, and anger in many L.D. students. Their complaints that we weren't helping them were partially correct. As we shared with them our fears of doing too much and learned from them and from Dr. Goldberg more about their capabilities, we discovered that we could properly do more for them than for the other students we serve. Many L.D. students need extra prompting to remember a word or to verbalize an idea; if they write slowly or illegibly, they may need a transcriber. Since their anxiety level is often extremely high, they need tutoring methods that create calmness and confidence. Our goal is still to make L.D. students independent of us, but we have learned to pursue that goal more slowly.

As a result of this meeting we were also reminded that we must help students become actively involved in shaping the direction and methods of their tutorials. Thus, at the end of a session we might ask the student if she has gotten the help she wanted or if she thinks we should try a different approach next time.

Learning disabled students come to us with a wide range of problems, the most common of which are editing, organizing, reading, and study skills. Among the editing problems, spelling, as Mr. Gleason finds too, is common. Many students are simply not able to identify misspellings, although they can correct them with a dictionary once we point them out. For some, such methods as slowing down and reading aloud help, but for many, improvement is laborious, even glacial. With the development of computerized spelling programs, spending hours on spelling hardly seems worth the effort. Most of these

students have more serious problems conceptualizing and organizing ideas and already devote at least twice as much time to their studies as other students. Many of our L.D. students have discovered the particular value of word processing programs, and several have their own computers. For those who do not, we are making some pc's available and training them to use word processing programs. We plan to continue this very promising work.

Most students do not come to us initially for help with editing. As I have suggested, they have more pressing problems of developing and organizing ideas. To develop ideas we work as we do with other students, clarifying the assignment and discussing and drawing out their ideas; however, with L.D. students we now take the further step of jotting down key words and phrases if they need such help.

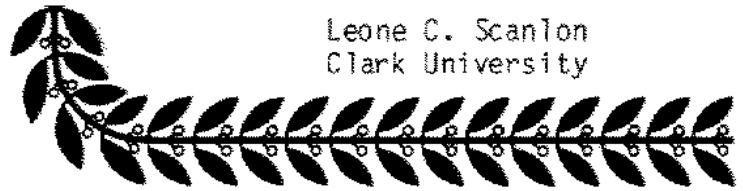
While some 25% percent of all students who come to the Writing Center want assistance with organizing, L.D. students have particularly acute difficulties with it. An L.D. student may arrive with notes scattered about on many scraps of paper. Tutors face the difficult task of helping the student to classify the ideas and to arrange them in an appropriate order, using lists, outlines, or flow charts--whatever method the student finds most helpful. When the student returns with a draft, we may use a post-draft outline to analyze and revise the organization. Here too we anticipate that the word processor will be especially useful to L.D. students.

In helping with reading problems we may need to work on deciphering an assignment or on showing the student some study skills methods such as SQ3R for reading a text. If a student has not been able to obtain recordings of some of his assignments, we may act as readers, perhaps combining the actual reading with discussion to assist the comprehension.

The Writing Center offers study skills workshops on such matters as note-taking or writing essay examinations. In addition we provide individual help, which is especially appropriate for L.D. students. We may assist a student to arrange her schedule or to develop methods for reviewing course materials.

While we use many of the same methods with L.D. students as we use with others, we

have found that we have to do so with special patience and creativity. We have also had to learn more about the nature of these disabilities and about the needs of the students. The advice of the L.D. students and of a specialist in learning disabilities has been essential. Our plans for improving our services to L.D. students include furthering this cooperation and exploring computer applications.



Leone C. Scanlon
Clark University

THE H.O.T. T.U.B. METHOD:
HOW OTHER TUTORS TEACH
US BETTER

The H.O.T. T.U.B. Method originally grew out of our awareness that good tutoring depends not only on what is said, but also on how it is said.

Our first efforts to deal with this concept were fairly simple. We asked our tutors to bring a piece of writing-in-progress to a staff meeting, and told them to tutor each other for fifteen minutes. The room filled with groans. Most of them were reluctant, some even defensive. But when the tutoring sessions were over, they found the discussions that followed were rich enough to outweigh the discomforts of being tutored.

Comments like "I really liked how you told me what was good about it" and "Just the way you sat showed me you were comfortable and interested" told the tutors what they'd done right. For many, such information came as a pleasant surprise--they'd had no idea of what they were doing well. Since no one was willing to criticize a fellow tutor unkindly, few negative comments were voiced. As the meeting progressed, however, we realized that negative responses were neither necessary nor desirable: those tutors who didn't hear comments like "She really seemed relaxed" correctly interpreted that they hadn't been helpful. Nobody needed to say it aloud; the silence was powerful.

We emerged from this staff meeting with the conviction that tutors tutoring each other should somehow become an important

part of our training program. A crucial aspect would clearly be the discussions that followed the tutoring sessions, so our next step was to design a set of questions that elicited either positive responses, or no response--avoiding unkind and unproductive negative comments. After much thought and many revisions, we produced the following:

1. How did your tutor put you at ease during your tutoring session?
2. Which part of her discussion with you was most helpful for your writing project?
3. How could you tell that your tutor was comfortable and relaxed during the session?
4. How did she help you realize that an assessment of your writing was not an assessment of your own value?
5. Which part of the tutoring session gave you a more positive feeling about being tutored than you might originally have had?

With minor changes, these questions became the starting point for discussions. One change was made when we realized that the tutors' unanimous response to question 4 was "It never even occurred to me that she'd do that!" We finally substituted "your opinions" for "your own values." All of the tutors' indicated, however, that their own students frequently confused an evaluation of writing with an evaluation of personal value.

The next refinement to the H.O.T. T.U.B. project came when we decided to tape several sessions of tutors tutoring each other for use in staff meetings. Our early concern that the camera would intimidate the tutors proved unfounded: once they became involved in discussing the writing, they forgot they were being taped. We first used these tapes unedited, but the sheer length of the sessions meant we either had to edit or start conducting rather lengthy staff meetings. We chose to edit, a task that took time and careful judgement. Surprisingly, though, we found that three or four minutes of a session, followed by the taped responses to the five questions, was more than enough to evaluate tutoring techniques.

We've used these edited tapes in several staff meetings, and the discussions that follow have never failed to raise important and sometimes startling questions about tutoring. Do tutors' techniques and behavior patterns vary with different clients?

Should they? Is it really important that a tutor be knowledgeable about the subject matter? Does the amount of time and effort that a client has already invested in her paper affect her attitude about being tutored? Should it affect the tutor's attitude? What cues might a tutor pick up about her client's attitude? This last question came up when the "client" of one session simply but emphatically removed her paper from in front of her tutor and placed it squarely in front of herself (where she kept it for the duration). Until she saw the tape herself, she was not even aware of her action, although her tutor had clearly seen and responded to it.

The value of H.O.T. T.U.B. goes beyond the riches of these discussions. The taped segment of "client" responses are equally valuable. Through them, a tutor not only receives positive comments on her work; she understands, often for the first time, why her work is good. One tutor who had always feared that her quiet responses and thoughtful pauses made her appear bored was delighted (and relieved) to learn the opposite: her "client" thought she was interested because of those pauses and low-keyed comments. Even better, she saw herself doing those good things, saw the productivity of that session.

When the "client's" response is slow in coming or vague when it gets there, we've found that the tutor herself will recognize that her approach hasn't worked. She begins to analyze how she might have been more helpful, and since we look at the tapes together, she gets a positive response to her suggestions from fellow tutors. With that reassurance, she can strengthen her tutoring skills.

One of the nicest results of the H.O.T. T.U.B. project is one that we hadn't anticipated. Tutors who once hid their own papers until the final copy was typed (or even until the grade was on the title page) now collar each other with messy notes, unfinished drafts, and a plaintive "Can you tutor me a minute?" This attitude--that writing needs a responsive listener--carries over into their tutoring. How they tutor, how they respond is an integral part of helpful tutoring. The H.O.T. T.U.B. shows them directly yet gently how to accomplish their sensitive task.

Sherri Zander
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TUTOR'S CORNER

THE EXPERIENCE OF A PEER TUTOR

Peer tutoring has become a very popular method of reinforcing skills needed by the student in today's competitive college atmosphere. The peer tutoring system offers a unique opportunity for student interaction at the academic level. In the structure of a help center or a private tutoring session, the tutor can be a valuable learning resource for the tutee. The experience that the tutor has as a student is something that can not be attained from any textbook. Some of my experiences as an English and biology tutor have demonstrated the potential of this type of educational support system.

As a tutor, I find students lose touch with a particular assignment or subject. The tutee does not understand what the professor is looking for in an assignment, or it may be that the student missed the class and does not understand the notes taken by a fellow student. I can usually help with these types of problems. I may clarify the assignment or I may retrieve my notes from the particular class that the student missed and teach the subject material of that class.

My experience has been of great help to me as a writing tutor. I had a student who came into the University of Vermont Writing Center with an intimidated look on his face. His assignment was to write an argumentative essay. He handed me a paper that described an argument he had with his older brother! There was an obvious lack of communication here. Having had the same course and assignment as this student, I showed him my argumentative essay on the question of nuclear weaponry. He felt quite foolish, but was happy that I had straightened him out before it was too late. This student did not understand the assignment, and he was afraid to go talk to his professor about it.

Whatever technique I use, my experience as a student helps pull the tutee through difficult situations. If the student knows that he/she is not the only person in the world who ever had difficulty with that assignment, overcoming the problem becomes

all that much easier. Once the students understand this, they feel much better about themselves.

For example, the biology 1 professor spends a lecture discussing the drinking behavior of fresh and salt water fish, as an example of compensating for osmotic pressure differences. At the introductory level, a student has a difficult time applying the osmotic pressure theory to a biological system. I have tutees who just cannot understand the relationship. Once I tell them that I did not understand the relationship when I was in the class, and that the majority of their classmates probably do not understand it, they feel much better about themselves and the course. Once this panic has subsided, I can proceed to explain the osmotic pressure concept to them in a way that may be more intuitive to them than the fish story. My experience with the biology 1 course played a major role in my success as a tutor.

In addition to the subject matter being difficult, the professor often has a difficult time dealing with all the students in a class. You usually find a small group that has the ability to get useful guidance from the professor, but the majority of the class finds it impossible to even consider getting any extra help. From the students' point of view, the professor is unapproachable. If a student does talk to the professor, the student usually is dissatisfied. I often have tutees who come to me after they went to see their professor about a problem. When I ask the student what happened at the meeting, he usually shrugs and says, "He repeated the lecture to me, and I did not understand any better the second time."

Being a student myself, I feel that I have what I call an "approachability advantage" over most professors. Because I am not a professor, I become an approachable contact. This makes me an effective early-warning trouble shooter for students developing academic problems. I find that I can go up to one of my tutees and question his or her understanding of a subject matter

without causing too much anxiety on the part of the student. Knowing that I am not responsible for giving the grade, the student is inclined to tell me if he/she does not understand something.

As a tutor I feel that I too have learned a great deal. My interpersonal relations with my tutees have opened a whole new area for me as a reference source for subject material. Being responsible for supplying information to a group of students has made my personal studies seem more important. I often bring out facts that I have learned in other classes to help clarify a point. This application of my studies has helped me tie together many of my college experiences.

Tutoring also gives me the opportunity to help the professor in planning the course for the future. As a tutor I can meet with him/her and give the feedback I hear from the students about the clarity of a particular lecture or section of the course. The professors are usually interested in this type of feedback and will make appropriate changes in the curriculum to alleviate the problem.

I think as students become more and more aware of the advantages of the peer tutoring

program, they will demand access to students at the university who have experience in the course material. My experience as a student has been essential to my success as a tutor. Tutoring offers a great opportunity for a peer relationship that is unique in the college situation. It also gives a tutor a chance to review previous material and apply more recent learning to it. As for the tutees, they gain an additional and powerful resource in their quest for success in college. They are the biggest winners.



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Microcomputers and Teaching Reading in College: Issues and Some CUNY Applications, a monograph by Clara Alexander, provides a resource and critical review of computer-assisted instruction currently in use by reading faculty at CUNY and at other colleges and universities. It also provides some guidelines for evaluating and creating software and programs. Copies, at \$2 each, are available from The Instructional Resource Center, Office of Academic Affairs, CUNY, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

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