



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Member of the NCTE Affiliate
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Vol. IX, No. 7 (March, 1985)

THE WRITING CENTER AS A CONSULTING SERVICE FOR CONTENT AREA FACULTY

As that old saying goes: "There are challenges--and then there are challenges. Some can invigorate you, and some can bury you." This month's issue of the newsletter offers both kinds. There are articles on helping ESL students in the writing lab, on consulting with content-area teachers about writing, and on working with competency testing in the lab. And then there's the job opening recently published in The Chronicle of Higher Education included below. If you have a better response than the one appearing here, let us know.

And keep sending in your articles, announcements, reviews, questions, names of new members, and \$5 yearly donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University, but sent to me) to:

Muriel Harris, editor
Writing Lab Newsletter
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907



A Recent Listing in THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Hamline University announces three undergraduate faculty positions effective September 1985 to provide leadership for implementing new curriculum.

Director of Writing: Assistant Professor, tenure track. Responsibilities: develop writing intensive courses in all disciplines, present workshops, supervise Writing Center, teach four courses. Salary \$19,000-\$22,000, nine-month contract, increment for summer. Ph.D. expected.

... only Übermenschen or small groups need apply.

To call our writing center the focal point of a writing across the curriculum program is something of a misnomer. And yet, as its name implies, our writing center has truly become the center for concerns about writing, both to students and to faculty members in many disciplines. Our college has not formed a grand scheme, complete with faculty committees and standardized grading scales and writing requirements in all courses. And yet, the writing center has had a definite impact on the way students and faculty view college writing. As I look back on the center's four years of history, I can immediately see four successful practices that have evolved from conversations, brainstorming sessions, and other center/faculty cooperation: content area writing labs, assignment guides, worksheets, and writing booklets. In the paragraphs to follow, I will explain each of these practices more precisely and show how each resulted in a newer approach to writing than had been used previously by the content area instructor.

Content Area Writing Labs

The center has helped to develop several content area writing labs, but the most successful one, in my opinion, was initiated in the first year of the center's existence. A sociology instructor was concerned because many of her students were experiencing difficulty with several skills she considered basic, such as taking notes, composing essay tests, and writing a simple questionnaire and analysis. She came to the center to ask whether we had learning packets or other materials that her students could use. On further examination of the nature and extent of the problems, she and I decided not to use general materials already available, but

to develop a series of labs especially tailored for her course. Students were encouraged to participate in the voluntary afternoon labs, and, as an incentive, she offered a few points of extra credit to those who attended. In preparation for the note-taking session, we first developed a list of note-taking strategies. Second, she taped an entire class lecture and listened to it, taking the type of notes she expected from the students. Students were then to come to the lab session with the notes they had taken from the same lecture. She and I went through each student's notes, pointing out strengths and weaknesses. Finally, she passed out copies of her notes and students compared their own notes to hers. She asked students to come to her on an individual basis during the next week or so to show her their notes and see whether they had improved as a result of the lab session. She was very pleased with the results exhibited by many of the students during this follow-up period.

For the essay test session, we followed a similar procedure, with students receiving tips on studying for and taking essay tests, then trying out the strategies on an essay question directly related to the information they had been studying from their text and classroom lectures. For the questionnaire and analysis paper, I developed with the students a sample questionnaire for a subject similar to the one assigned in class and led a discussion about how they would modify the questions for their own surveys. The instructor and I developed a fill-in-the-blanks model for a survey analysis, which we discussed with the students so that they would have a better mental picture of what was being required of them. The survey analysis was a writing genre totally unfamiliar to most of the students, so that we felt such a step-by-step approach was appropriate. In follow-up sessions, scheduled while students were working on their subsequent tests and papers, it was clear in most cases that the students' work reflected a better feel for both form and content.

Assignment Guides

The thought had never occurred to us on the writing center staff (being English teachers) that beginning students in many content areas are put into the position of having to write a research paper without a written set of instructions. In the first week of operation, however, we quickly learned that a large proportion of content

area research paper assignments come in the form of a hasty phrase scrawled on the blackboard or a few sentences spoken in the final minutes of a class session. It is true that some students have the sophistication to cope with such fleeting instructions and do produce passable research. Unfortunately, we have found that, all too often, two students exposed to the same assignment can copy down two rather different interpretations of what is expected of them. Moreover, over the course of the term, the instructor may repeat the assignment on several occasions, altering it unintentionally each time, perhaps because he is still refining it in his own mind. Such a situation can lead to confusion and frustration on the student's part and to an unfair grading standard on the teacher's part, for the student who most successfully guesses the teacher's intentions is generally the one to come up with the "A."

Having been frustrated with such situations again and again but lacking the perfect moment to confront faculty members directly about the problem, we were quite delighted when a faculty member from community and social services actually came to us and asked if we had any ideas about how to provide a little instruction in the research process within a content class. I met several times with him to discuss the objectives of the course, the purposes of the research assignment, and the criteria by which the paper would be judged. He and I then prepared a list of guidelines for the format of the paper. Second, we prepared a list of suggested topics, including formal outlines for several sample topics. The third step was to arrange a series of classroom presentations during the quarter. In the first session, the classroom teacher and I worked as a team to discuss the handout and to get students involved in thinking about possible topics. A few weeks later, I visited the classroom for a brief fifteen-minute session on narrowing a topic, and ended with an invitation to students to visit the Writing Center if they had questions or problems in organizing their papers. Toward the end of the quarter, I again attended the class, this time for a brief workshop with students' rough drafts. Both the classroom teacher and I circulated, giving pointers to each student about any modifications needed in his draft and answering specific questions about documentation. During the quarter, nearly all the students visited the writing center at least once and several attended more often. Best

of all, the classroom teacher was able to see a real difference between these papers and those of previous quarters. This instructor has worked with us every year since that time, developing similar assignment guides and classroom visits for each of the courses he teaches. He has also proved to be one of the best public relations sources the Writing Center has ever had.

Worksheets

Another project involved an instructor who has been using writing in her classes for a number of years. She was planning to assign a book review for her mental health classes and came to the writing center for some suggestions about how to approach this somewhat sophisticated writing genre with her students. We decided a logical approach was to have the students read a certain article on a subject of mental health and then spend a class session discussing how to analyze the article and write a review about it. The next step was to design and distribute a worksheet for students to use when preparing their article review. The worksheet asked general questions that would lead students to analyze the article according to their own background and then to set up the required components for a review. In this class, the review was to be divided into three parts: (1) summary, (2) personal response, and (3) relation to theoretical concepts learned in class; for each of these parts, the worksheet listed several questions to consider before writing the actual paper. Once the article reviews were completed, we went over them with the students and offered suggestions for improvement. Then the same procedure was followed for the larger paper. In the classroom teacher's estimation, the students did seem to learn what was expected in the longer book review from doing the article review. And from the perspective of the writing center, the students benefited noticeably from having the worksheet as a guide for organizing their thoughts before beginning to write.

Writing Booklets

A fourth technique was the preparation of a booklet on the topic of writing letters to the editor and to public officials. It evolved from a series of conversations between a government instructor and the writing center staff about how to instruct students in the art of letter writing without taking up an excessive amount of class time. Together, we gathered and composed informa-

tion for the booklet on what to include and what not to include in such letters. We also gathered examples for the booklet from the local newspapers and from the Washington Post to illustrate the variety of styles and subject matters represented by actual published letters. In addition, we included a letter in standard business letter format and a list of addresses of key city and state officials. The project began with a short classroom presentation by the instructor and me; together, we explained the requirements, displayed the booklet, and outlined the procedures for the students to follow. Students were to visit the writing center to read through the booklet and then discuss their letters with the writing center staff. The fact that the booklets were housed in the center encouraged all students to pay a visit. Once they realized the staff was friendly and helpful, many came back several times. Finally, the true test came: the letters were mailed to the newspapers and to public officials. Within a few weeks, at least a half dozen had been published in Richmond papers, and students were beginning to receive responses from their senators and congressmen; one actually heard from President Reagan. The next quarter, we included in the booklet some of the actual successful student letters from the previous quarter. Knowing that their letters had a real chance of being published turned out to be a strong motivation for writing organized and grammatically correct letters. Many students began to show special care in their writing that I had not often witnessed in my four years in the center.

Conclusion

These four examples are not intended to be judged for their originality; I am certain many of you have tried or at least heard of these techniques in your experience as English teachers. What the examples do show, I hope, is how a writing center can serve as a consultation service for instructors in other disciplines where writing is too often ignored and virtually never taught. We feel that projects such as those described here are valuable because they have formed a foundation for improved instruction and a stronger concern for writing at our college. Students have known from the beginning that the writing center is for all disciplines; now faculty members are beginning to see that we can help them too.

Mary Grattan
J. Sargeant Reynolds
Community College

THE SEMINOLE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE WRITING CENTER

The Seminole Community College Writing Center was born in the spring of 1983. It was housed in one room with three Apple IIe computer word processors and staffed by several English instructors working in part-time shifts.

In the fall of 1983 the Center was moved to a larger room and staffed by a full-time manager who also tutored English skills, a part-time student aide for computer instruction, and five part-time peer tutors. A Computer Writing Class was offered for the first time in the state of Florida.

By January, 1984, the Writing Center was equipped with ten computer word processors and another large room was incorporated for use in tutoring English skills. The staff consisted of Faculty Supervisor, Paraprofessional Computer Technician, Manager, and four part-time peer tutors.

Starting with the fall semester, 1984, all Fundamentals of Writing I & II students are required to spend one hour per week in the Writing Center working on writing skills. Our staff now includes Supervisor, Manager, Computer Technician, two Paraprofessional English tutors, three English instructors working as tutors, four peer Computer Assistants, and eight peer tutors in English skills. We have over 425 student folders in our active files for tutoring in English, and average 110 students per week using the word processors. Ten more computer word processors are being added soon.

The Writing Center is open six days a week for a total of seventy hours.

Our fast growth has been exciting, and we look forward to learning more of what other writing labs are doing.

Marva Tanner
Seminole Community College

TENTH ANNUAL
RHETORIC SEMINAR
**Current Theories
Of
Teaching Composition**

PURDUE UNIVERSITY
June 3-14, 1985

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FOR MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT THE SEMINAR:
Janice M. Lauer
Rhetoric Seminar
Purdue University
Department of English
West Lafayette, IN 47907
(317) 494-3746



POSITION NOTICE

POSITION: Assistant Director of the Counseling Service and Coordinator of Academic Skills Program

LOCATION: Counseling Service, University of Illinois at Chicago, Health Sciences Center, Chicago, Illinois

POSITION AVAILABILITY: March 1, 1985

RESPONSIBILITIES: The Assistant Director is responsible to the Director of the Counseling Service for functions related to planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating programs designed to help students develop their academic potential. The opportunity exists to build a comprehensive developmental program to meet a broad range of academic skill needs for students in the health sciences. The Assistant Director



TYPICAL ESL ERRORS
AND TUTORING STRATEGIES

contributes to the development and augmentation of programs having a proactive as well as remedial function in the areas of reading, composition and writing, mathematics, study skills, and academic self-concept and coordinates and supervises two staff members within the Academic Skills Program. The Assistant Director will have responsibility for maintaining and reporting accountability data, evaluating the section programs, preparing quarterly and annual reports, and making recommendations for strengthening the Academic Skills Program. The Assistant Director is also responsible for providing direct services.

QUALIFICATIONS: Individuals preferred with earned doctorate in Developmental Education or related field; experience in, and commitment to, the provision of direct service to a college population, with demonstrated leadership and administrative ability and program evaluation skills. Desirable candidates will have experience in a university learning center and in dealing with minority populations.

STARTING DATE: Position will become available March 1, 1985. Review of applications will begin February 15, 1985, and will continue until the position is filled.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE: Send a letter of application, vita, and three letters of recommendation to:

Jerry A. Treppa, Ph.D.
Director, Counseling Service
University of Illinois at
Chicago - Health Sciences
Center
721 South Wood Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612



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.

This semester we have been flooded with ESL students in our Writing Lab, and tutors lacking training in ESL have responded in two ways. They have felt overwhelmed by the number, variety, and novelty of the errors they find in ESL papers, and they have also sought specific tutoring strategies for recurrent problems. As the tutor specializing in ESL in our lab, I was asked to prepare some materials for new tutors, who were feeling especially unprepared. Hearing the two sorts of responses I've described, I thought the most productive approach to equipping tutors would be to look through both ends of the telescope, as it were, that is, to offer specific solutions to specific problems as well as a global taxonomy of error types that would help them classify systematic deviations from the rules of Edited American English.

In what follows I have listed and exemplified some of the more common inflectional and grammatical errors found in ESL papers (or in papers written by students from particular language backgrounds, in which case the language is noted in parentheses following the error) together with some suggestions about how a tutor might deal with these problems in a twenty- to thirty-minute session. The list is derived from my own teaching and tutoring experience and therefore partial and skewed, but I hope it will give you a somewhat representative sample of what you can expect to encounter. The materials cited are among items in our lab, which you may not have; therefore, publication and ordering information have been added.

Also included is a very brief sketch of an error typology together with a strategy for dealing with interlanguage errors which can fruitfully be applied to intralinguistic errors as well.

I would very much like this article to be the catalyst for discussion, refinement, and extension of the error types listed here. Address correspondence to me care of the Writing Lab, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907.

INFLECTION

Inflectional errors are most frequent at the elementary level and therefore usually

accompanied by other error types. Because they are so isolable and amenable to drill, however, it is often wise to begin with them rather than the others.

1. nouns: omission of the -S plural (Oriental languages; the omission of the -S after numbers [e.g., TWO UNIVERSITY] occurs in essays written by Korean speakers.)

Muriel Harris, USING THE -S MARKER IN WRITING, in the Audio-Tutorial Series, 1981. Instructional Systems, P.O. Box 173, Oakwood, GA 30566.

2. verbs

- a. omission of the 3rd singular -S (Spanish)

Harris, USING THE -S MARKER IN WRITING

- b. omission of the -EN of the past participle (Thai)

-oral proofreading (See the October 1984 issue of the WRITING LAB NEWS-LETTER for an article on this.)

- c. omission of the -ED of the simple past tense (Spanish)

Lucinda Arnold, THE -ED MARKER IN WRITING, in the Audio-Tutorial Series, 1981. Instructional Systems, P.O. Box 173, Oakwood, GA 30566.

- d. errors in the vowel alternations of strong verbs (which mark tense changes by a change in the medial vowel, e.g., SING, SANG, SUNG) or irregular weak verbs (which also show vowel alternation but in addition mark past tense in the normal way, by adding -T to the end of the verb, e.g., BRING, BROUGHT, BROUGHT; FEEL, FELT, FELT)

Alice Maclin, REFERENCE GUIDE TO ENGLISH: A HANDBOOK OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (New York: Holt, 1981), pp. 363-68, has a list of common strong and irregular weak verbs.

3. adverbs: omission of -LY

4. pluralizing the singular possessive: *COUNTRIE'S for COUNTRY'S; this is an example of HYPERCORRECTION, or applying a rule beyond its proper domain.

GRAMMAR

1. count vs. noncount nouns

- a. pluralizing noncount nouns or nouns used in their noncount sense: *FLOURS, *WINES
- b. using the indefinite article A(N) with a noncount noun or a noun used in its noncount sense: *A FLOUR, *A WINE IS GOOD TO DRINK (where the generic sense is meant).
- c. confusing quantifier pairs that match with either count or noncount nouns: *MANY RESEARCH, *MUCH BOOKS

I have written a self-instructional mini-course (sections of which can also be used in a tutorial) entitled COUNT AND NONCOUNT NOUNS which covers all three of these common problems.

2. incorrect choice of true prepositions, and, less frequently, of verbal particles

- a. an example of particles vs. prepositions

1) particle: She decided on / the boat. (She chose the boat.)

2) preposition: She decided / on the boat. (She decided while on the boat.)

- b. examples of errors

1) with a particle: *HE ANSWERED TO MY QUESTION (probably overgeneralized from RESPONDED TO).

2) with true prepositions:

--I prefer to live IN home.

___AT the day of her arrival, we went to the airport.

___Do you do your homework IN the night?

___The window was smashed WITH the boys.

3) with infinitive TO: *HE TRIED (WANTED, DECIDED, etc.) GO.

Errors with prepositions occur in papers written by students from all

language backgrounds. The reason seems to be that the meanings prepositions express vary idiosyncratically across languages. For example, English says we speak IN a language, whereas Arabic says we speak BY a language. The asymmetry between WITH and BY in English--the former is used instrumentally, the latter agentively--seems not to exist in the native language of the writer of the fourth sentence under (2). AT is particularly troublesome because there is no equivalent to it in some other languages. Such idiosyncracies suggest that interference from the native language is a likely cause of incorrect choices of prepositions.

In view of all this there seems to be little alternative to treating such errors piecemeal and simply telling the student how we say it in English.

3. incorrect choice of tense and aspect (action completed or still in progress) with verbs

a. use of the simple present for the present progressive: *I GO THERE NOW for I AM GOING THERE NOW (probably rare in written discourse)

b. Use of the present progressive for the present perfect or perfect progressive with SINCE: *I AM LIVING HERE SINCE JUNE for I HAVE BEEN LIVING HERE SINCE JUNE or I HAVE LIVED HERE SINCE JUNE.

c. use of SINCE instead of FOR with a durative time phrase: *I HAVE LIVED HERE SINCE THREE MONTHS for I HAVE LIVED HERE FOR THREE MONTHS.

d. use of the past perfect for the simple past: *I HAD GONE THERE LAST WEEK for I WENT THERE LAST WEEK.

N. B.: the simple past can substitute for the past perfect where a word like AFTER makes it clear which past action came first: AFTER I (HAD) GATHERED UP MY BOOKS, I WENT HOME.

e. use of present perfect for punctiliar (point-in-time) action: *I HAVE FINISHED MY STUDIES IN 1981.

1) Errors in tense and aspect, more than other kinds, require some understanding of linguistic terminology. The distinctions English

makes are often subtle and very difficult to explain well without explicit knowledge on the part of the tutor. For a concise, accurate introduction, see Quirk, Greenbaum, Svartvik, and Leech, A GRAMMAR OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH (London: Longman, 1972), chapter 3, pp. 84-97.

2) One tutoring strategy that I find to work very well is the use of time line diagrams to illustrate relative time, generally expressed aspectually in English. We find that diagrams communicate grammatical rules well to our students, many of whom are in engineering and seem to conceptualize better visually than verbally.

For instance, the past perfect can be diagrammed thus:

.-----X-----Y-----/ the present

The past perfect indicates which of two completed past actions occurred first. X and Y can symbolize this relationship, with X as the earlier and Y as the later action.

The past progressive can be represented this way:

/////////
.-----X-----Y-----/ the present

Here the shaded area represents a duration completed in the past, which captures the essential meaning of this tense/aspect combination. And so forth.

3) Instruction on the uses of various tense/aspect combinations can be found in the following lessons from Robert Lado, LADO ENGLISH SERIES, 1978 Regents Publishing Co., 2 Park Ave., New York, N.Y., 10016. This series is now available in a revised edition, published this year.

- present progressive: Book 1, Unit 5
- simple present: Book 1, Unit 7
- simple past: Book 2, Unit 6
- past progressive: Book 2, Unit 9
- present perfect: Book 4, Unit 4
- past perfect: Book 5, Unit 6
- present perfect progressive: Book 6, Unit 5
- past perfect progressive: Book 6, Unit 5

- habitual present progressive: Book 6, Unit 7
- future progressive: Book 6, Unit 7

4. omission of the definite article in contexts requiring it (Oriental languages)

THE USE AND NONUSE OF ARTICLES, a handout I have prepared for use in our Writing Lab.

5. lack of concord between demonstrative pronouns and count nouns (Spanish):
*THESE CHAIR

"Articles," in COUNT AND NONCOUNT NOUNS (my self-instructional mini-course)

6. word order errors

a. misplacing adverbs: *I WENT OFTEN HOME.

b. putting sentence-final prepositional phrases medially: *HE PUT IN THE CORNER THE SHOVEL.

c. switching indirect and direct objects:
*GIVE TO ME THE BOOK.

Because word order, like prepositions, can vary a great deal across languages, simply telling the student what the obligatory patterns in English are seems to be the best way of dealing with these errors. Diagrams may also be useful here; for (b) above, for example, the tutor could present the order this way:

NP---PUT---NP---PP

where NP is 'noun phrase' and PP is 'prepositional phrase.'

7. predication errors involving a mismatch between the semantic features of a noun (either a subject or an object) and a verb or of a noun and its predicate complement:

- *TOM ELAPSED AN HOUR BEFORE CALLING SARAH.
- *I ADMONISHED HIS ACTION.
- *THE POPULATION IS VERY CROWDED.

Such errors may be diagrammed for the student as follows:

----- VERB -----

Fill in the blank(s) with the offending

noun(s) (or noun and adjective), and fill in the square bracket(s) with whatever semantic feature is either missing or incongruous. Thus ELAPSED might be handled this way:

THE BOY ELAPSED -----

TIME EXPRESSION

Since ELAPSED takes as its subject a time expression with a nonhuman referent, THE BOY doesn't fit. (It would also need to be pointed out that ELAPSED is intransitive, so the second blank would remain empty; cf. (6).

Mark S. LeTourneau
Purdue University



A REVIEW OF WRITING CENTERS:
THEORY AND ADMINISTRATION

Writing centers are coming of age. Although in some quarters they are still considered first aid stations for ailing student writers, many have already been recognized for their contributions to improving writing instruction. Directing a writing center or tutoring in one has become a serious business as articles in the Writing Lab Newsletter and the Writing Center Journal suggest, and the publication of several books about writing centers and their work--including Muriel Harris's Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs (Scott, Foresman and Co., 1982) and Mary Croft and Joyce Steward's The Writing Laboratory: Organization, Methods, and Management (Scott, Foresman and Co., 1982)--has reaffirmed their importance.

The most recent of these books is Writing Centers: Theory and Administration, edited by Gary A. Olson (NCTE, 1984), which confirms that the practices of writing centers are based on sound theories. Some of the leading specialists in the field have contributed nineteen essays that are divided into three sections--"Writing Center Theory," "Writing Center Administration," and "Special Concerns." Olson states that "one of the principal objectives of this book is to provide a forum for center directors to speculate formally on theoretical and administrative matters germane to the writing center," and Writing Centers certainly allows directors to discuss key issues.

The first section of the book on theory, which includes articles by Kenneth A. Bruffee, Tilly Warnock and John Warnock, Stephen M. North, and Lil Brannon and C. H. Knoblauch, is the most useful because it suggests that although writing centers are often created in haste as stopgap measures to patch up bleeding manuscripts, they are founded on sound pedagogical premises. Collectively, these essays convey that writing centers are places that nurture and encourage the writer and writing, promote cognitive development, help students learn composing processes, and are models for collaborative learning approaches. Writing centers can experiment, respond to the special needs of their students, and take risks because they are flexible places that can change and grow to meet new demands; they are organized, but they are not constrained by the slow-moving wheels of curriculum committees and administrative bureaucracy. The main problem with this section of Writing Centers is that because some of the material has already been published, anyone who reads in the field will be familiar with it.

In the second part of the book on administration, high marks go to Jeanette Harris for her article on "The Handbook as a Supplement to a Tutor Training Program." Her sensible advice and thorough handling of this topic will give writing center administrators enough information to write their own handbooks. Although the rest of the articles in this section are about topics that promise to deliver much, such as establishing a center, obtaining funding, managing the paperwork, and training tutors, they are on the whole either too basic, have nothing new to offer, give bad advice, or describe a particular situation which is of limited use to readers.

The final section about special concerns is a mixed bag of interesting topics that don't fit into the first two categories. Gary A. Olson's article on how the attitudes of outside instructors, tutors, and students determine the effectiveness of the center is helpful in understanding how barriers to learning develop. Thomas Nash's discussion of prewriting in the tutorial setting provides a useful blend of the theoretical and the practical. And Bertie E. Fearing and W. Keats Sparrow give informed advice on how a center director can prepare tutors to work with students in business and technical writing. Both Mary Croft's article on the

reluctant student and Alexander Friedlander's article on meeting the needs of foreign students suggest approaches for dealing with these special situations, but each piece needs more information to be really helpful.

The book concludes with an extensive bibliography, valuable for research or for obtaining further information about writing centers. It includes books, dissertations, and articles in anthologies, journals, and proceedings.

Anyone contemplating starting a writing center or taking his or her first job in one would do well to read this book as it suggests the many dimensions a writing center can have. And the section on theory would benefit all writing teachers who are not familiar with recent developments in the teaching of writing. But for writing center staff who are already in the field, this book will be somewhat disappointing because there is not enough new material in it, and many of the articles about practical concerns are too superficial to be of value.

Susan Glassman
Southeastern Massachusetts
University

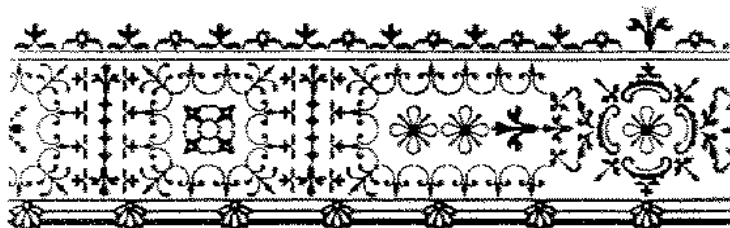
A READER ASKS . . .

J. P. McCaskey High School in Lancaster, Pennsylvania has recently established a Writing Center staffed by one full time director, several professionals who serve in the center in lieu of a "duty" period, and peer tutors.

The teaching staff has been involved in working toward professional growth goals involving reading, writing, and critical thinking. The Writing Lab Newsletter recently carried articles concerning the development of centers that encourage all the language processes.

I am requesting assistance in pointing out model programs or referring me to the current literature on this type of program. It seems like a natural evolution for our present center.

Joyce W. Oesch
J. P. McCaskey High School
445 North Reservoir Street
Lancaster, PA 17602



LISTENING, READING, WRITING:
ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION

A READER RESPONDS . . .

The Northeast Conference, the largest annual pedagogical meeting of foreign language professionals, has traditionally been concerned with trends and techniques in foreign language education. The 1986 Conference, however, will venture beyond the realm of foreign language teaching to look at current theory and present practice in related areas. The purpose is to increase dialogue between foreign and native language specialists, to gain other perspectives, and to generate new ideas for teachers and administrators alike. The focus will be on listening, reading, and writing. If you are involved in any aspect of the teaching or learning of these skills and wish to participate in a forum with foreign language colleagues at the Northeast Conference, you are invited to submit a proposal for a presentation.

Session proposals should reflect a workshop or practical presentation rather than a lengthy discourse on an obscure theoretical topic. All proposals should be submitted according to the guidelines on the Northeast Conference form. Deadline for submission is June 15, 1985. For forms or additional information, CONTACT:

1985 Northeast Conference Chairman
P.O. Box 623 -- Middlebury, VT 05753

1984 WRITING LAB
DIRECTORY MISPRINT

Does your copy of the 1984 Writing Lab Directory contain a complete entry for Thiel College? Some copies of the directory contain only the second page but not the first page of the questionnaire submitted by Kathleen Ward, Writing Lab Coordinator at Thiel College. If whatever gremlins that exist in offset printers mangled your copy and caused you to receive these misprinted pages, please contact Muriel Harris (Dept. of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907) for a corrected copy of the Thiel College entry in the directory.

Nothing is as discouraging as throwing a party and having few guests. As a response to Richard Hankins who wrote of his worries over the few visitors to his new writing center, I wish to offer suggestions for increasing student use. Like other centers at smaller universities and colleges, Mr. Hankins' center no doubt suffers first-year growing pains.

1. Let the word out that your writing center will help with rough drafts. When one student shows another he got a better grade after visiting the writing center, other students will come drafts-in-hand. Of course, this does not mean tutors are giving unauthorized aid, but that you are helping students pinpoint weaknesses on specific assignments.
2. Write colleagues who send students to the writing center thanking them for their efforts since some instructors will not know that their suggestions were followed. Personal notes in addition to the progress reports you also may be sending will encourage these teachers to keep on sending students.
3. Stay in touch with the more demanding composition instructors to remind them to recommend your services. Although students may complain about the high standards these staff members set, they may respect these staff members the most and be ready to follow their suggestions for extra tutoring.
4. Seek out non-traditional undergraduates. International students, older students, and special-needs learners can bring you some of your greatest challenges and highest rewards. Unlike many undergrads who want just a quick fix from your writing center, these students may want to undertake a whole course of study through the center. To attract

Tutor's Corner

THE JOURNAL AS A SOUNDING BOARD

The process of writing, as Peter Elbow has said, is much like cooking. Ideas become ingredients and idealistically combine to create delectable culinary coups. But what does the tutor do when the soufflé has fallen or the pie crust has become too flaky? As a first-time tutor I found it difficult to analyze my tutoring strategies and formulate achievable goals without using a journal as a sounding board.

Chris came into the Writing Center at the start of the semester with his first piece of expository writing. Chris' work was clearly in the developmental stage, top browned, yet not quite cooked in the center--his major weakness an inconsistent tense usage that transformed little anecdotes into separate vignettes. My journal entry centered around this tense problem and how I dealt with it. I had explained how the vignettes became focal points of the piece and asked Chris to identify which elements divorced the anecdotes from the core of the paper. After some discussion, Chris was able to see that the verb tense was isolating the anecdotes, creating the vignettes, and the problem cleared up.

At our next session, Chris' problems had moved from the tangible to the intangible. Mechanics were no longer the weakness of the paper, stylistics had become the issue. How could I give a lesson in stylistics to a tutee?

During the session I pointed out a few choppy sentences and asked Chris to combine them. Not entirely pleased with his

combinations, I turned to a style book in the Center for help in conveying the changes I wanted Chris to make. Chris was not receptive to this teaching aid, so I was left to plod through the remainder of the session explaining in circles what I thought was clarity and grace. In this second journal entry I analyzed my tutoring strategy and came up with a new approach. By reiterating the importance of verbs (e.g., asking Chris which were strongest and why), I hoped he would restructure his sentences, cutting out nominalizations and combining related ideas. If Chris did this, then a comparison between the new sentences and the old could clarify my stylistics lesson.

Chris returned to the Writing Center for more help on style, and during this, our latest session, I successfully employed the strategy created out of my journal analysis. What Chris needed was to create the clearer sentences himself and then to compare them to the previous ones. As the tutor, I needed to develop an approach that would begin this learning process. By providing the opportunity to prepare a strategy tailored to Chris' needs, my journal became the sounding board where ideas are thrown out, picked up, and transformed into workable strategies. Write about your tutoring, let those sessions simmer over low heat, keep covered.

Peter J. Stebbins
Peer Tutor
University of Vermont

these students, send personal letters to them if possible. Although not always identified by administrative offices, these students can be reached through deans of colleges or directors of professional programs. Be ready to discuss various kinds of academic problems they may face since these students may not be aware that some of their problems stem from weakness in writing. For example, low test scores can result from little or poor writing done while reviewing or studying. Once these students see you can help, they will

be back often.

5. Occasional special topics presentations such as resume writing, writing essay test questions, and writing literary analysis will help attract students. Some will attend these sessions, of course, but, more importantly, those who do not will recall that you offer help on these topics and will appear later for individual help.

Joyce Hicks
Valparaiso University

THE WRITING CENTER JOURNAL

Beginning with the fall 1985 issue, The Writing Center Journal will be co-edited by Joyce Kinkead and Jeanette Harris. An official publication of the National Writing Centers Association, WCJ is issued twice yearly, in the fall and spring. The new editors welcome submissions of articles related to all phases of writing center instruction and administration--tutor training, program development and evaluation, public relations, and new directions for writing center programs. They are especially interested in theoretical articles on composition, the writing process, and the dynamics of the tutorial and in reports on research related to or conducted in writing centers.

Typewritten, doublespaced manuscripts (approximately 10 to 20 pages) should be submitted in duplicate. Authors should follow the new MLA style manual, and identifying information should appear on a cover page only. A stamped, self-addressed envelope should be included so that manuscripts can be returned. Manuscripts and all correspondence regarding editorial matters should be addressed as follows:

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The subscription rate is \$5.00 per year; single issues are \$2.50. Checks should be made payable to The Writing Center Journal. Subscription requests and all correspondence regarding subscriptions should be addressed as follows:

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NATIONAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION
MEETING AT CCCC

The National Writing Centers Association will meet at the annual conference on College Composition and Communication in Minneapolis. The meeting will be an open session of the Executive Board, and all

interested members of NWCA are encouraged to attend. The meeting is listed in the conference program as Session D23 and is scheduled for 4:00-5:15 p.m. on Thursday, March 21. If you are planning to attend CCCC, please include this meeting in your plans.

COMPETENCY TESTING AND THE WRITING LAB

For three years, the English Department at Boise State University has administered competency testing in all freshman English classes. Students enrolled in English 101 or 102 must pass the exam for that course in order to get credit and a grade. If they do not pass during the semester, they get an Incomplete until they do pass. The outcome of the exam, however, cannot influence the course grade.

Soon after we began the testing, the administration, impressed with our effort, ruled that all graduating students must pass the exam, thus including all returning and transfer students in the requirement. As a support facility for the exam, the Writing Lab boomed. Before we began competency testing, we obtained a grant from the University to expand our existing small writing lab into a suite of three rooms, purchase furniture and audio-tutorial programs, and pay a staff of student tutors. By the time testing began, everything was in place.

The BSU English Minimal Competency Exam comes in two main sections: the "101" section, a six-part objective exam that tests editing and mechanical skills, and a "102" section, a one-hour essay. Students must pass each part by 80%; those who do not pass the whole test must retest on the parts they have failed. Students who do not pass may retest later in the semester. The essay exam is scored holistically, in special "retreat" sessions, by members of the English Department and faculty from other departments.

The 101 exam tests for minimal competency in editing and recognition of errors in the following categories:

1. sentence boundaries (fragments and run-ons);
2. subject-verb agreement;
3. verb form and tense;

4. pronoun reference;
5. sound-alike/look-alike words;
6. conventions of commas and apostrophes.

The 102 exam tests for minimal competency in understanding an essay assignment, focus, development, organization, syntactic maturity, and proofreading. I'm not allowed to reveal the actual essay topics, but a couple of practice topics (rejects that did not survive field-testing) will give an idea of what the exam is like:

1. We are all made of many selves. That is, in everyday life, most people must assume a variety of roles, such as food checker at a supermarket, big brother to a foster child, sole wage earner in a large family, "peacemaker" among friends or family who do not always see eye-to-eye; student, athlete, and numerous others. Your essay should (1) describe some of your various selves, and (2) explain how those selves are different; explain what they have in common.

2. Many observers of our society claim that modern men and women, immersed in materialism, are "owned by their objects." Your essay should (1) identify 1-3 possessions--large, small, expensive, or inexpensive--that "own" you; and (2) explain how these possessions own you.

After three years of experimenting, and plenty more experiments to come, we have settled for now on a few effective ways to prepare students for the exams. For the 101, we work mostly from diagnostic tests. Where there are problems, we go over specific test items, trying to get the students to explain why they chose the answers they did, so that we can dig down to the root misunderstanding behind the wrong answer. Sometimes we prescribe work in basic writing textbooks or tape-worksheet programs. For the 102 exam, we work with the students' own failing papers in order to diagnose problems, especially those that involve stages of the writing process. Our aim is to get the writers to talk about their own writing and find problems on their own with a minimum of coaching.

For a few semesters we put up with the uncomfortable situation of having to read failing 102 papers on the wing and assess strengths and weaknesses while the students

waited and watched. We alleviated the problem somewhat (and gave better help) by asking the students to read their papers first, so that they could think about them while the tutors read. The most disheartening aspect was that, after the tutor spent 20-30 minutes questioning and counseling, the student would often say something to the effect, "Well, maybe next time I'll get a better topic," or, "Next time I'll know what to do," and leave. Twenty minutes spent for nothing. Few ever came back for further work, even those with multiple problems in invention, organization, and mechanics.

Our current attempt to entice students back for the help they need is based on an appointment system. Students are given appointments--with specially printed reminder cards--not for the same day but for another day, "so we'll have a chance," we explain, "to look at your paper ahead of time." Each morning the papers for the day are pulled from the file and set aside. Tutors are responsible for reading and diagnosing the papers of students due to come in that day. If possible, more than one tutor reads each paper. It is discussed and brief notes are written on the back. The student still must read the paper at the beginning of the tutoring session, but now the tutor is ready, and the student has the assurance that the paper has been considered with care and not in haste.

Tutoring on the failing 102 papers is kept simple. If possible, only one or two problems are dealt with in a session. A student who has had trouble both with invention and sentence maturity, for example, is first taught clustering or some other invention technique and practices it. Only after the student knows how to develop a topic will the sentence problem be attacked, usually with a series of sentence-combining exercises. Some students put the tutors under a lot of pressure to tell them at once "everything that is wrong" with a paper. The tutors have to use their own judgment, but very few students are deemed capable of handling all the information at once, unless the paper is only marginally failing.

Our weekly tutor-training sessions concentrate largely on the exams. The tutors take the tests themselves--particularly the 102 essay--and discuss each other's papers in detail and at length. They make up new objective questions for the 101 exam and essay topics for the 102 exam in order to generate new forms of the test

and new exercise material, and to gain insight into the problems their tutees must face.

The marriage of competency testing and the Writing Lab has brought advantages. It led to the expansion of the lab in the first place and has increased our capabilities and resources dramatically. It has allowed us to operate on a full schedule 53 hours a week. It has brought us money to pay tutors more than they can earn on work-study. It had provided a focus for the lab's mission and for the tutor training. Finally, it has brought into the lab students who ordinarily wouldn't have come on their own. Many of them stay to work on their writing beyond the minimal skills of the competency exams.

The marriage also has brought some tensions. There is a constant tension between what we feel the lab should be and what the exam has made it. At times the staff members feel that the lab is little more than a competency-exam mill. Most of the students who come in are getting ready either for a test or a retest on the exam. Admittedly, because most of the students on our urban campus work full or part time, they simply don't have extra time to spend

in the lab. In most instances the tutors have no choice but to teach to the test rather than encourage students to improve their writing in other ways.

The second tension comes with the presence of exam records in the lab. The tutors must perform a lot of clerical work, since we do not have the money to hire a clerk. While they are busy tutoring, students come in to check on their scores, necessitating a search through the computer printouts; to ask routine questions about the exams; or to complain about the unfairness, in one way or another, of the System.

We haven't found a way to avoid entirely the constant interruptions in the tutoring or the need to teach to the tests. The problems and tensions of the test-support lab will probably always be with us. Still, the staff and I owe to the exam our existence as a thriving facility and our professional growth--both as administrators (but not as bureaucrats, we hope) and as teachers.

Richard Leahy
Boise State University

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